

Bumper Christmas Number!

The BOYS' FRIEND 1 1/2

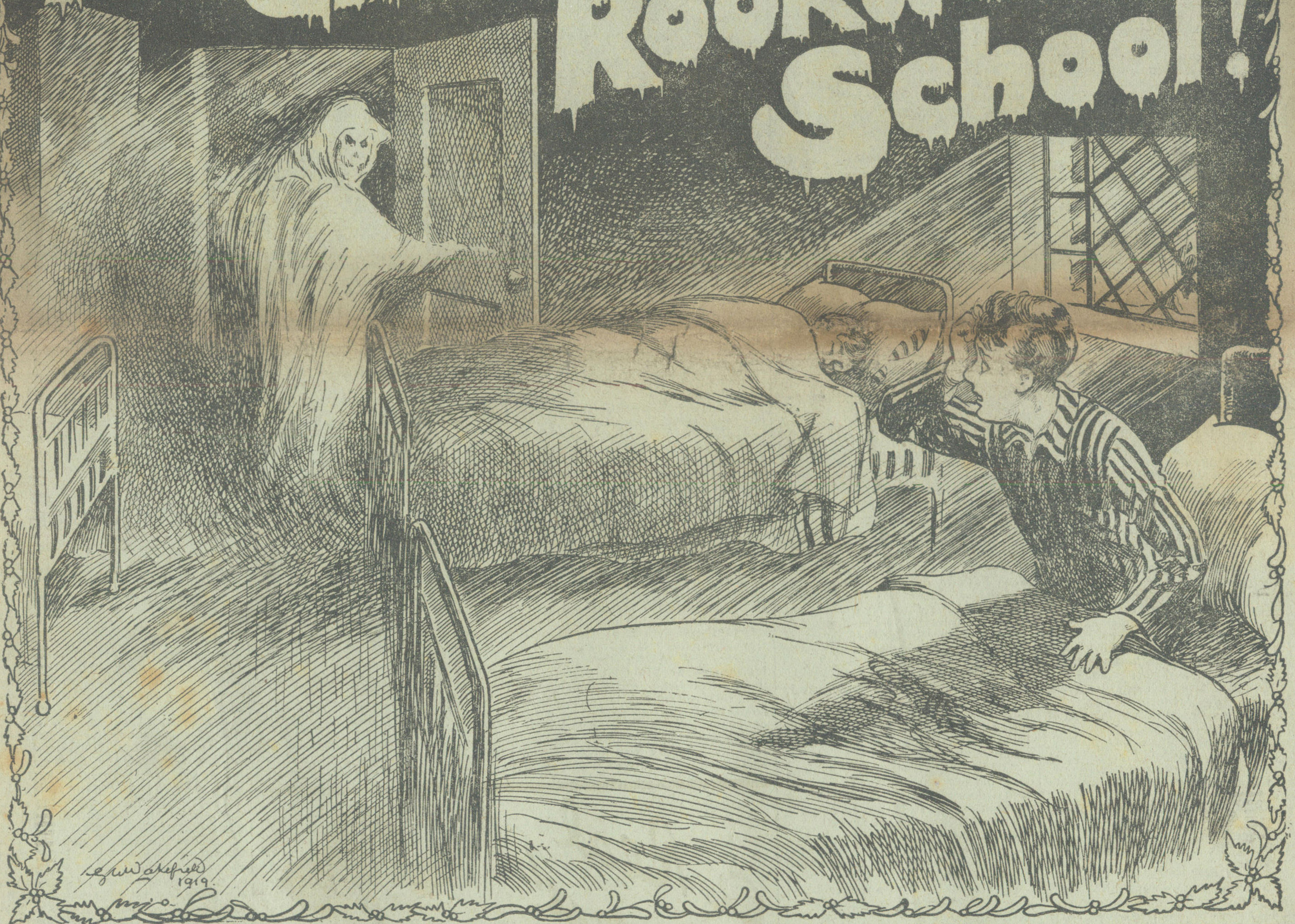
TWELVE PAGES!

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending December 27th, 1919.

The Ghost of Rookwood School!



JIMMY SILVER SEES IT!

A dim figure—a figure in white, with flowing robe—a figure that moved with a soundless, gliding motion! "Wake up, you fellows!" panted Jimmy Silver. "The ghost!"

Some slight sound in the dormitory had awakened Jimmy Silver, and with wide-open eyes he glanced round. Then, suddenly, he caught his breath, and unconsciously half-rose in bed! In the doorway—what was that?

The 1st Chapter.

What Tubby Muffin Saw.

"Oh!"
"Crash!"
"Help!"

The door of the end study in the Fourth flew suddenly open, and Jimmy Silver & Co. started to their feet in surprise and wrath as Tubby Muffin rushed in.

It was close on bed-time, and the Fistical Four had been demolishing

a supper of toasted cheese, while they chatted over the study fire—their talk running on the Christmas holidays. Rookwood was to break up for Christmas in a few days, and that subject naturally occupied the juniors' minds. The chat was suddenly interrupted by the study door flying open, and Muffin of the Fourth rushing blindly in in a state of wild excitement. He collided with the study table, and set it rocking; and there was a roar from

Arthur Edward Lovell as a plate laden with toasted cheese went to the carpet.

"You silly ass!"

"Help!"

"What's the matter, you fat duffer?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Keep it off!" shrieked Tubby Muffin.

"What?"

"Save me!"

Tubby Muffin dodged round the

rocking table, and seized hold of Jimmy Silver. He clung to him frantically.

"Keep it off!" he yelled.

"Keep what off, you ass?" roared Jimmy Silver. "Let go! Are you potty?"

"The gig-gig-gig—"

"What?"

"The gig-gig-ghost!" spluttered Tubby.

Jimmy Silver & Co. blinked at the

fat Classical. Tubby, still clinging to the captain of the Fourth for protection, stared with distended eyes at the open doorway, as if in dread of seeing some grisly phantom present itself there from the passage.

"The ghost!" repeated Lovell blankly.

"Ow! Help! Keep it off!"

"Potty!" said George Raby.

"Kick him out, Jimmy!"

"I'll lend a hand—I mean a foot!"



THE GHOST OF ROOKWOOD SCHOOL!

(Continued from previous page.)

remarked Newcome. "Now, then, all together, and kick hard!"

"Yaroooh! Help! The— the ghost!" shrieked Tubby. "You keep in front of me, Jimmy! Lock the door! Why don't you lock the door?"

"What's the good of locking doors against ghosts?" grinned Lovell. "They can come through doors. Besides, we're going to sling you out!"

"Yow-ow-ow! D-d-don't!" "Hold on, you chaps," said Jimmy Silver, looking very curiously at Tubby's fat and frightened visage. "Something's scared the silly ass. Some chap playing ghost perhaps."

"It—it wasn't! It—it was the ghost of Rookwood!" babbled Tubby. "I—I—I was s-s-s-so frightened! Ow!"

"You needn't tell us that," grinned Lovell. "We can see that. Hallo, is that the ghost coming along?"

There were footsteps outside the end study.

Tubby Muffin gave a wild yell, and bolted under the table. But it was not a ghost; it was Valentine Mornington of the Fourth who looked in at the doorway.

"What on earth's up?" asked Mornington, staring in. "Tubby's just bolted past my door as if a Hun were after him. I thought he came in here—"

"Ha, ha, ha! He's there!" Tubby peered out from under the table.

"Oh! Is it you, Morny? I—I thought it was the—the gig-gig-ghost—"

"Tubby's seen a ghost!" explained Jimmy Silver. "Of course, we all knew that Rookwood was haunted, but Tubby's the only chap who has seen the giddy spectre. What was it like, Tubby?"

Mornington chuckled. "Go it, Tubby; let's hear what it was like! Was it a fire-breathin' demon with hoofs and horns and tail?"

"Nunno!" "Not really?" grinned Lovell. "It—it was the abbot's ghost!"

gasped Tubby Muffin. "You—you know they say that Rookwood is haunted by the old abbot, in spotless white. He turns up at Christmas, and—and—and—"

"Oh, we know—we know!" said Jimmy Silver. "He was killed in the Wars of the Roses, but though he's dead, he won't lie down!"

"I—I say, 'tain't a laughing matter, Jimmy. Of—of course, I don't believe in ghosts. I'm not afraid of them, anyhow—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "But it was awful!" said Tubby Muffin, regaining courage a little now, as the appearance of the phantom abbot was still postponed. "I—I was just going into Peele's study, in the dark—"

"What were you going into Peele's study in the dark for?" demanded Newcome.

"I—I—I—"

"Oh, that's plain enough!" said Jimmy Silver. "Gower had a parcel to-day, with a pudding in it, and Gower shares Peele's study. Tubby was after the pudding!"

"I—I may have been going to— to glance into the cupboard," said Tubby Muffin cautiously. "I—I may, or I may not."

"With the odds on the may!" observed Mornington. "What else?"

"I—I had opened the door," said Tubby, with a shiver, "and—and I was going to creep to the cupboard— I—I mean, I had stepped in casually, and then I—I saw it!"

And the fat Classical shuddered. "Good! What was 'it' like?" "It was the—the ghost! The—the abbot, you know—cowl, and robe, and all that—white as snow!" gasped Tubby. "I—I think there was a smell of sulphur and brimstone—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I—I'm not sure about the smell of

sulphur, but I know I saw him—white and silent, and—and awful—and he raised his hand and pointed at me! Oh, dear! I—I was so frightened—I—I mean, I was startled. So I—I strolled along here to tell you, Jimmy—"

"My hat! You rather put on speed for a stroll," said Mornington. "If that was a stroll, what are you like when you're sprinting?"

"And now you're in the light, you know you only fancied it, I suppose?" said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"I—I didn't! It was real—an awful, unreal phantom—"

"Real and unreal at the same time?"

"You know what I mean!" roared Tubby Muffin. "I—I say, suppose we see it to-night in the dorm—"

"Fathead! Let's go along to Peele's study and see if there's anything up," suggested Lovell.

"Good egg!" The Fistical Four and Mornington left the end study, to investigate. Lovell called back to Muffin:

"Come on, Tubby!" "I—I'd rather stay here, Lovell. I'm not afraid, of course, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The five juniors went on their way, and Tubby Muffin remained alone in the end study, still shivering with fright. But he was not shivering too much to finish the toasted cheese.

The 2nd Chapter. The Black Sheep.

Jimmy Silver threw open the door of the first study in the passage, which belonged to Peele, Gower, and Lattrey—the three shady "blades" of the Classical Fourth. The juniors were wondering a little whether Tubby Muffin had really seen anything in that study, though they were quite assured that he had not seen a ghost.

Certainly, most of the Rookwooders did not scoff, or only scoffed very mildly, at the story of the phantom abbot. Nobody had ever seen the phantom abbot going his rounds; but a special ghost belonging to the school was a very respectable possession—the ghostly abbot was part of the tradition of Rookwood. There were small fags in the Second Form who half-believed in him. And although the oldest inhabitant had not actually seen him, there were legends of former inhabitants who had. On winter evenings the story would be told round the Common-room fire, or after lights out in the dormitories, with a proper shivery effect. And it was often related that some fellow—who had left—or some master no longer at Rookwood—had beheld the phantom stalking the corridors in trailing robes of white.

But even if the restless spirit of the ancient abbot found any solace in stalking the corridors or groaning in the vaults, there seemed no reason why he should haunt a junior study in the Fourth Form passage. As Lovell remarked humorously, the phantom abbot could not be suspected of being after Gower's pudding.

"Well, here we are!" grinned Mornington, as Jimmy threw the study door open. "Now, where's the giddy ghost? Hallo, Lattrey!"

The study was lighted now.

Mark Lattrey, of the Fourth, was seated at the table, with a cigarette in his mouth, and a sporting paper in his hand.

He glanced up, none too amiably, as the juniors looked in.

The blackguard of the Fourth was not on good terms with Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Well, what do you fellows want?" he asked sharply.

"Looking for the ghost," answered Jimmy Silver.

Lattrey stared. "The what?" "Ghost."

"What the thump do you mean?" asked Lattrey irritably.

"Were you here when Muffin came in a few minutes ago?" asked Lovell. "He said it was dark, and he saw a ghost."

"I've only just come up," answered Lattrey. "I found the study dark. I didn't see any ghost. Are you pulling my leg?"

"Well, Tubby says he saw a ghost here," answered Jimmy Silver. "We came to investigate. I dare say he saw a reflection of the snow in

the quad, and took it for a figure in white."

Lattrey laughed. "I dare say, he did! Shut the door after you."

"Sold again!" remarked Lovell. "Come on!"

Jimmy Silver paused in the doorway, and looked at Lattrey. The cad of the Fourth was re-lighting his cigarette, which had gone out. Lattrey met his glance with a sneering smile.

"You'd better chuck that rot, Lattrey," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "I'm not going to interfere with you—I don't want a row, even with you, just before we break up for Christmas. But for your own sake you'd better be a bit more careful."

Lattrey shrugged his shoulders. "The prefects are a bit more wide-awake than usual," said Jimmy Silver. "You may get spotted, I mean. You don't want a flogging just before the vac."

"Oh, rats!"

Lattrey blew out a cloud of smoke. Jimmy hesitated. He was greatly inclined to take Mark Lattrey by the scruff of the neck and rub his head in the coal-locker. But the ameliorating influence of Christmastide was making itself felt in the Fourth Form at Rookwood, and Jimmy restrained himself. He did not want to wind up the term by thrashing Lattrey.

"What makes you think the prefects are getting sharp?" asked Lattrey suddenly.

"I know they are—Bulkeley and Neville especially. It's common talk that a fellow—a junior—has been seen sneaking out of bounds, and sneaking along to the Bird-in-Hand—your favourite resort," said Jimmy Silver scornfully. "The prefects don't know who it is, but I can guess."

"And you're going to tell them?" sneered Lattrey.

"You know I'm not. I'm warning you that if you keep on playing the goat till we break up you may take a flogging home with you for the Christmas holidays. There was somebody trotting about the corridors last night when we were in the dorm, and that looks to me as if some of the prefects are on the look-out. Bulkeley of the Sixth knows that some young ass has been out of bounds at night, and if he spots the fellow you know what will happen."

"He won't spot me," said Lattrey carelessly.

"Well, you know your own business best, I suppose."

"Has that just occurred to you?" inquired Lattrey sarcastically.

Jimmy Silver turned away without replying, once more restraining his impulse to take Mark Lattrey by the scruff of the neck. Lattrey shrugged his shoulders as the door closed after the captain of the Fourth. He finished his cigarette, over the sporting paper, and threw the stump into the fire. Then he rose and paced the study, with a thoughtful line in his brow. Lattrey was quite resolved to go on his own shady way, and he was not thinking of repentance; but the primrose path was not all primroses, so to speak. There was, if the cad of the Fourth had only realised it, more worry and anxiety than pleasure in playing the amateur blackguard at a school like Rookwood. The little card-parties at the Bird-in-Hand might be enjoyable—from Mark Lattrey's peculiar point of view; but the risk of detection was great, and the punishment in case of discovery was severe. And if Lattrey was caught some night

breaking bounds after lights out he would—

The door opened, and Cyril Peele looked in.

"Dorm!" he said. And Lattrey locked up his sporting paper and his box of cigarettes and followed his chum to the dormitory.

The 3rd Chapter. Mysterious!

"I tell you I saw it!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "It was real!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a ripple of laughter in the dormitory of the Classical Fourth of Rookwood.

Tubby Muffin had told, and re-told, his story, and the more he told it the more wonderful it became, and the less the juniors believed it. Outside, the quadrangle and the old leafless beeches were thick with snow, and the juniors did not doubt that Tubby had caught some reflection of the snow at the window of Peele's study, and taken it for a figure in white. But Tubby Muffin stoutly maintained that he had seen what he had seen, and perhaps, with the desire to convince the doubting Thomases, he had drawn upon his fertile imagination for convincing details. But the Rookwood Fourth found the details far from convincing.

From Tubby's latest description of his thrilling adventure, it appeared that the ghost had been a towering figure in white, with clanking chains on, that his eyes had glittered with an unearthly light, and that he breathed sulphurous flames. Putty Grace pointed out, very reasonably, that sulphurous flames belonged to a department which no respectable abbot would visit after his demise. Then Tubby Muffin withdrew the sulphurous flames, but held on to the clanking chains and the glittering eyes. Finding, however, that this concession had no effect upon the doubting Thomases of the Fourth, Tubby re-introduced the sulphurous flames, and defiantly added a glow of unearthly light which had played all round the ghostly figure. And, to his great exasperation, the juniors only chortled more and more.

"You can chortle now," said Tubby impressively. "But you jolly well won't chortle when you see it!"

"When?" grinned Conroy.

"If you wake up to-night with an icy finger on your nose—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Or hear the phantom groaning under your bed—"

"I'll keep a boot handy for him!" said Van Ryn.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Was he groaning in Peele's study?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin had not thought of that, but he nodded at once. Groans seemed to fit into the picture.

"Yes, rather! Groaning like—like—like one o'clock!" said Tubby.

"Well, I've never heard one o'clock groan," said Jimmy thoughtfully.

"What was it like?" "You can cackle!" snorted Tubby.

"Ha, ha! We will!" "Not in bed yet?" said Bulkeley of the Sixth, coming into the dormitory.

"Now then, time!" "Tubby's been telling us ghost stories, Bulkeley," said Teddy Grace.

"We're all a-tremble." "Ha, ha, ha!" Bulkeley laughed.

"Tumble in!" he said. The Fourth-Formers turned in, and Bulkeley put out the light and retired. Then there was an immediate

demand from several beds for Tubby Muffin's ghost story over again, and Tubby retold his thrilling tale, with still more thrilling details added thereunto. This time the ghost had been shrieking, and wringing his hands in despair. And the juniors, still unimpressed, chuckled themselves to sleep.

There was no alarm in the Fourth Form dormitory that night. The phantom, if phantom there was, did not disturb the healthy sleep of the Rookwood juniors. When the rising-bell rang, and the Fourth turned out of bed, Lovell awoke Tubby Muffin by dabbing a wet sponge on his fat little nose. Tubby started up with a wild yell.

"Yaroooh! Keep it off!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby sat up, blinking wildly. "Keep it off! I—I say, something icy touched me—"

"Ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "It wasn't a phantom finger, Tubby—it was a wet sponge!"

"Oh!" gasped Tubby. "Look out, Tubby, there's something behind you!" shrieked Grace.

The fat Classical span round in bed.

"Wha-a-a-at was behind me, Grace?" he spluttered.

"All right—only the bed-head!" "Yah! Beast!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin turned out morosely. The Fourth Form still regarded his ghost story from a humorous point of view; and, indeed, in the daylight Tubby was beginning to have some doubts himself. Somehow, a phantom figure did not seem so probable in the clear frosty morning as overnight.

But when the juniors came down, they made the discovery that the night had not been so uneventful as they had supposed. Bulkeley of the Sixth came to meet them as they swarmed down the big staircase.

"Any of you kids out of your dormitory last night?" he asked.

"Eh? No! Not that I know of," said Jimmy Silver. "Anything up?" "Oh, never mind!"

Bulkeley said never mind, but as a matter of fact the juniors did mind. The Rookwood captain's question had made them curious. And some of them were still more curious when they came on Carthew of the Sixth in the quad.

Carthew was walking about with a jerky step, and his face was pale and troubled. He scowled at the juniors, and turned his back on them, and they stared after the prefect as he walked away.

"What's the matter with his ribs?" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "He's always beastly, but he seems a bit more beastly than usual this morning."

"Looks seedy!" remarked Jimmy Silver.

"I know!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin excitedly.

"Well, what do you know, fat-head?" "He's seen the ghost!" said Tubby.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "You can cackle!" howled Tubby. "I'll bet you that's it! Some of the prefects have been prowling round after lights out, to see about that fellow who's supposed to have broken bounds. Well, Carthew was prowling round, and he's seen the phantom and—"

"Bow-wow!" But, amazing as it was, it was discovered that morning that Tubby Muffin was right, for there were inquiries by the Form-masters, there were remarks and whispers among the seniors; and before lessons were over that day, all Rookwood was in possession of the story.

Carthew had seen the ghost!

So far as Jimmy Silver & Co. were able to learn the details, Carthew had been on the dormitory staircase when the thing dawned upon him. What he had been doing on the dormitory staircase was pretty clear; he had been watching—not for ghosts, but for breaker of bounds. Possibly the prefects of the Sixth, in their lofty way, were unaware that the juniors knew so much, but, as a matter of fact, the Lower School knew quite as well as the Upper that a fellow was suspected of breaking bounds at night, and that the Head had requested the prefects to exercise unusual vigilance. Apparently Carthew, as a prefect, had been taking his turn on duty, and so he had seen the ghost!

What Carthew had done when the ghost dawned upon him wasn't clear. It was certain that he hadn't tackled it. It was fairly certain that he had bolted. Carthew was not a hero. It was understood that he had burst into Bulkeley's room and awakened the captain of Rookwood. And some of the juniors declared that he had remained quaking there while George

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Bulkeley went to look for the phantom with a cricket-bat. But possibly that was an exaggeration; the juniors did not like Carthew. Anyhow, certain it was that Bulkeley hadn't found any ghost, and no window had been found unfastened, and no fellow missing from his dormitory, so it seemed clear that neither a ghost nor a breaker of bounds had been abroad that night. The Classical Fourth learned with surprise that their dormitory had been glanced into about midnight to ascertain whether anyone was absent. It was the first Jimmy Silver & Co. knew of the circumstance.

"Lucky for you you didn't go on the tiles last night, Lattrey," Jimmy Silver remarked, to the cad of the Fourth, after lessons. "You'd have been spotted safe as houses this time."

"Rot!" was Lattrey's reply. There was endless discussion in the junior studies, and Tubby Muffin assumed the manner of a fellow who had been grievously doubted and misunderstood. He was not alone in his glory now, so to speak. He had seen the ghost first, but a Sixth Form fellow had seen it second; and one look at Carthew's pallid face was enough to show how deeply disturbed he had been.

"Scared out of his senses—if any!" was the way Lovell put it. "Carthew won't be watchin' again to-night!" grinned Townsend. "Hard lines on Carthew, watchin' for a breaker of bounds—keeps him away from pub-hauntin' himself."

"Carthew thinks it was a fellow playin' a trick, though," said Topham. "I heard him say so to Brown major."

"That's why he bunked into Bulkeley's room, what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Things are different in the daylight!" said Arthur Edward Lovell sententiously. "I fancy there'll be a good many fellows peering round corners after dark."

And in that Arthur Edward was right.

When the gloomy December evening set in, quite a majority of the Rookwood fellows took to avoiding shadowy corners, and went about the passages in twos and threes.

A fellow who, with a misplaced sense of humour, turned the light out on the stairs, was bumped till he howled for mercy. And when Putty Grace gave a deep groan suddenly outside the Common-room, Putty Grace was seized by half a dozen fellows, and he groaned in a louder key when they had finished with him. Practical jokes weren't wanted just then, and all the Fourth looked serious when they went up to their dormitory.

Of course, they didn't believe in ghosts. Nobody did. All the same, there was something eerie in the atmosphere. And fellows who had hitherto been proud of the Rookwood ghost, as one of the school's cherished possessions, now began to wish that Rookwood, in that respect, was as prosaic as Eton or Harrow, and ghostless.

The 4th Chapter.
The Ghost Walks!

Jimmy Silver awoke suddenly. He had been dreaming of ghosts, and in dreamland was a horrid spectre in clanking chains, and pointing a skeleton finger at him. Jimmy came out of that disagreeable vision with a start.

The dormitory was silent, as the captain of the Fourth glanced round him with almost a nervous glance.

Through the high windows came the clear starlight of a fine, frosty winter night, glimmering on the row of white beds.

Either his startling dream, or some slight sound in the dormitory had awakened Jimmy Silver, and he awakened with the ghost story fresh in his mind.

With wide-open eyes he glanced round. And then suddenly he caught his breath.

Unconsciously, he half-rose in bed, all his nerves quivering. The dormitory door was open.

And in the doorway—what was that?

Jimmy quivered. A dim figure—a figure in white, with flowing robe—a figure that moved with a soundless, gliding motion.

It was only for a moment or two that Jimmy's starting eyes were fixed upon the figure.

Then it vanished. Then Jimmy Silver found voice and motion. He rolled breathlessly out of bed.

"Wake up, you fellows!" he panted.

"Wharrer marrer?" came sleepily from Lovell's bed.

"Hallo! What's the row?" yawned Raby.

"The ghost!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Six or seven fellows awakened, and sat up in bed, in startled amazement. Jimmy Silver dragged on his trousers.

"I'm going after it!" he exclaimed.

"But—Hold on! What—"

stuttered Lovell.

"It's the ghost!"

"You've been dreaming, old chap," said Conroy.

"I saw it, I tell you! It's a trick!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Are you fellows coming with me?"

"I say, it's cold—"

"Well, I'm going!"

Jimmy Silver ran to the door.

For the moment, as he stared at the startling figure in the doorway, Jimmy had been scared and dumb-founded. But his solid common-sense had come quickly to his aid. As there certainly were not such things as ghosts in existence, it followed that the phantom abbot was some sort of trickery; and Jimmy Silver intended to "warm" the trickster for startling him.

As he dragged open the door, and ran into the corridor without, half a dozen fellows turned out of bed to follow him. They came out into the shadowed corridor with a breathless rush.

"Where is it?"

"Where?"

"Look!" panted Jimmy.

He pointed in the darkness.

At a distance, just disappearing

Erroll, with the candle, came down the stairs, with a crowd at his heels. "What are you all doing out of your dormitory?"

It dawned upon Neville that he had not caught the breaker of bounds after all.

"Lookin' for a merry ghost!" said Mornington, with a chuckle.

"Jimmy's seen a spook, and we're after it!"

"You young asses!" Neville released the captain of the Fourth. "Take fifty lines each, and go back to bed at once."

"What about the ghost?" asked Conroy.

"Don't be an ass. There isn't any ghost!"

"There was something, Neville," said Jimmy Silver quietly—"something in white. I saw it in the dorm, and it came in this direction. Didn't you see anything of it?"

Neville started a little.

"I thought I saw something white flit by a few minutes ago," he said. "What was it—some silly kid playing a trick?"

"I don't know; but—"

"It was the ghost!" grinned Mornington. "Didn't you hear him groaning or rattlin' chains, Neville?"

"No, you young ass!" growled Neville. "It must be what Carthew saw last night. Wait here till I get a lantern, and you can help me look for it, whatever it is. Some little idiot playing the fool, of course."

Mornington closed one eye, in the candle-light, as the prefect strode away, to fetch a bike lantern from his study.

"If he's so jolly sure it's a kid play-

after bed-time?" asked Lattrey, with well-assumed astonishment.

Neville made no remark. He did not intend to explain his object in "prowling" the passages after dark. He was quite unaware that the juniors were well acquainted with his object.

For a quarter of an hour the stairs and passages were searched. Bulkeley came out of his room, and Neville briefly explained to him, and the Rookwood captain joined in the ghost-hunt. Then Mr. Bootles turned up, and Neville had to explain again, and the master of the Fourth joined in. But there was nothing to be discovered.

The phantom—if phantom there had been—had vanished.

The juniors were sent back to their dormitory at last; whether the Form-master and the prefects continued the search, they did not know. They were not sorry to get back to bed; the wide passages, on a December night, were distinctly chilly. Tubby Muffin was wide awake when they came in, and he blinked a wild and startled blink at the disappointed ghost-hunters.

"D-d-d-did you find him?" gasped Tubby.

"Wasn't anything to find," yawned Conroy.

"I tell you I saw it!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"You were dreaming, old chap."

"Fathead!"

"Same to you, old top, and many of them!"

And the Australian junior turned in.

"Ow! I sha'n't sleep again to-

was an ass, and Carthew might have been nervous; but Jimmy Silver was not troubled with nerves. What he said he had seen, he certainly had seen. And even Neville of the Sixth admitted having caught a glimpse of "something white."

Was Rookwood haunted, after all? Some of the fellows asked themselves that question seriously, as the grim darkness of a December night began to fall again on Rookwood School.

It was not a pleasant thought.

"If it's a fellow playing a trick, I fancy he will chuck it now. There's been too much fuss!" Mornington remarked. "But—"

"But if it's a ghost!" said Higgs.

"Well, it isn't!"

"I—I—I say, shall we ask Mr. Bootles to let us have a light in the dorm to-night?" quavered Reginald Muffin.

"Do, and we'll squash you!" said Conroy wrathfully. "Do you want the Moderns to jeer at us for funks, you fat porker?"

"I—I don't like g-g-ghosts in the dark!" mumbled Tubby.

"I don't see why we shouldn't have a light," said Townsend, "not that we're afraid, of course, but—"

"But rats!" said Conroy.

It was decided not to ask Mr. Bootles to allow a light. Most of the Classical Fourth would have faced a legion of ghosts rather than have allowed Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern Side to hint that they were wanting in nerve.

In the end study that evening Jimmy Silver did his prep in a very thoughtful state of mind.

After prep was over, the Fistical Four discussed the ghost, and baked chestnuts at the same time.

"Blessed if I sha'n't be glad to get away for the Christmas vac!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "I'm getting fed up on ghosts! Of course, a chap isn't nervous—"

"Of course not!" agreed Raby.

"But this kind of thing—other fellows being nervous, I mean—is apt to get on a fellow's nerves in the long run," said Arthur Edward.

"Exactly!" said Newcome.

"That's what I think. What are you grinning at, Jimmy Silver, you graven image?"

"Was I grinning?"

"Yes, you were! If you think I'm nervous about ghosts—" began Arthur Edward Lovell, in wrath.

"Not at all, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "Nervousness is catching, but you won't catch it!"

Lovell looked at him suspiciously. "If the Fourth had a captain who was any good, he would be catching that ghost and stopping his game!" said Lovell. "If there's anything in it, it must be a trick. A Form-captain who was any good—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Jimmy Silver. "I've been thinking it out."

"Any result?" grunted Lovell.

"Well, look at it," said Jimmy reflectively. "Let's go through the facts, so far as we know them. First of all, Tubby Muffin saw the ghost in Lattrey's study—"

"That's ancient history!"

"Peele and Gower were in the Common-room at the time, and when we went along we found that worm Lattrey there—"

"What on earth about it?" asked Lovell, with a stare.

"Next circumstances, a prefect—Carthew—sees the ghost while prowling round watching for Blades breaking bounds—"

"Well?"

"Last of all, I see the ghost—"

"Or dream you do!"

"I see the ghost," said Jimmy, unheeding, "in the Fourth Form dorm."

"Are you coming to any point?" inquired Lovell sarcastically.

"I hope so. Hunting for the ghost, we find that Lattrey's out of the dorm, and Lattrey surprised us all by showing enough nerve to join in a ghost-hunt."

"He's got more pluck than I ever thought," said Lovell. "But I don't see what that's got to do with the picture."

"The things you don't see, old chap, if put end to end, would reach from Bedlam to Colney Hatch!"

"Look here—" roared Lovell. Jimmy Silver made a soothing gesture.

"Shush! Keep smiling, old top! Don't you see anything in what I've just been saying?"

"Only gas!" answered Lovell.

Jimmy Silver laughed. "Well, possibly there's something more than gas in it. We shall see. Halle! Here's Tubby to tell us it's bed-time!"

And the Fistical Four left the end study for the dormitory—Jimmy Silver's chums in rather a puzzled



LAYING THE GHOST! In a breathless crowd, the juniors surrounded Jimmy Silver and the spectral form stretched on the floor. Lovell held up the candle. "It—it's some chap got up!" gasped Lovell. "Why, that blessed robe's made of old sheets pinned together!"

down the back staircase, was a blur of white in the shadows.

"Great Scott!"

"It's gone!"

"Oh crumbs! I'm going back!"

"Follow me!" panted Jimmy.

He ran along the corridor. Lovell & Co. followed him, and then Mornington. Then came Erroll and one or two more fellows from the dormitory.

The white figure had vanished from sight, as Jimmy Silver groped his way down the back staircase.

His comrades groped and blundered behind him in the dark. But Erroll, always thoughtful, brought a candle with him, and there was a glimmer of light on the scene.

"I've got him!" shouted Jimmy Silver, as he ran into something that moved, in the lower passage.

A grasp like iron closed on Jimmy Silver.

"Got you, you young rascal!" said a deep voice.

Jimmy gasped.

"Neville!"

"Yes," came Neville's voice. "So it was you, Silver, and I've caught you out of your dormitory!"

Jimmy laughed breathlessly. Evidently Neville of the Sixth had been "prowling" for the mysterious breaker of bounds, and fancied that he had caught him—in Jimmy Silver!

"Let go!" gasped Jimmy. "I'm not—"

"Hallo! A crowd of you!" exclaimed Neville, in astonishment, as

ing a trick, why don't he look for it alone?" he murmured.

"I say, it can't be a real ghost!" said Mark Lattrey.

Morny glanced round at Lattrey; he had not noticed the cad of the Fourth among the juniors who ran out of the dormitory. Lattrey was fully dressed, even to a pair of rubber shoes.

"Hallo! You out, too?" said Mornington. "I shouldn't have thought you had nerve enough to turn out after a ghost, Lattrey."

Lattrey shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps I've got as much nerve as anybody here," he said.

"More, in some ways," said Jimmy Silver. "Well, you can show your nerve by helping hunt for the ghost, when Neville comes back."

"I'll hunt for him as long as you do."

Neville of the Sixth returned with a bike lantern gleaming. His face was grim and angry. The task of keeping late hours and watching for a truant junior was unpleasant enough; and the ghost alarm had made Neville's vigil a vain one, for that night, at least.

"Did you see the ghost, Neville?" asked Lattrey, with a grin.

"No!" snapped Neville.

"What woke you up, then?"

"I was awake," said the prefect curtly. "Come on!"

"We found Neville here," said Mornington.

"Here! What the thump was Neville doin' here, more than an hour

night!" mumbled Tubby Muffin.

"This is awful, you fellows! I—I say, leave the light on! You beast, Silver, what are you turning the light out for? I say—"

"Dry up!" grunted Jimmy.

"I sha'n't be able to sleep!" said Tubby pathetically.

"Rats!"

The juniors turned in, and for some time there was a rather excited discussion on the subject of the ghost. But Tubby Muffin's fears as to insomnia were unfounded; before the discussion ended, Tubby's deep and unmusical snore was resounding through the Fourth Form dormitory.

The 5th Chapter.

Uncle James Thinks It Out.

There was excitement at Rookwood the next day.

The Christmas holidays, though now only a few days off, quite faded into insignificance as a topic.

The ghost of Rookwood was the one subject of interest; and if a ghost could have been laid by chinwag, as Arthur Edward Lovell remarked, the phantom abbot of Rookwood would certainly have been laid for good and all.

It did not seem to be so much of a laughing matter now. Tubby Muffin's ghost story had been voted funny; but since then, Carthew of the Sixth had seen the ghost, and now Jimmy Silver had seen it. Tubby

THE GHOST OF ROOKWOOD SCHOOL!

(Continued from previous page.)



frame of mind on the subject of Jimmy's rather cryptic remarks.

But the captain of the Fourth made no further allusion to the subject, so Lovell was confirmed in his impression that "Uncle James'" observations had been "gas"—merely that, and nothing more.

The 6th Chapter.

The Ghost's Last Walk.

Bulkeley had seen lights out for the Classical Fourth, and after a longer interval than usual, the juniors dropped asleep one by one. Probably a good many of them dreamed of grisly spectres and of groaning ghosts. But there was one who did not think of sleep.

As soon as all was silent in the dormitory Jimmy Silver raised his head from his pillow, and looked round him.

Outside, the sky was overcast with clouds charged with snow, and there was only the faintest glimmer of starlight. Within the dormitory the shadow was deep.

Jimmy Silver bundled up his pillow and bolster, and half sat up in bed, with eyes wide open.

Whether the prefects were still keeping up their watch for the supposed delinquent, he did not know; but Jimmy Silver certainly intended to keep awake that night.

It was not easy to dodge slumber, after a long day, lessons, and football practice. But Jimmy Silver was determined, and when Uncle James of Rookwood made up his mind, he was not accustomed to falter.

With luck, Jimmy hoped to solve the mystery of the phantom abbot that night; though how he expected to do so by sitting up in bed would have puzzled his Form-fellows had they known of his vigil.

Eleven o'clock rang out from the clock-tower, and Jimmy rubbed his eyes softly, and suppressed a yawn.

He was listening—more intently than ever now.

He felt a slight thrill, as there was a low, faint sound in the silence of the dormitory.

It was the creak of a bed. Jimmy Silver smiled in the darkness.

Had he been asleep, that faint sound certainly would not have awakened him; but he was not asleep. He was very much awake, and he listened more intently than ever, his hand grasping his pillow as if with the intention of using it as a missile.

Creak!
Then a fainter sound, indefinable, but unmistakably the sound of someone moving cautiously.

Jimmy Silver strained his eyes, but he could see nothing. The sky was thickly overcast, and hardly a glimmer came in at the high windows.

Jimmy moved at last. With infinite caution, taking the greatest care that the bed did not creak, he slipped out of the bed-clothes on the side furthest from the faint sounds he had heard.

His bare feet touched the floor without a sound.

Still soundless, stealthy as a Red Indian in the presence of foes, Jimmy Silver crept round his bed towards the door. Noiselessly he reached the door.

He did not open it; that was not Jimmy's intention. He stood with his back to it, the pillow grasped in his hand, and his eyes peering watchfully through the darkness towards the beds.

Nothing was to be seen, not even the shapes of the beds, in the deep gloom. But the faintest and vaguest of sounds reached his listening ear, telling him that someone was dressing cautiously in the dark.

Suddenly there was a glimmer of white. Jimmy's heart beat.

Vaguely, looming up spectrally in the dimness, a figure in white approached the door. In spite of his nerve, in spite of his fixed belief that he had to deal with trickery, Jimmy Silver felt an eerie thrill at his heart. But he did not falter; only his grasp closed more tightly on the pillow in his hand.

Closer and closer came the spectral vision.

It was close to the door now, close upon Jimmy Silver, and the pillow was silently raised. Then the figure suddenly stopped, as if it had caught Jimmy Silver's suppressed, hurried breathing.

There was an instant's breathless pause, and then—

Crash!
The pillow swept through the air, straight at the cowed head of the ghostly figure in white.

"Yoooooop!"

A wild howl awoke the echoes of the dormitory.

For a ghost, the phantom abbot was unusually solid. The swiping pillow had met with a resistance that proved the existence of something more than a spectre inside the ghostly cowl and robe.

The ghost of Rookwood staggered back.

Jimmy Silver rushed in with the pillow, grasping it with both hands, and swiping with all his might.

Crash! Bump!
Down went the phantom abbot with a bump, on the dormitory floor, and a loud and anguished howl.

Jimmy Silver chuckled breathlessly. Startled fellows sat up in bed on all sides. A dozen voices called out at once.

"All serene!" called out Jimmy Silver. "I've laid the ghost!"

"The—the ghost!"

"Ow! Help!" squeaked Tubby Muffin, and the fat Classical dived under the bedclothes.

"What is it—"

"Who is it—"

"What—what—"

"Get a light!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Ah! Would you?"

The last remark was addressed to the ghost. The phantom abbot was trying to scramble up. The pillow swept down, and the ghost howled wildly and collapsed upon the floor again.

Lovell scratched a match; a candle-end was lighted. All the Classical Fourth were out of bed now, with the exception of Tubby Muffin, whose muffled accents were heard, howling for help, under the blankets. But no one heeded Reginald Muffin.

In a breathless crowd, the juniors surrounded Jimmy Silver and the spectral form stretched on the floor. Lovell held up the candle. The Rookwood Fourth stared blankly at the strange apparition. Seen gliding along a dark corridor, it would certainly have been a terrifying vision. Seen sprawling on the dormitory floor, and gasping for breath, the phantom was far from terrifying.

"It—it's some chap got up!" gasped Lovell. "Why, that blessed robe's made of old sheets pinned together—"

"And the giddy cowl is white dusters sewn up!" exclaimed Mornington.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Who is it?"

Jimmy Silver stooped and jerked the concealing cowl from the head of the hapless phantom.

Then there was a howl.

"Lattrey!"

The Ghost of Rookwood was Lattrey of the Fourth!

The 7th Chapter. The Ghost is Laid.

"Lattrey!"

"You silly ass!"

"You spooin' cad!"

"Ow! Ow!" Mark Lattrey sat up, gasping for breath. Pillow-swipes might not have damaged the genuine article in ghosts; but the ghost of Rookwood had been rather severely damaged. He seemed in rather a dazed condition, as he rubbed his head and spluttered for breath.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help!" came from under Tubby Muffin's blankets.

"Shut that silly ass up!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We don't want the prefects up here."

Lovell dragged off Tubby's bed-clothes. There was a shriek from Reginald Muffin.

"Yoop! Keep off! Help! Ghosts! Yaroooh—"

"Shut up!" gasped Lovell. "It's only Lattrey playing ghost, you fat chump! Look at him!"

"Eh?"

Tubby Muffin rubbed his eyes, and blinked at the captured ghost. He was reassured at last.

"Lattrey!" he spluttered. "You—you spoofing beast! That's how I came to see it in Lattrey's study the first time! Yah, you spoofing rotter—don't you think you took me in! I guessed all the time it was you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, Lattrey, you silly worm, what have you got to say for yourself?" demanded Lovell.

"Ow! Ow! Wow!" Apparently that was all Mark Lattrey had to say for himself. "Groogh! Oh! Ow!"

"How the thump did you know it was Lattrey, Jimmy Silver? How did you catch him?"

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"I explained it to you in the end study this evening, fathead!" he answered.

"Eh?"

"Don't you see, ass?" inquired Jimmy Silver politely. "The ghost turned up first in Lattrey's study—we found Lattrey there. Of course, he had been trying on his ghost rig, when Tubby came sneaking in after Gower's pudding and caught him."

"I say, I wasn't after the pudding—"

"Shut up, Muffin!"

"That's how Lattrey was out of the dorm last night," continued Jimmy Silver. "He was the ghost, and when we got after him, he whipped off the rig, and streak it away somewhere, and then turned up—you noticed that he had all his clobber on."

"I thought he'd stayed behind to dress," said Lovell.

"You can't think, old chap," answered Jimmy Silver affably. "That was what made me suspicious, when I thought about it afterwards. Then I thought I tumbled to the game. Lattrey's got appointments to keep after lights out—he was nearly spotted pub-haunting one night, and the Head has set the prefects on the watch."

"We know that. What's that got to do with Lattrey?"

"Ass! This ghost rig was a dodge, to keep him from being recognised, if anybody should spot him outside the dorm."

"Oh!"

"By gad!" exclaimed Mornington. "A jolly good dodge, too! I never thought of that!"

"Well, I thought of it, old top!" said Jimmy Silver. "I can't say I thought of it at once; but it came into my head at last. Lattrey invented this ghost bizney so that he could sneak out of bounds unrecognised if he was seen—especially as anyone who saw him was more likely to bolt than to investigate. Carthew would have had him the other night but for his ghost rig."

"Phew!"

"Just a dodge for breaking bounds," granted Conroy. "And he was trying it on again to-night, because he couldn't get clear last night or the night before."

"Exactly. I thought he would."

"Well, you ain't such a silly ass as I thought you were, Jimmy Silver," said Arthur Edward Lovell, after some reflection.

"Thanks! I wish I could say the same of you, old fellow."

"Look here—"

Lattrey scrambled to his feet at last, his face sulky and savage. As he did so, there was a sound of footsteps without.

"Cave!" murmured Mornington. "Prefect! Lattrey, you ass, get that foolery off—quick."

The Fourth-Formers had been on the point of punishing Lattrey for playing ghost. But the footstep outside changed all that. Nobody wanted to give away even the black-guard of the Form to the powers that were. Jimmy Silver himself lent Lattrey a hand in dragging off the ghostly robe, and it was stuffed into a bag—which was already open beside Lattrey's bed. The bag had just closed on it, when the door opened, and Bulkeley looked in.

"I thought I heard a row here," said the Rookwood captain grimly. "What are you all out of bed for at this time of night?"

"The ghost—" said Jimmy Silver.

"What?"

"Jimmy thought he saw a ghost," said Lovell, with a grin; "but it's all right—there wasn't any giddy ghost!"

Bulkeley frowned.

"Get back to bed, and don't let's hear any more of this nonsense," he said.

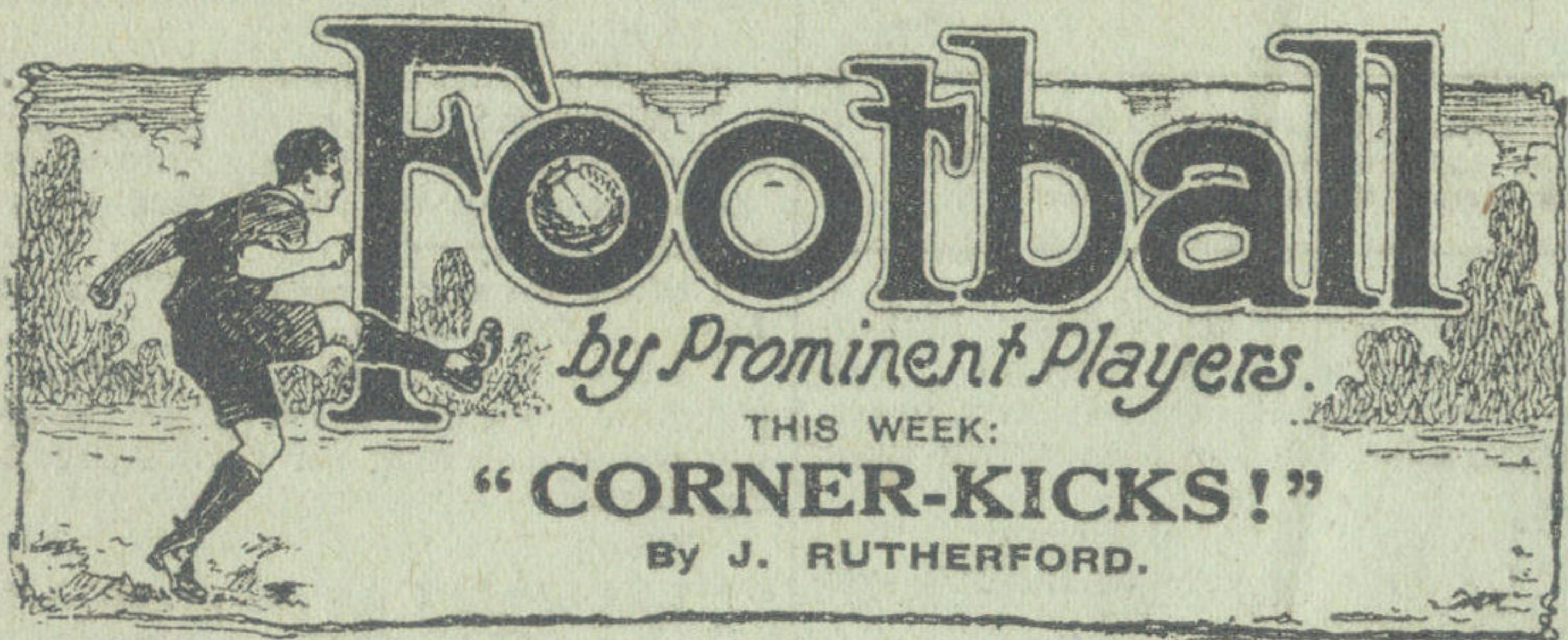
"Right-ho!"

The Fourth-Form turned in, and Bulkeley, frowning, closed the door and strode away. The ghost was not likely to walk again that night.

And indeed, the ghost of Rookwood did not walk again at all. In the morning, a severe bumping was administered to the phantom abbot; and Lattrey of the Fourth was still aching from it when Rookwood School broke up for Christmas.

THE END.

(A delightfully amusing story of Jimmy Silver & Co. is on the programme for next Monday, entitled, "Carthew's Tea-Party!")



THIS WEEK:

"CORNER-KICKS!"

By J. RUTHERFORD.

I have often wished that some of those people with fine heads for figures who compile the excellent football annuals would include one new set of figures. And those new figures would, to please me, show the number of corner-kicks taken during the average football season in first-class matches, and the number of goals scored from those corner-kicks.

I fancy such a table would give most people a shock. They would be surprised at the comparatively small number of goals scored from corner-kicks. I myself doubt if the proportion would work out at one goal from ten corner-kicks. Certainly, I am quite sure that I have played in many a match when I have taken ten corner-kicks myself and not one goal has been scored from them.

Of course you may retort—or at least the other players of the teams I have turned out for might retort—that it was partly my fault because I didn't place the corner-kicks right. Such a reply would be one up against me, and I should be the last person in the world to contend that all my corner-kicks are ideal. However, I shall have something to say a little

later as to my own ideas of what constitutes a good corner-kick.

For the moment it might be interesting to inquire why so few of them produce goals.

Certainly, the average football spectator at our big matches expects goals to result from corner-kicks. When a side gains one, there is a sort of expectant hush among the onlookers. They hope a goal will come to their side. Very often, however, they are disappointed. They see the ball worked away time after time—either punched out by the goalkeeper, or booted out by one of the defenders.

In a way, the disappointment which so often comes to the spectators as the result of corner-kicks which do not bring goals arises from the fact that they put rather too high hopes on these kicks.

It should always be remembered that when corner-kicks are taken the odds are always on the defending side. In the first place, the defenders have a goalkeeper who is allowed to use his hands, and in the second place those defenders have only one object in view—to get the ball away from their own goal.

On the other hand, the attackers

have not only to get to the ball, but in order to be successful they have to guide it into the narrow goal-space. To do this with one's head when there are three or four other players hustling around is by no means easy, and even when a member of the attacking side gets his foot to the ball and makes a shot it very often fails to count, for the simple reason that there are so many players packed between him and the goal that the ball never gets anywhere near the haven.

But although it is true that at the taking of corner-kicks the odds are against the attackers, I think it is none the less true that fewer goals result from them than there should, especially among the class of footballers with whom my readers play.

Just as there are right and wrong ways of doing most things, so there are right and wrong ways of dropping the ball in from a corner-kick. One big reason why more goals are not scored from corner-kicks is that too many of them are put behind the goal. I must confess that I myself have put a few there in my time, but never do I place a corner-kick behind without having a feeling that I ought to be kicked for doing so.

You see, the good corner-kick is not necessarily the one which is dropped just in front of the cross-bar, and that being so, it is not a good policy to run the risk of placing a corner-kick behind the goal.

I know that a corner which does come down in front of the cross-bar—almost grazing it—gets a lot of applause from the average man in the crowd, but my experience is that fewer goals are scored from this type of corner-kick than most other types. The goalkeepers of these days are generally pretty efficient in dealing with a situation like that, and they

are so well protected by the rules, too, that any attempt to hustle them over the line when they are making a save from a corner-kick so placed is usually greeted with a shrill blast of the referee's whistle.

No, I think the corner-kick which has the best chance of leading up to

J. RUTHERFORD.



The famous Arsenal and English International outside right, who is one of the best "corner-kick" men in England.

a goal is the one dropped, say, ten or a dozen yards in front of goal. Such a kick is too far out for the goalkeeper to reach by running out of his goal, and it gives the forwards the best chance of beating the defenders.

For my part, too, I always try to drop the ball over to the further side of the goal from that where the kick is being taken. The advantage of this lies in the fact that when they

have to get their heads to the ball the forwards can meet it in such a way that they are able to head at a convenient angle.

It is at the taking of corner-kicks that the value of one or two tall players in the side is realised, and I know some teams which possess a tall half-back who send that half-back right into goal when a corner-kick is being taken, and allow a smaller forward to fill the half-back's position temporarily.

Then again, if the maximum benefit is to be obtained from corner-kicks, the forwards must place themselves in the best positions for receiving the ball. As far as possible they must get away from the defenders, and in addition it is just as well to have one or two men on the edge of the crowd which surges round the goal at the taking of corner-kicks. Very often the ball is only partially cleared, and if there is a man on the attacking side waiting on the edge of the scrimmage there often comes to him the chance to crash the ball backwards towards the net.

But even with all the precautions and the arrangements which can possibly be made at the taking of these flag-kicks, the fact remains that they should not be expected to bring too many goals. After all, it must not be overlooked that the other fellows are generally about as efficient in preventing goals being scored as your men are in the scoring of them.

J. Rutherford

A MAGNIFICENT NEW TALE OF THE WILD WEST!

The DOUBLE HORSESHOE RANCH



A Thrilling New Story of a Young Cowboy's Adventures in the Wild West.
By GORDON WALLACE.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF THIS
GRAND STORY!

Steve Emberton, a youth of about nineteen summers is offered a job at the Double-Horseshoe Ranch, in the West of America, which he accepts. His acceptance is largely influenced by the fact that the ranch, which is run by Basnett, a blind man, really belongs to his father.

John Emberton's uncle had made a will making over the ranch to him, but when Steve's father became acquainted with this his uncle was too far gone to remember where he had hidden the will. Previous to this he had made a will in favour of Basnett, who was then his foreman, and that will was held valid in the absence of the other. Steve's plan is to work at the ranch with the intention of keeping an eye open for the missing will. He chums up with a fellow cowboy named Billy Steele, at the same time incurring the enmity of Jose Pascales, a Mexican half-breed.

Billy and Steve capture Black McKnight, a daring cattle-thief, who is duly handed over to the sheriff of Big Horn. Later they witness an amazing night raid on the court-house, which is led by Simon Basnett himself! Billy Steele gives the alarm, and in the ensuing struggle, McKnight is shot dead, while both the chums are slightly wounded.

They are riding over to Big Horn, with the intention of acquainting the sheriff of Simon Basnett's part in the affair, when they are captured by Jose Pascales and two rustlers. The two punchers manage to slip their bonds, and Jose and his followers suddenly find themselves captives instead of captors. "Catch the horses, Steve," says Billy, "and we'll ride into Big Horn with these birds!"

(Now read on.)

Justice!

Steve got busy. Jose was pushed in between his confederates, where he stood in as undignified a position as they did. But he was not muttering curses; oddly enough, he was praying as hard as though the saints he was calling to would have heeded him.

Steve went to Diabolo, who whinnied delightedly, and stood as still as a post while the entangling lariat was untwisted from his neck and forefeet, where it had been cunningly thrown. Diabolo laid back his ears, bared his teeth, and looked like savaging the men who had put this indignity upon him; but Steve quietly controlled him, and, instead of carrying out his equine desire, he followed Steve like a dog while that youth went behind the boulders and took the hobbles off three horses that stood there, one of them being Jose's.

"Now," said Billy, "as they did my horse in—poor old Mike!" and he glanced sadly at his own broncho, lying still now, and free from all pain, "I'll have to use Jose's. That means Jose can ride behind Shanks, an' Roberts can have a whole hoss to himself. I reckon, Roberts, you'd ought to think me quite the gentleman!" He grinned, and Roberts spat out a curse at him.

However, indignant, sulky though they were, the three prisoners had no other choice than to obey when they were ordered to mount two of the horses. When on their backs, their feet were tied beneath the horses' bellies by the lariat, which Steve unhesitatingly cut for the purpose. Then these horses were tied head to tail, and they had to follow Steve and Billy as the chums set off again on the trail for Big Horn.

It was about ten o'clock at night when they reached the railroad town. There were, however, several people still about as the procession trotted in. Neither Steve nor Billy had troubled about the feelings of their prisoners to any extent on the ride in. Jose was nearly shaken to pieces, for the second position on a horse's crupper, when that horse canters over rough trails, is no comfortable one—especially if the second rider has his feet tied beneath him

at the same time. Shanks and Roberts were cursing freely, but they were looking somewhat haggard about the cheeks, while Shanks, with both his injured hands hanging to his sides, seemed on the point of fainting.

Sheriff Dawson, as it happened, was sitting outside on the veranda of the main hotel. The huge, fat man came ponderously to his feet as Steve, Billy, and their following procession came to a halt opposite him.

"More prisoners for ye, sheriff!" grinned Billy Steele. "Whar'll you have 'em this time? Ye'll put 'em somewhere safer'n ye put Black McKnight, I reckon!"

Sheriff Dawson looked annoyed at this reference to the incident of the previous night.

keen-faced man, interrupted Billy's loquacious story.

"Let's get right down to brass tacks, Steele," he said quietly. "No trimmings!"

Billy blushed boyishly at being pulled up. He hummed and ha'd a little, then at length jerked his thumb over to Steve.

"Guess my pard can tell the story best," he said. "He knows it better'n me, too!"

The district-attorney smiled at Steve Emberton. Steve cleared his throat, and set to work to tell a story that astounded his listeners—probably astounded the prisoners, too.

"These men," he said, "are members of the rustling gang that has been worrying the State a lot. I can

The sheriff stopped laughing, and stared at the speaker.

"But Simon Basnett's as blind as a bat!" he exclaimed. "Say, Mr. Hodge, we can't swaller all this!"

"Go on!" said the lawyer again, briefly.

"Simon Basnett is not blind by night," Steve continued, and the lawyer started and eyed him closely. "I have enough evidence to prove that. I also believe I can prove that Basnett is a usurper, that he has no right to be owning the Double-Horseshoe Ranch. That is to say, I hope soon to be able to prove that."

"And who should own the ranch?" asked the lawyer, smiling a little grimly.

"My father," answered Steve. "That, however, is not at present the point. What I demand now is—the arrest of Simon Basnett, and I myself will charge him with being the leader of the gaol-breaking gang last night. Pascales, here, is his right-hand man. These others are members of the rustling-gang. My friend, here, will substantiate everything I say."

And Steve stopped, breathing hard, a vision of Aguila Gray before his eyes. He had spoken the words now that would tell the girl of her stepfather's villainy. He sighed a little, and was sorry for the girl. But it had to be said. Justice demanded that Basnett should answer for his sins.

Many were the searching questions asked by the keen-faced lawyer, who, it was obvious, doubted Steve's story. But Steve stuck to his statements, and Billy Steele loyally backed him up in every detail. At length the story was reduced to writing, and signed by Billy and Steve.

"Right," said Hodge at length, gathering together his papers. "The sheriff knows what to do now."

Wing, the Chinese cook, stood beside Steve.

"You lookee for Boss Basnett?" asked Hop Wing softly.

"Shore," said Billy. "Him lide away. Him velly, ba man. Him killee Batty Ann, t'ink, before go."

"What?" asked Steve sharply and grasped the Chinaman by the arm, and stared at his imperturbable face in the moonlight.

"I t'ink Batty Ann dead; n sure," answered Hop Wing. "He in my cookee-house light now. Yo come?"

Steve strode rapidly to the only building that showed a light. A glance at Hop Wing's bed told him a great deal. The old madwoman Batty Ann, was lying there on the blankets, her face covered by a handkerchief. She did not appear to be breathing. Steve gently lifted the handkerchief away, and looked at the poor woman's face. The next moment he recoiled in horror, for Ann's features were nothing much better than pulp.

"Did Basnett do that?" he asked hoarsely. "The bound!"

"Him do this, too," bleated the Chinaman, pointing to a dark bruise that now showed plainly on his forehead. "Him do that when I tly stop him from liding away with Missee Aguila hanging across his saddle—likee so."

He indicated an empty flour sack that was hanging on a nail in the cookhouse.

Steve and Billy looked at each other blankly.

The Flight of Basnett.

Hop Wing appeared not to be interested in the surprise he had created within the minds of Steve Emberton and Billy, but shuffled over to his bunk again, and there squatted on his heels, eyeing the disfigured face of Batty Ann silently, intensely.

"What d'ye make of all that?" Billy asked his chum.

Before Steve replied, he walked over to the Chinaman, and grasped him somewhat roughly by the shoulder. Hop Wing never took his eyes from the woman's face.

"Whar were the other boys while all this was happenin'?" he demanded.

"No come in then," Hop Wing answered. "Out now, looking for Mistel Basnett. Very angree, the boyees."

Steve imagined the "boyees" would be very angry indeed at any such news as this which Hop Wing had given them. Though no others of the personnel of the Double-Horseshoe Ranch were aware of the true character of their employer, they one and all were devoted to the bright, plucky girl who had the misfortune to be Basnett's stepdaughter and motherless. Also, they all had a great affection for the poor half-mad woman who now lay so still there in Hop Wing's bunk.

Anybody who laid hands on either of those women, boss or no boss, would incur the just wrath of the rollicking, clean-white boys who manned the ranch, Jake Collinson, the foreman, included. Indeed, it is possible that old Jake would have been the angriest of them all, for he loved Aguila as though she had been his own daughter.

"Was Miss Aguila unconscious, Hop?" Steve asked the Chinaman.

"No savvy. Missee lay velly still—velly much likee so." And the Chinese cook again indicated the empty flour-sack that hung on the nail. "Mistel Basnett had blue glasses on him eyes. I see him bling his horse out of the stable, aftel him stlikee Missee Ann, then bling Missee Gray out, and sling her across saddle—so. I run to stop him. He stlikee me, and I go allee sleepy for long, long time, till boyees come back."

"Then this beats four aces," Billy said. "What about Ann?"

He examined the woman's injuries closely. She had been most shamefully, brutally knocked about the head and face. Her clothing was torn in places, as were her fingernails. Shrewdly Steve Emberton guessed that the half-demented woman had fought like a fury in the defence of her girl friend—that Basnett had lain rough hands on Aguila on her return to the ranch to report to him his own and Billy's position when in the hands of Jose Pascales and his gang. But, of course, it was only guesswork. Ann was in no condition to say anything.

She was, however, still alive, which Steve was glad to notice. As he and Billy attempted to make her open her eyes, Sheriff Dawson and his posse came into the cookhouse. Sheriff Dawson was looking annoyed.



ROPED TOGETHER!

Sulky as they were, the three prisoners were placed on the two horses, and their feet tied beneath the horses' bodies. The animals were then tied head to tail, and so they set off after Steve and Billy on the trail for Big Horn.

"Who are they, and what have they done?" he demanded sharply.

"A whole bunch of crime here," Billy remarked. "All three connected with las' night's gaol-breakin' episode, too! Say, sheriff, let's get to your court-house, and fix 'em up. Guess we got a whole heap of information to give ye! We'll want the distric' attorney on the job, too, because we both—Steve an' me—got some affidavit-swearin' to do. Savvy?"

"Not pullin' my leg, I suppose?" said Dawson doubtfully, not at all sure about the seriousness of Billy's words.

"Nary a pull, sheriff! Let's get busy!" said Billy.

Followed by about half the population of Big Horn, the party proceeded to the court-house. In the sheriff's private room the prisoners were lined up, and the doors were closed on the inquisitive citizens.

"Guess ye'd oughter know," said Billy, "that we've unearthed about the worst thing in the way o' plots that's happened since this State of Montana was merely Indian territory. Sav—"

The district attorney—a youngish,

swear to that. They also were parties to the gaolbreaking that took place here last night. I saw them, and I know them again."

"Yes?" said the district-attorney, writing.

"The chief of the rustling-gang is Simon Basnett, present owner of the Double-Horseshoe Ranch," Steve continued quietly.

"Simon Basnett!" cried Sheriff Dawson. Then, holding his fat sides, lay back in his chair and roared with laughter. Steve bit his lips and flushed painfully, and glanced across at the district-attorney. The latter was eyeing him with puckered eyes, his lips pursed doubtfully, tapping his nose with his fountain-pen.

"Your statements—" he began doubtfully.

"Will you put me on my oath?" asked Steve sharply. "I want to swear an affidavit. I know what I'm saying, sir!"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "Go on!" he said briefly.

"Simon Basnett also led the gang that broke into the gaol last night," Steve continued, "and murdered Black McKnight!"

"I got to arrest a blind man?" asked Dawson blankly. "Arrest Simon Basnett?"

"Yes," said the lawyer. "I'd advise you to go now!"

"Waal, if that don't beat hen-huntin'!" exclaimed Dawson.

Pascales, Shanks, and Roberts were thrust into barred cells. The distress of Jose was painful to see as the great grids clanged shut on him. He gripped the bars and stared through them at his enemies, and prayed his saints and implored the sheriff to disbelieve his enemies' story. But they were left under guard, and Dawson ordered his horse, turned out a posse of half a dozen men, and, with Steve and Billy in their midst, rode back to the Double-Horseshoe Ranch.

It was very late when they reached there—well on in the morning. Everything was still and quiet. There was no light burning anywhere, save in the cook-house. The sheriff dismounted, and stumped up the veranda steps. He tried the door, and entered the big ranch-house. His posse followed him. Steve and Billy remained outside. As they waited, there was a shuffling sound, and Hop



SNOW-BOUND

A Tale of
FRANK RICHARDS & Co.'s
 Christmas Adventure.
 By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

The 1st Chapter Christmas Eve.

Jingle, jingle! The sleigh-bells rang merrily through the frosty air. The early dusk of the Canadian winter had closed in, and the stars, as they came out one by one, glittered like points of fire in a sky of steel. Round the Lawless Ranch the plains lay white under a winding-sheet of snow. There had been a heavy fall for several days, and light flakes were still fluttering down in the starlight of Christmas Eve. Frank Richards looked out of the doorway of the ranch-house, and drew his fur collar closer about his neck. "Here's the sleigh!" he said cheerily. Bob Lawless followed him out. The big sleigh, with its three steaming horses, was ready. Rancher Lawless stood in the doorway, and glanced rather uneasily at the sky. "I guess there's more coming down," he said. "You'll have to be careful, Bob. I hardly think you ought to go."

"But we've promised to call for the Lawrences, popper," said Bob Lawless. "And Molly will be waiting." "And we've got to call for Beauclerc, coming back," said Frank Richards. "We can't leave them in the lurch, uncle." Mr. Lawless nodded. "I know you're a careful driver, Bob," he said. "Look out for the drifts, and don't take risks."

"Nary a risk!" said Bob cheerily. "Safe as houses, popper. Haven't I driven a sleigh from here to Fraser in mid-winter?" "Well, off you go!" said the rancher, still rather dubiously. "If it wasn't for the dance at the mission—"

"But it is!" said Bob brightly. "The big dance of the year, popper, and Molly waiting in her glad-rags. Think of that!" The rancher laughed. "Well, take care—that's all!" he said. "Off with you!" The chums of Cedar Creek climbed into the sleigh, and Bob Lawless took the "ribbons."

Thick rugs were wrapped round them, in addition to fur coats and fur caps that covered head and ears and left little more than the nose visible. Billy Cook was holding the horses. He let go at a signal from Bob; the whip cracked, the bells jingled, and the sleigh was off. Out on the smooth snow the sleigh glided, gathering speed as it went. The rich grassland was deep under snow, which stretched for miles on all sides; in the distance, leafless, frosty trees loomed shadowy. Clatter, clatter! Jingle!

"Ripping, isn't it, Franky?" remarked Bob Lawless, when the ranch-house had vanished behind, and the sleigh was skirting the timber on its way to the upper valley. "Topping!" answered Frank. "The popper's a bit of a weather-prophet, but I guess he's off the mark this time," said Bob. "The snow's slacking off. A few flakes like this won't hurt even Molly."

"No fear!" "There's the Cherub's shebang," said Bob, pointing with his whip as a light gleamed out across the snow. The sleigh ran within a hundred yards of the Beauclerc cabin. Frank and Bob were to call for their chum, Vere Beauclerc, and his cousin Algy, on their way back from the Lawrences' homestead. It was a great occasion at the mission—the dance on Christmas Eve, when Mr. and Mrs. Smiley entertained all the young folk of the section, and the boys and girls of Cedar Creek School turned up in great force. "Hallo!" exclaimed Frank suddenly. "There's Beau!"

A fur-clad figure was running towards the sleigh through the snow from the direction of the remittance-man's cabin. Bob Lawless pulled in his horses. Vere Beauclerc came up, panting. "Coming along?" asked Frank. "You're going over to the Lawrences?" asked Beauclerc. "Yes—to call for Molly and Tom." "Father says the weather's likely to be thick to-night," said Beauclerc. "He doesn't seem to think it quite safe—"

"Just what popper seemed to think," said Bob cheerily. "But he's let us come, all the same. You come along with us, Cherub!" "If you're going, I certainly will." "Jump in, then!" "I thought I'd tell you what father said," remarked Beauclerc. "But he said that if Mr. Lawless let you go, I

could go, too. If you fellows come a cropper, I'd rather be with you." "No croppers this journey. Ready?" And Bob cracked his whip again, and the sleigh rolled on. "Jolly glad you're with us, Beau!" said Frank Richards. "Where's Algy?"

Beauclerc laughed. "Sorting out some beautiful evening-clothes that he brought from England," he answered. "He's going to turn up at the dance in style." "Ha, ha, ha!" "Good old Algy!" chuckled Bob. "His evening clobber will make a sensation at the mission dance—as much as his top-hat did at Cedar Creek. All the girls will want to dance with Algy. I guess we shall be left out in the cold!"

And Bob drove on merrily. The Thompson River, frozen fast and hard as iron, was left on the right, and the sleigh-bells jingled cheerily through the main street of Thompson, past the "Press" office and the Occidental Hotel and Gunten's store and the Red Dog. Then out on the north side of the town by an invisible track that Bob Lawless followed without a fault. Lights gleamed ahead at last—the lights of the Lawrence farmstead. With a jingle of bells and a fusillade of whip-cracks, Bob Lawless drove up to the farmhouse, and stopped his steaming team.

There was no need to knock; the farmhouse door flew open at the sound of the sleigh-bells, and ruddy firelight gleamed out into the snow. Molly and Tom Lawrence were ready. Molly's pretty face showed prettier

than ever among her furs as she came out to the sleigh. Kate Dawson came with her, and brother Tom followed. The sleigh was large, but it was well filled. But there was still a corner for Algy if that elegant youth was ready when the sleigh passed the Beauclercs' cabin en route to the Mission Hall. "Hustle along!" called out Bob. "Can't keep the horses standing! Now, then, all aboard!" "Back up, Molly!" said Tom Lawrence. "Give Frank a shove!" "Lots of room," said Frank Richards, laughing. "Here's your cloak, Molly. Here's your rug, Kate. Now, then, Tom; squeeze in!" Tom Lawrence squeezed in next to Kate Dawson. Old Mr. Lawrence tucked rugs round the young people, and Bob's whip cracked again. "Off!"

And the sleigh whirled away through the flakes. The snow thickened as the party turned out of Thompson, and glided along by the frozen river. Thick clouds were blotting out the stars now, and Bob Lawless glanced once or twice anxiously at the sky. It was pretty clear that Mr. Lawless' foreboding had been well-founded, and that there was a heavy fall coming on. But the rancher's son had driven through a heavy snowfall before.

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Tom Lawrence, as the sleigh turned from the river, and struck across the plains for the three mile run to the Mission Hall. "What's which?" asked Frank. "We're being followed!" "My hat!"

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The 2nd Chapter. Held Up!

"More snow!" remarked Beauclerc. The light, fluttering flakes had thickened, and snow was coming down more heavily, as the sleigh glided back through the main street of Thompson town. A fat figure appeared, and waved a fur-gloved hand at the sleigh, and yelled: "Stop for me!" "Chunky Todgers!" "Give us a lift, Bob!" roared Chunky Todgers. Again the sleigh halted. "Roll in, Chunky! You'll have to let Algy sit on your head when he gets in. The more the merrier!" "I say, it's jolly cold, ain't it?" gasped Chunky Todgers. "Give a chap room! I've got a bag here. Mind you don't drop it, Franky!" "What on earth are you taking a bag for?" demanded Tom Lawrence. Chunky gave a fat wink. "Grub!" he answered. "Ha, ha, ha!" "There's refreshments at the Mission dance, you fat clam," said Bob Lawless. "Old Smiley always does us well."

"I guess there ain't refreshments going and coming back, though," answered Chunky Todgers sagely. "I haven't got much—"

"It only weighs about a ton!" remarked Frank Richards. "Well, there's a ham, and some corn-cakes, and a pudding, and some sausages and things," said Chunky. "It's nearly an hour since I ate anything." "Ha, ha, ha!" "I was hungry last time I went, I know that," said Chunky Todgers warmly. "You give me my bag."



A MOMENT OF PERIL! "Halt!" shouted the desperado, flourishing his revolver at the schoolboy driver. Bob Lawless did not reply. He made a sudden lash with the whip, and caught the ruffian full across the face.

Frank Richards looked back. The snow-clouds were blotting out the stars, and a dim twilight reigned on the plains. Through the dimness a form was seen—the figure of a cloaked horseman, looming up eerily. "Silly jay, to be riding in this!" said Chunky Todgers. "What the thunder is he following us for?" "Lost the track, and using the sleigh as a guide, perhaps," said Frank Richards. "I guess that's it."

As the sleigh ran on, the little party looked back several times at the lonely rider in the mist and snow. "He's overtaking us," said Beauclerc presently. With a thudding in the snow the horseman came alongside the dashing sleigh, and a hoarse voice shouted: "Stop!" Bob Lawless did not stop, but he glanced round. "What's the trouble?" he called back. "Stop!" "Stop be blown!" answered Bob, with more force than elegance. "Go and chop chips, whoever you are!" "Stop!" shouted the horseman again. "Do you want me to drop your leader?"

There was a glitter of steel in the faint light as the horseman's hand came from under his cloak. Molly Lawrence gave a cry. "My hat! It's a thief!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "He's trying to hold us up. My only hat!" "It's Keno Kit, of the Red Dog," said Vere Beauclerc quietly. "Are you going to stop, Bob?" Bob Lawless set his teeth. "Nary a stop!" he said tersely. The whip cracked and the reins shook, and the team galloped on. For the moment the horseman was left behind. But the schoolboys and schoolgirls, peering anxiously back, saw the dim figure riding on furiously through the falling flakes.

Crack! Through the frosty air and the jingling of the sleigh-bells came the sudden report of the revolver. The bullet sped through the air high over the sleigh. It was a threat—so far. Bob Lawless drove on savagely. It was a race now. Keno Kit, as the man was called, was one of the loafers of the Red Dog Saloon in Thompson; and no doubt he had expended his last cent in tanglefoot, or in the game of euchre, at the Red Dog, and was "out" to make a "raise" by any means that came to hand. The desperate ruffian was reckless of consequences. Probably he was celebrating Christmas in his own way by a "bender" at the Red Dog, and his dollars had run out, and he was desperate.

His object was to go "through" the Christmas party in the sleigh—perhaps to steal the horses and sleigh, which were worth a very large sum. It was evident that he meant business, at all events. He drove on his horse savagely with whip and spur, and drew alongside the sleigh again at last. His hard face was flushed with rage. He rode beside the trampling team, and flourished his revolver at the schoolboy driver. "Halt!" he shouted. Bob Lawless did not reply. He made a sudden lash with the whip, and caught the ruffian full across the face.

There was a wild yell from Keno Kit as he reeled backwards in the saddle. His horse stumbled in the snow and went over, and the ruffian landed on his back. "Bravo!" shouted Frank Richards. Bob Lawless drove on furiously. It was less than a mile to the Beauclercs' cabin, whither the highwayman would scarcely dare to follow. Keno Kit scrambled out of the snow, pouring out a string of savage oaths. Crack, crack, crack! He was firing recklessly after the sleigh. There was a sudden whinny of pain from the leader, and he went plunging wildly into a drift, dragging the other horses down with him. The next instant the sleigh was on its side, and the occupants were rolling into the snow.

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The 3rd Chapter. In Deadly Peril.

Bob Lawless scrambled up, and rushed to the kicking, plunging horses. His first thought was for them. Frank Richards and Beauclerc helped the two girls to their feet.

"He's coming!" yelled Chunky Todgers.

Through the snow, now falling in thick masses, came the horseman, riding furiously, his horse knee-deep in snow, churning it up as he rushed.

"Look out!" yelled Chunky. Chunky Todgers' bag had burst open by the overturned sleigh, and packets of "grub" and a stone bottle had rolled into the snow. Frank Richards spotted the stone bottle and caught it up.

"Look out!" yelled Chunky. "That's my peppermint!"

But Frank Richards did not heed. Chunky Todgers' supply of peppermint was not an important matter at that moment.

As Keno Kit came plunging up through the snow, Frank Richards hurled the stone bottle with a deadly aim.

The ruffian received the missile full in his brutal, stubby face, and it struck him like a bullet.

He gave a gasping howl, and pitched off his horse.

"On to him!" panted Beauclerc.

Bob Lawless was too busy with the horses to help, but the other fellows rushed at the fallen ruffian. They knew that their only chance was to tackle him before he rose.

Vere Beauclerc was the first to reach him, and he hurled himself upon the dazed ruffian.

Keno Kit, who was making a dizzy effort to rise, was flung back, with Beauclerc's knee on his chest.

The next moment the other fellows were upon him.

The ruffian sank into the snow under a shower of blows. Tom Lawrence grabbed away his revolver, and the butt of the weapon crashed on Keno Kit's head.

The horse, frightened by the fracas, was dashing away through the snow, with trailing reins and dangling stirrups. Keno Kit squirmed in the snow, struggling feebly, and howling for mercy.

"Give me the shooter, Lawrence." Vere Beauclerc grasped the revolver. "Now, you scoundrel, hoof it!"

He jammed the muzzle to Keno Kit's ear.

"Let up!" gasped the ruffian. "I guess I give in. Let up!"

"Get out, you rascal!" said Frank. Keno Kit staggered up.

There was no fight left in him, and Beauclerc's finger was on the trigger of the revolver, and his look showed that he was quite ready to shoot.

Keno Kit staggered away dazedly on the track of his runaway horse, and the snow and the twilight swallowed him up in a few moments.

"I guess we're clear of him!" panted Lawrence. "Cheer up, Molly, it's all right!"

"We'll be going again in a few minutes," said Frank.

"I say, where's that bottle?" howled Chunky Todgers. "Look here, Richards, my peppermint's lost!"

"B-r-r-r!" "Why couldn't you chuck something else at him?" demanded Todgers, indignantly. "Look here, you help me look for that bottle—it's trapped into the snow somewhere—Yaroooooh!"

Frank Richards took the fat and wrathful Chunky by the collar, and sat him down in the snow.

Then he ran to help Bob Lawless.

During the tussle with Keno Kit, Bob had succeeded in cutting free the injured horse, and getting the other two upon their feet.

The schoolboys gathered round the sleigh to set it right.

Bob Lawless' face was very grave as he examined it.

"Anything up?" asked Lawrence.

"One of the runners is smashed," answered Bob quietly.

"Phew!"

"I guess it can't be moved."

"Oh!"

"We're only a mile or so from my home," said Beauclerc. "We can get help there—"

Bob Lawless looked at the falling snow.

The whole sky was blotted out now. Snow was coming down in great masses, and piling up round the sleigh and the horses. The injured horse, already at the point of death, was covered with it. The chums of Cedar Creek looked at one another with serious faces.

The sleigh was hopelessly wrecked, and only two horses remained, and the snowstorm was fairly coming on now.

"Hang the man!" muttered Bob, between his teeth. "We should have been close to the cabin by this time, and I guess it would have been too thick for us to get on to the Mission. But now—"

He broke off.

"Can't we walk to the cabin?" asked Molly Lawrence, in a low voice.

Bob did not answer.

Well he knew that it was impossible to cross the plain on foot and live.

"There are the horses!" muttered Frank.

"Keno Kit's done for, if he doesn't find his horse," said Lawrence.

"Serve him right!" muttered Bob.

"He's the cause of all this! Most likely he'll be under six feet of snow by the morning. But we—"

"We can't stay here!" whispered Kate Dawson.

Chunky Todgers came up, with a stone bottle in his hand, and a cheery smile on his fat visage.

"I've found it!" he announced.

"Found what?" snapped Bob.

"My peppermint!"

"You silly chump!"

"Oh, I say! I was afraid Frank had broken the bottle, biffing it at the bulldozer," said Chunky. "But it's all right! I say, what are you all looking so jolly serious about? Is my grub lost?"

"Oh, dry up, for goodness' sake!" said Bob crossly. "You fellows, you can see the snow—nobody could get through that on foot. Look how it's coming down. There's the two horses, but—"

He stared into the shadows.

"Two of us could go for help on the horses," said Beauclerc.

Bob Lawless nodded.

"After this blow is over!" he said. "Get into the sleigh now—it's all the shelter we've got!"

It was almost a blizzard that was raging on the plains now. An icy wind from the frozen slopes of the Rockies came across the flats like a knife-edge, and heavy flakes whirled in it. The dead horse was hidden from sight now; the two remaining animals shivered and whimpered. On horse or on foot, it was impossible to get through the snowstorm. Molly and Kate were wrapped in rugs in the sleigh, their faces very pale now. Bob Lawless and Frank covered up the horses with cloths as well as they could, and followed their companions into the slanting sleigh. Thicker and thicker the snow came down, and its level rose higher and higher round the wrecked sleigh.

There was a grunt from Chunky Todgers, as he drove his teeth into a corn-cake. Whatever might betide, Chunky Todgers was not likely to lose his appetite.

Bob Lawless uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Stop that!"

"Eh! Stop what?" ejaculated Chunky.

"Stop gorging, you fat clam. We may want every ounce of that!"

"Oh, I say!"

Bob Lawless took the bag away from the fat Chunky, who blinked at him speechlessly. A chill fell upon the party in the sleigh. Up to that moment, they had not looked at the situation as it was—it was too terrible to realise. But they realised it now. They were snow-bound on the open plain, and if help was long delayed, it was the shadow of death that hung over them!

The 4th Chapter. Snow-bound!

Thicker and thicker the snow came down.

Black darkness, broken only by the glimmer of the snow, enwrapped the sleigh.

There was a deep silence.

Kate Dawson was crying softly; but Molly was calm, though very quiet. The blizzard was growing fiercer, and even a well-found sleigh, with an experienced driver, could not have won through the storm then.

For the Cedar Creek party, there was nothing to do but to wait—and hope!

Frank Richards & Co. thought of the Mission Hall—of the rafters hung with lanterns and holly, of the light feet pattering to the strains of the wheezy Mission piano and the fiddler from Kamloops. The dance at the Mission was in progress by that time, though the rough weather would have made the attendance unusually thin.

And within a few miles of the merry scene, here they lay—snow-bound and in grim peril.

The night grew older.

Still the snow was coming down, thickly, heavily. It was round the sleigh like a sea of white, several feet deep. The horses were almost buried in it, as they shivered under their coverings. There was nothing to do but to wait—and waiting was dreary.

Sleep came to their help at last.

Molly Lawrence, with her head resting on Frank's shoulder, slept peacefully, and gradually the others dozed.

Chunky Todgers, after in vain endeavouring to reclaim his provisions, resigned himself to slumber—the next best thing, in Chunky's opinion.

Frank Richards was the last to sleep.

It was warm enough in the closely-packed sleigh, under the thick fur cloaks and rugs. It was not till the dim morning sun was glimmering through the snowflakes that the Cedar Creek party awoke.

Bob Lawless rubbed his eyes, and looked round him.

The wind had fallen, and the snow was coming down lightly; the blizzard had passed off in the night.

The two horses were no longer to be seen.

The bitter cold had been too much for them, and they had sunk in the snow, and lay frozen like iron under the spotless covering.

Round the sleigh was a sea of snow and mist, which blotted the sight at a distance of a few yards.

Bob Lawless rose to his feet, and stepped from the sleigh, upon the frozen body of a horse with a foot of snow over it.

Molly opened her eyes.

"I say!" Chunky Todgers was awake now. "I say, isn't it lucky I brought some grub with me! I'm awfully hungry! You give me my grub, Bob Lawless. I'll whack it out with you fellows, of course!"

"Shurrup!" grunted Bob.

"But, I say—I'm hungry!"

"Dry up!"

Chunky Todgers gave a snort of indignation. As a matter of fact, Chunky was not the only member of the party who was hungry.

"Christmas morning!" said Beauclerc, with a shiver.

"What will our people be thinking?" muttered Lawrence.

"It is useless to think of that."

"They'll be searching for us, anyhow," said Lawrence. "What the thunder are we going to do, Bob? Where are the horses?"

Bob pointed to the snow.

"Oh! We—we can't get away, then?"

"I guess a horse couldn't get through these drifts, anyhow."

"We're landed," said Frank Richards, as cheerfully as he could.

"We've got to make the best of it!"

"I'm not afraid!" murmured Molly.

"Nothing to be afraid of," said Bob sturdily. "We—we've only got to get help!"

"That's all!" murmured Frank.

"I've been snow-bound before," said Kate. "But that was in a cabin, with fire, and food, and shelter. But here—"

"We've got food," said Bob cheerfully. "Thanks to Chunky for that! I guess it's lucky he's such a greedy clam."

"Look here!" began Chunky hotly. "There's enough in Chunky's bag to last us a couple of days, on strict rations," said Bob. "We may as well begin now."

"Strict rations!" murmured Chunky. "Oh dear!"

"Lucky we gave you a lift, Chunky!" grinned Bob.

"Ye-es, isn't it?" said Todgers, rather doubtfully, however.

Bob Lawless examined the supplies, and handed out the rations. It was a frugal breakfast, but it made the snow-bound party feel better. Chunky Todgers sighed deeply when Bob wrapped the remainder of the provisions in the bag. His eyes followed them mournfully. Chunky was a good fellow, and was quite willing to "whack" out his supply. But he really considered it would have been wiser to whack it out more liberally, and trust to luck for the morrow.

Bob Lawless was leader, however, and Bob was not in the habit of trusting to luck for the morrow.

"I say, Bob," murmured Chunky, "I've got an idea—"

"Well?"

"Suppose we finish up the grub now," suggested Chunky. "It—it will give us strength, you know, to—to—"

"Let me catch you trying to finish up the grub!" growled Bob. "Dry up, Chunky, and go to sleep!"

"Well, I may as well, I guess," said Chunky. "I can bear hunger better when I'm asleep!"

And Chunky's melodious snooze was soon heard again.

While Chunky was snoring, Frank Richards & Co. held a consultation outside the sleigh.

"We've got to get help!" said Bob quietly. "They're searching for us, of course, already; but they don't know where to look, for miles. Two of us had better try to get through this!"

Frank Richards gave an almost hopeless look at the sea of snow.

"I know what you're thinking—it's as good as going to a funeral!" said Bob. "It can't be helped. The girls have got to be saved somehow. It's about a mile to Beauclerc's sho-

bang, and if we can struggle through, we're all O. K. I'm going!"

"I'm coming with you, then!" said Frank.

"And I!" said Beauclerc quietly.

"Count me in!" said Tom Lawrence.

Bob smiled faintly.

"No good all going," he said. "Besides, somebody's got to take care of the girls while we're gone. You'd better stay, Lawrence, as you're Molly's brother. Chunky stays, anyway. We three'll try it!"

Frank Richards turned back to the sleigh, and Molly's eyes met his anxiously.

"We're going for help, Molly," said Frank quietly. "Most likely we shall be back before long. Don't worry!"

"You cannot get through!" whispered Molly.

"We're going to try. Keep in the sleigh and keep warm. Tom and Chunky will clear away some of the snow here, so that you'll have room to move. Keep your pecker up!"

"Oh, Frank!"

"Good-bye, Molly! You'll see us again soon!"

And the three chums of Cedar Creek prepared for the desperate venture.

Bob Lawless led the way, through the clinging mist that hung over the plain, and his comrades followed him unquestioningly. The snow was like a soft barrier that had to be tramped and pushed aside to allow progress to be made, and it was heavy work.

As the three schoolboys proceeded, they left a deep gully in the snow-carpet behind them.

"You're sure of the way, Bob?" Frank Richards asked at last.

His Canadian cousin gave him rather a grim look.

"Almost!" he answered briefly.

They tramped on.

Taking it in turns to lead, and force a way through the snow, the three chums pressed on.

They could not see the sun, but a wintry light glimmered faintly through the thick, hanging mists.

Fatigue drew upon them, as they fought their way onward; but with fierce determination they stuck to their task.

For two hours or more they struggled on; and still the snow was thick about them, and the mist closed suffocatingly in upon them. Frank Richards stopped at last.

"I—I can't keep on, Bob," he gasped. "I—I'm done!"

Bob Lawless breathed hard.

"I guess it's the same with me," he muttered. "We haven't done a quarter of a mile yet. We—we can't win through!"

"Heaven help us!" muttered Beauclerc.

The three schoolboys sat in the snow, too exhausted almost to speak.

Hope was dying in their breasts.

But they did not think of returning. To crawl back through the gully they had made in the snow, and to let the girls know, by their return, that they had failed, and that there was no hope, was impossible. Somehow, they would contrive to keep on—when they had rested. But in their hearts they knew that there was no keeping on for them.

And it was Christmas Day!

Frank Richards thought, fully, of old Christmases—of the merry season in his earlier years in the Old Country. He thought of his sister and his father, far away, little dreaming that he was snow-bound and doomed on that Christmas Day. He struggled to his feet at last.

"We've got to try again!" he muttered.

Crack!

Suddenly, through the silence of the mists, came an echoing report—the report of a rifle!

The 5th Chapter. Algy to the Rescue!

Frank Richards & Co. started, and stared through the mists. The report died away in a thousand echoes round them. They looked at one another blankly.

"A rifle!" breathed Bob Lawless.

"It's somebody—"

"A signal, perhaps," muttered Beauclerc. "If they are searching for us, it may be a signal—"

"Shout!" said Frank.

The mist was full of echoes, and they could hardly define the direction from which the shot rang.

"Help!"

The three schoolboys shouted together with all the strength they could muster.

Crack!

As if in answer, came a second report.

Beauclerc uttered an exclamation.

"The revolver!"

He felt in his pocket hastily. He still had the revolver that had been taken from Keno Kit.

"Good!" exclaimed Bob joyfully. "They'll hear that—"

"There are two cartridges in it," said Beauclerc.

"Let them go!"

Vere Beauclerc pointed the revolver into the air and pulled the trigger twice in rapid succession.

Crack! Crack!

The reports rang loudly across the snow.

Then the chums listened.

Had the signal been heard? Had it been understood?

Bob Lawless grasped Frank's arm suddenly, squeezing it in his excitement.

"Listen!" he breathed.

"Bells!" shouted Frank. "Sleigh bells!"

Jingle, jingle!

Never had the merry sound of sleigh-bells sounded so musically in the ears of the chums of Cedar Creek.

Jingle, jingle, tinkle, tinkle!

"This way!" shouted Bob.

"Help, help!"

Through the mists the heads of two steaming horses loomed up, plunging through the snow.

"Look out!"

"By gad! Here they are!"

It was the voice of Algernon Beauclerc—the dandy of Cedar Creek.

The horses plunged to a halt, and the bells ceased to jingle. The three chums crushed through the snow towards the sleigh.

"Algy!" shouted Beauclerc.

An eyeglass glittered from the sleigh. Algy was alone in it, handling the reins. A rifle lay beside him.

"Hallo, you fellows!" said Cousin Algy, cheerily. "Glad to see you! Merry Christmas, by gad!"

"That blessed tenderfoot!" stammered Bob Lawless. "Who'd have thought he could even handle a sleigh? By gum!"

Algy grinned.

"Found you—what?" he asked.

"Where have you been, hay?"

"Snow-bound."

"Yaas, I thought so. No end of a row goin' on at the ranch!" yawned Algernon. "Your pater's out in a sleigh, Bob, and the cattlemen are searchin', and my Uncle Beauclerc is with them, and Old Man Lawrence—no end of a big fuss. I offered my services, and what do you think they said? Better stay at home and keep my feet warm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I didn't!" grinned Algy. "I trotted down to Thompson, and hired a sleigh and a gun, and here I am. My idea to pop off the rifle every now and then as a signal, you know. You heard it—what?"

"Yes, and we were jolly glad to hear it!" gasped Frank.

"Yaas, I suppose so! But where are the others?"

"Left with the sleigh—we were going for help!" said Bob.

"You've found help, old top! Let's go and round up the rest of the giddy party," said Algernon. "You can drive if you like. These geees are a bit skittish, and they've made my arms ache. Hungry? I've no end of stuff in the sleigh!"

"Well, my hat!" said Frank.

The three schoolboys clambered in, and Bob took the reins. With light hearts they drove back to the wrecked sleigh, and the jingle of the bells told Molly and her companions that help was coming. Progress was slow through the heavy snow, but the snow-bound camp was in sight at last.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom Lawrence as Algy's sleigh came plunging up.

"Bravo!" yelled Chunky Todgers. "Have you got any grub?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algy touched his fur cap to Molly and Kate, whose faces were very bright now.