

"BETRAYED!" SPECIAL CHRISTMAS STORY
OF TOM MERRY & Co.



MEET TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S—

BETRAYED! *By* MARTIN CLIFFORD

Snow! Snow piled deep and still more swirling down blindingly on the wild mountains of Wales! That's the setting for Tom Merry & Co.'s Christmas holiday—the most amazing of their lives!

CHAPTER 1.

Baggy Wants to Go!

"I SAY, Tom, old chap!"
Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, spoke in honeyed tones.

"Tom, old chap—"

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, glanced round in surprise, as he felt Baggy's fat, eager fingers plucking at his sleeve.

Tom Merry, Harry Manners, and Monty Lowther—the famous Terrible Three of St. Jim's—had just entered the Hall from the quad. In the quad the early wintry dusk was falling. Through the big doorway behind them could be seen the white, trampled snow that covered the ground and lay thickly on roofs and window-sills. Tom Merry & Co. had been enjoying a brisk snow-fight with Figgins & Co. of the New House, and they were looking very cheery and ruddy as they entered the Hall.

"Hallo, hallo! What's up, Baggy?" asked Tom.

"If you want to borrow a bob, Baggy, there's nothing doing!" grinned Monty Lowther. "We know you're expecting a postal-order from a titled relation, which ought to arrive to-night or by to-morrow morning at the latest; but all the same there's nothing doing!"

Tom Merry and Manners chuckled. Baggy snorted an indignant snort.

"I don't want to borrow anything!" he hooted.
"My giddy aunt!" gasped Manners. "Who says the age of blessed miracles has passed?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Manners—"

"Well, if you want us to stand you a spread, there's nothing doing, either, Baggy!" laughed Tom Merry.
"We're going out to tea."

As he spoke Tom glanced at his watch.

"Come on, you chaps—better hurry."

The Terrible Three moved on towards the stairs. Baggy scuttled hastily in front of them, barring their way.

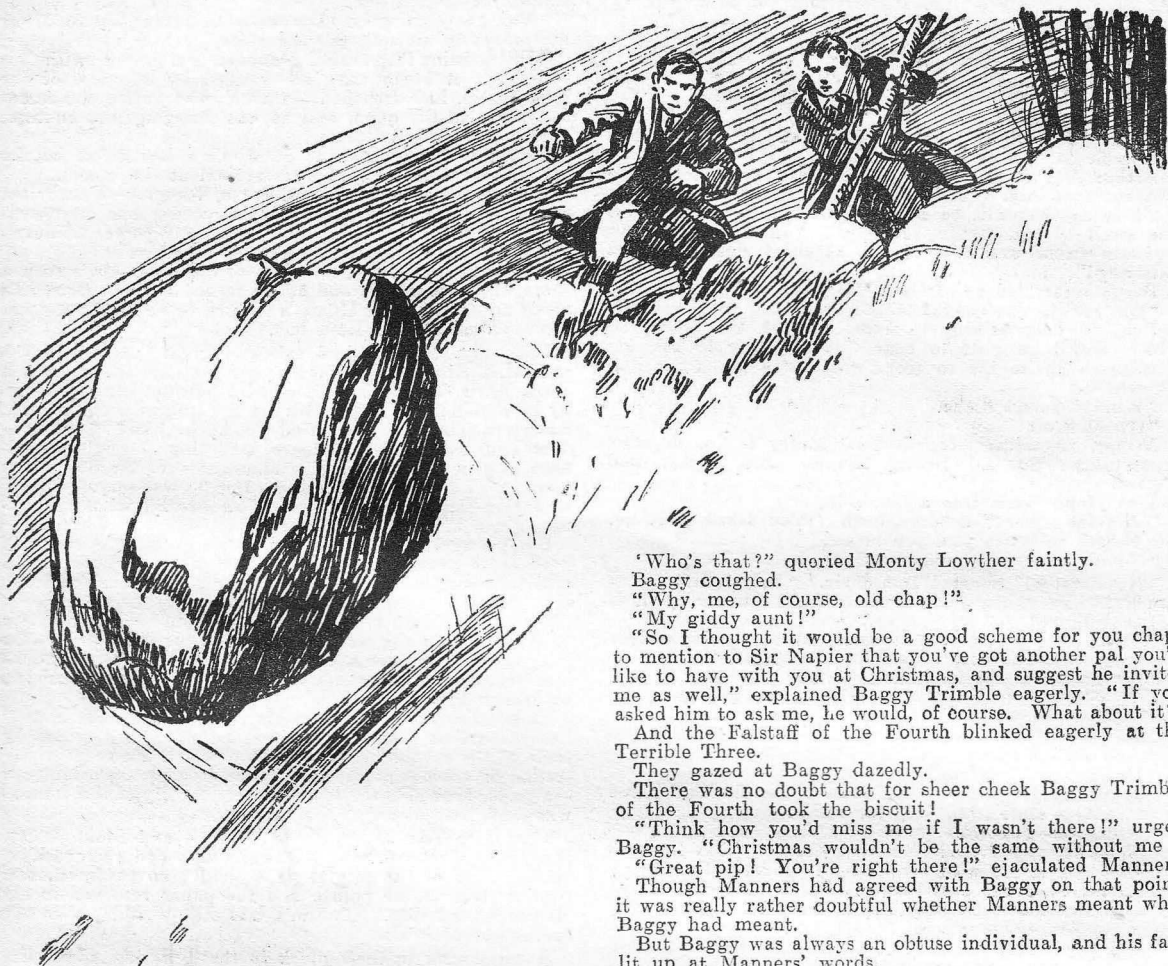
"Half a jiff!" gasped the fat Fourth-Former eagerly.

"Out of the way, porpoise!"

"Look here," said Baggy desperately, clutching at Tom



—IN THIS FULL-OF-THRILLS COMPLETE CHRISTMAS STORY!



Merry's sleeve as the chums of the Shell began to push past him, "it's about the Christmas vac. We break up tomorrow—"

"We know that, fathead!" exclaimed Manners.

"And you chaps are going to spend Christmas with Kildare and Sir Napier Wynter, aren't you?" went on Baggy, his little eyes gleaming with a very eager light.

Tom Merry stared at Baggy in surprise.

"Well, what about it?"

Sir Napier Wynter was an uncle of Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. Sir Napier was staying at the school, and the fact that he had invited Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. and Talbot of the Shell to spend Christmas at Llanfellyn Towers, his home in the Welsh mountains, was known to most of the other juniors.

But what it had to do with Baggy was a mystery!

"What about it, Baggy?" repeated Tom Merry curiously.

Baggy smirked and coughed.

"Ahem! You see, I—I'm thinking of coming, too!"

Tom Merry jumped.

The chums of the Shell had been looking forward very eagerly to spending Christmas with Sir Napier and Eric Kildare, and Talbot and Blake & Co., at Llanfellyn Towers. Callao Garcia, the South American junior who had recently arrived at St. Jim's, was also to be a member of Sir Napier's Christmas house-party.

But they certainly did not want Baggy Trimble!

"My hat! Sir Napier's invited you?" yelled Lowther.

"Ahem! Well, no—not exactly," admitted Baggy.

"But knowing how frightfully you chaps would miss me if I wasn't there—"

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Manners.

"My hat!" breathed Tom Merry faintly.

"Yes, I realise how dull it would be for you at the Towers without your old pal—" explained Baggy, with a fat smirk.

"Without whom?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Without your old pal," repeated Baggy.

"Who's that?" queried Monty Lowther faintly.

Baggy coughed.

"Why, me, of course, old chap!"

"My giddy aunt!"

"So I thought it would be a good scheme for you chaps to mention to Sir Napier that you've got another pal you'd like to have with you at Christmas, and suggest he invites me as well," explained Baggy Trimble eagerly. "If you asked him to ask me, he would, of course. What about it?"

And the Falstaff of the Fourth blinked eagerly at the Terrible Three.

They gazed at Baggy dazedly.

There was no doubt that for sheer cheek Baggy Trimble of the Fourth took the biscuit!

"Think how you'd miss me if I wasn't there!" urged Baggy. "Christmas wouldn't be the same without me!"

"Great pip! You're right there!" ejaculated Manners.

Though Manners had agreed with Baggy on that point, it was really rather doubtful whether Manners meant what Baggy had meant.

But Baggy was always an obtuse individual, and his face lit up at Manners' words.

"Good!" he exclaimed briskly. "I'm glad you realise what a difference I'd make to the party, Manners, old chap. Well, it only remains for you chaps to put it to Sir Napier. I'm not proud—I'm not the sort of chap to be offended because he hasn't asked me already. Rather not! Just tell him an old pals of yours, who would be the life and soul of the party, ought to be invited to the Towers—"

"Why, of all the—"

"You chaps are going to tea with him, aren't you?" went on Baggy eagerly. "I heard you telling Talbot you were. So that's your chance! Ask him at tea. Explain I'd be much more of an asset to his blessed house-party than those asses Blake & Co. and that dummy Talbot—"

Baggy broke off suddenly.

"Oh! Yaroooooough!"

It was unfortunate for Baggy that he had not noticed the appearance behind him of Talbot of the Shell!

Talbot had reached out an open hand and delivered a stinging smack upon Baggy's fat little ear. Baggy roared.

"Ow-yow! Yooooooop!"

"So I'm a dummy, am I?" grinned Talbot.

"Oh, lor'!" Baggy massaged his reddened ear and blinked at Talbot nervously. "Ahem! Nunno, old chap! I—I didn't say you, did I? I meant Blake & Co. were silly dummies—"

"Oh, that's what you meant, was it?" came a sudden voice behind him.

Baggy jumped and swung round. His jaw dropped.

"Oh crumbs!"

Jack Blake, Digby,* Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, had entered from the quad just in time to hear Baggy's words. They were surveying the Falstaff of the Fourth very grimly. Baggy backed away hastily.

"Hands off!"

But already Herries and Digby had grasped him. They

swung him into the air, and there was a dull and sickening thud as Baggy's tight trousers met the floor.

"Whoooooop!"

Baggy roared.

"So we're silly dummies, are we?" snorted Herries.

"Yow! Nunno! I—I meant—"

Bump!

"Ow-wow-wow!"

Herries and Digby released Baggy, and he collapsed on the linoleum in a gasping heap.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his gleaming monocle and surveyed him wrathfully.

"I twust that will be a lesson to you, Twimble," said the swell of St. Jim's severely. "In futuah, kindly wofwain fwom wefewwin' to us as sillay dummays, you fat fwog!"

Baggy scrambled painfully to his feet.

"Oh, really, you chaps! Don't be beasts, you know! I—I've just been talking to Tom Merry & Co. about the hols! You'll be glad to hear they're going to ask Sir Napier to invite me to spend Christmas at Llanfellyn Towers—"

"What?" yelled Blake.

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus stared at Tom Merry & Co. in utter amazement. So did Blake, Herries, and Digby, and Talbot.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"You fat fibber!" he exclaimed. "You asked us to get Sir Napier to invite you, you mean!"

"B-but you're going to, aren't you, gasped Baggy.

"Not exactly!" retorted Tom dryly. "Why, you're about the last chap at St. Jim's w'd want him to invite, if it comes to that!"

Baggy's face was a picture as he stared dumbly at the captain of the Shell.

"But Manners said my presence in the party would make all the difference!" he yelled, finding his voice at last.

Manners chuckled.

"So it would! That's why we're not getting you invited, old fat man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy surveyed the grinning faces of the Terrible Three with feelings almost too deep for words.

"Why, you—you—you—"

"Come on, you chaps!" chuckled Talbot. "It's time we buzzed along to tea with Sir Napier! So-long, Baggy!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. turned with Talbot towards the stairs, leaving Baggy Trimble staring after them in utter consternation.

"I—I say! Half a jiff!" gasped Baggy, scuttling after them. "I know you're only joking. He, he, he! You'll ask Sir Napier to invite me, won't you?"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry shook off Baggy's fat, clutching fingers and strolled on. Baggy stood breathless and panting at the foot of the stairs as the chums of the Shell and Fourth vanished up them.

"You—you blessed rotters!" gasped Baggy. "Yah! Beasts! Cads!"

"Bai Jove! Did you heah what that fat wottah called us?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, turning at the bend of the stairs as if he intended to retrace his aristocratic steps in Baggy's direction. "Shan't be a moment, deah boys—I'll just administrah a feahful thwashin' to the fat wottah—"

The swell of St. Jim's took a couple of strides down the stairs. Then he gave an exclamation of surprise. He adjusted his monocle, and stared down into the Hall in great astonishment.

The Hall was empty! Baggy had not waited.

"Bai Jove! Twimble seems to have disappaeahed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a surprised countenance, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned again and rejoined his chums, as they hurried on up the stairs to their studies, there to tidy themselves up in readiness for tea with Kildare's uncle.

CHAPTER 2.

The Silver Image!

"COME in!"

A tap had come at the door of Tom Merry's study. Tom, hastily changing his collar to a clean one, glanced towards the door as it opened.

"Hallo, Garcia!"

Callao Garcia, the South American junior, stepped smilingly into the room.

He was a striking-looking youngster, with a panther-like grace of movement. His swarthy, handsome face, with its

dark, gleaming eyes and flashing teeth, was utterly un-English.

"You are coming to take tea with Senor Wynter?" he murmured in his soft, purring voice.

"Just coming!" grunted Manners, struggling with his cuff-links. A large snowball wielded by Figgins, of the New House, had drenched Manners' shirt during the recent snow-fight in the quad, and he was changing into another.

"Good!" smiled Garcia.

Garcia had only been at St. Jim's a few days; but he had caused a sensation by his arrival at the school.

He was the son of the President of Rioguary—a turbulent South American republic—and his coming had been suggested to the President by Sir Napier Wynter, Kildare's uncle, when Sir Napier had been in Rioguary.

It was unusual for a new boy to enter St. Jim's such a short while before the end of the term. But the Head had made an exception in Garcia's favour, to oblige Sir Napier—himself an old St. Jim's boy.

Naturally, Kildare had taken a great interest in the arrival of his uncle's protegee; but the captain had had a shock when Garcia, in a fit of wild passion, brought about by Kildare's interference with his smoking of a black South American cheroot, had tried to knife him! The incident had blown over, Kildare accepting Garcia's repentance as genuine, and, making allowances for the Rioguyan youngster's foreign upbringing. But he was scarcely likely to forget—any more than was Tom Merry, who had witnessed the amazing incident.

But the excitement over Garcia's startling little ways had been quite overshadowed by the amazing happenings that had followed, when Sir Napier Wynter had arrived for a short stay at St. Jim's soon afterwards.

Sir Napier had only just got back to England from Rioguary, where he had held a high position under the Rioguyan government. On behalf of the government, he had put down a dangerous rebellion that had threatened to overthrow President Garcia.

Only a few hours after arriving at St. Jim's, Sir Napier had discovered that he had been followed to England by some of the revolutionaries—their object being to gain possession of a secret paper that he had brought from Rioguary—a paper that held the secret of the identity of the traitors who had brought about the revolution.

Thanks to Tom Merry & Co., Talbot, and Blake & Co., three scoundrelly South Americans who had succeeded in getting hold of the fateful paper had been captured, and handed over to the police, and the paper returned to Sir Napier's possession. St. Jim's was still thrilling with the excitement of it all.

It was owing to their pluck in that amazing affair that Kildare's uncle had invited the eight juniors to spend Christmas with him, in company with Kildare and Garcia, at his home in Wales.

It did not take Tom Merry & Co. long to finish their hurried changing. As they were leaving the study with Garcia, Talbot and Blake & Co. appeared in the passage, and the juniors set off in a body for Sir Napier's room.

The room that had been given to Kildare's uncle for use as a sitting-room during his stay at the school was on the ground floor, with a window overlooking the quad.

Kildare was there, standing by the cheerful fire, talking to his uncle, when the juniors arrived.

The captain of St. Jim's greeted the juniors with a smile and a friendly nod. Sir Napier, a tall, tanned figure with lean strength obvious in every limb, and eyes that were grey and keen, came forward with a smile.

"So here you are!" he exclaimed. "Splendid! I hope you have all brought good appetites with you," he added, glancing at the table, which was piled high with all Dame Taggles' most tasty delicacies.

"Rather, sir!" grinned Monty Lowther. "We've just been snow-fighting with some New House bounders, and I could jolly well chew the leg off a piano!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Same here!"

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

"That's fine!" laughed Sir Napier. "Make yourselves comfortable, then. Garcia, come and sit here, will you?"

With Garcia on one side of him and Tom Merry on the other, and Eric Kildare at the opposite end, Sir Napier took his seat at the head of the table, and the cheery tea-party began.

"Well, to-morrow we're all off to Wales, kids!" remarked Kildare, with a laugh. "No more school work for a while!"

"Hurrah!"

"I think you ought to enjoy yourselves!" nodded Sir Napier smilingly. "My place is right up in the mountains—you'll get all the tobogganing you could wish for. And there's a big lake near by for skating."

"Wippin'!"

"I have often wished to see the true English Christmas!" murmured Garcia.

"You'll see it all right!" grinned Tom Merry.

Dame Taggles' good things vanished rapidly, to an accompaniment of cheerful talk and laughter, and the merry rattle of cups. Despite the chilly darkness without, where the snow lay thick and white in the old quad, it was very warm and cosy in the big room.

All the juniors were in very high spirits at the prospect of breaking-up next morning, and leaving all thoughts of Form-rooms and prep behind them for a few weeks. Garcia was the only member of the party who was rather silent.

Even Kildare, though a Sixth-Former, joined in the talk and laughter very heartily. The captain of St. Jim's was always ready to enjoy himself with juniors when the occasion arrived.

After tea they all gathered round the fire and chatted. But at last Kildare stood up.

"I must get along and pack."

"Same here," nodded Blake.

There was a general movement to go. But as the juniors turned towards the door, Sir Napier touched Tom Merry on the arm.

"Will you wait, Tom? I want to speak to you."

A little surprised, Tom waited as the others said good-night. Sir Napier closed the door behind his departing guests and turned to Tom.

His face was serious.

"I wonder if you would mind going into the village for me this evening, Tom?"

"Of course I will, sir!"

"Thanks! I want you to post a parcel for me."

The baronet crossed to the fire. A grim smile appeared on his tanned face.

"It's that paper," he explained laconically.

Tom Merry gave a quick exclamation.

"You mean the paper those scoundrels stole—the paper you brought from Rioguary?"

"Yes," nodded Sir Napier. "I don't mean to risk letting it get into their hands again."

"But they're safe in the hands of the police!" cried Tom.

"I know. But what if they have got some pals still free?" murmured Sir Napier, with a grim smile.

"My hat!"

"Mind you, I'm not suggesting they actually have," went on the baronet. "But there is always the possibility. As I say, I'm not taking any chances. I am going to send that paper off by post to-night, to travel that way to the Towers. I feel it might be safer than carrying it with me on the journey to-morrow."

He chuckled.

"And when it gets to the Towers, Tom, there'll be a rattling good hiding-place for it! While I've been in South America, old Broom, the butler, who has been looking after the place for me, has found a secret panel somewhere in the house. I remember him mentioning it in a letter, though I didn't take much interest at the time. I shall write and tell him to hide the paper behind his secret panel till I arrive at the house."

"Good scheme!" grinned Tom.

Sir Napier's hand went to his pocket.

He took out a folded, crumpled sheet, with one corner charred and burnt away. Tom Merry caught his breath.

It was the fateful paper that held the secret of the identity

of the leaders of that treacherous revolution in far-off Rioguary.

Written on it, as he knew, were the names of the traitors who, while holding posts under the President, had fomented rebellion against him. But the names were written in code, and as yet Sir Napier had not been successful in solving the code. As soon as he did he would send the information thus gained to Rioguary, and the traitors would meet with their deserts.

No wonder the revolutionaries had been so desperately anxious to obtain possession of that paper before Sir Napier could solve the code and extract its secret!



A steely hand closed over Baggy Trimble's mouth from behind, and a knife glittered before his starting eyes. "Struggle, and you die!"

"I must put it in something for safety's sake," muttered Sir Napier thoughtfully.

His eyes roamed round the room.

Standing on the chimney-piece were a number of curiosities he had brought home from South America. Among them were two small silver figures, about four inches high, grotesquely moulded. Sir Napier's eyes gleamed.

"By Jove! The very thing!"

He picked up one of the little silver figures.

"These are ancient idols, Tom, made by the Rioguyan Indians. They are hollow inside. They were used by the Indians for holding little charms and superstitious emblems. See this?"

With a twist of his fingers Sir Napier removed the head of the little silver figure, revealing a hollow interior.

Folding the paper, he thrust it into the little cavity and replaced the head. From a drawer he took a small box, and packed the silver idol carefully within it, together with a letter of instructions to his butler. With brown paper and string he made up a neat parcel, and addressed it to Llanfellyn Towers.

"That's that!" he exclaimed. "Here's some money for the postage, Tom. And thanks very much?"

"I'll go with it now," said Tom Merry, taking the little parcel.

He glanced suddenly at the window. The curtains were drawn, but the window was open slightly at the top, and Tom fancied he had heard a faint sound outside in the darkness.

"Hallo! What was that?"

Tom crossed quickly to the window and dragged the curtain aside, staring out.

The light from the room flooded out over the trampled

snow of the quad. But there was no one there. Tom let the curtain fall back into place.

"I thought I heard something," he explained, as Sir Napier stared at him in surprise. "Must have been mistaken."

Sir Napier strode swiftly to the window and flung up the lower sash. He leaned out, peering into the darkness.

"Yes, you must have been mistaken, Tom. There's no one out there."

He closed the window, and the captain of the Shell left the room, carrying the precious parcel.

But, had Tom Merry only known it, he had not been mistaken. The sound he had thought he heard had actually been the footfall of someone stealing away from the window—someone who had heard every word that had passed in the room between Tom and Sir Napier Wynter concerning the fateful secret paper!

CHAPTER 3.

Trapped in the Crypt!

"BEASTS!"

Baggy Trimble made that remark.

He made it, so to speak, to the desert air, for he was sulking by himself near the foot of the stairs in the Hall.

Baggy was not feeling cheerful.

Though almost every other junior at St. Jim's was feeling very bright and pleased with life that evening, thanks to the prospect of breaking-up on the morrow, Baggy's face was as long as its podgy shape would allow.

Many a time and oft had Baggy boasted of the glories of Trimble Hall, the palatial home of the Trimbles. As a topic of conversation it was second only to the all-important one of "grub." One would have imagined, therefore, that Baggy would have been only too glad to be off home next day.

But, for some reason, Baggy did not seem at all to like the prospect of spending Christmas at Trimble Hall!

This was possibly because Trimble Hall and its wonders did not exist outside Baggy's fertile imagination, as most of the juniors declared. Whatever the reason, the Falstaff of the Fourth did not want to go home for the holidays. That was certain.

Instead, he had made up his fat mind to worm himself somehow, anyhow, into the party that Sir Napier Wynter was going to entertain at Llanfellyn Towers.

Obtuse though he usually was, even Baggy realised that to go to Sir Napier and ask outright to be included in the party would only annoy Kildare's uncle by its blatant "cheek." He realised equally well, however, that if he

could persuade Tom Merry & Co. to suggest to Sir Napier that he should be included in the party, that gentleman would be only too ready to agree to it. He had hoped to be able to persuade the Terrible Three to do that, and their blunt refusal of his request had been a bitter blow to Baggy.

"Beasts!"

It was to Tom Merry & Co. that his angry mutterings referred.

A sudden step on the stairs caused Baggy to glance up then. He gave a stifled exclamation.

The elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had come into sight, descending to the Hall.

"Oh lor!"

The last time Baggy had seen the swell of St. Jim's, Arthur Augustus had been intent upon administering a "feahful thwashin'!" It occurred to Baggy that at sight of him now Arthur Augustus might remember his earlier intentions.

Baggy did not wait to see! He scuttled hastily out through the big doorway into the shadow at the top of the steps leading down into the quad, and hid there as he heard the swell of St. Jim's come down the stairs and halt by the notice-board.

"Br-r-r!" scowled Baggy. "Gussy's a beast, too!"

He could hear someone else coming down the stairs now, striding quickly. The next moment the voice of Arthur Augustus was to be heard.

"Hallo, Tom Mewwy! Goin' out, deah boy?"

"Yes," came Tom's answer. "I'm just buzzing into the village—posting this parcel for Sir Napier. So long!"

Baggy shrank into the shadows as the athletic figure of the captain of the Shell came hurrying out through the doorway and down the steps without noticing the fat figure skulking in the porch. He had a parcel under his arm.

And in that moment a sudden wild plan came into the mind of the Falstaff of the Fourth.

"My hat!" breathed Baggy. "It might work!"

If he could only get possession of that parcel of Sir Napier's, take it to the village and post it, and so win the gratitude of Kildare's uncle, the chances were that the baronet might invite him to join his Christmas house-party. So it seemed to Baggy.

It was worth trying, at any rate.

In a moment the fat Fourth-Former was scuttling down the steps into the quad.

Fortunately for him, Kangaroo of the Shell had stopped Tom Merry in the centre of the quad to speak to him.

Keeping in the dark shadow of the School House, Baggy raced over the snow as fast as his fat little legs would

(Continued on next page.)

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carry him. His feet made no sound. As Tom turned from Kangaroo to stride on towards the gates, Baggy came to a breathless halt by the entrance to the old Cloisters.

Striding along with his coat-collar turned up, his hands thrust deep into his coat pockets, and the precious parcel under his arm, Tom Merry headed for the gates, whistling. About the last person in his thoughts just then was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth—until, as he was passing the entrance to the Cloisters, he heard a sudden startling yell.

"Ow! Oh! Let me go! Knox, you bully—oh!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom, coming to an abrupt standstill. "That's Baggy's voice!"

Judging by its tone, Baggy was in pain and terror.

"Oh—oh! Knox, you brute! Stop twisting my arm!"

"Great pip!" gasped Tom.

By the sound of things, there was no doubt as to what was happening in the darkness of the Cloisters! Baggy was being bullied by Gerald Knox, the tyrant of the Sixth.

"Oh, oh, oh!"

From the darkness came an agonised moan.

Tom did not hesitate further! With set teeth he dashed into the Cloisters, peering round in the gloom.

Baggy Trimble might not be one of Tom's greatest friends; but the captain of the Shell did not mean to stand by and let him be bullied by the cad of the Sixth.

"Baggy!" he shouted. "I'm coming!"

"Help!"

"Where are you?" cried Tom fiercely. "Knox, you cad, let him alone—"

"Ow! Oh!" From the sudden yells that came from the darkness Knox was still carrying on with his foul behaviour, despite the fact that he must—or so it seemed—have heard Tom's arrival on the scene.

"Oh, oh, oh! Stop him!" wailed Baggy's voice, apparently in a paroxysm of terror. "This way—the crypt—"

Tom swung in the direction of the voice. Not far away was the heavy door that gave entrance to the steps leading down into the crypt, and he saw now that it was standing open.

Knox, it seemed, was attempting to drag Baggy down into the crypt!

Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming fiercely, darted in through the low doorway into the blackness beyond.

"I'm coming, Baggy—"

His words broke off.

Before he realised what was happening, Tom Merry felt the parcel snatched from his hand. A heavy figure collided with him, knocking him flying. The next moment a shadowy shape darted out through the doorway, and the massive old door shut with a crash.

As he staggered to his feet on the stone steps, Tom heard the scraping of the ancient bolts as they were shot home.

He flung himself at the door and beat upon it. A faint snigger came to his ears from the other side, and the sound of rapidly retreating footsteps. Baggy's footsteps!

Tom Merry was trapped in the crypt, and the precious parcel containing the little silver figure that held Sir Napier's secret paper had been taken from him—was in the hands of the Falstaff of the Fourth!

CHAPTER 4.

Awkward for Baggy!

"HE, he, he!"

Baggy sniggered gleefully to himself as he emerged from the Cloisters into the quad.

His plan had worked wonderfully well!

All that remained to be done was to hurry into the village and post the parcel he had in his possession, and then explain to Sir Napier Wynter that he had found it lying in the quad, and had considered it his duty to post it without delay, seeing that it was already addressed. After that, surely the least Sir Napier could do to show his gratitude would be to invite him to Llanfellyn Towers!

The trapping of Tom Merry in the crypt would no doubt need some explaining. But if Baggy denied that it was his voice that had lured Tom into the Cloisters and declared it must have been an imitation of his voice instead, the fact that Tom had been trapped there might easily be put down to a New House rag.

Baggy was never hindered by questions of veracity in such little matters! And, anyway, it was never his habit to look very far ahead and worry about difficulties before they occurred.

"He, he, he!"

With another gleeful snigger Baggy turned and scuttled in the direction of the gates.

But in the shadow of the chapel he paused.

Baggy possessed an overwhelming curiosity. Already he was beginning to wonder what was in the parcel he was carrying. Considering that Sir Napier was off to Llanfellyn Towers himself next day, it certainly seemed peculiar

that he should be bothering to send a small parcel there by post.

"Rum!" muttered Baggy thoughtfully.

He weighed the parcel in his hand and shook it.

"Wonder what the dickens it is?" he muttered.

He moved on a few steps, then paused again.

Even to a fellow of Baggy's accommodating code of honour the idea of opening the parcel to learn its contents, though it had occurred to him, seemed a little too "thick!"

He eyed the parcel with wrapt interest, his terrific curiosity struggling with his sense of decency.

Baggy's sense of decency, however, was a poor thing at best! It simply did not stand a chance in the struggle. It wavered and gave up—curiosity had won fairly easily. The next moment Baggy was guiltily unfastening the string and unwrapping the brown paper.

Within, he came to the box and opened the lid with eager fingers. He scarcely knew what he expected to find inside. But he certainly had not expected to find there what he did.

"My hat!"

Baggy picked out the little silver image and stared down at it in great astonishment.

He recognised it instantly as being one of the two little figures he had seen on Sir Napier's chimney-piece the day before, when he had been sent to the baronet's room by Mr. Railton with a message for Kildare, who had been there with his uncle.

"Well, I'm blessed! What the dickens does Kildare's blessed uncle want to send this to the Towers for?" he grunted.

That was a new mystery for him to puzzle over. But he had, at any rate, satisfied his curiosity regarding the contents of the parcel. With hasty fingers Baggy returned the little image to its box and began to refasten the parcel. But he did not finish the task.

A crunch in the snow behind caused him to start and turn his head guiltily. Three figures had loomed up—Figgins, Kerr, and Patty Wynn of the New House.

They held snowballs in their hands.

"It's Baggy!" sang out Figgins cheerily. "Shoot, you chaps!"

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

Three snowballs came flying through the air.

"Yow-ow! Grooooh!"

Baggy gave a yell as one of the snowballs caught him on the nose, and another on the ear, and another in the waistcoat. He sat down in the snow with a gasp, and the unfastened parcel in his hand went flying!

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

Three more snowballs squashed on Baggy's fat countenance, and he choked and yelled. Then he was seized by the cheery New House trio and rolled in the snow, and snow was thrust down his neck. Then Figgins & Co. went their way, seeking further School House victims—leaving the Falstaff of the Fourth spluttering and gasping and groaning.

"Yah! Beasts!" gurgled Baggy, as he sat up dazedly. "Oh, the rotters!"

He staggered to his feet.

"Grooooh! Oh lor! Ow!"

He blinked round in sudden alarm. To his relief, he saw that the little box of Sir Napier's parcel had not been trodden on in the scuffle. He snatched it up, then gave a gasp of consternation.

The little silver idol was missing.

Evidently it had fallen from the box when the latter had flown from Baggy's hand. Baggy peered round in the trampled snow.

There was no sign of the missing image.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" breathed Baggy, in utter dismay.

He wished now, from the bottom of his fat heart, that he had never taken it into his head to open the parcel!

He began to search desperately. But the snow was thick, and it had been churned up a good deal by Figgins & Co. Though he finally went down on all fours and swept his fat fingers through the snow, Baggy could find no trace of the silver figure.

He gave up the search at last and rose to his feet, looking quite green.

"Oh dear!" groaned Baggy. "This is awful!"

That he was in a very awkward—even a serious—position, he realised.

If Tom Merry insisted that it was Baggy's voice that had lured him into the Cloisters when the parcel had been



snatched from him, Baggy knew that he might very easily find himself accused of having stolen the silver image.

"Oh lor'!"

Despite the wintry air, beads of perspiration were standing out on his forehead now.

Then suddenly a desperate scheme entered his mind.

He knew that the missing image that he had lost in the snow somewhere there in the shadow of the chapel was one of two. If he could get hold of the other one, and send it off in Sir Napier's parcel, he felt sure that the substitution would never be known!

What had happened to the second figure would be a mystery to Sir Napier, of course. But it was possible he would not trouble very much. The figures were small, and could not be of much value, in Baggy's opinion. In any case, Sir Napier would never connect Baggy with the disappearance!

It was a desperate plan, but Baggy was feeling desperate.

"I'll jolly well do it!" he muttered nervously.

He stood listening. His chief fear now was that Tom Merry would be released from the crypt before he could put his plan into execution. But even where he stood, not far from the entrance to the Cloisters, he could hear nothing, though he felt sure that Tom must be beating on the door of the crypt.

The crypt, beneath the Cloisters as it was, was far enough away from everywhere for Baggy to feel fairly safe regarding the captain of the Shell. It was highly unlikely that Tom would be found and released yet a while.

Hiding the empty box behind one of the buttresses, Baggy scuttled off towards the School House.

His heart was beating uncomfortably fast as he entered the empty Hall and turned in the direction of Sir Napier's room. But luck was with him. The room was empty.

Two minutes later Baggy was back in the shadow of the chapel, hastily packing up the second little image in place of the first.

"He'll never know!" he muttered.

But it was with a decidedly guilty conscience—a thing which Baggy seldom possessed—that the Falstaff of the Fourth hurried out of gates on his way to Rylcombe, with the parcel under his arm.

There was a limit—even for Baggy! And in his heart Baggy knew that this time he had stepped right past the limit!

CHAPTER 5.

The Masked Figure!

IT was very dark in Rylcombe Lane.

The moon was obscured by clouds and broke through only occasionally, causing the snow on the road and hedges to glitter in a ghostly way. There was no wind, and a heavy silence brooded under the snow-laden trees of Rylcombe Wood, on the left of the road.

It was all rather eerie, and Baggy, with his guilty conscience for his only companion, shivered and glanced over his shoulder from time to time uneasily.

"Tom Merry can say what he likes, but I'll jolly well deny it was me that trapped him in the crypt!" he muttered to himself. "He didn't see me in the dark—he couldn't! So he can't prove it. And when Kildare's blessed uncle finds out I—hem!—found his parcel in the quad and dutifully hurried off to the village and posted it—he, he, he!—he's sure to be decent and ask if I'd like to come with the other chaps to his place in Wales—"

Baggy did not finish his ruminations.

Hurrying along over the snow, he had not noticed a lithe, shadowy figure standing hidden in the gloom of the great trees beside the road—had not seen that dark, silent shape come gliding out as he passed, its footsteps noiseless on the snow.

The first thing Baggy knew of his danger was when a steely hand closed over his mouth from behind, dragging back his head. A knife glittered before his starting eyes, and he felt the point of it pressed to his heart.

He wanted to scream, but he could not utter a sound with that hand pressed over his mouth.

"Struggle, and you die!"

The sinister words were whispered in his ear in a soft, foreign voice that was somehow familiar.

Baggy ceased his first instinctive struggles. With the slim knife still held to his heart, he dared not disobey the commands of his mysterious assailant. The perspiration was rolling down his clammy cheeks, and his fat limbs were quaking with terror.

A handkerchief was thrust into his mouth, and he dared not even gurgle. His hands were dragged behind him, and tied there with another handkerchief knotted round his fat wrists. A third handkerchief was tied round his mouth, holding the gag in place.

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Baggy rolled his eyes wildly, striving to catch a glimpse of his captor's face. But the sight was scarcely reassuring!

His assailant's features were completely hidden behind a white cloth that was tied over them, with holes cut for the eyes.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Baggy to himself.

It was all rather like a nightmare to the Falstaff of the Fourth. He could scarcely believe that it was actually happening—there in the quietness of an English lane!

He was hustled to the side of the road, under the dark trees. A rough push sent him over sideways into the snow, where he lay gasping, his eyes wide with terror.

His assailant, he saw, now held the parcel that Baggy had let fall at the first moment of the attack. With quick, eager fingers, the shadowy figure was tearing off the string and paper. A moment later there was a gleam of silver, as the mysterious unknown snatched from its box the little Indian image.

Baggy heard him give a low, triumphant exclamation.

The fat junior's terror was such that he had little time to wonder who his assailant was, or what he wanted with the silver image that belonged to Sir Napier Wynter. He saw his attacker tear open the envelope that accompanied the little figure and read the contents with eager haste.

There was a soft laugh from behind the white cloth.

Baggy lay motionless, scarcely daring to breathe.

He saw the unknown, masked figure unscrew the curiously-shaped head of the silver idol—an act which bewildered Baggy considerably. He realised now that the interior of the idol was hollow—and a moment later he realised, too, that his assailant had expected to find something inside it which was not there.

"Carajo!"

The word was more like an animal's snarl, as the masked figure found the little image to be empty. But again it seemed to Baggy that there was something vaguely familiar about the voice.

The discovery that the interior of the idol was empty was clearly a staggering blow to the mysterious masked figure. He stood there almost dazedly, muttering what could only be Spanish curses below his breath.

Then, with a snarl, he flung the little image down at his feet with a gesture of uncontrolled fury.

Baggy trembled in every limb. He felt sure that his captor would turn his attention to him, now, and vent his disappointment and fury upon his helpless prisoner.

But to his overwhelming relief the masked figure turned the next moment and hurried away, vanishing in the darkness of Rylcombe Lane.

"Ow! Thank goodness he's gone!" groaned Baggy behind his gag. "Yow! Oh, crumbs! Who the dickens was it? Must have been one of those blessed South American rotters that Kildare's uncle had that scrap with, about some giddy paper!"

He began to wriggle and twist in an effort to free his bound wrists.

But they were fastened too securely. After five minutes' vain struggle, Baggy gave up the attempt with a groan.

"I—I can't get free! Oh, crumbs!"

The moon came shining through a gap in the clouds. It lit up the silver image lying near him in the snow, amid the remains of Sir Napier's parcel.

And then, to Baggy's relief, he heard someone cheerily whistling. Someone was coming along the road!

Baggy rolled over painfully till he was in clear view of anyone passing in the lane. The next moment Talbot of the Shell came striding into view from the direction of the village.

At sight of the fat form lying under the trees by the roadside, gagged and bound, Talbot gave a startled gasp.

"Baggy!"

"Mmmmmmmmmmm!" mumbled Baggy through his gag.

In an instant Talbot was bending over him, unfastening the handkerchief that held his wrists. He removed the gag hastily and Baggy sat up with a breathless groan.

"Ow! Oh, my hat!" mumbled Baggy, rubbing his wrists, which were sore and aching. "Grooooooh!"

"What the dickens—" cried Talbot, in amazement.

"Ow! I—I was set on by a gigantic ruffian, armed with a knife!" gasped Baggy.

As a matter of fact, his assailant had been by no means a gigantic figure. But Baggy always liked to lend colour to his stories.

"Great Scott!"

"I fought like a tiger, but I was overpowered!" explained Baggy faintly.

Talbot eyed him curiously. He knew Baggy too well to believe that Baggy had done much fighting! But there was no doubt of the fact that someone had trussed Baggy up for some reason or other.

"What really happened?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, really, Talbot! I'm telling you! A giant of a man attacked me, and I fought desperately for a quarter

of an hour, but in the end, by a foul blow, he got me down and tied me up."

Talbot's eyes suddenly fell on the little silver image in the snow. He caught his breath in amazement. He recognised the image instantly.

"Great pip! How did that get there?" he ejaculated. "That's one of Sir Napier Wynter's curios!"

"Ahem!" Baggy coughed. He had to remember his story. "I found a parcel lying in the quad, addressed to Llanfellyn Towers. Someone must have dropped it going to the post, I suppose. I'm an unselfish sort of chap, you know, and I didn't worry about the trouble. I just set off to the village to post it!"

"My hat!" Talbot stared at Baggy. The idea of Trimble doing anyone a good turn out of sheer good nature wanted some swallowing.

"I didn't see Sir Napier about it first," went on Baggy hurriedly, "because—because I thought the parcel might miss the post if I delayed a moment. I just buzzed along with it—it was clear enough it was meant to be posted, being addressed and everything. And—and then I was attacked by this chap, whoever he was, and he opened the parcel."

"Look here, Baggy, what sort of a chap was it who attacked you?" put in Talbot quietly.

"A giant of a chap—seven foot if an inch!"

Talbot made a gesture of impatience.

"Was he English, do you think?"

"Rather not! He was muttering in Spanish!"

"Whew!"

Talbot whistled.

It was quite clear to Talbot now that Baggy's assailant had been one of the gang of Rioguanan revolutionaries who had followed Kildare's uncle to England in order to obtain possession of the fateful paper that Sir Napier held. The reason for the unknown man's interest in the parcel that Baggy had been carrying was a bewildering mystery, however.

Talbot picked up the silver image from the snow and thrust it into his pocket.

"Come on, Baggy!" he said tersely. "The sooner Sir Napier hears about this the better!"

There was a faint gleam in Baggy Trimble's eyes as he scuttled along at Talbot's side in the direction of St. Jim's.

He felt that the attack upon him in the lane ought to make him an object of real interest! He had suffered assault for Sir Napier's sake—surely the least Sir Napier could do would be to invite him for Christmas, in return for his dangers and sufferings?

By the time he entered the quad, Baggy was really imagining himself as quite a hero!

CHAPTER 6.
The Wheeze Works!

"I SAY, Talbot, don't walk so beastly quickly!" gasped Baggy peevishly, as he and the stalwart Shell fellow turned in the direction of the School House doorway.

Baggy was finding it hard to keep up with Talbot of the Shell!

But Talbot did not seem to hear. There was a deep frown on his face as he strode swiftly along past the chapel.

It was clear enough to Reginald Talbot that although three of the revolutionaries who had followed Sir Napier to England were safe in gaol, awaiting trial for attempted murder, there were still other members of their gang at large.

So intent was he upon his own thoughts that Talbot did not hear a sudden excited gasp from the Falstaff of the Fourth, a gasp that Baggy stifled almost instantly.

For in the snow in the shadow of the chapel, as he trotted along breathlessly at Talbot's side Baggy had trodden upon a hard object. Glancing down, he saw that

he had uncovered something that gleamed like silver—the lost idol!

Though he had searched so long and fruitlessly for the little image, by a wonderful stroke of luck he had found it after all, by the sheerest accident.

In a flash Baggy stooped and snatched it up, stuffing it into his pocket. He glanced swiftly at Talbot. But the Shell fellow clearly had noticed nothing.



Professing vigorously, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seized by his chums and carried bodily from the study and down the stairs.

"My only aunt!" grinned Baggy to himself. "What a bit of luck!"

As they passed the entrance to the Cloisters he listened furtively. He could hear nothing. If Tom Merry were still imprisoned in the crypt, behind that thick and heavy door, there was no sound to betray the fact.

Talbot glanced at him as they went up the steps to the lighted doorway of the School House.

"What are you grinning at, Baggy?" he asked.

"N-nothing!" gasped Baggy hastily.

They turned in the direction of Sir Napier's room.

In answer to Talbot's knock, the voice of Kildare's uncle came to their ears. Talbot pushed open the door and strode in.

Sir Napier was sitting by the fire, reading. He glanced up at their entry, with a smile.

"Hallo, Talbot!" Then, as he saw the look on the face of the Shell fellow, he gave a quick exclamation. "Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Well—something's happened, sir," answered Talbot quietly.

He took from his pocket the little silver figure and laid it on the table. Sir Napier gave a startled cry, and took a quick step forward.

He snatched up the little image, and with quick fingers took off the head, revealing the little cavity beneath. His face set like stone.

"Empty!" he breathed.

And at that moment Baggy Trimble seized his chance!

Both Sir Napier and Reginald Talbot had their backs to the fire. Like a flash Baggy stepped to the chimney-piece and placed the second idol there, out of sight behind a vase.

He turned away quickly and saw Sir Napier grip Talbot's shoulder.

"What's happened?" demanded the baronet tensely. "How do you come to have this, Talbot? Where's Tom Merry?"

Talbot glanced at the Falstaff of the Fourth.

"Trimble here can tell you better than I can, sir. He found a parcel lying in the quad, addressed to Llanfellyn Towers, and thought he had better post it. As he was on his way to the village a man attacked him—"

"Good heavens!"

Baggy strutted forward and began to tell his tale. It did not lose anything in the telling! Baggy let his imagination have full play. When he had finished Sir Napier stared at him with gleaming eyes.

"Did you see anything of Tom Merry in the quad—any signs of a struggle?" he demanded.

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Baggy.

Sir Napier's face was pale and set. For a moment he stood silent, staring into space. Then he turned to Baggy again.

"You say that when your assailant unscrewed the head there was nothing inside?"

"Nothing at all, sir!" nodded Baggy, feeling very important at being so much the centre of interest. "So he just chucked it down and buzzed off."

Sir Napier turned to Talbot.

"This is extraordinary!" he muttered. "I put that important paper in this little figure and gave it to Tom Merry to post! Evidently some of these South American rascals are still in the neighbourhood—those three we caught are not the only members of their gang, it's clear. And somehow they got to know, I suppose, what I was doing—"

He broke off suddenly.

"Good heavens, yes! When Tom and I were talking about it in here he said he heard a sound outside the window! The scoundrel who attacked Trimble must have been listening to all we said!"

"My hat!"

"But where can the paper be?" muttered Sir Napier hoarsely. "And where is Tom Merry? How can the parcel have come to be lying in the quad?"

Baggy had been listening, with startled face, to Sir Napier's words. He understood now the reason for the attack in the lane. The secret paper!

He knew well enough where it was. Clearly it was safe in the figure now on the chimney-piece.

"My hat!" muttered Baggy to himself. "What a game! He, he, he!"

He blinked at Sir Napier with a faint gleam in his little eyes.

"I'll tell you what, sir! I fancy I can guess where that missing paper is."

"What!"

Baggy sniffed.

"It's clear, sir, to a clever chap like me. I should say that when you stuck that paper in the idol you got the two idols mixed up. I know there is another one, because I saw them both on the chimney-piece when I brought Kildare a message yesterday," he added hurriedly. "I'll bet anything you got 'em mixed up, as I say, and packed the wrong one."

Sir Napier shook his head.

"Nonsense, my boy. I only wish I could think so."

He glanced at the chimney-piece, and stepped forward quickly when the second idol was not to be seen. Then he caught sight of it behind the vase and picked it up. After a moment's hesitation he unscrewed the head.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated.

Almost dazedly he drew out the folded paper from within.

"I was right, eh?" grinned Baggy.

Sir Napier looked as though he could hardly believe his eyes. Then an expression of wonderful relief appeared on his tanned face.

"By Jove!" he breathed. "You were right, my boy! I can't understand it, even now—but there is no doubt the paper is safe here! Thank Heaven for that!" Then his anxious expression returned. "But what can have happened to Tom? I should never forgive myself if—"

The baronet broke off as there came a sudden loud knock on the door. The next moment Tom Merry had hurried into the room.

Baggy caught his breath. The captain of the Shell, catching sight of him, gave an exclamation and stared at him with gleaming eyes.

"Tom!" ejaculated Sir Napier. "Tom, what has happened? How did you come to lose that parcel—"

Tom Merry answered with a grim laugh. He strode forward and grasped Baggy by the shoulder. The Falstaff of the Fourth gave a frightened squeal.

"Ow! Leggo!"

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He twisted free and skipped hastily round the table. Sir Napier stared at Tom in surprise.

Tom's eyes fell on the two silver figures on the table, and upon the crumpled paper in Sir Napier's hand. He gave a gasp of relief.

"The paper's safe?" he cried.

"Yes—by a wonderful chance!" nodded Sir Napier. He explained in terse sentences what he knew. "But how did you come to lose possession of the parcel, Tom?" he finished. "I am not blaming you—something must have happened—"

"Something happened all right," said Tom grimly, his eyes going to Baggy Trimble, who was blinking at him across the table very nervously. "As I was going across the quad I thought I heard a chap being bullied. I went into the Cloisters to stop it, and I was deliberately imprisoned in the crypt, after the parcel had been taken from me! Only a couple of minutes ago did I get free again. Old Taggles happened to come along and he heard me."

"My only hat!" muttered Talbot in bewilderment.

Sir Napier laughed.

"Well, it sounds to me as if some youngsters were ragging you, that's all, Tom, without realising how important that parcel was. They must have left it in the quad where Trimble found it."

Tom did not answer.

He felt sure it was Trimble whose voice had lured him into the crypt; but he scarcely liked to say so in front of Sir Napier.

He glared at the Falstaff of the Fourth, and Baggy hastily looked the other way.

Sir Napier turned to him.

"Trimble my boy, I feel that I owe you a debt of gratitude! It was most admirable of you to sacrifice your spare time by setting off to the village to post that parcel—and I feel responsible for the danger you encountered in the lane."

Baggy's eyes gleamed.

"Yes?" he gasped. "I—I mean, nunno, not at all—"

"You're a plucky youngster!" exclaimed Sir Napier, with a smile. "I'll tell you what—won't you join my little party that's setting out for Wales to-morrow? You can perhaps telephone to your home for permission—"

Tom Merry gave a jump.

A sudden suspicion had entered his mind—as it happened, a true suspicion. What if Baggy had lured him into the crypt and snatched the parcel in order to bring himself to Sir Napier's notice, and cadge an invitation to Llanfellyn Towers? And, therefore, Baggy, not himself, had been attacked in Rylcombe Lane by the mysterious individual who had learnt of the contents of that parcel by listening at Sir Napier's window that evening!

It was all clear to Tom in a moment.

He opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again.

Even though Baggy had actually succeeded in obtaining the coveted invitation by false pretences, the captain of the Shell felt that he could scarcely "sneak" to Sir Napier.

Baggy's fat features were beaming like a setting sun.

"Thanks awfully, sir!" he smirked. "I'll come with pleasure!"

He shot a triumphant look at Tom Merry and Talbot. Talbot, like the captain of the Shell, was scarcely looking pleased at hearing that invitation extended to the Falstaff of the Fourth.

"I know the other chaps will be jolly glad to have their old pal Trimble with them at Christmas, sir," grinned Baggy. "Eh, you chaps?"

"Oh! Y-y-es, of course!" stammered Tom.

"Ye-es, rather!" gasped Talbot.

"Splendid!" smiled Sir Napier.

Thoughtfully he refolded the precious paper and thrust it into the hollow interior of one of the little silver images, and screwed on the head. He slipped the idol into an inner pocket.

"I think I shall change my mind, after to-night's revelation, that my enemies are still at work," he exclaimed, with a frown. "Instead of attempting to send this through the post, I shall carry it with me on the journey to-morrow."

As he spoke he tapped the pocket into which he had slipped the silver image.

"Not that I think for a moment that the scoundrel who attacked Trimble in the lane to-night will follow us to Wales," he added. "With the three chief agents in gaol, as they are, the underlings will not give us any further trouble, I feel sure."

"Well, I'll be getting along, sir," said Tom, with a grim glance at Baggy Trimble. "Coming, Baggy?"

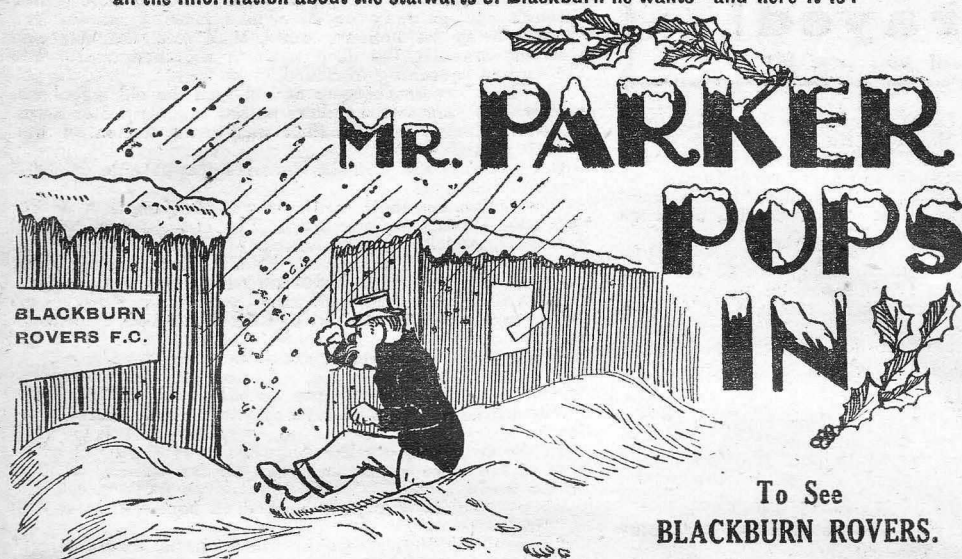
"Hem! Ye-es!" mumbled Baggy nervously.

Tom swung open the door. There was a quick exclamation from outside.

"Garcia!" ejaculated the captain of the Shell.

(Continued on page 12.)

Mr. "Nosey" Parker, our special football representative, dashes through the gates of Ewood Park, and a few minutes later comes dashing out again, shutting his notebook with a slam! But he's got all the information about the stalwarts of Blackburn he wants—and here it is!



To See
BLACKBURN ROVERS.

LAST week I told you about my interview with the ghost of Chelsea. Now, as a matter of fact, those notes got me a well-deserved reputation for being seasonable. So the Editor said to me: "The pantomime season is coming, what do you suggest?" Between you and me and the goalposts I think your Editor had an idea that "Nosey" would be floored by that question.

But I don't like being floored, because the process is apt to give me pain in my most prominent part—the nose. So I smiled my sweetest smile, and said to the Editor: "We've got the pantomime all fixed. The title is 'The Babes in the Wood.'"

Being in a hurry to catch a train I hadn't time to explain—nor the courage either—that what I really meant was that I would trot off to Blackburn to interview the Babes in E-Wood. As that may be a little bit subtle, let me get down to brass tacks and tell you about Blackburn Rovers, the club which plays at Ewood Park, and the club which can rightly be called the "Babes" just now, because they have such a lot of youngsters on the staff.

The Beefy Boys of Blackburn!

BUT don't you think that because these lads of Blackburn are young—most of them—that they aren't fully developed. As I went in at the gates of Ewood Park backwards—I generally do go in that way because that makes people think I am coming out—I bumped into something. At first I thought I had given the grand stand an awful bump, but soon discovered that I had run into a mountain of good Scotch beef. "Do ye mind ganging whar ye are lookin'?" came the voice. And I turned round to see that it was Jock Hutton. Perhaps you don't know Jock. Well, let me introduce you, but not all at once. Jock is so big that he has to be introduced by degrees, as it were. They say he is the heaviest footballer in the big game to-day. I can't swear about the truth of this because I haven't bumped into them all. But I don't want to bump into a bigger one than Jock!

They call him a full-back—and he certainly has! Jock told me that he has been troubled rather a lot since he came to England because forwards will fall down when he looks at them, and that referees immediately give free kicks against him.

The story goes that Hutton left the land of cakes because it was a land of insufficient cakes, but I can't vouch for the

truth of that story. He had an unhappy experience when he played in his first game for Blackburn Rovers. Burnley were the opponents, and the Rovers not only lost by five goals to one but Hutton had a penalty kick given against him. He said he wanted to return home at once. These Jocks, however, do stand together, and goalkeeper Jock Crawford, who was the next fellow I met, assured me that he never tells Hutton to get out of the way so that he can see the ball coming, because he knows Hutton can't; there's too much of him.

It is rather strange, but none the less a fact, that Crawford can't get out of the net habit. When he packs up his football jersey and ceases to stop footballs from going into the net he starts on another net game—lawn tennis. Crawford tells me that he loves to beat Syd Puddefoot at the summer game, but Syd is a breezy player, as you might suspect, because he lives at Blackpool during the week.

Another of the big Babes of Ewood is Rankin—bordering on fourteen stone by the look of him—while they have even got a real butcher's boy in Peter O'Dowd. So on the whole you can't be surprised when I describe Blackburn Rovers as a "meaty" team.

Birthday Fireworks!

OF course, you know that they won the Cup the other year, and you may know also that they have won the Cup as many times as any other club in the country, not even excepting Aston Villa. These Rovers go off like fireworks from time to time, and make everybody else jump. Do you know what they did on the Saturday nearest to the Fifth of November in this present season—scored eight goals against their neighbours from Burnley. But you can always expect something in the firework line from the Rovers around the Fifth of November, because I might tell you that the club was actually born on Guy Fawkes Day. That, however, was rather a lot of years ago, longer ago than even I remember, for the Rovers are among the oldest of the football clubs, and they are also one of three clubs in constant membership of the First Division ever since League football was started. Perhaps that record is still in the minds of the directors in these days, and that is why they sign on so many big players, so they won't be easy to move!

"Bob" Crompton was a big player in his day—in more senses than one—but we have to call him "Mr. Bob" now, because he is on the directorate. As I

was on the field he came out to look at his Babes doing their practice. Actually I think "Mr. Bob" is the unofficial—or rather unpaid—manager of the club in these days.

"Mr. Bob" is a very proud man in his quiet way just now, for there is in the Blackburn Rovers team his "Babe," Wilfred. The son of Bob Crompton plays at outside right, and there are good judges who think that he may go as far in the game as his famous father did. That, my lads, is a long way.

Now about some of these other Babes of Ewood. There is Arthur Groves, the inside left, and a fellow who knows where the goal is. He came from Halifax, and if I have any readers in that town I hope they will

forgive me when I say that I can't blame him. Blackburn isn't the most beautiful town on the map, but it is better than Halifax, anyway.

Another of the most promising lads is Tommy Turner, another Scot, by the way, who arrived not long ago from Raith Rovers. Apparently he couldn't bear not to play for some club called the Rovers, and that was one reason why he went to Blackburn. Another was that Jock Hutton told him to come, and when Jock tells you to do anything—well, you just do it for fear of the consequences.

When I had nearly finished finding out some things about these Blackburn boys, I spotted the trainer giving some instructions at one corner of the field, so I went over to him. The Babes all call him "Moy" for some reason which I did not gather, but his surname is Atherton, and he comes from Wigan, which, again running the risk of upsetting somebody, I might suggest is a good place to "come from."

Waxy!

MOY is as proud of his lads as a trainer could be, and he tells some fine tales about them. For some reason or other they have a weakness for waxwork shows. A year or two back they went into one of these shows at Blackpool—that's where they do a lot of their training, you know.

As the players walked round the waxwork show Arthur Rigby noticed a man reading a programme, and by the man was a little boy. Now, Arthur was anxious to find out why a little boy should be deemed worthy of being modelled in wax, so he went up to the man reading the programme and asked him who the boy was. The man made no reply. He couldn't, you see, because he was also wax!

Not to be beaten in his quest for information, Arthur walked across to the commissioner and put to him the question as to the boy's identity. Again there was no reply; even the commissioner was made of wax. So now, if you don't want to be shown the way out of Ewood Park, don't mention waxworks. I mentioned the matter, and that was why I had to leave hurriedly. The next place I visited was Madame Tussauds in London, and there I interviewed Harry Healless. At least, I should have interviewed him if he could have talked, but I discovered, as Arthur Rigby discovered when he asked about the boy, that the Healless in Madame Tussauds, was made of wax.

"NOSEY."

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Betrayed!

(Continued from page 10.)

The handsome face of Callao Garcia, the South American junior, was staring into the room from the dimness of the passage. For a moment the Rioguanay looked startled and taken aback. Then he stepped smilingly into the room.

"I was just coming to speak to Sir Napier," he explained easily, in his soft, foreign voice. "You startled me when you opened the door so suddenly."

Tom stared at Garcia hard. It seemed almost as though the South American had been standing outside the door listening to the conversation within the room.

But he dismissed the idea from his mind as unfounded, and left the room with Talbot. Baggy came reluctantly out after them. Tom closed the door, and grasped Baggy by the arm.

"You fat fraud!"

"Oh, really, Merry, old chap——"

"Don't 'old chap' me!" snapped Tom angrily. "You know jolly well it was you that shut me up in the crypt and grabbed that parcel, so as to post it yourself and curry favour with Sir Napier! It would have served you right if that chap who attacked you in the lane had jolly well knifed you, you fat rotter!"

"Oh, really, Merry, I—I don't know what you mean——"

"Oh, yes, you do!" said Tom grimly.

They had reached the Hall now. It was empty.

Baggy made a sudden bolt for the stairs. But Tom held him.

"Catch on, Talbot!" he exclaimed. "We can't stop Sir Napier from inviting him to the Towers, but we'll jolly well teach the fat boulder a lesson!"

Talbot had listened to Tom's words in amazement. Already he understood. Grim-faced, he seized Baggy, and he and the captain of the Shell swung the Falstaff of the Fourth into the air.

"Oh! Yaroooooop! Hands off——"

Bump!

"Yow-ow!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yaroooooooough!"

Again and again, Baggy rose and fell, and on each occasion his trousers smote the floor with a hearty thud. Baggy yelled and roared. But not till he was too breathless to roar any more did Tom Merry and Reginald Talbot leave him gasping on the linoleum and depart, rather more cheerfully, in the direction of the Shell passage.

"Oh! Grooooooh! Oh! Beasts! I'm dying! You've broken my back in three places!" roared Baggy.

"Good!" grinned Talbot, and vanished with Tom Merry up the stairs.

"Rotten bullies!" grumbled Baggy breathlessly. "Yah!"

He limped to his feet, and sniffed disconsolately.

But in a few moments a slow smile appeared on the flabby features of the Falstaff of the Fourth. He sniggered.

"He, he, he! Lucky they don't know everything!"

Even though Tom Merry had seen through his little scheme for gaining an invitation from Sir Napier, the captain of the Shell little dreamed of the whole truth concerning Baggy's dishonest actions that evening. Which was certainly lucky for Baggy. For had he known everything, Tom would have taken good care that the Falstaff of the Fourth did not accompany the rest of them to Sir Napier's home in Wales.

As it was, Baggy's scheme had worked wonderfully well. Though he might be feeling a little sore at the moment, he had succeeded in gaining the coveted invitation from Kildare's uncle.

Therefore, as he rolled away in the direction of the Common-room, Baggy chuckled in a fat, self-satisfied way.

Whatever his fellow guests from St. Jim's might think about it, Baggy Trimble was going to spend his Christmas as one of Sir Napier Wynter's guests at Llanfellyn Towers!

CHAPTER 7.

Startling News!

"Gussy, you dummy——"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake!"

"Buck up, for goodness' sake, ass!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Hewwies——"

"You're keeping the taxis waiting!" roared Robert Arthur Digby. "Get a move on, idiot!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Dig! Pway do not woah at me! I stwongly wesent bein' woahed at!"

And Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and surveyed Digby with a very frosty look indeed.

Blake, Herries, and Digby groaned.

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It was next morning, and through the window there came cheerful sounds from the quad. Cabs and taxis were rolling through the gateway of St. Jim's bearing seniors and juniors away on holiday, amid chaff and laughter and shouted farewells, the deep tones of dignified seniors and the excited squeaking of Third-Form fags.

St. Jim's was breaking-up at last, and the old school was swiftly emptying as the fellows passed eagerly out of gates, some in vehicles, some on their way to the station on foot, but all in high spirits.

But in Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, Blake & Co. still lingered.

The reason for their tardiness was the fact that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had decided at the very last moment that his collar needed changing. According to Arthur Augustus, there was a speck upon it. Blake, Herries, and Digby could not see any speck, but Arthur Augustus was adamant, despite their threats and groans. Accordingly, since all his collars were packed, the swell of St. Jim's had unlocked a suitcase and carefully unpacked it again, in order to get at his collars, which were right at the bottom.

The fact that Sir Napier and Kildare and the others were waiting in the Hall, and three taxicabs were waiting in the quad, did not seem to perturb the swell of St. Jim's in the least.

In the opinion of Arthur Augustus, a speck on his collar was of far more importance than all the waiting taxicabs in the world.

"I shall not be a moment now, deah boys——"

"Br-r-r!"

"Pway wefwain fwom makin' widiculous noises, Hewwies!" sniffed Arthur Augustus, laying down the rejected collar and picking up the new one.

"Well, buck up, for goodness' sake! Sir Napier's waiting for us!"

"I twust Sir Napiiah will wealise that I could not possibly appeah in public with a collah that was not clean," said Arthur Augustus severely. "Sir Napiiah is a gentleman who no doubt fully appreciates the importance of dweess——"

"Oh, get on with the washing!" groaned Blake.

"I considah——"

"Chuck jawing, and put that blessed collar round your silly neck!" hooted Digby.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Dig——"

"Oh, let's leave the ass and tell Sir Napier we'll go without him!" growled Blake.

"Look heah, Blake——"

There was a crash on the door. It swung open, and the faces of Tom Merry & Co. and Talbot of the Shell glared into the study.

"Are you chaps going to be all night?" roared Tom Merry.

"Looks like it," nodded Blake gloomily. "Gussy's changing his collar!"

"Oh!"

Tom Merry understood the reason for the delay now. He had guessed that it had been something to do with the toilet of Arthur Augustus.

His face went grim.

The Terrible Three stepped into the study, Talbot following.

"Look here, Gussy," said Tom, glancing at his watch, "the train goes in half an hour. See? We'll give you one minute to get that collar on. Then you're coming!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wefuse to be huwwied!" declared Arthur Augustus, surveying the captain of the Shell icily through his gleaming monocle. He examined the collar in his hands very carefully. "Yaas, this is clean, deah boys, so I shall not keep you vevy long while I adjust it. Five minutes or so at most——"

"We're giving you one minute, old hoss," grinned Tom Merry. "Only fifty seconds left now, though."

"Wats!"

The swell of St. Jim's carefully fixed the collar to his back stud, taking great care not to soil the starched whiteness with his finger-tips in doing so.

"Thirty seconds, old chap!" announced Tom Merry.

"Look heah——"

"I shouldn't waste time, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to be huwwied like this——"

"Only a quarter of a minute now!"

With a snort and a glare, Arthur Augustus began to fasten his collar in front. But he was only in the middle of the process when Tom Merry slipped his watch back into his pocket.

"Time, you chaps!"

"Collar him—and excuse the pun!" grinned Monty Lother.

"There was a rush.

"Yawoooooop!"

Arthur Augustus gave a wild howl as he felt himself seized by a dozen willing hands and whirled off his feet. His collar, insecurely attached as it was, flew from its moorings

(Continued on page 14.)

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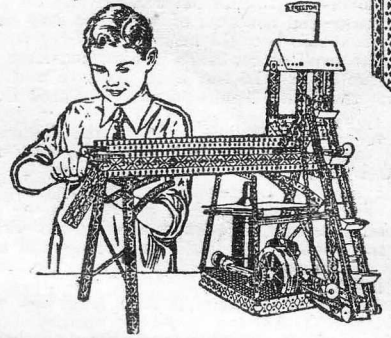
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Q

Betrayed!

(Continued from page 12.)

and clung precariously to its wearer by the back stud alone. Struggling wildly, the swell of St. Jim's was borne towards the door.

"You uttah wottahs—"

"Take back those cruel words, old chap!" begged Monty Lowther.

"I shall administah feahful thwashin's to all of you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With Manners carrying his hat and tie, and Herries carrying his suitcase—the contents of which he had thrust into it in a way that had brought an anguished cry from Arthur Augustus—the swell of St. Jim's was carried from the study and down the stairs. In the Hall, Kildare and his uncle, and Garcia, the South American junior, stared in astonishment.

"Gad!" ejaculated Kildare. "What the dickens—"

"It's only Gussy," explained Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"He was feeling tired, so we're carrying him!"

"Welaase me, you boundahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"I—I must request your pardon, Sir Napiah—"

Sir Napier chuckled. He knew already something of the habits of the swell of St. Jim's, and he could guess well enough the reason for the other juniors taking matters into their own hands.

Still protesting vigorously, Arthur Augustus was borne down the steps and across to one of the waiting taxicabs, and pushed into it. Blake, Herries, and Digby climbed in after him, and Sir Napier, still chuckling, climbed into one of the others with Kildare, Garcia, and Talbot. Tom Merry & Co. turned, grinning, to the third taxi, to find a fat figure already seated in a corner of it with a smirk on his fat face.

Baggy Trimble was feeling very pleased with himself.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he remarked, with a sniff. "You've been the dickens of a long time! You've kept me and Sir Napier waiting, you know."

"Oh, my hat! 'Me and Sir Napier'!" gasped Manners.

"If we miss that blessed train, it'll be your fault," grumbled Baggy.

"A good thing if you did miss it, anyway, you fat porpoise!" growled Monty Lowther, glaring.

"Oh, really, Lowther! Sir Napier asked me himself. He saw that I was just the sort of chap he wanted, to be the life and soul of the party—"

"What?" yelled Tom Merry.

Then he grinned, despite himself. The idea of Baggy being the life and soul of the party was really rather funny.

With a grinding of gears, the ancient taxi got moving and trundled towards the gates, in the wake of Sir Napier's. A farewell cheer from half a dozen School House juniors standing with their luggage by the gates gave Sir Napier's little party a rousing send-off, and then the gateway of St. Jim's vanished behind them, down the snowy road.

The Christmas holidays had begun!

Sir Napier Wynter's party reached Wayland Station a few minutes before the train was due. A boy on the platform was selling newspapers. Kildare tossed the youngster a penny and took one.

The train steamed in, and Sir Napier and his guests entered a first-class carriage. The train was full, and it was necessary for one or two of the juniors to stand, but no one minded, as they would be changing before long into the Welsh express.

"Now we're off!" chuckled Tom Merry, as the guard's whistle blew.

There was a sudden exclamation from Kildare.

"Great Scott!"

Everyone glanced at him. The captain of St. Jim's was staring at the newspaper in his hands, where he sat beside his uncle.

"What's the matter, Eric?" ejaculated Sir Napier.

"Gad!" Kildare glanced at his uncle with a queer look upon his face. "The paper says that three men escaped yesterday from Galton Gaol, where they were awaiting trial. South Americans!"

There was a breathless silence in the carriage, as the train gathered speed, passing smoothly out beyond the platform. Startled faces gazed at Eric Kildare.

There came a quick, stifled gasp from Garcia. His eyes held a queer gleam. Sir Napier Wynter drew a deep breath.

"By James!" he muttered. "It can only be they—the three scoundrels who stole that paper from me and tried to murder me! The villains these youngsters captured! They were in Galton Gaol, I know."

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"And they've escaped!" said Kildare quietly. "They are free again—"

"My hat!" breathed Tom Merry. "My only hat!"

CHAPTER 8.

In Wild Wales!

THE news of the escape of the three Rioguanan revolutionaries from Galton Gaol was certainly a startling piece of information.

There was a very odd look on the face of Kildare's uncle as he took the paper from the captain's hand and swiftly scanned the paragraph in question.

"Good gad!" he muttered.

"Caramba!" ejaculated Garcia. "This news is bad!"



There was an excited, frightened gasp from Baggy Trimble. Baggy, with his usual greediness, had succeeded in bagging a corner seat for himself. He stared out of it now with wide, startled eyes.

"I—I say, sir, you don't think those three chaps will follow you to Wales, do you?" he gasped nervously. "I mean, they're ever so keen to get hold of that blessed paper—"

"Oh, shut up, Baggy!" grunted Digby.

Sir Napier shook his head. But his face was grave.

"No, Trimble, I don't think these rascals will go to the extent of following me again in order to regain possession of that paper you mention. I feel sure that the scoundrels will realise that unless they fly from the country at once the police will be bound to recapture them soon. I expect that both they and the villain who attacked you yesterday in Rylcombe Lane will consider further attempts to get hold of the paper useless, after two disastrous failures. They are very unlikely to risk spending a long period in an English prison!"

Sir Napier smiled grimly. He glanced round the carriage.

"I do not think they will interfere with our Christmas

house-party at the Towers!" he went on lightly. "But if any of you feel at all worried at the possibility of these scoundrels paying us a visit there——"

He broke off questioningly.

But if the baronet thought that there was a chance of some of the juniors wishing to change their minds about visiting Llanfellyn Towers for Christmas, on account of the possible danger of a visit from the agents of El Lobo, as the chief of the Rioguyan revolutionaries was called, he was mistaken.

Trimble was the only one to whom such an idea had even occurred; and the Falstaff of the Fourth's alarm had been quickly allayed by Sir Napier's reassuring words.

To all the others, the idea of not going on to Llanfellyn Towers on account of the escape of the three Rioguyans was laughable.



Inch by inch Tom Merry edged his way along the footboard of the train through the swirling snow. He reached Sir Napier Wynter's compartment and stared in!

Blake chuckled.

"We're not worrying, sir!"

He had voiced the feelings of the others, as their quick murmurs of agreement showed.

"Let 'em come to the Towers if they want to—that's all!" grinned Talbot.

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in a war-like tone.

Arthur Augustus was looking quite his immaculate self again now, having fastened his collar and tie during the journey to the station. His chilly attitude towards his chums, however, had been quite forgotten by the swell of St. Jim's in the excitement of the news in Kildare's newspaper.

"Splendid!" laughed Sir Napier. "That's the spirit!"

The train roared on through the snowy landscape.

The party was travelling by way of London. Three taxicabs bore them off from the terminus at Paddington Station, where they boarded the long Welsh express amid the din of the metropolis. And very soon they were thundering westward, bound for the romantic mountains of the little principality.

Darkness had fallen by the time they left the train at a little Welsh junction in order to change to a local line.

They had had splendid meals on the express; but Baggly Trimble eyed the buffet hungrily as they crossed to the waiting train.

He touched Talbot on the arm.

"Talbot old chap, lend me a bob!" he murmured, in a wheedling tone. "I'm frightfully peckish——"

"Rats!"

"Oh, really, Talbot! Blake, old chap, lend me——"

"Go and eat coke, you fat stuffer!" growled Blake.

"Br-r-r! Mean beasts!" muttered Baggly disconsolately.

The local train was waiting—almost empty.

Blake & Co. and Tom Merry & Co. about filled one compartment. Talbot, Garcia, and Baggly Trimble climbed into the next. Sir Napier glanced at Eric Kildare.

"If you don't mind, Eric, I'll go in the smoking-compartment next door. Just dying for a pipe."

The baronet was already filling a pipe from his tobacco-pouch.

Kildare nodded, and joined Talbot, Garcia, and Baggly, while Sir Napier took the compartment next to that occupied by Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co.

A minute or so later the train began to move.

With a good deal of creaking and groaning, it clanked out over the points beyond the station, and rattled off in a leisurely way through the darkness, bearing with it Sir Napier Wynter and his guests on the last stage of their long journey to Llanfellyn Towers.

CHAPTER 9.

The Face at the Window!

TOM MERRY stirred his cramped limbs and yawned. For more than an hour the train had rumbled on, slowing down continually, more than once coming to a dead halt.

On either side of the line the mountains towered, lost in darkness. Snow had started to fall, swirling against the carriage windows in dim, scurrying clouds. The warm air within the carriage had condensed in thick mist on the windows. Tom wiped some away with his handkerchief and peered out. There was nothing to be seen but the deep white drifts beside the track, and the ghostly, whirling snowflakes.

The wind was rising.

"My aunt!" yawned Herries sleepily. "What price this for a snowstorm?"

The train rumbled on, labouring up a long incline. Soon they would be high in the mountain passes.

"What time do we get there?" asked Digby.

"Not till seven o'clock," answered Tom Merry, snuggling down comfortably in his corner. "And if you ask me, we shall be late, too. All this giddy snow——"

"Bai Jove! It'll be wotten if we are snowed up, deah boys!" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's anxiously.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Shouldn't wonder if we are, Gussy! It's coming down thick enough!"

Silence fell again in the compartment.

Manners, in one corner, was deep in a magazine. Monty Lowther was chewing a large chunk of toffee that made talk impossible. He handed the toffee-tin round, and the others followed his example, except for Blake, who seemed almost asleep. Tom Merry leaned back in his corner and closed his eyes, listening to the regular click-click, click-click of the wheels beneath them.

The sound of the train changed to an echoing clatter as they entered a deep rocky cutting, where the snow lay thick on the lines, then, with a rush and a roar, they plunged into a tunnel-mouth.

Tom Merry opened his eyes, and glanced, with a yawn, across the carriage.

The next moment a startled, breathless shout broke from him, causing the other juniors to turn their heads and stare at him in amazement.

"Look!" yelled Tom.

Staring in at them through the glass of one of the carriage windows was a human face.

So utterly astounding was the apparition that for some moments Tom Merry & Co. could do no more than stare at it. Two glittering eyes stared back at them through the dim, steamy glass. Then the train clattered out of the tunnel again, and in an instant the white face vanished.

"G-g-wreat Scott!" panted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dazedly.

"My only aunt!" gasped Monty Lowther excitedly. "There's someone out there on the footboard!"

Tom Merry's face had gone incredibly startled. He was on his feet in the swaying carriage.

"Didn't you see who it was?"

His voice was hoarse.

"What do you mean?" cried Manners—but already a suspicion of the answer to his question was in his mind.

"It was one of those three scoundrels we captured in the lane by the river last week," snapped Tom. "One of the three who have escaped from prison! The chap who wore the black sombrero, and tried to burn that secret paper!"

He rushed to the window, opened it, and stared out along the train.

He was just in time to see, through the swirling snowflakes that beat into his face, a shadowy figure vanishing into the next compartment from the swaying footboard.

"He's got into Sir Napier's carriage!" he panted.

Most of the other juniors had jumped to their feet. They stared at Tom dumbly.

For a moment the captain of the Shell hesitated. Then he swung open the carriage door.

"What are you doing?" cried Manners hoarsely.

"Sir Napier may want help!" jerked Tom grimly. "I'm going along to him! Somebody pull the communication-cord—"

His words were drowned after that by the rush of wind, as the captain of the Shell stepped out on to the footboard and swung fearlessly along towards the next carriage.

It was a terribly daring thing to do, and Manners reached out instinctively in an attempt to draw his chum back to the safety of the carriage. Then he remembered Sir Napier's danger—and in any case, it was too late now! Already Tom Merry was climbing along towards the next carriage.

"Pull the cord!" cried Manners, in a voice oddly unlike his own.

As he spoke he turned to grab at the communication-cord himself. But already Blake had pulled it down. Manners made a movement as if to follow Tom, but Monty Lowther dragged him back and slammed the door.

"No good you risking your neck as well, old chap," he breathed, in a strained voice. "Leave it to Tom!"

He leaned out of the window and stared along the side of the carriage. Manners and Herries were by his side in an instant, and through the swirling snow they could see Tom Merry edging his way precariously along the lurching footboard, inch by inch.

His cap had gone, the rushing, snow-laden wind was tearing at his clothes with seemingly icy fingers. They saw him reach the next lighted window and stare in, his face pressed against the glass.

And from the look that came into his face then as he clung there, gazing into the next carriage, his watching chums knew that something terrible had taken place in that next compartment, where Sir Napier Wynter had been travelling alone!

CHAPTER 10.

The Stolen Image!

TOM MERRY'S face was white as, with numbed fingers, he clung to the brass hand-grips outside Sir Napier's compartment and stared in.

Kildare's uncle was stretched on the floor of the carriage, senseless, with an ugly mark on his forehead showing where he had been struck down. His assailant was kneeling beside his inert form, his quick hands searching with swift dexterity through the pockets of his victim.

That Sir Napier had been dozing, or actually asleep, at the entry of the South American, Tom Merry realised. Otherwise, he felt sure, the man would not have been able to gain the upper hand at all.

Tom groped blindly for the handle of the door.

The train was still travelling fairly fast, though it seemed to the daring St. Jim's youngster that it was slowing down at last in answer to the pull on the communication-cord.

But there was no time to wait for help!

Even as he groped feverishly for the handle of the door, with the snow swirling round him, Tom saw Sir Napier's enemy jump swiftly to his feet.

In his hand the South American held a small glittering object. With a gasp, Tom recognised it.

It was the little silver image in which he had seen Kildare's uncle hide the precious secret paper the night before.

His fingers found the door-handle, and the captain of the Shell dragged open the door. In another moment he was in the compartment.

The Rioguan leaped round at the sound of the opening door, and his face went livid at sight of Tom Merry.

Tom sprang at him with blazing eyes.

"Carajo!"

The South American gave a startled ejaculation. He had recognised Tom as the youngster who had knocked him out in the lane near the river at Rylcombe, and apparently he was not anxious to chance the same thing happening again!

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In a flash, as Tom leapt forward, the man turned and thrust open the opposite door of the compartment. Clutching the little silver image, he stepped out on to the footboard, and dropped into a deep snowdrift beside the line. Then a wide stone bridge swept by, hiding the man from sight.

A few hundred yards farther on the train came to a grinding standstill.

Sir Napier opened his eyes dazedly, to find Kildare and Tom Merry, the guard of the train, and a passenger who was apparently a medical man, bending over him.

"Uncle—"

Kildare's voice was hoarse with anxiety.

Sir Napier sat up. He had been lying on one of the carriage seats. He smiled rather ruefully.

"Knocked me on the head, didn't he?" he muttered, as remembrance came back to him with a rush. "He came in at the door while I was sleeping; I hadn't time to defend myself after I'd opened my eyes and saw the scoundrel!"

He glanced round him. The train was rumbling on through the night again, the windows rattling to the wind.

"Where is he?" he asked steadily.

"He got away, sir—jumped into a snowdrift," muttered Tom Merry grimly. "We stopped the train, but we couldn't find him. The snow's coming down frightfully thick—it hid his tracks."

"The train had to go on, of course, sir," put in the guard almost apologetically.

"Feel all right?" asked the medical man.

Sir Napier nodded. He put a hand rather gingerly to his head.

"I'll be as fit as a fiddle in a minute," he murmured.

"Only a crack on the skull—put me out, but it's nothing. I can stand a lot more than that!"

"Good!" smiled the doctor. "You had a nasty knock, though, I can tell you!" He frowned. "Who was the scoundrel? Any idea?"

"Yes, a very good idea," nodded Sir Napier, with a dry laugh. "An old friend of mine, I might almost say!"

"Motive of robbery?" queried the guard, watching Sir Napier curiously.

"Yes, I suppose you'd call it that!"

Sir Napier's hand moved to his pocket. Kildare's face went dark.

"Uncle," he muttered, "there's bad news. He got away with that little image all right. Tom Merry saw him take it from your pocket before he jumped off the train."

"Tom Merry saw it?" echoed Sir Napier in astonishment.

Briefly Kildare explained how Tom had climbed along to the compartment after seeing the man on the footboard. Sir Napier gripped Tom's hand silently, but in a way that Tom was not likely to forget.

Then, to the amazement of Tom Merry and Kildare, he burst into a laugh.

"So our Rioguan friend got away with that little idol, did he? Afraid he'll be very disappointed, then. He's risked his neck for nothing!"

"But the paper—"

—began Tom in bewilderment.

"The paper is safe enough!" chuckled Kildare's uncle. "I deliberately changed my mind last night, you see, and posted it to old Bloom, the butler at the Towers, late in the evening—only just caught the post in Rylcombe with it, in fact! I still carried that little image; but it was empty!"

He laughed grimly.

"That scoundrel who listened at the window early in the evening, whoever he was, and afterwards attacked that boy Trimble in the road, guessed, I suppose, that I should carry the paper on me during to-day's journey. Well, he guessed wrong, as I intended that he should!"

His face darkened.

"But it shows one thing! Whoever it was who attacked Trimble in Rylcombe Lane, the fourth member of their gang, has evidently joined up already with the three ruffians who have escaped from gaol. And it looks to me as if the whole bunch of them are following us to Llanfellyn Towers!"

CHAPTER 11.

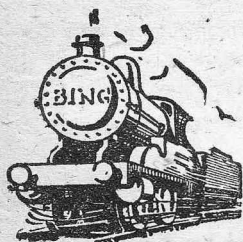
Snowed-Up!

CARAMBA! This snow!

It was Callao Garcia, the boy from Rioguan, who spoke. The South American junior had been peering out of the window of the carriage for some time. Now he turned his head and leant back in his corner with a queer gesture of impatience—a gesture

(Continued on page 18.)

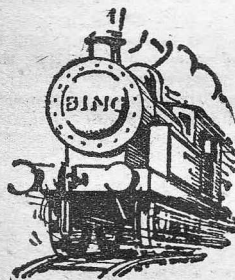
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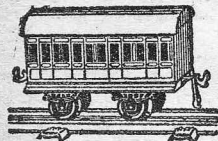
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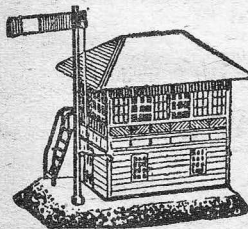
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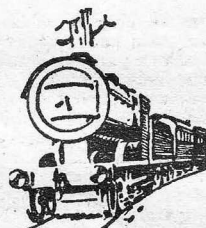
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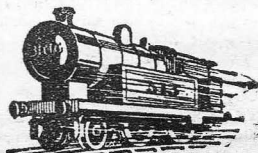
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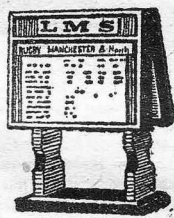
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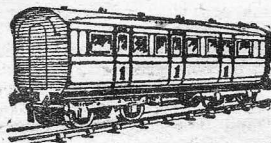
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Betrayed!

(Continued from page 16.)

that seemed to show that for some reason his nerves were on edge.

"Yes, it's still snowing all right," nodded Talbot cheerfully, glancing out at the falling flakes that on one side of the compartment were sticking to the windows in a white sheet.

It was an hour or so later. A little way back down the line the train had stopped at a small wayside station, and the St. Jim's party had taken the opportunity of all piling into one compartment. It was not easy—Blake and Manners were sitting on suitcases on the floor, and Baggy Trimble had complained bitterly of being squashed, until Monty Lowther had surreptitiously hacked the Falstaff of the Fourth on the shin and silenced him. After Sir Napier's grim experience, they somehow felt that they all wanted to be together.

At the station, too, Sir Napier had phoned to the police. The train was crawling very slowly now, jolting on through the blinding snowstorm, bearing the juniors deeper and deeper into the wild, lonely heart of the mountains.

Sir Napier had completely recovered from the effects of the stunning blow he had received from the scoundrelly Rioguyan. As he had told the medical man, he could stand a good deal more than a blow on the head. But there was an ugly, swelling bruise for a souvenir, as he himself put it, with a laugh.

Blake gave a sudden chuckle.

"That chap must have felt pretty sick when he found that the giddy idol was empty!" he grinned. "He risked breaking his neck, and landed in the snow miles from anywhere, for nothing!"

"Yaas, he must be feelin' wathah an ass at pwesent!" nodded Arthur Augustus.

"Caramba! Yes!" agreed Garcia, with a laugh. "The dogs! They shame me for my country!"

"Oh, rot!" grunted Herries. "Your country's all right—it's only some of your chaps who are giddy outsiders!"

Garcia smiled a flashing smile and glanced at Sir Napier. "You outwitted the scoundrels well!" he murmured. "So you sent the paper by post to your home after all?"

"I did!" nodded Sir Napier grimly. "My butler has instructions to hide it behind a secret panel that he once told me he had discovered during my absence in Rioguyan. It will have arrived by now."

"This secret panel—it interests me," murmured Garcia. "Whereabouts at the Towers is this secret panel, senor?"

Sir Napier shook his head.

"I don't know myself," he admitted. "I expect Broom explained in his letter; but it was a long time ago, and I was not particularly interested in it at the time. I've forgotten, if I ever knew."

He glanced at his watch.

"This train is badly late already," he muttered. "The snowstorm is delaying us, of course. I hope—"

He broke off. The train had stopped suddenly.

An unearthly silence seemed to fill the carriage. Outside the snow whirled dimly.

Minutes dragged by. Then a man's figure came swinging up to the footboard, and opened the carriage door. It was the guard, his cap and shoulders thick with snow.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Sir Napier sharply.

"'Fraid we can't get any farther, sir," answered the man, his breath like steam in the icy air. "The line ahead is blocked with great snowdrifts, sir. We're snowed-up!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stared at the guard through his monocle in great consternation.

"You weally mean to say we are stuck, bai Jove?"

"We are, sir!"

"Gad!" ejaculated Kildare. "This is rotten luck! What's going to be done?"

"Well, sir, we're going, on foot, to the next signal-cabin, and wire up the line for a snow-plough. If there is one to be had, we mayn't be delayed more than a few hours. If there isn't, we shall have to try to dig a way through with spades, and goodness knows how long that'll take!"

"My hat!" gasped Digby. "A few hours! Phew!"

"Oh, lor!" Baggy Trimble stared at the guard, with fallen jaw. "I—I say, this is rotten! I'm jolly peckish already! We'll blessed well starve! I call it rotten bad management of somebody's—"

"Ring off, Baggy!" growled Manners.

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"I jolly well won't!" snorted Baggy excitedly. "I tell you I'm hungry, and if we're going to be stuck here in the blessed snow for hours, I shall jolly well complain to the general manager or somebody— Oh! Yow! Yooooop!"

Baggy broke off with a yelp, as Monty Lowther trod firmly on his foot.

"Shut up, you fat bounder!" breathed Monty Lowther. "Do you think you're the only one that's snowed-up? Ring off!"

Baggy relapsed into a sulky silence. The guard banged the door, and hurried on to inform other passengers of their plight. Sir Napier, Kildare, and the juniors looked at one another.

"Caramba!" muttered Garcia, with an oddly nervous gesture. His glittering eyes went from face to face.

"How far are we from Llanfellyn Towers, uncle?" asked Kildare quietly.

"Now you mention it, not far!" exclaimed his uncle. "About three miles or so, I should think. But it's wild, mountainous country."

"Couldn't we walk it?" put in Tom Merry eagerly.

Sir Napier looked dubious.

"In this snowstorm?"

"The snow's stopping, anyway!" cried Blake.

It was. The flakes were lighter now, falling far less heavily every moment. They could see the moon a minute later, shining through a gap in the racing clouds.

"Well, if you youngsters are willing, we'll walk it, over the mountain road," said Sir Napier briskly. "Remember that bridge we passed a few hundred yards back? If we get up to it, and take the road, I can find the way to the house well enough, I fancy. The only risk is that the road may be impassable with snowdrifts. But, if so, we can return to the train. It'll be hours before they get it out."

"Good!" nodded Kildare.

There was a murmur of agreement from most of the juniors.

With the exception of Baggy Trimble, they all felt that it would be far better to set off tramping to Llanfellyn Towers rather than sit in the snowed-up train. And Baggy, though he heartily disliked the prospect of the long tramp through the snow and darkness, disliked still more the idea of being left alone! So he climbed out on to the line sulkily after the others.

Sir Napier found the guard, and made arrangements about the luggage. Then, cheerfully enough, apart from Baggy's muttered grumblings, the St. Jim's party set off along the line to the bridge.

As they scrambled up the embankment to the road Garcia glanced furtively back.

And then for a moment a queer glitter appeared in the dark eyes of the South American junior, as he caught sight of a dim, slinking shape through the lightly-falling snow.

But he said nothing. He quickened his steps, and fell in beside the others as Sir Napier Wynter, the captain of St. Jim's, and the party of School House juniors set off with their coat-collars turned high, on their long tramp over the mountains!

CHAPTER 12.

Lost!

"IT'S gettin' thickah, bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus made that remark half an hour later.

The St. Jim's party had been tramping up a winding road that led over the shoulder of a high mountain slope. A blustering wind was sweeping past them, and the snow, as the swell of St. Jim's had just remarked, was swirling thicker and thicker once more.

The going was anything but easy. Deep drifts, smooth as velvet, gleamed whitely on all sides. Their boots were caked with snow, and their shoulders were thick with it. They could not see far, now that the whirling flakes were falling in thick, ghostly clouds around them, stinging their faces as the wind buffeted them.

There was a dismal groan from Baggy Trimble

"I—I say, it's j-jolly cold—"

"Shut up, Baggy!"

"Oh, really, Talbot! I've got a delicate constitution, and I shall probably get pneumonia—"

"Good!"

"Beast!" sniffed Baggy, and ploughed on in disgruntled silence.

The other juniors were all enjoying the tramp. It was invigorating, and their cheeks were glowing. Kildare, too, was talking and laughing cheerfully.

But after a while Sir Napier came to a halt, with an exclamation. He peered ahead.

"Gad! he ejaculated. "With the snow blotting out all landmarks, I'm beginning to wonder if we are on the right road, after all! I'm sure we ought to have come to a

fork in the road by now. If we've missed it, we're on the wrong road!"

The juniors halted round him. Garcia cast a swift glance down the hillside. But there was nothing to be seen but the smooth snowdrifts and the thickly falling flakes.

"Hadn't we better keep on?" suggested Kildare. "No good turning back unless we know we're wrong. There may be a recognisable landmark soon."

"Right-ho!" nodded his uncle; and once again the little party trudged on.

"I say," began Baggy peevishly, "I'm peckish——"

"Ring off, Baggy!" growled Herries.

Once more Baggy relapsed into a sulky silence.

They made their way through the blinding snow over a high, windswept ridge, and plunged down on the farther side.

The road was steep and winding, and more than once they got off it altogether, so completely did the snow obliterate it in parts. Sir Napier was clearly very doubtful whether they were on the right road at all. With all the landmarks he knew hidden behind the veil of blinding snow that hemmed them in, it was impossible for him to feel sure of his path, well though he knew the mountain roads around Llanfellyn Towers.

Again Garcia glanced behind him.

He stopped suddenly.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "There is someone on the road behind us. Perhaps he can tell us if we are on the right way, senor."

Sir Napier turned. A dim, hurrying figure had loomed up through the snow. As it drew nearer, the St. Jim's party made out a man with a tweed cap drawn down over his thin face. He came to a standstill before them.

"Difficult going—eh?" he exclaimed.

"It certainly is," grinned Kildare.

"We want to get to Llanfellyn Towers, if you know where that is," put in Sir Napier. "We were wondering if we had missed the road."

"Llanfellyn Towers!" ejaculated the stranger. He laughed. "You've missed the road all right! I know this part well. I'm on my way to Whilyn, but I can spare the time to put you on the right road."

"That's jolly good of you!" exclaimed Kildare.

"Come along!" said the stranger briskly. "I'll show you the way."

With the man in the tweed cap at Sir Napier's side, the St. Jim's party tramped on down the hill. Their guide led them away to the right along a branch road after a while, and soon they were ploughing their way through deep drifts in a narrow valley. Sir Napier peered ahead.

"You are sure this is the right way to Llanfellyn Towers?" he exclaimed doubtfully.

"Trust me!" grinned the stranger. "I know these mountains like a book."

"I thought I did, but I've been abroad for some while, and must have forgotten," murmured Kildare's uncle.

An icy wind was whining up the valley, driving the snow into their faces in scurrying clouds.

The stranger was silent as he strode on, head down to the wind. Once his eyes happened to meet those of Garcia, and for a moment, unseen by the others, something like a meaning, understanding look passed between them. But they did not glance at one another again.

On through the snowstorm they followed their guide, following precipitous roads high on rocky bluffs, ploughing their way through snow-choked clefts in the mountains, turning along unexpected tracks over open hillsides. The stranger began to glance about him queerly, to halt now and then, before going on without a word.

They emerged at last on to a road that ran along the edge of a sheer, rocky cliff, and plunged steeply, in ghostly whiteness, down into a valley filled with flying snowflakes. Their guide halted, staring round.

Sir Napier touched him sharply on the arm. "Look here," he exclaimed, "where the dickens are we? I know this is not the way to Llanfellyn Towers! You've led us wrong!"

The man turned his thin, pale face towards Sir Napier. His eyes were not quite steady before the baronet's keen gaze.

"To tell you the truth," muttered the stranger, in a hesitating voice, "I—I don't know where we are!"

"What!" cried Kildare. "What do you mean?"

"I must have missed the right road somewhere. This snow is so infernally thick," growled the man in the tweed cap. "First time it's ever happened to me; but I'll admit I'm lost!"

"Lost?" quavered Baggy Trimble, his eyes wide with sudden panic. "You mean we're lost in the mountains, in this blessed snowstorm?"

"Yes," said the man harshly, "that's it. We're lost!"

CHAPTER 13.

Over the Brink!

"MY hat!" breathed Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and surveyed the stranger with consternation.

"Gweat pip! You weally mean we are uttally lost? Oh deah! How wotten!"

The swell of St. Jim's shivered a little, and stared round at the vast expanse of gleaming snow that hemmed them in. It was falling less heavily at the moment, and a pale gleam of moonlight penetrated the murk, shining down through a gap in the racing clouds that were flying above the mountain-tops. The dim light of the moon glittered on the snowdrifts eerily, revealing the yawning chasm of darkness near the edge of the road, where the hillside fell away in a precipitous cliff.

"Oh lor!" wailed Baggy Trimble.

He glanced round at the great silent wastes with a shudder. Baggy was wishing very heartily that he had never left the snowed-up train.

Sir Napier's face bore a dark frown.

Not for a moment did he suspect that there was any chance of their companion having led them from the right road with deliberate purpose. But he felt justifiably angry with the stranger who had brought them to their present plight.

It was no joke to be lost in those wild mountains at night, with the snowstorm still raging round them!

Without a word to the man, Sir Napier moved towards the edge of the road, and stared down over the cliff-edge into the gorge below. But if he hoped to see there the twinkling lights of a mountain village he was disappointed.

Kildare moved to his uncle's side, and, after a moment's hesitation, the stranger followed him.

"If you will wait here, I will go down the road and see if I can find some habitation where we could spend the night," suggested the man in the tweed cap, his eyes fixed on Sir Napier's face.

Kildare made a gesture of impatience.

He was about to speak; but the words were stifled in his throat.

The man in the tweed cap had stepped dangerously close to the rocky brink. The next moment the stretch of snow on which he was standing broke away from under him.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry, darting forward. But the warning came too late.

With a faint scream coming up from the dark, the man in the tweed cap had vanished into the abyss.

A hoarse cry broke from Sir Napier.

Their hearts chilled with horror, the St. Jim's party stared down into the void. The snowflakes whirled across the brink, filling the darkness with weird, scurrying shapes. But for the wailing wind, no sound came to their ears—nothing, after that terrible cry that had come floating up from the depths.

"Caramba!" breathed Garcia, in a trembling voice. "He is finished!"

But there was a sudden quick exclamation from Eric Kildare. The captain was pointing down.

Again the fitfully falling snow had thinned. Dimly

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Then, the "Oracle," who has been away for a week with a cold, will be fit enough to send in his popular feature. Last, but not least on the list of contents, comes another full-of-sensations instalment of "THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON!" By David Goodwin.

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seen in the moonlight, a dark, crumpled shape was lying on a snowy ledge beneath them. A still figure, one arm outflung. But as they watched they saw the figure move. The man half-lifted himself, and they saw him staring up. Then he collapsed, and lay quite motionless.

"He's not dead!" breathed Tom Merry.

Kildare gripped his uncle's arm.

"We must get down to him!"

"Yes. But how?" answered Sir Napier incisively. "We can't climb down. We can do nothing without a rope!"

Kildare stared round helplessly.

"We can't leave him there all night!" he muttered. "He would be frozen to death!"

"We must find a village!" snapped Sir Napier. Then suddenly he caught his breath. "What's that?"

He was staring down the road.

The snow was falling quite thinly now, and the moon lit up the great mountain-sides around them with an unearthly light. In the light of the moon Sir Napier had detected a sharp shape in a hollow of the hillside, against the road, some way farther on.

"Looks to me like a shepherd's hut!" he ejaculated, his eyes gleaming. "If it is, the chances are there's a rope—"

"I'll get it if there is!" gasped Herries.

He dashed off, the snow flying from his boots as he ran. Tom Merry, Blake, and Talbot followed swiftly.

Sir Napier had been right. It was a deserted shepherd's hut that stood beside the road, under the towering slope of the mountain-side. Tom Merry and Talbot put their shoulders to it, and drove in the door. A minute later the four of them were hurrying back to the group by the edge of the abyss, carrying a length of stout rope.

"Thank Heaven!" breathed Sir Napier.

He shouted. But there was no answer from below, no sign of movement. The man on the ledge far beneath was clearly senseless.

From where they stood the rocky face of the cliff dropped away. To attempt to descend to the ledge would be a dangerous task. But Tom Merry stepped quickly forward and faced Sir Napier.

"I'll go down to him!" he said quietly. "I'll fasten the rope round him for you to raise him—then lower it again for me."

Kildare shook his head swiftly.

"No! I'd better go, kid!"

"Rats!" said Tom. "I'm lighter than you. I'm the one to go!"

"No!" repeated Kildare, almost roughly.

It was evident that he was very loath to let Tom Merry take the risk. He would much have preferred to face the danger himself. But his uncle laid a hand on the captain's arm.

"The youngster's right!" he muttered. "You and I are too heavy, Eric! Let him go!"

Already Tom had seized one end of the rope and was knotting it round his waist.

"Right-ho!" he muttered coolly. "Hang on to the rope, you chaps!"

"Good luck, old chap!" breathed Manners hoarsely.

The juniors grasped the rope, and Sir Napier and the captain of St. Jim's followed suit.

With a reassuring grin to his chums, Tom Merry stepped to the edge. He clutched a jutting rock, and swung out over the dizzy brink, bracing his feet against the face of the cliff.

"Lower away!" he shouted.

The rope was paid out slowly, and Tom Merry vanished downwards into the windswept gorge.

CHAPTER 14.

Tom Merry to the Rescue!

CLINGING to the rope with chilled fingers, Tom Merry swayed sickeningly as the wind caught him. But he did not lose his nerve, though he knew that his life, probably, depended on that single rope.

Keeping himself from being swept against the cliff-face by thrusting his feet against it, he sank lower and lower towards the white ledge beneath, where that still figure lay black against the snow.

The moon vanished among clouds, and Tom found himself in an icy darkness, with the wind whining about him,

driving stinging flakes of snow into his face, blinding him. He fought for breath. Once his foot slipped against the face of the cliff, and he was swung heavily against the rock. But he braced his feet against it the next moment, and pushed clear.

Down, down into the darkness of swirling snow!

It seemed like an eternity to the captain of the Shell before he found himself at last standing upon the treacherous snow that had collected on the little ledge where the senseless man was lying.

The man in the tweed cap seemed scarcely to be breathing as Tom stooped over him.

An ugly cut on the temple showed that he had struck his head. But Tom, running swift fingers over the inert form, soon convinced himself that the man was not badly hurt. There were no bones broken, at any rate.

A faint shout came to him from the road above. He glanced up. Dimly through the flying snow he made out the face of Eric Kildare staring down over the brink. But Kildare's words were unintelligible in the wind.

"He's all right!" yelled Tom, cupping his hands round his mouth.

But he felt sure that Kildare could not hear him, so he turned his attentions to the unconscious man.

With numbed fingers, Tom unfastened the rope from round his waist.

It would be no good to do as he had originally intended, and send the senseless man up by himself. He would only be swung against the face of the cliff and injured.

"This rope's got to bear the two of us!" Tom told himself grimly.

Hastily he fastened the rope round beneath the man's armpits, knotting it securely, and leaving sufficient length to tie round his own waist. Standing with the other supported in his arms, Tom sent a lusty shout to the road high above.

A few moments later the rope tautened.

With the man held by one arm, his other hand grasping the rope, his legs thrusting their combined weight out from the rocky cliff-face, Tom Merry was swung off his feet.

Slowly they swayed higher through the snow-filled air.

The strain was terrible, and Tom gritted his teeth, wondering if they would ever reach the road above. His right arm was aching horribly with the effort of steadying the inert figure of the injured man as they rose slowly higher. His legs, straining against the cliff with desperate thrusts—fighting the wind that threatened to swing them against the face of it with crashing force—were utterly weary. But at last the ascent was accomplished!

Aching in every limb, Tom Merry found himself standing by the dizzy brink, while Sir Napier grasped his hand in a vice-like grip.

"Good lad!" muttered the baronet.

"Huwwah for Tom Mewwy!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The senseless man was laid on a coat spread out on the snow, and Sir Napier made a rapid examination. He agreed with Tom Merry that there were no bones broken, and that soon the injured stranger would return to consciousness.

"But if you hadn't gone down and fetched him up he'd have died of exposure, kid!" muttered Eric Kildare. "He could never have got up by himself."

"I—I say!" It was the voice of Baggy Trimble; a very peevish voice. "What's going to happen now, I'd like to know? I'm jolly well starving!"

Monty Lowther took Baggy by the arm, and the Falstaff of the Fourth broke off abruptly.

"Look here, old fat man," said Monty Lowther, in a grim tone, "we're all in this! It's not our fault we've got lost, and we've got to make the best of it. If you start grumbling I'll pull your fat nose, and thicken your fat ears, and wring your fat neck! So shut up, por-poise!"

"But, look here!" began Baggy truculently. "I want to— Oh! Yarooough!"

What it was that Baggy wanted he did not explain, after all. But it was unlikely that he wanted what he got! He gave a yell as Monty Lowther's hand landed with a hearty smack on his fat ear.

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Nursing his singing ear, Baggy skipped hastily out of Monty's reach, and said no more for the time being.

Monty Lowther turned to where the man in the tweed cap was lying, with Sir Napier and Eric Kildare bending over him. He was just in time to see the stranger's eyes flicker open.

"He's coming round!" muttered Digby, with a breath of relief.

With Kildare's arm over his shoulders, supporting him, the stranger sat up dazedly. He was clearly bewildered at finding himself back on the road, when his last memory had been of lying on that dizzy ledge far below.

He muttered a question, and Kildare explained what had happened. The man's eyes went to Tom Merry.

"You went down there for me, young 'un?" he breathed.

"Someone had to," answered Tom, colouring.

"Thanks, young 'un!" the man whispered. His eyes fell suddenly on the face of Garcia. He seemed to start, and glance quickly away again, avoiding the eyes of the South American junior. He made an effort to rise. But he was clearly very shaken, and Kildare and Sir Napier had to help him.

"I—I'll be all right soon!" he muttered, as he stood with their hands supporting him.

Sir Napier glanced at Kildare, then at the juniors.

"Seems to me it's not much good our going any farther to-night," he said quietly. "We can't get our bearings in this infernal snow, and we might tramp about over the mountains all night without getting anywhere. I suggest we spend the rest of the night in that shepherd's hut. In the morning we can probably get our bearings easily enough, particularly if the snow has stopped then, as seems likely."

"Good idea, sir," nodded Tom Merry.

"Yaas," agreed Arthur Augustus. "It's no good twampin' around without knowin' where we are goin'!"

There was a gasp from Baggy Trimble.

"But what about supper?" he howled.

"Afraid you will have to do without your supper for once, Trimble," answered Sir Napier a trifle sharply. "Unless you care to set off and try to find your way back to the railway station! I have some slabs of chocolate with me, anyhow," he added, glancing at the other juniors.

"Good egg!"

Several of the others had chocolate with them, and they were not likely to go very hungry. Everyone was satisfied with Sir Napier's suggestion, except for the Falstaff of the Fourth.

But Baggy certainly did not want to face the task of trying to find his way back to the station through the mountains by himself, with the chances of his succeeding about one in a hundred.

He muttered something under his breath, and sulkily followed the others as they turned towards the deserted hut, Kildare supporting the stranger with a muscular arm.

Tom Merry could not resist a chuckle.

When Baggy had set himself so successfully to obtaining an invitation to spend Christmas at Llantellyn Towers, the Falstaff of the Fourth had certainly not bargained for this strange adventure in the snow-clad mountains.

But, oddly enough, as things were to turn out, it was a lucky thing for Sir Napier and his guests that Baggy Trimble was one of the party, after all.

CHAPTER 15.

An Amazing Discovery!

"BAI Jove! It's pwetty ewie in heah!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced over his shoulder almost nervously.

The juniors were gathered round the brick fireplace with which the hut was provided. They had found plenty of wood, and a very cheerful fire was roaring in the grate, casting grotesque black shadows on the wooden walls. As the swell as St. Jim's had just remarked, however, it was certainly a little eerie, with the dim firelight the only illumination, and the wind howling weirdly outside.

"I'm cosy enough, anyway!" yawned Blake sleepily.

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Tom Merry and Monty Lowther.

"I've spent nights in far worse places than this," laughed Sir Napier Wynter. He glanced at the stranger. His name, he had told them, was Harvey. "How do you feel now?"

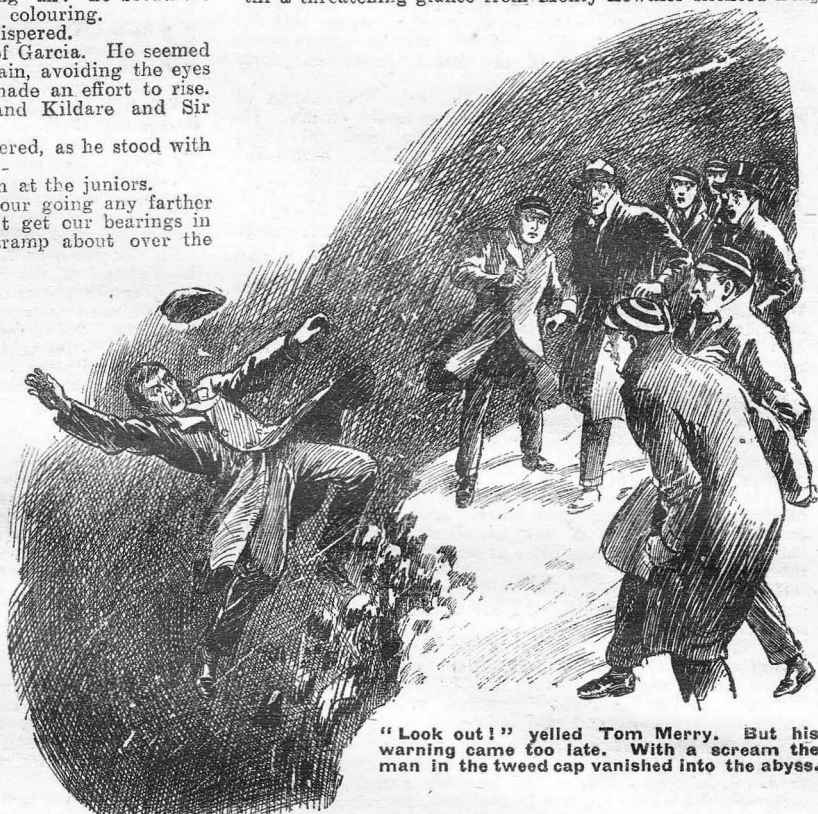
"Fit as a fiddle, thanks!"

Most of the juniors were munching chocolate. Baggy's fat little jaws were working like one o'clock. But Sir Napier put the last slab in his pocket.

"We'd better keep this for the morning," he observed.

"And the sooner we get to sleep the better!"

The wooden floor of the hut was scarcely as comfortable as the beds of a St. Jim's dormitory. But, with their great-coats for blankets, the little party settled down cheerfully enough, the only grumbles coming, as usual, from Baggy, till a threatening glance from Monty Lowther silenced him.



"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry. But his warning came too late. With a scream the man in the tweed cap vanished into the abyss.

And with the snowstorm still raging around the hut, Sir Napier and his companions were soon sleeping.

"Oh lor'!" Baggy Trimble opened his eyes, rolled over, and sat up, with a muttered exclamation of disgust.

Baggy did not like roughing it at any time. And now, when he had expected to be spending the night in the comfort of Llanfellyn Towers, he felt that he had a big grievance.

"This is rotten!" Baggy told himself. "Ow! This blessed floor's like a stone! Blow it! And I'm jolly peckish!"

He blinked round. The fire had died down to a red glow, and the dimly-lit hut was filled with the quiet breathing of sleeping fellows. He could make out the figure of Kildare, his handsome face lit by the glow from the fire. Beside him lay his uncle, breathing steadily. Near Sir Napier lay Garcia, his face in shadow, apparently asleep, too.

"That blessed South American!" sniffed Baggy. "Can't stick rotten dagoes!"

His thoughts turned to the slab of chocolate that Sir Napier had reserved for the morning. His mouth watered. "I've got a delicate constitution," Baggy told himself indignantly. "I need more nourishment than most chaps. Sir Napier ought to have let me have some more chocolate. I've a jolly good mind—"

His eyes gleamed greedily.

What the consequences would be were he to help himself to some of that chocolate, Baggy did not bother to think about just then. All he knew was that he was hungry, and that there was a big slab of chocolate in Sir Napier's

pocket. It would be easy enough to get possession of it, too, since the coat was spread on the floor with the pocket in question ready to hand.

Baggy glanced round furtively.

Everyone was asleep—or seemed to be. Softly he rose to his feet, and took a stealthy step towards the figure of Kildare's uncle.

He had to step over the sleeping form of Digby, and he was about to stretch out a fat leg to do so, when suddenly he gave a gasp of consternation.

Without warning, one of the still figures round the fire had risen noiselessly to its feet.

It was Garcia!

"Oh lor!"

Baggy drew back into the shadow, and crouched down. Garcia had not seen him, and, with his guilty conscience, Baggy was in terror of being discovered awake, lest his mean intentions should be suspected. Not daring to move another muscle, he watched the South American junior glance round the hut.

Garcia's eyes did not take in the crouching shape of Baggy Trimble among the dark shadows in the corner. He gave a mutter of apparent satisfaction, and his lithe, panther-like figure moved with ghostly silence across the floor to where the man named Harvey lay.

"What the dickens—"

Baggy watched with growing surprise.

He saw Garcia stoop over the stranger, and gently rouse him. The man opened his eyes, and instantly Garcia pressed a finger to his lips.

A few low, muttered words passed between them. Even to Baggy Trimble it was obvious in a flash that there was some sort of understanding between the two—that Harvey and Garcia were by no means the strangers they had pretended to be.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Baggy under his breath.

He saw the man rise silently and glance round. Then the two of them turned towards the door, and, noiselessly as cats, stepped past the still, sleeping figures on the floor as they crossed towards it.

Baggy's brain was in a whirl.

That Garcia and the man named Harvey were going off together somewhere was clear. And that was enough to have amazed any of the St. Jim's juniors! But to Baggy it was not so startling as something that happened the next moment.

Garcia's dark figure passed between him and the glowing mass in the fireplace, and for a few seconds was outlined sharply against the light.

In that instant a chord of memory was awakened in Baggy's brain. His mind went back to the scene in Rylcombe Lane, when that lithe, masked figure had attacked him and taken Sir Napier's parcel, and left him lying under the trees, gagged and bound.

That moment when Garcia was outlined against the dying fire told Baggy what the full light of day had never revealed to him. Though he had not recognised Garcia before as the masked figure in the lane, he recognised that outlined shape in an instant, and a breathless cry escaped him.

He knew now who that masked figure had been.

It was Garcia who had attacked him in Rylcombe Lane! The staggering truth left him dazed.

The gasp that broke from him as he realised it had not been loud enough to wake any of the sleepers in the hut. But it caused Garcia to turn in a flash, staring into the shadows with glittering eyes. And this time he saw the crouching shape of Baggy Trimble, his eyes fixed upon him in staring amazement.

"Carajo!"

Garcia spat out the word under his breath. Before Baggy had time to cry out the lithe South American had leapt noiselessly towards him, and a glittering knife pressed to Baggy's throat.

"Silence!" hissed Garcia in a voice so low that only Baggy could have heard it. "Keep quiet or you die!"

The shadowy figure of his companion had halted in startled alarm, peering through the gloom. But it was upon Garcia's eyes that Baggy's gaze was fixed, as he crouched there trembling, with the knife pricking his throat.

What it all meant Baggy's whirling brain had no time to consider. But vaguely, at the back of his mind, he realised with quailing terror that Callao Garcia, the junior from Rioguary, was in league with the scoundrels who had followed Sir Napier Wynter to England—realised, too, that Harvey, or whatever his real name was, was one of the gang. And Harvey, no doubt, had with deliberate purpose led them astray from the road to Llanfellyn Towers, and lost them in the mountains that night!

He wanted to cry out. But with that gleaming steel held to his throat, his instinctive cry froze upon his lips. So all along there had been a traitor in the camp!

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Garcia—who had, without doubt, revealed all their plans to Sir Napier's enemies—whose information had enabled his scoundrelly associates to follow the St. Jim's party to Wales, to attack Sir Napier on the train, and to prevent them from reaching Llanfellyn Towers by one of their number luring them from the right road in the blinding snowstorm!

It was staggering knowledge that Baggy Trimble held. But with Garcia's knife touching his throat Baggy realised, with terror in his heart, that this amazing knowledge had done nothing but place him in terrible, deadly danger!

CHAPTER 16.

Treachery!

BAGGY'S eyes roamed wildly round. The sleeping figures of Sir Napier Wynter, Kildare, and the rest of the School House juniors round the fire were dark and still.

Not one of them stirred or opened his eyes—though Baggy felt that the beat of his heart alone was enough to have awakened anyone!

And he dared not cry out.

Though help was so near at hand Baggy's terror was too great to take that risk.

The man in the cap had stepped close to Garcia, and was whispering in his ear. Garcia nodded.

He stooped over Baggy, putting his face close to that of the Falstaff of the Fourth. The point of the knife never left Baggy's quivering skin.

"You must come with us, you fat fool!" hissed the South American. "And remember—one sound, one word or shout, and I shall drive this knife into your fat body to the hilt!"

The perspiration stood out on Baggy's brow. His mouth opened and shut soundlessly. He licked his dry lips, and nodded in frightened assent.

Garcia's glittering blade was still held to his neck as he rose, quaking, to his feet. The South American grasped him by the shoulder, and Baggy wanted to squeal as he felt the knife shifted to his back—felt the point pressing between his plump shoulder-blades.

They were close to the door. The man named Harvey swung it open noiselessly. It was on the sheltered side of the hut, but the wind came eddying in, with a flurry of snowflakes, and Baggy's heart leapt. But if he hoped that the sudden inrush of icy air would awaken any of his sleeping companions he was disappointed.

Jack Blake stirred restlessly, causing Garcia to draw a hissing breath. But the leader of the Fourth did not awaken.

As he was forced towards the door, and realised that his last chance to get help would soon be gone, Baggy almost plucked up courage enough to scream out. But the steady pressure of the knife between his shoulder-blades caused him to think better of it.

A few moments later Baggy was staggering miserably into the blinding snow with Garcia at his heels.

Harvey closed the door noiselessly, shutting off the rosy light that shone out from the interior of the hut. The dim gloom of the snow-filled moonlight closed upon them.

Garcia laughed harshly.

"Good!" he muttered. "I thought he was going to shout out. Lucky for him he did not!"

"I'll say so!" growled his companion.

Baggy's teeth were chattering—partly with fear, partly with cold. Garcia and his companion were wrapped in their heavy coats, but the Falstaff of the Fourth was without either a coat or cap.

"I—I—I say, don't be a beast, Garcia—" stammered Baggy.

"Silence!"

Garcia accompanied his command with an uncomfortable prod of his sinister weapon. Baggy's flesh crept down his spine, and he said no more.

"Get on!" ordered his captor, and Baggy floundered ahead through the deep snow, wondering wildly if ever he would see Sir Napier Wynter, and Tom Merry & Co. and the others again.

Where they were taking him he could not imagine.

Garcia and his companion were talking in low, excited tones as they strode through the deep drifts that covered the road. Once Baggy caught the words "El Lobo"—the Wolf, as he knew them to mean in English. El Lobo—the chief of the revolutionaries! The very name seemed to turn his blood colder.

Even without the Wolf, his agents were bad enough, in Baggy's opinion. And he was in their hands!

Suddenly Garcia's hand fell on his shoulder, arresting him as he floundered on. Baggy turned a scared face to the South American.

They were sixty yards or more from the hut now. With the wind whistling over the mountain side their voices would never be heard within the hut.

"Listen, my friend!" grinned Garcia, slipping his knife away at last. "We are taking you away from the hut for a little distance, so that you cannot raise the alarm of our departure. But soon we shall let you go—when your story can do no harm by causing pursuit of us; for soon, you see, our tracks will be hidden by the falling snow!"

A wave of relief swept through Baggy. So he was not to be murdered after all!

"And when you get back you can give a message from me to your friends!" went on Garcia mockingly. "Tell them that they were led astray in the mountains to-night so that the agents of the Wolf could go to Llanfellyn Towers in search of that paper we want—that paper which they have no doubt found by now!"

He laughed softly. "But—but how did they know it was there?" stammered Baggy.

"You fat fool!" sneered Garcia. "I heard every word spoken in Sir Napier's room at St. Jim's. Within an hour that information had been given to my friends from Rioguary. They will have found the paper by now, for they are very thorough. Yes, very thorough!"

"I—I—I'll tell 'em!" gasped Baggy. "You can tell them more," said Garcia, with a flashing smile. "Tell them that they have been fooled all along! They may as well know the truth now. I am not Callao Garcia, the son of the President Garcia of Rioguary! My real name, my friend, is Charcas, if it interests you. The real Garcia, you see, was captured by us on his way from Southampton to St. Jim's, when he had landed from the ship that brought him from South America. And I came to St. Jim's in his place, to find out all I could."

He laughed mockingly. "That was clever—yes?" "My hat!" gasped Baggy. He had known that Sir Napier Wynter had never seen Garcia before arriving at St. Jim's. But that the new junior from South America had been an impostor, and not the son of the President, had never for one moment entered Baggy's head, any more than it had occurred to anyone else.

Baggy was certainly learning a lot. "You—you're not the son of the President?" he ejaculated in utter amazement. "Crumbs!" "No, I'm not!" snarled the South American. "I hate President Garcia! I am on the side of El Lobo. Even yet, though the revolution was defeated, thanks to the

cursed Englishman, Wynter—even yet, I say, President Garcia shall die and the Wolf shall triumph!"

His glittering eyes glared into Baggy Trimble's. "We must get that paper that Wynter had, or the revelation of the identity of our secret leaders will ruin our plans for the future. Well, no doubt; we have that paper now, for all night our men have been at Llanfellyn Towers. So!"

He burst into a triumphant laugh. His dark, gleaming eyes turned back towards the hut, with a malevolent expression. That Charcas—as he had told Baggy his real name was—hated Sir Napier Wynter almost as much as he seemed to hate President Garcia of Rioguary, was clear.

"Come on, Charcas!" muttered the man who had said his name was Harvey—a fact which Baggy, however, was beginning to doubt.

A queer gleam had come into the eyes of the South American. He gripped his companion by the arm. "Wait, Jackson, my friend!" he muttered.

"So his real blessed name's Jackson!" thought Baggy. The man named Jackson stared back in the direction of the South American's intent gaze. For the moment their eyes were off Baggy. But Baggy dared not move; he knew how easily they could have overtaken him had he tried to bolt for it.

"What's up, Charcas?" muttered the man. Charcas flung out an eager, pointing arm to where a giant boulder could be seen perched precariously on the steep mountain-side, directly above the little hut where the St. Jim's party were sleeping.

"See?" breathed Garcia, an evil light gleaming in his eyes. "See that great rock, my friend?"

"What about it?" growled Jackson. "If we could get it moving—and that should not be very difficult, my friend—it would roll down the hillside," whispered Garcia. "Down it would roll, and smash the hut like an eggshell! And that would be the end of Sir Napier Wynter, our enemy—of him and all his friends!"

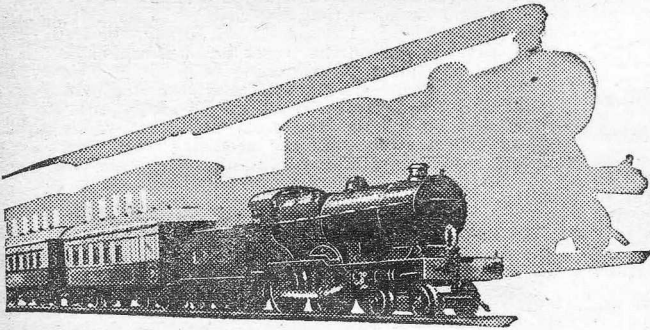
He grasped the man beside him excitedly by the arm. "We will do it!" he snarled. "And this fat fool shall help us!"

"No!" cried Jackson, with blanched face. "We—we can't do it!" His voice was hoarse.

"You coward!" hissed Garcia. "If I tell the others that you refused, you know what will happen! Come, I say! And you, too!"

(Continued on next page.)

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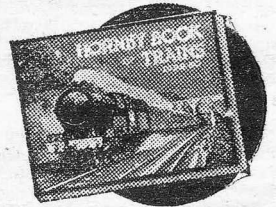
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Baggy Trimble gave a choking cry. But Charcas seized him by the shoulder. Jackson, though his face was white, nodded dumbly. Evidently he was afraid of the South American.

A few moments later Baggy Trimble found himself climbing, as if in a nightmare, up the snow-clad slopes towards the great black boulder that stood out from the glittering whiteness like a dark scar.

CHAPTER 17.

Baggy, the Hero!

HERE and there on the hillside a few stunted pine-trees grew. Close under the giant rock, which had sheltered it from being hidden in the snow, a small fir-trunk lay. It had evidently been uprooted in some past storm, and most of its dead branches had been smashed off in its fall.

"Good!" grinned Charcas evilly. "It will make a fine lever; we need a lever to move so great a stone as this!"

Jackson helped the South American drag the shattered pine from where it lay.

Baggy Trimble stood shivering in the snow, watching them like a fellow in a dream.

Below them, directly in the path that the boulder must inevitably take once it had been loosened and sent rolling down the hillside, the little hut could be dimly seen. Through a tiny window could be seen the warm, rosy glow from within, and Baggy could picture the sleeping forms sheltered there.

And then he pictured the hut smashed to splinters, with the huge boulder crushing it like an eggshell, as Charcas had said; and a choking cry burst from Baggy's lips.

He was trembling in every limb.

He glanced round swiftly, and saw that the two scoundrels had pushed the end of the slim trunk beneath the corner of the big rock, with a small boulder beneath it, upon which to lever it for their dreadful purpose. Charcas turned to him with an evil smile.

"We shall need your help," he purred. Evidently it appealed to the South American as a good joke to make Baggy Trimble help in the terrible plan he had devised. "Come, my fat friend—take hold of this trunk!"

Baggy did not speak. He made no movement. He seemed like a person in a trance as he stood trembling in the snow that swirled about him.

Charcas snatched out his knife and seized Baggy by the shoulder.

"You will do as I say," he snarled, "or feel the sharpness of this blade, my friend!"

Baggy clutched the trunk in wild panic. The South American laughed, and put his hands to it as well.

"Push!" he commanded.

He dragged down with all his weight. The boulder rocked a little, seemed about to topple forward down the steep hillside, but sank back again into the snow.

"Again!" grinned Garcia. "Another push—it will go then! The Senor Wynter shall feel its weight!"

And then suddenly Baggy's terror-stricken brain cleared.

In a flash it came to him what he was doing—that he was helping in a fiendish scheme that could only end in death for the sleepers in the hut below. He thought of Tom Merry and Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the others. In his heart he knew what good fellows they were—remembered long-forgotten kindnesses that they had shown him. His hands came away from the straining trunk as though it had seared his flesh.

"I won't!" he screamed. "I won't! You can knife me if you want to, but I won't! Hang you—both of you!"

He turned to rush away.

Lying in the snow, churned up by their feet, were lumps of broken rock and stones. Baggy, on a sudden wild impulse, snatched up a big stone, and flung it with all his force.

Whether it was simply a lucky shot, or whether his fear and desperation lent him an uncanny skill in his aim, he did not know or think about. But the stone struck the window of the hut below clean in the centre, and there was a crash of breaking glass.

"Carajo!"

Charcas was so taken aback by Baggy's sudden unexpected mutiny that the Falstaff of the Fourth was already plunging down the hill through the deep drifts before the South American had time to think of stopping him.

And already the door of the hut below had swung open, and dim figures were appearing in the snow.

"Quick!" gasped the Rioguanay savagely. "We can do it yet!"

With a tremendous push, he and his companion dragged down the levered trunk. The great boulder lurched over heavily.

"It rolls!" shouted Charcas, with hoarse triumph. "It is done!"

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Down the hillside with ever increasing speed the huge rock was racing and sliding through the snow.

Baggy, plunging wildly down towards the hut, glanced round, and gave a choking cry as he saw the giant boulder coming.

"Look out!" he screamed, his voice rising high above the wind. "Run for your lives!"

He slipped, and went sprawling into a deep drift, blinded and choking. Behind him he could hear the thunder of the oncoming boulder racing down upon him. He tried to scramble up, but he missed his footing and fell again.

And then, when Baggy thought his end had come, he felt himself seized and lifted like a child, and swung aside. He saw the great stone go crashing past—and found himself held in the strong arms of Eric Kildare.

Then Baggy fainted.

When Baggy Trimble opened his eyes it was to find himself lying on a coat spread on the snow, in the flaming light of a great fire that crackled near him.

He saw in another moment what this fire was.

The hut was in splintered wreckage, and the wreckage was blazing. In the heart of the flames lay the huge boulder that had smashed the hut like matchwood. The fire that had been burning within the hut had set light to the broken woodwork, and a great sheet of flame was roaring in the wind.

Baggy sat up, wide-eyed.

But then he saw that Sir Napier and all the juniors were gathered round him—safe!

"Baggy, old chap—"

It was Tom Merry's voice. And Tom's voice was not quite steady as he gripped Baggy's hand.

"Feelin' all wight, Baggy, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy anxiously.

"Ow! Yes!" gasped Baggy. "I—I say, where's Garcia? I mean, Charcas! He was going to knife me—"

"Tell us what happened, my boy," said Sir Napier quietly.

Baggy, in stumbling sentences, told his story. When he had finished, Sir Napier's face was fiercely grim.

"The villains!" he breathed. "And that fellow Garcia—an impostor! My heavens! He certainly fooled us."

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I nevah did care for the chap. I considah—"

"Neither did I!" put in Kildare quietly. "I tried to be decent to him, that was all. And so the real Garcia is a prisoner in the hands of these scoundrels! And they have gone to Llanfellyn Towers to-night in search of that paper, the hounds!"

Sir Napier smiled very grimly.

"You say Garcia—or Charcas, or whatever his real name is—was very confident that his friends will have found that paper by now, eh? I doubt it! If Broom, the butler, hid it as directed, behind the secret panel of which he knows, it will take many days' searching before it is discovered!"

"Let's hope you're right, sir," muttered Reginald Talbot.

The snow was stopping. Quite suddenly the air was clear, and stretching far across the great valley to the opposite mountains could be seen the vast stretches of glittering whiteness in the light of the approaching dawn.

"Look!" cried Manners eagerly, pointing down into the valley. "There's a village!"

There was an excited cheer from the juniors.

With the discovery of a village within reach of them it would not be long before they were on the right road to Llanfellyn Towers.

Baggy, feeling a little better now, rose to his feet.

Of Garcia and the man Jackson there was no sign, and Sir Napier knew how useless it would be to attempt to track them. Accordingly, in the light of the rising sun, the little party set off down the road into the valley towards the village that could be seen nestling there.

An hour later they were all at breakfast in a little Welsh inn, and Baggy was tucking in like a Trojan.

They discovered that they were six miles from Llanfellyn Towers.

What they would find when they arrived eventually at the Towers was a question that no one could answer. It seemed certain that further adventures would be awaiting them there, with the agents of the Wolf still so intent upon gaining possession of the secret paper that had been hidden there, and which Sir Napier felt very sure—despite Charcas' opinion—could not yet have fallen into their hands.

But whatever happened, the juniors would never regret, after all, that Baggy Trimble had been invited with them to Llanfellyn Towers, or forget the part he had played in the grim happenings of that amazing night!

THE END

(It looks as if Tom Merry & Co. are in for a peck of trouble at Llanfellyn Towers, doesn't it, chums? Look out, then, for a thrilling yarn in: **THE HOUSE ON THE MOUNTAINS!** which will appear in next week's GEM.)

Another Instalment of **DAVID GOODWIN'S** Thrilling School Serial Starring the Boys of Codrington!

THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON!

(Introduction on next page.)

Taffy & Co. get on the track of another strange mystery in which their Form-master is again implicated!

The Robbery at Roydon Hall!

DEREKER had had long leave, and did not want to abuse it by trouble with the authorities just then. Much as he would have liked to stay, there was no use in remaining and getting caught. Moreover, he had the note with him, which would probably fall into the hands of Mr. Perkes if he stayed, and that would be disastrous.

He was out of sight down the dark passage before the master arrived to see what the noise was about. Dereker gained his own dormitory, and, carefully hiding the note, he got into bed.

"Have you seen Kent?" asked Taffy. "What did you do?"

"Punched his beastly head. I wish I'd had time to do it properly. Tomorrow we'll settle that business with him and Ferguson and Kempe. Let's chuck it now. Good-night!"

It was rather an effort to turn out in time next morning; but as the Head had been particularly decent in granting them extra leave, the quartette did not like to be late.

They were anxious to bring the rival gang to book as soon as possible and confront them with the anonymous letter. But Ferguson and his chums most adroitly kept out of their way, and there was no getting hold of them.

"The beggars are scared this time," said Birne. "They know we've got 'em."

"Humph! I don't see that we can prove very much," replied Taffy. "They'll deny they had anything to do with it, of course."

"I'll let the whole Remove judge for themselves, anyhow," said Dereker emphatically.

"What's become of the Head, by the way?" said Birne. "He wasn't in chapel this morning, and he's not in the school now."

"Hasn't got up yet," suggested Dereker, grinning. "Got a head like a pumpkin after Sir Harry's old tawny port. He's having tea and soda-water in bed."

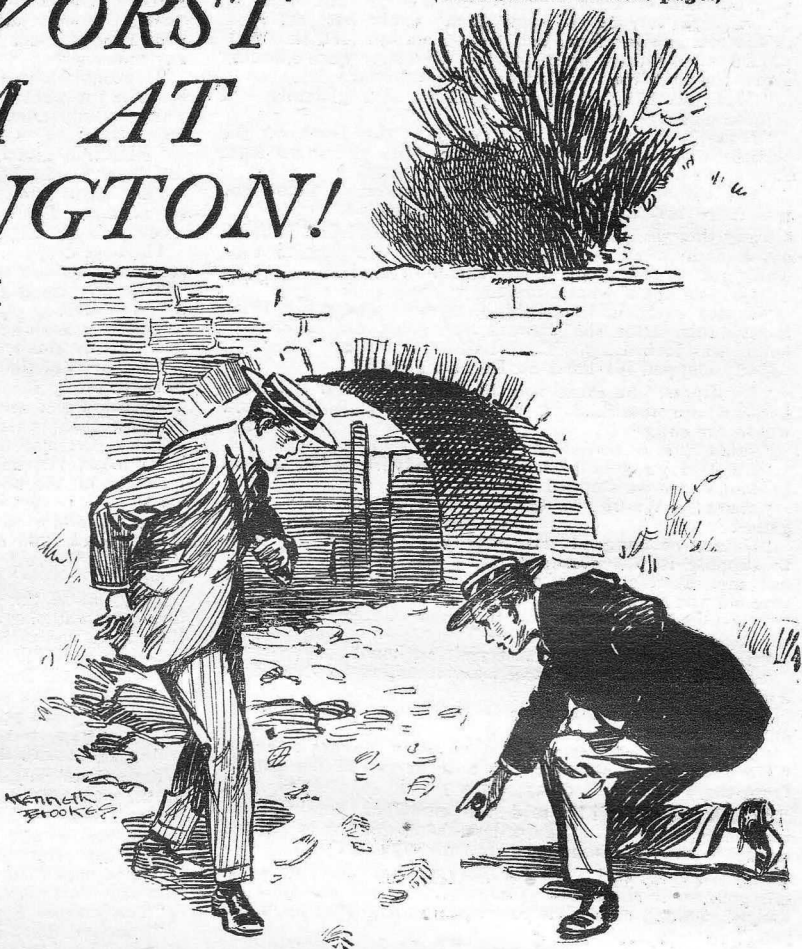
They learned, however, that the Head had left Codrington very early in the morning, driving away in a great hurry in the dogcart. Strangely enough, there seemed to be an air of uneasiness about the whole school, masters and all, though it was hard to define what it was. All sorts of rumours were flying about.

The general surprise increased when it was found that the Woolly Lambe was not there to take the Remove. Mr. Quayle took it for first lesson instead. There was a good deal of rioting, naturally, and Mr. Quayle found his hands very full. He could not handle the Remove as its customary master did.

Taffy and his chums, however, did not take much part in the "rag." They were too full of the events that had passed, and they had a feeling that something serious was in the wind. After second lesson they consulted together, and went up to No 12 Room, where the Form was fore-gathering, and where they hoped to corner Ferguson & Co.

The three rival warriors were there, but before anything could happen Johnson appeared at the door, and called:

"Who saw Lambe last! It was you, Taffy, wasn't it? Where is he?"



"How the dickens should I know?" said Taffy. "He left Sir Harry's after we did, and came home with the Head."

"That's just what he didn't do. He never came home last night, for his bed hasn't been slept in. I've just heard that."

Before anyone could comment on the fact Walsh came dashing along the passage and into the room, quite out of breath.

"I say, you chaps, have you heard the news?" he cried. "Roydon Hall's been burgled! Sir Harry Beckford's been robbed of eight hundred pounds' worth of gold plate!"

His words struck the whole assembly speechless, coming as they did right on top of Johnson's news.

"Roydon Hall burgled!" muttered Taffy.

"Absolutely stripped! They say it's the cleverest robbery that's been done for years."

Nobody said anything for a moment till Walsh gave a chuckle.

"No wonder, when you four chaps were there half the night! Where have you hidden the swag, Taffy? Share it out!"

Nobody paid any attention to Walsh's feeble joke, however. Taffy and Dereker were quite dumbstruck, and Ferguson, suddenly pushing forward, confronted them with a savage leer.

There was a heavy tread in the passage, and Lodgey, the school sergeant, appeared at the door.

"Master Wynne, you're wanted," he said. "All the four young gents that was at Sir Harry's last night are sent for to go to Roydon Hall at once."

"Who says so?" cried Taffy.

"The 'Ead. Police orders, I think," said Lodgey. "Come along, please, gen'lemen! There's a motor-car waitin' at the gates, an' I was to hurry you."

A perfect storm of questions assailed Lodgey and the quartette as the Remove crowded round; but Taffy, followed by Birne, Dereker, and Jellicoe, hurried out without

replying. They only stopped at the lobby to get their caps.

At the gates they found the car awaiting them, not the slow omnibus of the day before, but a large, fast Daimler, driven, however, by the same man. There was just room in the tonneau for four, and the chums squeezed in. Half the school saw them drive off, and soon they were spinning along the high road at twenty miles an hour.

"Great Scott, this is a go!" said Dereker gloomily. "I wonder how it's going to end?"

"I say," began Taffy, leaning over the front of the tonneau and talking to the chauffeur, "do you know what they want us for?"

"For witnesses, I think," said the driver. "Cause you was there last night just before it happened."

Taffy thought quickly. He looked so excited that Dereker asked him what was wrong. Without replying to him, Taffy got up and spoke to the chauffeur again.

"Do you know what time the robbery took place?"

"Pretty early in the night, they say. The p'lice think it was soon after the visitors had gone, an' before the house was locked up. 'Bout half-past eleven."

Taffy clapped his hand on Dereker's knee.

"By Jingo!" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming. "I don't know where the thief is, but I'll bet a shilling I know where the swag is!"

"What!" said the others.

"Sir Harry's gold plate! In the culvert under the old bridge, where we stopped last night."

"What? Where we saw those poachers stow their game?"

"Game, be hanged! We were a jolly sight too ready to suppose it was game, I fancy. Golden game, if you ask me. It was just after the robbery took place. An' where'd you find a better hidin'-place?"

"By gum! Remember the tall chap who came first with the biggest bag? Just like—"

"Taffy's right. It's worth tryin', anyhow."

"It's even betting the stuff's there, unless they've got it away in the meantime."

"There's the place coming in sight now! I vote we go an' see, anyhow!"

"Hi, chauffeur!" cried Taffy, leaning forward again. "We want you to stop for a minute or two at the gate in front there! 'Twon't delay you a jiffy!"

"Can't do it, sir!" said the chauffeur emphatically, increasing his speed. "My orders are to get you to Roydon as fast as the car can go, and stop for nothing!"

"By George," said Taffy furiously, "if you don't do as we tell you, we'll climb over there and run the car into the hedge! I don't care what your orders are! Pull up, I tell you!"

"Here, no larks, young gents!" said the chauffeur, in some alarm. "Don't get playing the fool with the car!"

"Larks, be hanged!" returned Taffy emphatically. "You stop, or I promise you we'll do what I said! Here, come on, you chaps!"

The chauffeur was scared at the thought of being interfered with while the car was going at such a pace, and he slowed down.

"I shall lose my place over this——" he began.

"No, you won't! We'll make it all right for you! Pull up here—close beside the hedge. We shan't be five minutes, if that!"

The car stopped, and the chums jumped out.

"There's no use all four of us going," said Dereker. "It'll only make a show if there's anybody about."

"All right; you come with me," said Taffy. "Birne and Jelly, stay here an' keep the chauffeur quiet. Very likely there may be nothing in it at all, but we'll just make sure."

Jellicoe and Birne were none too pleased at being left behind, but there was no time to argue; and Taffy led the way back along the road at a run.

"The ass of a driver has brought us a long way past it!" said Dereker.

"Couple of hundred yards, that's all. It's just as well—

we don't want the car waiting too close, in case there's anybody about. I'm not counting on this job, but——"

"Just as well to make sure," said Dereker. And they reached the gate leading into the field next the bridge. "See if there's anybody in sight before we get over. If you're right about the swag, someone might come for it at any moment."

"I should think they'd wait for dark, though they might leave it for weeks, till the whole thing's blown over," said Taffy, taking a careful survey round the fields. "There's no one in sight. Over with you!"

"I thought I saw somebody coming along round the little hill there," said Dereker, hesitating.

They stood upon the gate and looked; but neither could see anyone. The meadows seemed quite deserted—not even a cow or a grazing horse in sight.

The boys dropped over to the other side and ran across the meadow, through the hedge, and into the dry watercourse.

"Rummy thing there's no water in it—in winter, too!" said Dereker.

"There's a sluice that shuts it off from the main river now. They don't open it very often."

The banks of the dry back-water were high; and the boys hurried along the gravelly bed to the little stone bridge. They could just stand up under its arch.

"Now then, where's your hiding-place?" said Dereker.

Taffy examined the walls thoroughly. Many of the bricks were loose, but no cavity could be seen. Just under the entrance of the arch was an old sluice-gate of small size, made to draw up and down, and it had a sort of lid fixed across its under edge.

Taffy took hold of the top piece.

"This is where I thought it might be," he said. "Give us a pull!"

They raised the water-gate and its low lid without any difficulty, and fixed it as high as it would go. Under the lid, in the bed of the stream, was a slight cavity, but there was nothing in it.

"Sold!" said Dereker. "If there was anything here at all it was those bags of game, and they've been taken already, evidently. Let's get back to the car!"

"Hold on a shake! We'll have a look round first. Don't tramp about with those fairy hoofs of yours, but keep still!"

Taffy went outside, and bending down, had a good look at the ground. The sand and dry loam showed all footprints pretty plainly, and besides the ones they had made themselves he saw two sets of others, which could be traced with a little trouble.

"Look here!" he said. "Here are the marks of the chaps who came last night, anyhow!"

"The poachers?" put in Dereker.

"Poachers don't wear india-rubber shoes, as a rule. Look at the ribbing across the prints of this one. They lead under the bridge. These other ones are made by boots, though—somebody with a long, narrow foot an' rather neat."

"So they are!" said Dereker, stooping and looking closely. "And with those patent rubber heel-pieces, with a cross in them. You can see it quite plainly here where the soil's damp."

"There don't seem to be any pointing outwards again, though. They must have left by the other end."

The ground under the bridge itself was too trampled for any marks to be seen; but leading out on the other side of the arch both sets of footprints could be seen plainly—

the ribbed shoes and the boots with the patent heels quite clear, except where the two tracks crossed each other.

Walking beside them, the boys traced them some distance along, and the tracks then left the water-course and disappeared in the grass of the meadow next a tall hedge.

"There are only these two," said Dereker.

"That settles it. Nobody's been here since those chaps last night, then; and the bags they carried must be still here."

"Yes," agreed Dereker, "keep your eyes open, Taffy, we'll soon find 'em!"

(For the continuation of this serial see next week's GEM.)

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

Convinced that Mr. Wollaston Lambe, their new Form master, is an escaped convict, Taffy Wynne & Co. and Ferguson & Co., rival factions in the Remove, the most unruly Form at Codrington, determine to bring pressure to bear to rid the school of the new master. Their efforts prove of little avail, however, for the Woolly Lambe not only shows that he is capable of taking care of himself and his Form, but starles the school by catching a cracksmen in the act of looting the school's strong-room. Although Wynne & Co. are now ready to back up the Woolly Lambe, Ferguson and his cronies are still determined to expose their new Form master. Later Taffy Wynne is instrumental in saving the life of Dorothy Beckford, the pretty daughter of one of the governors of the school. As a recognition of his bravery he is invited, together with his chums and a new boy named Jellicoe, to dine at Sir Harry Beckford's house that same night. Canon Wyndham, the headmaster of Codrington, and Mr. Wollaston Lambe, are also invited. Seizing the chance of putting a spoke in the Woolly Lambe's wheel, Kent-Williams, at the instigation of Ferguson, expresses an anonymous letter to Sir Harry, warning the wealthy baronet that the Form master is a thief. Sir Harry, however, throws the incriminating missive into the fire-grate, and promptly drinks to the health of Mr. Lambe. Retrieving the letter at a favourable opportunity, Dereker pays a visit to Kent-Williams' dormitory late that same night, determined to show the culprit up in his true colours. The rumpus which follows, however, is overheard by one of the masters, and Dereker beats a hasty retreat.

(Now read on.)



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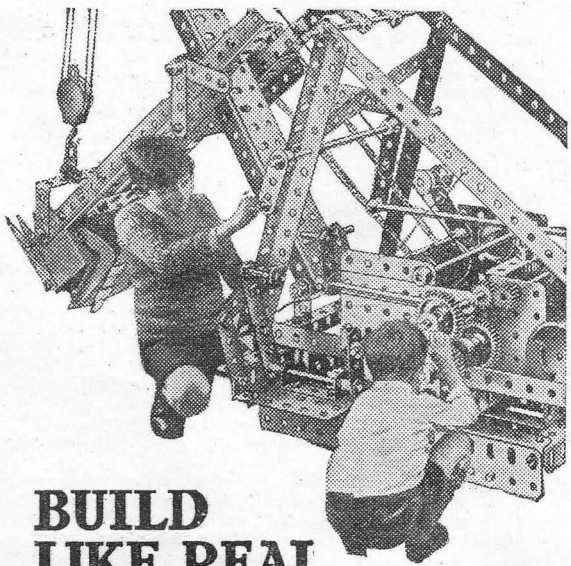
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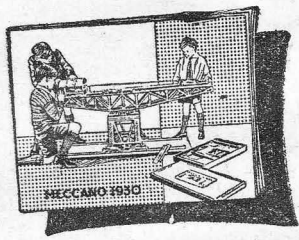
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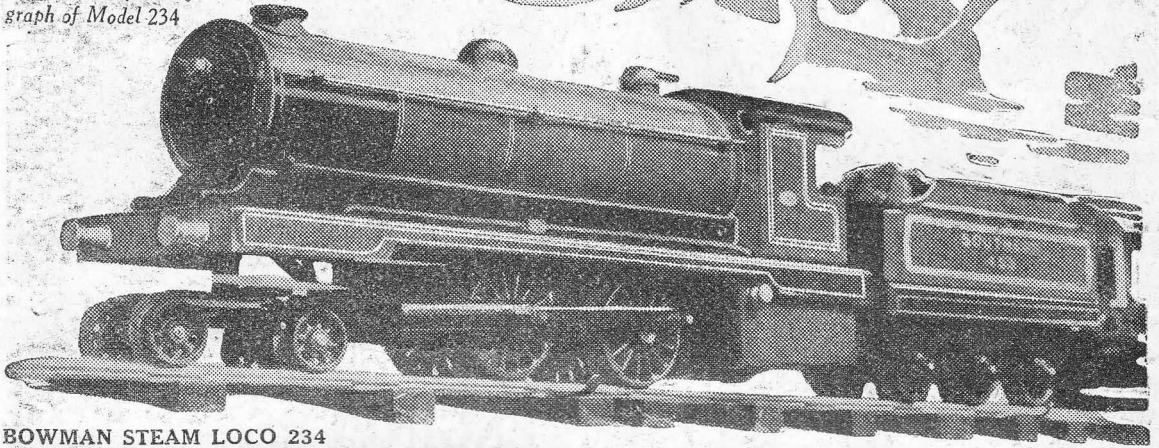
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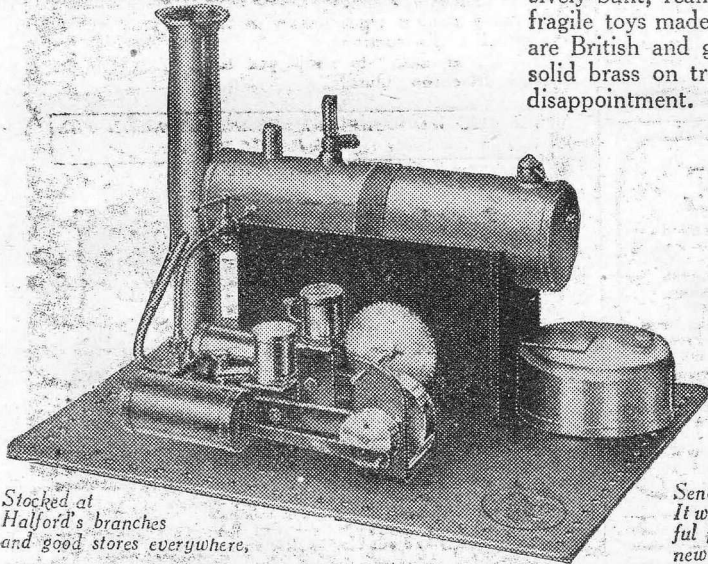
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