

REMARKABLE DETECTIVE-THRILLER INSIDE!

The POPULAR

Week Ending
March 1st,
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EVERY
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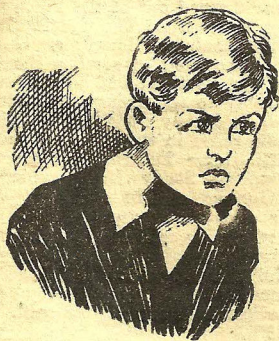


"ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE!"

Starring Ferrers Locke, Master 'Tec, in another dramatic adventure.

ROUSING TIMES AT ROOKWOOD—ELECTION RESULTS!

The NEW SKIPPER!



BY OWEN CONQUEST.

Who shall be Skipper? Peter Cuthbert Gunner, of the Fourth, intends to have a say in the matter—and he does!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Gunner takes a Hand!

THAT'S Gunner's fist!"

"That ass, Gunner!"

"Cheek!"

Jimmy Silver laughed, and Raby and Newcome frowned. A good many members of the Classical Fourth gathered before the notice-board, to stare at the paper written in the well-known sprawling "fist" of P. C. Gunner.

It was like Gunner's cheek, of course, to put a notice on the board at all.

Gunner was nobody—less than nobody, if that had been possible. It was true that Peter Cuthbert Gunner believed himself to be a most important fellow, but upon what he founded this belief no Rookwooder had ever been able to discover. It was one of those things which no fellow could understand.

But here was Gunner's notice, in Gunner's sprawling hand and Gunner's own particular variety of orthography. Nobody would have heeded it very much, but for the circumstance that it referred to the matter that was now exciting all the Lower School of Rookwood—the coming election of a new junior captain.

That election was fixed for Saturday, and there were four Classical candidates in the field, which made it extremely probable that the day would be carried by the only Modern candidate, Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth.

All the Classical juniors at Rookwood were convinced that the election of a Modern junior captain would be a tremendous disaster to the old school, and each of the four Classical candidates was convinced that the other three ought to withdraw to prevent this disaster.

But Lovell, Conroy, and Mornington of the Fourth, and Smythe of the Shell, were apparently determined to go ahead, grabbing at the shadow, as it were, while the Modern candidate secured the substance.

This was a state of affairs that caused considerable excitement among the Rookwood juniors. An election of a

captain of the school would not have stirred them so deeply.

It was, of course, just like Gunner to "butt in," Gunner being a nobody who firmly believed himself to be somebody.

Some of the juniors grinned and some of them frowned as they read Gunner's notice on the board. It ran:

"NOTIS!

A Meeting will be held in the IVth Form-room at half-past five, P. C. Gunner taking the chare. The present state of affairs means a win for the Modern kandydate, which would be a katastrofe for all Rookwood. P. C. Gunner will suggest an eazy way out of the difficulty. All members of the Forth and the Shell are requested to attend.
(Sined) P. C. GUNNER."

"The cheeky ass!" said Raby. "Who's Gunner to call a meeting of the Form?"

"Echo answers, who?" said Newcome. "Nobody will go, of course," remarked Conroy, "unless it's to rag Gunner. Might go and rag him!"

"Good egg!" agreed Mornington. "He's going to suggest an easy way out of the difficulty," observed Jimmy Silver. "I can't see any way out, unless you chuck it, Morny."

"Bow-wow!" said Mornington cheerily.

"Lovell ought to chuck it, at least," said Raby. "He's only got three voters at the most—those outsiders, Peele and Gower and Lattrey. He's simply playing the goat!"

"Does he ever do anything else?" grunted Newcome.

"Thanks!" said a sarcastic voice behind the chums of the Fourth.

And Jimmy Silver & Co. glanced round at Arthur Edward Lovell.

Lovell gave them a grim look. He was on the worst of terms now with his old friends—indeed, it was pretty well known that his candidature was only intended as a "knock" at the end study, to which Lovell had once

belonged and to which he belonged no more.

"You jolly well know that you ought to chuck it, Lovell!" exclaimed Raby hotly. "You're only splitting the Classical vote for nothing!"

"And what's Morny doing?" sneered Lovell.

"Well, Morny's got a chance, at least—and you haven't! But Morny ought to chuck it, too!"

"Dear man!" murmured Mornington.

"Well, I'm not chucking it!" said Lovell. "If you want a Classical man to win you can vote for me, otherwise you can go and eat coke!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell walked on, wrapped in sulky dignity as in a garment.

"Silly ass!" commented Raby.

Jimmy Silver glanced after Lovell rather wistfully. The estrangement from his old chum worried Uncle James of Rookwood, but as the days passed he had less and less hope of the breach ever being healed. The friendship that had so long united the Fistical Four seemed to be at an end, and that it was Lovell's fault was patent to everyone except Arthur Edward himself. But it was not like Lovell to admit himself in the wrong—the more he was in the wrong the less likely, in fact, was he to admit it.

Mornington looked at his watch.

"It's twenty-past five," he said. "Anybody goin' to Gunner's meeting? May as well go and shy books at him."

"Good!"

"It's barely possible that he may have something to suggest," said Jimmy Silver. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll give him a hearing, and if it's only some more of his rot we'll give him a ragging," said Jimmy. "Let's go."

"Let's!" agreed Conroy.

And towards half-past five most of the Classical Fourth converged towards the Form-room.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner was already there. His study-mate and faithful chum, Dickinson minor, was with him. Dickinson had a dubious expression on his face, but there was no dubiety about P. C. Gunner. His look was calm and confident—as it generally was.

"The fellows will come all right," he was saying to Dickinson. "You'll see. They've seen my notice, of course."

Gunner's face wore a cheery smile. With great satisfaction, he watched the Classical juniors streaming in. Arthur Edward Lovell was the last to arrive, and then the Form-room door closed.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Black Ingratitude!

GENTLEMEN—"
Peter Cuthbert Gunner had mounted on a form, from which conspicuous coign of vantage he surveyed the numerous gathering.

All eyes were on Gunner. Some of the juniors held their hands behind them—and it did not occur to Gunner for the moment that those hidden hands grasped missiles intended for his benefit. A fellow could not think of everything.

"Gentlemen, this meeting has been called by me—"

"Like your cheek!" said Peele.

"Order!"
"If you interrupt me again, Peele, I'll come over to you," said Gunner.

"Gentlemen—"
"We've had that!" remarked Mornington. "Get on with the washin'. We'll take it for granted that you consider us gentlemen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Gentlemen—" roared Gunner.
"You're repeatin' yourself, old bean."

"Shut up, Mornington! Gentlemen, in the present state of affairs, with the fate of Rookwood practically hanging in the scale—"

"Oh, my hat!"
"I have called this meeting to put a suggestion before all the fellows who will vote in the election to-morrow. I am sorry to see none of the Shell present—but the Shell are cheeky outsiders, anyhow—"

"Hear, hear!"
"If the Fourth stand together, the Fourth will win!" said Gunner. "That's what we've got to do. There are four candidates—three from the Fourth and one from the Shell. If they all put up for election to-morrow, it only means that the Modern man will romp home."

"We know that, ass!"
"Get on with the giddy suggestion!" exclaimed Morny. "I'm tired of holding this cushion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Shut up, Morny! I am now going to make a suggestion to clear up the whole difficulty," said Gunner. "The candidates refuse to retire in favour of one another—and they're right, because the whole bunch is no good! My suggestion is that all three should agree to retire in favour of a new man—"

"Oh!"
"A new candidate, who will be acknowledged by all as the best man for the job—a good all-round sportsman, a splendid footballer—a fellow born to command, in fact!"

Gunner paused.
He had made some impression. Fellows who held cushions, or ancient apples, or eggs, in their hands, for the moment drew back those missiles till it should be ascertained what Gunner was driving at—if anything.

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"Not a bad idea, if you could trot out such a character!" yawned Mornington. "But Jimmy Silver has said that he won't stand for re-election."

"I'm not speaking of Jimmy Silver."
"If you mean Erroll—"

"I don't mean Erroll!"
"Then who the thump do you mean?" demanded Conroy. "If you can trot out a better man, I'm ready to stand down, for one."

"Good! That's sporting!" said Gunner approvingly. "I hope that Morny and Lovell will say the same."

"Name! Name!" shouted the juniors.
Gunner smiled genially.

"Mine!" he said. "Gunner, you know."
"What?"
"Which?"
"Great Scott!"

"That's it!" said Gunner, smiling serenely upon his almost stupefied audience. "I'm the man!"

"You! Ye gods!"
"Great pip!"

The Rookwood juniors stared at Gunner. Some of them had been curious to hear what Gunner's wheeze might be, but certainly they had not expected this. Gunner really seemed to suppose that his eloquence had produced its due effect, and that a shout of applause was to follow, with the unanimous adoption of Peter Cuthbert Gunner as the sole Classical candidate for election.

If Gunner expected that, however, Gunner was disappointed—and his disappointment was quite brutal.

For a moment or two the Rookwooders stared at the egregious Gunner, as if he had dumbfounded them. Then Mornington yelled:

"Let him have it!"
Whiz, whiz, whiz! Smash! Crash!

"Why—what—how—stoppit—you silly owls! Yarooooogh!" roared Gunner, as he toppled off the form, under a shower of cushions, books, apples, and a few eggs. All kinds of missiles had been brought along by Gunner's audience, and Gunner had the benefit of all of them.

Bump!
Gunner landed on the floor with a loud concussion.

But he did not rest there. There was no rest for Gunner. A swarm of Rookwooders collared him, and dragged him out from the desks.

Gunner roared. But the raggers heeded not his roaring.

Bump!
Gunner, in the grasp of many hands, smote the Form-room floor again. As he sprawled, an inkpot was emptied over him, and Gunner spluttered and gasped.

"Give him some more!" shouted Mornington.

"Hear hear!"
"There's a bottle of ink in the cupboard!" shouted Putty of the Fourth. "Keep him while I get the bottle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Peter Cuthbert Gunner leaped up.

It was difficult, perhaps, for Gunner's mighty brain to comprehend why his generous offer to the Classical Fourth had been rejected. But he could have no doubt that it had been rejected. Amazing as it was, it was clear, even to Gunner, that he was not going to be selected unanimously as the Classical candidate. It was obvious, to Gunner, that he was far and away superior to the whole bunch of other candidates put together. But it was obvious to Gunner alone. The rest of the Classical Fourth either could not or would not see it. That was clear to Gunner—and it was also clear to him that the sooner he escaped from his ungrateful Form-

fellows the better it would be for his health.

So Peter Cuthbert Gunner stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once.

He fairly streaked for the Form-room door.

"After him!" roared Conroy. "Rag the silly ass!"
"Bump him!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold him!" yelled Putty. "I've got the ink!"

Gunner dodged out of the Form-room and fled for his life. The meeting broke up with shouts of laughter. Gunner had not succeeded in solving the difficulty of the election; but he had added considerably to the gaiety of existence. He had, as Morny remarked, furnished the comic relief in the serious situation.

A little later Dickinson minor ventured up to Study No. 7, where he found Gunner, still in a gasping state. Gunner eyed him morosely.

"Hard cheese, old chap!" murmured Dickinson, heroically repressing a powerful desire to chuckle.

Gunner snorted.
"The loss isn't mine!" he said.
"Eh?"

"The fellows refused to back me up!" said Gunner bitterly. "It's the sort of thing I'm accustomed to at Rookwood. Sheer obtuseness, you know. Crass asinine stupidity!"

"Oh!"
"I'm done with them!" said Gunner.

"I shall refuse to stand as a candidate now on any terms whatever! I shall refuse, if they come to me on their bended knees, and you can tell them so from me!"

Dickinson minor did tell them, eliciting howls of laughter as he gave Gunner's message to the Classical Fourth.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Gunner Means Business!

PETER CUTHBERT GUNNER were a thoughtful look the following morning.

It was Saturday—the day of the junior election.

Gunner's thoughtful expression was not caused by any extra attention he was giving to lessons. In fact, his construe that morning was even a little worse than usual, and drew extremely sarcastic comments from his Form-master, Mr. Dalton.

For "con" and for sarcastic comments thereon, however, Gunner cared little. He was thinking of more important matters than classical attainments—which, indeed, he regarded as "rot," and, in his more emphatic moments, as "blinking rot."

It was the junior election that occupied Gunner's thoughts.

The belief was fixed in his mind that this was a special concern of his—that it was up to him, in fact, to save Rookwood.

Rookwood was going to the dogs—that was its sad and inevitable fate, if a Modern cad got in as junior skipper.

Better even Smythe of the Shell, elegant and dawdling ass as he was, than a Modern outsider, in Gunner's opinion. He had that opinion, like many others, to himself; for there were few of the most loyal Classics who would not have preferred Tommy Dodd as junior captain to a smoky and slacking dandy like Adolphus Smythe, who really was not "the goods" in any imaginable way.

But Gunner carried loyalty to his House to excess, as he carried most things. Gunner was determined that,

come what might, Dodd of the Modern Fourth should never carry his Modern head high as junior captain of Rookwood. And that morning—regardless of such minor considerations as class work—Gunner was thinking it out.

Mr. Dalton did not know the important subject of Gunner's deep cogitations, but he knew that Gunner was unusually careless and inattentive in class, and he gave him firstly sarcasm, secondly lines, and thirdly the cane. It was quite an unfortunate morning for Gunner, and he was very glad and relieved when the Classical Fourth were dismissed for the day.

As it was a half-holiday, the juniors were free for the day, and all thoughts were turned on the coming election—no thoughts, perhaps, with such solid concentration as Gunner's.

After dinner he came on Jimmy Silver, who called to him cheerily. "Don't forget three o'clock, Gunner!" Peter Cuthbert grinned.

"I'm not likely to forget it," he said. "I understand that Bulkeley of the Sixth is taking charge of the election, Silver, in the lecture-room, and doors are closed at three."

"Five minutes' grace for late-comers," said Jimmy Silver. "At five minutes past three the doors are locked, and nobody can get in after that. So don't be late. We want every Classical vote."

"I shall be there."

"Voting for the end study candidate, of course?" asked Raby. "That's Conroy."

"Conroy buzzed a book at me in the Form-room yesterday."

"Well, you asked for it, and more, too."

"Mornington grabbed me by the ears," said Gunner darkly.

"Good for Morny!"

"You silly ass! And Lovell bunged an apple in my eye."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle," said Gunner grimly. "But after what I've seen of the Fourth Form candidates I don't think anything of them. We've got to beat the Moderns, and my opinion is that the three silly asses should withdraw and let it go to Smythe."

"Fathead!"

"Smythe's a bit of an ass, and a bit of a bounder," said Gunner. "But he's a Classical."

"That's so," agreed Jimmy Silver. "But he's no good as junior captain, and I'd sooner see Tommy Dodd get in."

"That's unpatriotic, Silver."

"Look here, are you going to vote Modern, you rotter, or are you going to vote for a Shell bounder?" demanded Raby warmly.

"I'm going to see that a Classical man wins this election," said Gunner. "Let it go at that! You refused me when I offered—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I refuse to stand now, even—"

"Even if we ask you on our giddy bended knees," chuckled Newcome. "It's not likely to happen."

"Well, then, my man's Smythe, and I'm getting him in."

"You've only got one vote, fathead."

"You'll see."

Gunner stalked away, dark and mysterious. Jimmy Silver & Co. stared after him rather curiously for a moment, but they forgot his existence the next. Gunner did not occupy the high place in the estimation of his Form-fellows that he occupied in his own. It would have been hard for Peter Cuthbert to realise that fellows could forget his existence. But they could—and did.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Strategic!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON mounted a rather narrow staircase that led to the top box-room, above the Fourth Form passage in the Head's house.

The door of the box-room stood half open, and in the room was a Rookwood junior, among the boxes and standing by the little window that looked over the distance from a height of about sixty feet.

It was Conroy of the Classical Fourth. He turned from the window as Mornington came in.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" said Mornington.

Conroy smiled.

"That isn't all, I suppose?" he asked. "You've got something to say to me, Mornington?"

"I fancied that you'd got something to say to me," answered Mornington. "Are you standing out of the election?"

"No fear! Aren't you?"

"I! No jolly fear!"

Conroy looked puzzled.

"Look here! What's this game, Conroy?" exclaimed Mornington impatiently. "Gunner told me that you were waiting for me here to speak in private about the election. I couldn't imagine what the thump you wanted to speak to me up here for, but he said that if I came up it would be settled about your standing out of the election. I supposed that it was a message from you."

"It jolly well wasn't!" exclaimed Conroy warmly. "Gunner told me that if I would come up here and speak to you it would be arranged about your standing out of the election, so I came."

"What?" ejaculated Morny.

"That's what he said, and I supposed that it was a message from you," said Conroy. "Looks to me as if that idiot Gunner has been pulling my leg and yours, too!"

"A fat-headed joke, I suppose, to get even for the raggin' we gave him yesterday," said Mornington, knitting his brows. "I'll jolly well make Gunner understand that he can't pull my leg like this!"

"Same here. Let's get out."

Both the juniors moved towards the door.

Click!

Under their very eyes the door was drawn shut from the outside and the key turned in the lock.

Conroy stood staring in blank astonishment. Mornington made a spring like a tiger at the door and dragged at the handle.

But the door held fast.

The lock on it was an old one, but it was large and it was strong. The two candidates for the junior captaincy were prisoners in the box-room.

"What the thump—" ejaculated Conroy.

Mornington shook the door-handle furiously.

"Open this door!" he shouted.

"Who's there?"

"Little me!" came a familiar voice through the keyhole, followed by a cheery chuckle.

"Gunner!"

"Just that! Make yourself comfy there for an hour or so. I'll come and let you out after the election."

"What?" yelled the two juniors together.

"Deaf?" asked Gunner.

"You frabjous idiot!" shouted Mornington. "It's a quarter to three now. We've got to show up in the lecture-room in a quarter of an hour. Open this door at once, you burbling idiot!"

"I'll jolly well smash you!" roared Conroy.

"Two can play at that game!" answered Gunner cheerily. "I dare say I can do as much smashing as the next man if it comes to that. You're staying here till after the election!"

"You silly owl, we're candidates in the election."

"That's why."

"What?"

"I'm seeing to it that a Classical man gets in," explained Gunner. "I'm going to handle Lovell next. Smythe isn't much good, but he's the best of the bunch, and the chief thing is to keep the Modern cad out. Smythe can do that with you cheeky cads off the scene. See?"

"Why, I—I—I—" gasped Mornington.

"I'll let you out afterwards!" called out Gunner.

And then his heavy footsteps were heard retreating across the landing to the stairs.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Conroy.

Mornington gritted his teeth. He thumped furiously on the hard, oaken door.

"Gunner!" he yelled. "Gunner, you ass! Gunner, you cheeky chump, I'll smash you! Gunner! Oh, gad! He's gone!"

Gunner was gone. His very footsteps had died away down the box-room stairs. Mornington breathed hard.

"Ten minutes more!" he said. "We've got to get out of this somehow, Conroy. Bulkeley's strict on rules. If we get there a minute after the door's locked we shall be kept out."

"Bang on the door and yell," said Conroy.

Bang, bang, bang! Thump! Bang! The two juniors beat on the door and yelled at the top of their voices. The din in the box-room was terrific. But minute followed minute, and answer there came none.

Gunner had laid his little scheme with wonderful strategy. The studies were deserted at that hour. All the Classical Fourth were making for the lecture-room. The top box-room was remote from any other inhabited quarter. Morny and Conroy thumped their hardest and yelled their loudest, but there were no ears to hear.

From afar came the strokes from the clock-tower.

One, two, three!

Mornington desisted from his vain attack on the oaken door, and rubbed his barked knuckles.

"Too late!" he said between his teeth.

"By gum, I'll make that idiot Gunner sit up for this!" breathed Conroy.

"That won't win the election."

Conroy whistled.

"We're both out of it. Fancy that ass Gunner spoofing the two of us like this! That born idiot! That frabjous chump! My hat!"

"I'll smash him!"

"I'll pulverise him!"

That was the only solace that remained to the two candidates—the prospect of signal vengeance on the egregious Gunner. Gunner doubtless would suffer for his amazing proceedings on election day. But that did not alter the fact that two of the Classical candidates were out of the election. On that point there was no doubt, no possible probable shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Lovell's Luck!

LOVELL, old man!" Arthur Edward Lovell glanced sourly at Gunner. Lovell was walking under the old beeches as the time drew on towards three o'clock. His face was moody, and his thoughts were not pleasant.

He was in no hurry to go to the lecture-room. His chance of succeeding in the election was nil, and he knew it.

Had his only opponents been Smythe of the Shell and Tommy Dodd he would have had a good chance, unpopular as he had become in his Form. All the Classics would have voted to keep a Modern out, and all the footballing fraternity would have voted against a slacking duffer like Adolphus Smythe. But Conroy was the popular candidate in the Classical Fourth, backed up by the end study, and Morny had a good following. Against either of them Lovell had no chance whatever, and he knew it.

The knowledge made him sore.

He was on bad terms with his former friends, but he took it very ill, all the same, that they did not support him. Perhaps he could not be expected to realise that Conroy was the better man for the post. He had, in fact, a party of only three—Peele & Co. Lovell was not proud of the support of the outsiders of the Fourth. He was, in fact, a little ashamed of it. But he needed at least two supporters to put up at all. He had to be proposed and seconded. So he could not afford to part with Peele & Co., well as he was aware that their only object in supporting him was to annoy the end study.

His thoughts were decidedly unpleasant as he tramped under the beeches, feeling a very injured fellow indeed. He had voted for Jimmy Silver at the last election. Now that Jimmy had resigned why couldn't he vote for Lovell? One good turn deserved another. It was not reasonable view to take. But Arthur Edward Lovell was not a very reasonable fellow, especially in his present mood.

Gunner came up to him under the beeches with a cheery smile. Gunner's masterly strategy had disposed of two of the Fourth Form candidates; now he was going to deal with the third. Arthur Edward Lovell, of course, was in total blissful ignorance of Gunner's wonderful scheme. Indeed he had not wasted a single thought upon Gunner that day at all.

"Counting up your chances, old bean?" asked Gunner agreeably.

"How many votes have you got?"

"Find out?" grunted Lovell.

"Is that what you call civil?" asked Gunner, with a warlike look. Gunner's warm temper was always liable to get the better of his strategy.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" retorted Lovell.

Gunner controlled his wrath with an effort.

"I've got something to tell you that's rather important," he said.

"Rot!"

"Look here, Lovell—"

"Go and eat coke. I tell you!"

Again Gunner swallowed his wrath and resisted the strong inclination to plant his knuckles in Lovell's moody face. Self-control was not usually in Gunner's line. But there was much at stake now. Somehow or other he had to persuade Lovell to accompany him to the wood-shed, where he had already placed the key on the outside of the

door. And it was close on three o'clock now, and there was no time to waste.

"What about getting Morny and Conroy to stand out of the election?" he said.

"You couldn't, ass!"

"Come along with me, and I'll jolly well prove to you that I can!" said Gunner.

Lovell stared at him, and then, in sheer amazement, he followed Gunner. A drowning man will clutch at a straw, and the faintest chance of winning the election, the remotest hope of triumphing over the fellows who had, as he considered, let him down, was everything to Lovell. Certainly not the slightest suspicion entered his mind that Gunner had any personal scheme to serve.

"Step into the shed, old chap," said Gunner. "Lots of time yet. It's only a minute to the lecture-room."

"But why—"

"I'll explain inside. I tell you its a good 'un."

Still unsuspecting, but amazed and perplexed, Arthur Edward Lovell stepped into the wood-shed.

Gunner stood in the doorway and grinned.

His hand was on the door.

He had only to jerk it shut, turn the key, and his plot was a complete success.

"It's all serene, old pippin!" he said.

"Morny and Conroy are out of it—and so are you! Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner stepped back.

Slam!

The door closed, and Gunner turned the key.

But, alas! for Peter Cuthbert and his scheme. The best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley, as the poet has told us. Thus it was with Gunner in this case.

He had calculated well—wonderfully well for a fellow endowed with an intellect like Gunner's. But he had not calculated on the circumstance that the wood-shed lock was old and rusty, and that the big key required a heavy jerk to turn it in the lock. Old Mack, the porter, certainly ought to have kept that key in a cleaner and well-oiled condition.

Gunner turned the key—or, rather, he tried to turn it. The key did not move immediately, as the box-room key had done.

For a single second, Lovell, in the

wood-shed, stared blankly at the slammed door. Then he leaped on it and dragged.

Two or three seconds were required to turn that ponderous key in the rusty lock. Gunner was granted barely one.

The door flew open again.

"Oh!" gasped Gunner.

"You silly owl!" roared Lovell.

"What funny tricks are you playing?"

"Here, stop!" shouted Gunner, as Arthur Edward brushed savagely by him. "Stop, I tell you! I'll jolly well make you!"

Gunner grabbed Lovell by the collar. He had intended to carry out his scheme by strategy. But he was quite prepared to use force if strategy failed him, as in this instance it undoubtedly had.

Lovell was going into the wood-shed if Gunner could put him there, and Gunner was a hefty fellow, with no doubts about his own prowess.

He closed with Lovell, and bore him into the doorway.

"In you go!" he gasped.

"My hat! You frabjous ass—"

"Get in!"

Lovell did not get in, and Gunner, rather to his surprise, found himself unable to put Lovell in. Lovell was a sturdy fellow, quite a match for Gunner—and, indeed, in his present enraged and exasperated state, a match for two Gunners, or more. He gave grasp for grasp, and Gunner found himself whirled round and hurled headlong into the wood-shed.

"Yoooooop!"

There was a crash as Gunner landed against a stack of faggots, and a louder crash as he rolled on the ground, with the faggots tumbling over him right and left.

"Oh, my hat! Ow! Oh gad! Oh!" spluttered Gunner.

"There, you cheeky chump!" gasped Lovell.

Boom!

It was the first stroke of three from the clock-tower.

Lovell started, and, bestowing no more thought on Gunner, he turned and raced away for the Head's House.

Two more strokes sounded before he reached the House. He rushed in breathlessly. One minute's grace was allowed—fortunately for Lovell, though not for Gunner's scheme.

He dashed up breathlessly to the door of the lecture-room, where stood Bulkeley of the Sixth.

Bulkeley smiled.

"Just in time!" he said. "Get in!"

Lovell went breathlessly in.

Bulkeley of the Sixth glanced at his watch. Then he closed the door of the lecture-room.

"Hold on, Bulkeley!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Conroy's not here yet, and—"

"That's his look-out!"

"Morny's not here!" exclaimed Oswald.

"That's his look-out, too!" Bulkeley of the Sixth turned the key in the lock. "The notice has been on the board for days now, and every fellow in the Lower School knew the time fixed for the election. We can't hang round all the afternoon for dawdlers!"

"But—" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in dismay.

"That's enough, Silver!" said the captain of Rookwood curtly. "Let's get on to business."

Bang! A heavy hand smote the door without.

"Let me in!" roared Gunner. "I say, I'm Gunner! Let me in! Do you hear? Who's locked this dashed door? Let me in at once!"

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"I've locked the door!" called back Bulkeley. "You're too late!"

"Look here, Bulkeley, I'm Gunner, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently Peter Cuthbert considered that the fact that he was Gunner was a matter of some importance. It did not appear so to the captain of the school.

"I know you're Gunner," answered Bulkeley. "Take a hundred lines for checking a prefect, Gunner?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Another word, and I'll give you six!"

There was no other word from Gunner. The junior election proceeded without the assistance of Peter Cuthbert.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Election I

JIMMY SILVER looked round the lecture-room in blank dismay.

Smythe of the Shell was there, with his nutty supporters; Lovell of the Classical Fourth was there, joined by Peete & Co.; Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth was there, with an army of Moderns.

Fellows who had intended to vote for Mornington and for Conroy were there in force, but neither Morny nor Conroy was present. The absence of Mornington did not matter, from Jimmy Silver's point of view; but the absence of Conroy was a disaster. Why hadn't the candidates arrived? Nobody could even guess. Neither of them was a fellow likely to be late for an election in which he was standing as candidate. Nobody had dreamed for a moment that either of them would fail to turn up on time. And Gunner, who could have explained had he chosen, was shut out of the room.

Smythe and Tommy Dodd had been quite early on the scene. Lovell had arrived at the last moment. But Morny and Conroy were not there; and even if they came now, they were too late. Bulkeley of the Sixth was expending his valuable time in supervising the junior election, but he had no time to waste in waiting for late-comers. And they did not come, anyway. There was no sound in the corridor of hasty, beated footfalls. For some reason absolutely inexplicable to the Rookwooders, both the missing candidates seemed to have "cut" the election.

"Now, then," said Bulkeley, in a business-like manner, "five candidates, I understand?"

"Only three present, Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver glumly.

"Well, there's enough and to spare," said the captain of Rookwood. "Stand forward, there—Smythe, Dodd, Lovell!"

Lovell's face was much brighter.

Apparently there was something in Gunner's mysterious hint—two of his rivals were standing out. Lovell could not understand it, but it was all to the good for his chances. Tommy Dodd did not take the same view. With only two Classical candidates the split in the Classical vote, upon which the Moderns had counted for success, was greatly reduced. Indeed, had Lovell been a popular candidate, it was pretty certain that he could easily have beaten both Smythe and the Modern man—Smythe's followers being the nutty contingent who despised games, great in their own estimation, but far from strong in numbers, and Tommy Dodd's own party being limited to fellows of his own House. Still, Lovell was far from popular at the present time, and Tommy Dodd drew hope from that circumstance.

Smythe of the Shell was proposed, and seconded by Howard and Tracy, and a

show of hands was called for. A few of the Mornington party decided on Smythe as the next best thing but the show of hands was small; and Adolphus realised that he was not in it.

"Hands up for Dodd!"

Every Modern hand in the room went up.

This time Bulkeley and Neville of the Sixth counted carefully and compared notes.

The result was twenty-four, which included all the Modern Fourth and as many of the Modern Shell as had been persuaded to roll up and vote for a fellow in a lower Form than themselves.

"That's not bad!" murmured Tommy Dodd to his pals, Cook and Doyle.

"Hands up for Lovell!"

Peete & Co. elevated their hands. Almost all eyes in the room were turned on Jimmy Silver.

For a moment or two Jimmy hesitated.

Conroy was his man, and Conroy was barred. Lovell was certainly not the fellow he would have chosen for a junior captain of Rookwood, even in the days when they were firm friends.

But House loyalty was strong.

No sensible fellow could have voted for Smythe, with Lovell in the field; Arthur Edward, with all his faults and weaknesses, was so obviously the better man of the two. And between Lovell and Tommy Dodd it was a question of House prestige. Letting in the Modern was not to be thought of, though Jimmy had his deep misgivings. Some of Conroy's party, without waiting for Jimmy to give the lead, were already putting up their hands for Lovell—and Jimmy's hand went up.

Raby's and Newcome's followed, and then there was a forest of hands. All

Conroy's supporters, and most of Mornington's, voted for Lovell.

Tommy Dodd made a grimace to his chums. He knew what the result would be before the counting was over. Once more the Moderns were overwhelmed by the Classical vote, and the larger House carried the day.

"Lovell, thirty votes. Lovell is duly elected junior captain of Rookwood!" said Bulkeley of the Sixth.

Afterwards, when Mornington and Conroy were released from the box-room, the tale of Gunner's iniquity was told. Arthur Edward Lovell chuckled when he heard it. But the other fellows did not chuckle; they gathered round Gunner and dealt with him painfully. It was in vain that Gunner explained that he had acted for the best—that his only object had been to secure a Classical victory, and that, after all, the Modern candidate had been kept out by his wonderful scheme.

The Rookwood juniors did not even listen to him. They bestowed upon Peter Cuthbert Gunner so tremendous a ragging that the hapless schemer spent the remainder of the evening groaning in his study.

Few fellows on the Classical side were satisfied with the result of the election. In fact, it was probable that only one fellow was really pleased with it—and that was the new junior captain of Rookwood.

THE END.

(Lovell as skipper causes a few sensations in next week's long story of Rookwood. Don't miss: "A BAD START FOR THE NEW CAPTAIN!")

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