

Special ❖ Grand ❖ Yuletide ❖ Number!



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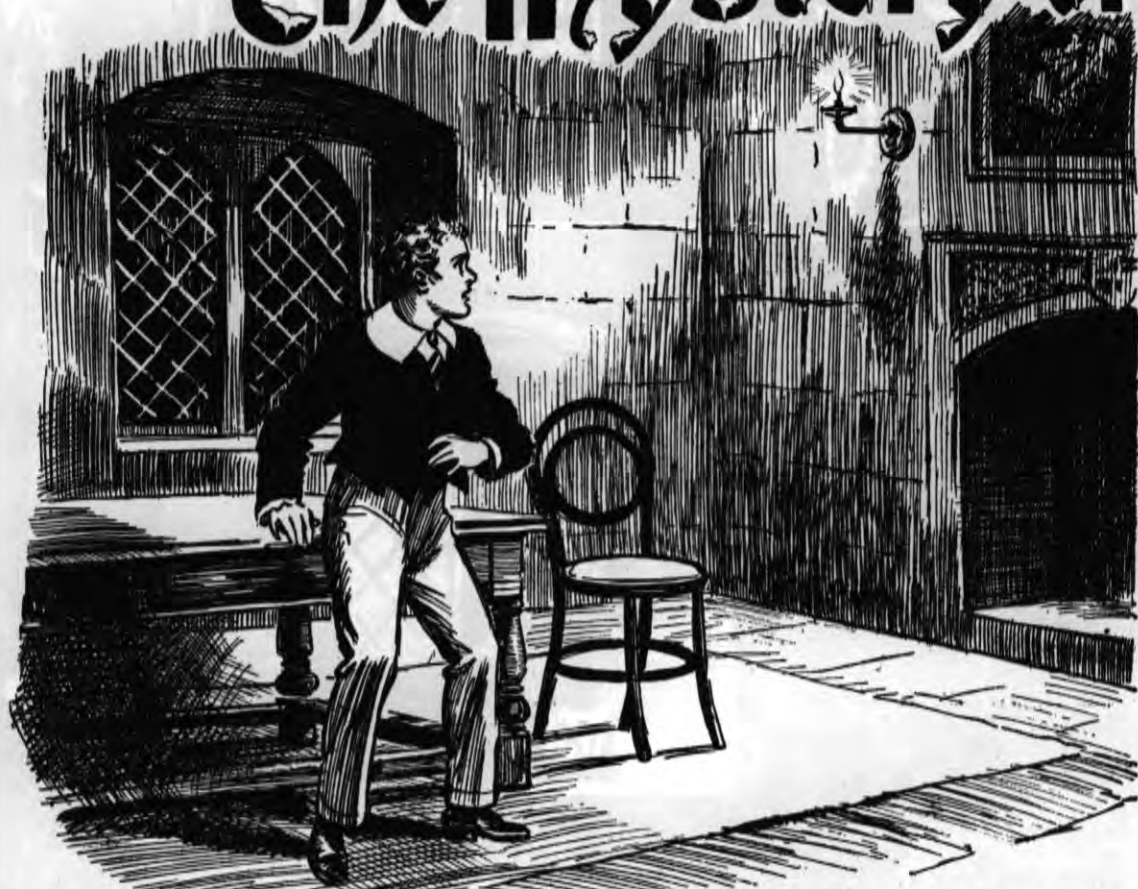
EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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The Mystery of



Tom Merry shuddered, and every hair on his head seemed to stand on end. From the silence came that fearful sound—as if the scene of the murder was being re-enacted. Suddenly the light flickered and paled, and even as Tom looked at it the flame began to expire!

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy Gets the First Snowball!

TOM MERRY came into his study at St. Jim's, his face glowing with exercise and excitement. There were patches of white upon his overcoat, which began to steam in the warm atmosphere of the study. Outside, in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's, the December night was setting in, dark and wintry, but in that study in the Shell passage of the School House the scene was very bright and cozy. A big fire burned in the grate, and the dancing flame glimmered in reflections upon the window-panes and the glass doors of the bookcase and upon the crockery on the table.

Manners and Lowther were in the study—the former laboriously extracting jam from the extreme recesses of an exhausted jar and lading it into a clean soapdish; the latter making toast, with a face almost as red as the fire itself.

Monty Lowther turned his ruddy face round from the fire as Tom Merry tramped in, breathing like steam.

Tom Merry jerked off his overcoat and tossed it into the armchair. Fragments of snow were scattered over the

tea-table as he did so, and Manners grunted.

"Careful, you ass!"

"It's come!" announced Tom Merry.

"Not Christmas?" asked Lowther humorously. "I wasn't expecting it for two weeks yet."

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, ass! The snow!"

"Snow!"

Monty Lowther dropped toast and toasting fork and ran to the window. He jerked up the lower sash and looked out into the darkening quadrangle. A

Whoever sleeps in Nobody's Study mysteriously disappears . . . spirited away by a spectre monk . . . leaving his clothes behind to tell of his fate! Such is the legend of the haunted old punishment-room of St. Jim's . . . And great is the shock to the school when the legend is borne out—a junior vanishing into thin air, with his clothes left lying on the floor!

strong gust of wind brought tiny snowflakes whirling into his face.

"My hat! You're right! It's snowing!"

"Shut that window!" roared Manners.

"The tablecloth's going!"

The gust of wintry wind swept into the study and it lifted the corner of the cloth on the tea-table and blew it out like a sail.

There was a clatter as teacups and saucers rolled over one another.

Manners made a wild clutch to save them and knocked the milkjug into the soapdish he had been so carefully filling with jam, then he yelled.

"You ass. Shut that blessed window!"

Slam!

Lowther jammed down the sash and turned round gleefully.

"Snow!" he said. "Snow, my sons! And it looks as if it's going to last. We shall be able to snowball the New House kids—eh?"

"We shan't get any jam for tea!" growled Manners. "Look at that!"

The jamdish was swamped with milk. Monty Lowther looked at it, but he seemed quite undismayed.

"Never mind the jam, old son!" he said cheerfully.

"But I do mind!" roared Manners. "I've been scraping it out of that giddy

—Magnificent Cover-to-Cover Yuletide Yarn of Tom Merry & Co.

Nobody's Study!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

jar for ten minutes or more. You ass!"

"It's snowing!"
"Oh, blow the snow!" snorted Manners. "You finished that toast yet? Kangaroo and Glyn are coming to tea, and they'll be here any minute—and perhaps Gussy."

"Nearly finished," said Lowther, resuming with the toasting fork. "How ripping to get a heavy snowfall now! Hark at the wind!"

"It's going to be a stormy night," said Tom Merry. "It's not Christmas yet, but it's real Christmas weather, by Jove! There's enough snow on the giddy window-sill for snowballs already."

Monty Lowther jumped up, his eyes dancing.

"Good egg!" he exclaimed. "I can hear Gussy in the passage. Let him have the first snowball of the season!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther rushed to the window; he pushed it up, and there was a rush of wind, and the tablecloth filled out again, and there was a fresh yell from the worried Manners. He held down the cloth with both hands. Monty Lowther scraped the snow from the window-sill in his hands and kneaded it into a ball.

Footsteps were coming along, and the Terrible Three knew well the light and elegant tread of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form.

"Ready!" murmured Lowther.

Tom Merry chuckled.

The most elegant form appeared in the open doorway of the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eye-glass into his eye and surveyed the Shell study with his lofty gaze.

"Bai Jove! It's vewy windy here—" he began.

Whiz!

Biff!

"Yawwooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The snowball flew with deadly aim and smashed into fragments upon the aristocratic nose of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove! Gwoogh!"

The chums of the Shell yelled. Arthur Augustus staggered back into the passage, gasping, his eye-glass fluttering at the end of its cord.

Monty Lowther almost doubled up in excess of mirth at the surprise portrayed in the face of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You feahful wottah!"

Arthur Augustus came into the study with a rush. Before Lowther could rise to the occasion the arms of the Fourth Former were thrown around him and he was whirled round in the grasp of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You awful wottah—"

"Groogh!" gasped Lowther. "Leggo! Oh!"

"I'm goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'—"

Monty Lowther struggled frantically to release himself.

Tom Merry and Manners were laughing too much to be able to come to his assistance. Lowther made a mighty effort and harled D'Arcy backwards, but the Fourth Former clung to him and dragged him over.

Crash!

Both of them crashed into the tea-table. There was a cry of alarm from Manners and he sprang forward—too late!

The table went flying, and there was a terrific crash as crockery and provisions went to the floor together, and in the midst of them rolled Monty Lowther and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 2.

Jammy!

"Bai Jove!"

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

The shock of the fall had separated the two combatants. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in the jam, and gasped for breath. Monty Lowther rose to his knees in a dazed way, with one knee in the butter and the other in the marmalade.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Ow! You fear-ful ass—"

"You awful wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I can see where the cackle comes in!" roared Manners. "Look at the crockery! What are we going to have for tea?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get out of that jam, Gussy! What are you sitting in it for?"

"What?" shrieked D'Arcy.

He leaped wildly to his feet. He scraped his hand along his elegant trousers to ascertain the amount of damage done, and brought it away covered in jam. He twisted round as if he were trying to tie himself into a knot to survey the damage.

"Ha, ha, ha!" panted Lowther.

"Was he sitting in the jam? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes! And you're kneeling in the butter and the marmalade!" growled Manners.

"What?" yelled Lowther.

He leaped up as if he had been electrified. Jam and marmalade and butter were clinging to the two juniors in chunks; and certainly they were not likely to be of any more use for the tea-table.

Tom Merry threw himself into the armchair, gasping with merriment. It was worth the loss of the jam and the marmalade and the butter to see the expressions upon D'Arcy's and Lowther's faces as they looked at one another.

"Oh! You uttah chump!"

"You dangerous lunatic!"

"If you hadn't thrown that snowball at me—"

"If you hadn't rushed in like a mad bull—"

"I wufese to be compared to a mad bull!"

"Look at my bags!"

"Look at my trucks!"

"My word!" said a voice at the door, as Kangaroo of the Shell looked in, with Bernard Glyn looking over his shoulder. "Is that a dust? Go it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Kangaroo—"

"Go it!" said the Cornstalk junior encouragingly.

"We've come to tea; but there doesn't seem to be much tea. We'll have the duet instead!"

"I wegard you as an ass!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet, with tears of mirth in his eyes.

"Gussy will be the death of me some day!" he said. "He came along just in time to get the first snowball of the season. Then he wrecked the study! We were lucky to escape with our lives!"

"We ally. Tom Merry—"



"There's some more grub in the cupboard," said Tom Merry. "But I don't know what we shall do for crocks. Perhaps you chaps can bring some along. I think Gussy is going to be quiet now!"

"You uttah ass! I'm goin' to change my bags!"

"Good! You can keep the jam!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gave Tom Merry a look of speechless indignation and walked out of the study, Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn making plenty of room for him to pass—he was very jammy and very sticky!

Tom Merry and Manners set the table to rights again, and the two guests cheerfully brought along crockery from their own study.

Monty Lowther retired to clean himself. He had more cleaning to do than D'Arcy, but he was back in the study long before the swell of the Fourth came down from the dormitory.

Tom Merry & Co. sat down cheerfully to tea in the study. Outside, the wind howled through the bare branches of the elms and round the ancient chimneys of the old School House. Snow in thick flakes dashed against the window-panes and piled on the sill.

"What jolly good luck to get a snow-fall!" said Kangaroo. "We don't get this in my country at Christmas-time!"

"It's the first fall of snow in the year," said Manners. "According to the legend of St. Jim's, that's the time when the ghost begins to walk."

Kangaroo chuckled.

"Good! We'll have a look in the haunted room as we go up to bed to-night, and see if the ghost has turned up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage. Tom Merry had left the study door open, in order to see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he came down. He did not want the swell of St. Jim's to miss his tea through Monty Lowther's little joke.

Arthur Augustus passed the open doorway, with his aristocratic nose held high in the air. There was a general shout from the juniors round the tea-table in Tom Merry's study.

"Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus paused.

"Did you address me, deah boys?" he asked loftily.

"Yes. Aren't you coming to tea?" asked Manners. "We've laid in sardines specially for you, because you're so fond of whitebait!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Come in, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to bweak bwecad with Lowthah unless he apologises for his wotten conduct!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, we can arrange that," said Monty Lowther.

"If you apologise—"

"Not at all! But you can eat the bread whole, without breaking it," suggested Lowther.

The juniors shrieked.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye and gave Monty Lowther a glare which ought to have shrivelled up that humorous youth upon the spot. But it did not have that effect; Monty Lowther only smiled blandly.

"Lowthah, I wegard you as a silly ass!"

"It's all right, Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "As head of this study, I have authority to apologise for any occupant

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of the said study. I therefore apologise in the name of Montague Lowther, and express the regret of the said Lowther that he acted in the manner of a giddy goat; and, the said apology being made by the said head of the study, the said offence is now cancelled, and may be considered as not having happened, and therefore—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Therefore, you may come into the said study, and partake of the said tea and the said sardines," said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, I appeal to all of you whether the said apology is not satisfactory to the said D'Arcy?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Vewy well, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus graciously. "I accept the apology—"

"The said apology," said Tom Merry. "Yaas. And I'll come in to tea."

And Arthur Augustus sat down at the tea-table with his sweetest smile.

CHAPTER 3.

A Sudden Alarm!

TOM MERRY & CO. were very cheerful. The wild weather outside seemed to make the Shell study more cosy and bright within.

Arthur Augustus was in high good-humour, and he told the juniors that he would sing a tenor solo after tea. The offer was not received with enthusiasm.

Jack Blake and Herries of the Fourth came along the passage and looked into the study. Digby followed them. The three juniors shared Study No. 6 with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and they had missed the elegant junior.

"Oh, here you are!" said Blake cheerfully. "How lucky you chaps are, having tea—and I see you've got sardines!"

"Quite a stroke of luck!" remarked Digby. "We should have had sardines if we'd had tea—only we happen to be stony."

"Are we going to raid the tea, or to be invited in?" said Herries.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Walk in!" he said. "This study is in great funds just now, and we're simply rolling in—"

"Sardines!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!" said Blake, pulling out a box, and taking a seat upon it—the available chairs all being in use. "We've been walking up and down the House seeking what we could devour. We had a pressing invitation from Skimpole."

Herries stared.

"Skimpole?" he said. "Skimpole didn't have anything to eat."

"I didn't say he had, ass! But he invited us into his study to hear him read out a chapter of Professor Balmycrumpet on Determinism—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He said it was food for the mind, which is superior to food for the body," Blake remarked. "But we were looking for food for the body. Pass the sardines."

"And the ham," said Digby.

"And the cake," said Herries.

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry hospitably.

"Yaas, wathah! And buck up, deah boys!"

"What's the hurry?" demanded Blake.

"I'm goin' to sing a tenah solo aftah tea."

"My hat! Put the brake on, you fellows!"

"Back-pedal!" murmured Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Arthur Augustus turned his eye-

glass indignantly upon his chums. It was too bad, when the Shell fellows were willing to endure the tenor solo with patience, that his own chums of the Fourth should behave in this way.

"Weally, you fellows—" began D'Arcy.

"I shall keep this tea on till supper-time," said Blake. "I hope there's enough grub to last."

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake. And if you are not finished, I shall sing a tenah solo without waitin' for you, as soon as Tom Mewwy is finished."

"Go slow, Tommy," implored Blake. "Hurry is a bad thing at any time, especially at this time. Slow and steady does it."

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry laughed. Arthur Augustus did not laugh. He rose from the table, and began to make some little preparation for the tenor solo. He cleared his throat by a succession of queer little coughs, which made Jack Blake turn round towards him with a look of alarm.

"Have you got a cold, Gussy?" he asked, with concern.

"Certainly not!"

"You mustn't sing if you've got a cold, you know."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You'll damage your voice, to say nothing of our ears—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway shut up, Blake!"

And Arthur Augustus gave another little cough.

"I am goin' to sing fwom memowry," he said. "I did not think of bwingin' any music. I suppose it won't be possible to have any accompaniment?"

"I could accompany you, if you like," said Lowther politely.

"With what instrument, deah boy?"

"The poker—on the fender."

"You uttah ass!"

"Suppose you accompany him to the haunted room, and lock him up there," suggested Blake. "It's time for the ghost of St. Jim's to begin prowling round now, you know, and Gussy might be able to lay the ghost. No reasonable ghost would think of facing Gussy's tenor solos."

"I wufuse to listen to your wotten wemahs, Blake. If we were not in another fellow's quarters, I would give you a fearful thwashin'. You fellows tell me what you would like me to give you."

"You can give me some more sardines," said Blake.

"You uttah ass!"

"Well, I'd rather have sardines than solos any day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle, deah boys. Now, pway shut up, while I get my note. I'm going to sing an awia fwom 'Wigo-letto.'"

Arthur Augustus solemnly tapped a tuning-fork upon the mantelpiece, and listened, with his head a little upon one side. He tapped again, and then emitted two or three most peculiar little yelps from his throat.

Blake jumped up in alarm.

"Water—quick!" he gasped. "He's choking!"

"You ass!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I'm not chokin'!"

"What are you doing, then?"

"I'm gettin' my note."

"Oh," said Blake, sitting down again, "my mistake! I should recommend you to change that note, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy did not deign to reply. He yelped again once or twice, and then was apparently satisfied with the note, for he started quite suddenly upon the tenor solo.



"Bai Jove! It's vewy windy in here——" began Arthur Augustus. Whiz! Biff! The snowball flew from Monty Lowther's hand with deadly aim, and smashed into fragments upon the aristocratic nose of D'Arcy. "Yawooh!" he roared. "Ow! Gwoogh!"

"La donna e mobile," sang D'Arcy.

"La what is what?" demanded Blake, in surprise.

"La donna e mobile.
Qual pium al vento,
Mut d'accento——"

There was a sudden interruption. The door of the study was flung violently open, and Skimpole of the Shell rushed in.

"Help!" he gasped. "Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

Crash!

Skimpole had rushed right into the tenor soloist, and he threw his arms round Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to save himself.

D'Arcy staggered, and fell under Skimpole's weight, and rolled over on the carpet, and Skimpole rolled over on D'Arcy.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole.

"Sit tight!" gasped Blake. "You're stopping the tenor solo! Don't move!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwoogh! Dwig the idiot off! Ow!"

"My dear fellows," gasped Skimpole, "I've had such a fearful fright! I say—— Yaroo!"

Skimpole had not meant to say that. He leaped into the air with a fiendish yell.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Ow! I'm bitten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up, with tousled hair and flushed face, gasping for breath.

"You frightful ass!"

"Ow!"

"Bai Jove! I'm almost suffocated! I'll give you the most feahful thwashin' you have evah had, you awful ass!"

"Ow! I'm bitten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy scrambled to his feet. The tenor solo was forgotten now. He pushed back his cuffs, and made a wild rush at Skimpole. Skimpole dodged round the crowded table, falling over innumerable feet, and Arthur Augustus pursued him furiously. More feet got somehow into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's way, and he stumbled and rolled over.

"Blake, you ass!" he roared. "Keep your silly feet to yourself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep him off!" gasped Skimpole.

"Oh dear! I'm quite out of breath! Is there anything the matter with D'Arcy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only a little potty!" said Monty Lowther, as he helped up the gasping swell of St. Jim's. "He's often taken like that; you mustn't mind!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Sit down, Gussy!" said Blake. "Don't mind Skimmy. Skimmy's potty, you know—same as you are! There ought to be a fellow feeling between you!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Oh, you fellows" gasped Skimpole,

"I—I've had a fearful fright! I—I say, the—the ghost——"

"The what?"

"The ghost!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Have you seen the ghost, Skimmy?"

"Yes!" gasped Skimpole. "I—I've seen it! I—I never believed in ghosts before, you know; their existence cannot be demonstrated by scientific rules!"

"Cheese it!" roared Blake. "Don't give us Professor Balmeyrumpet at second-hand! Talk English!"

"My dear Blake, I am endeavouring to explain in the most concise language suited to your understanding," said Skimpole, who from the long study of scientific books, had a language that was all his own. "Pray do not interrupt me, and I will explain the amazing occurrences!"

"Nothing under four syllables!" said Monty Lowther, holding up his finger.

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CHAPTER 4.

What Did Skimpole See?

SKIMPOLE sat up. He was confused by the sudden shock, and his spectacles had slid down his nose, and he blinked over them in a bewildered way at the juniors.

In his confusion of mind, he did not notice that he was sitting on D'Arcy's head. But D'Arcy did, and he gurgled and gasped sulphurously.

"Gro-o-oh! Wow! Oh! Draggim off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Lowther, this is a serious matter! I have seen the ghost! I've always regarded the ghost of St. Jim's as the outcome of a fevered imagination."

"And you've seen the giddy phantom, Skimpy?" grinned Tom Merry.

"Yes," Skimpole glanced nervously at the open door. "It—it was terrible! I shall never laugh at ghost stories again! I—I am very much alarmed!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, restraining his wrath as he saw that the genius of the Shell was really in a state of alarm. "You are a fearful ass, Skimpy!"

"What have you seen?" demanded Blake.

"I was passing the door of the empty study," gasped Skimpole—"the haunted room, you know. I could not help thinking of the ghost as I passed it, as you know that the old story says the ghost begins to walk at St. Jim's when the first snow falls. And—and as I passed the door I heard a sound in the room."

"Might have been somebody in there," suggested Digby.

"I thought of that, my dear Digby. I approached the door, and as I did so, I heard a fearful groan from within."

"My hat!"

"Young Wally playing a jape on you, perhaps," said Manners.

"I opened the door—" gasped Skimpole.

Monty Lowther held up his hand.

"Gentlemen, this is where you thrill. Get your thrills ready!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pray do not interrupt me, Lowther. I opened the door—"

"Groogh!" ejaculated Lowther.

"I opened the door—"

"How many times did you open the door?" demanded Blake.

"Only once, my dear Blake."

"You've said that you opened it three times."

"My dear Blake, I opened the door—"

"Four times," said Blake, counting on his fingers.

"I opened the door and gazed within. It was quite dark, only a little light from the window. Suddenly there was a groan, so near that I jumped. Then I—I—" Skimpole gasped at the fearful recollection. "I—I—"

"Yes," said Blake. "You—you—"

"I—I saw it!"

"Bai Jove!"

"A dark form that rose before me!"

gasped Skimpole. "I jumped out of the doorway into the passage. I had the presence of mind to close the door after me, and I turned the key in the lock. You know the key is always kept in the outside of the lock, as the room is used as a punishment-room. I turned the key, and—and—"

"You locked the door?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yes, yes!"

"And bolted?"

"Yes, I bolted," said Skimpole. "It was awful!"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "If Skimpy really locked the door on the outside, the chap who was playing the ghost must be still locked in the room. It will give him a fright to be locked up in the haunted room."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Serve him right for playing the ghost!" said Blake. "But somebody had better go and let him out. Go and unlock the door, Skimpy!"

Skimpole shuddered.

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"I—I couldn't, Blake. I would not approach that room again for—for anything—not for a complete edition of the works of Professor Balmcrumpet—"

"Well, we'd better go and do it, then," said Blake. "I shouldn't wonder if it was Levison or Mellish playing a trick, or a Third Form fag. Anyway, the silly ass will have to be let out." "We'll all go," said Tom Merry. "We'll investigate the haunted room. Come on, Skimpy; you will be safe with us, you know."

"I—I—" The juniors crowded out of the study. As Blake remarked, there were enough of them to deal with any ordinary ghost. Skimpole set his spectacles straight upon his nose and blinked after them, and, after some hesitation, followed.

CHAPTER 5.

Nobody's Study!

DARK and silent appeared the haunted room as the juniors approached it. The room was in an isolated position, in a recess of the rambling old School House. At the end of the Fourth Form passage, which was one of the oldest parts of St. Jim's, was a deep recess in the old stone walls, dimly lighted in the day-time by a high and narrow window. A stranger in the School House would have supposed that it was a passage leading to somewhere; but, as a matter of fact, it led only to a small room which was never used, excepting upon the rare occasions when a punishment-room was required.

In the old days of St. Jim's, when schoolboy life was harder and punishments more drastic, the punishment-room had been much in use—at least, so tradition averred. But for many years the room had been used as a study; though its isolated and inconvenient position made it unpopular among the fellows. Nobody wanted to "dig" at the end of a blind passage in a room with walls of solid stone, and a window that overlooked a space between high walls. Nobody wanted the study, and fellows who were assigned to it generally found an opportunity of changing out, so that the study was continually deserted. It went by the nickname of Nobody's Study, as it was generally occupied by nobody.

Sometimes, a new fellow, tempted by the prospects of having a study all to himself, took up his quarters in Nobody's Study, but he would soon tire of it.

The reputation of the room as a haunted room did not trouble the fellows much, as nobody had ever seen any ghost there, or heard one. But it was cold, badly lighted, and secluded.

Tom Merry & Co. halted before the door of the deserted study. The door was of thick and solid oak, and the lock was a large and ponderous one. The key, of a very large size, was in the outside of the lock.

The blind passage was very gloomy, as there was no light save what came from the Fourth Form passage, out of which it branched.

The silence and gloom of their surroundings had some effect upon the merry spirits of the School House juniors.

Blake shivered.

"Seems an uncanny spot, doesn't it?" he remarked. "Blessed if I should care to play ghost in there!"

"I'm sure it was not a pretence, Blake," wavered Skimpole.

"Rats! What was it, then?"

"It must have been the g-ghost of the monk!"

"Ghost of a monkey!" grunted Blake.

"Don't be an ass!"

"Well, open the door, somebody," said Kangaroo.

Somehow, nobody seemed to be in a hurry to open the door. If Skimpole had really seen anybody in the room, that person was evidently still there, as he could not have escaped by means of the keyhole. But there was not the slightest sound from the interior of the haunted room. If a japer had been locked in in such uncongenial quarters, he might have been expected to hammer on the door and yell to be let out. But there was no sound.

"Knock on the door first!" muttered Herries.

"Good egg!"

Tom Merry raised his hand and knocked sharply with his knuckles upon the oak.

The knock echoed with a hollow sound in the deserted room.

But there came no other sound from within after the echo had died away.

The juniors looked at one another uneasily.

"It's all rot!" murmured Blake.

"There's nobody there!"

"Wathah not!"

"Skimpy was dreaming."

"My dear fellows," gasped Skimpole, from the rear, "I was not dreaming. I assure you that I saw a dark figure—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

The snow outside drifted against the passage window in a white, thick cloud. The window shook under the fierce wind.

"Groogh!" said Manners. "It's just the night for a g-ghost! It's all rot—let's get back to the study!"

"Yaas, wathah! It's all wot!" said D'Arcy uneasily.

"It's a jolly queer legend about this room, you know," said Blake, with a shiver. "The old story is that anybody who sleeps in here mysteriously disappears, leaving his clothes behind, same as the old monk did who used to hang out here. They found his robe and cowl one morning on the floor, and he had vanished, and was never seen again. He was supposed to have been murdered."

"Oh, keep that till we get back to the light!" growled Manners.

"Yes, come on!"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry resolutely. "I'm going in! The fellows would chip us to death if they thought we were afraid to go in."

"Well, unlock the door and let's get it over!" said Kangaroo.

Tom Merry took hold of the key. He hesitated a moment longer, his ears strained to hear any sound from the interior of the mysterious room. But there was no sound, and he turned the key back. The key grated in the lock with a dull, echoing sound, and Tom Merry threw the door open.

Thud!

The heavy door thudded back from his push, and the mysterious room lay open to their gaze. The juniors did not enter, and Tom Merry, in spite of his courage, backed away a pace or two.

Standing close together, the juniors gazed silently into the room.

There was a pale glimmer in the darkness of the interior. It came from the window, where the snowflakes whirled by on the wintry wind. But the window, from the long disuse of the study, was covered with dust and cobwebs, and only a few faint and fugitive beams of starlight stole in.

(Continued on page 8.)

HAUNTED!



A Thrilling Christmas Adventure . . . By TOM MERRY.

Sinister Sounds!

IT was Figgy & Co. of the New House who were the cause of our carolling outside the haunted house of Rylcombe. They had the nerve to suggest that we were scared of the place—and that, of course, settled it! We secured a pass-out from the Head easily enough. With his sanction, we had already raised quite a respectable sum for the Wayland Cottage Hospital by singing carols at some of the big houses in the neighbourhood.

After a hurried tea and an early prep, we set out.

There were seven of us in the party—Lowther, Manners, and I of the Shell, and Blake & Co. of the Fourth. We were all in great spirits. It was a cold and frosty evening. Breaking-up was only two days ahead, and there was a promise of snow for Christmas. The world seemed a very jolly old place indeed.

But I must admit that it didn't seem quite so jolly when we marched up the drive of Pine Lodge and stood outside the gloomy old house at the end. Pine Lodge was said to be haunted, and had been empty for years until a week or so before.

Nobody knew much about the new tenant. He was supposed to be a wealthy Scotsman, and when we found the house in complete darkness, Monty Lowther humorously remarked that that was quite easy to believe, judging by the economical way he used the lights!

Still, we weren't going to be put off by appearances, and at a signal from me, Herries gave us our note on his cornet, and we started a lusty rendering of "Good King Wenceslas."

Nothing happened till we reached the end of the cheery old carol. Then we saw a light flickering in the hall and heard the sound of bolts being withdrawn. Soon afterwards the door opened, and we found ourselves gazing at the weirdest old johnny ever seen outside a nightmare! He had a hawklike nose, shaggy eyebrows, and grizzly whiskers, and he wore a long dressing-gown and a black skull-cap.

"Carol-singers!" he said, with a throaty chuckle. "Come in, boys, and partake of my hospitality."

And then he uttered an unearthly kind of cackle. We looked at each other rather dubiously. There was something sinister in the invitation. But for Gussy, it's quite possible we shouldn't have gone in; but Gus, of

course, had to act the perfect little gentleman.

"Come on, deah boys!" he said. "The gentleman has kindly invited us into his house. Thanks awfully, my deah sir, I'm sure!"

And Gussy led the way—and we could hardly do anything else but follow.

When we were all in, the weird old johnny bolted the door again—a move we didn't quite fancy, by the way—then led the way through the hall by candlelight.

As we followed him, we heard an awful moan echoing through the house. We all stopped and listened. But our cheery old host didn't stop. He just toddled on with his candle and cackled into his beard.

"Look here, I don't quite like this!" Blake whispered.

"Weally, Blake, you must wemembah that we are guests," whispered Arthur Augustus. "It's vathah stwange, I admit—"

Before Gussy could finish he got the shock of his lifetime. For at that moment the suit of armour standing beside him distinctly moved. Gus jumped—so did the rest of us. I can tell you! We moved away from that heirloom pretty quickly and hurried after the weird old johnny at top speed!

When we reached the dismal dining-hall to which our host led us, things went from bad to worse. Loud knockings sounded from all directions, and once we distinctly heard the clanking of chains, while several times we were startled by shrieks from distant parts of the house. In the end, Jack Blake's patience as a guest gave way, and he tackled the old gentleman in the skull-cap about it.

"Look here, sir, what's the meaning of all these noises?" he demanded.

The old johnny's only reply was to burst into what the novelists would call a "peal of demoniacal laughter." And Jack Blake gave it up.

The Grinning Skeleton!

WE were all in a jolly uncomfortable frame of mind when we sat down to the hot coffee and cakes the old boy eventually set in front of us—and before we had time to get through them we were more uncomfortable still.

For a genuine, dyed-in-the-wool

ghost arrived on the scene! It appeared in the shadows at the end of the room and started gliding towards us—a weird, white, shapeless thing that we could see right through!

Well, I ask you! None of our crowd are exactly chicken-hearted, but we weren't standing for any more! We got up and made a rush for the hall. Even Gussy didn't stop to apologise for our hurried departure!

And then the spell was broken! For, before we reached the front door, we heard a yell of laughter behind us which had a decidedly familiar ring about it, and then a chortling cry in a voice we all recognised:

"Ever been had? New House wins!"

"Figgins!" we gasped.

And Figgins it was! He and Fatty Wynn came rolling out of the "haunted" room, grinning all over their chivvies, and behind them was our "host," who, minus his whiskers and hawklike nose, was now recognisable as Kerr, the Scots genius of the New House.

"Oh, my hat!" I gasped. "Then it's a House rag! We've been japed!"

"Japed is right!" chortled Kerr. "Jevver see chaps so scared in your lives, you men? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins and Fatty Wynn.

"But how the thump—"

"Oh, it was all quite easy!" chuckled Kerr. "It's an uncle of mine from Scotland who has taken this house. I asked him if I could have the run of the house for an evening—with this result! The funny thing about it is that it's the mouldy old School House that made it all possible, for it was Glyn that helped us fix up the stunts for you—the moving suit of armour, and the 'ghost,' and all that!"

"The 'ghost,'" laughed Figgins, "was only a light from a film-projector really! All the work of a School House chap! Of course, we bound him to secrecy. Imagine his face when he hears he was helping in a jape against his own House! Ha, ha, ha!"

Then Figgins' roar of laughter suddenly died away. Simultaneously, Wynn and Kerr stopped chortling, too.

Coming towards us was a skeleton—walking with slow and regular step, and grinning hideously as it did so! The New House chaps evidently knew that this was not in the programme, for the sight of it made them gasp with horror.

"Ow! It's a ghost—a real ghost!" howled Fatty Wynn. "Run for it!"

And he ran. So did Figgins and Kerr!

But this time it was our turn to laugh. Just as it happened, you see, we'd already seen Glyn constructing a mechanical skeleton for the Christmas party at Glyn House, and we recognised it at once.

"Jevver see chaps so scared, in all your lives?" I yelled.

"All serene, Figgy!" chuckled Bernard Glyn, emerging from below the stairs. "It's only me! You didn't invite me, but I turned up—just in case it was a jape against the School House! School House wins the last rag of the year now, I fancy!"

And so said all of us!

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The juniors stood still and listened. There was no sound. "Nobody's there!" growled Lowther. Tom Merry resolutely struck a match, and, holding it aloft, strode into the room. The rest of the juniors followed him closely.

Tom Merry turned on the gas and lighted it. The glimmer illuminated every corner of the room and shone upon the old stone walls.

The room was empty.

CHAPTER 6.

The Spectre Monk!

TOM MERRY looked about him with quick glances. In spite of himself, the solitude and silence of the room and its weird associations had had an effect on his nerves.

"There's nothing here," he said.

"Then it is gone," murmured Skimpole.

"It is—if there was anything!" said Tom Merry distrustfully. "You must have imagined it, Skimmy. Nobody could have got out of this room after the door was locked on the outside."

"The window," suggested Blake.

Tom Merry shook his head. The sill outside the study window was thickly covered with snow, and the snow was smooth and undisturbed. And the window was fast, and the cobwebs showed that it had not lately been opened.

"What about the chimney?"

"There's a bar across it."

"Yes; I remember. Skimmy must have dreamed it; nobody could have got out."

"Wathah not!"

"It was a g-g-ghost!" muttered Skimpole.

"Oh rot!"

The juniors searched the room. Some of the old study furniture had been left in it. There was a table, a chair, and a square of carpet on the stone floor, and a couple of mouldy old pictures hung on the stone walls.

"Nothing here," said Monty Lowther at last.

"Skimmy was dreaming," said Blake.

"My dear Blake—"

"Well, look here, if you locked the door on the outside, how could anybody have got out afterwards?" demanded Blake.

"It—it must have been the g-ghost!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Let's get out of this!" growled Blake. "It's chilly. Blow the ghost, and blow Skimmy! Come on; I want to get back to the fire!"

"Same here!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors trooped out of the study. Tom Merry drew the door shut.

"Lock it," said Monty Lowther. "If there's a giddy ghost, keep him locked in!"

Tom Merry turned the key.

"Now let's get out!"

Tom Merry was turning away from the door when he suddenly stopped and held up his hand.

"Hark!" he muttered.

A dead silence fell upon the juniors. From the interior of the study they had just left there came a sound. It was slight, almost indefinable, but it was a sound, distinct in the dead stillness.

The juniors gazed at one another with white faces.

"G-good heavens!" muttered Blake.

"Wh-what's that?"

"Listen!"

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Again the sound, low and faint, but unmistakable—the sound of a soft robe swishing upon a stone floor.

"Good heavens!"

"It's—it's—"

Silence!

Tom Merry unlocked the door, thrust it open, and struck a match. The light flickered over the deserted room. The juniors gazed in with awe-struck eyes, ready to bolt. But nothing met their gaze.

Nothing but the bare, chilly walls of the empty room—the cobwebbed windows glimmering with snow and starlight.

The match went out.

Tom Merry backed out of the darkened study and shut the door again, his heart beating hard and fast.

He locked the study door, and the juniors stood in the gloomy passage, listening, with beating hearts, for a repetition of the sound.

But it did not come.

Stillness reigned.

For several minutes they stood there, silent in the gloom, their hearts thumping against their ribs.

But the silence was unbroken.

"Let's get off!" muttered Blake at last.

Tom Merry nodded.

In silence, with hurried feet, the juniors retreated from the spot, and they did not breathe freely again till they were once more in the light and warmth of Tom Merry's study.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus in a hushed voice. "It's howwid! I—I wondah what that sound was?"

"It must have been the wind," said Blake.

"Or the snow against the window," said Lowther.

"Perhaps some soot falling down the chimney," Kangaroo suggested.

"Yes, perhaps."

But though the juniors made those suggestions none of them seemed satisfactory. They shivered as they recalled the soft, swishing sound that had proceeded from the haunted study. It was the sound told of in the old legend, made by the spectre monk who haunted St. Jim's when the snow was on the ground.

"Blessed if it wouldn't be more comfy to be in the New House!" grunted Blake. "No blessed haunted rooms or ghosts over there!"

"The room isn't haunted," said Tom Merry uneasily. "Only it's—it's queer. You see, it fits in with the legend. The old monk is supposed to walk when the snow falls, and there's been a fall of snow to-night."

"There's a yarn of a fellow who used that room, too," said Manners. "I heard it when I first came to St. Jim's. It happened before any of us were here. A chap was put to sleep in there—it was a punishment-room then, and he had to sleep there—and when they found him in the morning he was raving mad."

"Ugh!"

"It isn't true!" muttered Blake. "They tell these rotten old yarns, but you find they always happened before the time of anybody living in the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What became of him afterwards?" asked Kangaroo.

Manners shook his head.

"That's as far as the story goes," he said. "They say he was found right off his head and babbling about a monk in white garments. That's all."

"Ugh! Cheese it!"

"I—I don't feel inclined for any more

tea!" muttered Blake. "I think I'll be getting along. We've got to do our prep."

"Yaas, wathah! I'll finish that tenah solo anothah time, deah boys!"

And the Fourth Formers took their departure. The cheery party broke up, and the Terrible Three were left alone in their study to do their preparation.

Tom Merry's brow was moody and thoughtful as he sat down to his work. In spite of his efforts to throw it aside, the eerie happenings in Nobody's Study persisted in haunting his mind.

"Don't think about it, Tommy," said Lowther. "It will get on your nerves. The noise we heard was only the wind in the chimney."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I—I suppose you're right; it was only the wind in the chimney. But—but it's jolly queer. Let's get on."

And the chums of the Shell "wired" into their preparation. But, in spite of themselves, their thoughts wandered still to the dark, gloomy room with the chilly stone walls—Nobody's Study.

CHAPTER 7.

Wally on the Warpath!

WALLY, you young boundah, what—

"Hullo, Gus!"

"What are you young wascals up to?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suspiciously.

The swell of St. Jim's was coming round the corner of the Fourth Form passage later that evening when he ran into a group of Third Form fags. Wally D'Arcy, Joe Frayne, Jameson, and Curly Gibson of the Third were there, and Arthur Augustus was naturally distrustful. He suspected a rag.

"What are you doin' here?" he inquired.

"Walking along the passage," said Curly Gibson innocently.

And the fags chuckled.

Arthur Augustus frowned rather majestically.

"Fway don't be a young ass, Gibson," he said. "I suppose you are up to some wag. Wally, I forbid you to wag in the Fourth Form quarters."

"It's all right, Gussy," said Wally cheerfully. "We're not ragging. We haven't any designs on your giddy best toppers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"We're going to lay the ghost," Wally explained.

"The ghost, you young ass?"

"The giddy spook," said Wally. "I suppose you know the ghost of St. Jim's is walking again? We're going to lay it."

"Lay it low!" said Jameson.

"You chaps bolted when it scared you," pursued Wally. "But we can't have this kind of bisney going on in the School House. It's up to the Third Form to take the matter in hand; that's how we look at it."

"You cheeky young sweep—"

"So we're going to look into Nobody's Study, and catch the ghost," said Wally. "We're going to keep watch till bedtime. Come on, you chaps!"

"You had better go and do your prep," said D'Arcy severely.

"We've done our prep," grinned Jameson; "old Selby's seen to that. And now we're going to do the ghost."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head solemnly and went on his way. The fags turned into the recess that led to Nobody's Study, and Wally unlocked the door. The room was dim and dark,

with a faint glimmer of misty starlight at the window. Wally shivered.

"Don't look over cheerful, does it?" he remarked.

"Groogh! No!" said Joe Frayne.

"I'll get a light. Who's got a match?"

"Here you are."

Joe Frayne struck a match and Wally turned on the gas, and it was lighted. The light showed up the dim and dark corners of the punishment-room. It did not look inviting. The fags glanced round the room rather nervously. In that remote chamber they seemed very far from the rest of the school, and the enterprise did not seem so inviting within the stone walls of Nobody's Study as it had seemed when they had discussed it in the lighted Form-room. But they did not care to retreat.

"If the giddy phantom is walking, we're bound to see some sign of it now. Just watch out, that's all," said Wally.

"Suppose it appears?" said Jameson, with rather a shake in his voice.

"Well, that's what we want, isn't it?"

"Ye-o-es."

"Ark!" exclaimed Joe Frayne suddenly. Joe Frayne had been some time at St. Jim's since Tom Merry had rescued him from his original home in a London slum, but he had not yet become quite at home with his aspirates. Sometimes he dropped them in the most reckless manner, but by way of compensation, perhaps, he would put in extra ones sometimes where they were not strictly required.

"What's the matter?" demanded Wally.

"I heard something."

"Heard something drop, perhaps?" suggested Curly Gibson, with a touch of sarcasm.

"No, it wasn't that," said Joe innocently. "I didn't hear anything drop, did you?"

"Yes."

"Wot was it?"

"A giddy 'h.'"

"Look here—" said Joe wrathfully.

"Shut up, Curly!" said Wally. "Joe can drop as many 'h's' as he likes without you being funny about it. You're funny enough of your own, anyway. Shut up!"

"I heard something," said Joe. "There ain't anybody 'idden in the room, is there? It was a sound."

There certainly was no one hidden in the room. The furniture was too scanty to offer concealment even to a cat.

The fags glanced round the room nervously, however.

"Ark!" exclaimed Joe. "There it is again."

"This time all the fags heard it."

It was a low, indefinable sound, but it seemed to them that it bore some resemblance to a groan, and it seemed to come from the depths of the stone walls.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Jameson.

"I—I say," stammered Curly Gibson. "There—there's the Welsh rabbit we're going to have for supper, you know. It's about time we saw about it."

"Rot!" said Wally determinedly.

"B-but I say—"

"You can buzz off if you're scared!" said Wally disdainfully.

"Hark!"

A deep groan came from the silence.

The fags jumped.

"Where did that come from?" demanded Wally, glaring round him ferociously to conceal his inward alarm. "That one of you fellows japing?"

"Tain't me," said Frayne.

"It—it came from the floor, I think," stammered Curly.

"From the roof, I thought," said Jameson.

"I—I—I say," said Curly through his chattering teeth, "if—if the giddy ghost is invisible—it may be in the room all the time along with us, you know."

"Ow!" murmured Frayne.

"Rot!" said Wally fiercely. "You said only ten minutes ago that you didn't believe in ghosts, young Gibson!"

"Ye-es, b-but that was in the Form-room," stuttered Curly.

"Oh, you're an ass! I—"

Wally broke off.

The sound had come again, from whence the fags could not divine.

Groan!

There was no doubt about it; it was a deep and fearful groan.

"Oh crumbs!"

Jameson and Curly Gibson made a strategic movement towards the door.

"Stop!" yelled Wally. "You're not going to leave me here!"

"I—I—I'm thinking of supper, you know," stuttered Curly.

"S-s-so am I," murmured Jameson.

"Rats!"

"Look here, Wally—"

"We're staying here," growled Wally. "It's some chap laughing; I know that. Look here, we came here to lay the ghost, didn't we?"

"Ye-es; b-but—"

"Well, we're going to lay him, or bust something," said Wally resolutely.

"Suppose we have a look along the passage," suggested Jameson brilliantly.

"Jolly good idea!" said Curly Gibson. "We'll keep watch in the passage, Wally, in—case the ghost comes that way."

And, without staying to argue the point, Jameson and Curly bolted into the passage.

Wally grunted.

"You stay here with me, Joe," he said.

"Yes, Master Wally," said Frayne nervously.

"It isn't a ghost," argued Wally; "it can't be. There aren't any ghosts; it's all piffle! It's some boulder laughing."

"Then where is he?" demanded Frayne.

"Blessed if I know!"

Groan!

The nerve-racking sound came close behind Wally, and he swung round. Only the cold, solid stone wall was there. As he swung round the room was plunged into sudden darkness.

"You ass, Frayne!" yelled Wally. "What have you turned out the gas for?"

"I ain't!" gasped Frayne.

"What—you—"

"I didn't touch it!"

"Oh!"

Groan!

That fearful sound in the sudden and inexplicable darkness terrified the two fags almost out of their wits. They made a wild bolt for the door, and dashed through it together.

"Run!" panted Wally.

They blundered into Jameson and Gibson, and the four fags fled together into the Fourth Form passage. They rushed madly away, not looking where they were going, and there was a sudden collision. In their frantic haste and terror, the fags seemed to be under the impression that it was the ghost they had dashed into, and they yelled hysterically and hit out blindly.

There was a roar.

"You young duffers! What do you mean!"

(Continued on the next page.)



Send your Joke to *The GEM Jester*,
1, Tallis House, John Carpenter Street,
London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

A NODDING ACQUAINTANCE!

Two centre-forwards of rival teams were bragging about their marksmanship.

"I have an average of four goals a game," said one.

"That's nothing," said the other. "I have scored so many goals that all the goalkeepers are frightened of me. Why, only the other day I nodded to a goalkeeper I knew, and he dived full length on the pavement!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Greaves, 12, Cross Lane, Stocksbridge, near Sheffield.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON!

Father: "Sums wrong again! You must be wooden-headed!"

Son: "Yes, pa. I'm afraid I'm a chip of the old block!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. White, Vinayr, St. Ann's Chapel, Gunnislake, Cornwall.

TAKING THE COUNT!

Caller: "Could I speak to Mr. Brown the boxer?"

Boxer's Wife (acidly): "He isn't up yet. Since he became a professional pugilist he hasn't ever got up before ten!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Shepherd, 2, Spring Villas, Hatfield, Herts.

TRUTHFUL!

Manager: "Why do I find you always reading a book every time I come into the office?"

Office-boy: "It's because you wear rubber soles on your shoes, sir!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Eagle, 109, Queen's Road, Reading, Berks.

WHEN FATHER HELPED!

Teacher: "The next time your father helps you with your homework, Brown, tell him that $1 = 2X$ is algebra and not one home, one away, and one draw!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Palmer, 47, Argyll Avenue, Luton, Beds.

CHRISTMAS COMFORT!

It was Christmas Day, and two tramps were sitting on a bench in a park.

"What would you do, Bill," said Harry, "if you won a big prize in one of these competitions?"

"I'd 'ave these bloomin' seats up-'olstered!" replied Bill, in disgust.

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Lawrence, 69, Lightwoods Hill, Warley Woods, Smethwick.

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"Oh crumbs!" gasped Wally. "It's Kildare!"

CHAPTER 8.

Very Queer!

It was Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's.

Two or three of the punches of the terrified fags had taken effect upon the senior, and he had staggered back, but he did not lose his presence of mind. He grasped Wally by the collar with one hand, and Joe Frayne by the ear with the other, and effectually stopped the fight.

Jameson and Curly Gibson had already disappeared in the direction of the stairs.

Wally and Joe Frayne wriggled in the grasp of the captain of St. Jim's, but they could not break away; Kildare's grip was like iron.

"Now, you young rascals," said Kildare grimly, "you can come to my study and take the biggest licking of your lives! You've got to learn not to punch prefects!"

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"What have you been up to?" demanded Kildare.

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" gasped Wally. "We—we didn't know it was you, Kildare—honest! Injun! We didn't, did we, Joe?"

"N-no!" gasped Joe.

"Whom did you take me for, then?"

"The g-g-ghost!"

"The what?" exclaimed Kildare.

"The spook!"

Kildare tightened his grip.

"So you are trying to be funny!" he remarked. "I'll give you something to stop all that! Come along!"

"B-but—but it's honest, Kildare!" gasped Wally. "We've been hunting the ghost in Nobody's Study, and we got scared."

"It was 'orrible!" panted Frayne.

Kildare looked at them sharply. He could see that they were speaking the truth, and he relaxed his grasp upon them.

"You've been ghost-hunting in the punishment-room?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you mean to say that you've seen anything?" demanded Kildare.

"No; but—"

"We 'eard something!" said Joe Frayne, with a shudder.

"What did you hear?"

"Hawful groans!"

"Nonsense!" said Kildare sharply.

"It's true!" stammered Wally.

"And the gas went out without anybody touching it. Curly and Jimmy were in the passage, so they couldn't have done it; and Joe and me didn't, did we, Joe?"

"No fear!" said Joe. "It was 'orrible!"

"Somebody's been playing a trick on you!" said Kildare.

"But 'ow did they get the gas out, then?" said Frayne.

"I'll look into this! Come with me!"

"I—I'd rather not!"

"Stay here, then!"

Kildare strode towards the door of Nobody's Study.

The two fags hesitated and followed him.

Kildare put his hand on the door to open it, and Frayne gave a cry.

"The door's shut, Wally."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Didn't you shut it after you?" said Kildare, looking back at the scared fags.

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"No fear!" said Wally promptly. "We didn't stay to shut the giddy door!"

"It couldn't close itself," said Kildare; "it's too heavy for the wind to move—and, besides, there isn't any wind here."

"It was the ghost!"

"Rubbish!"

Kildare threw the door open.

A blaze of light shone from the deserted room.

Wally and Joe Frayne uttered a simultaneous yell of amazement. The gas was alight!

Kildare strode into the room. The two fags looked in after him with frightened eyes. The gas was burning away, and the room was lighted up. Had they been dreaming?

Kildare fixed his eyes upon them.

"You said the gas went out?" he said.

"So it did, Kildare!"

"I'll swear it did, Master Kildare!"

"Nonsense! It's alight now."

"Yes, I can see it's alight now," said Wally.

"Then how could it have gone out? It couldn't have relighted itself, I suppose?" said the prefect sarcastically.

"N-no!"

"You've been so scared you didn't know what was happening and what wasn't happening," said Kildare. "You'd better keep out of this room, you silly kids, and give up ghost-hunting."

Wally's face was a study.

Unless he had been suffering from hallucinations—and he wasn't given to anything of that kind—the gas had certainly gone out.

But it was lighted now!

What was the meaning of it?

The room was haunted!

"It was the ghost," said Joe Frayne. "I've read in stories that when the ghost appears it makes the lights go out."

Kildare laughed.

"Yes, in stories," he agreed. "That's the only place where a ghost ever appeared, Frayne. You'd better buzz off and keep out of this room."

"Blessed if I can understand it," said Wally.

"Me, neither!" said Frayne.

Kildare put his hand up to the gas and turned it out.

Nobody's Study was plunged into darkness again.

The two fags backed away into the Fourth Form passage quickly enough then.

Kildare followed them out of the haunted room.

"Mind, no more ghost-hunting!" he exclaimed.

"No blooming fear!" said Joe Frayne fervently. "I've 'ad enough, for one!"

"Same here!" said Wally.

Kildare laughed and walked away.

Wally and Joe Frayne looked at one another in the passage. Their faces were still white and scared, but they were recovering their courage now.

"What do you make of it, Master Wally?" said Joe Frayne. "Was it the—ghost?"

"Blessed if I know," said Wally. "I don't believe in ghosts. But—"

"But if it was a fellow japing, where is he? He ain't come out."

"Goodness knows!"

The Terrible Three came down the passage, and they paused at the sight of the two fags. They could easily see that something very unusual had happened.

"What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry.

"The ghost."

"Hallo! Have you seen it?"

"We've been looking for it," said Wally. "There was a groan—"

"A awful groan!" said Joe Frayne.

"And then the light went out," said Wally.

"And I suppose you went out, too!" remarked Monty Lowther humorously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It isn't a laughing matter," said Wally. "The light went out. Then, when Kildare looked into the room, the door was closed—and we hadn't closed it!—and the gas was alight, and it was out when we bolted—I mean, when we stepped out—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cut the cackle!" said Wally crossly. "It's horrible! If there isn't a ghost, what was it made the light go out?"

"You must have been dreaming!" grinned Manners.

"Oh, rats!" growled Wally.

"But how could the light go out without somebody turning it out?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, it did go out!"

"Did you notice whether the tap was turned off?"

"How could we notice anything of the sort in the dark?" demanded Wally.

"It jest went out," said Joe Frayne. "That's all! I s'pose it was the ghost made it sort of fade away—"

"And made you fade away, too!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Oh, rats!"

Wally and his chum walked away.

The Terrible Three turned into the recess, and Tom Merry opened the door of Nobody's Study. All was dark and silent within.

"Nobody there!" yawned Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry closed the door.

"No," he said. "It's queer!"

And his chums agreed that it was queer.

CHAPTER 9.

Bernard Glyn's Brain-Wave!

WALLY'S ghost-story caused a good deal of amusement in the School House, especially among the fags.

Up to bed-time there was almost a constant procession of fellows coming along the passage to look in at Nobody's Study.

But the ghost was not walking, and, apparently, not groaning, either, for no sound was heard in the desolate apartment.

Neither did the gas go out of its own accord; and most of the fellows announced their opinion that Wally and Joe Frayne had been dreaming, or else had been so scared that they did not know what was happening.

Levison and Mellish, the cads of the School House, came along together to look round the punishment-room, and they grinned over the story of the gas that had gone out.

"Rot!" Levison declared. "The kid was scared out of his wits, that's what it was!"

"Of course it was!" said Mellish.

"Weally, my deah fellahs," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was among the investigators, "you are a pair of silly asses, you know. It is quite impos for a D'Arcy to be scared out of his wits!"

"Because he hasn't any, do you mean?" asked Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Levison—"

"Well, he was scared into a blue funk, then, if you like that better!" said Levison.

"You wottah—"

Levison yawned and walked out of Nobody's Study. In the Common-room Bernard Glyn of the Shell, the schoolboy inventor, joined a group of juniors who were talking the matter over. Glyn was looking extremely thoughtful.

"My opinion is, deah boys, that the gas did go out!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy averred.

"But how?" asked Tom Merry.

"By bein' extinguished, deah boy!"

"Ass!" yelled Tom Merry. "I didn't mean that. How did it get extinguished? Do you think it was the ghost?"

"Well, it was vewy wemarkable!"

said Glyn. "Might be a ventriloquist for all I know. But I've got a scheme for catching him."

"Good egg!"

"I'm thinking of laying on an electric bell," the Liverpool lad explained. "It will give an alarm whenever anybody goes into Nobody's Study."

"Jolly good wheeze," said Manners. "Only the ghost won't remember to ring the bell very likely."

"Ass! I shall fix it so that nobody can walk across the room without ringing the bell," said the schoolboy inventor.

"If it's a real ghost, of course, it will be so light and airy that the bell won't ring. But if it's a human being, the bell will ring."

"Blessed if I see how you're going to work that," said Monty Lowther.

contact, and that sets up a current. Then the bell rings. Well, if the terminals can be brought into contact without a button being pressed, there's no need to press a button."

"Clear as mud!" said Kangaroo gravely.

"I've got an idea for working it. I'm going to run a wire into Nobody's Study, under that rag of carpet there is in the room. I shall leave the terminals exposed, just out of contact, and if the carpet's walked across, and the walker treads in that spot, the weight of his foot will bring the two terminals together—and the bell will ring. And by leaving the terminals loose, when the two wire-ends are brought together by a heavy pressure, they'll remain together, and the bell will keep on ringing, with-



Just as Arthur Augustus was going strong on his tenor solo the door flew open and Skimpole rushed in. "Help!" he gasped. "Oh!" Skimpole rushed right into the tenor soloist and threw his arms round D'Arcy's neck to save himself. "Ow!" Arthur Augustus' solo became a yell of alarm. "Bai Jove! Oh!"

"I've got an idea," Bernard Glyn remarked.

There was a chorus of groans. The juniors knew what a new idea of Bernard Glyn's generally meant. A new invention, which might or might not answer, but which was quite certain to cause trouble, whether it answered or not.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "Have you been rigging up a new telephone that won't work?"

"It's about the ghost," said Glyn.

"My hat! You haven't invented a mechanical ghost, have you?" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, fathhead!" said Bernard Glyn. "I'm thinking of laying the ghost. Look here, my opinion is that some rotter is larking."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't know how he's working it,"

"That's because you're not an electrician."

"Well, how are you going to do it, anyway?" asked Tom Merry.

"Listen! I suppose you know how an electric bell is worked?"

"Yes; you press a button!"

"Fathead!"

"Well, I've always rung electric bells that way," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, ass! But what happens when you press the button?"

"The bell rings!"

The juniors chuckled as the schoolboy inventor glared at Tom Merry.

"Oh, don't be funny!" implored Glyn. "We have enough of that from Lowther."

"Do you?" said Lowther. "Look here—"

"Don't interrupt. I'll explain to you how a bell rings. The pressure on the button simply brings two terminals in

out stopping, till somebody goes and disconnects the wires."

"Bai Jove!"

"Jolly good idea!" said Tom Merry.

"Where will you put the bell?"

"In the entry just outside the door. It won't be seen there in the dark corner, and it would be a bit difficult to run a wire along the passage."

"If it's some fellow larking, he may watch you shoving in the bell," said Tom Merry.

"I shall slip down after we've gone to bed. You chaps will keep it dark?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll put on a pretty live bell," said Bernard Glyn. "I've got it in my pocket now. I'll stick the dry battery beside the bell. And if it rings, we shall hear it from the dorm, and we can come down!"

"Good egg!"

"And if it doesn't ring to-night, it will ring to-morrow, when the rotter, whoever he is, is monkeying around in the room."

"Yaas, wathah! And if it is some wottah practical jokin'—"

"We'll scrag him!"

"What-ho!"

And when the Shell and Fourth Form fellows went up to their dormitories, Bernard Glyn carried a bell and dry battery, and a coil of wire in his pocket.

Kildare saw lights out in the Shell dormitory; and after he had retired, the schoolboy inventor slipped out of bed.

He dressed himself in the dark.

"Where are you off to, Glyn?" called out Gore.

"Going down!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to mind my own business!" replied Glyn cheerfully.

And he quitted the dormitory.

He put on a pair of rubber shoes instead of his boots, so his feet made no sound as he stole along the passage, and went down to the studies.

He reached the dark entry before the door of Nobody's Study, and slipped into it, out of sight of anybody who might pass. The light in the passage was very dim. Glyn paused outside the heavy oaken door of Nobody's Study and listened. There was no sound from within. Glyn unlocked the door, and on second thoughts put the key in his pocket. If a practical joker should be cornered in the punishment-room, he did not want to give him a chance of locking himself in.

He lighted the gas in Nobody's Study, and glanced rather uneasily round the room.

He did not believe in ghosts, but he did not exactly like his quarters. If he had heard that weird groaning from the silence of the night, he would probably have retired hastily. But there was no sound.

He turned up the gas just high enough to show him light for his work. To the schoolboy inventor the task was quite simple. He ran a double insulated wire round the room close to the wall, securing it in place with a little putty jammed down hard. The end of the wire he ran from the wall, turning back the old square carpet.

The end of the double wire was exposed, the waxed covering having been scraped off in readiness.

Glyn placed one wire on the floor, and bent the end of the other just over it, and laid the carpet lightly above. Nobody could tread on that spot now without jamming the upper wire down upon the lower one, which would set up a current. Glyn put the carpet in its former place. The only part of the wire that showed was that short piece from the edge of the carpet to the wall, and that Glyn contrived to jam down into a crack between two of the large stones of the floor. The stone floor was dark in colour, and the covering of the wire was dark, so it was perfectly invisible.

The other end of the wire passed out of the doorway, close to the jamb, into the entry. There, in the darkest corner, Bernard Glyn planted the bell and the little dry battery, and connected up the wire.

He closed the door of Nobody's Study, after turning the light out. The wire was jammed very tightly between the door and the jamb, but not to the extent of injuring it. All was in working order now, and Glyn stole back silently to the Shell dormitory, satisfied with his handiwork. If anybody moved about the study, sooner or later

he must tread upon the part of the carpet that covered the loose ends of the wire, and then the bell would ring, and ring incessantly.

"All serene?" asked Tom Merry, as he heard the schoolboy inventor enter the Shell dormitory.

"Yes, rather!"

"If there's any alarm—"

"We'll go down with pillows and bolsters, and give the boulder beans!"

"Hear, hear!"

"What on earth is it all about?" asked Gore, in amazement.

The Liverpool lad chuckled.

"Don't you ask any questions, Gore, and I won't tell you any terminological inexactitudes," he replied. "Go to sleep, old son, and dream that you've given up smoking cheap cigarettes behind the woodshed."

"Oh, rats!" said Gore.

"Did you see any ghosts, Glyn?" asked Buck Finn, the American junior.

"Yes; couple of dozen," yawned Glyn. "They were doing a war-dance in the passage."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell settled down to sleep, but some of them strove to sleep with one eye open and one ear open for the electric bell.

Tom Merry & Co. were ready for the alarm. If the bell rang, it would show that it was not a ghost, but a solid personage, who was in Nobody's Study, and then a rush down the stairs with pillows and bolsters would do the rest. The ghost of St. Jim's would probably cease walking after that.

CHAPTER 10.

The Alarm!

"PENNY for 'em, Kildare," said Langton of the Sixth.

Kildare started and smiled.

There were three of the Sixth in Kildare's study with him, chatting about footer, before turning in.

The juniors of St. Jim's went to bed at half-past nine; the Fifth at ten; but the great and mighty Sixth were allowed to use their own judgment about the matter. It was half-past ten now, and the seniors were still chatting in Kildare's study. A match with Milverton was shortly coming off, and the Sixth Formers were discussing that most interesting topic, but Kildare was silent and thoughtful, which had led Langton to offer him the sum of one penny for his cogitations.

"I'm thinking about the ghost of St. Jim's," said Kildare.

The seniors grinned.

"There's been a lot of ghost-talk among the juniors this evening," Darrell remarked. "Some young ass playing a practical joke, I suppose."

"Most likely," said Rushden.

Kildare nodded.

"I dare say it's that," he said. "But, whatever it is, the ghost ought to be laid—don't you think so?"

"Yes, that's so," agreed Langton.

"Some of the fags were badly scared," said the captain of St. Jim's. "Young D'Arcy minor told me the gas went out suddenly, without being turned out, when he was in Nobody's Study."

There was a laugh.

"Well, it's queer," said Kildare slowly. "You fellows know the legend of that room? Chaps who sleep in there disappear, leaving only their clothes behind—spirited away by the spectre monk, who disappeared the same way himself. Of course, it's never happened—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the story goes, too, that the presence of the ghost causes the light to fail, by supernatural influence," said Kildare. "It's queer!"

"Somebody must have got at the gas," said Rushden.

"Yes; but I don't see how it was done. I can't help thinking that D'Arcy minor was stating the facts, now I've thought it over carefully, and I should like to know how it's worked. Whoever it is doing it knows the ghost story by heart—about the light failing, and the ghost not appearing till after the first fall of snow, and so forth. If a chap gets in and out of the room without being seen, there must be some secret passage, and somebody knows it—"

"The oldest part of the School House is honeycombed with them," said Darrell. "There was one leading from Study No. 5, in the Fourth, till it was bricked up."

"Only, if there's one in the haunted room, it's queer that the jape hasn't been played before, if it is a jape."

"Might have been lately discovered."

"True. I think it ought to be looked into; and it's up to us, as prefects, to look into it," said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Thinking of a giddy ghost-hunt?" asked Rushden.

"Yes; that's what I was thinking of."

"Well, it would be amusing."

"Will you fellows come, then?" asked Kildare, rising.

"Certainly!"

And the four Sixth Formers, with smiles upon their faces, left Kildare's study, and proceeded to the Fourth Form passage. They turned into the dark recess leading to Nobody's Study, and Kildare opened the door.

A breath of cold, chilly air greeted him.

Darrell struck a match. Kildare turned on the gas, and it was lighted. The light glimmered upon the grim stone walls of the desolate chamber.

"Looks pretty cheerless," said Langton, with a shiver.

"You're right!"

"Nobody here at present."

"It's time the ghost walked, if he's going to walk," said Rushden, moving round the room and examining the blocks of solid stone in the walls. "Doesn't seem much chance of an opening here, I think."

"What price keeping watch for a bit?" asked Kildare.

"Just as you like."

"Not much good keeping watch with the light going," said Darrell, with a grin. "If it's a practical joker, he'll see it, and we shall have our watch for nothing."

Kildare turned off the gas.

The room was plunged into instant darkness.

Kildare groped his way to a chair and sat down. Langton and Darrell sat upon the old table. Rushden leaned against the wall, and they waited. There was the palest glimmer of starlight at the window, and a faint gleam from the passage under the door.

Darrell swung his legs as he sat upon the table to keep them warm. He was sitting with his feet a few inches from the spot of the carpet that covered the loose wire-ends, though he was in blissful ignorance of the fact.

Langton shivered.

"Cold here," he remarked, in a low voice. Somehow he spoke instinctively in a low voice within the walls of the haunted study.

"We'll give the giddy phantom a quarter of an hour," said Kildare.

"All serene."

"Groogh! It's cold!"

Darrell slipped off the table to stretch his limbs.

Buz-z-z!

The sudden sound in the silence made all four of the Sixth Formers jump.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Kildare.

"What's that?"

Buz-z-z!

"It's an electric bell!"

"Where is it?"

Buz-z-z!

The seniors stood listening in amazement. They could not tell for the moment whence the sound proceeded. They knew that there were no electric bells in the passage—or, rather, they thought that there were not.

"It's a jape!" growled Kildare. "This is a new variety of the ghost wheeze, I suppose—a ghost bell ringing!"

"Where is it?"

"It's not in the room."

"Must be outside."

Kildare threw open the door.

The buzzing of the bell was louder now, though it had been loud enough before. But there was another sound to be heard now—excited voices, hasty footsteps! There was a rush of feet along the passage. A regular army of juniors in pyjamas, armed with pillows and bolsters, came tearing down the passage, and they turned at top speed into the recess leading to the study, and dashed in.

"Give 'em socks!" roared Tom Merry.

"We've caught 'em! Give 'em beans!"

"Hurrah!"

"Why, what—ow! Ooooh!"

Kildare staggered under a swipe from a pillow. In a moment the other seniors were being swiped right and left. And over them rushed the victorious juniors, yelling triumphantly, and still swiping with all their might.

Tom Merry & Co. had arrived.

CHAPTER 11.

A Little Mistake!

"**B**URRAH!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Swipe 'em!"

"Go it!"

"Swipe the bouncers! There's three or four of 'em!" yelled Kangaroo.

"We'll give 'em playing ghost! Swipe 'em!"

And the juniors swiped with a vengeance.

Biff, biff, biff!

Crash, crash, crash!

Bump, bump, bump!

In the darkness of Nobody's Study, Tom Merry & Co. could not see whom their victims were. But they had no doubts. The alarm bell had rung, and they had rushed down from the dormitory and they found three or four dark figures in the haunted room, and that was enough for them. The solidity and the gasps and howls of their victims showed plainly enough that they were not ghosts.

And Tom Merry & Co. swiped away with such energy that they swiped one another as well, and several of the juniors went sprawling over under the whizzing pillows and bolsters. And as for the unhappy seniors, they were so taken by surprise, and so biffed and banged and flustered, that they hardly knew what was happening, and they had no chance to explain.

Just My Fun

Monty Lowther
Calling!



Hallo, everybody! The whitest man I know is the snowman the fags built in the quad.

Even at Christmas we have our "present" difficulties.

"Don't forget that this is Leap Year," said Gore. "Goodness!" replied Skimpole. "I mustn't forget to put the clock on!"

Traffic note: If you hear a deep thrumming overhead on Christmas Eve, it will be Father Christmas in his new monospar speed plane.

I hear the girl in the Rylcombe bun-shop is going to be the Queen of the Carnival at a New Year's ball. New Year's Eve.

Less heavy weather is predicted. Well, it always gets lighter after Christmas.

"I rented a cottage," complains a reader, "but was forced to leave

through a hole in the bath-room ceiling." Acrobatic exit, that!

Waterproof banknotes may be issued. Just right to put by for a rainy day.

"After Christmas you expect a dish of odds and ends," says Fatty Wynn. That's when the cook makes a "hash" of things.

At the panto: "What do you call the man who plays the flute?" asked the learned one. "It all depends how he plays it," answered his companion.

The new Wayland outside-right is a keen motorist. They say he always puts his hand out before taking a "corner."

Then there was the financier who plunged in oil. Yes, he went down.

"What sort of pet should I give a friend for Christmas?" asks Figgins. Well, porcupines have their points.

How's this: "How'd you like to join my music-hall act?" "Great! What do you do?" "Dagger throwing. My last partner is in hospital!"

But the one I like best is about the Mexican Prime Minister, a stickler for etiquette, who, on seeing a bomb thrown in at the window, hastily adjourned the meeting before it rose. Happy landings, chaps!

"Yes, rather!"

"You ought to know better than to play these kids' tricks, Kildare," said Manners solemnly. "And you, too, Darrell, and Rushden, and Langton. I'm shocked at you!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "There is some absurd mistake somewhere! It is impossible to suppose that Kildare was playing ghost!"

Kildare was almost stuttering with rage. But for the presence of the Housemaster, the ghost-hunters would probably have paid dearly for their little mistake.

"What were you doing here, Kildare?" asked Mr. Railton.

Kildare panted.

"There's been a lot of talk in the House, sir, of someone playing ghost here," he explained. "We came to see if there was anything in it—to watch for the practical joker, sir. Then a bell rang, and then these young idiots—ahem!—these boys came piling in on us, sir, goodness knows what for!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Did you come to hunt the ghost?"

"Yes, you young idiot!"

"Sorry, old man! We took you for the giddy jokers!"

"You say a bell rang," said Mr. Railton. "What bell are you alluding to?"

Bernard Glyn turned pink. The bell had ceased ringing now. Doubtless the struggle on the carpet had disconnected the wires again. Bernard Glyn rolled back the crumpled carpet and disclosed the wires.

"Bless my soul, what is that?" asked Mr. Railton.

"It's the ghost alarm, sir," explained the schoolboy inventor. "I laid it on to give the alarm if the ghost started walking, so that we could come down and lay him and stop his pranks. I didn't know that these chaps were

coming ghost-hunting. They didn't tell me."

"They would be hardly likely to acquaint a junior with their intentions, Glyn!" said Mr. Railton severely. "You should not have done this without consulting the prefects!"

"I—I suppose not, sir. We were keeping it dark, so as to catch the practical joker on the hop, sir—ahem!—I mean, to catch him napping, sir."

"We've caught him scrapping!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" said Mr. Railton. "It was an—ahem!—excusable mistake. You see how it came about, Kildare?"

The captain of St. Jim's rubbed his head ruefully.

"Yes, I see, sir," he admitted. "The young rascals!"

"We're all awfully sorry, Kildare!" said Tom Merry. "Of course, if we'd known—"

"You'd better wait and look next time before you start slogging prefects with your confounded pillows!" growled Darrell.

"We will," said Tom Merry gently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your desire to—ahem!—lay the ghost was quite laudable, my boys," said Mr. Railton. "But it does not excuse your having left your dormitory without permission! You will take fifty lines each!"

"Yes, sir," said the Shell fellows meekly.

They were glad enough to escape so cheaply. As Monty Lowther remarked afterwards in the dormitory, slogging four prefects at a time was an experience worth fifty lines.

"Now return to your dormitory at once, and do not leave it again!"

"Yes, sir."

And the juniors trooped off, chuckling.

Mr. Railton looked at the discomfited prefects. Kildare & Co. were a little recovered by this time, and they were putting their dishevelled persons into order. They were very much rumpled and crumpled by the terrific slogging they had received.

"This is a very curious thing," said the Housemaster. "What is this story of the ghost having been seen again, Kildare?"

Kildare explained, rather breathlessly. Mr. Railton listened with deep attention. He went round the punishment-room, examining the walls. He tapped upon them here and there, but there was no sound of hollowness; all appeared to be solid.

"A great deal is probably due to the imagination of the juniors," Mr. Railton observed at last. "But if anyone has entered and left the room secretly, it can be only by means of a secret opening. The idea of a ghost is absurd!"

"Quite absurd, sir!" said Kildare. "But it was very strange about the gas going out, sir. I am sure D'Arcy minor was keeping to the facts when he told me."

"That is certainly very odd."

Mr. Railton examined the gas-bracket carefully. When the gas had been laid on in the room, it had been impossible to place the pipes behind the walls; the pipe from the passage ran up the wall and along the edge of the ceiling. Mr. Railton scanned it carefully its whole extent, from the burner to the place where the pipe passed out of the room, through a hole bored in the top of the door-frame.

He wrinkled his brows a little, and turned to the prefects again.

"Either there is a ghost or somebody has been playing ghost," he said. "The

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first supposition is absurd; the matter is, therefore, to be attributed to a practical joke on the part of some foolish and mischievous boy. The matter will have to be looked into; and we must keep our eyes open upon this room until the mystery is cleared up."

"Certainly, sir!" said Kildare.

And the Housemaster and the prefects retired from Nobody's Study, and the haunted room was left dark and deserted. And if the ghost of St. Jim's walked that night, he walked undisturbed by the electric alarm bell of the schoolboy inventor.

CHAPTER 12.

Disinterested Friendship!

FATTY WYNN stood outside the little tuckshop kept by Dame Taggles in the corner of the quadrangle behind the old elms.

There was a struggle going on in the breast of the fat Fourth Former. Morning lessons were over, a few days after that peculiar ghost-hunt in Nobody's Study. There had been a thaw, and the snow had melted away from the quadrangle of St. Jim's like a dream. The ground was reeking with damp, and frost was still thick upon the trees, but melting and running down in murky streams. Skating was an idea that had to be dropped, and the ground was in no state for footer.

But Fatty Wynn, though he was wearing a very thoughtful look, was not thinking of lost opportunities of skating, or of postponed footer matches, or of the snow-fights that would not come off. He was thinking of the tuck within Mrs. Taggles' little establishment, and of the fact that he was hard-up. Levison of the Fourth was in the tuckshop, and he was making purchases; and he seemed to be well supplied with money, and determined to get rid of it. And Fatty Wynn, as he watched through the doorway and saw Ernest Levison's purchases mounting up on the counter, felt a struggle going on in his breast.

Fatty Wynn did not like Levison. It was not because they belonged to the rival Houses of St. Jim's—in the intervals when ragging ceased the rival juniors pulled together very well. But the cad of the Fourth was, as many fellows had remarked, an unpleasant beast. But when an unpleasant beast is buying cold ham and tongue by the pound, and doughnuts by the bagful, and jam tarts by the dozen, his unpleasantness seemed to fade away somehow, and he appeared much less of a beast.

Fatty Wynn struggled between the desire to be very cordial with Levison and share his good things, and the feeling that he ought not to do it.

Figgins came sauntering round to the tuckshop, and he saw the stress of mental conflict in Fatty's plump face. "Postman been?" asked Fatty.

Figgins shook his head.

"Still stony?" asked Fatty.

"Busted!" said Figgins, with concise elegance.

Fatty Wynn groaned.

"It's more than half an hour to dinner," he remarked.

"Bear up!" said Figgins kindly.

"Come and have a tramp through the slush, and get an appetite for dinner."

"I've got the appetite," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "It's the dinner I want."

Figgins grinned.

"Poor old Fatty! Bear up! Every-



"Give 'em socks!" roared Tom Merry, as a regular thump came from the room. "We've caught 'em!" "What—what—what?" roared Fatty Wynn from a pillow. In a moment the other

thing comes to him who waits, you know."

"I say, Figgy—" began Fatty Wynn.

"Well?" said Figgins.

"It's getting on towards Christmas, isn't it?"

Figgins started.

"Yes," he said. "It generally is at the end of the year, you know. It's owing to the way they've arranged the calendar, I suppose."

"Don't be funny, Figgy. I'm serious. Of course, it isn't Christmas yet, but it's near enough to Christmas to put in practice Christmas maxims and things—don't you think so—forgiving

one's enemies, and all that kind of thing?"

Figgins simply stared at Fatty Wynn. From where he stood he could not see into the tuckshop, and so he could not see the explanation of Fatty Wynn's peculiar mood. He began to fear that a keen appetite, rendered keener by the sharp, winter air, had made Fatty Wynn lightheaded.

"Cheer up, Fatty, old man!" he said soothingly. "Dinner will be along soon."

"Yes. But don't you agree with me about a chap forgiving his enemies,

what you're driving at!" exclaimed Figgins.

"I'm thinking of Levison."

"Levison?" said Figgins, frowning.

"That unspeakable cad!"

"Yes. Because he's a beast, that's all the more merit in forgiving him, and making friends with him now—now he's getting—I mean, now Christmas is coming round. Don't you think so?"

"Ye-es; perhaps so," said Figgins.

"Well, I'm going to do it," said Fatty Wynn bravely. "I don't care how big a cad he is, I'm going to be friendly with him at Christmas-time."

And Fatty Wynn marched into the tuckshop, to carry out his benevolent intentions.

Figgins glanced in, and saw Levison piling up his unaccustomed purchases, and understood. He chuckled softly.

Fatty Wynn gave Levison a cordial and friendly nod, and a sweet smile.

"Thaw to-day," he remarked.

Levison nodded.

"Yes," he said. "And a dozen marmalade tarts, Mrs. Taggles."

"Yes, Master Levison."

"Had a good tip, I suppose, old chap?" said Fatty Wynn.

"No," said Levison. "I'm careful with my money, that's all, and so I'm able to buy things when I want them. And a jar of jam, Mrs. Taggles."

"Yes, Master Levison."

"Standing a feed?"

asked Fatty Wynn.

"Yes. And a jar of marmalade."

"Yes, Master Levison."

"Who to?" asked Fatty Wynn jovially.

"Myself," said Levison coolly. "Chap I know best and like best, you know. And one of those pound seed cakes, Mrs. Taggles, and a currant one."

"Yes, Master Levison."

"Not going to have a feed all on your lonesome?" asked Fatty Wynn, in surprise. "I always like another chap, at least, at a feed with me."

"Do you?" said Levison.

"I don't."

"Ahem! Can I help you carry those things?"

"Thanks; I can manage them! Wrap them all up in one parcel, Mrs. Taggles, please."

"Yes, Master Levison."

"I—I say," said Fatty Wynn, "I'm stony, Levison!"

"Blued all your tin on grub, I suppose?" said Levison. "I've got none to lend, if that's what you're driving at."

Fatty Wynn turned pink.

"I—I wasn't driving at that," he said. "I—I was thinking that—that Christmas is coming. It—it won't be very long now, will it?"

"It will be here on December 25th, as usual, I think," said Levison calmly.

"Thanks!" said Fatty Wynn. "I mean, exactly—just so! Now, at a time of peace and good will and things, you know, I—I'm thinking of making friends with everybody—even rotten cads that

I can't stand at other times," he said. This, to say the least of it, was not very tactful of Fatty Wynn; but his anxiety was so keen as he saw the good things being wrapped up that he really hardly noticed what he was saying, and spoke with beautiful frankness. "I—I'm going to make friends with you, Levison."

"Thanks for nothing," said Levison.

"Now, as—as we're friends—"

"But we're not!" said Levison,

taking his parcel from Mrs. Taggles.

"It takes two to make a bargain, you know. Good-bye!"

And Levison walked out of the tuckshop with his bulky parcel, leaving Fatty Wynn rooted to the floor.

"Well, my sainted aunt!" said Fatty Wynn as soon as he recovered his breath. "Of all the rotten, caddish, hopeless skunks—"

Figgins strolled in, smiling.

"Did you make it up with Levison, Fatty?" he asked casually.

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"Make it up with Levison!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I'd make it up with a rotten, beastly, unspeakable toad like that? I really think you ought to know me better, Figgy!"

"But what about Christmas coming along, and making it up with your enemies, and the right hand of giddy friendship, and so forth—"

"Oh, blow the right hand of friendship!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Bai Jove! What's the joke, dear boys?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sauntered into the tuckshop. Fatty Wynn stared at him. He was not feeling in a good humour at that moment.

"You chaps have some tarts?" asked Arthur Augustus agreeably. "I've just weecived a fivah fivom my gornah, and I want Mrs. Taggles to change it."

Fatty Wynn's fat face was like unto a rising sun at once.

"What-ho!" he said, rolling up to the counter. "How many did you say, D'Arcy?"

"As many as you like, dear boy."

"Trot out your whole stock, Mrs. Taggles!" grinned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn did not laugh; he was too busy.

CHAPTER 13.

Not a Feed!

PERCY MELLISH spread the tablecloth very carefully in his study and put the kettle on the fire.

Crooke of the Shell looked in at the doorway with an unusually agreeable expression upon his face.

"Must have spent a quid at least," said Crooke.

Mellish whistled.

"A quid!" he repeated.

"Quite—and more!"

"It will be a stunning feed, then!" said Mellish.

"I should say so!"

"Not much like Levison, either," said Mellish, rubbing his nose thoughtfully.

"Even when he's got plenty of money he doesn't usually spend it in standing feeds."

"Influence of Christmas, perhaps," suggested Crooke.

"H'm! Perhaps!" said Mellish very doubtfully. It did not seem to him at all probable that the approach of the festive season would have the effect of making Levison generous in money matters.

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of juniors, armed with pillows and bolsters, dashed into the doorway, gasped Kildare, staggering under a swipe and being biffed right and left.

and—making friends with people he dislikes?" said Fatty.

"Chap ought always to forgive his enemies, I suppose," said Figgins, looking perplexed. "But what are you jabbering about, Fatty?"

"Suppose a fellow's a rotten mean bouncer?" said Fatty Wynn. "When Christmas comes round a chap ought to take him by the hand and be chummy, don't you think?"

"I suppose he might," said the astonished Figgins. "But—"

"Well, I'm going to do it," said the fat Fourth Former.

"Look here, Fatty! If you're not quite off your silly rocker, tell me

Wynn, "I'm stony, Levison!"

"Blued all your tin on grub, I suppose?" said Levison. "I've got none to lend, if that's what you're driving at."

Fatty Wynn turned pink.

"I—I wasn't driving at that," he said. "I—I was thinking that—that Christmas is coming. It—it won't be very long now, will it?"

"It will be here on December 25th, as usual, I think," said Levison calmly.

"Thanks!" said Fatty Wynn. "I mean, exactly—just so! Now, at a time of peace and good will and things, you know, I—I'm thinking of making friends with everybody—even rotten cads that

"I suppose the idea is to have a feed up here, instead of going down to dinner," said Crooke. "Well, I don't mind."

"Same here," said Mellish. "It's cold mutton to-day, and we can get leave away from dinner if we ask old Lathom."

"I shall have to ask Linton," said the Shell fellow. "But that's all right: I shall manage it—if Levison asks me, of course."

He grinned. Levison, Mellish, and Crooke, the three black sheep of the School House, were thick as thieves, as Blake had described it. If Levison were standing a feed of unusual proportions in his study, Crooke meant to be present. Mellish went on with his preparations, hunting out plates and cutlery from odd corners and dusting them. Lumley-Lumley came into the study and surveyed the preparations for the feed with surprise. Study feeds were not generally celebrated in the middle of the day just before the juniors' dinner-time.

"Hallo!" said Lumley-Lumley, shaking the mud off his boots. "What's the game? Dining in state?"

"We're going to have a feed," said Mellish loftily—"a big feed here, instead of going down to dinner."

"Oh, good! I've got a jolly good appetite walking back from Rylcombe," said Lumley-Lumley. "If you buck up I'll feed with you, and then go down to dinner and start again."

Mellish sniffed. "You haven't been asked yet," he remarked.

"That's all right! You can ask me," said Lumley-Lumley cheerfully. "Who's standing the feed?"

"Levison."

"Thunder! Is he ill?" asked Lumley-Lumley in surprise. "Where is he?"

"He hasn't come back from the tuckshop yet," said Mellish. "You needn't wait."

"Why not?" demanded Lumley-Lumley.

"He won't ask you to feed."

"I guess—"

"Hallo! Here he is!" said Crooke. Levison came into the study. The three juniors looked at him; to their surprise, he came in empty-handed. He glanced round at the three fellows, apparently a little surprised by the expressions upon their faces. Lumley-Lumley was grinning as he threw himself into a chair and toasted his steaming boots at the fire. Mellish had assumed his friendliest smile; and Crooke was smiling in a most agreeable manner—a very unusual thing for Crooke.

"Hallo, Levison, old man!" said Mellish affectionately.

"Hallo!" said Levison.

"We're all ready!"

"All what?" asked Levison.

"All ready!"

"Are you?" said Levison, looking astonished. "What are you all ready for?"

"The—feed!"

"Wandering in your mind?" asked Levison pleasantly. "I'm not aware that I'm standing any feed. If I am, I don't know anything about it; but I'm much obliged to you for mentioning it. Where is it?"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"I—I say, you know, don't be funny," said Mellish feebly. "I—I suppose this is a little joke of yours, Levison?"

"If it is, I don't see the point," said Levison calmly. "Perhaps I've developed a gift of unconscious humour. I don't know."

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"Look here!" said Crooke, his agreeable smile fading away somewhat.

"Look here, Levison! I saw you in Dame Taggles' shop ten minutes ago."

"I dare say you did," agreed Levison. "You were buying up lots of things—half the blessed shop, I think."

"I may have bought a few things," said Levison.

"Well, I—I concluded, naturally, that it was a feed," said Crooke. "I suppose you haven't bought the stuff to feed in a corner all by yourself, have you?"

Levison laughed.

"Trot it out, Levison, old man," said Mellish. "We'll have a feed up here instead of going down to dinner. We can get leave."

"Yes, you can get leave all right," agreed Levison, warming his feet at the fire. "The question is, how are you going to get the feed?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lumley-Lumley. "On second thoughts, Mellish, I guess you needn't trouble to ask me to join you, after all."

"Do you mean to say you're not standing a feed, Levison?" asked Mellish, his expression changing very much.

Levison nodded.

"Then what have you bought the grub for?"

"Cash!"

"You fathead! I mean, what are you going to do with it?"

"Eat it."

"All by yourself?"

"Yes."

"Well, of all the pigs—" said Crooke.

"Of all the mean cads—" said Mellish.

"There's your character, Levison," grinned Lumley-Lumley. "You know what your pals think of you now. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, go it!" said Levison. "I don't mind. You had a feed in your study the other day, Crooke, and you mentioned to me that you didn't want any Fourth Form kids."

"Ahem!" said Crooke.

"You had a bag of tarts last night, Mellish, and there weren't any left for me when I came into the study," Levison remarked.

"Ahem!"

"I didn't know Crooke had his eye on me in the tuckshop," said Levison, frowning. "But it doesn't make any difference. I'm not standing anything. Ta-ta! There's the dinner!"

And Levison walked out of the study.

Lumley-Lumley chuckled as he watched the faces of Mellish and Crooke. All their pleasant expressions had vanished.

"You silly ass!" said Mellish, addressing Crooke. "What did you tell me Levison was laying in a feed for? You might have guessed that he didn't mean it for anybody but himself."

And Mellish jerked the tablecloth from the table, and hurled it into a corner of the study. And hurled the knives and forks after it. He would have hurled the plates, too, but they happened to be his own property.

"You chump!" replied Crooke, with equal politeness. "If I were studymate to that rotter, I'd make him play the game, or take it out of his hide! Poof!"

And Crooke swung away angrily. Mellish went downstairs disconsolately to cold mutton, and Lumley-Lumley followed him, still chuckling.

The extensive purchases Levison had made in the tuckshop did not make their appearance in the study. Levison had probably bestowed them in some very safe place.

CHAPTER 14.

Tom Merry Keeps Watch!

IN the Common-room that evening a group of juniors were chatting round Tom Merry.

The talk ran on the subject of the ghost of St. Jim's. The whole House was still in a state of puzzled excitement over the strange manifestations from Nobody's Study.

The general impression was that some practical joker was thus disturbing the serenity of the School House, but how he was doing it was a mystery. Some of the fellows, however, were inclined to take a supernatural view of the matter; and all of them, whether they believed in ghosts or not, showed a marked disinclination to go near Nobody's Study after dark.

Levison came into the Common-room and joined the chatting juniors.

"Talking ghosts?" he asked.

"Yes!" said Tom Merry shortly.

"I think it's about time that the giddy ghost was laid," said Levison.

"If I were junior skipper of the School House, I should consider it was up to me to lay it!"

"Oh, rats!"

"I weally do not see how it is to be laid, Levison," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If you have got an ideah—somethin' bettah than Glyn's wotten electric bell—"

"Why not stay up all night in the haunted room, and watch for it?" asked Levison. "If the ghost walks, you'd be bound to nab it!"

"Ahem!"

"I don't think anybody would care to stay up all night in the haunted room," said Monty Lowther.

"Why not—if you don't believe in ghosts?"

"Well, you see—"

"It's up to Tom Merry to do it," said Levison.

"Well, I'm not going to do it," said Tom Merry.

"Very well; if you funk it, I'll do it!"

"You?" exclaimed half a dozen voices.

Levison was not famous for courage, and his offer took all the juniors by surprise.

"Yes; I'm not afraid!"

"I'm not afraid!" said Tom Merry angrily. "But I don't want to get the shivers in that cold place, and—and—"

"And you don't want to see the ghost or hear him groaning!" said Levison, with a chuckle.

"Oh, you're gassing!" said Tom Merry scornfully. "You haven't the nerve to do it!"

"You'll see, then! I'll do it to-night. I'm not afraid of disappearing and leaving only my clothes behind, like the giddy monk in the legend!" grinned Levison.

"If you mean business—"

"You'll see that I do!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "I dare say you'll come downstairs, but you won't stay in the haunted room. You'll stick somewhere else; we know you, Levison!"

"You can lock me in, if you like."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry frowned.

He did not like the idea of watching all night in the haunted room, but still less did he like the idea of Levison calling him a funk and doing it himself.

"Well, if you stay up I'll stay with you," he said.

Levison shook his head.

(Continued on page 18.)



**Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.**

BALLO, chums! Christmas comes and Christmas goes, but the good old GEM goes on for ever. The grand issue which you hold in your hands is the twenty-ninth Yuletide number of the old paper. That is a great record of which the GEM may justly be proud. There are very few boys' periodicals which can boast of such a long and successful run. In fact, I believe I'm right in saying it's the oldest boys' paper, under its original name, in existence. As far back as March 23rd, 1907, the GEM was first published, and it ran for forty-eight weeks before the "Magnet," our companion paper, was born. A new series was then started, bearing the same issue number as the "Magnet," which has now reached No. 1,452. So that the present number is the fifteen hundredth one exactly. That record speaks volumes for the quality of the stories the GEM has maintained. But in particular it proves that Martin Clifford, as a school story author, is unbeatable, and that the famous characters of St. Jim's that he originated long ago are still the firmest schoolboy favourites of the present time.

By the way, I had a letter from a reader the other day who has somehow got the impression that Martin Clifford is dead! I can assure him that our popular author is very much alive and writing more school and adventure stories now than ever before.

Another great story of his, entitled:

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S SECRET!"

appears in our next ripping number.

The rivalry which has always existed between Mr. Railton, the popular master of the School House, and Mr. Ratcliff, the sour-tempered New House master, gives place to bitter enmity on the part of "Ratty" in this splendid yarn. The New House master learns, in a shady manner, that Mr. Railton is troubled by some secret. Ratty thinks it will not bear the light of day, so he sets out to discover what it is, with the desired object of showing up the School

House master. It is then that Tom Merry & Co. take a hand, with results that are highly amusing to them—if not to Mr. Ratcliff!

"TUBBY MUFFIN'S CHRISTMAS PUDDING!"

After an interval of a week our grand Rookwood series is continued again under the above title. It is a lively Christmas story in which Tubby Muffin gets the bright idea of forming a Christmas pudding fund, the juniors subscribing to it to pay for the cost of the ingredients. Tubby intends to make it himself. But neither that pudding, nor the one which follows it, is destined to reach the cooking-pot. The founder of the fund is responsible for the non-appearance of the first; but the second—Well, the "mystery man" of Rookwood, who has caused such a sensation in the school, puts it to a use for which it was never intended.

This ripping story, together with "The Housemaster's Secret!" will give you many happy hours of entertainment; so make sure that you order your GEM early.

FOR THE CHRISTMAS PARTY!

Many of you, chums, will be holding Christmas parties or attending those of your friends, and, of course, at such functions one is usually called upon to perform in some way to keep the party going. If you don't play a musical instrument or sing, then it is as well to be prepared with some other form of amusement. Mystery tricks never fail to appeal to young and old folk alike, and here are a few which you can have up your sleeve ready. All that is required is a box of matches.

THE DISAPPEARING MATCHES!

For the first trick you must prepare the matchbox in advance. Empty out the matches and cut the container in half crosswise, taking care not to split it in doing so. You can cut it quite easily with an old safety-razor blade. Now push the two halves back into the

lid of the box, first putting in about three or four matches (see Fig. 1). No one can tell that the container is cut in half.

The trick is, you tell your friends, that you will make the matches disappear. Of course, you first show them the box contains matches, then, holding it up so that no one can see inside, you pull out the top half of the container about an inch (see Fig. 2). Don't make the mistake of pulling it out too far, or you will give the game away that the container is cut in half. No matches will be visible, and your friends will be completely mystified. Then, with a few "magical" passes with the hands, you shut up the box, push it open again, and show your friends that the matches have returned. You can repeat this trick two or three times, but your friends will never guess the secret of it—until you show them.

LIFTING THREE MATCHES!

Having got your friends interested with that trick, set up three matches on end, with the "live" heads resting against each other. Now challenge your audience to lift them with a fourth match without touching them with the hands. Unless someone knows the trick they will have to admit defeat. Then all you do is strike the fourth match and set light to the three standing up, blowing them out immediately. You will find that the heads of the matches have stuck together, and so you can lift them easily.

THE TEN MATCHES TRICK!

From raising three matches with one you now tell your friends that you will lift nine with one. This is how it's done. Lay one match on the table, and alternately, at right angles from each side, lean the eight matches on it. Your eight matches now form a sort of "guard of honour" over the match lying flat on the table. Next place a match down the centre where the matches cross the bottom one. Now grip the bottom match in finger and thumb and very gently raise the nine matches, as shown in Fig. 3. You will find that the centre match will lock them together, so that you can lift them clear of the table.

FORMING FOUR TRIANGLES!

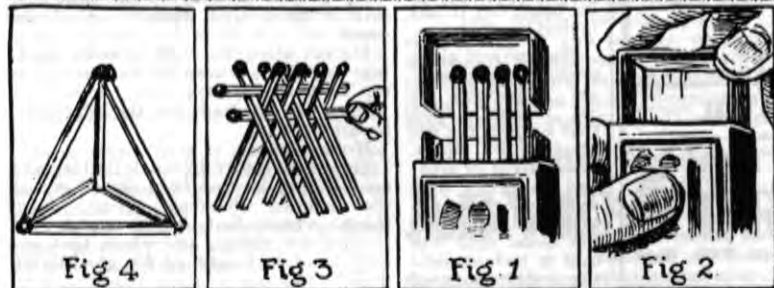
Here is just one more easy match trick to try. With three matches form on the table a triangle. Ask your friends if any of them can, with the aid of three more matches, form three more triangles. They will try all sorts of ways, but they will not fathom how it's done. Then you stand three matches upright, one from each corner of the triangle formed on the table, as in Fig. 4, leaning the heads against each other.

By the way, in performing this trick, and also when lifting the three matches with one by fusing them, difficulty may be experienced in leaning the matches together in an upright position. This can easily be overcome by breathing on the heads, when they will readily hold together.

Your friends will probably have had enough of match tricks by now, so you round off your performance with a laugh. Turn to a chum and say: "Are you having tea anywhere on Sunday?" He will think that an invitation is coming and say "No!" Then you reply: "You will be hungry on Monday, won't you?"

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"That won't do!"

"Why not?"

"Because if it's a practical joker he'll get on to it if there's more than one of us. One chap by himself could get in without being noticed, but a lot couldn't; and if it's the ghost he mightn't appear to more than one at a time. I believe that's supposed to be one of the little peculiarities of spooks. Look here, if you've got nerve enough to watch for the ghost you can do it; but if you haven't, I'll do it—and I mean it. It's time the ghost was laid, or we shall have all the fags dreaming dreams and going about in a state of nerves. Even the masters don't care about going into Nobody's Study after dark."

Tom Merry set his lips. He could not very well refuse Levison's challenge, but he did not like the prospects. He was not afraid, but—

"Very well," he said, "I'll stay there to-night, if you'll undertake to do the same to-morrow night, Levison!"

"Done!" said Levison.

"It will be wathah wotten stayin' there all alone," said Arthur Augustus dubiously. "You can't even keep the light goin', Tom Mewwy. It seems that it goes out when the ghost appears."

"I shall do it," said Tom Merry quietly. "After lights out I'll come down and go into Nobody's Study, and I'll stay there."

"If you get scared—" said Levison. "If I get scared I'll clear out. But if I leave the study I shall come back to the dormitory and own up."

"Yaas, wathah! We can wely on you, deah boy."

Tom Merry wore a very thoughtful look until bed-time. He had taken on the task, and he did not think of retreating from it. But he did not like it. The cad of the Fourth had contrived to plant it upon him, and when Levison's turn came to follow his example Tom Merry suspected that he would find some excuse for not carrying out his compact. But the Shell fellow was in for it now, and there was no retreat.

The secret was well kept, and when Darrell saw lights-out in the Shell dormitory that night, he went away without a suspicion that anything was "on."

When ten o'clock sounded from the

old tower of St. Jim's Tom Merry stepped out of bed and began to dress himself. Most of the Shell fellows were asleep by that time, but Tom Merry's chums were awake.

Monty Lowther sat up in bed.

"That you, Tommy?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, pulling on his shoes.

"Blessed if I half like your going down alone," said Lowther. "Haden't you better let me come with you, Tom?"

"Can't be did! The arrangement is for me to go alone."

"Yes; but—" began Manners.

"Levison will crow to-morrow if I take anybody with me," said Tom Merry. "I don't like it, but I'm going through with it."

"Take a cricket stump with you," said Kangaroo.

"I've got one."

"And a box of matches," said Bernard Glyn, "in case the light goes out."

"I've got 'em!"

And Tom Merry, having finished dressing, slipped quietly out of the dormitory. His chums remained in a wakeful and anxious frame of mind. It was all very well to scoff at ghost stories in the day-time, and when there were a good many fellows together; but at night, with darkness over the school and the winter wind howling round the old roofs of St. Jim's, it was a different matter.

"He'll be back in 'five minutes," said Gore.

But Gore was mistaken. Tom Merry did not return, and one by one the Shell fellows dropped off to sleep.

Tom Merry was in Nobody's Study.

He shivered a little as he entered the desolate apartment. It seemed more cold, more desolate, more gloomy than ever at that late hour of the night.

Tom Merry lighted the gas and closed the door. In more distant parts of the School House there were people awake with lights and fires; but Nobody's Study seemed remote from all human contact.

After the heavy oaken door was closed every sound was shut out. Tom Merry looked carefully round the room and sat down on the old table to avoid contact with the cold stones on the floor.

He heard eleven strike from the clock tower as he sat there, tired and sleepy, but kept awake by the thought of what might happen. He slipped from the table and began to pace up and down the room to keep himself warm.

In the solitude and silence the legend of that room came into his mind. He tried to think of other things—of football, of Latin verses; he tried to work out a mathematical problem in his head, but it was useless.

One subject alone persisted in remaining uppermost in his thoughts, and that subject was the ghost of St. Jim's. He thought of what had happened long centuries ago in that lonely room—of the blood that was said to have stained the cold stones of

the floor; of the imprisoned monk who had vanished, leaving his robe where he had lain down to sleep—carried off, according to one account, by the evil one.

He started, and looked round about him incessantly. As he moved his shadow moved, and it startled him strangely.

A picture floated in his disturbed mind—the picture of that old monk sleeping on his bed of straw—of the thing that had appeared to bear him mysteriously away.

He gave a sudden start.

He stood in the middle of the haunted room, looking about him. What was that sound? Whence had it come?

Tom Merry shuddered, and every hair upon his head seemed to stand on end. From the silence came that fearful sound—as if the scene of murder was being re-enacted by invisible forms in the haunted room!

The light flickered and paled.

Tom Merry rubbed his eyes.

There was no doubt about it!

The gas was turned full on, but even as he looked at it with startling eyes the flame died down and expired.

The room was plunged into darkness!

CHAPTER 15.

The Mystery!

TOM MERRY stood in the darkness in the haunted room, his very flesh creeping.

What had caused that sudden extinguishing of the light?

He had not touched it; no human hand had touched it.

He put out his hands instinctively in the darkness, as if to ward off something—he did not know what.

What was that sound?

A rustling sound, as of a robe—an old monk's robe—sweeping on the stone floor, brushing against the stone walls!

The blood rushed to Tom Merry's heart.

What was it?

From the silence came that deep and terrible groan.

It rang in Tom Merry's ears; it seemed to fill the haunted room with strange and eerie noises.

Groan!

Tom Merry dashed in the direction of the sound. He stumbled against the table, and gave a sharp cry.

There was a movement; something was in the room—he was no longer alone! But what was it? What dreadful thing had appeared in that lonely chamber in the darkness, with the door closed—amid walls of solid stone?

Tom Merry shuddered. An icy touch was on his face, as if a hand of death had touched him there.

He cried out in horror, and threw out his hands. They swept the empty air!

The nerves of the boy could stand no more.

He groped his way to the door and tore it open, and dashed out of the room.

He ran along the dark passage, panting, and did not stop till he was at the top of the stairs.

Then he paused in the darkness, breathing hard.

He hesitated.

Should he return to the dormitory and confess that he had been scared out of the haunted chamber, or—return there, where that weird sound had thrilled his nerves, and where that ice-cold hand had touched his shuddering flesh?



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He shivered. He could not go back to the haunted room. He made his way with trembling footsteps to the dormitory.

He was shaking from head to foot; the silence and darkness of the familiar passage seemed fearful to him now.

He hurried his footsteps, and almost ran into the Shell dormitory. He closed the door behind him and stood shivering and panting.

"What was it? Oh, good heavens, what was it?" he gasped.

There was a sound in the dormitory. Manners had been awakened by Tom Merry's entrance, and he sat up in bed.

"What's that? Is that you, Tom?"

"Yes," muttered Tom Merry.

"You've come back?"

"Yes."

Manners jumped out of bed. The choking, shaky voice of his chum warned him that something was wrong.

"Tom, old man, what's happened?"

Tom Merry sank panting upon his bed.

"I—I don't know!" he gasped. "I—I—it was real enough! The light went out; nobody touched it, but it went out, and—something touched me!"

"Tom!"

"Something icy cold, like a dead man's hand!" said Tom Merry, shuddering. "I—I wouldn't go through it again for worlds!"

"Get into bed, old man," said Manners, his arm round his chum. "You're cold all over. I wish I hadn't let you go alone. Tumble in!"

Tom Merry turned into bed. Manners piled the bedclothes on him, and then returned to his own bed.

"All right, Tommy?"

"All serene, old man."

And Tom Merry fell asleep at last. He slept, to dream of his terrible experience in the haunted room, and once he woke up, feeling that ice-cold touch upon his face again, but this time to discover that it was only a dream.

He slept fitfully till morning, and when the morning light streamed in at the high windows of the dormitory, and the rising-bell clanged out, Tom Merry's face was pale as he rose.

His disturbed looks attracted general attention, and there were inquiries on all sides as to what happened in the haunted room.

"Very steep!" said Crooke, when Tom Merry had told his story. "You dreamed it."

"I did not dream it," said Tom Merry quietly.

"I suppose you were in such a blue funk that you fancied it all," said Crooke, with a sneering laugh.

Tom Merry turned red.

"Will you undertake to watch in the haunted room to-night?" he asked.

"No fear!" said Crooke. "I'm not afraid of ghosts, but I don't want to catch a cold, or to lose a night's rest, either."

"You're afraid," said Tom Merry scornfully. "You'd be too much in a blue funk yourself to go into the room at all after dark, so you can shut up on the subject of funking. If I get any more of it, you'll get a thick ear!"

And Crooke thought it wisest to shut up.

There was a buzz of comment on the strange story in the Shell dormitory. An idea occurred to Bernard Glyn as he thought it over.

"You say the gas went out without being touched?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"You didn't touch it yourself?"

"I didn't touch it!"

"Then it ought to be turned on now," said Glyn.

"My hat! Yes! I never thought of that!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It certainly went out, and I never turned it off. The gas must have been escaping all the time!"

"And the burner will still be turned on," said Kangaroo.

"That's jolly queer!" said Monty Lowther. "If the gas is escaping all the time, there ought to be a smell of it, even as far off as this!"

Tom Merry hurried into his clothes. He knew well enough the danger of leaving the gas turned on unlighted, but in the terror of the night he had not thought of that. He hurried downstairs as soon as he was dressed, and several fellows followed down with him. On the way to Nobody's Study they met a crowd of the Fourth.

Blake & Co. were anxious to know what had happened from the vigil of the previous night.

"Well, what happened?" asked Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! What happened, deah boy?"

Crooke grinned.

"Merry got a scare and bolted!" he said. "He says the gas went out of its own accord, without being turned off! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! That's what happened with young Wally!"

"We're going to see if the burner's turned off," said Tom Merry.

The juniors hurried to Nobody's Study.

Tom Merry opened the door. There was no odour of gas in the room. The juniors looked up at the burner; it was turned off in the usual way. Then they looked at Tom Merry.

"You are sure you didn't turn it off?" asked Kangaroo.

"Quite sure!"

"Then somebody has turned this burner off since, or else it would be escaping now," said Digby.

"That shows it must have been somebody playing a trick," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" "Unless it was all funk and fancy," suggested Crooke.

Biff!

Crooke sat down suddenly on the carpet. He sat there and gasped, and glared at Tom Merry.

"What did you do that for?" he roared.

"To satisfy you that I'm not a funk," said Tom Merry. "I may have bolted from the haunted room last night, but I can lick you any time, Crooke, my boy—and I'm ready to do it now, if you're not going to give a sample of blue funk!"

Crooke scrambled up. Evidently he preferred to give the sample of blue funk, for he slouched out of the room without replying.

"I'm blessed if I can understand it at all!" said Blake. "Perhaps you'll clear up the mystery to-night, Levison."

Levison was looking very thoughtful.

"Yes, perhaps," he said.

"Don't feel so much inclined for it now?" asked Herries, with a grin.

"Oh, yes, I'll stick to it!"

"I'll believe that when I see it," murmured Monty Lowther.

And the other fellows were of Lowther's opinion. Levison was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and there was not a fellow in the School House who believed that he would keep watch in the haunted room.

CHAPTER 16.

Levison Means Business!

THE story of Tom Merry's strange adventure in the haunted room was the talk of St. Jim's that morning.

Skimpole's fright in Nobody's Study, and Wally's lurid account of what had happened there, had been discounted; but all the fellows knew that Tom Merry's word was fully to be relied upon; he was not likely to imagine things or to exaggerate. And the excitement on the subject of the haunted room was growing more feverish.



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The unknown practical joker—if, indeed, the strange manifestations were due to a practical joker—was probably laughing very much in his sleeve at the excitement in the House.

During the day a crowd of fellows examined the study, looking over the walls, and examining the solid stone blocks of the floor, and scanning the gaspise for a solution of the mystery. But the solution was not to be found.

Figgins & Co. came over specially from the New House on a journey of investigation. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence came over from the New House after them, and they examined the mysterious room right and left, but they made no more discoveries than the School House fellows had made.

The mystery of Nobody's Study, whatever it was, was well kept by those gloomy walls.

There was so much talk on the subject that Tom Merry's exploit came to the ears of the prefects, and Kildare called the captain of the Shell into his study after lessons to speak to him. He heard Tom Merry's account of what had happened, but he did not give his opinion on it.

As a matter of fact, he did not know in the least what to make of it. But he warned Tom Merry against any more night vigils.

"You're not to keep watch in there again," he said. "If you'd been a kid with weak nerves, you might have gone dotty—or into hysterics. Keep out of the room at night. Remember!"

Tom Merry laughed ruefully.

"Right-ho!" he said. "I'm not likely to keep watch in there again, Kildare. I wouldn't do it for a dozen terms' pocket-money in a lump!"

And Tom Merry's views were shared by the rest of the juniors. They wanted to solve the mystery, but they didn't care for the idea of keeping watch in the haunted room.

To the general surprise, Levison held to his intention of doing it, however. Levison was not cast in heroic mould; and that Levison should undertake to do what fellows like Tom Merry and Jack Blake did not care to take on was astonishing.

The simplest explanation was that Levison was indulging in swank, and that when the time came he would back out. So when Levison declared his intentions of taking his turn at the vigil in Nobody's Study, his declarations were received with shakings of heads and incredulous smiles.

Everyone expected that towards evening he would develop a cold, or some other excuse for not keeping his word. But he didn't.

After tea, when he was doing his preparation in his study, Mellish and Lumley-Lumley asked him about it. Both were exceedingly sceptical.

"I guess you've given up that wheeze, Levison," Lumley-Lumley remarked, as Levison rose from the table, his work finished.

"What wheeze?" asked Levison.

"Watching in the haunted room."

"I've not given it up."

"You're going through with it?"

"Yes."

Lumley-Lumley grinned.

"You're leaving it pretty late to back out," he remarked.

"I'm not going to back out," said Levison. And he sauntered out of the study.

Lumley-Lumley looked at Mellish.

"What does it mean?" he said.

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"Levison hasn't got the pluck to do it. I guess I shouldn't undertake to do it myself, and I reckon I've got more pluck than Levison."

"Blessed if I can catch on," said Mellish. "Perhaps he's going to let it out, and get stopped by the prefects at the last minute."

"Ah, that's it!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess you've hit it."

But Lumley-Lumley guessed wrong. Levison did not let it out, and the prefects had no suspicion of Levison's intention.

The other juniors did not let it out either; they were very careful about that. Levison had declared that he would do what the leaders of the House did not care to do; and nobody wanted to save him from the humiliation of climbing down after his swank.

The amazing thing was that Levison showed no sign of wanting to climb down.

When the juniors gathered in the Common-room before bed-time for the usual talk, Levison was there, looking cool and unconcerned, and he said nothing about having a cold, or being caught by the prefects, or anything of the kind.

Most eyes were upon Levison just now; he had come into very unusual prominence. Levison was not given to distinguishing himself; he was too idle to earn distinction in classes, though he was clever enough if he had chosen, and he was nothing at games. But he enjoyed being conspicuous, that was easily seen; and he more than anything else enjoyed being able to swank over the acknowledged leaders of the School House juniors. He had undertaken what Blake and Tom Merry retreated from, and if he carried it through it would be a feather in his cap, and he would take care not to let his rivals forget it.

"Got a cold, Levison?" asked Monty Lowther, shortly before bed-time.

Levison looked surprised.

"No," he replied.

"Feel ill?"

"No; I'm all right."

"What the dickens reason are you going to give for not keeping watch tonight in Nobody's Study?" demanded Lowther.

Levison grinned.

"I'm going to keep watch," he replied. "Strange as it may seem, I'm going to keep my word, Lowther."

"Oh, that's piffle, you know!" remonstrated Lowther.

"Don't you believe me?"

"Well, to put it quite truthfully, I don't."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll see!" he said.

"You'd better not do it, Levison," said Tom Merry seriously. "I had a scare, and I don't deny it. It was a rotten experience, and I wouldn't go through it again for anything. I advise you to chuck it."

"So that you and your pals can chip me for funking it, I suppose?" said Levison, with a sneer.

Tom Merry flushed.

"No," he said, "that's not my reason for speaking, and you're a rotten cad to suppose so. But it's no good talking to you."

And Tom Merry turned away without another word.

Levison yawned.

"I don't believe in ghosts," he said. "And I've got pretty strong nerves. If it's a practical joker, I'll nab him; if it's a ghost, I'll lay him; if it's all imagination and funk—as I believe it is—I shall prove it by staying in the

haunted room all night. If I see nothing, and hear nothing, it will be pretty clear proof that there's nothing to be seen or heard."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "If—if—"

"Well, if what?"

"If you weally stay in Nobody's Study all night, Levison," said the swell of St. Jim's calmly. "You must excuse me, deah boy, but you are such a feahful—ahem!—whoppah-merchant, that we can't take your word."

"No fear!" said Manners emphatically.

"I don't ask you to take it," said Levison. "After I'm in the haunted room one of you chaps will lock the door on the outside."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"That will settle it, I think," said Levison, with a glance round.

"That will settle it—rather!" said Blake. "But don't be an ass, Levison. We're not going to lock you in. If the same thing happened to you that happened to Tom Merry, you might go dotty with fright."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I haven't got such a giddy imagination as Tom Merry," said Levison, grinning. "I shall be all right. You fellows can come down with me from the dorm and see me into the room, and lock the door."

Blake shook his head.

"I won't have a hand in that, for one," he said. "It's too dangerous. If we found you a babbling lunatic in the morning, I shouldn't like to have to explain it to the Head."

"No feah!"

"Faith, and it wouldn't make much of a change in him entirely!" remarked Reilly.

Levison scowled.

"Look here, what's to be done, then? If you don't lock me in you won't believe that I've been in the room, and you say you won't lock me in."

"I certainly won't!"

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Good old Levison!" he said. "That's the way out, is it? You won't be able to undertake the job at all, will you, Levison?"

There was a general laugh. All the fellows thought that the time had come now for Levison to back out. But it was a mistake again.

"Very well! I've got an idea," said Levison. "You shan't lock the door, if you won't, but you shall tie it shut with a twine on the handle. If I want to open the door the twine will break, and if you find it unbroken in the morning, you'll know that I haven't opened the door. How's that?"

"Not out," said Monty Lowther, "if you mean business."

Kildare looked in.

"Bed, you young sweeps!" he said.

And the young sweeps went to bed.

CHAPTER 17.

Levison's Vigil!

CE N o'clock was sounding from the clock tower of St. Jim's when the door of the Fourth Form dormitory opened gently.

"Hallo!" came Blake's voice. "Who's that?"

There was a chuckle.

"It's I!" said Monty Lowther. "I've brought the string."

"The what?"

"The string, to tie Levison in Nobody's Study—unless he can't possibly be awakened this side of rising-bell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For goodness' sake don't be funny, Lowther!" said Levison's voice. "I'm up!"

"Oh, you are, are you?"

"Yes; and dressed! I'm ready!"

It was true, and Monty Lowther gave a low whistle of astonishment. Even that Doubting Thomas had to believe now. Levison meant business!

"You fellows coming down with me?" asked Levison. "There had better be one or two of you, to see that Lowther ties the door safely."

"Right-ho!" yawned Blake, rolling out of bed.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus slipped on their clothes. Levison had finished dressing, and he was quite cool and collected. The four juniors went out of the dormitory together. The passage was dark, but they knew the way well. They crept silently down to the Fourth Form passage, where the light was on, and slipped into the recess at the corner of the passage.

Monty Lowther opened the door of Nobody's Study. The juniors entered, and Lowther lighted the gas.

"It's turned off at the main at midnight, you know, Levison," Blake remarked. "You'll be in the dark then!"

"I've got a lamp!" said Levison.

"You really mean to stick it out, then?" said Blake, with a last lingering doubt.

"Haven't I said so?" demanded Levison.

"Oh, all right!"

Levison placed the lamp on the table and sat down in a chair. He drew a paper from his pocket to read. The juniors looked at him; he was perfectly

cool. They turned to the door and passed out of the room.

Lowther pulled the door shut. He tied a piece of string to the handle, and forced a little staple in the wall, and tied the string to that. It was thin string; the opening of the door would snap it at once, and so Levison's escape was open to him if he chose to flee. But he could not leave the study without leaving indisputable evidence that he had done so.

"He's a deep beggar," said Blake. "He might come out, and tie up the string after him, you know!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we shouldn't find him here when we came down in the morning, should we, fathead?" said Monty Lowther politely.

"He would go back before morning, chump!"

"Well, he couldn't tie this string again after going in, could he, you duffer?" said Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove, no!"

"No; I suppose it's all right," said Blake. "But he's such a deep bounder, and I'm blessed if I can understand his taking this on!"

"Well, we shall see if he sticks it out," said Lowther sceptically.

The juniors returned silently upstairs. Monty Lowther went into the Shell dormitory, and found several fellows awake to ask questions.

"Is he in the study?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes; he's there all right!"

"And you've tied the handle?"

"Right as rain!"

"He'll clear out before morning," said Kangaroo.

"I'm jolly sure he will!" said Monty Lowther. And he turned in.

Blake and D'Arcy went to bed in the Fourth Form dormitory. There, also, there were inquiries as to whether Levison had been safely disposed of.

"Safe as houses!" said Blake. "He can't get out and get in again without showing that he's done it—unless some pal of his goes down and ties the string after him. And no pal of his is going out of this giddy dorm! I'm going to lock the door and put the key under my pillow!"

Mellish grinned.

"I never thought of going down, if you mean me," he said. "I don't believe Levison will stick it out. He'll come bolting up in ten minutes, same as Tom Merry did!"

"Well, you and Levison are as thick as thieves, and a chap may as well make sure," said Blake, with a chuckle. And he locked the dormitory door on the inside and put the key under his pillow, and went to bed.

Some of the fellows remained awake, fully expecting Levison to return to the dormitory before half an hour had elapsed.

But Levison did not return.

Blake was the last to go to sleep. He heard half-past ten strike, and then a quarter to eleven chimed out, and then he dozed off.

He did not awaken again till the rising-bell was peeling out in the misty morning.

Clang, clang, clang!

Jack Blake sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes.

The misty December morning was peeping in at the windows, and Blake looked at once towards Levison's bed.

It was empty.

"My hat! Levison didn't come back!" he exclaimed.



"Go it, Towser!" exclaimed Herries. "Fetch him!" Towser made a wild leap into the cupboard, and reappeared a moment later with a cold rabbit in his mouth. "My rabbit!" yelled Mellish. "You'll have to pay for it, you rotter!" Instead of tracking down the missing Levison, it was the rabbit Herries' bulldog was after!

"How could he?" said Reilly. "Sure, the door's locked, and you've got the key under your pillow, Blake darling!" "Better get the door unlocked before a prefect comes along and wants to know what it's locked for," suggested Kerruish.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake crossed over to the door and unlocked it. The Fourth Formers tumbled out of bed, some of them looking and feeling anxious. Nobody had really believed that Levison would watch out the whole night in the haunted room; but he had evidently done so. And there was a lurking fear in some minds that something might have happened to him.

Blake dressed himself quickly. He was just ready to go down when the door was flung open and the Terrible Three looked in.

"Good-morning, Levison!" called out Monty Lowther; and Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

"Levison's not here," said Bishop.

"Not here?" said the three Shell fellows together.

"Wathah not, deah boys!"

Monty Lowther whistled.

"You don't mean to say that—that he didn't come back to the dorm?" he asked.

"He jolly well didn't!" said Blake. "I kept the door locked all night, and the key under my pillow. You can see that Levison hasn't been back."

Tom Merry's face became very grave.

"I hope nothing's happened to him," he said. "Fellows with weak nerves have died of fright before now. Let's go down and see him."

"It's all right," said Lowther, as they hurried downstairs. "He's not in the haunted room. I'll bet my hat we shall find the string broken and nobody in the study."

Tom Merry did not reply. His own fearful experience in the haunted room was in his mind, and anxiety was in his heart. He did not like Levison. It would have been difficult to like the cad of the Fourth. But it was a terrible thought that harm might have come to him in that lonely vigil of the night.

Kildare met the juniors in the lower passage, and looked at them in surprise.

"You're down sharp to time this morning, you young beggars!" he said. "Where are you rushing off to in such a hurry?"

"Nobody's Study!" said Blake.

Kildare frowned.

"You don't mean to say that some young ass has been watching there?" he asked.

"Yes; Levison."

"Levison!" exclaimed Kildare, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah; and as he didn't yme back to the dorm, we're feelin' athah anxious, Kildare, deah boy. I wathah think—"

The St. Jim's captain did not wait to hear what D'Arcy rather thought. He hurried away to Nobody's Study, and the juniors hurried after him.

Monty Lowther ran ahead, and reached the door of the haunted study first.

"My hat!" he exclaimed, in a hushed voice.

"What's the matter?" said Kildare sharply.

Lowther pointed to the string, fastened from the handle of the door to the staple. It was intact—unbroken!

"What does that mean?" asked Kildare.

"It means that Levison hasn't been out of the room all night," said Lowther. "We fixed that string before we went to bed."

"You young asses! I suppose he's gone to sleep in there," said Kildare.

But there was uneasiness in his tone. Not a sound came from Nobody's Study—and the silence struck them all with a chill.

"He must be all right!" muttered Blake.

Kildare flung the door open. He strode into the deserted study; the juniors crowded in after him. There was a cry of amazement from all the fellows there.

The door had not been opened—the unbroken cord was proof enough of that. The window was fastened on the inside.

But the room was empty!

CHAPTER 18.

The Disappearance of Levison!

LEVISON had disappeared.

The junior who had been shut up in Nobody's Study had vanished—vanished as completely, as mysteriously as if the solid stone wall had opened and swallowed him up.

The faces of the juniors grew pale. "Look!" said Tom Merry, in a hushed voice.

On the carpet lay Levison's clothes. The whole suit of clothes was there, even to the socks and boots. If Levison had left the study, he had done it without his clothes. The lamp was on the table; it had not been lighted. The gas was turned off. And Levison was gone!

Kildare looked at the clothes. Back into his mind came the weird legend—of the monk who had been spirited away, leaving his robe and cowl behind—of the strange story of a watcher in the haunted room who had vanished, leaving his clothes.

Had some unseen power whisked the unhappy junior away in the same manner? Could Levison have gone willingly on a bitter December night and left his clothes there? What had happened in the haunted room in those hours of darkness? Had Levison vanished into thin air, as the strange old legend averred must happen to anyone who had the temerity to pass a night in the room under the dominion of the specters of St. Jim's?

"It's all rot!" said Kildare; but his voice was husky. "It's impossible! That story is only a rotten ghost story—such things can't happen!"

"But where is Levison?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Did he bring any other clothes here with him, Blake?"

"None," said Blake positively. "He carried nothing with him but the lamp. I'm certain of that."

"Were there any in the room?"

"I am sure not. There's no cupboard here—nothing to hide anything in. We should have seen anything of the kind. We looked round the room, too, while we were here."

Kildare pressed his hand to his brow.

"Then what has happened?" he muttered.

"The legend says—"

"Confound the legend!" said Kildare angrily. "Never mind that. Levison ought never to have kept watch here. You oughtn't to have let him do it!"

"I know that now!" said Tom Merry hoarsely.

Kildare went to the window. The

catch was fastened; it was old and rusty, and jammed in its place. A fellow might have left by the window, with a rope down to the ground. But where was the rope, and how could he have closed the window again from the outside?

From inside, the rusty old catch was not easy to move, and it creaked and groaned as Kildare forced it back with difficulty.

Kildare opened the window and looked down. Far below was the ground, a shadowy entry between two high buildings. In spite of the thaw, a quantity of snow that had been piled in the narrow space where feet seldom trod had remained unmelted. Kildare could see that the surface of it was unbroken; no foot had trodden there. It was impossible in every way that Levison could have left Nobody's Study by the window.

But where was he?

Kildare turned back into the room, his handsome face very pale.

"Which of you tied the cord on the door?" he asked.

"I did," said Monty Lowther.

"Are you sure it had not been broken and tied again?"

"Quite sure. I knotted the string in a peculiar way; there were the knots just the same. Besides, it's the same string, and it hadn't been broken."

"The door could not be opened without breaking it, could it?"

"No!"

"Then the door cannot have been opened?"

"Impossible!"

"I—I thought Levison might have gone out and tied up the door again to give you fellows a scare; he might have arranged the clothes here, perhaps, and—"

"I thought of that," said Lowther. "But it's the same string, and it hadn't been broken; and the knots were exactly as I left them. Levison was inside the study when I knotted it up last night, and he couldn't possibly have seen how I did it, so if he came out, he couldn't have knotted the string in the same way after breaking it."

Kildare pressed his hand to his forehead.

It was a problem there was no solving apparently. The door had not been opened—the window had not been opened—yet the room was empty!

He looked round at the solid stone walls. Did those grey old blocks of stone hold a strange secret? The captain of St. Jim's went slowly round the walls, tapping on the great blocks. But there was so sound of a hollow. All seemed solid, substantial, impenetrable. The idea of a hidden opening, a secret passage, had been in Kildare's mind, but it did not seem possible.

"I shall have to inform the Head of this," said Kildare, moving to the door at last. "I cannot help thinking that Levison contrived to get out somehow of his own accord. It is just one of the impish tricks he would play to scare us all. You fellows go round and search for him. Tell all the others, and hunt for him through the House."

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

Kildare took his way in search of Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's. Tom Merry & Co. began to search for the missing junior, but without hope. They knew that he was not to be found. If it was a trick, he would keep well out of sight; and if he had disappeared by supernatural means—it was impossible, and yet it seemed that there was no other explanation.

The news of Levison's disappearance spread quickly enough.

In ten minutes the whole House was humming with it; fellows of all Forms forgot everything else, and joined in the search for the missing Fourth Former. The School House was ransacked, up and down, from garret to cellars. Studies and Form-rooms and box-rooms and attics were searched, but no sign was discovered of Ernest Levison.

Then the juniors trooped out into the quadrangle, and extended the search farther. They were joined by a crowd of fellows from the New House, who had heard the news. Figgins & Co., and Redfern & Co. joined in the search with great energy. Every recess in the old quadrangle, and the gym, and the ruined chapel, and the clock-tower, every possible and impossible place was searched and searched again.

But the result was the same.

Levison had disappeared, and there was no trace of him.

When the breakfast bell rang, the search was still going on; and many fellows continued it instead of coming in. It was not till morning chapel that the search slackened and ceased. All St. Jim's had been searched, and it had been made quite clear that there was no possibility of discovering Levison. Either he could not, or would not appear; and the searching was in vain.

Dr. Holmes' brow was very troubled that morning. He visited the haunted room and examined it, and so did all the masters in turn. Indeed, there was scarcely anybody at St. Jim's who did not make a special examination of Nobody's Study that morning; but all searching there led to the same result—nothing!

Levison was gone!

He had vanished from the haunted room as it was said that others had vanished before him—legends that had not been believed till now! But now even the hardest-headed fellows felt their incredulity shaken. What had become of Levison? Where was he?

There was horror on the faces of the St. Jim's fellows when they looked into Nobody's Study, into that dark, gloomy chamber, whence the junior had vanished—vanished, as it seemed, into thin air!

CHAPTER 19.

Missing!

THE day wore on at St. Jim's.

The fellows went into morning school as usual. But very little attention was given to lessons that morning. And the masters slacked as much as the boys. One question was occupying all minds. What had become of Ernest Levison?

Some of the fellows held to the belief that Levison was in hiding. That he was lurking in some secret place, enjoying the confusion and terror he had caused by his disappearance. The theory was so in keeping with Levison's impish character that it seemed the most probable explanation. Levison would not lack some explanation or excuse when he turned up, to save himself from the punishment he had earned. But those who held most firmly to that theory felt that it was untenable, and the day wore on to a close. If Levison was in hiding, he was going without food—for certainly there was no chance of his getting at the larder undiscovered, or to the tuckshop. Fatty Wynn was the first to draw attention to that obvious fact. As Fatty Wynn remarked, a fellow might miss breakfast—it was conceivable! But that he should miss dinner as well in sharp winter weather, and then miss tea—that was incredible. If Levison did not turn up to meals, Fatty averred, it must be because he couldn't. No fellow in his senses would go without a day's grub for the sake of a jape.

Night fell upon St. Jim's.

The winter evening had drawn to a close; and there had been no sign of Levison. Dr. Holmes, in his worry and anxiety, had sent for Inspector Skeat, from Rylcombe. The inspector had come over to the school, and scanned the haunted room with wise eyes, and made notes in a notebook. Then he departed, utterly puzzled, and unable to afford the slightest solution to the mystery.

In the Junior Common-room that evening faces were gloomy, and voices hushed.

Nobody had liked Levison—even his own chums, Crooke and Mellish, had not really liked him. There was nothing in his character to like. But that rather weighed upon the boys' minds than relieved them now. The fact that they had disliked the boy who had vanished added a touch of remorse to their anxiety for him.

"He wasn't such a feahful wottah, you know," Arthur Augustus remarked, breaking the long silence in the

(Continued on the next page.)

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Common-room. He felt a natural desire to say as much as could be said for the vanished junior.

Jack Blake nodded glumly.

"He had his good points," he said.

Herries grunted.

"Towler never liked him," he said.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"He wasn't really such a bad chap," said Manners. "You remember once he did a rather decent thing—when he saved Cousin Ethel from a bull!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, that was a decent thing," said Tom Merry.

And it made the juniors feel quite cheerful for a moment, to think that there was one decent thing to be laid to Levison's credit, now that he had gone.

"We might have been a bit easier with him," said Monty Lowther. "But—but after all, you know, it may turn out one of his weird japes."

"You know, he had a peculiar turn of mind; he would think of the weirdest japes; this may be one of them."

"I hope it is," said Kangaroo. "That would be better than—than—"

"It must be a jape," said Tom Merry desperately. "He can't have vanished into thin air. They say there's some influence—the Evil One at work—in the haunted room. That's all piffle!"

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"But where is Levison intirely?" said Reilly.

"Yes, that's it!"

"I guess he'll turn up, with some yarn to account for the trouble he's given us," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. "I can't believe that anything's happened to him. Nothing could have happened to him, unless there's a real ghost. And I guess I don't take any stock in spooks!"

"Well, I never did," said Clifton Dane. "But now—"

"Yaas, now it seems wathah—wathah poss, you know."

"You think he's in hiding, Lumley?" asked Tom Merry.

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"Then what is he living on, and where is he? He can't have had any food for a whole day," said the captain of the Shell.

"Might have had some in his pocket."

"But he left his pockets along with his clothes," said Monty Lowther; "and his clothes are still in the haunted study. If he's in hiding, how could he hide about in this freezing weather without his clobber?"

"Might have had some more hidden ready. If it's a jape, he would think of that—he knew the story of the haunted room as well as we do—that fellows who stay there at night are supposed to vanish into air."

"But then, where is he?"

Lumley-Lumley shook his head.

"I guess I can't answer that. This old place is full of secrets; and Levison may have discovered one that nobody else knows anything about."

"It's possible," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"It's more possible than a ghost, or an evil spirit, and vanishing into space," said Lumley-Lumley.

"I—I suppose so."

"But he never left the haunted room," said Lowther. "I know the cord on the door-handle hadn't been disturbed—I'll swear to that!"

"Then there's a secret way out of Nobody's Study, I guess."

"Every chap in the school has been hunting for it."

"I guess I give it up!"

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And that was all the others had to do, as well as Lumley-Lumley. They puzzled over the problem until their heads ached, without getting any nearer to a solution. The night advanced, and Levison remained missing—and when bed-time came, nothing had been seen or heard of him.

The juniors went to bed in a sleepless mood.

Mr. Railton and Kildare and a couple of prefects had arranged to watch in the haunted room that night, till dawn, in the hope of discovering something. They were provided with lamps to light if the gas went out; and if there were any manifestations of the restless spirit, they hoped to discover something.

But in Nobody's Study that night there was no alarm. There were no sounds, no groans; the silence and stillness of the winter night were unbroken.

When morning came the watchers gave up their vigil, tired and white and weary. Nothing had been discovered.

A new day dawned upon St. Jim's. It was twenty-four hours since Levison had disappeared.

What had become of him?

—

CHAPTER 20.

Lumley-Lumley's Theory!

COM MERRY & CO. wore gloomy looks that morning. Lumley-Lumley still held to the theory that Levison was in hiding; that the whole affair was simply an unscrupulous jape of the cad of the Fourth. But almost everybody else had given up that idea now. It seemed impossible that Levison, with all his coolness and nerve, could have the hardened effrontery to keep up such a trick for so long a while. And what excuse, what explanation could he offer when he reappeared, to save himself from the heavy punishment that would certainly be inflicted?

Tom Merry & Co. felt that something had happened to Levison—he was not staying away of his own free will. Something had happened during that night in the haunted room. What, they did not know; but something horrible—something that had taken the junior away from the sight of his school-fellows—perhaps for ever!

During the morning, workmen arrived at the school and were taken into Nobody's Study. They raised several of the great flagstones off the floor, and tested the walls in every way. They failed to discover the slightest indication of a secret passage or a secret opening. They retired, leaving the mystery deeper than before. For now it seemed to be clearly proved that there was no secret means of exit from Nobody's Study.

Morning lessons dragged by. Levison's place was vacant in the Fourth Form Room. A shadow hung over the school—it seemed as if it was a shadow of death!

"It's rotten!" groaned Fatty Wynn, when the juniors came out after morning lessons. "Do you know, Figgis, I think this is affecting my appetite."

Figgins grunted.

"You didn't look like it at brekker this morning," he said.

"Oh, didn't I?" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "You know I ate jolly little—only a few eggs with the bacon, and a cake afterwards. That's why I'm frightfully hungry now. Let's go round to the tuckshop. I feel as if I must do something to turn my thoughts in some other direction, you know."

"You never turn them in any other direction than the tuckshop," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Wynn. "This isn't a time for being funny. I'm feeling rotten about poor old Levison. If he's alive, he hasn't had any grub since Tuesday night."

"He must be alive," said Tom Merry, with a shiver.

"Then, where is he?"

It was the old question.

"I was rather rough on him the other day," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm glad now that I didn't hit him. I came jolly near it, but I didn't. He was a pig—ahem—I mean, he—he—he wasn't a pig! I shouldn't like to say he was a pig now, poor old chap, as he's disappeared. Though why a chap should want to buy a quid's worth of grub, and keep it all to himself, is more than I can say. I've got a pretty good appetite, especially in this December weather, but I shouldn't do a thing like that."

Lumley-Lumley uttered a sharp exclamation.

"My hat! Mellish!"

Percy Mellish looked round.

"What's wanted?" he asked.

"You remember on Monday, thinking that Levison was going to stand a feed—you got all ready in the study, and he never showed up with the grub—"

Mellish scowled.

"Well, what about it?" he snapped. "I don't want to think of Levison's caddish tricks now; I'm sorry for the poor brute."

"Did you ever see any of the grub?"

"No, I didn't!"

And Mellish swung away.

Tom Merry & Co. all looked at Lumley-Lumley; his eyes were bright with excitement.

"What have you got in your head, Lumley?" asked Tom Merry.

"About that grub," said Lumley-Lumley. "You say you saw him getting it, Fatty?"

Fatty Wynn nodded.

"How much did he get? Crooke said it was an awful lot. He saw him."

"Oh, heaps!" said Fatty Wynn, his eyes glistening at the remembrance. "Ham and tongue, and tinned beef, and pickles, and cake, and bread and butter and cheese, and all sorts of things. Enough to stand a siege!"

"The day before he disappeared," said Lumley-Lumley, with a significant look.

"Yes, that it was," said Fatty Wynn. "I wonder if he ate it all. It would be awful to think of it lying about and getting mouldy in some corner, wouldn't it? It's bad enough as it is—"

"Do you fellows see?" asked Lumley-Lumley excitedly.

"Blessed if I do!" said Blake.

"Don't you catch on? The day before he disappeared, Levison laid in a big supply of provisions. They haven't been seen in our study—none of Levison's friends have seen anything of them. Levison isn't the kind of fellow to blue a quid in standing himself a feed, in the ordinary way; he's not like Fatty—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Fatty Wynn.

"He was buying up that grub for some special reason," said Lumley-Lumley, pursuing his idea. "Where is it? He can't have eaten it all, I suppose. What has he done with it? If he's put it away somewhere, it ought to have turned up, with all the giddy searching we've been doing."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"You think—" he began.

"And you remember he specially



Lumley-Lumley made a sudden dash through the smoke. In a moment he had gripped the figure which had entered the room by the secret entrance. "Got him!" yelled Lumley. "I've caught the cad!"

wanted the study door locked on the outside, as a proof that he hadn't gone out of the room."

"Yes. You think—"

"I guess he went to Nobody's Study that night with the express intention of disappearing," said Lumley-Lumley steadily. "I believe, as I've believed all along, that it's a rotten jape—one of his impish tricks. You remember he was shut up in the punishment-room nearly a whole day some time ago. While he was there he must have found out some secret about the room—some secret way out. And he's thought out this scheme to worry us all; it's his idea of humour. He laid in a supply of grub because he intended to keep in hiding for some days."

"My word!" said Digby.

"Bai Jove! It weally seems extremely pwob," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a very thoughtful way. "I am wathah surprised that I did not think of that."

The faces of the juniors were excited now.

The discovery that Levison had purchased a very large supply of provisions at the tuckshop the day before he disappeared let in a flood of light upon the mystery.

Levison was not of Fatty Wynn's tastes; he was by no means the kind of fellow to spend a pound on a feed for himself or anybody else. He would not have laid out his money in that way without a powerful motive.

And his persistence in keeping watch in the haunted room, which had surprised the fellows so much, knowing as they did that he was by no means a hero—that was explained now.

The whole thing was a trick from beginning to end—Lumley-Lumley's sudden theory was a correct one.

And the more the juniors pondered over it, the more likely it seemed to

them that Lumley-Lumley had hit upon the truth.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "If Levison has wowwied us like this for nothin', he ought to have a feahful waggin' when he turns up."

"He will!" said Tom Merry grimly. "But"—his expression changed—"I don't want to think hard thoughts about him till we're sure."

"I guess I'm sure," said Lumley-Lumley.

"If that's the case, he'll turn up sooner or later," remarked Redfern of the Fourth.

"I guess so!"

"When his grub's gone, of course," said Fatty Wynn. "But if he's got all that I saw him buying, he's got enough for a week. He's not got my appetite, you know."

"I think the fellow must have a screw loose to play a jape like this," said Manners. "He will get flogged when he's found out."

"I guess he'll have some yarn all ready," said Lumley-Lumley. "He's never in want of a yarn to help him out of a scrape."

"But—but it seems to be proved that there isn't any secret opening in Nobody's Study," said Figgins.

"I guess there is, and it's not found yet. Levison most likely found it by accident; and of course, it's Levison who's been playing ghost," said Lumley-Lumley. "It's exactly the thing he would do. Look here, can you fellows remember whether Levison was with you at any time when you heard sounds from Nobody's Study?"

"Not that I know of," said Blake. "But, of course, there were a good many fellows who weren't in sight at those times, either."

"It's another point, though, I guess."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat! It looks as if Lumley-Lumley's bowled out the facts," said

Kangaroo. "What an awful spoofer, if he's really in hiding all the time."

"Yaas, what a wottah! But it's just like the boast—ahem!—it's just like him if nothing's happened to him," said D'Arcy.

"But about the gas," said Lawrence. "How could Levison manage that? If he's done this, he's done the whole business. And how did he make the gas go out without turning it off?"

"I'm going to have another look at that gas-pipe," said Lumley-Lumley.

A crowd of juniors followed Lumley-Lumley as he hurried away to Nobody's Study.

They crowded into the gloomy room. Once more—for the hundredth time, probably, an examination was made of the mysterious apartment.

Keen eyes scanned the gas-pipe to ascertain if it had been tampered with. But even Lumley-Lumley was a little staggered by the result of the investigation. For the gas-pipe showed no signs of having been meddled with. If Levison had some trick for turning off the gas before it reached the burner, it was clear that he must have made some opening in the pipe that conveyed it. One side of the iron pipe, of course, was invisible to the juniors, as it was clamped closely to the wall. But all the visible part of it was intact.

Lumley-Lumley's face grew sombre as he examined it, and failed to find a sign of tampering.

There was silence in the haunted room.

"Well?" said Tom Merry at last. Lumley-Lumley gritted his teeth.

"I guess it means only one thing," he said.

"And what's that?"

"The opening in the pipe is on the other side of it."

"But it's jammed close to the wall."

"Exactly! That proves that the

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secret opening is there—on the side of the room where the gas-pipe is."

The juniors looked at the solid blocks of stone. They felt over them; they examined the cracks between them. There was nothing to indicate that there was an opening of any kind, and the stone, when tapped, sounded solid, impenetrable.

Jack Blake shook his head.

"It's too steep, Lumley," he said. Lumley-Lumley set his lips obstinately.

"I guess we're on the track," he said. "I guess one of those blocks of stone slides back, or something of the sort. That would leave the other side of the pipe bare. A chap could drill a big hole in it, and plug it up. Then, when he chose, he could take the plug out, and ram in some wadding or something, and that would stop the gas getting to the burner, and the light would go out."

"Bai Jove!"

"But if a stone opened in the wall while the light was on, I should have seen it," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "The gas went out while I was keeping watch here the other night, you know."

"I guess not. The pipe runs close to the floor just here; and there's a chair here," said Lumley-Lumley. "You wouldn't be looking under the chair just at that minute. Those blocks are about a foot square, and if one could be pulled away from the other side, the chair would hide it. And it would only be for a second, then the gas would be out."

"Bai Jove! It's quite poss."

"But Levison couldn't get through an opening as small as that," said Blake.

"Most likely there's a larger opening as well—like a wicket in a big gate."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"It's possible," he said at last. "It's unlikely, but it's possible—more possible than the ghost story, at any rate."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But how are we going to bowl him out, if Lumley-Lumley's right?" said Figgins. "I don't suppose Mr. Railton would have the pipe taken away. He would think it a fatheaded theory, but—Excuse me, Lumley."

Lumley-Lumley grinned. "We don't want to bring the masters into it, anyway," he said. "I guess we can deal with the matter ourselves. I'm going to do a big think; and I'll get on to a way of getting the end out of his hiding-place, without waiting till he chooses to show up—you bet!"

And Lumley-Lumley walked away, to shut himself up in his study for the "big think." And Tom Merry & Co. returned to the quadrangle, and thought it over, too; and the more they thought it over, the more they felt that Lumley-Lumley had hit upon the truth. But how it was to be proved was another matter.

CHAPTER 21.

Towser Makes A Discovery!

HERRIES of the Fourth was look-more thoughtful than any of the others. Herries was not supposed to be brilliantly intellectual, and thinking was not an easy process with him. But he thought this matter out carefully, and he suddenly startled Blake and D'Arcy, who were with him in the quad, with an exclamation.

"It's all right."

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D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon his burly chum.

"What's all wight, Hewwies, old man?" he asked.

"Look here! Lumley-Lumley's made it pretty clear that Levison has worked this dodge—"

"We're not quite sure that it is a dodge yet, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus mildly.

Herries snorted.

"I'm sure," he replied. "And I've thought of a way of bowling the spoofer out. We want to discover exactly where that secret opening is in Nobody's Study."

"Yaas, but—"

"Well," said Herries triumphantly, "I can do it."

"Bai Jove! How?"

"Towser."

"Towser!" repeated Blake.

Herries nodded.

"Yes, Towser. You know how Towser follows a scent—"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated. "Are you going to spring that on us again?"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Yes, I am!" said Herries belligerently. "I'm going to put Towser on the scent. I'm going to show him something of Levison's and he will follow

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the scent. If Levison disappeared through a secret door in Nobody's Study Towser will lead us straight to that secret door. If we know exactly where it is we shall be able to find out how to open it. What do you think of that for an idea?"

"Rotten!" said Blake cheerfully.

"Yaas, wathah! Utthahly wotten!"

"Poof!" said Herries scornfully.

"That's just like you chaps. You know how Towser follows a scent—"

"Yes; if it's the scent of a kipper," said Blake. "I've never seen him follow any other scent."

"I'm going to try," said Herries, as he started in the direction of the kennels.

"You're not allowed to bring Towser into the House!"

"Rats!"

"There'll be a row!"

"Bosh!"

"Look here—"

"Piffle!"

And Herries disappeared round the School House. Jack Blake grinned. Herries' faith in the marvellous powers of his faithful bulldog was touching. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not grin. He frowned.

"If Hewwies bwings that wotten beast near me, and he goes for my twousahs, I'll bwain him!" he said. "I'm goin' to get a cwicket stump!"

Five minutes later there was a sound of pattering feet, and a deep growl in the Fourth Form passage. Herries had succeeded in bringing his bulldog into the House without being spotted by

the masters or prefects. He brought him along the passage to the door of Lumley-Lumley's study and opened it.

Lumley-Lumley was seated in the armchair, his brows corrugated, evidently in the throes of his "big think." Mellish was in the study, just closing the cupboard door, having placed there something that he had purchased at the tuckshop for tea. Both the juniors swung round as Towser pranced in. Mellish promptly backed round the table, and Lumley-Lumley grasped the poker.

"Take that beast out!" Lumley-Lumley roared.

"Take him away!" shrieked Mellish. Towser was leaping excitedly, trying to get away from the lead Herries held in his hand. The burly Fourth Former had plenty to do to hold him in.

"It's all right," panted Herries. "He's only a bit fresh, after being in the kennel. He won't hurt you if you don't look at him. He doesn't like being looked at."

"Does he like having pokers chucked at him?" roared Lumley-Lumley. "That's what he'll get if you don't take him out of this study."

Gr-r-r-r!

"Better not raise your voice," said Herries. "Towser doesn't like that, either. I want something of Levison's. That's what I've come for. Towser is going to track him down by the scent."

"Take him away!" shrieked Mellish. "Give me something of Levison's."

Mellish caught up a cap that was lying on a chair and threw it across to Herries.

Herries caught it.

"Thanks!" he said. "Come on. Towser, old boy!"

Towser showed a strong disinclination to quit the study. He struggled with the lead as Herries dragged him out. But Herries succeeded in getting him into the passage and dragging him along to the recess leading to Nobody's Study. A crowd of juniors gathered round to watch his progress, keeping at a respectable distance from Towser's teeth, however. Mellish slammed the door.

"Whose cap was that you gave him?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Yours," growled Mellish.

"Why, you ass, he may tear it up!"

"Well, we had to get rid of him."

Lumley-Lumley burst into a chuckle.

"Well, if my cap helps Towser to find Levison, he's welcome to it!" he remarked.

And he sat down to resume his interrupted "think."

In the passage Herries dabbed Towser's nose with the cap. It did not occur to Herries that Mellish might have given him a cap that did not belong to Levison.

Towser made a snap at the cap and reduced it to a rag.

"He'll have your hand next," remarked Blake.

"Oh, rats!" said Herries crossly.

"Come along, if you want to see Towser find the secret door!"

And, partly by persuasion, partly by main force, he dragged Towser into Nobody's Study.

The juniors crammed up the doorway, watching.

"Now, Towsey, old man—"

Gr-r-r-r!

"Find him, Towsey!"

Gr-r-r-r!

Towser pranced round Nobody's Study, and then, with a sudden wrench, he broke away from Herries and dashed towards the doorway. There was a yell from the juniors, and they fell over one another in their haste to get out of Towser's way.

"Stop him!" roared Herries.
 "Yes, I don't think!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Towser disappeared down the passage, with the lead dangling after him. Herries dashed in pursuit.

Gr-r-r-r! Gr-r-r-r!
 Towser was dashing at the closed door of Lumley-Lumley's study, trying to get in, and growling furiously. Herries dashed up and caught the lead.

"My hat!" he exclaimed excitedly. "We've got him!"

"Got whom?"

"Levison!"

"What?" roared Blake.

"He's hidden in his own study!" yelled Herries. "There's no doubt about it. Towser didn't want to leave the study at all, only I didn't understand. Levison must be hidden in his own study all the time. We never thought of that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You chuckling asses——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries flung open the door of the study. Towser pranced in, dragging Herries after him.

There was a yell of indignation from Lumley-Lumley and Mellish at this second invasion.

"Get that brute out!"

"Scat!"

"It's all right!" gasped Herries. "Towser's tracking him down! He's followed the scent here!"

"Here!" yelled Lumley-Lumley.

"Yes. Stand back, you fellows! Levison's hidden here somewhere! Perhaps there's a secret passage in this study, or——"

"Perhaps he's hidden behind the clock!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Towser made a dash for the corner cupboard, and leaped up at the door, and growled and tore at his lead.

"Keep him away from my grub!" roared Mellish. "Don't you open that cupboard!"

"Rats!" said Herries. "Levison's in that cupboard, or else there's a secret passage there. I'm going to see. It's all right, you fellows! Towser's got him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish yelled as Herries threw open the door of the cupboard. But Herries did not heed. He shouted to Towser.

"Go it, Towser! Go it! Fetch him!"

Towser made a wild leap into the cupboard. He reappeared with a cold rabbit in his mouth. That special tit-bit which Mellish had intended for his tea would never adorn Mellish's tea-table now. Towser crunched it up with a satisfied growl.

Herries looked into the cupboard. The other fellows shrieked. There was no sign either of Levison or a secret passage; it was only too plain what Towser had been after.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My rabbit!" yelled Mellish. "You'll have to pay for it! You rotter——Yah!"

Gr-r-r-r-r!

"Oh!" said Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare put an angry face into the study doorway.

"Take that dog out of the House immediately, Herries!" he shouted.

"Ye-es!" said Herries.

And he did. Towser went, and the remains of Mellish's rabbit went with him. And the juniors who had witnessed Towser's remarkable powers as a tracker went, too—into hysterics!

CHAPTER 22. The Only Way!

TOM MERRY & CO. were much more cheerful during afternoon lessons. The mystery of the disappearance of Levison was still unsolved; but the more the juniors thought about it, the more sure they felt that the whole thing was a trick—that Levison was in hiding, and laughing in his sleeve at the trouble he was causing.

The welcome word "Dismiss!" came at last, and the Fourth Formers streamed out and met the Shell, who had been released from their Form-room at the same time.

The Terrible Three were greeted with a shout from Lumley.

"I guess I've got it!"

"Where?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ass!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I've got it! We're going to get Levison out!"

"How?" demanded Tom Merry.

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"Lend me your ears," as Bacon says," he replied. "Now, we're all agreed that Levison is in hiding, and it's up to us to ferret him out. Well, if the School House were to catch fire——"

"Catch fire?" yelled Blake.

"We're not 'oing to set the House on fire," said Lumley; "but there's nothing to prevent us from burning some old rags in Nobody's Study to make a smoke, and yelling 'Fire!' at the top of our voices."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"That's the idea!" said Lumley-Lumley coolly. "We've got to raise an alarm of fire, and yell it loudly enough for Levison to hear, wherever he is skulking. I guess he'll come hopping like a cat out of an oven, and some of us will be in Nobody's Study to see that he doesn't hop back again when he finds it's a sell."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a jolly good idea, and we'll try it," said Tom Merry resolutely. "If it comes to nothing, there will be a fearful row, and we shall get it in the neck. But it's worth risking to clear up this giddy mystery. I'm game!"

"So am I!" said Figgins.

"Same here!" said Blake, with a nod.

"Yaas, watah!"

"Then follow your uncle!" said Lumley-Lumley.

Tom Merry & Co. followed Lumley-Lumley's lead. His preparations were soon made. A quantity of old rags was soon collected, and fellows were stationed up and down the Fourth Form passage to yell when the word was given. A select party stationed themselves in Nobody's Study to watch for Levison. The window was opened to allow air for them when the rags were burning.

Lumley-Lumley jammed the rags into the grate, closed the chimney, and lighted them. A dense smoke was soon pouring into the room.

Tom Merry & Co. crowded round the windows for air.

"Groogh!" murmured Blake. "This is warm!"

Lumley-Lumley tapped on the door—a signal to the crowd of fellows in the passage. There was a sudden and formidable yelling:

"Fire!"

"Run for your lives!"

"The House is on fire!"

"Fire, fire, fire!"

The shouting was deafening. It was safe to say there was no recess of the old School House where that shout was not heard. It rang through the building—from the garrets down to the vaults.

Tom Merry & Co., in Nobody's Study, were very quiet. They waited.

"Hark!" whispered Tom Merry suddenly.

There was a sound in the room.

It was the sound of a chair being pushed away from the wall, on the other side of the study, behind the thick masses of smoke.

Lumley-Lumley's eyes gleamed with triumph.

He made a sudden dash through the smoke, and there was the sound of a collision, a fall, a wild struggle as two fellows rolled over on the floor.

"Got him!" yelled Lumley-Lumley from the smoke. "I've caught the cad!"

CHAPTER 23. The Secret Out!

THE door of Nobody's Study was flung open. Outside the fellows crowded, coughing in the smoke as it escaped into the passage.

Blake ran to the grate, and dragged away the folded newspapers with which the chimney had been stopped. The smoke found its natural outlet, and the atmosphere in Nobody's Study cleared. And as it cleared, Lumley-Lumley and Levison became visible.

There was a yell of fifty voices:

"Levison!"

"Levison, you cad!"

"Gerroff!" gasped Levison, struggling. "You mad idiot, do you want us both to be burnt to death? Gerroff! The House is on fire! Let me go!"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"The House isn't on fire, my pippin," he replied. "The House is quite safe. Nothing's been on fire except those old rags in the grate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wh-what!"

Levison's face became dark with fury as he realised that he had been tricked.

The smoke was almost clear now, and the juniors were able to see how the cad of the Fourth had entered Nobody's Study. A block of stone in the wall had rolled back, evidently moving on some hidden slide. It was a secret such as the juniors had suspected, but had not been able to find. The opening was in the wall where the chair had been standing, and the moving of the stone had left the iron gaspipe bare on the side hitherto jammed against the wall.

Tom Merry bent over it, and uttered an exclamation.

Lumley-Lumley's theory was quite correct; a hole had been bored in the pipe from the side of the secret door, and plugged up. The cad of the Fourth, concealed on the other side of the wall, had been able to move the sliding stone back, and then a moment had sufficed to remove the plug, and jam a pad into the pipe to stop the flow of gas.

And as Tom Merry looked at the sliding door of stone, he saw that several blocks had been moved at once, but it was possible to move them separately. Now that the secret door was open, it was easy to manipulate it.

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Tom Merry stepped through the opening.

There were several articles of furniture in the hidden room—old, crumbling. The room had been hidden, deserted, perhaps for centuries. But there were signs of recent occupation now: there were coats and rugs on the ancient couch, where Levison had slept; there was food on the old oaken bench. It was Levison's den while he had been in hiding. On the opposite side was an opening in the stone wall—evidently the beginning of a secret passage, leading away into the darkness.

There was a shout from Nobody's Study.

"Cave!"

"The Head!"

Tom Merry hurried back from the secret chamber.

Dr. Holmes stood in the doorway of Nobody's Study. Mr. Railton was with him; Kildare was behind, and all three were looking angry.

"What does this mean?" thundered the Head. "There has been an alarm of fire—a false alarm. Who has played this prank?"

Then he broke off suddenly at the sight of Levison, and started back.

"Levison!"

"Levison!" cried Mr. Railton and Kildare together.

Levison turned pale. The hour of reckoning had come at last, and it had not come as he had schemed.

"Let Levison get up, Lumley-Lumley," said the Head. "And now explain to me what all this means."

"I guess that's easy, sir," said Lumley-Lumley coolly. "I figured it out that Levison was hiding somewhere, and we reckoned we'd scare him into showing himself by raising an alarm of fire—and it's worked, sir."

"What! Is it possible—can it be possible that Levison has deliberately hidden himself away in order to alarm the whole school?" asked Dr. Holmes. Levison gasped.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" he stammered. "I—I— It really wasn't my fault, sir. I—I—I happened to discover that secret door by accident, sir, when I was shut up here; and—and if that stone's pushed in a certain place, sir, it rolls open, unless it's fastened on the other side, and I found it out. I—I—"

"And you used your discovery to

play ghost and alarm the boys?" thundered the Head.

"It—it was only a lark, sir," faltered Levison.

"It was a foolish and unfeeling joke to play the ghost," said the Head; "but I might overlook that. But this disappearance, this throwing the whole school into a state of alarm and anxiety—"

"I—I didn't, sir! That—that wasn't my fault, sir!" stammered Levison. "I—I got shut up there by accident, sir!"

"What!"

"The night I was keeping watch here, sir," said Levison, gaining confidence. "I thought I'd explore the secret passage, sir. I was going to let Tom Merry find me gone in the morning, just as a surprise, and—and then come back, sir. That's why I left the clothes there, and—and—"

"You rotter!" murmured Tom Merry. "You had another suit of clothes in the next room all ready, and you only had to change!"

Levison grinned for a moment, but he became grave as he caught the terrific frown of the Head.

"And why did you not come back, Levison, if, as you say, you intended only to surprise Tom Merry by being missed in the morning?"

"I—I couldn't, sir."

"Why not?"

"The—the door got jammed somehow," said Levison. "I tried to get it open, but it wouldn't open. I've had a fearful fright, sir; I—I thought I was buried alive. I shouted, but I suppose my voice couldn't be heard through the thick walls. I—I searched for the way to open the door all the time, sir, excepting when I was asleep, and—and I couldn't find it, sir. I've had an awful time!"

"Then you have had nothing to eat?"

"Ye-es, sir," said Levison, who knew that the remains of his provisions would be discovered in the secret room. "I took some food in there with me as I was going to stay all night."

The Head glanced through the secret doorway.

"And you took a lamp and a can of oil and books!" he said grimly.

"I—I—"

The Head turned back and fixed his eyes upon Levison.

"You could not open the door?" he asked.

"No—no, sir!"

"Then how did you get out when you heard the alarm of fire?"

"I—I—I—" Levison stammered. "I—I just found it, sir—"

"Levison!"

"It's true, sir!" groaned Levison. "And if you had shouted for help, as you say, without being heard, because the walls are so thick, how is it you heard the alarm of fire at all?"

"You have lied to me, Levison!" thundered the Head. "You have played a wicked, unfeeling, miserable trick upon the whole school and upon your headmaster, and you had this untruthful story ready; but it does not fit the circumstances now, Levison. You have acted wickedly, and you are trying to save yourself by falsehood, Levison. You will not succeed. Follow me to my study. I shall flog you."

Tom Merry & Co. crowded out of Nobody's Study. The mystery was cleared up at last, and they were satisfied. Howls of anguish were heard proceeding from the Head's study, but no one had any sympathy to waste upon the end of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am jolly glad the mystery is cleared up, dear boys, and I weally considah that Levison deserves what he's gettin'—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen," said Arthur Augustus, looking round, "I have a suggestion to make. My governah has sent me a fivah—"

"Hear, hear!"

"It is an extra one, on account of Christmas comin'. I propose that we blue it in havin' an extra-wippin' feed in Study No. 6 to celebrate the clearin' up of the giddy mystery."

"Hear, hear!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's proposal was carried by acclamation. And the feed was something extra-special. Even Fatty Wynn had enough, and had to leave off while there were still good things on the table. Which was a very pleasant ending to the time of anxiety and alarm which had been caused by the mystery of Nobody's Study.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: "THE HOUSE-MASTER'S SECRET!"—another great part of school mystery and adventure, featuring all your favourites of St. Jim's. Watch out for it!)

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