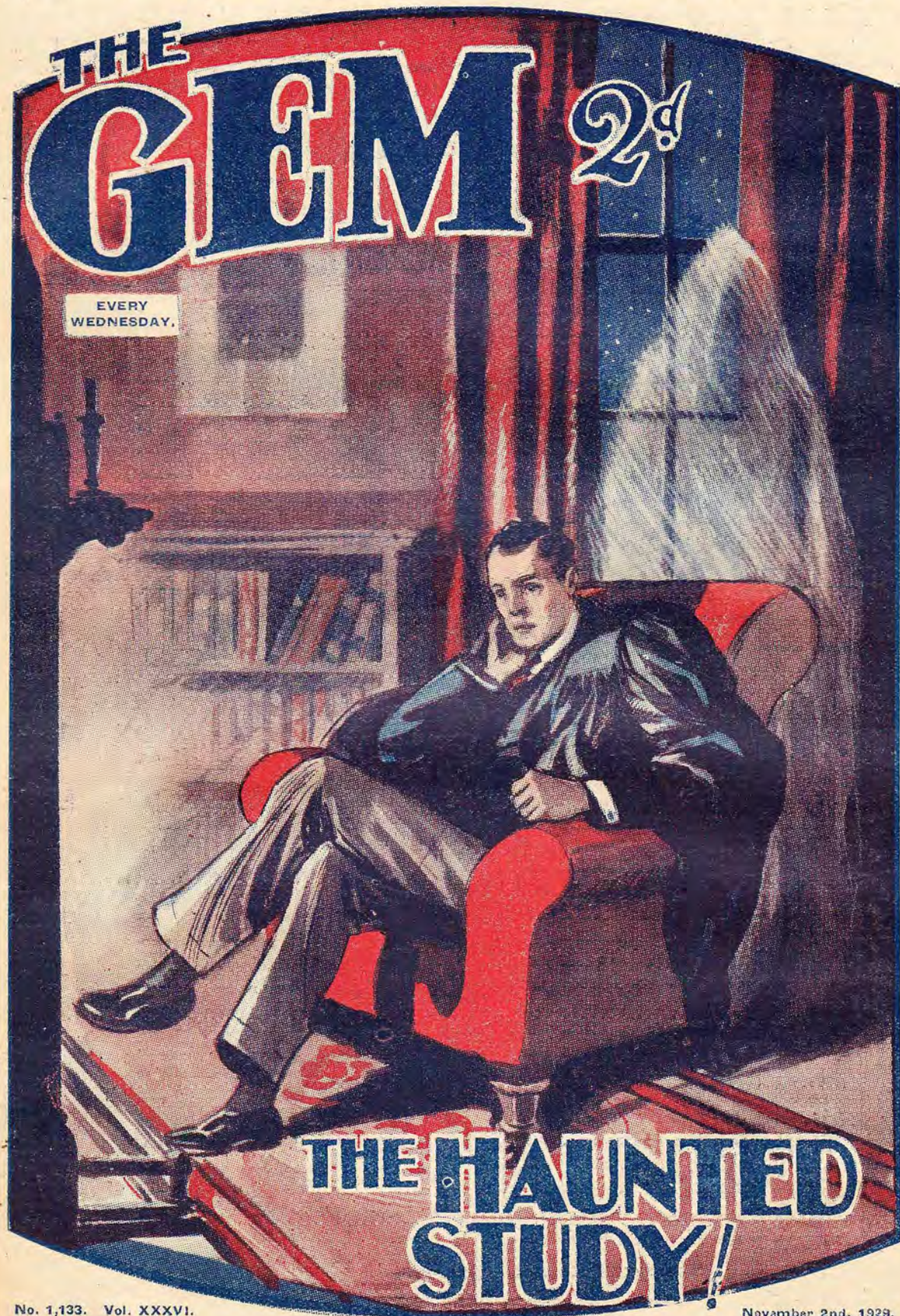


THRILLING BOOK-LENGTH SCHOOL STORY—INSIDE!

# THE GEM 2¢

EVERY  
WEDNESDAY.



No. 1,133. Vol. XXXVI.

November 2nd, 1929.

*(Read the thrilling tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—inside.)*

THRILLS—YES! YOU'LL FIND THEM IN EVERY CHAPTER OF—

# The Haunted Study!

by MARTIN CLIFFORD



There was a sound of footsteps in the Housemaster's study—footsteps that seemed to be treading in the room itself—yet nobody was moving. Then another sound—a long-drawn-out moan, horrible and unearthly, followed by sudden darkness and a loud, shattering crash! What is the secret of the haunted study?

## CHAPTER 1. Payment in Kind!

"SEEN Toby?"

Gerald Cutts of the Fifth and Bagley Trimble of the Fourth asked that question simultaneously.

Tom Merry smiled. Manners and Lowther—the other two members of the Terrible Three of the Shell at St. Jim's—also smiled. Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth smiled, too. The School House steps seemed full of smiling juniors, in fact.

The little crowd had watched with mild amusement the sudden appearance of the elegant senior and the podgy junior from within the House. Trimble had been keeping pace with Cutts—a little circumstance which, judging by the expression on Cutts' face, was rather annoying to that stately and elegant Fifth-Former.

Between the Fourth and the Fifth at St. Jim's was a

mighty gulf fixed. Fellows like Cutts would probably have admitted a vague knowledge of the existence of the Fourth, but Fifth Form dignity forbade any interest whatever in so insignificant a race of mortals. Hence the obvious annoyance Cutts had felt at the proximity of Trimble.

Cutts had evidently thought he was going to shake off the obnoxious Falstaff of the Fourth when he stopped to speak to Tom Merry.

But Cutts was sadly mistaken.

Instead of being shaken off, Baggy Trimble halted at precisely the same moment as Cutts halted. And by the strangest possible coincidence, his squeaky voice joined Cutts' elegant drawl in the inquiry:

"Seen Toby?"

Cutts frowned.

The juniors smiled.

Monty Lowther went one better by making a facetious comment.

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# —THIS SENSATIONAL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S!



"Practising a duet, you two?" he asked politely.

And there was a chuckle.

Cutts reddened.

"No cheek, Lowther! I asked you, Merry, whether you'd seen Toby?"

"Just what I want to know!" nodded Trimble.

"I'm expectin' a hamper from home," explained Cutts.

"The carrier should have delivered it by mid-day—"

"I say, Cutts, that's funny!" grinned Trimble. "I'm expecting one, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a roar from the juniors.

That the mighty Cutts should be forced to tolerate the proximity of Trimble's podgy person was amusing. That he should suffer the humiliation of asking a question in the same words and at the same time as Trimble was even more amusing. But that he should find himself confessing to expectations that were identical with those of the Falstaff struck them as really funny. They roared.

On the strength of that roar, the Fifth-Former deigned to acknowledge the existence of Trimble.

"Trying to be funny?" he asked furiously.

"He, he, he! Not at all! I mean it. Coincidence—what?"

Cutts took a step forward, and the junior backed away hurriedly. Fortunately for Trimble, however, hostilities were nipped in the bud by the arrival of Toby, carrying on his shoulder a hamper of imposing dimensions.

Cutts abandoned warlike thoughts and touched the school page on the shoulder.

"Take it up to my study, Toby!" he rapped out.

Toby looked up from beneath his burden and grinned.

"Sorry, sir! Can't be done!"

"And why not, pray?"

"'Cause why? 'Cause this 'ere 'amper is addressed to Master Trimble!" grinned Toby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts' face was a study for a moment.

"Look here——" he began furiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheer up, Cutts!" grinned Lowther. "There's still tea in Hall to fall back on, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts clenched his fists as though he felt tempted to wade in and make mincemeat of the hilarious juniors. On second thoughts, he decided not to do so. It was possible, of course, that he entertained a faint suspicion that they might make mincemeat of him.

Cutts finally transferred his hands to his trousers pockets and tramped off, looking almost fiendish.

A yell of laughter followed him.

"So much for Cutts!" chuckled Jack Blake. "And now for the hamper. Whom have you been black-mailing, Baggy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Blake! This tuck-hamper is from my people—at Trimble Hall, you know!"

Blake shook his head.

"That's all very well, Fatty. But Trimble Hall doesn't exist, whereas the hamper does!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! It's mine, anyway!" grunted the Falstaff of the Fourth. "If it's not from Trimble Hall, it's from one of my titled relations!"

"But they're even more mythical!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther, who had been quiet for several seconds, suddenly grinned and significantly closed one eye—the one which was out of Trimble's range of vision.

"Listen, you chaps!" he exclaimed. "I've got an idea!"

"Sorry I can't stay to hear it, old chap!" said Trimble hurriedly. "Take that hamper up to my study, Toby!"

But Lowther laid a restraining hand on the page.

"Hold on, Toby! Now, you men, it seems to me that it's up to us to bag this wonderful hamper of Trimble's."

"Look here——" roared Trimble, in sudden alarm.

"I take it for granted that Trimble owes money to everybody present?"

"Bai Jove! That's true!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Very well, then. As it's about a million to one against any of us getting back anything in cash, I suggest we take something back in kind!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Herries heartily. "He's owed me five bob for the last three terms. I'll take a roast chicken and a tin of pineapple chunks and call it square!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——" roared Trimble.

"If everybody's in favour, we'll take the hamper up to our study, and dish out the goods!" said Lowther briskly.

"All agreed?"

"What-ho!"

"Look here, you rotters, if you touch my tuck——" hooted Trimble.

"Stand back, Baggy! Leave it to us, Toby!"

Monty Lowther slipped a shilling into the palm of the page, and Toby dumped the hamper on the steps and went off, grinning.

Baggy Trimble, his podgy face almost purple with indignation, made a grab at the hamper.

So did Jack Blake and half a dozen others. Jack Blake & Co won.

Trimble gave a yell of rage.

"You awful rotters! If you pinch my hamper——"

"Run it upstairs before he brings the beaks down!"

"What-ho!"

Willing helpers rushed the hamper up the steps and into the House. The rest of the ragers followed, grinning.

Trimble, almost speechless with rage and dismay, brought up in the rear at express speed.

The Falstaff of the Fourth, with his usual obtuseness, had no suspicion that the whole thing might be a joke. In point of fact, Lowther and his allies had no intention whatever of taking so much as a jam-tart from the fat junior. But Trimble was incapable of seeing a joke where such a serious matter as tuck was concerned.

In the wake of the ragers, he rolled up the steps and into the House, breathing fire and slaughter as he went.

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Up the stairs, across landings and through deserted passages raced the raiders. And after them raced the raided, inspired to feverish energy by the awful prospect of losing an entire hamper of tuck.

Having gained the Shell passage, the raiders rushed along to Study No. 10. Baggy Trimble rushed after them. By a mighty effort he managed to squeeze his podgy person into the study just a moment before Blake slammed the door shut.

"Dump it on the table!" grinned Lowther. "Now, chaps, I propose to dish out the tuck to each fellow in accordance with the amount Trimble owes him—"

"You jolly well won't!" howled Trimble. "Look here, Lowther—"

"Hallo, Baggy! You here? Just in time to see fair play! Now, let's start with you, Gussy. How much does Baggy owe you?"

"Bai Jove! I'm afraid I've no ideah whatevah, deah boy!"

"Make it a couple of jars of jam and some pastries!" said Lowther. "Open up the hamper, Blake!"

"Pleasure!"

"Gimme my hamper, you awful beasts!" shrieked Trimble, almost in agony at the idea of vandal hands invading that basket of tuck.

"Dry up, Baggy!"

"You—you—"

Trimble watched, mesmerised, as the skipper of the Fourth cheerfully opened the hamper and pulled away the straw packing.

A cake came to light—a delicious iced cake, with walnuts on top, and a hint of rich fruit under the icing.

Trimble eyed that cake, and his heart ached within him. To remain there and watch the contents of that beautiful hamper disappear before his eyes was impossible. Equally, of course, it was impossible for him to engage seven strong juniors in a battle for the prize.

But something had to be done.

All at once, an idea occurred to Trimble. It was a desperate idea, but then the situation was desperate, and sages had said that desperate diseases require desperate remedies.

With a suddenness which astonished the cheerful raggers, the Falstaff of the Fourth rushed out of the study.

Tom Merry and his chums were left to roar over the success of Monty Lowther's little jape, and after that, to conjecture what brainwave had led to Trimble's sudden disappearance.

Meanwhile, Trimble was racing over to the New House.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Confiscated!

"**W**HAT the thump—"

Figgins, the lanky leader of the New House juniors at St. Jim's, broke off in astonishment, as a podgy figure came racing across the quad from the direction of the School House.

"Can it be?" asked George Kerr wonderingly.

"Can't!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"But it is!" said Figgins. "It's really Trimble—and Trimble in a hurry! Thought it was a fat frog at first, but, of course, it's not good-looking enough—I can see that now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. were surprised. Baggy Trimble in a hurry was rather an unusual sight. It took a lot to make Trimble hurry. Exercise of any kind made not the slightest appeal to the Falstaff of the Fourth.

Another unusual thing was that Trimble was heading straight for New House territory. Not many School House fellows dared invade the enemy's quarters alone and unsupported.

Figgins & Co. made a movement forward with the intention of intercepting the daring visitor. But there was no need for that. Trimble was already making a bee-line for them.

He stopped with a jerk in front of them, puffing and blowing like a grampus from his unaccustomed exercise.

"I—I say—poof! I—I say—ugh!—you fellows—" he gasped.

"Well, Trimble, what's the idea?" asked Figgins sternly. "Didn't you know that only gentlemen are allowed on this side—no School House worms need apply?"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Kerr and Wynn heartily.

Trimble nodded and paused for breath.

"It's all right, you chaps!" he managed to gasp at last. "I haven't come to rag you, or anything like that—"

"My hat!"

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"Well, it did occur to us that there might be some other explanation!" remarked Kerr thoughtfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you chaps, there's no time to go into detailed explanations," gasped Trimble. "Just collect a crowd of New House rotters—"

"New House what?" asked Figgins sharply.

"I—I mean New House f-fellows!" said Trimble hurriedly. "Just collect a crowd of New House fellows as soon as you can and follow me!"

"What the merry dickens—"

"You're out for honour and glory and all that sort of thing, aren't you?" asked Trimble persuasively. "You're out to rag Merry and Blake and all those rotters, aren't you?"

"Rather! But—"

"Well, follow me, then! There's half a dozen of 'em in Tom Merry's study, simply waiting to be ragged!"

"But—but what's the giddy idea, you fat idiot?" asked Figgins. "You're a School House waster yourself. Mean to say you're inviting us to raid your own kith and kin?"

"Exactly! Hurry up, or it'll all be gone!"

"What'll be gone?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Trimble hurriedly. "Of course, they haven't pinched my tuck-hamper, or anything like that! Don't think that for a moment!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Figgins and Kerr grinned, and Fatty Wynn, whose appetite was almost as keen as Trimble's, suddenly looked keenly interested.

"So there's a hamper in it, is there?" asked Fatty Wynn. "Not at all! I've just told you there isn't! I—I hope you don't doubt my word!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think Tom Merry and his pals need a ragging, as a matter of fact. That's the explanation," said Trimble glibly. "Now, what about it? Going to chance it?"

Figgins looked at Kerr and Kerr looked at Figgins.

"Well, speaking for myself, I think it's rather a good idea!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm rather keen on it, in fact!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurry up, then!" said Trimble impatiently. "If you don't come soon, they'll scoff every bit of the tuck—the tuck that isn't there, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Feel like it, Figgys?" asked Kerr.

Figgins smiled.

"Well, just a little. Things have been quiet lately, haven't they? And we can't rub it in too much that New House is Cock House!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Right-ho, then, Trimble. Rely on us!" said Figgins. "We'll be over with a crowd in half a jiffy. In the meantime, I won't leave you without expressing thanks. The chap who betrays his own House deserves thanking, I think."

"That's all right, old chap. Pleasure!" said Trimble. "Hurry up, you know!"

"Must thank you first, though!" grinned Figgins. "Here goes!"

And he thanked Trimble—with the tip of his boot.

"Yarooooooop!"

"And now we'll get busy—having thanked Trimble!" said Figgins cheerfully. And he and his two chums departed.

Trimble rolled back to the School House, groaning from the painful effects of Figgins' gratitude, but wearing an expression of hope on his podgy face. His move had succeeded, and the New House contingent would soon be invading Tom Merry's study now. It was Trimble's hope that he might seize that opportunity for making off with his raided hamper.

He rolled up the Shell passage to be ready when the raiders arrived.

Before he had reached Tom Merry's study, a rush of feet behind him announced the arrival of the invaders.

Trimble hastily dodged into a doorway to allow them to pass. At least a dozen New House juniors tore past him in the space of two seconds. Trimble watched them, with a fat grin. Then, when the coast was clear, he came out again and rolled after them.

In Study No. 10 there was a sudden alarm. Figgins & Co. did not stand on ceremony in entering Tom Merry's celebrated apartment.

The School House juniors jumped to their feet in astonishment as the door was flung open to admit a rush of New House fellows.

"What the thump—" gasped Tom Merry.

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"New House cads! Down with 'em!" yelled Jack Blake.

"Back up, School House!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Instantly the clash of war sounded in Study No. 10. The New House invaders piled in with a right good will.

They had the advantage of having taken their opponents by surprise, and, of course, they were numerically superior. On the other hand, the space in Study No. 10 was rather limited, and a dozen fellows could do very little more than half a dozen.

As soon as Tom Merry & Co. had recovered from their first shock of surprise they proceeded to give a very good account of themselves. And very soon a rare old battle was raging in the study.

While the battle raged Baggy Trimble, treading with caution, edged his way through the doorway, and, dodging about between the various contending parties, made for the table on which, almost untouched, reposed his precious hamper.

But alas for the hopes of the Falstaff of the Fourth!

The battle in Study No. 10 did not last long enough to give him time to get away with the spoils.

The Shell passage was some distance from the masters' quarters, and usually a "scrap" might have gone on for quite a long time before the "beaks" became aware of it.

This occasion was an exception.

Mr. Railton looked into Study No. 10 with a grim look. "Merry, what is the meaning of this—this outrageous disturbance? Figgins, what are you and all these other New House boys doing here?"

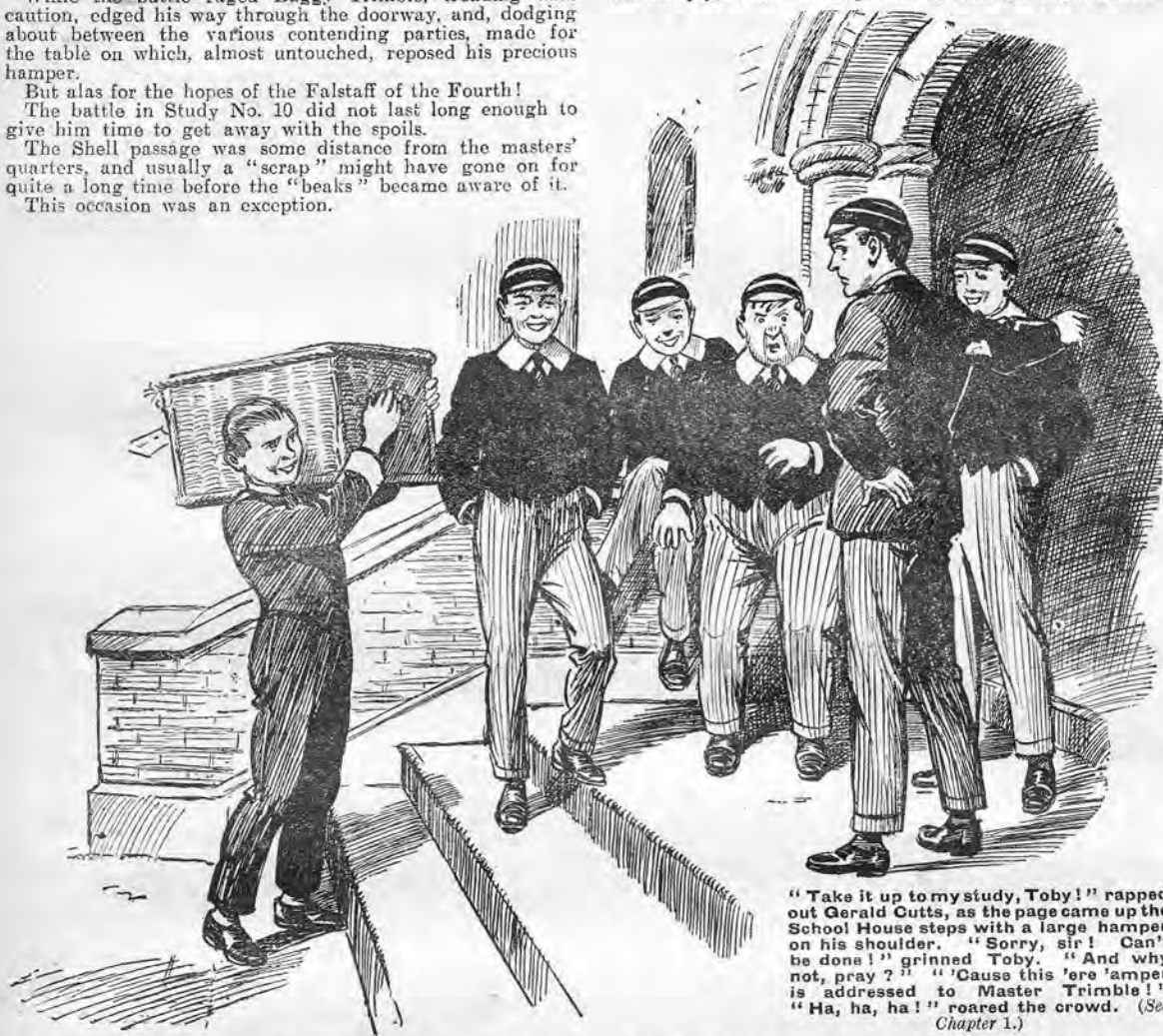
"Hem!"

"Hum!"

"You see, sir—"

"It's like this—"

"Trimble! Where are you going?" called out Mr. Railton sharply, before the explanations had got any further.



"Take it up to my study, Toby!" rapped out Gerald Cutts, as the page came up the School House steps with a large hamper on his shoulder. "Sorry, sir! Can't be done!" grinned Toby. "And why not, pray?" "'Cause this 'ere hamper is addressed to Master Trimble!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd. (See Chapter 1.)

By a stroke of bad luck Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, happened to be passing the foot of the stairs leading to the Shell passage within two minutes of the entry of Figgins and his men.

Mr. Railton was a man of action. He came up the stairs two at a time, and, scattering the crowd of School House juniors who were turning out of their studies at the sound of the battle, went straight for Study No. 10.

And it was just as Baggy Trimble, after many vicissitudes, reached the door with his hamper held triumphantly in his podgy arms, that the Housemaster reached the scene of combat.

Mr. Railton was apparently anxious to get into the study, and Trimble was certainly anxious to get out of it.

The result, not unnaturally, was a sudden and violent collision between Mr. Railton and the hamper.

Crash!

"Ouch!"

"Oh, lor'!"

Mr. Railton regained his equilibrium, and bestowed on Trimble a look that almost shrivelled up that fat junior.

"Remain here, Trimble!" he said.

Turning his head towards the inside of the study, he boomed out:

"Boys!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Cave!"

"Ware beaks!"

As if by magic, the warfare ceased.

Trimble, who had by some means insinuated his fat person half-way down the passage, pulled up hurriedly, and reluctantly returned, still holding his prize.

"Hem! To tell you the truth, sir, I—I just remembered an important appointment," he explained. "I—I think there's a titled relation of mine waiting to see me downstairs!"

"Then I'm afraid your titled relation will have to wait, Trimble!" said Mr. Railton, with a grim smile. His eyes fixed on the tuck-hamper. "Might I ask why you came out of this study at such a reckless speed with a hamper in your hands?"

"Certainly, sir. It's mine!" said Trimble. "If these fellows tell you it isn't, they're telling fibs, sir!"

"Trimble!"

"As to this rumpus, I hope you won't think it's anything to do with my hamper," went on Trimble anxiously. "If you think I went over and fetched the New House fellows so that I could get it back again while nobody was looking, you're mistaken. I didn't!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "Of all the fat-heads—"

"Silence, Merry!" Mr. Railton frowned majestically on the Falstaff of the Fourth. "Do I understand, Trimble, that you invited these New House boys here to indulge in a melee, so that you could take the hamper while the rest were fighting?"

"Not at all, sir! What ever put such an idea into your

head?" gasped Trimble, in surprise. "In any case, the hamper's mine, sir. Anyone will tell you that. Ask the page!"

"I do not intend to make inquiries into the question of the ownership of the hamper, Trimble!" said Mr. Railton tartly. "Since you seem to be the cause of all the trouble, however, you will do me two hundred lines."

"Owl! Yes, sir!"

"Merry and the rest of you who belong to the School House will do, a hundred lines apiece also, and bring them to me this evening."

Tom Merry & Co. smiled. A hundred lines each seemed a pretty light punishment in the circumstances.

"You New House boys will return to your House immediately, and I will ask Monteith to collect a hundred lines from each of you."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" smiled Figgins & Co., inwardly wishing that their own Housemaster was as lenient in the matter of "rags" as the good-natured Mr. Railton.

"And now may I go, sir?" asked Trimble.

Mr. Railton eyed Trimble, then eyed the tuck-hamper.

"Not yet, Trimble. Before you return to your own quarters I want you to deposit that hamper in my study."

"W-what for, sir?" almost groaned the fat junior.

"Because I have decided to confiscate it, Trimble!" was the Housemaster's enlightening answer. "Partly my decision is the result of the trouble it has caused. But a stronger consideration even than that is my regard for your health."

"M-m-my health?" stuttered Trimble.

"The excessive indulgence in rich foods which I have noticed in you will in time undermine your health, unless it is sternly checked. This seems a favourable opportunity of applying the needed check!"

"But look here, sir—" howled Trimble furiously.

"Enough! You will take that hamper to my study without further argument, Trimble!"

And on looking a second time at Mr. Railton's face Baggy Trimble decided that he would be wise to obey the Housemaster's order, though it broke his heart to do so.

So Trimble's tuck-hamper finished up in Mr. Railton's study. And for the rest of that day Trimble was disconsolate.

Like Rachel of old, he mourned for that which was lost, and would not be comforted.

### CHAPTER 3. Struck Down!

"WHAT'S that?"

Tom Merry paused, his hand on the door-handle of Mr. Railton's study, and asked the question.

It was some hours after the rag in Study No. 10, and the Terrible Three, having finished their impots, had brought them along to Mr. Railton's study.

Mr. Railton himself they had just met in the Hall, on his way to the Head's house, and, as he had anticipated being detained for some time, the Housemaster had instructed the juniors to leave the impots on his desk.

In the circumstances, the Terrible Three had naturally expected his room to be silent and deserted.

Tom Merry was surprised, therefore, in nearing the study, to notice a beam of light in the minute space between door and floor. His surprise was greater still when his ears caught the faint sound of tapping from within the study. It was that peculiar sound that caused him to wheel round before opening the door, with the quiet inquiry:

"What's that?"

Manners and Lowther listened.

"Funny!" remarked Lowther. "Shouldn't be anyone in Railton's room while he's out."

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"There's someone in there now, anyway. Wonder what that queer tapping noise is?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Can't say I half like it, anyway, whatever it is," said Manners. "Somebody having a lark, do you think?"

"Open the door and settle it," suggested Lowther.

Tom Merry touched his lips with a significant gesture, and Manners and Lowther were silent.

Tom then opened the door, taking care in doing so not to make a sound.

The sight that was revealed to the eyes of the Terrible Three was a surprising one. It was so surprising, in fact, that for some seconds they could hardly believe the evidence of their senses.

The juniors were, of course, prepared to see someone in the room. They had formed vague ideas that the occupant might be a japer belonging to the School House who had seized the opportunity of Mr. Railton's absence to arrange some sort of practical joke. Tom Merry, trying mentally

to explain the tapping sound, had anticipated that it might be a servant, effecting some minor repair or alteration to the fixtures in the room, though he had to admit to himself that it was rather late in the day for such work to be in progress.

What none of them was prepared for was the sight of a complete stranger.

That, however, was what greeted them when Tom softly opened the door. As the stranger's back was turned to them they were unable to see much of his face. They saw enough, however, to be able to tell immediately that the man was a complete stranger to them.

In itself, the presence of an unknown stranger was surprising enough. What was more surprising still, however, was the strange behaviour of the visitor.

For reasons which for the time being were utterly beyond the chums of the Shell, he had climbed on to the top of Mr. Railton's desk, and from that vantage-point was examining the ceiling with a fixed intenceness that had obviously made him oblivious to everything else. His hands were held aloft, and as he made his inexplicable examination, his fingers drummed on the ceiling almost continuously.

It was that faint tapping sound which the Terrible Three had heard from the passage outside, and their curiosity as to the explanation of the sound was therefore satisfied. But the explanation merely whetted their appetites for further explanations.

For what reason should an utter stranger be engaged in the extraordinary task of tapping the ceiling of Mr. Railton's room?

The three chums stood in the doorway, silent and motionless with astonishment, unable even to get to grips with that question.

There was, of course, the possibility that he was a workman, engaged on some technical job connected with the ceiling. But that was a very remote possibility. The Terrible Three naturally didn't know a lot about the habits and customs of builders and house-repairers, but they realised that there would be something unusual about the circumstance of a building workman going about his work at eight o'clock in the evening.

Apart from that, there was an indefinable something about this strange visitor that told them he was not engaged on a repairing job. It might have been the tense, rigid attitude of the man. It might have been something in his dress and general appearance. Whatever it was, the juniors sensed instinctively that there was something sinister in the business he was engaged in.

Tom Merry glanced round at his chums. He could see by their expressions that their thoughts were similar to his own. All three had formed the opinion that the visitor was not there for any honest purpose.

It followed, from Tom Merry's point of view, that the man had to be challenged.

Tom was a fellow of action. Having arrived at a decision, he proceeded to give effect to it at once.

He took a step into the room. Manners and Lowther followed.

Simultaneously, the mystery man became aware of their presence. The Terrible Three heard him utter a startled cry, and saw him swing round above them.

"What are you doing here?"

It was Tom Merry's voice. After the weird moments of silence that had preceded it, it seemed to echo across the room with unnatural force.

To Manners and Lowther it broke the spell. The tension became relaxed, and they looked up at the intruder without the uncanny qualms they had felt previously.

It seemed to break the spell for the stranger, too. The tense poise of his body departed, and he looked down at them with startled eyes, like one who had just awakened from a dream.

For just one second he stood there. In that brief interval the chums of the Fourth had time to get a fleeting impression of him. It was not a favourable impression. The man was tall and ungainly and remarkably muscular in build. His hands were gnarled and knotted, and his head protruded from his body like that of an ape. His eyes were deep-set and dark, and his expression scowling and ugly.

Fleeting as the impression was, it gave the juniors a momentary feeling of utter revulsion.

For just one second the evil-looking visitor glared down at them.

The juniors waited for his reply.

He replied—but not in words.

With a swiftness that seemed all but incredible in his ungainly person, he suddenly leaped from his perch on the top of Mr. Railton's desk.

Lowther gave a yell.

"Tom! Look out!"

Crash!

The warning was too late. No warning could have been quick enough to save Tom Merry from the vicious spring.

The heavy body crashed into the captain of the Shell with sickening force. Simultaneously, a gnarled hand shot out, striking the junior full in the face.

Tom fell like a log.

Another spring, and the stranger was out of the room.

Manners and Lowther were petrified for a moment. The almost fiendish violence of the man temporarily deprived them of the power to act.

Then Lowther came back to life.

"Stop him!" he yelled. "Don't let that rotter get away, Harry!"

"The brute!" muttered Manners hoarsely.

Their eyes blazing and their faces white and set, the two chums raced after the vanishing visitor.

They could hear him scudding away in the distance, through passages leading to the rear of the House. Whether by accident or design, he was making his exit by the quietest and most unfrequented part of the building.

But quiet though the passages were, they were not altogether deserted, and a crash and a yell from some distance away told Manners and Lowther that the fugitive was encountering some opposition.

At the bottom of a flight of stairs they came across Gore of the Shell, just picking himself up from the floor.

Gore had evidently fallen foul of the intruder, and the expression of mingled rage and astonishment on his face would have been funny in less serious circumstances.

"Where did he go?" panted Lowther.

"Out by the tradesmen's door, I think. Kangaroo and Talbot have gone after him. But what the thump—"

Manners and Lowther did not stop to explain matters. They sped down the passage after their quarry.

Out in the darkness of the misty November night they slowed up, realising, with bitter feelings, that the chase had become well-nigh hopeless now that it had led out of the House.

Kangaroo and Talbot, two misty shadows, loomed up out of the darkness of the trees as they halted, uncertain what to do.

"Lost him?" asked Lowther.

"Fraid so," answered Kangaroo. "Who the dickens was he? A burglar?"

"Goodness knows. Where did he go?"

"Just what we'd like to know," said Talbot, with a rueful laugh. "We followed him to the Cloisters, and then he seemed to vanish into thin air, as though he'd been a ghost."

"No good staying out here, then," said Manners. "Better get back and see how poor old Tommy's getting on."

And all four returned to the House. Lowther explaining to the astonished Talbot and Kangaroo the incidents that had preceded the mysterious visitor's wild flight as they went.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### The Haunted Study!

**A**N excited babel of talk was coming from Mr. Railton's study when Manners and Lowther returned.

Tom Merry was sitting up in a chair, looking white and drawn. A trickle of blood from his lip bore testimony to the force of the blow he had received.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was fussing about him and trying to question him. A small crowd of wide-eyed juniors discussed the affair excitedly just inside the doorway.

Manners and Lowther pushed through the crowd and entered the study.

"You're all right, Tommy?" was Lowther's first anxious question.

Tom Merry smiled rather wanly.

"Don't worry, Monty. It was a bit sudden, and it left me rather sick, but I'll be all right in a minute."

"Thank goodness!"

Mr. Linton turned a worried face to the newcomers.

"Lowther! Manners! You appear to know something of this extraordinary affair. Pray explain the circumstances to me."

Manners briefly related what had occurred. The babel in the doorway died down and everybody listened in silence.

Mr. Linton was quite horrified.

"Dreadful!" he exclaimed, when Manners had finished. "Dreadful—and at the same time very extraordinary! The police must be informed at once. Kindly get through to the police station on the telephone, Lowther. Talbot, please ask Kildare to come here immediately. The prefects must scour the school grounds, in case the scoundrel is still lurking in the vicinity."

Talbot hurried off, and Lowther picked up the telephone receiver on Mr. Railton's desk.

Mr. Linton hustled off the curious crowd, which was beginning to grow to unwieldy proportions, then closed the door, and, taking the receiver from Lowther, had a brief conversation with Inspector Skeat at Wayland police station.

By the time he had explained the affair to the inspector Talbot had returned with Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare listened gravely to the Shell master's account of the recent happenings in Mr. Railton's room, and his jaw set grimly as he eyed the white-faced victim of the visitor's violent attack.

"I'll get the prefects out at once, sir," he said, when Mr. Linton had concluded. "If the scoundrel is still on the school premises he shan't get away if I can help it!"

And Kildare hastened off, looking very grim and determined.

"You are feeling well enough to go now, Merry?" asked Mr. Linton, when Kildare had departed. "If you like I will summon the doctor."

"Oh, that's not necessary, thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry. "I'm feeling better now."

"Very well, my boy. If you are sure you have recovered sufficiently—"

"Quite sure, sir." Tom Merry rose. He was still a little unsteady, but some of the colour had come back to his cheeks now; and Manners and Lowther were relieved to see that he showed every sign of rapidly recovering.

"Take my arm, old scout?" asked Manners.

"No need; I'm as right as a trivet," answered Tom Merry reassuringly. "Are you staying here, sir?"

Mr. Linton nodded.

"I will stay here until Mr. Railton returns. A police-constable is being sent to look into the matter to-night, and Mr. Railton—and, of course, the Head—will have to be informed."

"Very well, sir. If I'm wanted I shall be in the Common-room."

The Terrible Three and Talbot prepared to go.

But they were not destined to leave Mr. Railton's room that night before a second incident, even more extraordinary and alarming than the first, had occurred.

At the precise moment that they turned to quit the study a sound broke the momentary silence that had fallen on the room.

It was a steady, rhythmical sound—a sound as of footsteps echoing in the room, yet with a dull, dead quality about it that made it strangely unreal.

The five occupants of Mr. Railton's study heard it simultaneously and listened.

There was no mistake about it. It was the sound of footsteps—footsteps that seemed to be treading in the room itself. Yet nobody in the room was moving.

The juniors looked at one another, and Manners and Lowther shivered slightly. The affair in which they had just figured had been rather unnerving, and it was perhaps excusable that this weird, unaccountable sound should affect them more deeply than it might otherwise have done.

Mr. Linton was listening in unconcealed surprise.

"Bless my soul! Am I suffering from hallucinations, or can I actually hear somebody walking?"

"I can hear it, sir, anyway," said Manners in a low voice.

Mr. Linton looked round him with just the faintest suspicion of uneasiness.

"Am I—am I mistaken, boys, or does the sound seem actually to come from the room itself?"

"I don't think you're mistaken, sir. That's what it sounds like to me," said Lowther.

"Same here!" nodded Tom Merry.

Master and boys were silent.

Thud, thud, thud!

The regular tread continued.

It was uncanny and unaccountable. Closing their eyes, the juniors could have been certain that there was someone walking about the room. Yet they knew there was nobody present but themselves.

"This—this is truly remarkable!" exclaimed Mr. Linton. "Naturally, there must be some explanation of the phenomenon. Possibly it is an echo reaching the study in some obscure way from another room."

"You don't believe in ghosts, sir?" asked Manners, in tones which did not turn out to be quite so jocular as he had intended.

"Ghosts? Certainly not, Manners! I have always regarded the belief in such things to be merely the symptom of a disordered imagination," replied Mr. Linton sharply—rather too sharply to carry conviction, Manners thought.

"Still, it's rather queer—"

"Listen!" interrupted Tom Merry.

Manners stopped, and all five listened.

The dull, eerie thudding had stopped now, but its place had been taken by another sound—a sound that almost froze the marrow in the juniors' bones as they listened.

It was a long-drawn-out moan—a haunting, dreadful wail, so horrible and unearthly that it seemed to the listeners impossible that any human being should have uttered it.

Whatever differences of opinion there might have been

about the sound of footsteps that had preceded it, there could be no two opinions about that moan. All could hear for themselves that it was originating in the room where they were standing.

The Terrible Three and Talbot were not lacking in courage. In point of fact, each one of them had heaps of pluck. But at that dreadful sound their faces blanched.

It would have required something exceptional in the way of physical danger to daunt the chums of the Shell. But there was no physical danger on this occasion. It seemed incredible that there could be any danger at all. What affected them was the fact that they were witnessing phenomena of which there seemed to be no explanation.

The wail died away on a low, haunting note.

No sooner had the last echo gone than the silent and uneasy listeners received the crowning shock.

The room was suddenly plunged into darkness.

Almost simultaneously there was a loud, shattering crash.

Talbot yelled out.

"The door! Open the door!"

There was a moment of confusion; then somebody opened the door, to admit a welcome gleam of light from the passage outside.

Mr. Linton crossed over to the switch, and the juniors heard him utter an explanation.

"Goodness gracious! The switch has been turned off!"

He jerked it downwards, and the study was flooded with light again.

The juniors, white-faced and astonished, blinked at each other.

Talbot laughed shakily.

"Well, chaps, if this isn't the limit——"

"Look at that!" broke in Manners suddenly, pointing a trembling hand to the corner.

They all looked. One of the study chairs which had been standing near the window was lying in the corner, broken.

Hurled from the other side of the room and broken!

How?

"Let's get out!" muttered Lowther. "I'm not exactly a nervous sort of chap, but this is a bit too much for me!"

And the rest were in full agreement with Lowther. They quitted the room with all haste.

Mr. Linton came with them.

## CHAPTER 5.

### After Lights Out!

"I SAY, you chaps——"

"Dry up, Baggy!"

"Yes, but look here——"

"Can't you give your tongue a rest for a single minute, fatty?" asked Jack Blake despairingly.

"Oh, rats! Look here, what I want to know is, why should old Crump come here to see Railton to-night?"

"Better ask Railton," suggested Herries.

"I would, only he might think I was being nosy or something——"

"Just possible he might, of course," agreed Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble snorted.

"Don't rot! I'm jolly serious, I can tell you! Why the thump did a blessed policeman stroll in to talk to Railton at nine o'clock?"

"Echo answers why," yawned Digby.

And Baggy Trimble snorted again.

The Fourth were just turning into bed in their dormitory. Trimble, as usual, was giving his podgy jaw a considerable amount of exercise. This time there was a certain amount of justification for him. It was decidedly unusual to see a police-constable at bed-time, and Trimble was not alone in wondering what could be the reason.

The news of the extraordinary series of happenings in Mr. Railton's study had not yet spread beyond the four Shell juniors who had been there. Rumours of Tom Merry's encounter with the intruder a little earlier had got about in the Shell, but there had hardly been time for them to spread to other Forms.

Mr. Linton had considered it advisable to enjoin silence on the Terrible Three and Talbot, anticipating that if distorted versions of the affair got about it might lead to something like a panic among the fags in the lower Forms. So far, therefore, the matter had been hushed up.

Mr. Railton had been incredulous when told of the strange affair. Police-constable Crump had been politely sceptical. Even the evidence of the broken chair had left them unconvinced. Mr. Railton's inward impression being that that accident had occurred during the scuffle in the study.

While the Fourth were turning into bed Mr. Crump was

taking his departure, having given Mr. Railton the pompous if somewhat unconvincing assurance that everything possible should be done to bring the violent intruder to book.

And while Mr. Crump tramped back to Rylcombe, Baggy Trimble continued to ply anybody and everybody in the Fourth dormitory with questions as to the possible reasons for his visit.

Baggy's voice continued long after Kildare had turned the lights out, and only desisted when a boot, flung with unerring aim by Jack Blake, turned the fat junior's attention to matters of personal safety.

That boot gave the Fourth a short respite. But it didn't altogether put a stop to Trimble.

Five minutes after the indignant howl he had emitted on receiving the boot, that fat junior sat up in bed and spoke again.

"I say, you chaps——"

"There was a roar from the other beds.

"Can it, Baggy!"

"Give us a rest!"

"Change the record, you know."

"Blow Crump, anyway!"

"Blow him if you like; I don't care!" grunted the Falstaff of the Fourth. "Matter of fact, I wasn't going to talk about Crump. I'd almost forgotten about him."

"Good! Now forget you've got a tongue, and we'll be happy!" said Herries.

"Oh, really, Herries! Look here, you chaps, I've been thinking about my tuck-hamper."

"Bother your rotten tuck-hamper!"

"It's not a rotten tuck-hamper; it's a jolly good one—better than any of you poverty-stricken bounders get, anyway!" sniffed Trimble. "Now, listen to me! I've got a wheeze!"

"Bury it, then!"

"If one of you fellows will go down later on when there's nobody about, and nab my hamper from Railton's study——"

"Do dry up!" urged Levison.

"Then bring it up here to the dorm," pursued Trimble, unheeding. "I'll dib out half a dozen jam-tarts to that chap, just to reward him for his trouble—see? Now, who's going? Don't all speak at once!"

The Fourth didn't all speak at once. They didn't speak at all, in fact. But if they didn't speak, quite a number of them acted. There was a general feeling abroad that Trimble's voice had been heard enough for one evening. The prospect of half a dozen jam-tarts did nothing to improve that feeling. Having already had supper, and not being gifted, like Trimble, with the appetites of elephants, jam-tarts made no appeal whatsoever to most of the fellows in the Fourth.

By a strange coincidence, a number of boots whizzed through the air simultaneously from every direction.

And almost simultaneously they landed on Baggy Trimble's podgy person.

From Baggy there came a wild yell.

"Whoooooop! Look here—— Yaroooooooop!"

"Now dry up!" roared Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Next time you speak you'll get slaughtered!" came Herries' booming voice from out of the darkness.

And though it was unlikely that Trimble swallowed that fearsome threat, he decided that it would be policy on his part not to force the conversation on the Fourth again that night. For the time being nothing was heard from the direction of the fat junior's bed, save sundry groans and moans which the Fourth utterly disregarded.

In ten minutes or so most of the fellows had fallen asleep. In half an hour the entire dormitory was sleeping the sleep of the just.

That is to say, the entire dormitory with one exception. That exception was Baggy Trimble.

It was unusual for the Falstaff of the Fourth to be awake while others were sleeping. If there was one thing apart from tuck which Trimble enjoyed with a great enjoyment, that thing was sleep.

On the other hand, he loved tuck more than he loved sleep.

And that was the explanation of his wakefulness on this particular night. Trimble could not forget that glorious hamper which still reposed, untouched, in Mr. Railton's study.

Thus it was that, long after the rest of the Fourth were in the arms of Morpheus, Trimble continued to turn and twist in his bed, thinking longingly of succulent ham-patties, tender roast chicken, and luscious jam-tarts.

As time went on the longing became more intense. Trimble, like the rest, had had supper; as a matter of fact, he had had enough supper for half a dozen; but enough for half a dozen was not enough for Baggy Trimble.

Boom!

Trimble started.

In his mouth-watering visions of unlimited tuck, he had not noticed the passage of time. The first stroke of an hour from the old clock-tower of St. Jim's reminded him with a start that it must be getting late.

He counted the strokes. Eleven others followed the first one.

It was midnight!

The fat junior sat up in bed and glanced round the dormitory.

"You fellows awake?" he asked softly

There was no answer.

"Beasts!" muttered Trimble to himself, thereby getting a little consolation for the rain of boots he had endured earlier.

Trimble hesitated for a few seconds, cogitating to himself. Then he rolled out of bed.

It was a cold night, and he shivered slightly and almost turned back. But the thought of the hamper spurred him on. He donned slippers and a dressing-gown, and, after

The sight of the dim outline of his tuck-hamper in the corner where he had deposited it under Mr. Railton's eye decided him. A light was unnecessary.

Trimble started again as his foot trod on something that seemed to crush into powder under his weight. Glancing down, he saw a white patch on the floor. The starlight which was his only illumination was dim, but sufficient to enable him to recognise the substance as plaster. A glance up to the ceiling confirmed this impression, for there was



"Tom! Look out!" Crash! Monty Lowther's warning was too late. The evil-looking intruder leaped from the top of the desk, and crashed into the captain of the Shell with sickening force. Simultaneously, a gnarled hand shot out, striking the junior full in the face, and Tom fell like a log. (See Chapter 3.)

another look round the shadowy dormitory, tiptoed to the door.

It was dark and silent out in the passage, and Trimble's heart almost failed him—almost, but not quite.

Once again the thought of that tuck-hamper came to the rescue. Certain it was that nothing but tuck would have taken the Falstaff of the Fourth through the eerie silence of the sleeping House at the midnight hour. For tuck, however, Trimble was prepared to face a lot.

It was a dark and dismal journey down to Mr. Railton's room, but Baggy reached his objective at last.

He halted outside the Housemaster's study, and started a little as the impression came to him that he had heard a faint sound from within the room.

He listened again, but now the silence was unbroken.

Deciding that he must have been mistaken, Trimble cautiously opened the door. He was relieved to find the room in darkness. He had wondered for a moment whether Mr. Railton might be sitting up late, working.

He groped for the electric-light switch, then hesitated. Perhaps it was inadvisable to turn on the light. Mr. Railton's study looked out on to the quadrangle, and the sudden appearance of a light might wake up somebody and cause an alarm.

a dark patch just above his head. Evidently a part of the ceiling had collapsed.

That circumstance might have intrigued the inquisitive Trimble at any other time, but he didn't feel like investigating it at this moment.

Instead, he crossed over to the corner where the hamper stood and fixed his podgy paws on to the handles.

Two seconds later he might have been hurrying back to the Fourth dormitory, triumphant.

But—

Suddenly Trimble experienced a cold chill down his spine. For a moment he was at a loss to explain it. Then it struck him, with the force of a sudden revelation, that he was not alone.

Something was there in the study beside him.

Possibly it was a human being. Trimble hoped so—hoped so from the bottom of his heart. In the horror of that moment, he would have welcomed a prefect or even Mr. Railton with open arms.

Trimble's nerveless hands dropped the hamper. In a state of terrified expectation, he looked round.

Then he saw it—the Something whose presence he had felt!

Suddenly a scream rang out through the School House, and Trimble collapsed in a dead faint.

## CHAPTER 6. The Unknown!

**T**OM MERRY sat up in bed with a sudden jerk. Since turning in that night he had slept but fitfully. Tom's nerves were strong enough to stand a good deal of strain, but he had been through an altogether exceptional ordeal, and there was nothing remarkable in his being rather restless.

The school clock striking midnight had wakened him out of a doze. After a few minutes he had turned over again, hoping to doze off once more.

Then something caused him to sit up suddenly. For a moment he could hardly make out what it could have been.

Two or three other fellows in the dormitory sat up, and Tom realised that he had not been a victim of a disordered imagination. Something must have startled them as he had been startled.

Talbot's voice floated across the dorm:

"You awake, Tommy?"

"Yes. Did you hear something?"

"I did; something that sounded like a scream to me."

"Just what I thought," came Lowther's voice from the darkness.

"What could it have been?"

"Somebody in another dorm suffering from nightmare?" suggested Gore.

Talbot slipped out of bed.

"Might be only that. But I think I'll punt round and see. Anybody coming?"

Tom Merry and one or two others turned out quietly and joined Talbot at the door. The little party then quitted the dorm.

At the corner of the passage they ran into half a dozen Fourth-Formers, led by Jack Blake, who were hurrying towards the stairs.

"Hear it, you fellows?" asked Blake, addressing the Shell fellows.

"We thought we heard something; that's why we're here," answered Tom Merry. "What did you hear?"

"Sort of a yell. It woke me up."

"From what I heard of it, Blake, I should pwefer to describe it as a shwiek," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Can it, Gussy!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Stop arguing, you idiots, and come along!" urged Herries. "Where are we making for, anyway?"

"Downstairs, I should think," said Talbot. "That's where it seemed to come from, according to my judgment."

The combined groups pushed ahead and descended the dim staircase.

Several seniors were hurrying along at the foot of the stairs. Tom Merry & Co. followed them up.

There was a light in the distance, coming from the direction of the passages where Mr. Railton's study was situated. Seniors and juniors, reinforced now by stray inquirers from all directions, made for the light.

As they rounded the corner of the passage and came in sight of Mr. Railton's room, Blake made a sudden exclamation.

"Baggy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Great pip! I thought his bed was empty when I passed it!" said Digby. "But what the thump—"

The rest of Digby's remark was drowned in the buzz of talk that greeted them as they got near the door. Baggy Trimble was seated in a chair in the centre of the room, moaning slightly. Mr. Railton and Mr. Linton were standing by him, chafing his hands and endeavouring to restore some life to his podgy and only semi-conscious body. And round the door several seniors and at least a score of juniors were buzzing with excited talk.

"Bai Jove! What evah can have happened, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus, in wonderment. "Pway make way, so that I may offah assistance to Mr. Wailton!"

"Stand back, Gussy!" growled Jack Blake. "No time for funny turns from you, you know!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hallo, he's coming round!" exclaimed Talbot.

All eyes were turned in Trimble's direction.

The fat junior's eyelids flickered, and a slight shiver ran through his podgy frame. A moment afterwards he opened his eyes to blink stupidly up at Mr. Railton.

His consciousness rapidly returning now, he reached out a fat paw and grabbed the Housemaster's sleeve with a quick, convulsive movement.

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"Quick! Save me!" he gasped. "It's coming again! Oh, save me—"

Mr. Railton laid a firm hand on his shoulder.

"Steady, Trimble! You are quite safe. Nothing can harm you."

"But you didn't see it," Trimble began to whimper. "If you'd seen it—"

"What is it you imagine you saw, my boy?" asked Mr. Railton, regarding the Falstaff of the Fourth with knitted brows.

"The ghost!"

Tom Merry started, and looked significantly at Talbot.

Mr. Railton himself was not altogether unaffected. He had not yet forgotten the strange story which Mr. Linton had told him only a few hours before, and Trimble's mention of yet another phenomenon gave him momentarily a bit of a shock. He glanced at Mr. Linton. Trimble's words had deeply impressed him.

Mr. Railton pulled himself together and gave Trimble a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

"Calm yourself, Trimble. Surely you do not believe there are such things as ghosts? You have been dreaming."

Trimble shuddered.

"Ugh! I wish I had. But it wasn't a dream; I was awake all right. When I came in here—"

"For what purpose did you come into my study at midnight, Trimble?" broke in Mr. Railton, with a frown.

"Because I wanted to get back my tuck-hammer, sir." For once in his life, even if it never happened again, Trimble was making no attempt at evasion. In the terror which he still felt, matters of school discipline did not seem important enough to be evasive about. "I wasn't dreaming, sir, I can tell you. I came in here, and went over to the corner. Then—then—"

"There is no need to go on, if it distresses you, Trimble," said Mr. Railton, with a compassionate glance at Trimble's white face.

"Ugh! It was horrible. All at once I felt something come into the room—from nowhere—"

"Nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense, sir," groaned Trimble. "I know it didn't come through the door, and it couldn't have come through the window because it was closed. So it must have come from nowhere, mustn't it?"

"Utter nonsense, Trimble! Perhaps you had better not say more now. In the morning you will not be so overwrought."

"But I must tell you, sir, so that you'll know what I've seen. Then you can have a look and—see that it isn't about any longer. It was a great, tall white thing, with staring eyes. It didn't say anything. It just came straight for me—"

"My dear Trimble, you cannot expect me to credit any story so wild as the one you are telling me," broke in Mr. Railton impatiently. "I refuse to listen any longer. Are you feeling a little better now, or shall I transfer you to the school sanatorium temporarily?"

"I—I think I'm all right, sir, but I wish you'd believe me," whimpered Trimble. "I didn't make any mistake, sir, and I wasn't dreaming. It was a great, tall, white thing—"

"You are exciting yourself, Trimble. I forbid you to say any more about it." Mr. Railton turned to the doorway and beckoned Blake. "Blake, will you kindly help Trimble back to the dormitory and keep an eye on him for a time?"

"Certainly, sir," answered Jack Blake, advancing into the room.

"By the way, Trimble, before you go, can you explain the cause of part of my ceiling having fallen?" asked the Housemaster, pointing to the patch of plaster on the floor and then to the ceiling through which the laths were showing. With an ironical smile, he added: "I suppose your ghost didn't come through the ceiling, by any chance?"

There was a laugh from the crowd in the doorway—a laugh that sounded a little forced, as a matter of fact.

Trimble didn't laugh. He stared at the gap in the ceiling and shook his head.

"That wasn't the ghost, sir. I noticed that it was already down when I came into the room. I remember noticing that particularly."

"It is a very annoying circumstance, whatever the cause," remarked Mr. Railton, with a frown. "Well, if you feel well enough to go, Trimble—"

"I'll go, sir. I don't want to stay here, anyway," said Trimble, with another shudder.

Blake helped him up, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed forward to take the other arm. Between them the two piloted the trembling Falstaff out of the room, the crowd parting to make way for them.

Mr. Railton then turned to the crowd in the doorway and made a gesture towards the stairs.

"Up to bed, all of you! There is no need for alarm,

(Continued on page 12.)

**INSIDE FOOTBALL INFORMATION**—that's what our special representative Mr. "Nosey" Parker always gives to his readers. But it's the way he gets the goods that makes this feature so novel and interesting!



# Mr. Parker POPS IN

TO SEE  
EVERTON!

## At Goodison Park!

**E**VERYBODY says that variety is the spice of life. Well, just now spice is my other name, because I am getting so much variety on my football rounds. At some places I find difficulty in getting into the grounds; at other places I find difficulty in getting out, while yet again I sometimes get helped out—with more speed than dignity.

It is a long time since I had such a welcome as I got when I poked my nose between the decks of what they call their double-decker stand at Goodison Park. I could tell you a lot about that stand; how wonderful it is and that sort of thing. But just as I was taking in the wonders of it bit by bit, a nice gentle voice greeted me. "Welcome, little stranger," it said. And before I knew where I was, all the beauties of Secretary McIntosh's office were revealed to me.

This was the sort of questionnaire through which I was put immediately I was ushered in.

"Ah, boy, glad to meet you! What position do you play in?"

"Well," I replied modestly. "I didn't really come to play for you."

"Oh, but you must! How much a week do you want?"

I have told you this story, my lads, just to get my own back on the artist who has drawn the picture which appears at the top of this page. He hasn't made me look like a footballer at all, but you see there are some people who think I look the part: the Beau Brummell of the football world.

## Hard Up for Players!

**O**F course, I couldn't really sign on for the Toffees without the Editor's permission, and he wouldn't give it to me unless I promised to send him enough toffee to keep him sticky for the rest of his life. So I went about my job of poking my nose here, there, and everywhere.

Out on the practice field I went up to a fellow with two or three sweaters on who had been just racing round the field. I was still full of my experience of being invited to play for Everton.

"Are you hard up for players?" I asked, my modesty again getting the better of me.

"Hard up nothing," replied the fellow with the many sweaters. "We are going to win the championship this season."

Then I told him the story of my reception at the office.

"Oh!" said my friend. "You needn't allow your head to get too big for your hat on that account. They treat everybody who calls at the office like that in these

days. You see, that was how they picked me up." It was then I discovered that I was talking to Arthur Davies, the Everton goalkeeper. He told me that he walked into the office just like I had done, only about two years previously. He asked for a trial, signed on immediately, and the other day this self-same Arthur Davies played for the English League against the Irish League.

## Introducing "Dixie"!

**T**HAT'S one way in which they find them at Everton. But of course, they have other ways as well.

There is an oblong book with some forms inside embossed with a twopenny stamp which has been known to be useful when Everton have been hunting for players.

There was one William Dean, for instance, and in calling him William I give him his Sunday name. Most people call him "Dixie," but to tell you the plain truth he doesn't like it. To him the name suggests foreign blood, but actually Dean is as English as that roast beef you had for dinner last week.

Dean is the goal-scorer of the side, and there is a war-cry which is often heard on the Everton ground: "Give it to Dixie!" This "Give it to Dixie" business can be overdone, of course, and there are more centre half-backs in love with Dean than with any other forward. At least, he says they must be in love with him because they stick so close to him.

Dean will talk any sport, in addition to football. He isn't a bad golfer; he is interested in dogs and has owned greyhounds of his own; he plays lawn tennis for exercise, and in his spare moments loves a game of bowls, while motor-ing is included among his hobbies. "I have had the honour of reading my own obituary notice," he told me, "having been reported dead as the result of a motor accident, but the story was grossly exaggerated."

## The "Macs" of Everton!

**T**HERE is a lot of Scotch at Everton, as you would have noticed if you had gone round with me. The accent was cutting at times. A right-wing pair, Dunn and Ritchie, came all the way from Scotland, and so did wee Alec Troup, who plays out on the left. Alec has played for Scotland more than once, but he entertains a secret hope. It is that he should not be picked to play for Scotland when they have to meet Ireland at Belfast, because he is such a bad sailor. I could tell you a story of an occasion when the Everton team crossed to France to

play some football on the Continent, but I refrain, because so far as Alec is concerned the story is a very painful one, and the descriptions of the scenery en route not very lucid. Indeed, Alec quickly got into the state when he was afraid the boat was going down, and then soon afterwards he was in the state when he hoped it would go down.

But they have one cure for all their ills at Goodison Park, and his name is O'Donnell. He went to the side as an inside-left, and the only place he hasn't occupied during the last couple of years is "left outside." He is now a full-back, but once having to go into goal in an emergency, he did so well that the directors seriously considered making him into a goalkeeper!

## "Made of Lead, Lead, Lead!"

**N**OW we must have a word with the skipper. He is almost a meal in himself, because they call him mustard and cress. His real name is Cresswell, of course, but nobody ever gives him that title. Often he is referred to as Warney. He came from South Shields, and his lock of golden hair which flows in the breeze as he plays at full-back is the envy of all Liverpool.

I asked "Warney" about a certain medal which he showed me. This medal is a bit of a mystery, and is certainly unique in its way. The players went on a trip to the Continent, some little time ago, and while there were asked to play a game against another English team. Everton won, and were given medals to celebrate the victory.

These medals are certainly not gold; they don't look like silver, but—whisper this—they are heavy enough to have been made of lead.

The man who is most interested in these lead medals is a new chum who has come to the front with Everton this season. He is George Martin. He is a Scot, and some time ago he was awarded a first class diploma at the Arts Exhibition at Edinburgh for a life-size bust of Julius Caesar. And that bust was modelled in lead!

Martin is a player gifted with most unusual talents for a footballer; he is an artist on the field as well as an artist in his spare time. As I do a bit of drawing in my spare time, I showed Martin an odd sketch or two. "There is only one sort of drawing at which you seem likely to be any good," he said, "and that is drawing cheques!"

Having got into the Everton ground—and found out most of the things I wanted to know—I tried to get out again. But it isn't easy. I said rude things to various people, including Mr. Jack Sharp, that very able director who has played for England at both cricket and football. But they simply wouldn't let me put my foot in it.

You see they still suspect that I may be a footballer—another Arthur Davies—in disguise. I can't blame them.



NOSEY.

# "The Haunted Study!"

(Continued from page 10.)

boys. Trimble, I think, must have been sleep-walking and dreaming at the same time."

With a chorus of "Good-nights!" the crowd melted away. But Mr. Railton's air of carelessness did not altogether convince the juniors among them, and there was an excited buzz of conversation in most of the dormitories for a long time after everybody had got back to bed that night.

Tom Merry and his chums were only human, and it was natural in the circumstances that they should tell the others something of their own strange experiences in Mr. Railton's study previously.

Within the next half-hour most of the fellows in the School House had heard from somebody or other the full story, and in some cases rather more than the full story of the haunted study.

Among the healthy-minded juniors in the Lower School, superstitious fears did not flourish. But there were many fellows who did not feel altogether easy in mind that night.

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Shock for Mr. Railton!

ST. JIM'S was in a buzz next day.

By dinner-time everybody, from the stateliest of Sixth-Formers down to the inkiest of Second Form fags, had learned pretty accurately what had been seen and heard in the mysterious room from the time the Terrible Three discovered the intruder there down to the time when Trimble had been found lying on the floor unconscious.

The strangeness of it all was almost stupefying. First, that gaunt, ugly stranger, tapping on the ceiling. Then the uncanny moaning and wailing which Mr. Linton and the Shell juniors had heard, and the violent visitation that had followed. After that, the apparition which Trimble had seen during his nocturnal excursion.

Mr. Railton had thoroughly cross-examined Trimble on that matter after breakfast. It was a little difficult to get down to the real facts with Baggy's fertile imagination working at high pressure, but the Housemaster had succeeded in doing so eventually.

What he learned convinced him that the ghost was not altogether the product of the Falstaff's imaginative brain. Something undoubtedly had appeared before the marauding Fourth-Former—something, or somebody. Mr. Railton, who was a plain-thinking, practical man, with no regard for superstition, decided that it must have been the latter.

But that did nothing to solve the mystery. If the ghostly visitor had been a burglar, what was he doing in the Housemaster's study—a room almost devoid of interest from the point of view of any burglar worthy of the name? And again, how had he got in, and how was he able to escape again? A thorough examination of the House had revealed the fact that none of the doors or windows had been tampered with.

Mr. Railton realised that the whole thing was beyond him.

Another matter which seemed somehow linked up with the strange affair was the fall of plaster from the study ceiling. Since the fall overnight, there had been another during morning lessons, and Mr. Railton was at a loss to explain it.

Throughout the School House there was but one topic of conversation at breakfast-time and again after lessons. That topic was the haunted study. Little groups all over the House discussed the matter almost ad nauseam, and there was the keenest speculation as to what the explanation could be—if, indeed, there was an explanation.

Some of the fellows were frankly of the opinion that there was no material explanation at all—that Mr. Railton's room was the centre of an outbreak of ghostly manifestations. Quite a number quoted instances of haunted houses to which prominence had been given in the most reliable of newspapers.

Skimpole of the Shell went so far as to put forward the theory that Tom Merry's aggressor had not been a human being, but a ghostly visitor, associated in some way with the haunting of the room. Not many gave this theory consideration, but several fellows were inclined to think he must have been a psychical investigator, whose studies had affected his brain.

Taking it all round, some very wild theories were put forward in the course of the day. But really, the circumstances

were so extraordinary that no theory seemed too wild to fit in with the known facts.

The masters affected to be blissfully ignorant of the fact that the School House contained a room that had shown every sign of being haunted. But there were fellows who averred that in reality they were just as keenly interested in the mystery as the fags themselves.

In the Form-room Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, betrayed by his manner when the matter was mentioned, that he was inclined to view the affair in a superstitious light.

Mr. Railton, on the other hand, was grimly sceptical. Not for a moment, despite all the evidence, would he admit the possibility that his study was haunted.

Mr. Railton, however, was destined very soon to experience something which was to test his scepticism very severely.

When afternoon lessons had finished that afternoon, the Housemaster went along to his study.

A bright fire was burning in the grate, and he did not immediately turn on the light. Considering the evil reputation which the room had acquired during the preceding twenty-four hours, many men would have been rather glad to take advantage of as much light as was available. Mr. Railton, however, did not suffer from nerves, and feeling in the mood for a quiet ten minutes, drew his chair up to the fireside without troubling about further illumination.

His forehead wrinkled into a thoughtful frown as his eyes fell on the dark gap in the ceiling from which the plaster had fallen. Though he felt no fear, either of the known or the unknown, the mystery which surrounded his study disturbed and annoyed him.

He had found it an unsettling factor in school work that day. Even the Sixth had been thinking more of the haunted study than of the works of the celebrated Livy, which should, of course, have been much more interesting to them.

Mr. Railton eyed the gap, and wondered, with a start, whether there was a chance that the whole ceiling might be affected by the weakness which had appeared in it. In that case, he mentally decided, he would vacate the room without delay until a builder had been called in to effect the necessary repairs. To expose himself to the danger of injury from a falling ceiling, if that danger existed, would have been unnecessary and ridiculous.

As if in confirmation of the reality of the danger, several pieces of plaster rattled to the ground. Mr. Railton rose to his feet and stared up.

It was as he did so that he became conscious of a sudden rush of air at the back of him.

It was a surprising phenomenon, for there was no window or door or outlet of any kind on that side of the room. Mr. Railton, nonplussed, turned round to investigate.

Then he jumped.

Mr. Railton did not suffer from nerves. But the bravest of the brave may experience a shock, and what Mr. Railton saw certainly gave him a shock.

Standing on the far side of the room, in the deep shadows cast by the chimney-breast, was a white, misty figure. Unlike the extremely active spirit Trimble's imagination had invented in the Fourth dormitory, this ghost, if ghost it was, stood motionless and silent.

To Mr. Railton, it was all the more impressive on that account. A word or movement would have endowed it with human qualities. But no sound or movement came. It stood in the shadows like a dim marble image.

Mr. Railton gasped audibly, and rubbed his eyes. What he had heard from others regarding the ghostly manifestations in his study should perhaps have prepared him for the strange phenomenon. But he was not prepared. He could hardly believe the evidence of his senses. He rubbed his eyes in sheer amazement, thinking for a moment that the flickering firelight had deceived him.

But it was not so.

Almost, he felt a pang of fear. Then his sound common sense returned to him and he took a step forward.

"Who are you?"

His voice, with just a trace of hoarseness in it, rang through the study.

No reply, and no movement.

Mr. Railton, with a decisive movement, made to cross the room, with the intention of putting all doubt to rest.

He strode fearlessly into the shadowy corner, raising his hands as he did so, in order to be able to seize his ghostly visitor as soon as he was within arms' length of him.

Then something happened that brought the Housemaster to a stop, in a state of utter amazement.

Before he had got within a couple of yards of the white, silent figure, there was again that strange, unaccountable rush of air.

Then—

Mr. Railton stood rooted to the floor, bewildered and completely confounded.

The figure had vanished!

Recovering himself, the Housemaster rushed to the switch and turned on the lights.

There was no sign of anybody else but himself in the room!

Mr. Railton, with a muttered exclamation, opened the door of the study.

Blake of the Fourth and Bernard Glyn of the Shell were chatting in the passage outside. Mr. Railton called them over.

"Did somebody come out of my study a moment ago?" He asked them.

Blake and Glyn looked surprised.

"Didn't see anybody, sir. Did you, Glyn?" asked Blake.

"Not a sign. I can be quite certain of it, sir, for I've been facing your door all the time."

"How long have you been here?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Five minutes at least, sir."

"Very well."

And Mr. Railton left them—not to return to his study, but to go to see Mr. Linton and confide in him his uncanny experience.

The two juniors stared after him rather wonderingly for a moment.

"Potty?" asked Bernard Glyn, indicating the retreating figure.

"Not Railton." Jack Blake wrinkled his brow thoughtfully. "I wonder—"

"The question he asked was weird enough, and he certainly looked as though he'd had a shock. I wonder if he's seen the ghost?"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn.

"Well, it looks like it to me, anyway. I'm off to tell Tom Merry. He'll be interested."

Jack Blake nodded and rushed off.

And within half an hour the crowning sensation had reached the ears of practically everybody in the School House.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster himself, had seen the ghost that was haunting his study!

## CHAPTER 8.

### Tom Merry's Plan!

"DO we believe in ghosts?" Tom Merry asked that question. And the decided and unhesitating reply from Manners and Lowther was:

"No!"

"Then the problem is, what's the matter with Railton's study?"

The Terrible Three were sitting round the study table in Study No. 10. They had finished prep, and their thoughts had rather naturally returned to the subject of the mystery of Mr. Railton's room.

"There certainly is something the matter with it," remarked Manners. "What's more, there must be an explanation somewhere."

"Just what I think," nodded Tom Merry. "That being so, why shouldn't we have a cut at solving the giddy mystery?"

"H'm!"

"Rather a feather in our caps if we did happen to get to the bottom of it," said Tom, with a smile. "I feel rather keen, anyway; the more I think over it, the more keen I feel, as a matter of fact."

"Yes, but how are we going to do it?" asked Manners.

"By looking into the thing from a common-sense point of view—just that, and no more."

"H'm!"

"We've been losing our heads a little under the strain of the shocks we've had. That's not surprising, under the circumstances; but to get at the truth, we've got to look at things calmly and coldly again."

"Which is rather difficult to do," remarked Manners.

"Well, perhaps it is a little difficult. But if we agree that we don't really believe in ghosts, it should be possible."

"Hence the question," said Lowther.

"Exactly. Excluding the possibility that Railton's room really is haunted, there must be a sound and solid reason from all the funny things that have been happening there."

"In other words, there must be a human being at the bottom of it all?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"That follows."

"But—but why on earth should anybody in his right senses cause such a rumpus?" asked Manners.

"Goodness knows! Possibly the chap who's doing it is not in his right senses, anyway. For the time being, we needn't consider motives. What we want to find out, to begin with, is how all these weird stunts have been worked, and who is working them—see?"

Manners and Lowther nodded slowly.

"Dashed if I can see how they could have been worked, anyway," remarked Lowther. "That broken chair, for instance—"

"Don't worry about details, old bean. Once you admit

that someone has been right there in Railton's room to work the oracle, all the details can be worked out in time."

"But there never has been anyone there."

"That remains to be seen. Now, what I've been thinking about a lot is that rough customer we found in the room when we took our lines in last night. All the trouble dates from that incident."

"Agreed. But he can't be the giddy culprit, can he?" asked Lowther. "It was after he'd been chased away that we heard all those noises."

"That's so. But the fact that he was here, examining the ceiling as though it was lined with gold, proves that there was something about the room that he found very interesting."

"Well?"

"The hazy notion that has formed in my mind is that there's something in Railton's room that somebody is after very badly."

"Oh!"

"We can assume, for the sake of argument, that that chap was only one of the people who want to get at the thing in Railton's study, whatever it is. It doesn't need a lot of imagination to visualise another fellow, hiding himself in some corner of the room and trying to frighten interrupters away by making ghostly noises and even appearing dressed up as a ghost."

"Oh, my hat! But—"

"But we know jolly well we were the only people in the room when the row started last night," objected Manners.

"That's the difficulty I've been trying to get over. I think I've found a possible solution."

"What the thump can it be?"

"Just this—that there is someone with the secret of an unknown entrance into Railton's room."

(Continued on next page.)

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Manners and Lowther stared at their leader with startled eyes.

"A—another entrance?" repeated Manners. "Well, there's the window, of course. But apart from that—"

"Listen to me for a moment, old bean!" interrupted Tom Merry. "We're living in a very ancient and historical building."

"Blessed if I can see—"

The skipper of the Shell smiled.

"Perhaps you'll see in a minute. Mr. Railton's room is situated in the oldest part of the building—a part which was at one time simply honeycombed with secret passages. The johnnies who lived here in olden times often found it necessary to skip off in a hurry, you see."

"Well, we know all that," said Lowther. "Do you mean that—"

"I mean that it's just as likely as not that one of those secret passages exists at the back of Railton's study, with an entrance through the wall into the room itself."

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"I may be altogether wrong, of course. It's just a shot in the dark, anyway. But it's just possible and feasible, and what I like about it is that it knocks the ghost theory on the head. What do you think about it?"

Lowther looked at Manners, and Manners looked at Lowther. Then they both looked at their leader.

"My hat, I believe you've struck it, Tommy!" breathed Manners.

"Or if not it, something very near it!" said Lowther. "What are you going to do—tell Railton?"

"What's wrong with bringing off a coup ourselves, alone and unaided?" asked Tom Merry. "What I had thought of, as a matter of fact, was that three of us could lie low in Railton's room after lights out to-night and just wait for things to happen."

"Good egg!" said Lowther. "We're with you, aren't we, Manners?"

"What-ho!"

"Then it's fixed. To-night's the night!" grinned Tom. "Now let's get down to the Common-room before we turn in."

The Terrible Three rose and quitted the study.

In the doorway they ran into Trimble of the Fourth.

"I say, you chaps—" gasped Trimble.

Tom Merry fixed a thumb and forefinger on the Falstaff's podgy ear.

"Eavesdropping again, Baggy?"

"Yoooooop! Nummo! Not at all! I didn't hear you say a word about watching out for the ghost in Railton's room to-night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, as it happens, there was nothing very confidential in what we were saying," remarked the skipper of the Shell. "Just as well to point out the error of this fat oyster's ways to him, though. Oblige me by giving him a kick, will you, Monty?"

"Certainly!" grinned Monty Lowther.

And he obliged his leader by bringing his foot into violent contact with Trimble's podgy anatomy.

"Yaroooooooooogh!"

"Don't trouble to thank us, Baggy!" said Tom Merry magnanimously. "Always ready to keep you on the straight and narrow path, old fat bean!"

And the Terrible Three strolled on down the passage.

"Beasts!" howled Baggy after them wrathfully.

From which it would seem fairly certain that whatever Baggy's feelings were at that moment, gratitude was not one of them.

## CHAPTER 9.

### At Midnight!

**A**RRANGING a midnight ghost-laying expedition while there is a warm fire burning in the grate and things are bright and cheery is, in the words of an ancient ditty, all very fine and large.

The expedition is liable to lose its attraction when the midnight hour arrives.

It was nearly midnight when Tom Merry slipped out of bed and put on trousers and an old jacket in preparation for the expedition. Tom himself was as keen as mustard to get to the bottom of the mystery of the haunted room, and although he had slept for a short period, he re-awakened without difficulty at the time he had mentally decided on.

With Manners and Lowther it was different. Possibly they were over-tired as a result of the disturbance on the previous night. Possibly they felt that the prospect of laying a ghost was not sufficient compensation for turning out in the raw cold of a November night. Whatever the reason, Manners and Lowther were a long time in waking up, and once they were awake they both suggested postponing the affair until the following night.

Tom Merry felt keenly disappointed, but as his chums

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Peering round the side of the armchair, Tom Merry fixed his eyes upward, from a gap in the ceiling laths. Tom could see at a glance what was going on.

seemed so reluctant to start out, he did not care to make them feel uncomfortable by revealing the fact.

"Then you're not coming?" he whispered, standing between their respective beds, which were next to one another.

Lowther yawned prodigiously.

"Hardly that, Tom. I'll come, if you're really keen; but, frankly, I don't feel at all keen myself."

"Same here," mumbled Manners, turning over, and pulling the bedclothes over his shoulders. "After all, as Railton's not using the room now, we can have a look round it on the quiet after morning lessons."

"But there may be nothing to see then," objected Tom Merry. "Everything that has happened so far has happened while it has been dark. Are you listening, you fatheads?"

As the only reply was a yawn from Manners and a snore

from Lowther, Tom Merry was forced to the conclusion that they were not.

After a moment's hesitation the Shell leader turned away. It was evident that the only way of getting Manners and Lowther to turn out was to use force, and even if he had felt like doing that, Tom would have been deterred by the thought of the disturbance that would have created in the silent dormitory.

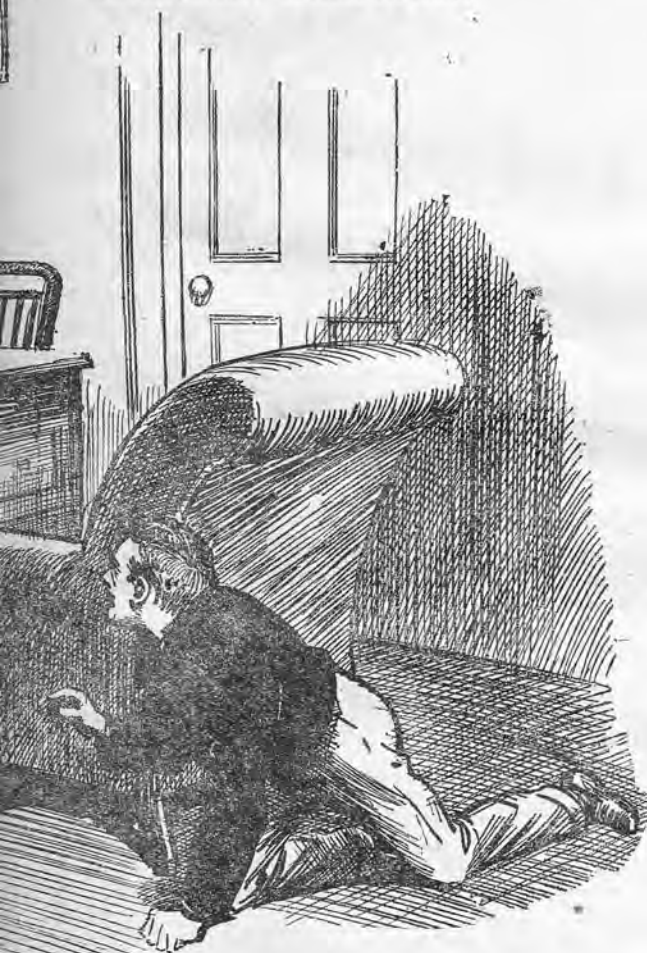
Tom's immediate impulse was to throw up the whole thing for the time being now that his two chums were out of the reckoning. It was a cold, unpleasant night, and the prospect of a journey downstairs and a vigil in a dark, cold room by himself, was by no means inviting.

Then his anxiety to know what was the solution to the riddle of Mr. Railton's room got the better of him.

He decided to go down and have a look round; perhaps to hide under the table, or behind a chair for ten minutes or so, just to see if anything happened.

All Tom's keenness returned again. He slipped on a pair of rubber shoes.

"Anybody awake?" he called out softly.



In the gnarled hands of the intruder was a canvas bag, taken, obviously, from the room—containing a glittering array of jewellery worth a fortune!

There was no reply. The Shell were sleeping soundly, even to Manners and Lowther.

Satisfied that he had disturbed nobody, Tom Merry silently quitted the dormitory.

The hour of midnight struck as he crept quietly down the stairs. Tom Merry remembered that it had been soon after midnight when Trimble's scream of terror had roused the House on the previous night. But he felt no fear. Such few superstitious thoughts as he had entertained during his previous experiences in the haunted study had vanished by this time. Tom was convinced that some human agency was at work in Mr. Railton's room, and he was not afraid of human beings. What he felt as he tiptoed down the silent stairs was not fear, but a keen desire to find out what that human agency was.

He reached the mysterious room, and listened cautiously outside for a minute or so.

No sound of any kind broke the silence.

Making hardly a sound, Tom opened the door and crept in, closing it softly behind him once he was inside the room.

There was no sign of anything untoward. No further falls of plaster had taken place, and the room was, to all appearances, exactly as Mr. Railton had left it.

His heart beating a little more rapidly now that he was actually there, Tom Merry tiptoed across the room, and made for the shelter of an armchair in one of the corners.

Behind that armchair he ensconced himself as comfortably as he was able in the limited space at his disposal. Then he prepared to watch and wait.

Five minutes went by—ten—fifteen.

Nothing happened.

The captain of the Shell began to feel cramped and cold, and wondered whether it was worth while keeping up the vigil any longer.

Another five minutes, spent debating whether to return to the Shell dormitory or not.

Suddenly a thrill ran through the watching junior's body.

A sound had broken the deathly silence—a sound as of footsteps coming nearer and nearer until they were in the very room itself.

Tom Merry caught his breath, felt every muscle stiffen. What was coming? Was he about to witness another ghostly manifestation? Was the mysterious spectre which had appeared to Trimble and to Mr. Railton going to appear to him now?

Or, on the other hand, was he about to get proof that the more materialistic theory he had propounded to Manners and Lowther was true?

Suddenly the dull tread of the footsteps ceased.

Tom Merry felt a sudden draught of cold air, coming, apparently, from the other side of the room.

Cautiously, he peered round the side of the armchair.

For a moment his eyes could distinguish nothing in the deep shadows that enveloped one half of the room. Then, with an instantly-suppressed start, he saw something startling.

In the centre of the opposite wall a space had appeared. And through that space was climbing a dim, white-shrouded figure!

Tom Merry clenched his fists to keep in check his growing excitement. No superstitious fears assailed him now. The sight of that cavity in the oak panelling of the wall was all he needed to convince him that the weird-looking visitor was very much human.

His heart pounding furiously against his breast, the captain of the Shell watched. The ghostly newcomer glanced round the room, as if to satisfy himself that he was alone. Apparently satisfied, he walked silently across to the door.

Click! Tom Merry felt a qualm.

The mysterious stranger had turned the key in the door. Tom realised that he was alone—alone with what? Madman? Fiend in human shape? It was impossible to know yet. But he knew well enough that his midnight excursion had led him into real peril, the extent of which he hardly dared contemplate.

He drew back as the silent figure crossed the room again, and for a few moments he saw nothing. But he could tell by the slight sounds coming from the direction of the window that the old-fashioned shutters were being closed.

Pitch-darkness for a second. Then the room was flooded with light, as the electric switch was turned on.

Hardly daring to breathe, Tom Merry looked again.

The strange visitor was standing on the top of Mr. Railton's desk, examining the ceiling! And now, in the white gleam of the electric light, Tom made a startling discovery.

The white shroud which the man had been wearing when he entered had now been cast aside, to reveal a tall, gaunt, muscular figure which Tom recognised instantly.

It was the savage intruder who had struck Tom down two nights before!

Tom Merry watched closely, trying to fathom the man's motives in the peculiar examination he was making.

It was more than an examination this time. The man was deliberately pulling away one piece of plaster after another, then inserting his fingers between the laths, and feeling and groping in every inch of space revealed to him.

He was engrossed in his task—so engrossed that Tom felt safe in watching him continuously.

Time passed in this way, the searcher cautiously working his way across inch after inch of the ceiling, groping, and peering upwards all the time, and the watcher gazing, almost mesmerised by the weird scene.

Half an hour—the best part of an hour passed by.

Tom, weary of his vigil, had begun to feel very tired, when all at once a suppressed cry from the man on the desk brought him back to full wakefulness with a start.

There was no mistaking the meaning of that cry. What-

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ever the searcher had been looking for, he had found. The note of triumph was unmistakable.

Peering round the side of the armchair again, Tom fixed his eyes upwards.

And from that moment he began to see reason in the whole strange business.

In the gnarled hands of the intruder was a canvas bag, taken, obviously, from the gap in the laths which had appeared since Tom had last looked. The triumphant searcher had already ripped open the top of the bag, and Tom could see at a glance what it contained—a tiara, necklaces, bracelets, rings; a glittering array of jewellery which even the inexperienced junior could see was worth a fortune.

This, then, was the secret of the haunted study! This, then, was the reason why this ugly ruffian had turned Mr. Railton's apartment into a room of terror! Small wonder that he had gone to such pains to frighten away occupant and visitors alike, when the prospect of this glittering prize was before him!

Tom was awake and tingling now—tingling with the excitement of his discovery and the desire to complete his triumph by thwarting this crook, for crook he obviously was.

But how to do it?

Alone, Tom knew that he was no match for the great, hulking ruffian. That meant that he had to get help. And to do that he had first to get out of the locked study.

There was no time for hesitation. Something had to be done, and that quickly.

There was just a chance that he could slip away unobserved, while his quarry, entranced and triumphant, exulted in his prize. Tom determined to take it.

Silently he crept across the study to the door; silently, bit by bit, turned back the key, until he had unlocked the door.

Two seconds more, and he might have been speeding down the passage for the help he needed.

But in those last two seconds Tom's luck failed him.

There was a quick movement from the centre of the room—a startled gasp.

Tom Merry opened his lips to shout.

But the cry was stifled ere it was uttered. A heavy hand descended over the junior's mouth, and a thick, muscular arm swept round his shoulders, pinning his hands helplessly to his sides.

Tom Merry felt himself flung violently to the floor—felt cruel, hard hands throttling him, and the unbearable weight of the ruffian upon him.

Then he lost consciousness.

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Ghost Talks!

**T**OM came round again, to find himself lying on the floor, bound hand and foot, and gagged so well that he could make no sound whatever.

The lights were still on, and as he opened his eyes he saw the evil, scowling face of his captor turned down on him.

"So you're awake again—eh?"

It was the first time Tom had heard the man speak, and he shuddered at the cold brutality in the tones of his voice.

"You thought you'd get me, did you, you meddling young fool? Curse you for your interference! But you'll rue it before you're an hour older! You've indulged your curiosity for the last time on this earth, my meddling young friend!"

He laughed harshly.

Tom Merry shivered. What did that sinister threat mean, unless it meant that the scowling villain standing over him contemplated—

Tom hardly dared allow himself to think the word. But he read murder in the man's eyes.

"Curse you again for what you've done!" The man lifted his foot and kicked his helpless victim. "But for you I could have got clean away to-night without blood on my hands. Now—"

He clenched his fists, and was silent for a moment.

"You wanted to find out all about the haunted room, did you?" he went on. "Well, you've found out now. Since you've proved so inquisitive I'll tell you more. You'll be the only one to share my secret, and there's no harm in your knowing. You'll never tell!"

He made a gesture towards the canvas bag which lay on the edge of the table.

"You noticed that—eh? Precious little escapes your notice, I imagine, my inquisitive young friend! Well, that little bag explains why I came back to St. Jim's. Oh, yes, I've been here before! Years ago, it was; and I'd have been back here before this if his Majesty's Government had seen fit to allow me out!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,133.

He chuckled grimly.

"I've served my time in prison for the stuff you see on that table; I and my partner. He went west before he finished his sentence—died in prison—so I get the lot—see? Let me satisfy your curiosity up to the hilt, boy. It's the last time it ever will be satisfied!"

Desperate as his situation was, Tom Merry still found interest in the strange story of his scowling captor. He listened intently to what was yet to come.

The man eyed the canvas bag with a grim smile.

"Those little trinkets came over from Colonel Bland's house, just about half a mile from this room. It was a wonderful job. We worked in the district as builder's labourers and odd-job men for six months before we brought it off.

"When we did get away with it at last we were working on repairs in this school—in this very room, in fact.

"It was my partner that got back first. He had the stuff—or, at least, he had when we left old Bland's place. When I joined him back in this room, it had gone again. He'd double-crossed me—or so it seemed, anyway.

"There was a row. If a hiding-place was needed, I knew a better hiding-place than he had ever dreamed of. Working in this room, I'd found out something that was worth a lot to me. You've seen me come through that wall to-night. Well, that was the hiding-place I'd fixed on in my mind. Somewhere where the stuff would be safe and sound for years, if necessary—somewhere easily got at. Since you don't know it, and since it doesn't matter, anyway, I'll tell you, my inquisitive young friend, that the passage at the back of that panel leads right out of the building into the Cloisters. Useful—eh?"

The light of understanding came into Tom Merry's eyes. That revelation explained the fugitive's sudden disappearance in the direction of the Cloisters two nights before; explained, also, the shortness of the interval between his disappearance and the commencement of the disturbances in Mr. Railton's study.

Evidently the ex-convict read the junior's thoughts, for he chuckled again.

"Beginning to see daylight now, are you? Well, I'll give you the rest. We started arguing. My precious partner wouldn't say where he'd put the stuff, and I wanted to know. Words led to blows. In the end I went for him."

He scowled.

"Fools that we were! I'd thought we'd covered up our traces. But the local police were smarter than we'd bargained for. While we were rowing up here, a carload of police was driving up through the school gates. They got us, durn them! And we paid for that visit to old Bland's, all right—paid for it in the stone jug!

"The only satisfaction was that they never got the stuff. That wasn't much consolation to me at first, because I didn't know where it was, either. But there's plenty of time for reflection in prison, and I soon developed a good idea of its whereabouts."

Tom Merry, with his eyes on his captor, who had turned his glance back to the table, made a sudden convulsive effort to break his bonds. The ex-convict looked round again with a grim smile on his lips.

"That won't work, you young fool! Do you think I'd take any chances with you? To finish—my idea was that he had hidden it in the ceiling, which he was repairing at the time. From the moment I got that idea I counted the days to the time when I should be free again—free to get back to this place again and take the stuff I'd paid for so dearly.

"Well, I got back. And, as you see, I've succeeded. It's been difficult—more difficult than I thought. I had to get this room cleared so that I could work without interruption, and it was hard to know how to do it at first. Then I thought of turning it into a haunted room. Clever—eh?"

He laughed mirthlessly.

"But you still made it difficult for me, you meddling fools! I thought when I came out behind you the other evening that I'd scare away everybody for a week. And you got a shock, didn't you? Remember how the light went out and that chair smashed up? Oh, I worked it well!"

"Yet, in spite of that, a fat young puppy chooses to wander in at midnight just after I started work! I think I gave him enough of this room to last him a long time, though!

"You all took a lot of frightening. When I came out for the benefit of your schoolmaster yesterday he tried to get me. But I scared him all right—scared him stiff when I backed into the wall and vanished!"

The man's villainous face twisted into an ugly smile.

"And now you turn up—just when I've succeeded. Do you think I dare let you live, knowing what you know?"

"Simply by telling the police what you've seen you can lose me everything. They'd soon remember if they heard about those little gems coming out of the ceiling! And they'd get me—get me in less than an hour!

"Curse you for your meddling! But for you I could have

left this place to-night with the stuff, and nothing would ever have leaked out. But you've interfered, and for interfering you've got to pay the price. It's a case of me or you—and it's not going to be me!"

Every vestige of a smile had died out of the face of the crook now. His expression was remorseless and villainous—almost fiendish.

"There's going to be a fire in this room to-night!" he said harshly. "A fire out of which you won't emerge alive! Think of that, you meddling puppy! There's going to be one more crime on my hands; but a crime that will never be traced down to me, and one that will leave me free to enjoy the wealth I've schemed for!"

He turned away abruptly.

Tom Merry followed him with his eyes—eyes dilated with horror at the thought of what was coming.

To die from heat and suffocation, unable to move a limb—was that to be his end? Could anyone—could even this black-hearted criminal—be so fiendish as to plan such a crime?

Tom's heart sank within him as he watched the man's deliberate preparations. He could tell that it was so—that for the sake of his ill-gotten gains this evil creature was willing to commit the greatest crime of all.

Papers, books, inflammable material of every description he heaped up in the middle of the floor.

In a few minutes he had prepared a pile of stuff that would burn like tinder.

The last faint hope left the helpless junior. He closed his eyes, abandoning himself to his terrible fate.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Trimble Turns Up!

"I SAY, you chaps—" Bagley Trimble sat up in bed and blinked round the dark, silent dormitory.

For the second night in succession, the Falstaff of the Fourth was finding sleep difficult.

Partly that was due to excitement. The conversation he had overheard between Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, too, had stirred up anew the terrors of the previous night—terrors which might otherwise have departed from the forgetful junior's mind by this time.

A more important factor than excitement, however, was that which had kept him awake on the first occasion—hunger. Trimble was more than fond of sleep, but when the pangs of hunger oppressed him even sleep was impossible where Trimble was concerned.

It was the thought of that confiscated hamper, still standing in Mr. Railton's study, idle and neglected, that chiefly disturbed the serenity of Baggy Trimble's outlook.

That hamper, judging by its external appearance, was, without doubt, the finest hamper Trimble had ever received. Since Mr. Railton had heartlessly appropriated it, several fellows had expressed the opinion that it must have been sent to the fat Fourth-Former in error. For, although, Trimble never tired of describing the vast extent of the "oof" in which his titled relations were always, to use his own expressive phrase, "rolling," tuck-hampers for Trimble, like remittances for Trimble, were, in point of fact, very few and far between.

But nobody could deny that the hamper had been addressed to Trimble; and that podgy junior, judging by his attitude in the matter, had no doubt whatever as to its being really his. In the circumstances, his feelings over the loss of such a gift were understandable. Baggy's woe, at all events, was deep and inexpressible. And time brought no consolation; it only made Baggy feel hungrier still.

It was increasing hunger that at last brought the Falstaff up to a sitting position in bed. He felt that he really couldn't get to sleep without a snack of some kind. Even a slab of toffee would be acceptable in this moment of need, and it was with the idea that somebody in the dormitory

might have a supply concealed in his clothes that Baggy called out:

"I say, you chaps—"

There was no reply from the sleeping Fourth.

Trimble peered into the darkness.

"Blake! Are you awake, Blake?"

Apparently Blake was not awake.

"Gus! I say, Gussy, wake up, old chap!"

But neither "Gus," nor "Gussy," nor "old chap" drew the swell of the Fourth.

The next bed to Trimble's was occupied by Herries. Having listened in vain for answers from Blake and D'Arcy, Trimble reached out into the darkness until he almost overbalanced himself, then gave a sharp dig at the dim shape which was presumably Herries.

"Herries, old man—"

Possibly the Falstaff had applied too much force to that dig. Whether from that cause, or simply for the reason that a dig of any kind in the middle of the night was sufficient to give a fellow a start, Herries jumped up, with a yell.

"Whoooooop! What the thump—"

"You awake, old chap?" asked Trimble.

"Awake? I should jolly well think I am! Who hit me?" growled Herries, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"Hem! I nudged you, as a matter of fact—"

"Asking for a boot, you fat idiot?"

"Certainly not, old chap! I—I say, Herries, I'm simply ravenous—starving."

"You know!" said Trimble pathetically.

There was a gasp from the direction of Herries' bed.

"And you've woke me up to tell me that? Why, you—"

"Well, a fellow can't help feeling a bit overcome with hunger on the rations they dish out here, can he?" asked Trimble. "Look here, Herries, what I wanted to know was whether you happen to have a bit of toffee, or chocolate, about you—just so that I can stave off the pangs, you know—yooooooooop!"

Something white and bulky had whizzed through the air from Herries at a speed that gave Trimble no chance to duck. The Falstaff of the Fourth collapsed under a pillow, yelling.

The Fourth began to wake up, and sleepy inquiries came out of the shadows from all sides.

"What's the matter over there?"

"Who's hurt?"

"Can't you let a fellow sleep?"

"It's this fat oyster in the next bed to me!" came Herries' indignant explanation. "Silly ass woke me up to ask if I'd got any toffee to give him!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, and why not?" hooted Trimble. "I'm jolly hungry, I can tell you! For all you know, it may be a matter of life or death!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I wonder what you'd feel like, all of you, if you woke up to-morrow morning to find me stretched out here a lifeless corpse?" asked Trimble dramatically.

"I should feel it couldn't be true—too much luck to expect all at once!" said Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can it, you fellows!" called out Levison. "I'm still tired from last night!"

"Same here!"

"What about me?" asked Trimble. "I had less sleep than any of you, and I'm not tired. I'm only hungry."

"Go and eat coke, then!"

"Who's got some toffee up here?" asked Trimble. "I only want a snack—half a pound or so would do!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Anything will do; a box of chocolates or a tin of biscuits, if anybody has such a thing."

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Of course, I would not think of leaving out our wise old "ORACLE," who comes up to scratch with his brainy "Answers to Readers."

**Look Out, Then, For This Bumper Feast Next Week, Chums!**

"Or a ten-course dinner, if one of you chaps happened to bring it up with you to-night!" added Digby sarcastically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——" began Trimble.

"Dry up, Baggy!"

"Yes, but——"

"Dry up!" yelled a dozen voices.

"Anything will do! A measly rock-cake or a doughnut!" almost wept the Falstaff of the Fourth.

"Will you dry up, or shall we have to dry you up?" shared Herries.

"Just a biscuit—— Yoooooooooop!"

Trimble didn't get a biscuit. What he got was rather more substantial but decidedly less digestible than a biscuit; to wit, one pillow, three boots, and several rubber shoes.

"Now go to sleep!" said Jack Blake severely.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yah! Beasts!"

And with that Trimble at last subsided.

But still not to sleep. While the rest of the Fourth dozed off one by one, Trimble continued to twist and squirm in his bed—hungry still.

Soon the dormitory was buried once more in slumber. Trimble listened to his Form-fellows' steady breathing in a state of mental misery.

He thought again of the confiscated hamper. Then he thought of his experience the night before, and shuddered. Not even for all the tuck in the world would he go through that experience again.

But then he thought once again. And suddenly he ceased to squirm, and sat up, with eyes gleaming in the darkness.

Something had just occurred to him. He had suddenly recollected his encounter with Tom Merry and his chums outside Study No. 10 early that evening.

Of course!

Trimble felt like kicking himself.

Why on earth hadn't he remembered it before? It was this very night that the Terrible Three had fixed for their vigil—the vigil he had heard them plan when he had been listening outside their study door.

While he was lying inactive up in the Fourth dormitory Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were actually keeping watch in the room that contained the hamper for which he longed!

They might even be scoffing the contents of that hamper. Trimble felt that he wouldn't trust the beasts with it, anyway, especially after the way they had filched it from him soon after its arrival.

Trimble's eyes gleamed.

If the Terrible Three were there, the prospect of entering Mr. Railton's room wasn't quite so terrible, after all. If the ghost did happen to turn up, they could deal with it, while he made his exit.

But suppose they were not there?

Trimble shuddered again. Then he brightened up. Tom Merry was a fellow of his word. If he said he was going to do a thing, he did it. Trimble felt, on consideration, that the chances that Tom was not in the haunted study at that very moment were remote in the extreme.

Of course, there was a slight risk. One never could tell; and, anyway, the journey down to the Housemaster's room at this hour of the night was not a pleasant one.

But the reward that was his at the end of the journey! Trimble's mouth watered at the thought of it. That reward was surely worth the trifling risk involved—the very trifling risk, as Trimble mentally decided it must be.

The fat Fourth-Former decided to act quickly before he gave himself time to think much more about it.

He climbed out of bed, hastily put on dressing-gown and slippers, and rolled towards the door.

Before leaving the dormitory, he thoughtfully armed himself with a cricket-stump, which he raked out from the locker nearest the door.

Then he went forth.

His heart palpitated as he stood out in the dark, cold passage. Suppose the ghost wandered away from the haunted study and decided to haunt the passages instead? Trimble almost hesitated. Then, with a quick decision, he scuttled along towards the stairs.

Like a frightened rabbit he hurried down the stairs and through the passages leading to the part of the House he was aiming for.

In a couple of minutes he reached Mr. Railton's room.

Outside he paused. Suppose they were not there, after all? Suppose the room was inhabited solely by that dreadful spectre he had seen the night before?

Trimble gave up supposing. Fixing a firm grip on his cricket-stump, he quietly opened the door.

It was fortunate that Tom Merry had succeeded in turning back the lock ere his savage aggressor had caught him. Fortunate also that the turning of the lock had passed unnoticed. A locked door in the present circumstances would certainly have ended the fat junior's investigations.

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As it was, however, Trimble was able to open the door with scarcely a sound.

For a moment the light from the study dazzled him, and he could hardly see.

A second or two, and then Trimble was able to take in the scene before him.

What he saw caused his podgy jaw to drop and every bit of colour to fly from his face.

Trimble stood in the doorway of Mr. Railton's study, deprived of action—rooted to the floor with utter horror and amazement!

## CHAPTER 12.

### Saved!

"THIS is the finish of you!"

It was the voice of the stranger on whose gaunt, ugly figure Trimble's horrified eyes were fixed. The sound of it, harsh and cold and grim, struck a chill to the fat Fourth-Former's heart.

The speaker had not noticed the coming of Trimble. His glance was on the captain of the Shell, who lay bound and helpless before him.

"In ten minutes this room will be a roaring furnace. But for your cursed curiosity this wouldn't have happened. But you've brought it on yourself, and now you've got to face it!"

Trimble, in a state of stupefied amazement, heard but hardly understood. The extraordinary scene before him held him fascinated; but he failed altogether to grasp its significance for the time being.

Certainly the scene in Mr. Railton's room was an extraordinary one. The picture of the tall, gaunt stranger bending menacingly over the bound and gagged body of the junior in a room piled high with papers and books as if in preparation for a bonfire, reminded Trimble vaguely of nightmares he had had as sequels to late suppers in the dormitory. With recollections of his last visit to the haunted study, he had been half-prepared for something weird. But that he would be greeted on his appearance with anything so weird as this had certainly not occurred to the Falstaff of the Fourth.

Trimble's first shock of surprise died down sufficiently to permit him to look down at Tom Merry.

His eyes met those of the skipper of the Shell. Gagged and bound as Tom Merry was, he could give no sign of welcome. But Trimble did not need words to tell how welcome he was. Tom Merry's eyes spoke volumes. Trimble had turned up just at the moment when it seemed the last hope had gone, and the appearance of that podgy figure in the doorway brought back hope and life once more.

Trimble himself, however, was by no means conscious that he was Tom's hope of deliverance. Had he had time to think, the fat junior would have run a mile before taking aggressive action against the burly ruffian who had made a captive of the skipper of the Shell.

Fortunately for Tom Merry, Trimble was given no time to think.

Even as he stood there, still almost paralysed with shock, the man finished speaking and turned to the piled-up heap that was intended to fire the study and seal Tom Merry's lips for ever.

There was the sound of a match being scraped against a box and the sharp splutter as it ignited. Trimble, watching with dilated eyes, saw the fire-raiser deliberately light the heap in half a dozen different places.

Even then it was doubtful whether the fat junior could have summoned up sufficient presence of mind to act, had not something happened to bring the war to his own door, so to speak.

That "something" happened as Tom Merry's captor raised his eyes from the already smouldering fire. For the first time, he was facing the door; and for the first time he saw Trimble.

What happened next was never very clear to Trimble, though his imagination enabled him to give a vivid and detailed description afterwards.

Actually, the fire-raiser gazed at the fat intruder for quite three seconds, almost deprived of action himself by the unexpected apparition.

Then he leaped at Trimble—leaped with the same frenzied, ferocious spring which Tom Merry had twice experienced.

Trimble was quite beyond acting consciously. But the common instinct of self-preservation acted for him before he knew that anything had happened.

A podgy arm shot up in the air. A cricket stump flashed.

There was a crack; then a groan; then a heavy thud.

Trimble, a cricket-stump hanging absurdly from his right hand, gazed stupidly at what he had done.

His savage aggressor was lying in a huddled heap before him, insensible and helpless.

"Who's got some toffee up here?" asked Baggy Trimble, looking round the dormitory. "Will you dry up?" roared Herries. "Just a biscuit—Yooooop!" What Trimble got was rather more substantial than a biscuit; to wit, one pillow, three boots, and several rubber shoes! (See Chapter 11.)



Then Trimble howled. All his pent-up feelings came out in one great howl that echoed through the House from end to end.

With that howl, the Falstaff of the Fourth came back to consciousness again. He saw the flames licking up the sides of the heap of papers and books that was in the middle of the room, and saw Tom Merry's eyes rolling eloquently. Trimble staggered into the study, and with hands trembling violently wrenched the gag from the captive's mouth.

Tom Merry spoke again.

"Quick! My knife! Pocket!"

Trimble dived into the Shell junior's pocket and fetched out a penknife. A few slashes, and Tom was free again—free to jump up and take control of the situation.

"The fire-bucket at the end of the passage!" he rapped out.

Trimble nodded and rushed off. Tom bent over the prostrate body of his late captor and dragged it out of the room. Then he himself raced off in the opposite direction to that which Trimble had taken, making for a chemical fire-extinguisher which he knew was situated at the foot of the stairs.

Trimble's yells were ringing out now:

"Fire! Help! Fire! Police!"

Already there was a stir in the House. Footsteps were thudding along the passages overhead. Somebody was coming down the stairs as Tom Merry rushed back carrying the extinguisher with him.

Trimble had just emptied the bucket of water over the flames when Tom got back to the room, and a cloud of hissing steam showed that it had achieved good results. Tom up-ended his extinguisher, and directed the nozzle on the smouldering heap, and a stream of potent chemical mixture shot over it with instantaneous effect.

There was a rush of footsteps in the passage outside.

"Boys! Good heavens! A fire!"

Mr. Railton, his face white and anxious, entered.

There was no time for inquiries. The Housemaster took in the situation at a glance, and hastened to help in the work of completely extinguishing the outbreak, stamping out stray pieces of paper that were still burning, and raking away the smouldering rubbish from the main heap that was fortunately unaffected.

It was exciting work while it lasted. But it did not last long. The fire had had no time to get a good hold, and the prompt work of Tom Merry and Trimble had most effectively nipped it in the bud.

Very soon it was obvious that all danger was past.

Housemaster and boys ceased their efforts, and Tom Merry, with a deep sigh of utter relief, put down the extinguisher and sank into a chair, exhausted.

There was a sudden cry from the passage.

"Look out! He's coming round!"

Trimble gave a yell.

"Nab him! Collar him! I say, you chaps, don't let that awful villain get away!"

"He won't get away!" came a grim answer in Kildare's voice; and the fat junior, peeping cautiously round the door, was relieved to see that the fire-raiser, whose huddled-up body was just beginning to show signs of life again, had a bodyguard of seniors big enough to make it quite certain that escape for him was impossible.

"I—I say, sir, you'll send for the police, won't you?" asked Trimble, anxiously turning to Mr. Railton.

"That will be done in due course, Trimble; there is nothing for you to fear. First, however, I want an explanation of this utterly extraordinary affair. At present I can hardly credit the evidence of my own eyes. Has there actually been an attempt to set the House on fire? Merry, are you well enough to be able to explain matters briefly?"

"I feel just a bit weak, sir. Shock as much as anything, I think. I can give you the facts all right."

"If you are too exhausted, Merry—"

"I'm fit enough, sir," said Tom, with a faint smile. He rose and opened the shutters of the window, and threw back the window itself to let out the acrid smoke which was everywhere. "See that that fellow is well looked after, though. He's dangerous."

"He is in good hands," said the Housemaster, with a glance outside at the passage. "Pray proceed, Merry."

"Very well, sir. I dare say it was rather startling to you to come down and find your study on fire and a stranger lying unconscious outside it. Well, it has all come about through ghost-hunting."

"What?"

"That fellow out there is the ghost that has been haunting your room for the last two days."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

There was a buzz of interest from the crowd that had gathered in the passage.

Manners and Lowther came hustling through the crowd at that moment and stopped in the doorway, their faces white and anxious.

"Tommy!"

"You're all right?"

"Right as rain!" answered Tom Merry, though his looks at that moment hardly bore out his words. "Look at all the fun you've missed by staying up in the dorm!"

"We heard something had happened to you. Thank goodness you've come to no harm!" said Manners.

"Continue, Merry!" said Mr. Railton, silencing Tom Merry's contrite chums with a gesture.

"I came down here with the intention of finding out the truth about this ghost business," went on Tom Merry. "I've found it out, all right; but not without getting the scare of my life. I've been as near to death as it's possible to get. But I've pulled through anyway—thanks to Trimble!"

"T-T-Trimble!" came an incredulous gasp from the passage.

"Oh, ye gods!"

"Of all people—Trimble!"

Mr. Railton turned a frown on the buzzing crowd.

"Silence, boys! Please go on, Merry."

Tom Merry told his story—told of the eerie vigil, of the appearance of the "ghost" through the secret panel, of the "ghost's" transformation into the intruder of two nights before, of his discovery of the jewels in their strange hiding-place.

The crowd listened in breathless silence.

Then Tom went on to describe his capture by the desperate crook, and the revelations that followed. Finally, in a tense silence, he told of the ruthless scoundrel's resolve that his captive should perish in the flames rather than that the truth should be known.

A shudder of horror went round as Tom described the fiendish preparations that followed. And then, as the recital concluded with the account of Trimble's timely appearance at the door and the crook's fall under the fat junior's deadly cricket-stump, there was a murmur, partly of astonishment, but equally of admiration.

Trimble the hero! It was unprecedented, and it was inexplicable! But everybody felt more than willing to give credit where credit was due. Trimble had undoubtedly saved the captain of the Shell from a terrible fate, and Trimble should get the full kudos attaching to his great achievement.

When Tom Merry had finished Mr. Railton drew a deep breath.

"Really, Merry, this is a most extraordinary story. Even now I can hardly realise all the implications of it."

His hand rested gently on the Shell captain's shoulder. "I suppose I ought to say that you did wrongly in the first place in leaving your dormitory on such an expedition. But I do not intend to say it. What has happened has fully justified the action you took. You have been successful in disproving the fallacy that this room was haunted, and, furthermore, you have brought a most dangerous and diabolical criminal to book. You have done well indeed, Merry."

"I—I say, sir, what about me?" asked Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was the first laugh that night, and it brought relief after all the tension that had preceded it. Even Mr. Railton smiled.

"Really, Trimble, I hardly know what to say to you! Needless to say, your object in coming here to-night again was to recover your hamper?"

"Not at all, sir!" answered Trimble promptly. "My sole object, as a matter of fact, was to save Tom Merry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, boys! Well, Trimble, we will not go too deeply into your motives. Whatever they were, you, too, have done splendidly! I am sure your plucky action will receive the recognition it deserves from your schoolfellows!"

"Hear, hear!" came a cordial chorus from the passage.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And now you must all return to your dormitories," said Mr. Railton briskly. "I will ring for the police to send somebody immediately to take charge of this man. Until they come, may I ask the seniors present to remain here to watch over the man, and also to see that there is no possibility of the fire breaking out again?"

The seniors were very pleased to assist, and while the juniors reluctantly went back to their dormitories, half a dozen or so of the Sixth-Formers remained behind to await the arrival of the police.

Dawn was near at hand by the time the last of them had got back to bed. But nobody minded that much. There was general relief in the knowledge that, serious as the events of the night had been, everything had turned out for the best. The mystery of the haunted room was a mystery no longer. Thanks to Tom Merry's courage and common sense, everything had been cleared up, and the very real menace that had hung over the School House had been removed for good.

## CHAPTER 13.

### A Hero by Accident!

"TRIMBLE, you know!"  
"Baggy Trimble!"  
"That fat oyster!"  
"That bladder of lard!"

"Trimble a hero!"

"What next?"

All over St. Jim's spread the glad tidings next day.

The affair in Mr. Railton's study the previous night had naturally caused a sensation almost without precedent in the old school. But, from the point of view of most of the fellows, the most staggering sensation of all was the revelation that Trimble was a hero.

Hardly anybody believed it at the first hearing. But the evidence was so conclusive that the most sceptical of the sceptics had to admit in the end that it must be true.

Baggy walked about on air.

To be regarded with awed admiration by the fags, to be treated with respect by his colleagues in the Fourth, to be chummed up with even by members of the lordly Fifth—this had long been Trimble's dream.

And now it had come true!

Trimble could hardly believe it, but it was so.

Even the Sixth condescended to notice the existence of the fat junior. The Sixth had not come into Trimble's wildest dreams. Yet Kildare and Darrell both had a kindly nod for him now, and one or two of the lesser lights even stopped to speak.

Trimble had to pinch himself to make sure that he was awake.

In his excitement, he even forgot to say a lot about his part in the stirring events that had led to the extraordinary state of affairs. True, there was scarcely any need for him to do so. By breakfast-time the whole school knew every detail, and seniors and juniors alike had decided that Trimble, for once in his career, really did deserve well of his country.

Doubtless, a time would come when the enthusiasm would wane, and Trimble would need to remind the fellows of his heroism to retain their good will. But for the time being no reminder was necessary. The plain, unvarnished truth was sufficient to make Trimble the hero of the school without that fat junior having to furnish any vivid and picturesque details from his brilliant imagination.

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Trimble was the cynosure of all eyes at breakfast-time. That pleasing fact made no appreciable difference to his appetite. If anything, Trimble ate with an even heartier zest than usual, and for once in a way Mr. Lathom raised no objection to his consuming enough for at least half a dozen.

In the Form-room Trimble did pretty well as he pleased—which amounted to nothing! In view of the general excitement, Mr. Lathom was inclined to deal mercifully with his Form. But nobody received quite such merciful treatment as Trimble. When it was a question of testing the Fourth's knowledge of English History, Mr. Lathom completely ignored the Falstaff. When it came to Baggy's turn to construe, Mr. Lathom passed him by like the idle wind which he regarded not. All of which was very much to Trimble's liking.

After morning lessons Tom Merry came along from the Shell Form-room especially to invite Trimble to partake of refreshments in the tuckshop. The fat Fourth-Former accepted that invitation with a glad heart, and rescuer and rescued trooped off to Dame Taggles' little shop in quite regal state, escorted by an enthusiastic crowd from the Fourth and Shell.

With a glass of ginger-pop and a plate of assorted pastries before him, Trimble really began to enjoy his sudden and amazing popularity. His podgy face beamed until there seemed almost more beam than face about it.

"I say, Tom Merry, this is something like!" he murmured. "Try one of these tarts. They're prime!"

"Thanks, but I'd rather not—this side of dinner-time, anyway!" laughed Tom Merry, who by now had fully recovered from his experiences and looked his usual cheery self. "I notice last night's bizney hasn't affected your appetite, Baggy."

"Why should it? A fellow with a delicate constitution like mine needs extra nourishment; in fact, after working hard like I did—saving you and putting out that fire and so on, you know—"

"Good old Baggy!" grinned Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Which reminds me," said Baggy thoughtfully. "What about that hamper of mine?"

"Well, what about it, old fat bean?"

"Don't you think old Railton ought to give it back to me now after all I've done for him?" asked the fat junior

(Continued on next page.)



A misguided chum has written to the office-boy to ask advice about his pet rabbits. Our Oracle takes this opportunity of warning the writer and others, that if the said office-boy's

brains were gunpowder and you set a match to them, the explosion wouldn't blow his cap off! Please take this, the only intimation.

#### Q. What are Toby Jugs?

A. I have asked the artist to draw you one, "Potty on Pottery," and you will see it on this page. The original Toby jug was in the shape of a stout figure wearing a cocked hat and knee breeches such as are shown in the illustration. The pottery was glazed and in various colours. Other designs of the Toby jug that became popular were John Bull, the sailor, Simple Simon, the watchman



A Toby Jug—think how nice it would be to drink ginger-pop from one of these!

claimed money about?

A. "Stonybroke" is very anxious to know, and I can assure him that there is—millions! It is held in Chancery awaiting claimants, but my correspondent will have to put up a pretty good case if he wants to "touch" the authorities for a few thousand quids! The famous Law Courts in the Strand, London, were built entirely out of unclaimed funds of this sort.

#### Q. What is ipecacuanha?

A. Before answering this—though all my chums must know the answer to their

cost—I should like to explain that I printed the question after receiving a letter from a chum who simply signs himself "Skolard." ("Scholar," I think he means.) Anyway, here's the bright little epistle: "Dear Orakul,—I have been a reader of yor kolum for sick's yeers but at larst I hav cort you napping. You spelled the wurd 'leegus' with a 'A' insted of three E's, a L, a G and a U. I hav not bean well of late and mother says it is becaws I hav bean doing to much work at skool and doing to much spelling and arithmetiek for home work. She is going to giv me sum hippipeckackewjohanner. If it tastes like it sounds it must be rotten. Your affeckshunate reader, 'Skolard.'" What my chum refers to—presumably ipecacuanha—is the root of a South American shrub with powerful medical properties. But I fear that my young correspondent, if somewhat weak at spelling, is strong at "drawing the long bow." For instance, when he says that he has been a reader of my columns for six years. Well, considering that I didn't join the staff of the GEN until rather more than a year ago, his is distinctly unlikely!

#### Q. What are the Benda Masks?

A. Grotesque yet curiously human-looking masks designed by the artist, W. T. Benda, for theatrical pantomimes and dances. A particular mask, for instance, may suggest the character of some emotion such as hatred, kindness or diabolical mirth.

#### Q. Who was Albert Cuyp?

A. A great Dutch painter

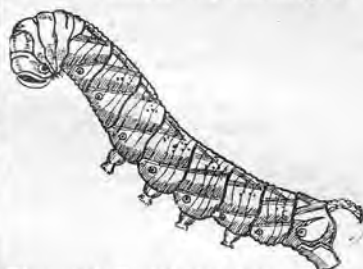


This is a mask—not one of the Guy Fawkes variety, but one that is used in pantomimes.

who lived between the years 1620-1691. Although he painted much scenery and cattle, it was in his studies of the sky that he so excelled. There are many examples of Cuyp's wonderful work in British collections of pictures.

#### Q. Is there any grub that squeaks?

A. For the life of me I couldn't make out at first what Tom Pascoe, of Worthing, meant by this extraordinary question! In the first part of his letter he referred to a dormitory tuck-in, and I put the old dome to considerable overtime in the effort to remember whether I had ever heard a sausage roll give audible protest. Then in the second part of



The great Death's Head Hawk grub of the moth of the same name. Ugly-looking chapple, what?

Tom's letter, I found that he was an entomologist and realised that by "grub" he meant caterpillar or similar insect. Actually there is a grub that squeaks, Tom; it is the caterpillar of the great Death's Head Hawk moth. This is a truly awe-inspiring insect, being about six inches long when full grown, of a green and purple colour, and having a curious tail that is often mistaken for a sting. The moth itself has the strange markings of a skull and cross-bones on its thorax.

#### Q. Who was Demosthenes?

A. I thought I had answered this question once before, K. W. He was a Greek orator who lived in the fourth century B.C. and seems to have made himself especially conspicuous from his strange habit of living in a tub. So far as I know, he was no relation of my great-grandmother.

#### Q. Which is the smallest county in England?

A. Rutland. It measures 18 by 15 miles and has a total area of only 152 square miles.

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"M-m-mine? Of c-course it was mine!" stuttered the

The whole thing struck the crowd as really rich.

(Continued on next page.)

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With a ferocious spring, the midnight marauder leaped at Baggy Trimble standing in the doorway. Quite unconscious of what he was doing—acting only by the instinct of self-preservation—Trimble's podgy arm shot up in the air. A cricket stump flashed. There was a crack; then a groan; then a heavy thud!—  
(See Chapter 12.)

Mr. Railton continued to smile. Cutts frowned at first, then even he, infected by the rest, had to grin.

"Well, it seems to be fairly clear that the hamper belongs to Cutts," said Mr. Railton, at last. "To Cutts, then, it must go. Since the fire, I have had it transferred to Mr. Linton's room. You have my authority to call and ask him for it, Cutts."

"Thank you, sir," Cutts hesitated for a moment, then he said: "Matter of fact, I'm not in real need of it now, sir, so perhaps—well, the young bounder doesn't really deserve it, but I suppose he did do somethin' worth doin' last night. Trimble can keep the hamper now."

"Oh, my hat!"

Trimble's podgy face beamed once more. This was indeed his lucky day!

"Well, that's what I call doing the decent thing, Cutts!" he remarked. "Dashed if I'm not sorry I changed those labels, now—I mean, of course, I would have been sorry if I had changed them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts strutted off, with the air of one who had made a rather noble gesture. And Baggy Trimble rolled off towards Mr. Linton's room without wasting another second.

At the first opportunity Mr. Railton and a couple of prefects made a thorough exploration of the secret passage that led from the Housemaster's study to a concealed exit in the Cloisters, and which the "ghost" of the School House had used so effectively.

The sliding panel in the study had been left open by the midnight marauder in order to enable him to make a quick "get-away," so that no time was lost in what might have been a long search for the secret of its opening. Behind the panelled wall a flight of stone steps descended to a musty passage that ran underground with hardly a twist or turn for nearly two hundred yards.

Half-way along the tunnel the exploring party came upon a small cell-like apartment which, judging from the oil-lamp, the blankets, and the store of food it contained, was where the burglar had slept and eaten.

The subterranean passage ended in another flight of stairs leading up to a large flagstone that took the combined strength of Mr. Railton and Kildare to shift. That done,

the party found themselves in a part of the Cloisters that seldom echoed to the sound of footsteps, a fact which had doubtless appealed to the scoundrel who had very nearly succeeded in terrorising St. Jim's.

The existence of a secret passage appealed greatly to the imagination of most of the Lower School, but Mr. Railton was determined to make quite sure that there should be no more ghostly manifestations. Arrangements were made for the tunnel to be bricked up at both ends, and within a few days it was effectively sealed.

In due course the burglar and would-be murderer received his just reward. The long term of imprisonment to which he was sentenced was, in the opinion of most people, not a bit too long. His attempt to silence Tom Merry for good had shown him to be a diabolical and inhuman scoundrel, and his return to the prison from which he had so recently come, elicited little sympathy from the fellows at St. Jim's, at any rate.

To Colonel Bland, the return of his long-lost valuables was naturally as pleasing as it was unexpected. To the surprise of everybody, the fiery old veteran called at St. Jim's himself to thank Tom Merry and Trimble for their part in the recovery of his property, and his thanks were expressed in such terms as to bring a blush to the face of Tom Merry, if not to Trimble's.

Trimble's "heroism" was a nine-days' wonder, and the flights of imagination to which he soon resorted in describing the happenings of that eventful night in the School House speedily lost him the admiration he had gained.

Tom Merry, of course, remained grateful. As he put it to Manners and Lowther, Trimble had become a hero purely by accident; but whether accidental or otherwise, the Falstaff's momentary heroism had undoubtedly been Tom's salvation. So, despite his many failings, the captain of the Shell continued to have a soft spot in his heart for Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

THE END.

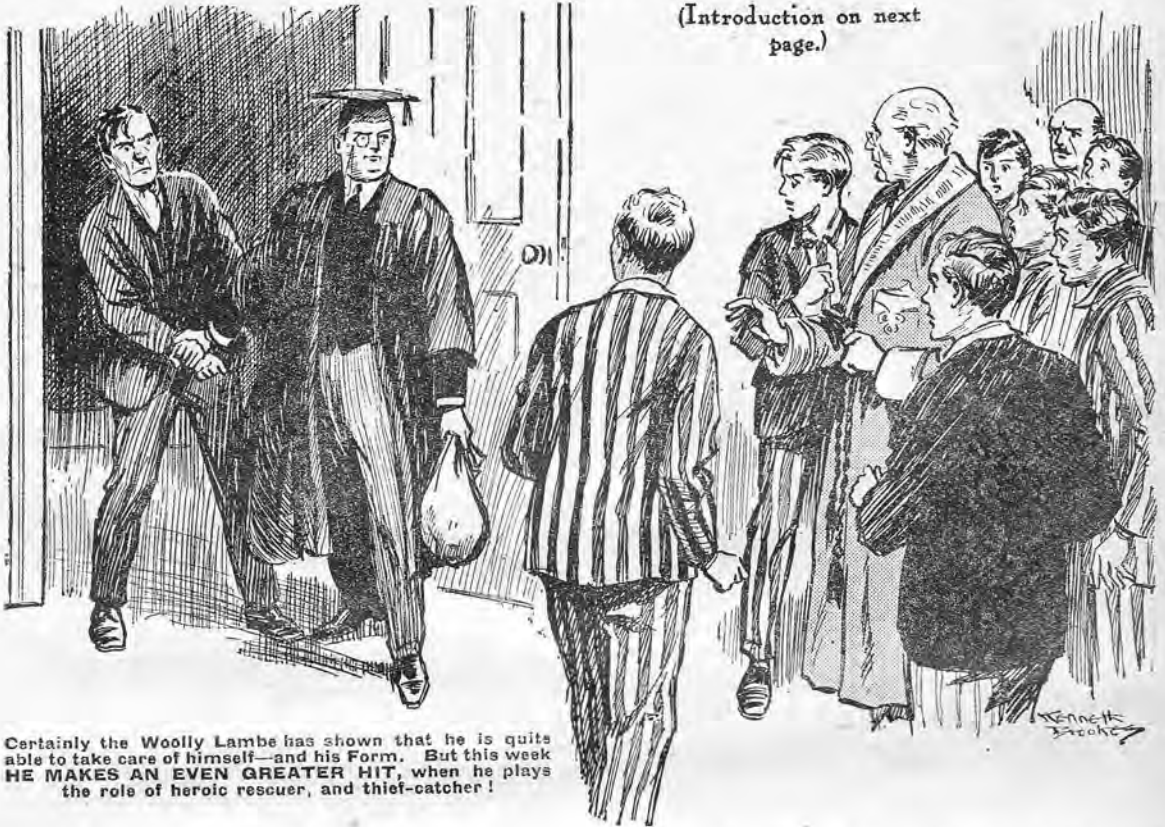
(Next week's bumper issue of the GEM will contain a grand long, "Fifth of November" yarn of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "THE 'FIFTH' AT ST. JIM'S!"—full of fun and exciting situations. You cannot afford to miss it, chums, so order your copy EARLY!)

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DAVID GOODWIN'S MASTERPIECE—

# THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON!

(Introduction on next page.)



Certainly the Woolly Lambe has shown that he is quite able to take care of himself—and his Form. But this week **HE MAKES AN EVEN GREATER HIT**, when he plays the role of heroic rescuer, and thief-catcher!

## A Hero and Sportsman!

**“W**HAT a howling jackass you were to do it, though,” added Dereker, under his breath. “We don’t know whether the worst of it’s over yet.”

“No, I suppose not,” answered Taffy.

“My dear young friends,” said Dereker, as the chums gathered in the quadrangle afterwards, “let us quit this ignoble strife, and walk in the ways of peace. We want a restful afternoon; no japes, no rivalry, no Lambe-worrying. What shall we do with our noble selves till tea-time?”

“There isn’t a match,” said Taffy, “and we’ve had a good whack at practice this week. My idea is to go jacking.”

“Rather!” said Dereker. “Angling’s a peaceful occupation, an’ has been ever since Izaak Walton threw his tin of worms at the milkmaid for singing out of tune. Go and get the two rods and the waterproof bag out of my locker, will you, Jelly?”

In a short time the quartette, armed with three rods of sorts, a fishing bag, gaff, and a zinc bait-kettle, sallied forth from Codrington, and crossed the meadows towards the river. A favourite spot for jack-fishing, and one within easy reach, was a little way below a mill that spanned an off-shoot of the river half a mile from the school.

It was a very pikey-looking spot, with clumps of reeds breaking the edges of a wide, deep pool, with a fast run of water at each end. The boys put down their burdens and prepared for the fray.

“River’s very high,” said Dereker, glancing at it; “the main stream must be swollen like anything.”

“It’s pretty bad here,” replied Taffy. “Still, the fish feed better in this stream when there’s big water coming down. We’ll have to fish close on the bottom, that’s all.”

“Live-baiting’ll be the best dodge,” said Birne, who had already put his rod together and fixed a fine gut collar to the reel-line with a quill float. “We’ll have to start gettin’ some baits.”

In half an hour the chums had caught as many live bait as they needed, and as soon as possible they set out for the haunts of the pike.

Three-quarters of a mile brought them to the main river, **THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,133.**

the Ore, where it flowed deep and wide through a series of pastures and copse-covered hills. The river was very full, as Dereker had expected, and ran in a great volume of brown water between its clayey banks. At the foot of the eyots and in the corners of the bends, however, there were eddies and slack water, where beds of rushes quivered and rustled.

To a fisherman’s eye it was a very likely-looking piece of water indeed, and, for that matter, it was as good as it looked. There was a thatched boathouse near the head of the bend, without a door, and a heavy fishing punt was inside it.

“We’ll borrow the punt,” said Taffy. “The old keeper always lets us have it. Decent old bird! Jelly, are you afraid to navigate the giddy waters?”

“I’ll go with you, Wynne, if you’ll let me, wherever it is,” said Jellicoe.

“What touching faith!” remarked Dereker. “I prefer the banks myself for fishing, don’t you, Birne? You an’ I have only got one rod between us, so we’ll take turns.”

“We’ll go down below the big pool,” said Birne. “You can yell to us when you’re going to turn it up, Taffy.”

“All right,” said Wynne. “Give us one or two baits; I want ’em for Jelly. I’m goin’ to spin a Devon minnow myself.”

He borrowed three or four of Birne’s small roach and put them in the well of the punt, where they swam about quite contentedly. Birne and Dereker, with a cheery smile, walked along the river bank, and were soon out of sight round the bend. Taffy put his two rods together before pushing off. To his own line he filled a trace and artificial minnow.

“What’s that roaring noise?” said Jellicoe, as they poled out of the boathouse.

“Marford Weir,” said Taffy; “it’s down the next reach. I’ll bet there’s a regular Niagara of water sweepin’ over it to-day. Precious nasty place. However, we needn’t go anywhere near it. Our best tip will be to moor in the best spots for a quarter of an hour at a time, as you can’t manage the punt, and we’ll fish them out piece by piece.”

Taffy and Jellicoe each managed to hook a jack, after

which they shifted along again. There was a stretch of unpromising water before them, so they passed it over and went some way farther down, mooring again in a rather stronger run of water.

"Current's a bit rapid here," said Taffy, casting out as soon as Jellicoe had thrown out his float tackle. "All right for you, your bait's in the eddy; but it's not much good my spinning in such a— By gum, isn't it, though?" he exclaimed, striking sharply. "I'm into him! A proper fish this time!"

Jellicoe turned eagerly to look, and saw his companion was engaged in a stiff tussle. The fish, instead of dashing off like a torpedo, sank deep in the river as soon as he felt the hooks, and bored suddenly along the bottom—sure sign of a good fish. Taffy dared not put too much strain on him, for the tackle was light, and the way in which the pike forged along was irresistible.

"He's no sprat," said Taffy. "He'll make yours look like twopence-halfpenny if I can get him out!"

"I say, the punt's loose!" said Jellicoe.

They had not noticed it in the struggle with the big fish, but the punt had become unmoored, and was floating rather rapidly down midstream.

"I can't help it if she is," said Taffy, his eyes riveted on the sizzling line as it cut through the water. "Is the brute never going to slacken? He is a stayer, an' no mistake. say, kid, get hold of the punt-pole, and try to shove her in to the shore, and we'll land. I shall be able to manage this chap better then."

Jellicoe poled away as best he could, but he was not much of a hand at it, and the current made things all the harder. He got the punt towards the left bank somehow, however, and tried to stick the punt-pole in it. It would not hold, however, and as the stern of the punt came within reach of the bank he jumped ashore with the painter in his hand, meaning to pull her in by it.

The attempt was a disastrous failure, for his heels slid on the bank. The wet rope slipped through his fingers with a jerk, and when Jellicoe recovered himself the punt was out of reach. The impetus of his spring had sent her out towards the middle again, and as Jellicoe looked at her and then glanced downstream, a sudden fear seized him.

"I say, look out!" he shouted. "Wynne! Look ahead! Bring that punt in to the bank!"

Taffy was so engrossed in his fight with the big pike that he scarcely heard. Another cause prevented him from catching what Jellicoe said; a continuous, dull roar, growing louder and louder till it drowned every other sound.

A wild yell from Jellicoe attracted his attention.

"The weir!" he exclaimed. "She's driving right down to it, by gum!"

He laid down his rod, and darted aft to seize the punt-pole. To his horror it was not there. There was no spare pole in the boat, and the danger was now only too evident. Right ahead was the line of big square posts, rearing high above the surface that marked the edge of the weir, and between them the water was rushing over in one long, solid cataract, with a roar like thunder, to the weir-pool below. Once over the fall and into the seething cauldron, no swimmer could have lived a minute, even if he escaped smashing on to the jagged posts and piles beneath.

"Great Scott!" cried Taffy. "She'll be over it!"

There was a single paddle in the punt, and, snatching it up, Taffy paddled with all his might, striving to drive the punt in towards the bank. It was hopeless. The current carried the craft along like a straw, faster, and faster yet, towards the fatal spot. Jellicoe, on the bank, was horror-struck, and utterly unable to help.

The edge of the weir was now not thirty yards away, and right ahead was a large jagged stake sticking up, with the water foaming round its crest. Taffy made a frantic effort to paddle clear of it, but too late.

The punt, though heavy, was ill-balanced, and as her side struck the stake the current lurched her violently, and, with a roll, she turned right over.

Taffy was thrown out and soured under, with the water roaring in his ears. He came up, gasping and choking, only a few yards away from the weir edge, and a moment or two later he was swept right up to it.

One of the square posts was in his road, and he grabbed

it, with frantic energy, just as he was about to be swept over. The current, racing along in one great volume, pressed him violently against the post and spouted past him, and clinging on with arms and legs, he hung there helplessly.

How long Taffy hung there he could not have told. Sick and dizzy with the roar of the weir, and not daring to shift his hold for fear of being torn from it and hurled over the edge, he gave himself up for lost. The chilly water numbed him to the bone. He felt his grip relaxing.

The faint echo of a voice reached him above the roar of the fall, and, opening his eyes feebly, he caught a glimpse of somebody on the bank—a man, with Jellicoe close behind.

It was the Woolly Lambe—of all people. One glance did the Form master take, and then he started running like a hare towards some sheds a hundred yards down the meadow.

Mr. Lambe reappeared with a long coil of wagon-rope, and swiftly threw off his coat. Never had the master of the Remove looked so fit or so capable, and his movements were quick as lightning. Even the half-unconscious boy, hanging to the weir-stake in despair, felt a faint thrill of hope again. Mr. Lambe was well above him—a considerable distance along the bank.

Then, knotting one end of the rope round the stem of a stout bush, the master, without a moment's hesitation, took the rest of the coil and sprang into the river with a leap that took him far out from the bank, and was swept straight down upon the roaring weir.

"Hold on, Wynne—only a moment! Brace up!"

Mr. Lambe's powerful voice only just reached Taffy through the roar of the weir. There was need of the warning, but the boy was too far gone to give much heed to it. He had done all he could; his strength was exhausted, and a deadly numbness made his grip relax slowly.

With the rope uncoiling fast behind him, Mr. Lambe was sweeping down towards the weir-post, driven by the current, striking out with all his might to get a little way out across the stream.

On the bank, Jellicoe was dancing in an agony of anxiety and horror, for it needed only a glance to see how deadly was Wynne's peril. Dereker and Birne came in sight, running as fast as they could towards the weir.

It looked as though Mr. Lambe had given himself up to the same fate as awaited Taffy. There seemed hardly a chance that he could ever reach the boy. But with tremendous overarm strokes he forced himself still farther outwards, and just in time he came in line with the post Taffy was holding.

Taffy's stiffened arms had unclasped from the great bulk of wood, and the current, taking him in its grip, was at the point of tearing him away and hurling him over the fall. The Woolly Lambe, being swept right on to the post from above at that moment, caught the boy with a grasp of iron and pulled him back to his hold in the very nick of time.

"Lock your arms round! Hang on!" roared Mr. Lambe in his ear.

Wynne's brain scarcely took the words in, nor was he more than half conscious, but the sound of the master's voice braced him up a little, and he managed to cling on. Mr. Lambe holding him. They both hung there for some time, pressed against the post by the flood, with the brown water swirling round and past them. The master recovered his breath, and turned his head towards the shore, where Dereker and Jellicoe stood alone, Birne having sprinted off to seek help. Dereker had waded into the eddy at the side, up to his middle, in his anxiety.

"Undo the rope from the bush and make your end of it fast to the bank!" shouted Mr. Lambe, with all the power of his lungs. "Stretch it as tight as you can!"

So deep was the roar of the water that the boys could not hear what he said. He tried to make them understand by signs, waving his free arm, while he clung on with the other and his legs.

Jellicoe was the first to see what was meant, and darted off up-river to the bush, Dereker wading out and dashing after him. They untied the rope and ran back with it towards the weir, the light of it sagging right across the stream.

"Stick to it tight!"

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#### 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 Coddington, determine to bring pressure to bear to rid the school of the new master's presence. The Woolly Lambe proves equal to the occasion, however, and the miscreants are punished accordingly. As a last resource to expose the unwanted Form master, Taffy Wynne, goaded on by his rival, Ferguson, dons a policeman's uniform, complete with helmet, truncheon, and Government boots, and sets forth to spoof the Woolly Lambe by "running him in." Enraged beyond measure, Mr. Lambe seizes the sham policeman in a vice-like grip and whirls him to and fro until his helmet flies from his head, revealing the victim's youthful appearance. Fearing the consequences, Taffy makes a bolt for it and seeks sanctuary in the tap-room where, with lightning like precision, he discards the uniform.

"Never mind the helmet," says Sanderson, "you brought the joke off rippingly, Wynne!"

(Now read on.)

exclaimed Derekker, taking a turn with the rope round his wrist. "If we lose it they're both done for!"

Had he not taken the precaution, the rope would almost certainly have slipped from his grasp when the strain of the current came across its whole length. The Woolly Lambe with difficulty made his own end of it fast to the post to which he was clinging.

The two boys ashore put their weight on the rope and hauled it taut, Derekker binding it round the tree that stood on the bank. Mr. Lambe watched them with anxious eyes, for if a bad or loose knot was made, or the rope clumsily fastened, he knew there would be little chance for him or Taffy. Few people know how to make a rope fast, though all think they do.

He need have had no fear of that score, however, for Derekker had spent many a yachting holiday on his father's cutter, and knew what to do. He bent the rope to the tree with a rolling hitch, and left it taut as a fiddle-string.

The rope was now stretched between Mr. Lambe and the bank, its length pressing against the row of posts about a foot above the water, almost on the very brink of the weir. The master tried his weight upon it, and then glanced at Taffy.

The boy's face was blue and pinched, and his eyes half shut. It was plain he could do little to help himself, for the chill of the water had taken all the strength out of him, and Mr. Lambe was beginning to feel its effects too.

"Buck up, Wynne!" shouted the master, close to his ear. "We'll soon be out of this! Can you hang on to me while I get ashore?"

"I'll try, sir," said Taffy. "I'll do it somehow."

The Woolly Lambe put one sinewy arm round the boy, and gathering all his strength, seized the rope with his right hand and let go the post. The force of the current made the rope quiver and give desperately, and they seemed fated to be swept over.

But with a swinging, kicking motion the master managed to cover the space between the posts, and reached the next one. Then realising the longer he stayed the more numb he would become, he went straight on to the second, reaching it successfully.

"He'll do it! He'll save Wynne!" cried Jellicoe.

"I'd have sworn it wasn't possible for anyone to keep hold!" muttered Derekker. "Ah, they're gone!"

The words came from him with a gasping cry, as Mr. Lambe and his burden were swung nearly straight out over the edge between the second and third posts. The strength of the flood there was tremendous, running in fits and starts. But it slackened an instant, and the Remove master, reaching the next stake with a great effort, hung there, panting. He was nearly worn out by the desperate struggle, but after thirty seconds' rest he pushed on again, and passing the two last posts by main force, he reached the safety of the eddy, and was helped out upon the bank by the willing hands of Derekker and Jellicoe.

"Thank Heaven, sir!" cried Derekker fervently. "You're a hero if ever there was one! We thought you were both done for."

The Woolly Lambe made no reply, but turned his attention to Taffy, who had revived somewhat now that he was on dry land and out of the strain of the current. The master rubbed him violently to restore circulation, helped by Derekker, and the blue colour quickly left Taffy's lips and cheeks. He had been tired out and numbed by cold, but had not swallowed any water or suffered semi-drowning, which made all the difference. He recovered rapidly.

Birne suddenly turned up, running at full speed, with a burly ploughman lumbering along behind him. He looked quite thunderstruck on seeing the party all safe.

"What—you've got him out, sir?" he exclaimed. "Thank—"

"Yes, all's well," said Mr. Lambe. "We shall not need any help now, my man," he added, glancing at the ploughman. "Thank you for coming, all the same."

The ploughman, after staring at the wet couple and scratching his head, went back to his work without any remark, and Taffy struggled to his feet.

"You saved my life, sir," Taffy said earnestly, his face flushing, "and risked yours to do it. I—I wasn't worth it. If you wouldn't mind shaking hands—"

"That's all right," said the Remove master, with a nod and a smile, taking Taffy's hand. "Nothing to make a fuss about. Don't want to lose any of my Form in the middle of the term, you know."

"I'll never forget what you've done for me, sir. You're a brick!" said Taffy fervently. "And if ever I—"

"Oh, never mind that!" said the master. "All I want you to do—you three—is to keep your own counsel. That

will be quite enough repayment," he added. "I don't want it chattered about the school, you understand."

"Of course, sir, if you'd rather," said Derekker.

"I happened to see your punt upst," said Mr. Lambe, wiping the wet from his eyeglass, with Derekker's handkerchief. He put his monocle in his eye and looked through it pensively at Taffy. "I was not hiding under an alder-bush this time, however," he added with a sleepy smile.

The three chums started and looked at each other guiltily.

"I should get back and change as quickly as possible, if I were you," said the Woolly Lambe cheerfully. "And, talking of changing, Wynne, a police-constable, you should notice, does not usually wear a hat that is several sizes too large for him."

He blinked thoughtfully through his eyeglass at Taffy, and, with a nod, turned and walked towards the school at a brisk pace, leaving the chums looking both astonished and rather foolish. They stared after him till he disappeared.

"I don't care if all Scotland Yard's after him!" cried Taffy. "I don't care if he's a forger or scragged somebody—though I'm hanged if I believe it! I'll never do anything to queer him—no; and I'll stand by him against the blessed lot of them if ever I get the chance!"

"Fergy an' that lot means to try an' get him into quod if they can," said Derekker.

"The sweeps! We'll make hay of 'em if they try it! We'll take a hand in that game!" snorted Taffy.

"Right-ho! Down with Fergy and all his gang!" said Birne. "Confound their politics! Down with their knavish japes! We back the Woolly Lambe against all Codrington! Where's Jelly?"

They looked round for the new boy, and, to their astonishment, found him by the deep water some way below the weir-pool, with a rod in his hand, playing a fish that was making the top joint bend like a whip, and he was hopping with excitement.

"I've got him! He's beginning to give in!" yelled Jellicoe, as the chums hurried down towards him. "Where's the gaff?"

Jellicoe wound in the prey, which was now pretty well played out; and, as the gaff was lost, Taffy tailed the fish and drew it out on the bank. It was a grand, deep-sided, beautifully-marked pike of fully nineteen pounds' weight.

"Well done, kid!" said Taffy. "A real beauty! We'll have it stuffed in memory of the occasion."

### A Night Alarm!

THE following afternoon the four campaigners settled down to a very decent "brew" in the upper box-room, and did full justice to the provender.

"Saw old Baggy-breeches hangin' round the place again half an hour ago," remarked Derekker, devouring doughnuts at the rate of two per minute.

"Who?" said Taffy, pausing.

"The chap in the baggy tweeds—only he's wearin' different clothes now—that fell on Ferguson and was climbin' up the ivy to Lambe's room not long ago. Don't you remember?"

"By Jove! The chap we nearly caught in the laurels?" exclaimed Birne. "He's Lambe's accomplice or something."

"Hope the Woolly Lambe isn't gettin' up to more mischief," said Derekker. "He'll get nabbed sooner or later. Ferguson an' his lot are hot on it already."

"Hang me if I'll stir a finger to get the Lambe into trouble, whatever he may do!" said Taffy warmly. "And whoever nabs him, if there's anything wrong, Ferguson's lot shan't!"

"You can't do less than stick up for him," said Birne.

"He saved my life, and I wish I'd the chance of savin' his," said Taffy. "He's a white man—I don't care what he's done! Wonder if we couldn't give him a hint somehow about Fergy?"

"Can't do that. I don't much think he wants one, either," said Derekker. "But keep an eye on Fergy's gang, in case they spot that chap who's hangin' about. Fergy don't miss many chances, though he generally makes a mess of things. There's prep bell!"

The rest of the evening passed without event, and nothing more was seen of the man whom Derekker had noticed, nor did the chums think that their rivals, the Ferguson gang, had noticed him. All seemed perfectly serene, and they turned in at lights-out time in a serene frame of mind. The Fergusonites were judged to have had enough to keep them quiet for a day or two.

Taffy lay for a while after he had turned in, chuckling gently over the events of the day. It had been a fairly

successful one, as things went. Finally he lapsed into slumber.

Taffy, whether for his sins or not, was the lightest sleeper there. He seemed to be conscious of the attack before it was made, even in his sleep.

Perhaps it was that peculiar sense which caused him to half open his eyes towards three in the morning and turn over.

He was only half awake, and half dozing. But there came from the corridor outside ever so faint a creak, and no sooner did that sound reach Taffy's ears than he was broad awake in a moment.

Taffy listened for a few moments, and then slipped quietly out of bed and made for the door.

"Can't be the Ferguson lot again, surely?" he thought. "They wouldn't want to be on the prowl after the day we've given 'em."

He opened the door gently and peered down the corridor. It seemed to him that he heard a faint rustle down at the far end; but nothing was to be seen.

Round the corner went Taffy, and peered down the next corridor. There was a faint light from the waning moon through the landing window, and the first thing that struck Taffy was that the door of the room next to the Head's library was open.

That door was always kept double-locked at night, and the window of the room was iron-shuttered. It was there that the Head's famous collection of antique gold coins—said to be of great value—was kept. And there certainly seemed to be a slight glimmer of light from the room.

"Jimini!" he muttered. "Is somebody monkeying with the coins?"

For a moment Taffy hesitated. Should he go on at once and tackle the matter himself?

But the next instant he was darting back to the dormitory. Three were better than one, and an idea had struck him that would take all three of them to carry out.

As he slipped back into the dormitory he thought he saw somebody else dart out of another door farther along; but he did not wait to investigate. He grabbed Dereker by the nose and awoke that worthy from his peaceful slumber.

"Waas marrer?" gurgled Dereker.

"Don't make a row! Nip out quick, and come with me! Somebody's after the Head's coins!"

Dereker was out of bed instantly, and Taffy woke Birne and warned him. Without a moment's loss of time the three of them gained the corridor without disturbing anybody. Taffy taking the lead.

"Are you sure, Taffy?" whispered Dereker.

"The door's open, anyway, and there was a light in the room. Look here," whispered Wynne, halting, "we've got to settle what to do. Supposin'—what if—"

"Supposin' it's Lambe's work, you mean?" put in Birne, for Taffy found it difficult to say anything against the man who had saved his life, strong though his suspicions were. "If that loafer in the baggy clothes is doing it?"

"More likely to be Lambe himself," said Taffy, under his breath. "I thought I heard that heavy breathing of his. We can't wink at a burglary, you chaps, whatever's happened. We'll put it to him straight, and make him chuck it!"

"We're going to have our hands full," muttered Dereker. "But what if it's Baggy-breeches who's grabbing the swag?"

"We'll jump on him all together and save the stuff at any price. Then we'll see Lambe together, an' tell him it's all up, and that he must chuck it. I want to save him from a smash if I can."

The others were doubtful, but there was no time to argue, and they followed Taffy's lead.

"Come on, then! This is no time to be talking about it," said Dereker impatiently.

"I fancy I saw Fergy comin' out of Dormitory No. 7," whispered Taffy, as they sped noiselessly along towards the landing. "Don't know if the others were with him."

"Confound the beast, showing his wretched nose into everything!" said Dereker. "All the more reason to hustle, if he's out for trouble, or Lambe won't get much mercy. By gum, the door is open, sure enough! Better bunk straight in."

They did so. They burst into the room all together, guessing they might have a desperate man to deal with, who would probably keep them busy before they got the better of him. But, to their surprise, the room was empty.

A candle-end was burning dimly, stuck on a chair, and the big cabinet which held the famous gold coins was broken open. All the drawers were pulled out, every one was rifled, and the collection of some hundreds of pieces had been thoroughly looted. A coin or two shimmered on the floor in the candle-light.

"He's gone!" cried Dereker. "He must have heard us, and hooked it while we were stopping to jabber like a lot of fools! We ought to have— Great Jehosaphat!"

Birne tripped headlong over a wire, and instantly a deafening peal of bells rang out. Dereker's exclamation of dismay was drowned in the crash of sound. Bells jangled all over the room, echoing all through the great sleeping house, and other bells were heard faintly tinkling in the distance down the corridors.

Birne had touched off a burglar-alarm, which the burglar himself had been clever enough to avoid. The three chums nearly jumped out of their skins, so startled were they at the sudden uproar; and Taffy, jumping back, touched off another alarm, starting the peal all over again.

"We shall have the giddy house on to us now. They'll think we're the burglars!" exclaimed Dereker, rushing out of the door. "Come on, you fellows, let's see if we can collar the beggar before he gets away! He can't have gone far."

Away they went down the next corridor, instinctively making for the window which opened on to the leads over the old gymnasium. It was the way by which they usually went out when they wanted to, and they thought it the likeliest way for a burglar to get in.

But hardly were they round the corner when a dark form was seen running towards them at full speed. It was a man in stocking feet, judging by the padded sound his footfalls made. He held a large bundle under one arm, and appeared to be making for the direction of the leads window as fast as he could go.

The boys started back into the shadow as soon as they saw him. But only for an instant. One glance at the flying figure—which had evidently not seen them—was enough.

"It's the burglar! Nab him!" hissed Birne. And the next moment the man reached them, and they hurled themselves upon him with a yell.

The shock of the collision was severe. Taffy, darting out, collared the man low, and the two of them toppled over heavily, the fugitive striking the ground with a violent bump. Dereker and Birne threw themselves upon him and lent willing aid.

"Murder!" howled the captive, as the two lusty Removites threw their weight on him. "Ough! Oosh! Leggo! Help!"

"Hold him down! Sit on his head!" cried Taffy; and there was a violent struggle, the prisoner fighting frantically.

They could hardly see what they were doing in the dark—Dereker, in fact, saw nothing but stars, somebody's fist smote him violently in the eye.

But the captive lay face downwards, and was soon overpowered, though he struggled with hysterical strength. Birne sat on his legs, and Taffy on his head.

"It's all right—it's not the Lambe!" hissed Taffy. "Get hold of that bundle he was carrying; that's the swag. Here's somebody coming. By Jove, it's the Head!"

"Get off!" gasped the prisoner faintly. "You're killing me!"

It was the Head, indeed, who came in sight, half dressed, and hurrying down the corridor with a perturbed face and a candle in his hand.

"What is it? Who are you?" he cried.

"It's all right, sir!" called Taffy enthusiastically; for he was vastly relieved to find the culprit, whoever he might be, was not Mr. Lambe, but a smaller and slighter man.

"We've got the burglar!"

"And the swag, sir—your coins!" chimed in Dereker.

"Burglar?" exclaimed the Head, holding the candle down. "What are you doing, boys? Are you mad?"

"Get off! Help!" spluttered the captive.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Birne in dismay. "It's Mr. Perkes!"

"I don't care who it is—he's got the coins, and they're in that bundle!" cried Taffy excitedly.

"Get up! Release him at once!" exclaimed the Head. "What does all this mean? Explain!"

Mr. Perkes, for it was the mathematics master sure enough, struggled to his feet with a purple face and glaring eyes, his whiskers sticking out like a halo. The boys looked at him in blank consternation, for it began to dawn on them that they had made a mistake.

"Wynne, Dereker, and Birne!" he gasped furiously. "I might have guessed it! I call you to witness, sir, I have been disgracefully assaulted by these young ruffians! I demand that they be flogged and ex—"

"We thought you were the burglar, sir. We've very sorry!" exclaimed Birne. "It was—"

"Thought Mr. Perkes was a burglar!" broke in the Head. "Are you crazy, Birne?"

"What was he running for the window for, with that bundle under his arm?" said Taffy suspiciously; for he was still not satisfied.

