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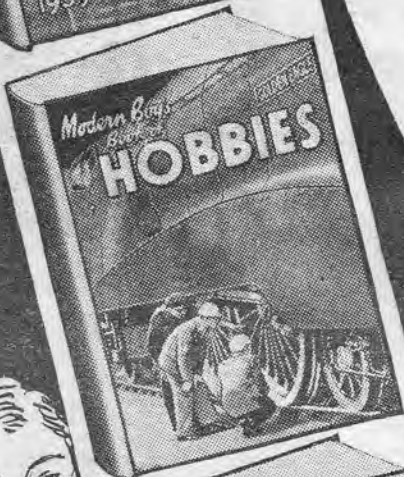
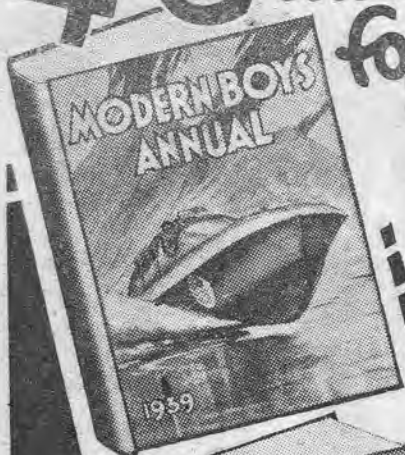
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Join Up With the Chums of St. Jim's for Christmas! You Cannot Fail to Be Thrilled and Amused by Their Adventures!



The big car drew to a halt and Lord Conway jumped out. He had a cheery greeting for his brother and for Gussy's Christmas party. "Hop in!" said Conway, after shaking hands all round.

CHAPTER 1. Breaking Up!

"FINISHED!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet, with a sigh of relief.

The other members of the editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" rose to their feet also.

The amateur journalists had been engaged in a race against time. The "copy" for the New Year number had to be in the printer's hands next day. At first it had seemed a hopeless task, but everybody had wired in, and Monty Lowther had written four comic columns instead of one.

Manners had declared that one comic column was quite enough for most of the readers, and that four would kill them outright.

"They'd rather read my comic column than

your camera corner, anyway!" said Lowther warmly.

"If you ask me my opinion," said Talbot, "the readers could do without both. The camera corner makes 'em laugh, and the comic column makes 'em weep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we've got out the whole issue in a single evening," said Tom Merry, "and that's jolly good

going. True, I had to pad out the number with fifteen columns of Skimpole's piffle; but it's better than having no New Year number at all! We couldn't possibly have got the thing out during the vac."

"Of course not!"

Tom Merry squeezed all the articles and stories into a large envelope, which he addressed to the printer.

"You'll just catch the post by the skin of your teeth if you hustle!" said Lowther.

In cheery spirits, Tom Merry & Co. set out for Gussy's ancestral home, looking forward to a merry Christmas holiday. But their Yuletide is not to be without its thrills, for two members of the party find themselves menaced by a shadow from the past!

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

The captain of the Shell nodded and hurried out to the pillar-box in the quad.

The ground was carpeted with snow, and more snow was falling. The gusty wind drove the flakes into Tom Merry's face.

Crossing over to the pillar-box, he dropped the package in with a thud just as the postman loomed up through the snow.

"Brought any letters along?" inquired Tom Merry.

"One for Master D'Arcy, sir!"

"Good! I'll take it if you like."

The postman handed over the missive, and Tom Merry took it along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage.

Arthur Augustus was at home. He was seated before a blazing fire, holding forth to his study-mates on the subject of silk hats.

"Letter for you, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"Good! Hand it ova, deah boy!"

"Gussy, old top," said Jack Blake, "I'm positive there's a remittance in that envelope. That being so, let me hasten to swear eternal friendship!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus opened the letter, but no remittance fluttered out of the envelope.

"It's a lettah fwom my patah!" explained the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh!" said Blake in tones of disappointment. "In that case, the eternal friendship's off!"

Arthur Augustus read the paternal missive, and his eyes gleamed as he did so.

"Bai Jove! This is awfully wippin' of the patah!" he exclaimed. "This lettah is to say that I can bwing home as many fwends as I like for the vac."

"My hat!"

Jack Blake's eternal friendship revived suddenly. He clasped his elegant chum round the waist and proceeded to waltz him up and down the study.

"Gussy, old man, this is great! I've been to your ancestral halls before, and I won't say 'No' if you ask me again. You will invite me, of course?"

"Ow!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Blake, you wuff wottah, you are wumplin' my togs! Pway welease me at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake desisted at last, and Gussy sank limply into the armchair, gasping for breath.

"Your pater's a brick, Gussy!" declared Digby.

"A brick of the first water!" agreed Herries.

"I wonder if he'll have any objection to my bringing Towser along?"

Arthur Augustus promptly put his foot down.

"I wegard Towser as a wuthless, destwuctive, an' wepwehensible beast!" he panted. "He has no wespsect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats! He's all right if you rub him the right way!" said Herries.

"I wufuse to wub him the wight way, Hewwies! You, as one of my fwends, may accompany me to my patah's place for the Chwistmas vac, but the othah beast must stop away!"

"That's a nasty one for you, Herries!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "By the way, Gussy, am I on your list of friends or not?"

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"I should certainly not dweam of leavin' you out, deah boy! You and Mannahs and Lowthah will be among the guests, of course! I should like to invite Levison, Cardew, and Clive, and

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Julian and Hammond. But I feah it can't be done. Talbot must come, though, and Miss Mawie."

"Yes, rather!"

"Old Talbot will be awfully bucked," said Tom Merry. "He was telling me only this morning that he didn't for the life of him know where he was going to spend the vac. Colonel Lyndon, his uncle, is abroad, you know."

"It will be ripping to have Miss Marie with us, too!" said Digby.

"Especially if any of us get a dose of flu and require nursing!" chimed in Herries.

"Of course, my bwothah Conway will be there—likewise Cousin Ethel," said Arthur Augustus.

"Better and better!"

"An' the lake is bound to be fwozen ovah, so that we can have skatin'."

"Ripping!"

"There will also be othah attwactions," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I intend to wendah a tenah solo—"

A deep groan came from Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in concern. "I twust you are not ill?"

"It was just a passing twinge," said Blake. "When you threatened to sing a tenor solo I wondered if I should be among the survivors."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye and surveyed his chum with a wrathful glare.

"Blake, you uttah wottah! I have a vevy good mind to administrah a feahful thwashin'—"

"Shush!" murmured Tom Merry. "This is the time for peace on earth and good will towards fatheads. Spare him, Gussy!"

"Pip-pip-please, I won't do it again!" faltered Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake, I wegard you as a cwass ass!"

"The regard is mutual, old chap."

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his nose. He looked at first as if he intended to mix Blake up with the study furniture. But he seemed to think better of it, and turned to the door.

"I'm goin' to see Talbot and Miss Mawie," he said. "Can I wely on you to explain the posish to Mannahs and Lowthah, Tom Mewwy?"

The captain of the Shell nodded. He hurried along to Study No. 10 to acquaint his chums with the good news, while Arthur Augustus sought out Talbot.

The latter was alone in his study, and he was looking rather glum. He could not quite decide what to do and where to go now that the Christmas vacation was near.

Arthur Augustus settled the problem.

"Talbot, deah boy, can you manage to spend the vac at my patah's place?"

"Can a duck swim?" said Talbot, brightening up at once. "I shall be delighted, Gussy! Who else is coming along?"

Arthur Augustus rattled off the names.

"Good!" said Talbot. "Quite a decent selection! Has Marie accepted the invitation yet?"

"No. I'm just goin' up to the sanny to ask her."

"You'll have to put it to her very strongly, because I fancy she may decline on the grounds that she will be the only young lady present."

"Wats! Cousin Ethel will be there!" said Arthur Augustus. "And the two are awfully good pals, as you know."

Talbot nodded. And Arthur Augustus, who was enjoying his position as the bearer of good news, quitted the Shell fellow's study. He crossed the

snow-white quad, and entered the wing in which the school sanatorium was situated.

Marie Rivers, the charming young nurse, was seated by the fire in one of the wards.

A book rested on the girl's lap, but she did not seem to be reading it. Her thoughts were elsewhere—probably with her father, the ex-cracksman, who had abandoned his shady career for a more honourable, if less remunerative, vocation.

John Rivers had returned to London after a year or two abroad, and was now earning his living honestly. I was strange to think that this cultured and clever man, who had formerly made as much as four hundred pounds as the result of a night's work, was now taking a year to earn the same sum by honest means.

But he was happy—happy in the sense that all honest men are happy. Not for anything would he have gone back to the old life which had involved not only him, but his daughter, in deep disgrace. He had said to Talbot on one occasion: "Once a cracksman, always a cracksman." But he himself had given the lie to this theory.

Thanks to the example set by John Rivers, the old Angel Alley gang had been broken up. A new gang, under the leadership of Jim Dawlish, had since sprung into being, but it was not such a formidable gang as the old one.

Marie Rivers thanked Providence as she sat gazing into the fire that her father had turned honest.

"Miss Mawie!"

The girl gave a start as Arthur Augustus uttered her name.

"Sowwy if I startled you, deah gal!" said the swell of St. Jim's.

Marie smiled.

"I'm afraid I was day-dreaming," she said. "You wish to speak to me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas. My patah has wequested me to take a numbah of fwiends home for the vac. My list of fwiend- includes you, Miss Mawie, of course! Will you come?"

The smile faded from Marie's face.

"I—I'm afraid—" she began.

"There's nothin' to be afraid of, deah gal! There will be no spooks, or phantoms, or anythin' like that. Besides, Cousin Ethel will be there. It will be gweat fun—skatin', and singin', and dancin'!"

"It all sounds very tempting," said Marie, "and it's awfully good of you to invite me. But I'm afraid I must decline."

"Oh cwumbs!" he exclaimed. "Ewevyone will be awfully disappointed!"

"Is Talbot going?"

"Yaas, watnah!"

"That only increases my desire to go, too. But it simply can't be done."

"Why not, deah gal?"

"I haven't seen my father for ages," Marie

explained, "and he will be expecting me this Christmastide. And it will be a sorry sort of festival if he has to spend it alone."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I quite undahstand the posish," he said, "and I think I can see a way out. You can rely on me to wangle things, Mawie. I am a fellow of tact and judgment, as you know."

"I am sure you will do your best, D'Arcy. All the same, I am afraid my Christmas will not be spent with the rest of you."

To which Arthur Augustus replied with a time-honoured injunction:

"Wait and see!"

CHAPTER 2.

Off for the Holidays!

CLANG, clang!

It was the shrill note of the rising-bell on the final day of the term.

"Breaking-up day at last!" chortled Monty Lowther, leaping out of bed. "Old Taggles can ring that merry bell to-morrow morning till his arm drops off, but there will be nobody left to hear him—barring the kitchen cat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors turned out in high spirits.

This was indeed a day of days—the last of the term and the best!

The snow in the quad was hard and frozen. Icicles hung from the windows and from the branches of the old elms without.

It was an enchanting scene; but the juniors had little time in which to enjoy the beauties of Nature.

There was packing to be done, and, in the case of fellows like Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, that was a big item.

When they were dressed, the Terrible Three and Talbot went along to the Fourth Form dormitory in order to give their chum a hand, if necessary.

They found Gussy in what he himself described as "a feabul fluttah."

The swell of St. Jim's monopolised fifty per cent of the available floor space in his dormitory. He was sandwiched between two large trunks, into which Blake, Herries, and Digby were pitching his things haphazard.

The two trunks did not constitute the be-all and the end-all of Arthur Augustus' baggage. There were innumerable hat-boxes on the floor.

"Your packing ought to have been started a fortnight ago, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther gravely.

"Or at the beginning of the term!" said Manners.

"What on earth are these silk stockings for, Gussy?" inquired Digby. "You don't wear 'em, surely?"

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"No, deah boy. It is my intention to hang them both up on Chwistmas Eve."

"My hat!"

"Good old Peter Pan!" chuckled Cardew.

"When are you goin' to grow up?"

"I should be sowwy to see the simple customs of our childhood die out!" said Arthur Augustus.

"You mean to say you still believe in Father Chwistmas?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Of course not! But I believe some of my guests will be genewous enough to fill my stockings."

"We will!" murmured Monty Lowther, sotto voce. "We won't guarantee to fill 'em with chocolates, though!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Willing hands continued to lend assistance to the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus had sufficient sartorial belongings to set up a good-sized tailor's and hosier's establishment.

"How many toppers are you taking, Gussy?" inquired Manners.

"All of them, deah boy."

"Help! Have you arranged for a pan-technicon?"

"Wats!"

"I vote we pack the toppers on the concertina principle," said Jack Blake. "Squash them so that they can be squeezed into the trunks—"

Arthur Augustus, who had been wading through an assortment of neckties, in an endeavour to find his purple, pink, and pale-blue one, jumped up with a cry of alarm.

"If you dare to squash my toppers, Blake, you wuffian, I'll squash you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With eight juniors engaged, the packing was finished at last, and Arthur Augustus sent Hammond of the Fourth in search of Taggles.

The surly old porter, whose brow was a shade less surly than usual, shuffled into the dormitory a few moments later. He even went so far as to touch his hat to Arthur Augustus.

"Angling for a tip!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yes, rather!"

Arthur Augustus turned to the porter.

"Taggles, deah boy, I wish you to take these twunks down to the hall."

"Very good, sir."

"Also the boxes."

"Very good, sir."

"That is all, Taggles. Pway wemove the things at once, as they appeah to be takin' up a lot of woom."

Taggles did not budge. Arthur Augustus regarded him curiously.

"I twust you are not deaf, Taggles?"

"Which my hearin' is very good, sir."

"Then why are you lingewin'? I distinctly requested you to wemove my belongings to the hall."

Taggles coughed significantly.

"Which it's the custom, Master D'Arcy, at this 'ere festive season of the year to put your 'and in your pocket."

"Of course!" said Arthur Augustus in surprise. "We all do that in cold weathah. I do it myself, except when I'm weawin' gloves."

"Density thy name is, Gussy!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Can't you see that Taggy wants a tip?"

Light dawned upon Arthur Augustus at last. He produced his wallet, and took out a pound note.

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"Can you give me change, Taggles?"

The porter shook his head.

"That is unforch. I wanted to give you ten shillings. However, you may take this note, an' pewwaps you will find change between now and the time we go away."

"Perhaps, sir," said Taggles. But, judging by his tone, he seemed to regard it as extremely improbable.

The School House fellows went down to the quad, where a pitched battle took place in the snow with the New House juniors.

"Nothing like getting a good appetite for brekker!" said Jack Blake. "I—ooch!"

Blake's remarks were cut short by the arrival of a snowball, which smote him in the mouth and then burst into fragments down his coat.

"Buck up, School House!" shouted Tom Merry, amid the uproar. "Let's drive those cheeky beggars back to their own quarters!"

"Hear, hear!"

The fight raged fast and furious. But the School House were stronger numerically, and Figgins & Co. were forced to retreat, step by step, until the quad was finally cleared of all New House rabble, as Monty Lowther expressed it.

"Good!" said Tom Merry, brushing the snow from his garments. "School House are top dogs this term, and every term!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Now for some bwekkah."

As the School House warriors trooped into breakfast, Marie Rivers came up to Talbot. She was smiling cheerfully.

"Good-morning, Talbot!"

"Good-morning, Marie! You're looking very bucked with life."

"I feel it. Christmas is in the air, and yours—and mine—should be the most enjoyable we have known."

Talbot stared.

"I don't understand," he said. "We shall not spend Christmas together. Aren't you going to your father?"

"No. Father is coming to us."

"Oh, good!" said Talbot.

"D'Arcy pulled the strings," said Marie, "and this is the result."

The girl handed to Talbot a letter which had come for her by the morning's post. It ran thus:

"My dear Marie,—There will be no need for you to come to town to see me after all, Lord Eastwood having invited me to the country house party. This is exceedingly kind of his lordship, for it means that we shall spend a really happy Christmas together."

"I can only come to Eastwood House for two days—Christmas Day and Boxing Day—as on the following day I have to resume my duties. But a great deal of happiness can be squeezed out of a couple of days, and I am eagerly looking forward to seeing my little girl again."

"Ever your affectionate father,

"JOHN RIVERS."

"Good old Gussy!" said Talbot, as he handed back the letter to his girl chum. "Fancy him working the oracle like that! I shall begin to think he really does possess tact and judgment presently!"

Marie laughed.

"We ought to have an exceptionally jolly time, Toff," she said.

"Don't worry," said Talbot, "we will!"



Quick as thought, Dawlish caught Arthur Augustus round the waist and hurled him among the other St. Jim's juniors as they came running up. "Yawooooh!" roared Gussy.

After breakfast there were great scenes in the old quadrangle. A crowd of fellows—seniors and juniors—of both Houses appeared on the scene with smiling faces and packed portmanteaux.

Ever and anon, the station cab drove up through the snow and stopped in front of the great building to collect luggage and passengers.

Gussy's party stood together in a cheery group. "Have you all got your luggage weady, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus.

There was a general nodding of heads.

"You are sure you have left nothin' behind?"

"Of course, fathead!" growled Blake.

At the end of an hour the crowd in the quad was considerably reduced.

The New House juniors marched to the station in a solid body. They threw kisses to Tom Merry & Co. as they passed through the school gateway.

"Merry Christmas, old sports!" shouted Fatty Wynn.

"Same to you!" responded Monty Lowther.

"Go easy with the plum pudding, Fatty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison major, Cardew, and Clive were next to go. They were spending the vacation at Cardew's place.

Ralph Reckness, in some mysterious way, managed to charter a taxi, and the three Fourth Formers looked as proud as peacocks as they were whirled away.

"Bye-bye, you fellows!" called out Cardew.

"Mind you take care of Gussy!"

"Rely on us!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

The breaking-up was well advanced by this

time. Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn, Dane, and Glyn and Reilly tramped off through the snow, exchanging Yuletide greetings with Tom Merry & Co. as they went.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had a cheery word for the members of Gussy's party, of course. "Hope you kids will have a topping time!" he said.

"Thanks, Kildare!"

"See that they don't stuff too much, Miss Rivers!"

Marie smiled and promised to keep an eye on them.

With the exception of the Eastwood House party, Kildare was the last fellow to leave.

Gussy's companions glanced inquiringly at the swell of St. Jim's.

"I don't want to be rude," murmured Monty Lowther, "but would you mind telling us, Gussy, how much longer we've got to cool our heels here?"

Arthur Augustus consulted his watch.

"Five minutes, deah boy!"

"Five minutes!" hooted Jack Blake. "You mean to say our train goes out in five minutes? We shall never do it, you frabjous chump!"

"And there isn't another train until late in the afternoon!" groaned Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus smiled knowingly.

"That will be all wight!" he said.

"Sounds quite all wrong to me!" growled Digby. "If you weren't our respected host, Gussy, we'd roll you in the snow!"

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"Weally, Digby——"

The next minute there was a hoot of a horn, and a large Daimler car swung through the gateway of St. Jim's.

"What the merry dickens——" began Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus gave a chuckle.

"This is my bwothah Conway. He has come to collect us in the cah. I thought it would come as wathah a pleasant surpwise, deah boys."

The "deah boys" were overjoyed at this unexpected stroke of fortune. They had anticipated being stranded at St. Jim's for several hours.

The car drew to a halt, and Lord Conway jumped out. He was a good-looking young man, and he had a cheery greeting for his brother and Gussy's chums.

"Hop in!" said Conway, after shaking hands all round. "We'll make the journey in less than an hour. I mean to let her rip through the snow!"

The luggage was piled into the car, and the passengers followed.

"Wight away, deah boy!" sang out Arthur Augustus.

A moment later the car fairly flashed through the old gateway. It gathered speed in the lane, and its merry passengers chuckled to themselves, and settled down to enjoy the drive to Eastwood House. Lessons were over, the holidays had started!

And happiest of all, as they leaned back in the soft seats of Lord Conway's Daimler, were Talbot and Marie Rivers.

CHAPTER 3.

Very Mysterious!

"CUMBLE out, deah boys—and gal!"

The car had arrived at its destination, and Lord Eastwood and Cousin Ethel greeted the juniors and Marie Rivers as they clambered out.

A portly manservant took the luggage into the house, on the instalment system, and Lord Conway ran the car round to the garage.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Talbot, taking stock of his surroundings. "What a jolly old place!"

"This isn't your first visit, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"No; but it's the first time I've been here when the snow's been on the ground. Don't those Christmas-trees look topping?"

"Nevah mind the scenewy now," said Arthur Augustus. "I undahstand fwom the patah that lunch is weady."

"That is so, Arthur," said Lord Eastwood, smiling. "I expect you are hungry after your journey?"

"Yaas, wathah! I was too excited to eat much bwekkah. It's wippin' to get home again!"

Lunch was served in the oak-panelled dining-room where, nearly three hundred years before, gay cavaliers had romped and revelled.

Everyone was quite at home. Marie Rivers had been a trifle shy at first, but Cousin Ethel cured all that, and the two girls chatted away merrily.

Lord Eastwood beamed upon his guests from the head of the table, and Lord Conway related some of his big-game hunting experiences.

In the afternoon a snow-fight took place in the old-fashioned courtyard.

The four Shell fellows tackled the four Fourth Formers, and Marie Rivers and Cousin Ethel were the judges.

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Tom Merry's side won the day after a fierce and exciting tussle. They destroyed their opponents' fortress, and they swamped Jack Blake & Co. with snow to such an extent that the Fourth Formers were eventually obliged to howl for quarter.

"Oh cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "My togs are wumped and soaked, and there's nearly a ton of snow down the back of my neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys, I fail to see where the joke comes in! We had bettah change our togs, or we shall be catchin' cold!"

The juniors realised the wisdom of Gussy's suggestion. They went into the house and changed their garments, and shortly afterwards the gong sounded for tea.

The winter dusk had set in, but from the mullioned windows of the dining-room the juniors could still see the snowflakes descending thick and fast.

"Looks as if we shall be snowed out to-night!" remarked Lord Conway.

Lord Eastwood nodded.

"Better to be indoors than out to-night!" he said. Then, glancing at his watch, he added: "Your father is due in half an hour, Miss Rivers!"

Marie's face glowed.

"In that case I'll go to the station to meet him," she said.

"My dear girl, you mustn't venture out on such a night!"

"I'll pick your father up in the car," volunteered Lord Conway.

Arthur Augustus demurred.

"It's not worth while usin' the cah for such a short wun, deah boy!"

Finally, it was decided that the St. Jim's juniors should go to the station to meet John Rivers.

They started off directly after tea, and battled their way through the fast-falling snow.

"Groogh! What a night!" gasped Jack Blake.

"Wonder if Marie's father will be snowed up?" said Digby.

Arthur Augustus blinked as the snowflakes beat slantwise into his face.

"Shouldn't be surpvised, deah boy," he said.

"It is extremely pwobable that the twain will be held up."

"How far is it to the station?" inquired Tom Merry. "I forget."

"It's thwee miles by woad, but only a mile and a half across the fields," explained Arthur Augustus. "Follow your leadah, deah boys!"

The swell of St. Jim's clambered over the stile, and the others followed suit.

They found themselves in a spacious, snow-covered field.

A crude footpath was visible in the snow, and the juniors followed it with difficulty. It was so dark that they could scarcely distinguish one another.

"Stop!"

It was a sudden exclamation from Manners.

"What the thump——" began Tom Merry.

"Shush! I heard footsteps behind us!"

"Your ears are a jolly sight sharper than mine, then!" grunted Tom Merry. "I heard nothing."

The juniors stopped short and listened.

The only sound that greeted their ears was that of the wind, which whirled the snowflakes hither and thither.

"Mannahs, deah boy, your imagination was playin' you twicks," said Arthur Augustus.

But Manners declared he had heard a footfall. "What if you did?" said Jack Blake. "It's a free country, and anybody's got a right to be out walking. Come on!"

And the party plunged on through the snow. They had proceeded but a few yards when Manners again uttered an exclamation.

"Footsteps! I heard them again!"

"I heard them that time, too," said Talbot. "But there's nothing to be alarmed about."

The juniors had stopped, and the footsteps had stopped, too.

"I can't help thinking that Manners is right, and that we're being followed!" muttered Tom Merry. "It's curious that the footsteps stop every time we do."

For some moments the juniors stood still, straining their ears to listen. But the footfalls had ceased.

"Who is there?" called out Arthur Augustus at length. "Why are you hidin' yourself?"

There was no reply.

With puzzled expressions on their faces, the St. Jim's juniors resumed their journey, keeping close behind Arthur Augustus, who knew every inch of the way.

As the juniors crossed the next field they could no longer doubt that they were being followed, for the footsteps were audible the whole time.

Presently Arthur Augustus could stand the suspense no longer. He made a sudden rush back, and his form was swallowed up in the darkness.

After an interval of a couple of minutes he rejoined his chums.

"What luck?" asked Blake eagerly. Arthur Augustus pumped in breath.

"The brute got away!" he panted. "I tried to gwab him, but he was too quick for me, deah boys!"

"Was it the family ghost?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"It was a man in a mask!" said Gussy. "My hat!"

"I am positive he was up to no good," continued Arthur Augustus. "He looked like a fellow who was contemplatin' wobbewy with violence."

"Then why on earth did he turn tail?" asked Tom Merry.

"The sight of Gussy's face, of course!" said Lowther. "That would be enough to scare Dick Turpin himself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowtherah—"

"Oh, come on!" said Jack Blake. "We shall never get to the station to-night at this rate!"

"How much farther, Gussy?" asked Talbot.

"We're nearly there, deah boy!"

It so happened that the London train was in when the juniors arrived at the station. The line had been cleared all the way down, and there had been no "hold-up."

Only three people alighted from the train, and Tom Merry & Co. recognised John Rivers at once.

The ex-crackman was tall and upright—a clean-looking, clean-living man. He looked a shade worn and tired, perhaps, as he stood, bag in hand, beneath one of the station lamps.

The new arrival's face brightened up as he caught sight of the St. Jim's juniors. A moment later he was busily engaged in shaking hands with them all.

"It is very good of you to come and meet me!" he said.

"This way, deah boy—I mean, deah man!"

And John Rivers was escorted out of the little

station and across the fields. Within half an hour the party arrived at Eastwood House.

Marie Rivers stood waiting in the brilliantly lighted hall, beneath the mistletoe, as it happened, and the girl's hands were outstretched to embrace her father.

"I'm so glad you've come, father!" said Marie. "I was afraid the snow would have delayed you. I have been looking forward ever so eagerly to this moment."

"And so have I, Marie. This is a merry Christmas, indeed!"

The voice of Lord Conway boomed through the hall:

"Come along, Mr. Rivers! You must be famished!"

Dinner was served shortly afterwards, and Tom Merry & Co. described the mysterious adventure which had befallen them that evening.

"I distinctly caught a glimpse of the masked man," said Arthur Augustus. "He had been followin' us acwoss the fields. And when I made a wush at him, the scoundwel took to his heels."

"Sounds very mysterious," remarked Lord

Conway.



"Can you swim?"

"No!"

"Well, here's your chance to learn!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. Chong Fai, 10-c, Loke Yew Street, Singapore.

Conway. "It's hardly likely that it was a joke on the part of one of the villagers."

"I am inclined to think," said Lord Eastwood, "that the man was a genuine blackguard. Men who wear masks are seldom otherwise. What sort of a mask was it, Arthur?"

"A cwape one. It covahed the uppah part of the wuffian's face."

"It might be advisable," suggested John Rivers, "to acquaint the police of the incident."

"I will do so at once!" said Lord Eastwood.

And he went to the library to make a communication by telephone to the local police. His lordship, however, had no great faith in the local representatives of the law; and it seemed too much to hope that they would be successful in apprehending and arresting the mysterious man in the mask.

CHAPTER 4.

Marie's Peril!

CHRISTMAS EVE!

The countryside was mantled with snow. Faintly from the distance came the strains of carol-singers.

In the warm, cosy drawing-room at Eastwood House, all was merry and bright.

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The affair of the masked man was forgotten—for the time being, at any rate—and the St. Jim's juniors were gazing in some surprise at a vast array of toys and presents on the table.

"Looks like the headquarters of Santa Claus!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"What a crowd of Christmas presents!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Who are they all for, Conway?"

"For the villagers," said Lord Conway, with a smile. "They are an awfully decent lot; but the majority of them are miserably poor. Very few of the parents are able to afford presents for the kiddies, so I decided to remedy matters in this way."

"Bai Jove! That's awfully sporty of you, deah boy!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Many hands make light work," said Lord Conway; "so perhaps you all would like to lend a hand with the distribution?"

There was a chorus of assent at once.

The presents—each duly labelled with the name of the place it was going to—were stowed into sacks, and the juniors, accompanied by Lord Conway and John Rivers, set off on their enjoyable errand.

Marie wanted to go as well, but she had promised to write a long letter to Mrs. Holmes, her kind benefactress at St. Jim's, and unless the letter was written at once, it would not catch the last post.

Lord Eastwood, who had correspondence of an even more urgent nature to attend to, remained in the library, while Marie Rivers made herself comfortable by the drawing-room fire and wrote her letter.

The missive was completed at last—five packed pages of neat, girlish handwriting.

Marie was about to ring for one of the servants to dispatch the letter. Then she remembered that a big celebration was taking place in the domestic regions, and she had no wish to disturb it.

"I'll go myself," she murmured. "It isn't a great distance to the pillar-box."

As an afterthought, Marie tapped on the door of the library and entered.

"Have you any letters for the post, Lord Eastwood? I am just going to post one of my own."

"My dear girl, one of the servants will do that!"

Marie smiled.

"I don't want to interrupt the kitchen festivities," she said. "Do let me take your letters!"

"It is unsafe for you to venture out alone—"

"I shall be quite all right, I assure you."

Reluctantly, Lord Eastwood handed over the letters.

Marie went down to the hall, and donned her hat and coat. Then she opened the heavy oaken door, and a shower of snow rushed in.

"Goodness! What a night!" muttered Marie.

It was with difficulty that Marie groped her way down the drive and out into the roadway.

A pall of darkness hung over everything, and through the darkness the snowflakes faintly glimmered. The girl groped her way as best she could through the snow.

Presently she halted. She knew that she was in the vicinity of the pillar-box, but it was difficult to discover its precise whereabouts.

The sudden gleam of a torch, however, revealed both the pillar-box and the postman, who had come to collect the letters.

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"Splendid!" murmured Marie.

She handed the letters to the postman, who thrust them into his sack; then, wishing him a Merry Christmas, she retraced her steps in the direction of Eastwood House.

After a few minutes, however, Marie distinctly heard the sound of footsteps behind her—furtive, stealthy steps.

Marie stopped short, and as she did so the footsteps ceased.

The girl peered into the darkness, but could see no one.

"Strange!" she murmured. "I wonder—"

The thought struck her that the person whose footsteps she had heard might be the masked man mentioned by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was not a pleasant thought, and Marie promptly walked on, quickening her pace, and hoping to be safe within the gates of Eastwood House before the unknown could catch up to her.

As she walked, her fears gathered weight. She could still hear the footsteps behind her, and every time she quickened her pace the pace of her pursuer was quickened also.

Marie was no coward. At the same time she had no desire to find herself confronted by a masked man on a lonely road at night.

The footsteps were growing nearer. Marie judged that only a dozen yards separated her from the man behind.

"I'd better run for it!" she panted.

Marie Rivers was a splendid runner for a girl, and it looked as if she would regain the gates of Eastwood House before the masked man could overtake her.

But there were slippery patches in the snow, and on one of these Marie came to grief.

There was a patter of feet close behind her, and, before the girl could rise to her feet, her pursuer was bending over her.

It was the man in the mask!

There was something familiar about the lower features of the fellow's face.

Marie's curiosity got the better of her alarm. She was wondering where she had seen that prominent jaw before.

"Marie!"

In that single word the speaker betrayed his identity.

Marie rose to her feet, and the masked man's hand gripped her by the wrist.

"Dawlish!" panted the girl. "Jim Dawlish!"

Marie was thunderstruck.

She knew Jim Dawlish well—only too well. He had been one of the members of the Angel Alley gang. He was a thorough-paced scoundrel—a rogue whose record bore no redeeming feature.

Like Talbot, Marie Rivers had hoped that the past was dead and done with. What could Jim Dawlish want with her now?

"What brings you here?" she asked.

"I'm here to get you, Marie—you and the Toff! I have re-formed the gang, and I want you both."

"You scoundrel! You are wasting your breath. I haven't the slightest intention of joining your gang—or any gang, for that matter—and neither has the Toff. Release me at once!"

Dawlish laughed softly.

"I rather think I hold all the cards," he said. "You will be silly to offer resistance."

"Do you mean that you will use force?"

"If necessary."

"You coward!" panted Marie. "I—I wish my father were here!"

"I happen to know that your father is doing the Santa Claus stunt in the village at the present

LAUGH THESE OFF!

—with Monty
Lowther.



Merry Christmas, Everybody!

Christmas comes but once a year, and when it comes I hope it brings a huge pile of presents for each of you.

Judging by the number of articles which reach the lost-property office, we are a terribly absent-minded nation, states an official. Anyhow, we are good losers!

Echo of the end-of-term exam: "An octopus," wrote Buggy Trimble in an essay, "is an eight-sided cat." Miao!

Pratt of the New House has hay fever, even in the winter time. "Are you taking anything for it?" asked Redfern. "Yes, boxing lessons," replied Pratt. "Boxing lessons?" echoed Redfern. "Yes," responded Pratt. "To sock the next chap who gives me free advice!"

Hammond and Kerruish finished up the

term with a caning from Knox for "cheek."
"I heard them kicking up no end of a row with their groaning," said Blake to their studymate, Patrick Reilly. "Sure," agreed Reilly. "Each one of 'em was roaring so loud you couldn't hear the other one!"

News: A scientist foresees great glaciers covering the earth in a few million years' time. No doubt there will be a politician riding the ice and promising a solution!

For the party: Why is an hour glass made small in the middle? To show the waste of time!

"Yes," said old Taggles, the St. Jim's porter, "I fought in the Boer War." "Did you get a commission?" asked D'Arcy. "No, only my wages!" explained Taggles.

Stop Press: I hear there has been a hold up over the film they were going to make about the life of Alexander Bell, inventor of the telephone. Sorry you've been tr-r-r-r-r-roubled!

A well-known comedian had given his services at several prison concerts. After the last performance, the prison governor said they were beginning to look upon him as one of themselves.

Then there was the chap who had an electric light installed over his sundial, so that he could read it in the dark evenings.

Happy hunting this Christmas, chums!

moment. He has not seen me, but I have seen him. There is no help for you, Marie. Be a sensible girl and make up your mind to come quietly," said Dawlish.

"If you join our gang you'll never lack money and fine clothes. The gang's in a flourishing state, I might mention, and it's going to flourish still more when you and the Toff are working with us. Don't be a fool, Marie! You can see which side your bread's buttered. Chuck that silly nursing stunt—you're wasted as a school nurse—and come and follow the only profession worth following."

The grip on Marie's wrist tightened with an intensity which was painful.

"Quick, Marie!" rapped out Dawlish. "I'm not going to wait here all night. What's it to be—yes or no?"

"No!"

Marie's voice ran out defiantly on the night air. Having delivered her answer, the girl paused breathlessly and strained her ears to listen.

Footsteps were approaching from the distance!

The sound was muffled owing to the snow, and Jim Dawlish failed to hear it. But Marie heard, and her heart beat quickly with hope.

"Very well," said Jim Dawlish. "Then I will have to use force!"

He drew something from his pocket, and as he did so Marie uttered a ringing cry:

"Help—help!"

Both the man and the girl paused to listen, but there was no indication that Marie's appeal had been heard, and her heart sank.

Dawlish turned to his intended victim.

"You're only making it harder for yourself by behaving like that," he said gruffly. "I won't give you the chance to speak again. Here goes!"

Before the scoundrel could take action, however, there was a sudden cry:

"Got you, you wottah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with fists clenched, hurled himself at Jim Dawlish.

The latter was thrown off his balance, but only for a second. Quick as thought, he caught the schoolboy antagonist round the waist and hurled him towards the other St. Jim's juniors as they came running up.

"Ow!"

"Yawoooooooh!"

There were two separate and distinct roars as Arthur Augustus crashed into Tom Merry, bowling him over like a ninepin.

"Quick, you fellows," panted Talbot, "or he'll get away!"

But Jim Dawlish had already got away.

The St. Jim's juniors, with John Rivers and Lord Conway, rushed in pursuit.

In spite of the fact that the cracksman had only a few seconds' start, he was aided by the pitchy darkness and the driving snow, and he eluded capture.

Marie Rivers waited in the roadway until the baffled searchers returned.

"No go!" said Lord Conway, with a grunt of dissatisfaction. "The bouncer's got clear!"

"And it's hopeless to continue the search," said John Rivers. "Finding a needle in a haystack

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would be child's play to getting on the track of that ruffian."

The St. Jim's juniors were bitterly disappointed that their quarry had slipped through their fingers. They had hoped to wind up an enjoyable Christmas Eve by marching the man in the mask to the police station. But their hopes had not materialised.

"Come along!" said Lord Conway. "We've missed collaring that masked beauty, but it will be a bigger tragedy still if we miss dinner!"

And the whole party trudged off through the snow in the direction of Eastwood House.

CHAPTER 5.

All Gussy's Fault!

CALBOT pressed the hand of his girl chum in great relief.

"I'm awfully glad you're safe, Marie!"

he said. "I was afraid that—"

"So was I," confessed Marie. "I don't think I ever felt so afraid in my life. Did you recognise our friend in the mask, Toff?"

"No," said Talbot, in wonder. "Surely it was no one we know?"

"It was Jim Dawlish."

"My hat!"

"He's keen on getting us to join his gang."

"By Jove! So that's his game. Well, he's wasting his time," said Talbot.

"He certainly is. But Dawlish is a persistent scoundrel, and he's come down here for the express purpose of getting hold of us."

John Rivers, who had listened to this conversation without taking part in it, clenched his hands fiercely.

"There will be short shrift for Dawlish if ever I get hold of him!" he muttered.

John Rivers was furious to think that Dawlish had attempted to kidnap his daughter. At the same time, he was just as relieved as Talbot to know Marie was safe.

Lord Eastwood noted the excited looks of the juniors when they came in, and he inquired the cause.

He listened with astonishment to Lord Conway's recital of recent events.

"It is amazing that the police have not arrested that masked scoundrel," said Lord Eastwood. "I gave them implicit instructions."

"Pewwaps they're too busy gettin' the turkey and plum puddin' weady," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it hadn't been for Gussy," said Tom Merry, "we should have collared the fellow with ease!"

"But it was D'Arcy who rushed at him!" protested Marie Rivers.

"Granted! But he rushed too soon! He was too impatient to wait till I gave the signal. If only he had waited we should have rushed up at once and surrounded the scoundrel. Blake had an empty sack, all ready to bung over his head."

"Oh!"

"It would have been as easy as falling off a form," said Manners. "With the sack over his head, the fellow would have been helpless. We should have carted him off to the police station, left him there with our best wishes for a merry Christmas and a bright New Year, and come back with the feeling that we'd deserved well of our country. But Gussy, not being able to possess his soul in patience, spoilt everything—as usual!"

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Arthur Augustus writhed as a result of this speech. He jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed Manners with a glare which should have shrivelled that youth up.

"Weally, Mannahs, I acted ffrom the vevy best of motives! It made me extwemely watty to heah that wuffian thweatenin' Miss Mawie, and I couldn't westwain myself—"

"You never can!" growled Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You must admit, Gussy, that it was your fault that things went wrong," said Herries. "Now, if you had allowed me to bring Towser—"

"Bothah Towseh!"

"Towser's a dog in a thousand. If I wasn't so fond of him I'd lend him to Scotland Yard. They'd welcome him with open arms. He would have hung on that scoundrel like a leech!"

"Give Towser a rest!" pleaded Monty Lowther. "Let's adjourn to the library and have a nice, exciting game of ludo."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors, together with Miss Marie and Cousin Ethel, amused themselves in the library until bed-time. They did not play the fierce and exciting game of ludo, as Monty Lowther had suggested, but they related ghost stories to each other until most of them had the "shivers."

It was past midnight when the party finally retired.

Outside the wind blew fitfully, driving the snow-flakes against the window-panes.

Arthur Augustus slept in the room known as the state bed-room.

"Good-night, deah boys, and a mewwy Chwistmas!" he said cheerfully.

"Same to you, Gussy!"

"Mind you're asleep when Father Christmas comes!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After Arthur Augustus had retired, his chums met together in Tom Merry's bed-room.

"Now, Gussy told us he was going to hang up two stockings," said Tom Merry. "What shall we put in them?"

"We'll have a whip-round," said Digby charitably. "Here's a French penny with a hole in it, for a start."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors turned out their pockets, and made a collection of those things for which they had no use.

Tom Merry produced a slab of very ancient toffee; Manners added a bladeless penknife; and Jack Blake contributed a quantity of old chest-nuts. Herries came to the fore with a quaint-looking golliwog; and Talbot, who had found a book of nursery rhymes during the day, added it to the collection.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "What are you going to give, Monty?"

Monty Lowther went through his pockets for the second time.

"Afraid I've got nothing that's valueless," he said.

"What about your brass watch?" asked Manners.

"Brass!" hooted Lowther. "Why, that watch is solid gold! It's stamped in every link, and jewelled in every movement!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got a fiver here," continued Monty—"a Christmas present from one of my aunts, bless her! Apart from this and my watch and my pearl-handled penknife, I've got nix. Afraid you'll have to leave me out of the donors."

"Couldn't you write Gussy an ode or something and drop it in one of his stockings?" suggested Talbot.

"By Jove," said Lowther, "I hadn't thought of that! It shall be done! If you fellows wouldn't mind clearing out of the room while I court inspiration—"

"Well, of all the cheek!" gasped Manners. "Do you think we're going out to freeze on the landing?"

"Oh, all right!" grunted Lowther. "You can stay, so long as you sit on the bed and be quiet."

The others waited patiently while Monty produced a scrap of paper and addressed a Christmas greeting to Arthur Augustus.

The finished article ran as follows:

"To our illustrious Vers de Vere,
We wish great joy and all good cheer.
We trust that when he finds this stocking,
His language will not be too shocking!
We trust the toffee will adorn
His cheeks on Christmas morn
We also trust the nursery rhymes
Will keep him from committing crimes.
The toffee, by the way, was Merry's;
The golliwog belonged to Herries.
And this most tender, touching ditty
Is Lowther's work, so smart and witty.

(Copyright throughout the civilised world.)"

The juniors chuckled when they read that effusion.

"Gussy will have a blue fit when he wakes up and goes through his stockings," said Digby. "In one of them he'll find all these useful articles and that piffle—"

"What!" shouted Monty Lowther. "You—you dare to describe my poetry as piffle?"

"Poetry?" echoed Digby. "My hat! You surprise me! I thought it was blank verse—so blank that nobody could see anything in it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about Gussy's other stocking?" said Jack Blake. "Pity to leave it empty—"

"We'll fill it with soot from the chimney," said Tom Merry, after a moment's reflection.

"That's the idea!"

"Think Gussy's asleep by now?" asked Manners.

"Most likely."

"How many of us are going to do the deed?"

"I think a couple will be enough," said Tom Merry. "If too many of us start barging about we shall wake Gussy up."

"You and I will go along, Tommy," said Monty Lowther.

"All serene! Take off your shoes."

Lowther thrust his ode into his pocket for the time being, and removed his shoes.

Tom Merry did the same, and then, gathering up the miscellaneous assortment of rubbish, the



Suddenly the front door of the cottage opened and the sound of muttered voices came to Talbot's ears. "It ought to be simple, Jim. His lordship has taken no precautions against burglary, so you've nothing to worry about."

two juniors stole away in the direction of Gussy's bed-room.

The apartment was in darkness.

From the bed came a sound of heavy breathing. Arthur Augustus was in the arms of Morpheus.

"We must do the trick in the dark," whispered Tom Merry. "I'll see to the stocking that's got to be filled with soot, while you shove those things and your ode into the other."

"Right you are!" said Lowther, very softly.

The juniors groped their way to the end of the bed. Monty Lowther nearly gave the whole show away by tripping over a shoe on the floor.

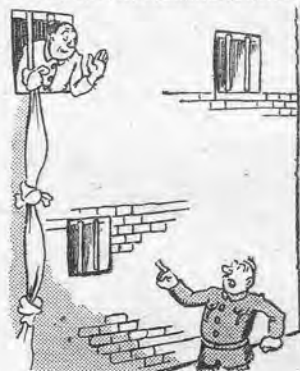
"Shush!" muttered Tom Merry.

The couple strained their ears to listen, but the sleeper made no sign that he had been disturbed. "Carry on!" whispered Tom Merry; and he took one of the stockings and groped his way towards the fireplace.

It was comparatively easy, in spite of the darkness, to load the stocking with soot.

Tom Merry thrust a poker up the chimney, and quite an avalanche of soot shot down into the grate.

The junior scooped it up with a shovel, and



"It's all right, warder. I'm only airing the bed clothes!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Stewart, 2, Manor Villas, Weston, Bath.

filled the stocking while Lowther held it for him. Then the stocking was replaced on the bedrail.

"Finished filling the other stocking, Monty?" he murmured.

Lowther whispered an affirmative reply, and the two practical jokers returned to their school-fellows.

"Did you work the oracle?" asked Talbot.

"We did," chuckled Monty Lowther. "The only drawback is that we shan't be on the spot when Gussy wakes up out of his beauty sleep. Still, life is full of these little disappointments. Fare thee well, chaps! I'm going to bed!"

"Same here!" said Jack Blake.

The juniors dispersed to their own rooms and turned in. Within ten minutes they were all sound asleep.

CHAPTER 6.

A Tragie Discovery!

CHRISTMAS morning!

The snow had ceased.

As Monty Lowther remarked, it was high time the inhabitants of Mars stopped sprinkling salt on the earth.

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Meadows and hedges and trees, however, were still mantled in white.

It was a glorious morning. The bells of the old village church rang out in merry, joyous peal.

Christmas—the time of mirth and good cheer! Christmas, with its heritage of happy laughter.

In consequence of their late retirement over night, the majority of the St. Jim's juniors failed to awake until the morning was well advanced.

After hurriedly dressing, the Terrible Three, with Talbot and Jack Blake, went along to the "state bed-room." They were hoping to find Arthur Augustus ruefully surveying the contents of his silk stockings.

But the bed was empty, and the swell of St. Jim's had evidently dressed and gone down.

"What a sell!" groaned Monty Lowther. "No sign of Gussy, and no sign of the stockings."

"I expect he slung them out of the window," said Talbot.

At that moment the breakfast gong sounded.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "I've got an appetite like Fatty Wynn's and Billy Bunter's rolled into one."

The juniors clattered down the stairs, being joined en route by Herries and Digby.

Lord Eastwood and Lord Conway were already in the dining-room, chatting to John Rivers.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seated between Marie Rivers and Cousin Ethel, and his expression was happy and contented. He did not look like the victim of a "jape."

Christmas greetings were given and returned whilst breakfast was being served.

"Top of the morning, Gussy!" said Jack Blake.

"Did you find your stockings?" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"Fairly gave you a fit, didn't it?" said Tom Merry.

"Not at all. Of course, I was agreeably delighted and surprised. I have been tellin' Cousin Ethel and Miss Mawie all about it."

The juniors stared at Arthur Augustus. They could not understand why he should inform the girls of the trick which had been played on him. They had imagined that he would be only too anxious to hush the matter up.

"Did the pwesent come frowm all of you?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"Which present do you mean?" said Tom Merry, in surprise. "The toffee came from me."

"And the nursery-rhymes from me," said Talbot.

"I supplied the bladeless penknife," chuckled Manners.

"And I threw in the old chestnuts," said Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Did you contwibute anythin, Dig?"

"Yes," said Digby. "A French penny with a hole in it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you, Hewwies?"

"I presented you with the golliwog."

Arthur Augustus turned to Monty Lowther with a beaming smile.

"Then it was you who made the weal pwesent, Lowthah? I am extwemely obliged to you, deah boy. Furfah, I am touched by such an unexpected act of kindness, bai Jove!"

Monty Lowther gasped.



Detective Kerr Investigates

No. 21. The Ghost of St. Jim's!

IN the course of a talk on the history of St. Jim's, Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master, described the ghostly abbot, who was reputed to appear at the full moon, haunting the site of his former abbey. The abbot had not been seen for some years, but several people were sure they had seen him in the past. Mr. Lathom reassured his listeners by saying that the ghostly abbot was quite a kindly sort, and did not attempt to scare his beholders. Most fellows forgot the matter, till next day, when Baggy Trimble startled the school by affirming he had seen the ghostly abbot in the night. "Detective" Kerr resolved to see if Trimble was spoofing or not.

KERR: Trimble says he saw the ghostly abbot last night in the Fourth Form dormitory. Blake. Did any other fellow see it besides Trimble?

BLAKE: Not a soul. But then, we were all fast asleep at midnight, when Trimble claims the ghost walked.

KERR: It was unlike a fat funk like Trimble to keep quiet. I should have expected him to shout the place down.

BLAKE: Trimble says the abbot was too terrifying for him to be able to move for a long time after it had gone. And then he was afraid to wake any of us up, for fear of being laughed at.

KERR: Then how does he expect us to believe him in the cold light of day?

BLAKE: According to Trimble, the abbot passed right through the dormitory door. But before he vanished, he left a cross on the door.

KERR: And is there really a cross there now?

BLAKE: Funnily enough, yes. It might have been scratched on with any blunt instrument, though—

DAME TAGGLES: Oh, Master Kerr, they do tell me the ghostly abbot was seen to walk last night. Is it true?

KERR: Trimble is the only fellow who claims to have seen it, ma'am. I'll have a lemonade.

DAME TAGGLES: There you are, Master Kerr. Twopence, please. I shouldn't be surprised if Master Trimble is really telling the truth for once. The abbot was seen to walk not many years ago.

KERR: You've never seen the abbot yourself, Dame Taggles?

DAME TAGGLES: I wouldn't go as far as that, though I admit I am superstitious. I said to my husband only last night, turn your money over as it's a new moon; but Ephraim only laughed at me, as he always does. You should ask Mrs. Mimms, the House dame. She says she saw it once, though not long enough to describe what it looked like.

TRIMBLE: I tell you, Kerr, I've never seen anything like it. Mr. Lathom has excused me from classes for the day, as it has affected my nerves—so I shall get out of doing that Latin paper, after all.

KERR: About the ghost. What time did you say it appeared?

TRIMBLE: At the stroke of midnight. I couldn't sleep very well, and I roused up just before the chimes. As the last chime died away, a bluish glow appeared at the far end of the dorm, by the windows and I could see a tall, robed figure slowly taking shape. I tell you, my hair simply stood on end.

KERR: I should imagine so. Go on.

TRIMBLE: Well, as I looked, the abbot came towards my bed, seeming to glide along. He had a horrid look on his face, and he was brandishing an old two-handed sword.

KERR: Could you see all that in the dark?

TRIMBLE: I remember the scene distinctly—the moon was full, and it shone straight through the high windows. I thought the abbot was coming for me, and I don't mind admitting I thought my last moment had come; but he passed my bed, unseeing, and went right through the door, and was gone.

KERR: Didn't he make a mark on the panelling?

TRIMBLE: Yes; a cross with his sword.

KERR: And that's all the story?

TRIMBLE: Yes. I'm the only chap at St. Jim's who has seen the abbot walking. . . .

(Did Trimble see the ghost, or was he spoofing for some reason? Turn to Kerr's solution on page 33 and find out.)

"What on earth are you babbling about, Gussy? I admit that I was responsible for the note."

"Then I can only repeat that I am extremely obliged to you! I had never before regarded you in the light of a Good Samaritan. It was wippin' of you to make me such a handsome present."

Monty Lowther tapped his forehead significantly.

"Mad!" he murmured.

"Mad as a hatter or a March hare!" agreed Manners.

"Fancy Gussy making such a fuss over a piffing poem!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"It wasn't a poem, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus. "It was, as Lowthah said, a note—a fivah, to be pweicse!"

And the swell of St. Jim's, to the utter and complete astonishment of his chums, produced a crisp and rustling banknote.

"This is a Chwistmas pweisent worth havin'," he declared. "Even Fathah Chwistmas wouldn't have been as genewous."

Monty Lowther's face worked convulsively.

"Where did you find that note?" he gasped.

"In my stockin', dear boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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A yell of laughter rang through the dining-room.

The juniors understood now.

Owing to the darkness, Monty Lowther had made a slight mistake. Instead of putting his poetical effusion in Gussy's stocking, he had put the five-pound note there!

Lowther produced the ode from his pocket. His face was a study.

"Oh crumbs!" he gasped. "I—I— There's been an awful mistake, Gussy!"

"Didn't you intend that fivah for me, deah boy?"

"Of course not."

"Then I was quite w'ong in c'reditin' you with chawitable motives."

"Hand over that fiver!" roared Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It would serve you wight," said Arthur Augustus severely, "if I sent it to the local hospital. Howevah, I won't be hard on you. Here's your fivah."

And, as Lowther pocketed the note, he realised that the laugh was not against Gussy, after all, but against himself.

The day passed pleasantly, but all too swiftly.

In the evening, Lord Eastwood entertained about a dozen villagers—mainly men who worked on his estate.

Tom Merry & Co. organised a concert, and it went with a swing from start to finish.

Then came feasting and revelling, and yet more revelling.

When the village guests had returned to their homes, John Rivers took Marie aside.

"I leave to-morrow, Marie—early in the morning."

Marie nodded wistfully.

"I do wish you could stay longer, dad. Lord Eastwood wishes it, too."

John Rivers smiled.

"Duty calls, my dear."

"Have you had a good time?" asked Marie.

"The time of my life! I have never known such genuine happiness."

"I am so glad. I will come to the station in the morning, of course."

Father and daughter remained in each other's company for the rest of the evening. Every moment was precious, for it would be many months before they met again.

After breakfast next morning John Rivers bade farewell to his hosts. Tom Merry & Co. would have liked to accompany him to the station, but they realised that he and Marie would prefer to be alone.

"We'll put in half an hour's skating on the lake, Marie," said Tom Merry. "By that time the train will have gone, and we'll come and escort you home."

"Don't trouble," said Marie.

"It's no trouble, deah gal—it's a pleasuah!" said Arthur Augustus gallantly.

John Rivers shook hands all round, and the last hand he shook was Talbot's.

"Good-bye, Toff!" he said, in a low tone. "Before I go I should like to ask a favour of you."

(Continued on next page.)

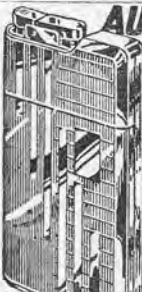
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John Rivers lowered his voice until it was barely audible.

"I have fears for Marie's safety," he said. "Dawlish is in the neighbourhood, and the police have not yet succeeded in locating him. Perhaps they regard the story of the masked man as a myth, and are making no serious effort. Anyway, the presence of Dawlish in the district spells danger. He was barked the other evening in his attempt to capture Marie, but he may not be so easily thwarted next time. Is it asking too much of you, Toff, to make my daughter's safety your first consideration?"

Talbot smiled.

"You may rely on me to see that no harm comes to her," he said.

"Thank you, Toff! Now that I have this assurance I shall be easier in my mind."

"Good-bye!"

John Rivers, his brief holiday at an end all too soon, started off for the railway station, accompanied by Marie.

Tom Merry & Co. stood in a group by the front door and watched them go. They returned John Rivers' farewell wave, and then, collecting their skates, they proceeded to the frozen lake.

All of them were good performers on the ice, and the half-hour passed all too quickly.

Tom Merry, his face flushed and healthy with exertion, consulted his watch.

"Time to go and meet Marie, you fellows," he said.

The juniors hurried away towards the railway station. They found the little platform deserted.

"Has the London twain gone?" inquired Arthur Augustus of the solitary porter.

"Yessir; ten minutes ago, sir."

"Bai Jove! Then Mawie must have returned home. We're too late, deah boys!"

"And we promised Marie we'd escort her back to Eastwood House," said Tom Merry. "We're bright specimens, and no mistake!"

"We had bettah hwybak, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Come on!"

The juniors sprinted back across the fields to Eastwood House.

Cousin Ethel met them in the hall, but there was no Marie.

"Where is Marie, Arthur?" inquired Ethel.

"Hasn't she returned?"

"No."

Arthur Augustus gave a start, and so did his schoolfellows.

"Marie must have started back from the station half an hour ago!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Surely she must have come in? Perhaps you didn't see her, Cousin Ethel?"

"I couldn't have missed her," said Ethel. "I've been here the whole time."

"She wouldn't have come in by the back entrance?" suggested Jack Blake.

"The servants are sure to have seen her if she did. We'll ask them."

Inquiries were made in the servants' quarters, but Marie Rivers had not been seen since she set off for the station in her father's company.

The juniors looked very worried now, particularly Talbot.

Less than an hour ago he had assured John Rivers that he would make Marie's safety his first consideration.

And now—

Marie had not returned, and there were only two possible explanations. Either the girl, after leaving her father, had gone for a walk beyond the railway station, or there had been foul play.



PROFESSOR SKIMPOLE'S HOROSCOPE

This Week:

BAGGY TRIMBLE.

THE fattest and most unprepossessing member of the Fourth was not so hard to run to earth as some of my previous victims. "You'll be sure to find him in the tuckshop," said Mellish, his studymate—and I did! "If you want to cast my horoscope, you'll have to stand me some buns and a ginger-pop first," said Trimble rudely. "Really, Trimble," I pointed out, "you are not doing me a favour by allowing me to cast your horoscope. If you don't want me to—" "Oh, stand me a ginger-pop and go ahead—I'm hard up!" pleaded Trimble, with a change of tone.

Under the zodiacal sign of Capricornus, the Goat (birthdays between December 22nd and January 19th), Trimble is also influenced by both Uranus and the Moon. He is, I am afraid, doomed to many trials and tribulations, from which a more resolute character under this configuration might well emerge triumphant. I fear, however, that Trimble is far too much given to dissatisfaction to appreciate the opportunities that come his way. He might be capable of doing deeds, instead of talking about them, if only he would pull himself together.

"Only one ginger-pop?" grumbled Trimble, as I made off. "You're a stingy beast, Skimpole—and as for your horoscope, do you know what I think? I think it's a lot of drivel, see?" To such ingratitude I could think of no reply. Thank goodness there are many Capricornians whose hearts are warmer towards their fellows than Trimble's!

And, knowing Jim Dawlish as he did, Talbot inclined to the latter theory.

"This—this is awful, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "It seems ridiculous to suppose that Mawie has been kidnapped in broad daylight, and yet—"

"A kidnapper's job would be perfectly simple on a lonely road," said Jack Blake.

Talbot clenched his hands hard.

"If this is Dawlish's doing," he said fiercely, "I shan't rest until I've squared accounts with him!"

"I suppose we'd better tell Lord Eastwood that Marie's missing?" said Manners.

"Not yet," replied Tom Merry. "We'll go along to the station by way of the road, and see if we can pick up any information."

With worried and anxious looks the juniors quitted the house.

They all felt convinced by this time that Marie's disappearance was directly due to that scoundrel Jim Dawlish. And their convictions were borne out when, at a lonely part of the road, Digby made a startling discovery.

A small gold locket lay glittering on the hardened snow.

Talbot knew that locket well. It belonged to his girl chum, and it had evidently been dropped during a struggle.

There were footprints in the snow—beyond a doubt the footprints of Jim Dawlish.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, who was nearly as white as Talbot. "This is dreadful, deah boys!"

"And it's our fault, too!" said Tom Merry bitterly. "If we had come to meet Marie earlier, instead of fooling about on the lake—"

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"Cheer up, old scout!" said Monty Lowther. "We'll go back and report to Lord Eastwood, and he'll ginger up the police. We'll form a search-party, too, and Marie ought to be found soon."

"Dawlish won't leave this neighbourhood, I feel certain," said Talbot, taking possession of Marie's locket. "If he attempted to take Marie away by train or car, she would raise a hue-and-cry and give him away. The rascal means to hide somewhere until this has blown over."

"In that case, we'll dig him out like a rat from his hole!" said Jack Blake. "Come on! The sooner Lord Eastwood and the police are informed of this the better."

And the juniors, angry at the disappearance of their girl chum, returned with all speed to Eastwood House.

CHAPTER 7.

Black Despair!

LORD EASTWOOD did not let the grass grow under his feet.

As soon as he was acquainted with what had occurred he went to the telephone and summoned the local inspector of police.

The inspector arrived shortly afterwards. He was a stout, pompous-looking individual, with a vast idea of his own importance.

In the presence of the juniors, Lord Eastwood described what had happened.

The official listened respectfully, but did not seem to be raised to any great heights of enthusiasm.

"You say there were signs of a struggle in the roadway?" he asked, turning to Tom Merry.

"Yes," replied Tom. "There was a man's footprints—obviously those of Jim Dawlish."

"H'm! In what direction did the footprints lead?"

"There was no sign of them except at that part of the road. Dawlish must have gone through a gap in the hedge and got away across the fields."

"And you say that this man wears a crepe mask?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I'll give you a detailed description of him," said Talbot. And he did, the inspector jotting down the particulars.

"No stone must be left unturned to bring the rascal to justice," said Lord Eastwood. "I might mention, inspector, that if your efforts prove successful, an adequate reward will be forthcoming."

The inspector smiled. He evidently regarded the tracking down of Jim Dawlish and the restoration of Marie Rivers to her friends as a very simple matter.

"I fancy there will be developments by night-fall, your lordship," he said.

"You will communicate with me at once in the event of Dawlish's capture?"

"Of course."

The inspector quitted the room with a ponderous tread and an expression of confidence on his florid face. But neither Lord Eastwood nor the juniors had any great faith in him.

"Of course, we must institute a search on our own account," said Lord Eastwood. "After lunch we'll go out in two parties and scour the district. Conway will conduct one party and I will be responsible for the other. Talbot, my boy, pull yourself together! You must not look so dejected."

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But Talbot found it difficult to conceal the anxiety and misery he felt. He was perpetually haunted by the assurance he had given to John Rivers—an assurance which had been broken!

"Will it be necessary to communicate with Mawie's fathah?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"Not at present," said Lord Eastwood. "We will see what the afternoon search brings forth, and if there are no developments, I will wire to Mr. Rivers in the morning."

After lunch, the two search parties set out, and they went about their task in grim earnest.

Lord Eastwood, with the Terrible Three and Talbot, went to the village to institute inquiries.



The old bridge, rotten with decay, gave way beneath Dawlish. Talbot saw bridge and man plun-

His lordship quite startled the local printer by striding into his establishment and insisting upon fifty leaflets being printed, at once.

The leaflets—which were to be posted up for miles around—ran as follows:

"FIFTY POUNDS REWARD!"

"The above sum will be paid to any person or persons giving such information as may lead to the apprehension and arrest of JAMES DAWLISH, who is wanted on a serious charge.

"Dawlish is stockily built and of medium height, and when last seen was wearing a crepe

mask, which concealed the upper portion of his face. He is believed to be in hiding in the neighbourhood.

"Information should be either given direct to the police station or to Lord Eastwood at Eastwood House."

Having arranged for the distribution of the leaflets, Lord Eastwood and his companions made an exhaustive tour of the village.

They inquired if a man answering to Dawlish's description had been seen in the locality, but they drew blank.

No one in the village had seen a masked man, and the news that such a person was in the



Dawlish's weight. There was a startled cry, and next moment he fell into the stream together.

neighbourhood greatly alarmed some of the inhabitants.

The party extended their search. They explored all the by-lanes and the meadows and the copses; in fact, all the environs of the village. But they met with no success.

Lord Conway's party went farther and fared worse—if that were possible. They explored barns and sheds, and hundreds of nooks and crannies, but with no result.

Herries felt very bitter about it all.

"Now, if only I had brought Towser, all would have been well," he kept saying. "Towser would have run Dawlish to earth in no time."

Jack Blake, Digby, and Arthur Augustus became so fed-up with that parrot-cry that they consigned both Towser and his master to Jericho.

Finally, Lord Conway was reluctantly obliged to abandon the search. The winter dusk was descending and the task seemed indeed hopeless.

Even Lord Eastwood, persistent and determined as he was, remarked that everything had been done that could be done, and he suggested that the search should be relinquished—for that day, at any rate.

"There's one place we haven't inquired at," said Tom Merry.

"Indeed! I was under the impression that we had called at every house for miles around," said Lord Eastwood.

"There's a cottage standing by itself, close to the mill-stream," said Tom.

"That cottage is empty."

"All the more reason why we should explore it," said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" said Manners. "An empty cottage would be just the place for Dawlish. It would suit him down to the ground."

"This way!" said Lord Eastwood briskly. "It is a forlorn hope, I think; but we will leave nothing to chance."

The cottage by the mill-stream was not empty, as Lord Eastwood had supposed.

An aged couple were in occupation, and they explained that they had recently rented the cottage. On being questioned as to whether they had seen a masked man in the vicinity, they answered in the negative.

"No go!" said Talbot glumly.

"We'll be getting back now," said Lord Eastwood, "and I'll phone the police to ascertain if there are any developments. Sorry I have disturbed you, Mr.—"

"Jenkins is my name," said the old cottager, in a wheezing voice.

"I see Good-night, Mr. Jenkins!"

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night!" added Mrs. Jenkins, in a shrill falsetto.

Had the members of the search party looked closely at the old lady, they must have seen several things to arouse their suspicions.

In the first place, Mrs. Jenkins face was not at all smooth, and secondly, her feet were extremely large. Her hair was hidden by a mob-cap, and one row of eyebrows seemed to be out of all proportion to the other.

The St. Jim's juniors noticed none of these things; though had they remained in the cottage a little longer, they could not have failed to become suspicious of an incessant knocking on the floor of the room above.

Unfortunately, however, Lord Eastwood and his party had not dallied, and they little suspected that the quaint old cottage by the mill-stream could have furnished them with no little information.

With heavy hearts and tired feet, the searchers returned to Eastwood House. There they encountered Lord Conway's party, and exchanged experiences.

The result was not inspiring.

Marie Rivers had been kidnapped, and neither of her nor her kidnapper was there any trace.

The last gleam of hope was extinguished when Lord Eastwood telephoned to the police station and received the inspector's laconic message that

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nothing had happened. Every effort was being made, but up to the present time there was nothing to report. His lordship would be kept posted of any developments.

"I'm afraid, dear boys, that nothin' more can be done to-day," remarked Arthur Augustus. "If we had no luck in the daylight, it's not likely that we should twice Dawlish in the darkness."

"We'll turn in early," said Jack Blake, "and have another hunt at daybreak."

"Poor old Marie!" said Digby, his voice quivering a little. "It must be awful for her, being trapped like this!"

Talbot took no part in the juniors' conversation. Just as Eugene Aram, in the poem, "sat remote from all, a melancholy man," so Talbot sat now. The kidnapping of his girl chum, and the long, disappointing search, had greatly upset him. And then there was his promise to John Rivers—a promise he had not kept.

He ought to have been Marie's constant companion. He ought to have been at hand to protect her when danger threatened. He had left undone those things which he ought to have done, and he considered himself far more to blame than he was in reality.

But, in his acute distress, Talbot quite overlooked the fact that the darkest hour heralds the approach of dawn, and that right triumphs over wrong as surely as night follows day.

CHAPTER 8.

A Happy Reunion!

THE winter night had set in dark and grim. The St. Jim's juniors, acting on Jack Blake's suggestion, went early to bed.

There was one exception, however.

It was useless for Talbot to think of slumber. How could he sleep, with the haunting knowledge that his girl chum was in peril?

By ten o'clock the great house was still and silent. But Talbot still lingered in the drawing-room, gazing moodily into the dying embers of the fire.

The junior's mind was in an agony of fear and suspense.

He was acutely concerned for Marie, of course, but he was also concerned for her father.

It would be a terrible blow for John Rivers on the morrow, when he received Lord Eastwood's telegram to the effect that his daughter had been kidnapped.

The unhappy junior rose to his feet. He was too restless to remain still any longer.

He went quietly into the hall, donned his cap and coat, and, opening and closing the heavy oak door as noiselessly as possible, he stepped out into the night.

And a wild night it was!

The fierce wind tore through the leafless branches as Talbot strode along, heedless alike of direction and destination.

Presently the rush of the mill-stream, turbid and swollen from the melted snow, came to his ears.

Talbot's attention was then arrested by a light which glimmered from the windows of the cottage occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Judkins.

The junior was mildly surprised. He knew that country people retired to rest early, as a rule, especially in the winter, and it was now decidedly late.

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Instinctively Talbot walked up to the little cottage.

Suddenly the front door opened, and a shaft of light fell upon the path.

The sound of muttered voices came to Talbot's ears, and he stepped back behind a big tree.

"It ought to be simple, Jim. Everybody in the house will be asleep by now, I reckon. His lordship has taken no precautions against burglary, so you've nothing to worry about."

"You will keep an eye on the girl in my absence?"

"Of course!"

"I shall be back within a couple of hours—with the loot, I hope. So long!"

Talbot kept close behind the tree, his heart thumping against his ribs.

He had not overheard the whole of the conversation between the two men, but he had overheard sufficient to ascertain three very important facts. Mr. and Mrs. Judkins were impostors. The former was no other than Jim Dawlish, and the latter was a confederate. That was the first important fact.

Secondly, Jim Dawlish had planned a burglary at Eastwood House, and he was about to carry out his design.

Thirdly—and this was by far the most important discovery of all—a girl was imprisoned in the cottage.

Talbot was wildly excited, though he made no sound.

The captive would, of course, be Marie, his girl chum. Who else could it be?

The junior's brain was in a whirl.

He wanted to do several things at once. He wanted to get to grips with Dawlish—to prevent him from carrying out his shady scheme. He wanted to overpower Dawlish's rascally confederate. And, thirdly—this was the keenest desire of all—he wanted to rescue Marie Rivers from her terrible plight.

In order to do this, however, it would be necessary to carry out the other two operations first.

It was useless to think of releasing Marie until her captors had been dealt with.

Talbot was wondering how to act, when an idea came to him.

He would return with all speed to Eastwood House, and raise the alarm. Then, when the cracksmen arrived at the house, he would walk into a hornet's nest.

He would be arrested and taken to the police station. After which, the St. Jim's juniors would proceed to the cottage in full force, overpower the other man, and rescue Marie.

It all seemed so beautifully simple. Certainly it was a far better plan than for Talbot to tackle the situation single-handed.

But the junior's luck was out, for as he moved away from the spot the rays of an electric torch were flashed upon him, and a startled exclamation burst from the lips of Dawlish.

"The Toff!"

Talbot halted, and spun round.

"Yes, you scoundrel," he said fiercely, "it is I! And I might add that your game's up."

"Hang you, Toff!"

Jim Dawlish quickly drew a revolver from his hip-pocket.

"I'll give you one chance—Marie has consented to join the gang!"

"I don't believe you!" flashed Talbot.

"Whether you believe me or not, it's the

(Continued on page 22.)

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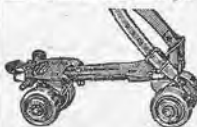
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truth. Marie has become one of us—and I'm giving you a chance, Toff, to do the same."

"Fool!" said Talbot. "I would rather die than go back to a life of dishonour!"

"Then take what's coming to you!" muttered Dawlish thickly.

He had lowered the revolver temporarily whilst parleying with the junior, but now he raised it again.

Talbot was not alarmed. He knew that Jim Dawlish, coward and blackguard though he was, hadn't the pluck to fire.

Talbot's brain worked swiftly.

Should he hurl himself at Dawlish, or—

An alternative occurred to him. He would pretend to be terrified and dash away at top speed, hoping Dawlish would follow. And if Dawlish followed him as far as Eastwood House, the rest would be easy.

Accordingly, Talbot turned on his heel and took a flying leap across the mill-stream at its narrowest part.

Dawlish immediately gave chase, but he was less athletic than Talbot, and, instead of attempting to leap across the stream, he made for an old narrow wooden bridge.

Talbot saw him step on it, and what followed was like a strange dream.

The bridge, rotten with decay, and already undermined by the swollen water, gave way beneath Jim Dawlish's weight.

There was a startled cry, and next moment bridge and man plunged into the stream together.

Talbot stood rooted to the ground. Then he pulled himself together. He sprang down the bank, and, seizing one of the boughs of an overhanging tree, he leaned over the dark waters.

If he could reach Jim Dawlish as he passed, he might save him.

It was the only chance.

Talbot's enemy was struggling in the surging waters, trying to fight against the powerful current of the mill-stream.

But the fight was futile. The swirling waters bore him onward.

"Now!" muttered Talbot.

And he leaned over and seized the man's arm in the nick of time.

The bridge and the waters rushed on, but Reginald Talbot had saved his enemy.

Jim Dawlish was now unconscious, and his face was colourless.

With a supreme effort, Talbot dragged him safely to the bank. Then the junior took off his overcoat, spread it out on the hard, frozen turf, and heaved the inanimate form upon it. This done, he sped away to Eastwood House for help.

It was a novel experience for Lord Eastwood to be aroused in the middle of the night, but he behaved admirably in the circumstances.

Without waiting to ask a lot of needless questions, he hurried into his clothes, while Talbot roused his schoolfellows.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is extraordinary! How on earth did you manage to wun into Dawlish, Talbot?"

"You shall hear the full story later," said Talbot. "Buck up!"

The juniors, with Lord Eastwood at their head, went out into the night, and bore the insensible form of the cracksman back to the house.

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Dawlish was laid on a couch, and brandy was administered.

The injured man came round, and then in hoarse, broken accents, he explained everything to his eager audience. He told how he had kidnapped Marie Rivers and made her a prisoner in the cottage, locking the girl in a small room under the eaves—a room without windows. He also explained how he and his partner had disguised themselves and rented the cottage as Mr. and Mrs. Juddins. He hoped to keep Marie a prisoner there until the affair of the kidnapping had blown over, when he intended to remove the girl to his headquarters in London.

Remorse and repentance seemed to be mingled with Dawlish's confession. He appeared to be genuinely ashamed of himself and of his shady past.

"Thank you, Toff," he concluded, "for saving my life to-night. It was a plucky effort, and I didn't deserve it."

"The doctor shall be sent for," said Lord Eastwood, "and we will endeavour to make you comfortable here until he comes."

Jim Dawlish was wrapped in several blankets and a rug, and one of the servants was dispatched for the doctor.

"And now," said Talbot, his eyes glowing with a glad light, "we'll go and fetch Marie."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And while we are about it, we'll collar the other precious scoundrel!" said Herries.

Meanwhile Lord Conway, who had been awakened by the disturbance, had slipped into his clothes and come down to see what it was all about.

He was overjoyed to know that Marie's whereabouts had been discovered, and he insisted on accompanying Lord Eastwood and the others to the cottage.

Cousin Ethel joined the party in the hall, and she, too, insisted upon going.

The cottage by the mill-stream was in darkness.

Tom Merry & Co. swarmed into it, and the rays of several electric torches lit up the little kitchen.

There was no sign of Jim Dawlish's accomplice. A blouse, a skirt, and a mob-cap had been thrown in the corner, and the man who had worn these feminine garments had bolted.

A sudden feeling of dread assailed the party.

Had the man, in his hurried flight, taken Marie with him?

Talbot soon proved that these fears were false. He went to the foot of the stairs and shouted:

"Marie!"

To his delight, there was a ready response from the room above.

"I am here, Toff!"

Talbot went up the rickety stairs three at a time, and hurled himself at the door of the room where Marie was a prisoner.

"It is locked, Toff!" came a voice from within.

Talbot laughed—quite his old merry laugh.

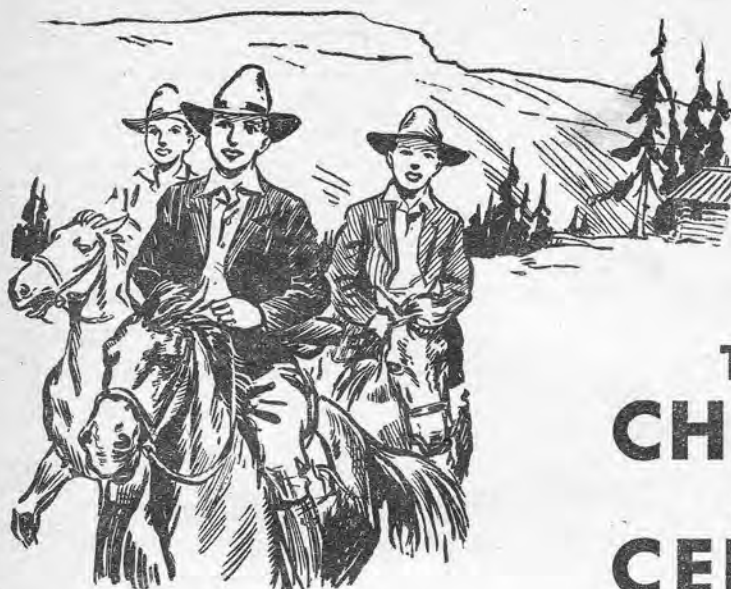
"It won't take long to burst it in!" he said.

"This way, you fellows!"

The Terrible Three and Jack Blake were up the stairs in a twinkling, and the united weight of the juniors was pitted against the door.

It was not a very stout door, and in less than a couple of minutes it was forced open, and the juniors entered the room. Marie stepped forward, her eyes shining with delight.

(Continued on page 36.)



When Yen Chin comes to the backwoods school he soon makes an enemy of Eben Hacke, the bully. Yet in a moment of peril it is only the Chinese's courage that stands between his enemy and death!

The CHINEE of CEDAR CREEK!

by *Martin Clifford.*

A New Boy!

"A GOLDARNED Chow!"
"A which?" inquired Frank Richards.
"A goldarned Chow!" repeated Eben Hacke, in utter disgust.

Frank Richards & Co. had just arrived at Cedar Creek School when Eben Hacke greeted them with that information. Ebenezer looked disgusted.

"A Chinaman—here?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Yep!"

"A Chinese come to school?" asked Vere Beaucherc.

"That's it."

"Well, what's the matter with him?" Frank Richards further inquired.

Eben Hacke replied to that question with a snort.

"Where is the galoot?" asked Bob Lawless, looking round. "We haven't had a Chow here before."

"He's gone to see Miss Meadows," grunted Hacke. "Hallo! Here he is!" he added, as the subject of the discussion came out of the lumber schoolhouse.

The new fellow at Cedar Creek was surrounded at once. Frank Richards looked at him very curiously.

Yen Chin was a small, slim fellow, with a yellowish complexion and long, almond-shaped eyes. He was dressed in his own Chinese garb, but he wore a stetson hat over his pigtail.

He grinned good-naturedly at the Cedar Creek fellows. Evidently he did not see any reason why he should not be quite welcome in the lumber school.

"So you're a new kid here?" asked Frank Richards, feeling that someone was called upon to say a welcoming word.

Yen Chin nodded and grinned.

"Me come to school," he answered. "Me Yen Chin. Me learn hee allee samee Melican man."

Eben Hacke snorted wrathfully.

"And what do you mean by coming to a white man's school?" he demanded.

Yen Chin blinked at him.

"You no likee me come?" he asked.

"Nope!"

"Me come allee samee."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Got yor there, Hacke!" grinned Bob Lawless.

"The goldarned cheeky heathen!" exclaimed Hacke. "I'll have his pigtail off for his sass!"

"Leave him alone!"

"I guess I'm having his pigtail off!"

Hacke took a large clasp-knife, and opened it with an air of great deliberation.

Yen Chin's eyes grew wide with alarm.

"No cuttee pigtail!" he exclaimed shrilly.

"You cuttee pigtail me killy!"

"The fathead's only joking, kid!" said Frank Richards.

"I guess not!" snorted Eben Hacke. "I'll have his pigtail off and make him look a little less like a heathen. Now then, you Chow!"

He strode at the little Chinese, flourishing the clasp-knife. Yen Chin dodged round Frank Richards.

"No cuttee!" he yelled.

"Leave him alone!" exclaimed Frank Richards, pushing Hacke away.

"Mind your own business, Richards!"

"I tell you—"

"Rot!"

Hacke rushed after the little Chinese and caught him by the shoulder. The next moment Yen Chin curled round him like a cat, and Hacke came to earth with a heavy thud.

"Ow!" roared Hacke.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The sudden fall of the burly Eben brought a

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shout of laughter from the Cedar Creek fellows. He had smitten the ground with great force, and he lay there dazed and gasping, while the little Celestial dodged into the schoolhouse porch.

"Waal, I swow!" ejaculated Hacke, sitting up at last. "How the thunder did I get down hyer?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll break him into little bits for that!" spluttered Hacke, as he scrambled to his feet. "I'll—I'll—"

"Hacke!" It was Miss Meadows' quiet voice. The schoolmistress looked out of the porch with a severe frown, and Hacke's rush in pursuit of the Celestial stopped suddenly.

"Ye-es, marm!" he stammered.

"No cuttie pigtail!" wailed Yen Chin.

"Were you going to cut Yen Chin's pigtail, Hacke?" asked Miss Meadows.

"Nunno! Only sneering him, marm!" stammered Hacke.

"You will be careful to do nothing of the sort again," said Miss Meadows.

"Ye-es, marm."

"I shall keep an eye on you in future, Hacke. If you bully this lad in any way you will answer for it."

Miss Meadows went back into the schoolhouse, and Hacke was left with a red and sheepish face. He put the clasp-knife away.

"You little toad!" he said, shaking a knuckly fist at the Chinese, who was grinning now from the porch.

"Melican chappie gleat fool!" remarked Yen Chin.

"What?"

"Gleat fool! Suppose bully Yen Chin, Missew Meadee whackee."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was too much for Hacke.

Miss Meadows had disappeared, and the big schoolboy made another rush at Yen Chin. Frank Richards caught him by the shoulder just in time. Hacke came spinning round in his grasp, and brought up against the log wall of the schoolhouse with a bump.

"You pesky coyote!" yelled Hacke. "Whatter you mean?"

"Let him alone, old son," said Frank. "He isn't up to your weight, you know. Don't be a bully."

"I'll smash him!"

"You'll smash me first, then!"

324 MORE OVERSEAS READERS WIN PRIZES FOR "STAMPS"!

This week we announce the result of the Overseas Section of our "Armaments" Contest No. 2, for which there was a special late closing date.

As stated in the competition offer, there were special prizes for good "scores" from overseas, and these have been awarded in cash form as follows:

FIRST PRIZE, £2: G. Aaron, 6, Rockey Street, Bellevue, Johannesburg, South Africa (whose stamp total was 327—congratulations!).

SECOND PRIZE, £1: P. George, 27, Reed Street, Port Elizabeth, South Africa (who came next with a "score" of 318).

For space reasons we are unable to print all the other winners' names here. All "scores" of 72 and over qualified for prizes, however; totals of 178 stamps and over winning special consolation prizes of 5s. each; while totals of 177 down to 72 were awarded prizes of 2s. 6d. each. These prizes have all been posted.

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"And then me!" grinned Bob Lawless.

"And me third!" remarked Vere Beauclerc, with a smile.

"Me for fourth!" chuckled Tom Lawrence. "Don't be a brute, Hacke. The kid's done no harm."

Hacke glared round at his schoolfellows. Opinion was evidently against him. He grunted discontentedly and strode away.

Yen Chin glided up to Frank Richards as the latter was turning away. He tugged at the English schoolboy's sleeve, and Frank looked down with a smile.

"Whatee namee?" asked Yen Chin.

"Frank Richards."

"Frank Richards. Me lemembel," said Yen Chin in his peculiar "pidgin" English, in which all the "r's" were changed into "l's." "Flank Richards goodee boy. Me flriend."

"All right!" said Frank, laughing.

"Me lemembel."

And Yen Chin nodded seriously.

Frank's interference with the heavy-handed Eben had made an impression upon the mind of the little Chinese.

The school-bell called Cedar Creek into class, and Yen Chin glided in with the rest.

He occupied most of the morning in blinking round him with his almond eyes, taking note of his surroundings. Only Eben Hacke gave him hostile glances. The inglorious result of Hacke's encounter with the little Chinese was not to be forgotten easily, and Hacke did not forget it.

A Little Present!

FRANK RICHARDS and his chums were chatting in the school-ground after morning lessons, when the bull-voice of Eben Hacke was heard in loud and wrathful tones.

"Anybody got my knife?"

"Lost it!" inquired Bob Lawless.

"I guess I haven't lost it, as it was in my pocket when I went into class!" growled Hacke. "Somebody's taken it!"

"Rubbish!"

"I tell you it's gone!"

"Then you've dropped it somewhere, fathead!"

"I calculate I've done nothing of the sort! Somebody's hooked it out of my pocket!" persisted Hacke.

"Rot!"

"I tell you——"

"Oh, rats!"

The three chums sauntered away to the creek, leaving Eben Hacke fuming.

The ice was thick on Cedar Creek, and the trio intended to slide till dinner. But as they came down to the bank, Yen Chin came scuttling after them.

"Stoppee!" he called out.

"Hallo, heathen!" said Bob.

"Me wantee speakee to Flank Richards."

"Here I am," said Frank, smiling.

"Allee lonee," said Yen Chin mysteriously.

Frank looked puzzled.

"What the dickens do you want to speak to me alone for?" he demanded.

"Allee lonee," persisted Yen Chin.

"Come on, Cherub!" grinned Bob Lawless. And Frank's chums moved off.

"Well, what is it, Yen Chin?" asked Frank, mystified.

"You comee with me."

Yen Chin led the mystified schoolboy under the trees. His manner was one of great mystery.

"Well, now, what is it?" exclaimed Frank, as soon as they were in the timber.

"You stoppee Melican chappie beatee Yen Chin. You goodee boy," said the Celestial. "Me, Yen Chin, goodee boy. Me makee you nicee plesent."

"You young ass!" exclaimed Frank. "I don't want you to make me a present."

"Yes, yes. Me makee plesent. Nicee knifee."

"Wha-a-at!"

With a mysterious air Yen Chin produced a clasp-knife from the recesses of his loose garments. Frank stared at it blankly. He knew that knife by sight.

"You takee," said Yen Chin. "Goodee knifee. No lettee Melican chappie see."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Frank.

He could hardly believe for a moment that the little Celestial was trying to make him a present of Eben Hacke's clasp-knife.

But Yen Chin was evidently in earnest, and it was equally evident that he did not see any harm in what he was doing.

"You takee!" urged Yen Chin, trying to push the knife into Frank's hand. "Nicee knifee. Costee thees doller in Thompson. You puttee in pocket."

"Oh, my hat! You young rascal!"

"Whatee sayee?"

"You young rascal!" exclaimed Frank indignantly.

Yen Chin looked injured and sorrowful.

"No lascal—goodee boy," he replied.

"Bob!" shouted Frank. "Beau! Come here!"

"No tellee!" whispered Yen Chin hurriedly in alarm.

"Come here, you chaps!" shouted Frank, unheeding.

His chums came through the trees and joined him.

Yen Chin whipped the knife out of sight at once.

"What's the row?" asked Beauclerc.

"That young idiot's stolen Hacke's knife, and he's trying to give it to me."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"No tellee!" said Yen Chin anxiously. "Allee light. Flank only jokee. No gottee knifee."

"You awful young rascal!" exclaimed Bob. "Don't you know it's wrong to steal, you blessed heathen?"

"No steallee. No gottee knifee," said Yen Chin, with a face of perfect innocence.

"Why, you've just shown it to me!" shouted Frank.

"Flank mistakee."

Frank Richards drew a deep breath.

"You young scamp!" he said. "You ought to have your pigtail cut off! How did you get that knife away from Hacke?"

"No gottee. No gottee."

The chums of Cedar Creek looked at one another and burst into a laugh. They could not help it. The Oriental indifference to the truth was very much developed in Yen Chin.

"Come with me, you young rotter!" said Frank. "You'll give Hacke his knife back and ask his pardon."

He grasped Yen Chin by the shoulder, and led him back to the lumber school. The Chinese wriggled in his grasp.

"Lettee go!" he pleaded. "Flank Lichards no wantee knifee?"

(Continued on the next page.)



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Let the Editor be your pal. Drop him a line to-day, addressing your letter: The Editor, The GEM, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! There is still some days to Christmas, but, as is the usual custom, the GEM heralds in early the festive season with a special issue. It is my pleasure to present to readers the thirty-second Christmas number of the old paper, together with my sincere wishes for

A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS!

If your Yuletide is as humorous and exciting as the contents of this number, then you could not wish for anything more.

By the way, that last remark reminds me of something you could wish for. If you have not yet had your "Holiday Annual," now is the time to drop a tactful hint to an obliging aunt or uncle. A real bumper book, which contains grand yarns of all your schoolboy favourites, will be very welcome to all readers. I am sure. And as there is a big run on the "H. A.," don't lose any time over dropping that hint!

"FATHER CHRISTMAS MUST GET THROUGH!"

In next week's GEM you will find a magnificent, double-length yarn of Frank Richards & Co.'s Yuletide in the backwoods of Canada. This is one of the finest Christmas stories of human interest, the Christmas spirit, and thrilling adventure I have ever read. It tells how Frank, Bob, and Vere play the part of Father Christmas to gratify the wish of a poor ailing child. Of their daring, sixty miles dash in a sleigh through the darkness and solitude of the prairie on Christmas Eve, and of their grim battle against trail thieves, wolves, and other perils, I will leave Martin Clifford to tell you, in his most convincing style, next Wednesday. Make sure you don't miss this real masterpiece.

"THE MYSTERY OF CARDEW & CO.!"

In addition, there will, of course, be another ripping long complete St. Jim's yarn, starring Cardew, Clive, and Levison. The chums of Study No. 9 create quite an air of mystery at St. Jim's when they make several journeys to some unknown destination. The black sheep, Racke & Co., try to find out what Cardew & Co. are up to, but without success. Nevertheless, ugly rumours are spread about concerning the three juniors, two of whom are not wholly above suspicion. And as Cardew & Co. do not explain the object of their mysterious journeys, many juniors wonder whether there is any truth in the rumours, after all. What is all the mystery about? That remains to be seen when you read this great yarn.

Owing to the extra-long Christmas yarn of Frank Richards & Co. the boys of the Benbow will not be on parade next Wednesday. But they will be in their usual place the following week. Monty Lowther, Kerr, and Skimpole, however, provide their usual fun and amusement, completing another tip-top number.

There is just one more thing before I close down. Have you played "Stak-a-Stik"? No? Then you don't know what ripping fun you are missing. It became a craze in America and on the Continent, and it's just the game for Christmas. Try it! You can buy Stak-a-Stik for as low as a shilling. Chin, chin!

THE EDITOR.

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"Of course not!"

"Me keepee, then."

"You jolly well won't keepee, you young rascal!"

Frank Richards marched the wriggling Chinese into the school-ground, where Eben Hacke was still inquiring after his clasp-knife.

His grinning chums followed.

It was very difficult to be angry with the little Celestial, whose ways evidently were not the same as the white man's ways.

"Hacke!" called out Frank.

"Seen my knife?" demanded Hacke.

"Yes. Yen Chin's got it."

Yen Chin gave Frank a look of deep reproach.

Hacke came towards him threateningly.

"You've got my knife, you goldarned heathen?" he exclaimed.

"Me findee," said Yen Chin, producing the knife and holding it out meekly. "Me pickee up on floor."

"I didn't drop it on the floor, you lying heathen!" exclaimed Hacke, grabbing the clasp-knife. "I guess I should have heard it drop."

"Me pickee up on glound," amended Yen Chin.

"That's another lie! You stole it!" roared Hacke.

"No stealee!" exclaimed Yen Chin in alarm. "Me findee and blingee to you, because you goodee boy."

"Ha, ha ha!" roared Bob Lawless. "Doesn't he take the cake! I wonder if he could tell the truth if he tried?"

"Chinese boy always tellee thuth."

"So you stole my knife, you heathen!" said Eben Hacke. "I'm going to cowhide you for that! How did you find him out, Richards?"

"The young ass doesn't know any better," said Frank. "He brought it to me to make me a present of it."

"Gee-whiz! He reckoned you'd take it?" ejaculated Hacke in astonishment.

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Waal, if that don't beat everything! You hand him over to me, and I'll take it out of his hide."

"Let him alone," said Frank. "You've got your knife back, and the poor little beast doesn't know any better."

"A lambasting will do him good!"

"I'll talk to him instead."

Yen Chin was trying to wriggle away, but Frank kept hold of his shoulder.

"Look here, kid!" said Frank quietly. "What you've done is a beastly rotten thing, though you don't seem to understand it. A thief is the meanest kind of rotter on earth. Do you understand?"

"Me savvy," said Yen Chin humbly.

"If you take anything again that doesn't belong to you, Miss Meadows will be told, and you will be turned out of the school."

"Me solly!"

"Well, if you're sorry, that's something," said Bob. "But what are you sorry for, Yen Chin?"

"Me solly makee Frank angry."

"Oh dear!" said Frank. "That isn't the point, you young duffer! You ought to be sorry because you've done wrong."

"Me vally solly."

"It's wrong to steal and tell lies," said Frank impressively. "Can you get that into your head?"

"Allee light."

"Now you know why you shouldn't steal?"

"Me knowee."

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"Why then?" asked Bob, suppressing a grin. "Because gettee 'founded out," replied Yen Chin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Frank. "It's no good talking to him. Yen Chin, you'll promise me never to do anything of the kind again, or I'll take you to Miss Meadows at once."

"Me plomise!"

"You'll keep that promise?"

"P'laps!"

"Look here, better give him the cowhide!" exclaimed Eben Hacke.

"Me keepee plomise!" howled Yen Chin. "Me good boy. Me keepee plomise. No givee Yen Chin cowhide. Yen Chin good Chinese."

"Well, mind you keep your promise, that's all," said Frank, and he gave it up at that.

But it was very doubtful whether Yen Chin's truly Oriental mind had benefited by Frank's instruction.

Cornered!

HERE was a cheery sound of chipping axes from the direction of Mr. Slimmey's cabin. Some of the Cedar Creek fellows were at work there, splitting logs, and Frank Richards and his chums joined them.

It was after dinner and half an hour before afternoon lessons, and Frank especially was very willing to render any service he could to the assistant master of Cedar Creek.

Hacke was working with the others, but as the trio joined in the work, Ebenezer threw down his axe and strolled away. Eben Hacke was not exactly a bully, but he was an extremely heavy-handed youth, and he disapproved emphatically of Frank's method of dealing with the new boy at Cedar Creek.

His idea was that what Yen Chin wanted was a thorough good cowhiding, and his idea also was that Yen Chin was going to get it.

He did not want a fight with Frank Richards, however, partly because he had already failed in a fight with the English schoolboy, but partly because he rather liked Frank.

So he waited till Frank and his chums were busily engaged on the logs before he started in search of the Celestial.

Yen Chin was by himself outside the gate when Hacke caught sight of him and started towards him at a run.

The little Chinese looked at him very warily.

"Whatee wantee?" he demanded.

"I guess I want you, you heathen," growled Hacke, "and I guess I'm going to lambaste you!"

Yen Chin dodged nimbly.

"Come here, you ornery heathen!" shouted Hacke.

"No comee!"

"By Jehoshaphat! I'll fairly skin you when I get a holt of you!" gasped Hacke, as he pursued the nimble Chinese among the trees.

But Yen Chin was not easy to get a "holt" on. Hacke barred him off from the school, taking care that he did not get a chance to double back to the gates. But the little Celestial dodged him among the trees, and Hacke's temper grew worse, and worse as he panted in pursuit.

Yen Chin was driven out on the bank of the creek at last, still dodging.

"I guess I've corralled you now!" panted Hacke.

He rushed on. But Yen Chin was not corralled yet. He shinned up the trunk of a tree that

grew by the water's edge, its branches extending over the frozen creek.

Hacke came to a halt under the tree, glaring up wrathfully. He was tired and breathless with the chase, and he brandished his riding-whip at the grinning Chinese above.

"Come down, you critter!" he roared.

"No comee," chuckled Yen Chin.

"I guess I'll skin you if I come after you."

"Hackee gleat fool!"

"You cheeky ornery heathen!" gasped Hacke.

He began to clamber up the sloping trunk.

Yen Chin promptly retreated along an extensive branch which hung over the ice on the creek. The branch swayed and sagged under his

weight. Yen Chin looked alarmed now. The branch swayed and creaked as Hacke's heavy weight was added to that of the Chinese.

Slowly but surely he was working his way along, the branch drooping more and more towards the ice, and creaking in a threatening way.

"Blanch bleakee off!" gasped Yen Chin.

"I don't care—come back, then!"

"No comee!"



Yen Chin's face was hard and set as Hacke clung desperately to his feet. The strain upon him was terrific. His hands were almost dragged from the branch overhead, but still he held on.

"Then I guess I'm coming for you!"

Hacke worked on, and Yen Chin began to sway on the long branch, causing it to swing to and fro, with a louder creaking each time. Hacke had to stop then, and clutch tight with both hands to keep from falling off.

"Stop it!" he gasped. "You'll—you'll have me off, you silly heathen!"

Yen Chin chortled.

"Oh, by gum!" stuttered Hacke helplessly.

He was not so nimble as the Chinese, who seemed to have the activity of a cat, and his weight was more than double that of Yen Chin.

With the branch swaying and dancing under him, he could not keep his balance. In spite of his frantic efforts he rolled to one side, and pitched helplessly over, hanging on underneath the branch with both hands.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Yen Chin. "You dloppee. You gleat fool!"

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

Hacke clung desperately to the swaying branch. His boots, as he swung, were six feet above the ice. He knew that he could not hold on many minutes, and he knew, too, that the ice would not bear his weight if he crashed on it from that height.

"Will you stop it, you yellow coyote!" he howled. "I'm going! Oh, Jehoshaphat!"

His grasp slipped on the branch.

Crash!

As he hurtled downwards, his thick, heavy boots smashed through the ice, and Eben Hacke shot down and through into the black water beneath.

The branch, relieved of his weight, shot up

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weight, and drooped till the twigs at the extremity almost touched the ice.

Hacke clambered astride of the branch, glaring at the elusive Chinese, still far out of reach.

"Will you come back?" he howled.

"No comee backee!"

"I'll skin you!"

"No skinnee. Hackee gleat fool!"

"I'll give you great fool!" panted Hacke. "I'll wring your heathen neck with your own gold-darned pigtail when I get a holt on you!"

Astride of the branch, he worked his way along it towards the Chinese, his whip held in his teeth.

again, and Yen Chin clung to it like a cat to save himself.

Hacke disappeared under the water for a moment, and then his head came up, wet and dragged, and he clutched desperately at the broken edges of the ice.

From above the little Chinese grinned down at him.

"Help!" panted Hacke.

"Hackee gleat fool!" grinned Yen Chin.

"Hackee gettee wettee, gettee dlownee!"

"Help!"

The Pluck of Yen Chin!

EBEN HACKE'S husky shout rang through the timber. He was holding on to the crumbling edges of the ice, the black waters bubbling round him in the broken gap. The bitter cold of the water penetrated to his very bones, and his face was as white as chalk.

He could not clamber out, for the ice chipped off in his grasp as fast as his weight was put upon it. And he was some distance from the shore.

"Help!"

Yen Chin's expression changed.

"Hackee dlownee!" he muttered. "Gleat fool!"

"Help me, you heathen beast!" groaned Hacke.

"I—I can't hold on much longer! I'm frozen! Help!"

"Me helpee!" said Yen Chin suddenly.

"Don't jump down!" panted Hacke. "You'll go through!"

"No jumpee!"

Yen Chin sidled along the branch towards the trunk till he was over the gap where the half-frozen boy was hanging on to the ice.

There was a sound of shouting in the distance. Hacke's cries had been heard, and voices were calling; but it was very doubtful whether help would reach him before the bitter cold forced him to loose his hold.

There was fear in his white face now—a gnawing fear. For he knew that once his hold was loosened he would be swept away under the ice, never to be seen again till the creek melted in the far-off days.

"Help!"

His voice was growing faint.

Yen Chin swung himself over the branch, holding on by his hands. He lowered himself, the branch sagging under his weight, till his feet were close to Hacke's head.

"You holdee on me!" he panted.

Hacke understood. He shifted the grasp of one chilled hand from the ice to Yen Chin's right ankle. The other followed to the Chinese's other ankle.

The strain upon the little Celestial was great, but he bore it without a murmur.

"You holdee on!" he called out.

"Yep!" gasped Hacke.

"Now you climbee out, Hackee."

"I—I'll try."

The Celestial's ankles made an easier hold than the crumbling edge of the ice. Hacke had a good grip, and it was pretty certain that he would not let go.

If Yen Chin's strength had failed him under the strain he would have been dragged down into the gap in the ice. But he held on to the branch grimly.

"You holdee on and climbee, gettee feettee out on ice!" he panted.

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Clutching Yen Chin's limbs and loose garments, Hacke essayed to pull himself out of the gap. He came up as high as his waist, but he could get no footing on the ice, cracked and broken all round the gap.

Yen Chin's face was hard and set. The strain upon him was terrific. His hands were almost dragged from the branch above, but still he held on.

There was a crash in the thickets, and Bob Lawless came tearing down to the bank.

"Here he is!" shouted Bob.

Frank Richards and Beauclerc were at his heels, and three or four other fellows after them.

"Hold on, Yen Chin!"

"Me holdee on!" muttered the little Celestial faintly.

"Good man!" panted Frank Richards.

"Lend a hand with this branch!" exclaimed Vere Beauclerc.

A big branch, lately lopped down by the woodman's axe, lay in the timber, and the schoolboys grasped it and rushed it down to the ice.

It was pushed out cautiously on the ice towards the gap. The end of it lapped over the opening and reached the opposite side, forming a bridge across the gap in the frozen surface.

Frank Richards crawled out on it and reached Eben Hacke. He grasped the half-frozen schoolboy by the collar and held on to him, kneeling on the branch.

"All right now!" he gasped.

Hacke, who was half-unconscious now from cold, mechanically let go the Chinese.

Frank, with a strong grasp on him, drew him steadily on the branch that lay on the ice.

Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc crawled along to his aid, and among them the helpless schoolboy was drawn back to the bank.

"Yen Chin!" exclaimed Frank.

The Chinese was still hanging on the bough over the creek. His strength was spent, and he could not pull himself up.

"You helpee," he murmured faintly. "No can climbee. Me dloppee if no helpee."

"Hold on! I'm coming!"

Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc raised Hacke in their arms and rushed him away to the lumber school.

Frank clambered into the big tree and out along the overhanging branch to where the little Chinese hung suspended. He grasped Yen Chin, and by main strength dragged him up into the tree.

"Safe now, young 'un!" he said breathlessly.

"Allee light!" breathed Yen Chin.

Frank drew him into the tree, and Tom Lawrence and Dick Dawson received him from below as Frank lowered him down.

"Allee light!" murmured Yen Chin.

Eben Hacke did not turn up to afternoon lessons that day. He lay in bed in the house, piled with blankets, with a hot-water bottle at his feet. But for his hardy constitution he would have been booked for an illness.

But when the Cedar Creek fellows came to school on the following morning they found Hacke up and out of doors, looking a little pale, but otherwise nothing the worse for his perilous adventure.

He came towards Frank Richards & Co., who had been joined on the trail by the Chinese schoolboy from Thompson.

(Continued on page 36.)



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Jack Drake Is No Match for the Cunning of His Enemy—and He Walks
Right Into the Trap Set for Him.



There was a shout as Chilcot allowed the ball to slip through his hands and enter the net. "Goal!" "Go home, Chilcot!" yelled the St. Winny's juniors behind the goal.

Doubts!

"**R**IPPING day for footer!"

Jack Drake's face was very bright as he came out of the Fourth Form Room after lessons on Saturday morning. It was, as he said, a "ripping" day.

A cold, clear sunlight fell on the old Benbow, and on the glimmering waters of the Chadway. The football ground looked bright and green, and Drake's eyes turned in that direction at once as he came out on the Benbow's deck from the Form-room.

"You're glad to be playing for St. Winny's this afternoon, old chap?" said Dick Rodney, with a smile.

"Yes, rather!" Drake drew in a deep breath of the cold, fresh air from the river. "It's jolly decent of Daubeney to put me in the eleven, considering—"

"Considering your form?" chirruped Tuckey Toddles.

"No, ass! Considering that his noble nose hasn't yet quite got over the last punch I gave it!"

"It would have been a bit better if he had put in a few more fellows who could play," growled Sawyer major of the Fourth. "St. Winny's can't win. You and Daub are the only footballers in the eleven, and Daub's no great shakes."

Drake laughed.

"Better one than none," he remarked. "It's a sign of grace, at any rate, for Daub to leave out one of his own pals and put in a man who can keep his end up. I suppose we can't beat Redclyffe, but the game won't be such a walk-over for the enemy as the Highcliffa match was. Daub's showing more sense than I ever expected."

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DAUBENY'S DARK SECRET!

By Owen Conquest.

Rodney's face had a thoughtful cast. All Drake's thoughts now were given to football, and the Redclyffe match and his inclusion in the junior team had evidently made him think more kindly of his old rival and enemy, Vernon Daubeney, the junior captain. Rodney was far from sharing the easy and unsuspecting faith of his chum.

Drake turned to him with a smiling face.

"I can guess your thoughts, old scout," he said.

"Guess away."

"You're thinking that I'm going to forget all about slogging for the scholarship exam now I'm playing footer for St. Winny's again. But it isn't so. Of course, there can't be any swotting this afternoon—there's the footer match, and after that I shan't feel much like sapping. But let's have a dig before dinner."

"Oh good!" said Rodney. "If you feel up

Just when Jack Drake should be swotting hard for a scholarship, he neglects his studies for football—which is exactly what Vernon Daubeney has schemed for!

to it we can put in half an hour, and every half-hour tells."

"Let's get our books up into the maintop, where we shan't be disturbed," said Drake cheerily.

"Right-ho!"

Rodney ran down to the study for the books, and Drake, with his hands in his pockets, looked away across the shining waters towards the football ground with a cheery face.

Daubeney & Co. of the Shell came sauntering along from the direction of the Shell class-room.

Vernon Daubeney nodded pleasantly to Drake.

Judging by the great Daub's urbane manner, no one would have guessed that he had ever been on fighting terms with the Fourth Former. And Torrence and Egan were equally urbane.

"Feeling fit for this afternoon—what?" asked Daubeney.

"Fit as a fiddle."

"That's good. We're relyin' on you in the front line," said Daubeney. "I don't mind tellin' you, Drake, that I'm jolly glad to have you in the team, and I think it's very decent of you to play up like this."

"Jolly glad to play for St. Winny's any day. I'd have played before if you'd asked me."
 "Perhaps I shall ask you so often in future that you'll get fed-up!" said Daubeny gracefully.

"Not likely," said Drake, laughing.

Dick Rodney came back with a couple of volumes under his arm. Daubeny noticed him and his volumes with the corner of his eye, as it were, though he did not seem to glance towards Drake's chum. He went on speaking to Drake as if oblivious of Rodney's presence.

"I want to ask your advice about the team, Drake," he continued. "Will you step into my study for a little chat?"

Drake looked at Rodney.

"I was going—" he began.

"I'm not quite satisfied with the team as it stands. I was thinkin' of shiftin' one or two men," said Daubeny calmly. "I'd really like your advice, Drake, if you can spare a few minutes before tiffin."

It was not easy to refuse.

"Do you mind, Rodney—" began Drake hesitatingly.

"Not at all."

"All serene, then!"

Jack Drake walked away with Daubeny & Co., and Rodney was left with the books that were to have been "dug" into. He looked after his chum as Drake disappeared with the knuts of the Shell. Then he slowly turned away and went down to his study.

He laid the books on the table, and for some minutes he stood by the window, gazing out on the river.

His mind was uneasy.

From the first, Rodney had not trusted the great Daub, and he had wondered uneasily whether the dandy of the Shell had any concealed motive in his new cordiality to Drake, and his offer of a place in the junior eleven.

Whether Daubeny intended it or not, it looked as if this new interest would come between Drake and his work for the scholarship exam.

On the result of that examination depended whether Drake was to remain at St. Winfred's after the end of the present term.

Tuckey Toodles came into the study, grinning.

"Left over—what?" he remarked.

Rodney turned from the window.

"I don't quite understand—"

"My dear man," said Toodles patronisingly. "I could have told you so; in fact, I did tell you so. Now Drake's getting thick with Daub again he won't bother about a half-pay boulder. You don't mind my mentioning it, do you? You see, Drake had to pal with somebody, and I dare say he found you useful in helping him mug up Latin—"

"Do you want me to kick you, Toodles?" inquired Rodney quietly.

Tuckey Toodles jumped back.

"N-n-no! Wharrer you getting your rag out for, I'd like to know? I haven't said anything to offend you, have I?"

"You fat chump!"

"As for mugging up Latin," continued Toodles with a grin, "there won't be much more of that. Now Drake's got a chance at the footer again, he won't worry much about sapping. I know him, you see. I say, Drake used to think that Daub was trying to dish him over the schol. Do you think that's why Daub's put him into the footer, Rodney?"

Rodney started. The thought that had been

lurking in his own mind had evidently occurred to Tuckey Toodles.

"Anyhow, you won't see much of him here, now Daub's taken him on again," grinned Toodles. "I must say it serves you right, Rodney. You fairly bagged my old pal Drake, and I never liked it. You're rather a pushing boulder, you know—Daub says so, and I quite agree with Daub. Here, I say, don't you chuck that book at me, you ass! Wharrer you getting waxy about?"

"Oh, buzz off!" exclaimed Rodney irritably.

"Shan't!" retorted Tuckey Toodles, with great independence. "This is my study as well as yours! I'll stay here if I like, and say what I like, and if you don't like it you can—Yaroooooh!"

The independent Tuckey dodged out of Study No. 8 just in time to elude a hurtling volume.

Rodney stood at the window, staring out into the sunny river, with a cloud on his brow.

The minutes passed, but Drake did not appear in the study. Dick Rodney did not see his chum again till they met at the dinner table.

The Redclyffe Match!

"YOU'RE coming along, Rodney?"

It was close on time for Redclyffe to arrive, and Daubeny & Co. were preparing to go ashore. Jack Drake was with them, but he detached himself from the knotty footballers to join Rodney on the deck. Rodney was leaning on the rail, staring rather glumly at the swift-flowing waters of the Chadway as they whirled past the hull of the old warship.

Rodney looked up.

"Coming where?" he asked.

Drake's sunny face fell a little.

"I thought you'd like to see the match as I'm playing," he said. "Most of the Fourth are turning out."

"Oh, I'll come!"

"I wish you were playing, old chap."

Rodney smiled rather sarcastically.

"I dare say I could put up as good a game as Torrence or Egan or Chetwynd," he remarked.

"Miles better, old chap. But you know Daub; he can't understand the first principles of a footer captain's bisney."

"More fools the fellows to have him for skipper, then."

"But he is skipper, and the fellows won't turn him out," said Drake. "We've got to take things as they are. I've been talking to him in his study, and I tried to get him to see sense; but he couldn't find a place for you in the team."

"He wouldn't, you mean."

"Well, I suppose I do mean that. Daub's an ass; there's no mistake about it. But he's put one good man in—little me, you know," said Drake, with a smile. "It's a beginning. Even Daub will see in the long run that he's got to strengthen the team. I'd be jolly glad if you and Sawyer and Rawlings were in. We might beat Redclyffe then. You don't feel inclined to waste time watching?"

"Oh, I'm coming!" said Rodney. "I hope you'll have a good game, old fellow."

Drake looked at him quickly, but Rodney's face was quite cheerful and smiling now.

Tuckey Toodles' insinuations were lingering in his mind, in spite of himself, but he put them aside firmly. He would not spoil his chum's happiness that afternoon by any want of faith or by nourishing a sense of injury or neglect.

"Come on, then, old scout!" said Drake, much relieved.

The two juniors crossed the gangway together, Rodney in Etons, Drake with a coat and muffler on over his football garb. Most of the Fourth Form, and a crowd of the Shell and the Third, gathered round Little Side to watch the game.

In the Lower School of St. Winifred's there was a strong opposition to the lofty rule of Vernon Daubeny, an opposition which was not yet great in numbers, but very loud and emphatic. But by playing Drake in his team Daubeny had, as it were, drawn the teeth of the opposition, for Drake had been its acknowledged leader.

By playing Drake, in fact, the wily Daub was killing more than one bird with the same stone.

He was interrupting very seriously Drake's work for the exam—an interruption that might prove fatal to his success. He was silencing the opposition Drake had led. And he was adding to his chances of pulling off a victory, which would more effectually silence criticism. Vernon Daubeny felt that he was scoring all along the line, in fact, and he was in a very satisfied mood that afternoon. And his keen eye had already noted the beginning of a rift between Drake and his best chum, which was an added satisfaction to the excellent Daub.

Drake and Rodney were chatting by the ropes when Drake was called away by his skipper to join in punting the ball about till the Redclyffians arrived.

Dick Rodney stood with a group of the Fourth, looking on. There were many comments among the Fourth Formers on Daub's team of "fumlbers," as Sawyer major called them; but there was no doubt that adverse criticism had been to a great extent silenced by Drake's inclusion in

the team. Drake was admitted to be the best junior footballer at St. Winifred's, and even one good man made a difference to the side.

But when Redclyffe arrived on the ground Sawyer major grew more sarcastic. Sawyer major was very sore at seeing the place he was entitled to filled by a duffer like Chetwynd.

"Redclyffe seem rather amused—what?" he remarked to Rodney. "Look at their skipper, Fane, grinning like a Cheshire cat!"

"They know what to expect when they play St. Winifred's," grumbled Rawlings. "It's always been the same since Daub was skipper."

Fane of Redclyffe was not exactly grinning like a Cheshire cat. But there was a slightly ironical expression on his face as he tossed with Daubeny. Slight as that expression was, the keen eyes of Sawyer major read it aright. The Redclyffians had come there for a walk-over, and they did not conceal the fact that they thought so. The last match had been played on the Redclyffe's ground, where Fane & Co. had piled up five goals to nil. That recollection was sufficient to make Fane & Co. regard the return match with an ironical eye.

Daubeny won the toss, and gave Redclyffe a rather keen wind to kick off against. The ball rolled and the game began.

"Play up, St. Winifred's!" bawled Sawyer major. "Wake up, Chilcot—goal isn't a sleeping bunk! Keep both your eyes open! Take your hands out of your pockets—you'll need 'em soon."

Chilcot glared round at the juniors behind the goal, apparently not in the least pleased by Sawyer's admonitions.

Sawyer wagged an admonitory finger at him. "Keep awake all the time!" he said. "You can take a nap afterwards, you know!"

"Shut up, you cheeky fag!" howled Chilcot.

"And keep your eyes on the game," continued Sawyer major calmly. "Jever see a goalie play with his back to the game, you fellows?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Chilcot, thus politely reminded of his duty, turned back and tried to turn a deaf ear to the comments that reached him from behind his goal.

"Get up again, Egan!" roared Sawyer major, as Egan of the Shell was left gasping on the ground from a Redclyffe charge. "You're not in your hammock now. Don't you know rising bell's gone?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Play up, Daub—don't dodge 'em!" yelled Sawyer, warming to his work of friendly critic.

"You'll never win a game by dodging a charge. Don't be afraid of getting your clobber dusted. Stand up to 'em!"

"Play up, Daub!" chorused Sawyer major's comrades. "Don't dodge 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Wake up, Chilcot—you're wanted!"

Chilcot in goal was indeed wanted. Redclyffe were attacking, and the St. Winifred's defence was hard pressed. Shots began to rain in on goal. As fast as Chilcot cleared the ball it came whizzing back again, and the backs and halves were nowhere. There was a shout as the leather found a resting-place in the net, Chilcot allowing it to slip through his hands.

"Goal!" "Go home, Chilcot!"

It was first blood to Redclyffe, in the first ten minutes! Armitage of the Sixth, who was acting as referee, came along to speak to the noisy juniors behind the home goal.

"Shut up, you fags!" he called out.

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"Mustn't we speak, Armitage?" demanded Sawyer major in a tone of great injury.

"I'll be among you in a minute if you don't cheese it!" exclaimed the Sixth Former.

"Mustn't we even cheer Daub's goals?" inquired Sawyer. And there was a yell of laughter.

Armitage judiciously turned back to his duties. He was a prefect of the Sixth Form, but just at present the juniors preferred to regard him simply as a football referee.

The sides lined up after the goal, and there was no doubt that Redclyffe were grinning now.

A goal scored in the first ten minutes against a keen wind was a good augury for the result of the match—from the visitors' point of view. The game was going to be the walk-over they had anticipated.

Jack Drake at outside-left had been given little to do, so far. He began to wonder whether he had acted wisely in consenting to play in such a crowd. He did not seem likely to be able to do very much for St. Winny's.

But Daubeny, at least, was playing up well; and Daub could play well when he chose. The next attempt of Redclyffe to set up an attack was foiled. Vernon Daubeny robbed Fane of the leather, and sent it to his inside-left, Torrence. Torrence fumbled with it, and a Redclyffian bowled him off before he could get it under control.

But Jack Drake's chance had come now. He neatly deprived the Redclyffian of the ball, and ran it down the field like the wind.

He owed a good deal of his success to the fact that the Redclyffians made the mistake of despising their opponents too much. They had not looked for a bold attempt like this. In fact, one of the backs was chatting with the visitors' goalkeeper, with his hands in his pockets, when Drake came down with a sudden spurt.

He was through the Redclyffians almost in a flash.

There was a frenzied roar from the St. Winifred's crowd.

"Bravo, Drake!"

"Go it, Jacky!"

"Shoot—shoot!" raved Sawyer major.

There was nothing for the St. Winifred's winger to do but shoot, for his fellow forwards were nowhere, and there was nobody to take a pass.

He shot from the wing, with a deadly accuracy that left nothing to be desired.

The Redclyffe goalkeeper woke up from his chat with the Redclyffe back, to discover the leather whizzing over his shoulder.

St. Winifred's roared and howled.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Bravo, Drake!"

"Well scored, man—well scored!"

It was a goal, and the expression on the Redclyffe goalie's face was, as Sawyer major remarked, worth a guinea a box. Fane dropped back to goal to have a little heart-to-heart talk with his goalie, and the goalie's expression revealed that he did not enjoy it.

"It's catching," remarked Sawyer major.

"What's catching?" inquired Rodney.

"Slacking," explained Sawyer. "Redclyffe have caught it from Daub's crowd. Jevver see a goal like that?"

But however it had happened, it was a score for St. Winny's, and that success put new heart into Daubeny's team. At half-time the score was still unaltered.

Not So Bad!

JACK DRAKE came along to the ropes to speak to Rodney in the interval. There was rather a rueful smile on his handsome face.

"What do you think of it, so far, old scout?" he asked.

"I won't tell you what I think," said Rodney, laughing. "The English language isn't equal to it. But that was a jolly good goal of yours."

"The Redclyffe man was caught napping; he could have stopped it if he'd tried."

"No doubt. But you had to play on your own."

"They are an awful crew, and no mistake," Drake confessed. "Even Daub seems rather ashamed of them. But this isn't such a walk-over as the Highcliffe affair, at any rate. We've broken our duck, at least."

The whistle went, and the sides lined up again. Daubeny's merry men looked rather winded, and one or two of them were limping. Egan had a very sulky look. Daubeny was keeping him up to the game, and Egan did not like it. He preferred to lounge elegantly through a match, regarding little where the ball went. But Vernon Daubeny seemed more in earnest than usual, and he was doing his best to keep his men up to the mark. A hint from him that further slacking would lead to changes in the team inspired the bucks of St. Winifred's to do their best—for what that was worth.

With the wind in their favour, Redclyffe seemed irresistible in the second half. They came down the field like cavalry at the charge, and the knotty footballers of St. Winifred's were hopelessly scattered. Drake, too, found that he was a marked man, and a couple of Redclyffians made it their business to see that he had no chance again.

In ten minutes the ball was in the net. Chilcot tossed it out ruefully amid caustic remarks from Sawyer & Co., who had changed ends along with the players. And that goal was followed by another in a few minutes.

"For goodness' sake, pull yourselves together, you fellows!" Daubeny exclaimed irritably, as the breathless bucks limped back to the centre of the field. "Do you want to make Redclyffe a present of the match?"

A question that elicited only scowls from his overworked bucks.

Redclyffe were grinning widely when the ball rolled again, and they attacked as vigorously

DETECTIVE KERR INVESTIGATES.

Solution:

KERR: Trimble, eager for any sort of fame, and possibly still more eager to plead shattered nerves, and thus avoid taking the Latin paper in class, might easily have convinced Mr. Lathom, and most of the fellows, that he had actually seen the ghost, but for one thing. Trimble said the abbot was clearly revealed in the light of the full moon, coming through the windows, whereas Dame Taggles had commented previously on the fact that there was a new moon that night. When I asked Trimble how he squared his full moon with Dame Taggles' new moon, he began to bluster, and it was not long before the spook story was clearly revealed as a complete spoof!

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as before. The St. Winny's half-back line crumpled up. Two of them were on the ground, and they seemed in no hurry to rise. Possibly they found a little rest in the midst of such a gruelling game grateful and comforting.

Jack Drake fell back to defend, and almost in the goal area he robbed Fane of the ball, and booted it away past the half-way line. There Daubeny pounced on it and rushed it away. Daubeny's luck was good for once; he beat the Redclyffe backs, and slammed the ball in.

"Goal!" yelled Sawyer major, rubbing his eyes in exaggerated astonishment. "Did you fellows see that? Daub's bagged a goal! Daub, you know!"

"Hurrah!"

"Goal! Goal!"

"Who said the age of miracles was past?" gasped Sawyer major. "Daub's scored a goal! Who'd have thought that Daub could put the ball in the net without wheeling it up on a wheelbarrow?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good man, Daub!" exclaimed Jack Drake, as he joined his leader in the centre of the field.

Daubeny smiled loftily. That captured goal had raised the leader of the bucks very much in his own estimation, and it was agreeable to him, too, to hear the cheers of the St. Winifred's crowd. It was an unaccustomed sound in his ears.

"Oh, we'll pull through!" he said.

"H'm! I hope so," remarked Drake doubtfully. "We'll do our best, anyway."

"Where are you goin', Egan?"

Egan gave his skipper a black look.

"I'm goin' off," he answered.

"THE BOY WHO WALKED BY NIGHT!"



Who is the unknown that stalks through Rookwood at night committing serious outrages? His identity is wrapped in mystery—yet he is one of the boys of the school! You will be thrilled by this great yarn of Christmas holiday fun, starring Jimmy Silver & Co.

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"What?"

"My ankle's crooked; I've had a kick."

"Look here—"

"I can't play."

Egan limped off, with a very exaggerated limp. He was fed-up with football of this strenuous nature. If Daubeny was going to make work of it, Egan was prepared to leave him the work to do.

"Ambulance! Ambulance!" yelled Sawyer major. "Egan's foot's been trodden on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Egan bestowed a fierce scowl upon the lively Sawyer, and limped away out of sight, followed by jeers from Sawyer & Co.

Ten men lined up to face the Redclyffians.

Two more goals followed for the visitors, and then again fortune, for a moment, smiled upon St. Winifred's, in the shape of a good goal from Jack Drake.

That was the finish. Five goals to three was the final result. Few, if any, of the St. Winifred's fellows had looked for a victory for the home team, but, at all events, the defeat was not so overwhelming as it might have been. Daubeny slipped his arm through Jack Drake's as the footballers came off.

"Thanks no end, Drake!" he said cordially.

"I don't think anybody will deny that I was right to play you. Will you play for us again on Wednesday?"

"Like a bird!" said Jack Drake cheerfully.

"Done, then!"

"If you'll let me make a suggestion, Daub, I—"

"Go ahead!"

"Couldn't you find a place for Rodney? He's a good man."

Daubeny's expression was very wry for an instant; then he smiled again.

"I'll see what can be done," he answered.

And Jack Drake went off, hoping for the best.

The Little Supper!

"**B** ALLO, Rod!"

Dick Rodney glanced up as Drake came into Study No. 8 a few hours later. Rodney had his books on the table, though there was no prep that evening.

"Going it, as usual?" asked Drake.

"Well, I was going to put in an hour. What about you?"

Drake sat on the corner of the table, swinging his legs; he coloured a little.

"I don't feel much like sapping this evening," he confessed. "A tough game rather puts you off books, doesn't it?"

"I suppose it does," agreed Rodney.

"After all, a fellow can overdo sapping," said Drake argumentatively. "You yourself told me I was rather going it, and suggested a bit more time given to footer."

"So I did."

"Daub's giving a little celebration in his study," said Drake, without looking directly at his chum. "Over the match, you know."

"Celebrating a defeat? Nothing novel about that for Daub, is there?"

"H'm! Well, we were licked, of course. But I think St. Winny's put up a better show than usual. Anyhow, there's a bit of a celebration going on, and Daub's asked me, as a member of the team."

"Oh!"

Rodney spoke very quietly and turned to his

books again. Drake shifted rather uncomfortably.

"Do you mind if I go?" he asked.

"Why should I?"

"Well, of course, there's no reason why you should," said Drake more brightly. "No harm in Daub's standing a little feed to the members of his own eleven, is there?"

"Not that I can see."

"If it wasn't specially for the eleven, of course, Daub wouldn't have had the cheek to ask me without my pal," said Drake.

"No doubt."

"But, you see, it's a football supper—"

"I see."

There was a short silence, which seemed rather uncomfortable. Rodney was turning the leaves of his Horace. Drake broke the silence.

"You don't mind, old scout?"

"Of course not."

"Well, all serene, then!" said Drake, slipping from the table. "You wouldn't care for those chaps' society, anyhow, I know."

"That's quite true."

"They won't do me any harm, old fellow. I'm not going to Daub's study on the old footing, of course; it's simply a football supper."

Rodney looked at his chum. If he was hurt, his face did not show it. His expression was friendly and serious.

"You're your own master, Drake. You know I wouldn't want to interfere with you in any way. But I don't trust Daubeny. Are there going to be any cards after the supper?"

Drake flushed.

"If there's anything of that sort I shall clear off, of course," he said. "I'm done with that kind of rot for good."

"Well, off you go, old fellow. I hope you'll have a good time."

"Dash it all!" said Drake irresolutely. "I—I won't go! I'll send Tuckey to tell Daub I can't come. After all, I don't care about it."

"Bosh!" said Rodney, with a smile. "You're not in trim for sapping this evening, and I dare say it will do you good. Ta-ta!"

"Oh, all right, then!"

And Drake left the study. Dick Rodney remained with his books—and with a growing cloud on his brow. Vaguely, imperceptibly, he felt that Daubeny was drawing his chum away from him, and that he did not mean it for Drake's good. Rodney's heart was heavy as Drake made his way aft for that merry little supper in Daub's study.

But in Daub's quarters all was merry and bright.

It was quite a happy gathering of six or seven members of Daubeny's wonderful eleven, and, though some of the members seemed surprised to find Jack Drake there, there was general urbanity, and the Fourth Former felt quite at home.

After supper several of the guests dropped off, and Drake found himself left with Daubeny, Torrence, Egan, and Chilcot. He had risen to go with the other parting guests, but Daubeny would not hear of it.

And Drake found himself too comfortable to be anxious to go. He sank back again into one of Daub's luxurious armchairs.

Daubeny produced a box of cigarettes, which were handed round. The bucks began to smoke, only Drake declining, with a rather flushed cheek. The slightly ironical look on Daub's face as the junior refused a cigarette was not agreeable, and

Drake almost altered his mind, but not quite: and the four bucks filled the study with cigarette-smoke without his assistance.

The talk ran on football for a time, and on next Wednesday's match, and Drake found his opinions listened to with unexpected respect. He could not help thinking that he had been rather hard on "old Daub" in some ways.

It was Egan who first produced a pack of cards from the table drawer and suggested a little game.

"Good egg!" said Daubeny heartily. "You'll take a hand, Drake? It'll be like old times, begad!"

Drake shook his head.

"Not much use my taking a hand," he answered, smiling. "My dear man, I couldn't pay if I lost. You know how I'm fixed."

"That's nothin'! Among friends I O U's are good enough."

"Oh, quite!" said Egan.

"Thanks, but I'd rather not."

"My dear man—" began Daubeny.

Drake rose to his feet.

"I think I'd better be cutting now," he remarked, though his glance lingered on the glimmering cards. "Thanks awfully for the supper, Daubeny. So long, you fellows!"



Mother: "You mustn't eat any more Christmas pudding to-night, Johnny. It's bad to sleep on a full stomach."

Son: "Never mind, mum—I can sleep on my back!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Kirkland.

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And, with a nod to the bucks, Jack Drake stepped out of the study.

There was a silence as the door closed after him; then Torrence laughed softly.

"N.G.!" was his remark.

Daubeny knitted his brows.

"My dear chap, I told you it was no good," said Egan. "He's too safe under Rodney's thumb for that. Stick to the footer wheeze; you've got him there."

Vernon Daubeny muttered an oath.

"Turned down by that penniless cud!" he said. "By Jove! But let him wait! This is goin' to be his last term at St. Winny's—by hook or by crook!"

There was a smile on Jack Drake's face as he came into Study No. 8, where Rodney was putting away his books.

"Had a good time?" asked Rodney.

"Topping! I say, Rodney, old Daub isn't such a bad sort. I really think we've been rather rough on old Daub."

To which Dick Rodney made no reply.

Another great yarn of the boys of the Benbow in a fortnight's time. Look out next week for the thrilling double-length Christmas story of Frank Richards & Co.

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GUSSY'S CHRISTMAS PARTY!

(Continued from page 22.)

"Toff! So you have found me?" she said.
"Trust old Talbot to do the trick, Miss Marie!" said Monty Lowther. "He's going to be a detective when he grows up—aren't you, Talbot?"
Talbot scarcely heard the question. All his attention was for his girl chum.

"Have you had a rotten time, Marie?"
"It might have been worse," said the girl.
"The actual kidnapping was neither a gentle nor a pleasant affair. But I'll give Dawlish his due; he hasn't kept me short of food."

Lord Conway's voice boomed up from below:
"Have you found her, boys?"
"Yes, rather!" replied the Terrible Three and Jack Blake, in unison.

"Huwah!" chorled Arthur Augustus.
"Come along, Marie!" said Talbot.
Light of heart now that all danger and suspense was over, the party returned to Eastwood House. A surprise awaited them on their arrival.

Jim Dawlish had escaped.
"The spoofer!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "He was merely putting it on that he was injured."
Talbot looked puzzled.

"He was certainly injured," he said. "He must have found it awfully difficult to get away."

THE CHINEE OF CEDAR CREEK!

(Continued from page 23.)

Yen Chin scuttled behind Frank as Hacke came up.

"You young jay!" exclaimed the latter. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"No wantee cowhide!" said Yen Chin.

"So you're all right again, Hacke?"

"Yep, I guess so. And that goldarned Chow saved me," said Hacke. "That blessed Chin—that pigtailed heathen! But for the Chow I should be under the ice on Cedar Creek at this blessed minute!"

"How did you come there?" asked Beaucherc. Hacke coloured.

"I was after him with my riding whip," he confessed. "I thought he wanted a hiding; and I guess he did, too. I followed him out on the

"Better search for him in the grounds," suggested Lord Conway.

The search, however, came to nothing.

Aided probably by his confederate, Jim Dawlish had got clear and escaped the consequences of his crime.

Next morning Lord Eastwood received a telephone message from the local police-inspector.

The latter was very excited.

"We're fairly on the track of Miss Rivers, your lordship," he announced. "Her footprints have been discovered at a spot four miles away."

"Fool!" shouted Lord Eastwood. "Miss Rivers has already been restored to her friends—small thanks to you!"

This intelligence caused the inspector to gasp, and he was still gasping when Lord Eastwood rang off.

As for the St. Jim's juniors, they were as happy as sandboys to know that their girl chum was safe and sound.

And happiest of all was Reginald Talbot, who had chiefly been instrumental in delivering Miss Rivers from the hands of an unscrupulous plotter.

Jim Dawlish was still at large, but he was not fit enough to cause any more trouble at the moment.

And when the joyous vacation came to an end, Tom Merry & Co. took back with them to St. Jim's all the thrilling details of their Christmas adventure!

Next Wednesday: "THE MYSTERY OF CARDEW & CO.!"

branch and fell. And—and that Chow held me up—you saw him—"

"I saw him," said Frank Richards quietly. "He saved your life, Eben Hacke, after you had run him down with a riding whip! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!"

"I guess I am, if you come to that," said Hacke frankly. "Yen Chin, I ain't going to lambaste you. Give me your fin!"

He held out his hand to the surprised Celestial.

Yen Chin shook hands with the big youth from the States. Hacke gave him a grip that made him wriggle a little.

"All O.K.!" said Hacke. "You're a real white man, Yen Chin, though you're a lying, thieving heathen in some things."

Yen Chin grinned with satisfaction.

"Allee light. Yen Chin goodee boy!" he remarked. "Hacke goodee boy—oh, yes!"

And for a day or two at least there was much limelight for the Chow of Cedar Creek.

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