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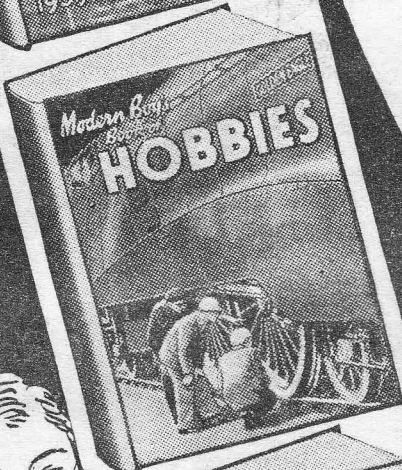
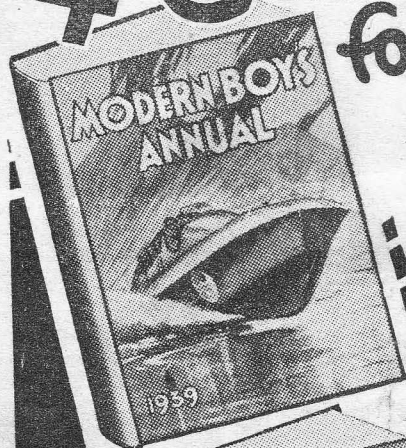
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# What Is The Object of Cardew & Co.'s Visits To A Lonely Cottage? The St. Jim's Juniors Are Left Guessing!



In the doorway of the cottage a figure appeared for a moment. It was Cardew. He glanced towards the road, and then, to the astonishment of the juniors, he darted back into the cottage out of sight!

## CHAPTER 1. Too Much Coventry!

"I'M getting fed up!" Cardew of the Fourth snapped out that remark in Study No. 9.

He was standing with his hands in his pockets and a dark frown on his face, staring grimly at his studymates, Levison and Clive.

Clive looked uncomfortable, and Levison gave a slight shrug of his shoulders.

Neither replied.

"I suppose you two are not 'sendin' me to Coventry, as well as the rest?" said Cardew sarcastically.

"I'm not, and you know it," said Levison.

There was a pause before Clive replied.

"No," growled Cardew. "After all, what's all the dashed fuss about?" "All through a chap breakin' bounds, and cheekin' the Head!"

"Cheekin' the Head's bad form," said Clive. "The fellows are down on it, naturally. If I

weren't your studymate, I should send you to Coventry, like the rest. It's only for a week, anyway."

"Might have been for a whole term," said Levison. "Grin and bear it!"

"I'm not goin' to grin and bear it! That ass D'Arcy passed me a few minutes ago with his nose in the air, and didn't seem to hear when I spoke to him!"

"You shouldn't have spoken, then."

"Oh, rats!"

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*When Cardew & Co. make several visits to a secret destination, their enemies are not slow to spread ugly rumours about them. And when the chums of Study No. 9 remain silent on the subject, the juniors cannot help thinking that there is some truth in the rumours, after all!*

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By

**MARTIN CLIFFORD**

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"It's the sentence of the House," said Clive. "You've simply got to toe the line."  
 "Well, I'm not goin' to toe the line!"  
 "I don't quite see what else you'll do," said Levison, with a grin. "You can't make the fellows speak to you."

"I'm not goin' to stand much more of it, anyway!"

And with that, Ralph Reckness Cardew quitted the study and closed the door after him with a slam that rang the whole length of the Fourth Form passage.

There was no doubt that Cardew of the Fourth was getting fed up. The grandson of Lord Reckness had an excellent opinion of himself, and he expected rather to be sought after than avoided.

To be cut, not only by fellows like Tom Merry & Co., but by insignificant persons like Trimble and Mellish, was humiliating and exasperating to him. And he was likely to forget that he was in Coventry, and to address a remark carelessly to a fellow—generally to receive a stony stare in response.

Cardew's passionate temper had been on the point of breaking out more than once; and now it was at a dangerous pitch.

As he came swinging down the Fourth Form passage, with his hands in his pockets, his eyes were gleaming, and he looked like a fellow who was hunting for trouble.

Blake and Herries, and D'Arcy and Digby were chatting in and around the doorway of Study No. 6 as he came by. They did not seem to be aware of his existence, though he stopped and stared at them.

"How long are you goin' to keep up this rot?" snapped Cardew.

"Talkin' about the footah, deah boys, it's about time I gwessed my boots," Arthur Augustus remarked thoughtfully.

"Gettin' deaf?" asked Cardew.

"Looks as if the weather's goin' to mend, too," remarked Digby.

Cardew quivered with anger.

"You silly chumps!" he exclaimed. "Can't you speak?"

"I wufese to speak to you, Cardew, as you are in Coventry."

"Shurrup, ass!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, I was only explainin' to Cardew that I wufese to address my wemarks to him in any circs whatevah."

"Cheese it!" said Blake. "Come and get your boots greased."

"Yaas, deah boy."

The chums of Study No. 6 went into their study.

Cardew's eyes glinted, and he looked for a moment as though he would rush in after them. But that would not have been much use.

He restrained himself and went sullenly downstairs.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—were coming in as Cardew went out.

He stopped on the steps, right in their path. The Terrible Three walked round him and went in.

Cardew was left standing on the steps, pale with anger.

He strode out into the quadrangle, where he found Julian, Reilly, and Kerruish chatting together. He came up to them with a lowering

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brow, and they turned away at once, Kerruish indulging in a sniff as he did so.

That was too much for Cardew. He reached out and grasped the Manx junior's collar and spun him round.

"Now, you sniffin' idiot— Oh!"

Without a word the three juniors closed in on Cardew, grasped him, and lifted him off his feet. They sat him down in the quad with a heavy bump, and left him there, grinning as they walked away.

Cardew sat for some moments, gasping, before he scrambled to his feet. His brow was black as he rose at last. His efforts at breaking the icy circle of Coventry had not been very successful, so far.

Three juniors, at a little distance, were grinning; they were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House.

Cardew gave them a savage look.

"Well, what's the snigger about?" he demanded.

"You're in Coventry in your own House, and we know you've asked for it," said Figgins. "It's

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nothing to do with us, of course, but we're not going to interfere with the sentence of your House. So buzz off!"

"You silly fatheads!"

Figgins & Co. sauntered away.

Cardew drove his hands deep into his pockets, his scowl growing darker. The sentence of the House was just, and the New House fellows knew it.

Cardew knew it, too, for that matter; but that knowledge did not make it easier to bear.

The sight of Tom Merry, a little later, crossing the quad towards the school shop, caused a gleam to dart into his eyes.

The captain of the Shell was alone now, and Cardew, who was ripe for a row, hurried towards him and planted himself directly in Tom's path.

The Shell fellow made a gesture to him to stand aside.

"You can't speak?" sneered Cardew.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Well, if you want me shifted you can shift me. I'm waiting!"

Tom Merry pushed back his cuffs, quite prepared to take the Fourth Former at his word. Then he paused.

Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, was coming from the direction of the gates, and he had an eye on him.

The New House master had nothing to do with the School House fellows, but "Ratty" was much given to interference.

Cardew had his back to the Housemaster, and he did not see him. His lip curled as Tom passed.

"Thinkin' better of it?" he asked sarcastically.

Tom's eyes gleamed, and he clenched his fists and came on. Cardew stood his ground, and struck out as the Shell fellow advanced.

Tom Merry hit out heartily in return, and in a moment the two juniors were fighting.

There was a terrific thumping and trampling and gasping as they closed in combat and struggled.

"Cardew! Merry!" It was Mr. Ratcliff's acid voice. "Cease this at once! How dare you!"

Bump!

Cardew was down on his back, gasping. As he leaped up, his eyes flaming, the New House master rustled up, his hand raised commandingly.

"Stop!" he thundered.

Cardew dropped his hands, with a savage scowl.

Tom Merry stood quietly. The New House master frowned at both of them.

"How dare you fight in the quadrangle!" he exclaimed. "What is the cause of this dispute?"

Tom Merry did not reply.

"You hear me, Merry?"

"You are not my Housemaster, sir," said Tom quietly. "I will explain to Mr. Railton if he asks me."

Mr. Ratcliff compressed his lips. He might have expected that rebuff, but apparently he did not expect it.

"I shall report your impertinence to your Housemaster, Merry. Cardew, you will answer me!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sent to Coventry, and I was punchin' that silly fool for not speakin' to me," he said. "That's all!"

"Indeed! Why is Cardew sent to Coventry, Merry?"

No reply.

"Follow me at once, both of you!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

He whisked away towards the School House, and the two juniors followed him in silence.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Ratty Does Not Prosper!

MR. RAILTON laid down his book as his colleague entered, with the two juniors at his heels. He compressed his lips a little, though his manner was quite courteous. He found his colleague a little hard to bear at times.

"I have to report to you a somewhat serious matter, which appears to have escaped your observation, Railton," began the New House master.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! You are aware there is a form of persecution among schoolboys known as 'Coventry.' I find that this boy, Cardew, is being made a victim of that form of persecution, and I feel it my duty to bring the matter to your notice."

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Ratcliff." Mr. Railton did not look very much obliged, however. "You may leave the matter in my hands."

Mr. Ratcliff hesitated. He did not feel inclined to be dismissed summarily. He felt that he had an advantage over Mr. Railton, and he did not want to relinquish it.

"Quite so," he agreed. "I will remain in case my evidence is needed."

The School House master nodded. He could not actually turn his colleague out of his study.

"Well, Cardew," he said, "it would seem that you have some cause of complaint which you have stated to Mr. Ratcliff instead of to your own Housemaster?"

"Not at all, sir," said Cardew.

Tom Merry glanced curiously at him. He had expected the whole matter to come out. But Cardew, with all his faults, was loyal to his House, and he did not in the least intend to be used as a means to helping Mr. Ratcliff to score over his own Housemaster.

"But Mr. Ratcliff says——"

"I am not responsible for what Mr. Ratcliff says," said Cardew calmly.

Tom Merry suppressed a grin as he noted Mr. Ratcliff's expression. He almost liked Cardew at that moment.

"Cardew," gasped Mr. Ratcliff, "you distinctly stated to me that you had been sent to Coventry by the other juniors."

"I made no complaint, sir."

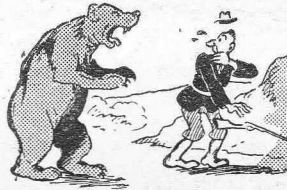
"If the boy does not complain, I can scarcely take notice of the matter," said Mr. Railton, inclined to smile himself. "However, I must ask you some questions, Cardew. You have been sent to Coventry by your schoolfellows?"

"Yes, sir. Coventry for a week is the sentence."

"You do not complain of that?"

"Not in the least, sir."

"For what cause are you sent to Coventry?"



"Er—g-g-go away! I'm not hunting bears—I'm hunting rabbits!"

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"The fellows considered that I was lackin' in respect to the Head, sir," said Cardew.

"Oh!" said Mr. Railton, taken aback, and the New House master stared. "If that is the case, Cardew, the boys are very right to express their disapproval. Am I to understand that you admit the justice of your sentence?"

"Certainly, sir! I fairly asked for it and got it. I'm not complainin' in the least."

"I am glad that you can see the matter so sensibly, Cardew. You may both go."

Mr. Ratcliff's face was a study. Cardew's answers had quite taken the wind out of his sails. Evidently he was not going to make out his case of persecution in the School House, going on under Mr. Railton's nose unnoticed.

"But—but," broke out Mr. Ratcliff, "this boy confesses that he has been guilty of disrespect to the Head! Surely——"

"Quite unintentionally, sir," said Cardew. "The other fellows and I took a different view of a certain matter, and I was in the wrong, and I own it. That is all."

"And that is enough," said Mr. Railton. "You may go, Cardew and Merry."

The two juniors left the study.

The door closed behind them. In the passage Cardew grinned.

"Rather a facer for the old sport—what?" he chuckled. "He thought he was goin' to make old Railton sit up."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Good for you!" he said. "Look here, Cardew, it was jolly decent of you to speak up like that."

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and as far as I am concerned, the Coventry's done with. I'll speak to the other fellows."

"Oh, rats!" said Cardew. "I don't care a two-penny rap either way!"

"I think you do," said Tom, "and I mean it." Cardew shrugged his shoulders and walked away; and Tom Merry, with a smile on his face, made his way to the school shop again.

A few moments later Mr. Ratcliff quitted the School House master's study. His disappointment made the acid gentleman compress his lips as he crossed the quad. His case of "persecution" had vanished into thin air, and nobody was to be punished or called over the coals, which was a very severe disappointment for Ratty.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Good News for Racke!

"GOOD-EVENING", deah boy!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that greeting as Cardew of the Fourth came into the Common-room.

There was really no reason why Arthur Augustus should bid Cardew good-evening, such greetings being not at all customary in the Common-room. But the swell of St Jim's desired to make it known that he gave Cardew his gracious approbation. Tom Merry had told how Cardew had shut up the New House master in Mr. Railton's study, and the juniors had chuckled over it, and agreed that Cardew had earned his exemption from Coventry. And Arthur Augustus proceeded to mark the difference at once.

"Hallo!" said Cardew, with a grin. "Found your voice at last?"

"Yaas, deah boy. I have no objection to speakin' to you," Arthur Augustus assured him graciously.

"Neither have I, so long as you don't overdo it," said Cardew calmly.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus; and there was a chuckle from the other fellows.

Racke of the Shell looked round sharply.

"You're speaking to Cardew, D'Arcy!" he exclaimed.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Aubrey Racke.

"Yaas; you are quite wight," he replied.

"What do you mean by it? Cardew's in Coventry!"

"I wegard you as a cheeky ass, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Racke's right," said Crooke of the Shell. "You're breaking the rule, and you'll get sent to Coventry yourself!"

"I should be vevy pleased to be sent to Coventry by you, Cwooke! I do not wegard you as a desivable acquaintance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all very well!" exclaimed Racke. "But you've got to chuck it!"

"Wats!"

But Racke felt that he had an advantage, and he meant to pursue it.

Racke & Co. had been delighted to see Levison and Cardew in the black books of the School House fellows. Levison, their old associate, had turned his back upon them and their shady ways. Cardew, in spite of the most polite attentions from the black sheep, had disdainfully declined to be drawn into their select circle. So they entered

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into the Coventry business with keenness, and were prepared to keep it up most rigidly.

"You know the rules!" Racke exclaimed. "Cardew's in Coventry by sentence of the House. Any fellow who speaks to him goes to Coventry, too. Isn't that so, Tom Merry?"

"That's so," said Tom. "But there are extenuating circumstances in this case. We've decided to let Cardew off."

"You've no business to decide anything of the kind without a meeting of the House!" said Racke.

"Why, you cheeky ass——"

"Oh, cheese it, Racke!" said Jack Blake. "You're offside!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wefuse to listen to your wot, Wacke!"

"So you're all speaking to that outsider?" exclaimed Racke savagely.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But don't you do it," suggested Monty Lowther. "Keep him without the delights of your conversation, Racke, and gloat over his sufferings!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke scowled, and left the Common-room with Crooke. The two Shell fellows went up to their study.

"So that's over!" said Racke, as he threw himself into a chair and lighted a cigarette.

"Give us a light," said Crooke. "Yes, Study No. 9 seems to be in favour again. It wouldn't have lasted, anyway. Levison has squeezed himself into favour; he's quite popular now. Cardew seems to be able to do as he likes. Hang them both!"

Racke bit through his cigarette in his anger.

"Levison's keeping it up," he said. "I don't believe it's genuine, but he's keeping it up. And we've never made him sit up for throwing us over!"

"I fancy his giddy reform is genuine," said Crooke.

"No; it's only spoof!" said Racke fiercely. "By gad, I'd like to get the truth out about him some day and show him up!"

Crooke shrugged his shoulders. He was as annoyed as his chum by Levison's defection from their set, but he did not take the same view. His belief was that Levison had done with his old ways, and that his reform was not merely an elaborate piece of spoof, as Racke supposed.

The study door opened, and Mellish of the Fourth came in.

The two Shell fellows looked at him rather grimly.

Mellish was a member of their set, but he was poor, and generally trying to borrow money. Mellish's friendship was founded chiefly upon a desire to share the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

"Give us a fag!" said Mellish cheerily.

Racke grunted, and shoved his case across the table.

The Fourth Former lighted a cigarette.

"All serene now in Study No. 9," he remarked.

Racke grunted again.

"I don't think the fellows would be so willing to give them the glad eye if they knew all I knew!" said Mellish, with a grin.

Racke started.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "You don't mean that you've bowled Levison out?"

"I fancy so!" said Mellish complacently.

"By gad!" Racke drew a deep breath. "I'd

give a tenner to show him up if he's really at his old games! What have you nosed out?"

"A mare's nest, most likely!" remarked Crooke.

"You can judge for yourselves," said Mellish. "Where do those three buzz off to so often?"

"Do they?" asked Racke.

"Yes, they do. I noticed it first last week. Nearly every day after lessons they come out together, get their bikes, and simply disappear. They went again this afternoon, and I trotted along, and saw them bike off along the towing-path. You know where that leads?"

"The Green Man!" said Crooke.

"They don't go to the Green Man," said Racke decidedly. "We should have heard of it from Joliffe and Lodgey. But they go somewhere."

"And they keep it a secret," said Mellish. "I've noticed that Clive hasn't said a word about it to Blake or his pals, though he's very friendly with them. Looks fishy!"

"By Jove, it does look fishy!" said Crooke. "Levison and Cardew might be up to something, but Clive is not that sort."

"You never know," said Racke eagerly. "There's a merry old proverb that says that 'evil communications corrupt good manners.' Clive is Levison's studymate, and he's sure to get tarred with the same brush in the long run. We're jolly well going to look into that little secret, anyway!"

"Good egg!" said Mellish. "I say, Racke, can you lend me a quid?"

"No!" snapped Racke. "I can't!"

"I owe Lodgey a quid," said Mellish. "He's worrying me for it. Dash it all, you're loaded up with tin!"

"Well, it's my tin, not yours," said Racke.

"Is it yours?" asked Mellish, with a sneer. "I understand that your pater made it by profiteering. That doesn't make it yours—only legally."

And with that Parthian shot Mellish strolled out of the study.

"I'm fed-up with that worm's sponging!" growled Racke. "He owes me several quids already. But, I say, Crooke, this is worth looking into! We'll keep our eye on Study No. 9 after this."

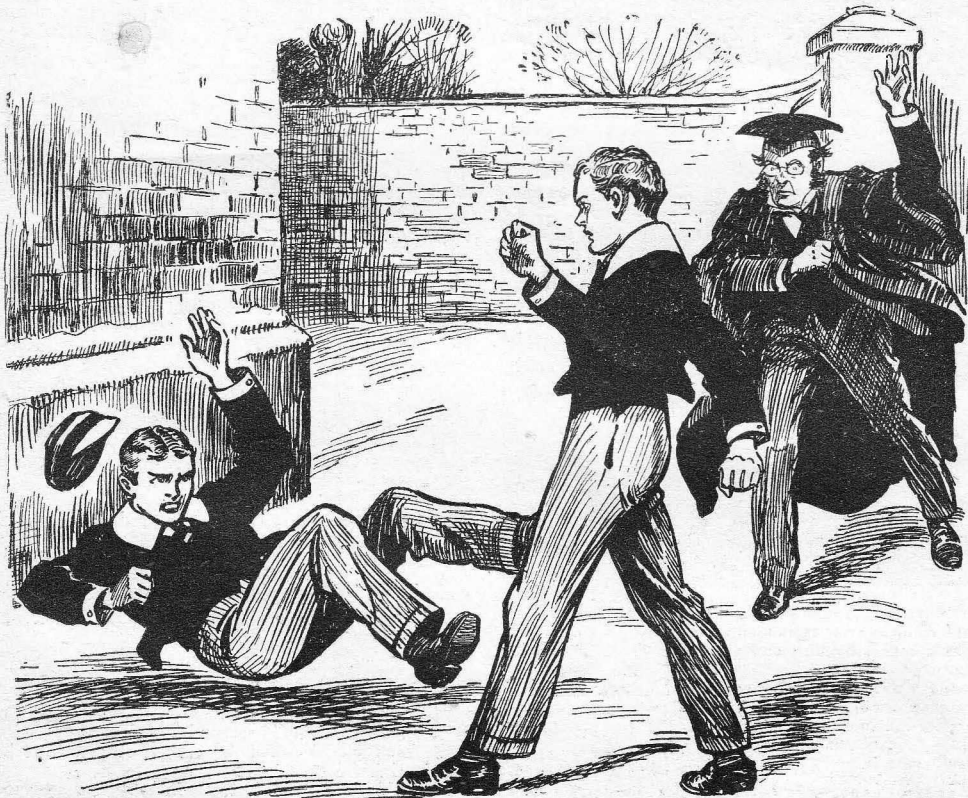
Audrey Racke's eyes gleamed. It really looked as if he had a chance at last of repaying his ancient grudge.

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins in a Fix!

**F**IGGINS of the Fourth came into his study in the New House, his rugged face quite pale, and his eyes gleaming.

Kerr and Wynn stared at him. They had never seen George Figgins look quite like that before.



"Cardew! Merry!" It was Mr. Ratcliff's acid voice. "Cease this at once! How dare you!" Bump! Cardew went down on his back, gasping, as the New House master rustled up.

Fatty Wynn was busy cooking sausages for tea. Fatty was a great chef; but the expression on Figgy's rugged face made his fat chum forget even the important task of preparing tea in the study.

"What's happened, Figgy?" asked Kerr.

"Ratty!" said Figgins, between his teeth.

"What did Ratty want you for, Figgy?"

"The cad!" muttered Figgins.

"Who? Ratty?"

"The filthy beast!"

"Who?"

"The skinny reptile!"

Figgins spared in the air with his clenched fists. He had to relieve his feelings somehow. His looks showed that he would have liked Mr. Ratcliff's acid countenance to be within hitting distance just then.

"But what has he done?" asked Kerr in wonder.

"The rotten beast!" hissed Figgins. "You'll hardly believe it. You know my dog—old Spot?"

"Ratty can't have been ragging about him. He hasn't caught Spot in the study since last week," said Kerr.

"He wants me to get rid of him, or have him destroyed!" yelled Figgins. "He says Spot's a nuisance, and tried to bite him yesterday. I wish he had done!"

"Poor old Spot!" said Kerr. "It's hard cheese, old chap!"

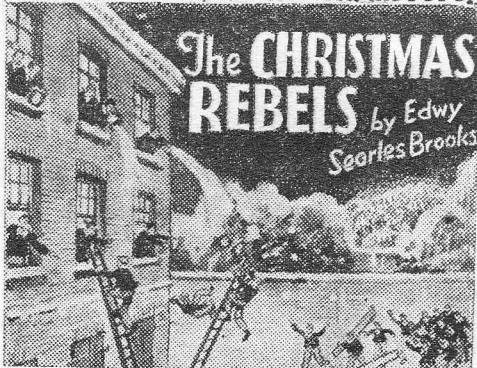
Figgins glared.

"Do you think I'm going to do it?" he hooted.

"I'll see Ratty blown first! I'll be sacked from the school first! Let me catch anybody laying a paw on my dog! I'll brain him with a cricket stump!"

"I don't see what you can do, old fellow," said Kerr. "If you don't get it done Ratty will order Taggles to take him away."

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"Let Taggles touch him, that's all!" said Figgins ferociously. "There'll be a new porter wanted at the school afterwards!"

"But you can't—"

"Whether I can or not, I'm going to!" said Figgins. "The question is—how are we going to get out of it? That's what we've got to consider. Look here, Kerr, it's up to you to think it out—set your blessed Scotch brain to work on it."

Kerr grinned. The Scottish junior, as a matter of fact, did most of the thinking that was done in Figgins' study, and Figgins had absolute faith in his sagacity. But this was a knotty problem for Kerr.

"What about asking a School House chap to mind him?" asked Fatty Wynn.

Figgins snorted.

"Ratty's thought of that. He's going to see that Spot is removed from the school."

Figgins eyed Kerr anxiously. Figgy was feeling inclined to take the most desperate measures to keep his dumb pal, but it was really upon Kerr's sagacity that he relied.

A grin broke over Kerr's thoughtful face at last; and Figgins' face brightened as if by the reflection.

"Got it?" he asked eagerly.

"I think so," said Kerr. "You'll have to sell him."

Figgy's face fell.

"Sell him? Fathead!"

"That's it. You've got to sell him to a School House chap. If you sell him, say, for a half-penny—"

"A halfpenny!" said Figgins with a stare.

"Yes; that will make it a sale, you see. No law against taking as little as you like for a dog. And Tom Merry or Blake or Gussy would buy him like a shot, and agree not to exercise any rights of ownership. You could trust them."

"Oh!" ejaculated Figgins.

He understood now.

"That sees you clear," said Kerr. "You sell him, and he belongs to Tom Merry, say; and Ratty won't be able to touch him. The new ownership will only be nominal. But you needn't explain that to Ratty."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

He gave his chum a terrific slap on the shoulder to show his appreciation, and Kerr gave a yell.

"Yow-ow! You ass!"

Figgins rushed out of the study. He crossed the dusky quadrangle like the wind, and sped into the School House.

He ran up the stairs three at a time and raced along the junior passage till he was suddenly seized by three pairs of hands and stopped.

"New House bouncer! Bump him!"

Bump!

And Figgins sat on the passage floor, and Cardew, Clive, and Levison grinned down at him.

"No dogs or New House bouncers admitted," said Cardew.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins sat and gasped.

"Give him another!" chuckled Clive.

"Pax, you duffers!" gasped Figgins.

He held up his hand in a sign of peace as he regained his feet.

Study No. 9 graciously forbore to pursue hostilities.

"Anything the matter?" asked Levison, noting for the first time the signs of disturbance in Figgins' face.



"Yes! You'll do, Clive!" said Figgins.  
 "Eh? I'll do for what?" asked the South African junior in surprise.

"To buy my dog."  
 "My hat! I don't want to buy your dog!"  
 Figgins hastily explained; then Sidney Clive nodded at once.  
 "I'll do it like a shot!" he said. "No danger of Railton doing anything of the sort in this House. I suppose it had better be a genuine sale. I'd better hand you a tanner—"

"A halfpenny will do," grinned Figgins, "and another halfpenny for the kennel I keep him in. I know you're as straight as a string, Clive. You don't mind calling my dog your dog. Though, of course, it would be your dog, as far as that goes. Of course, I'll look after him and feed him and clean him and take him out for walks; you needn't bother about him at all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "I understand," said Clive. "He's going to be my dog, but you'll take all the trouble of him—eh? And I shan't claim him, of course."

Figgins chuckled.  
 "You're a good sort!" he said. "Hand over the cash."

Clive extracted a penny from his pocket and handed it over to the New House junior.  
 "Thanks!" said Figgins. "Now, as a separate transaction entirely, I'll lend you this penny till your hundredth birthday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 Figgins handed the penny back, and Clive chortled and slipped it into his pocket again.

"Now you'll be able to explain that Spot's your dog," said Figgins. "You fellows are witnesses."  
 "Yes, rather!" Levison said.  
 And Cardew nodded.

And Figgins, having found so suitable a purchaser for his dog, returned to his own House in cheerful spirits to acquaint his chums of the good news.

CHAPTER 5.  
 Uphill Work!

"YOU fellows coming?"  
 Tom Merry asked the question the following afternoon, a half-holiday.

The Terrible Three came out of the School House in sports coats and grey flannels, and Study No. 6 followed them, similarly attired.

Julian and Reilly and Kangaroo joined them on the steps. Levison, Clive, and Cardew were chatting in the doorway, and it was to them Tom addressed his remark.

"That depends," said Levison. "Where are you off to?"

"We're going to the pictures at Abbotsford," said Tom. "You fellows coming along?"

"Not this time. We're going for a spin."  
 "Right-ho! Come on, Talbot!"

Talbot of the Shell came out and joined Tom Merry & Co.

Mellish of the Fourth was lounging on the steps. He glanced curiously at Levison & Co. as the rest of the juniors departed, and then went into the House.

Ralph Reckness Cardew glanced at his watch and yawned.

"About time we were off," he remarked.  
 "May as well get the machines out," said Clive, with a nod.

"Better give those chaps time to clear, though,"

Levison remarked. "We don't want to run into them!"

"Yes, that's so!"  
 Mellish, in the hall, heard those remarks, and he grinned. He hurried up the stairs to Racke's study. Racke and Crooke were there.

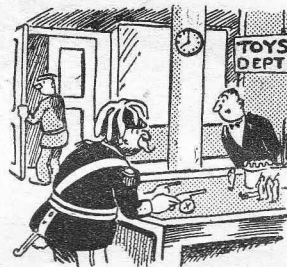
"They're just off," said Mellish. "If you want to run them down, you've only to get your bikes out, and wait at the gates for them."

"Rotten fag!" yawned Crooke.  
 But Racke started to his feet, and threw his cigarette away.

"Come on, Crooke!" he said. "We don't want to lose a chance like this!"  
 "Oh, all right!"

Crooke followed Aubrey Racke from the study. They passed the chums of Study No. 9 on the steps of the School House, and went round to the shed for their machines. They wheeled their bicycles down to the gates, and there they stopped, leaning on the machines and chatting.

Tom Merry & Co. had disappeared from sight down the road. About ten minutes later Levison,



"Sorry, sir, you'll have to suspend hostilities—it's closing time!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to K. Edwards, 5, Rectory Terrace, South Gosforth, Newcastle.

Clive, and Cardew came out with their bicycles, and mounted them in the road.

Clive glanced at the two slackers in the gateway and smiled.

"Waiting to get steam up?" he said.  
 "Oh rats!" said Racke politely.

The three juniors rode off in the direction of Rylcombe, and Racke and Crooke mounted at once and pedalled after them.

"Easy enough," Racke remarked. "We've only got to keep them in sight. Hallo! Levison's looking round. He's spotted us!"

"Let him!" grinned Crooke. "He can't prevent us riding where we like."

"No fear!"  
 Levison had lost none of his old keenness in his new way of life. That one glance behind was enough to tell him that Racke and Crooke were shadowing the party.

"Look back!" he said.

Clive and Cardew glanced back.  
 "They're following us."

"Inquisitive asses!" growled Clive. "Let's give them a run. They'll crack up in ten minutes if we put on speed."

Cardew burst into a laugh.  
 "Good egg!" he said.

And they rode on.

Wherever it was that the three Fourth Formers were going, they evidently did not want to disclose their destination to Racke and Crooke. They rode on, and turned into another lane, which led up the steep slope of a hill. It was not their intended

direction, but Levison's idea was that by the time the two weedy slackers behind reached the top of the hill they would be sorry that they had started.

The three plodded their way steadily up the rise. Behind them came Racke and Crooke. But the pursuers laboured painfully over their handle-bars. Too many cigarettes in the study had told upon their wind. They were soon gasping like landed fish, and riding in spasmodic jerks.

"My hat! I—I can't stand much more of this!" panted Crooke. "Groogh!"

Racke was panting, too.

"Hang it! Hallo! They're getting down!" he exclaimed. "We can walk the rest."

On the top of the rise in the road, half a mile ahead, but plain to see against the clear sky, they could discern three dismounted cyclists. For reasons best known to themselves, Cardew and his companions had halted to rest on the top of the hill.

Crooke and Racke jumped down and wheeled their machines on and upward. They expected the cyclists ahead to disappear every moment.

But the trio stood there, apparently admiring the scenery.

Wheeling the machines up was easier than pedalling them up, but Racke and Crooke had bellows to mend, with a vengeance, by the time they reached the top of the slope. They halted there, gasping and gasping as if they would never leave off gasping.

"Hallo!" said Clive cheerily. "You coming our way?"

"Looks like it!" panted Crooke.

"Bellows to mend, dear boy!" chuckled Cardew.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Levison put his leg over his machine.

"You fellows ready?" he asked. "Lovely bit here for free-wheeling."

"Ha, ha, ha! We're coming!"

To the amazement of Racke and Crooke, the three juniors remounted their machines and shot away down the same slope up which they had toiled.

The Shell fellows watched them in wonder.

"They—they—they're going back!" stuttered Crooke.

"Oh crumbs!"

Down the steep slope, free-wheeling, the three riders went at a fine speed. They vanished from the eyes of the fagged and perspiring slackers of the Shell. Racke ground his teeth.

"Oh, the rotters! Oh, hang them! They've spoofed us into climbing this rotten hill for nothing."

"Oh, confound them!" mumbled Crooke.

The two spies looked at one another in utter disgust. It was only too clear that they had been spoofed.

As for keeping up the pursuit, that was out of the question. Cardew & Co. were almost in Rylcombe Lane again by this time.

"What a rotten sell!" groaned Crooke. "You were a silly ass to come, Racke! You might have known they'd spot you. Oh dear!"

"Oh, don't jaw!" snarled Racke. "Let's get home!"

"I'm jolly well going to have a rest before I get on that dashed jigger again," growled Crooke. "My legs ain't made of iron."

It was half an hour before the two slackers mounted their machines again. And it was nearly another hour before they pedalled wearily up to St. Jim's.

Where Levison & Co. were by that time they

could not even guess. Evidently their little expedition had been a frost.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Something Like a Mystery!

"**B**AI Jove! That's Cardew's jigger!"

Tom Merry & Co. were riding homeward in the late afternoon after their visit to the pictures.

They wanted to get in before locking-up, and they had turned from the Abbotsford Road and taken a short cut. It saved a couple of miles on the ride, but it led over the hill, and on the steep road the juniors were wheeling their machines.

The road was bordered by fields and woods. A lonely cottage was standing back from the road. As the juniors glanced towards it, they observed three bicycles in the garden, leaning against a fence. And then Arthur Augustus uttered that remark.

Cardew's handsome, expensive jigger was easily recognisable. The grandson of Lord Reckness had the best of everything that money could buy, and his handsome bicycle was well known.

"By Jove! That's Cardew's machine right enough!" said Talbot. "The others must be Levison's and Clive's. They're here."

"Hallo, there's Cardew!" said Julian.

In the doorway of the cottage a slim and shapely figure appeared in view for a moment. It was Cardew of the Fourth. His glance turned towards the road, and then, to the astonishment of the juniors, he darted back into the cottage out of sight.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"What's the name of that game, I wonder?" said Manners. "What has Cardew done the vanishing trick like that for?"

"Goodness knows!"

Tom Merry looked perplexed.

"Did he see us?" asked Reilly.

"Yaas wathah!"

"But he didn't know we saw him, and he scooted," grinned Lowther. "Gentlemen, I think we'd better get on. When a fellow jumps out of sight like a giddy kangaroo, the inference is that he doesn't want to be seen."

"There's somebody watching us from the window, keeping behind the curtains," said Blake.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry abruptly.

"I say, this is dashed queer!" said Kangaroo.

"Is Levison up to his old games? And has he drawn Clive and Cardew into it?"

"Cardew wouldn't want much drawing for one," said Blake. "He goes to Racke's study to play nap—or he did, anyway. I'm surprised at Clive, though."

"It can't be as you think," said Talbot.

"Cardew certainly seems to be keeping a secret, but I know Levison is dead straight now. There's nothing going on here that we mightn't see."

"What did Cardew dodge out of sight for, then?" grunted Herries.

Talbot shook his head. It was too deep a problem for him, and he gave it up.

"He's still watching us," said Blake, with a curling lip. "Let's get off. We don't want to be mixed up in their blessed secret, whatever it is."

The juniors wheeled their bikes up the hill, silent and thoughtful. They mounted at the top and rode on to the school.

They reached St. Jim's as dusk was gathering, and found Figgins & Co. waiting at the gate.

Figgins was looking anxious.

# LAUGH THESE OFF!

—with Monty  
Lowther.



Hallo, Everybody!

**Uncontrolled laughter is bad for the health, states a medical authority. Don't let anybody see you reading this column!**

"What did you think of the party?" asked Curly Gibson of the Third of Jameson. "Not much," said Jameson. "It struck me as giggle, gabble, gobble, and git!"

**An amateur gardener wants to know how to distinguish flowers from the weeds. Just hoe everything out of the bed, old chap, and what comes up will be weeds!**

News: In assessing the ratepayers at a Wayland Council meeting, the town clerk calculated that thirty-three pence equalled three and ninepence. The town clerk was evidently an ex-waiter!

**Tit-bit: I hear a man is to be fired out**

"Clive with you?" he asked, as the crowd of School House fellows wheeled their machines in.

"No," said Tom Merry, somewhat dryly.

"Oh blow!" said Figgins. "I want him. Cardew or Levison, then?"

"Neither of them."

"Do you know where they are?"

"Can't say exactly," said Tom. "What the dickens do you want them for, Figgins? Have you chummed up with Cardew?"

"Fathead! I've sold Clive my dog," said Figgins. "Ratty told me to come to his study at six, and I know what it's for. He'll want to ask Clive about it."

"I dare say he'll be along soon," said Tom.

"Sold your dog!" exclaimed Herries. "I thought you were fond of him, Figgins."

Herries indulged in a slight sniff. Untold gold would not have purchased Towser, Herries' ferocious favourite.

"It's a little game," explained Figgins. "Ratty's ordered me to get rid of him, or have him destroyed, so I've sold him to Clive."

Herries drew a deep breath.

"Lucky I'm not a New House chap!" he remarked.

"Yes, rather! He'd have ordered you to have poor old Towser done in."

"I don't mean that. I mean I should brain him with a ruler!" said Herries. "A Housemaster like that ought to be boiled in oil. What's he doing in a civilised country, I'd like to know? Br-r-r-r!"

And, with a growl that was not unlike Towser, Herries tramped on.

*of a gun for a distance of 250 yards. If all goes well he will then be employed by a firm of debt collectors to visit people with outstanding accounts.*

BANG! Oh, you're been had before. You didn't even jump.

**"London Club's New Forward Scores £14,000 Goal." At that price some of the poorer clubs won't be able to afford any goals at all this season.**

A reader inquires if I can appreciate what good crooning is? No, what good is it?

**After all, anybody can ride a mule if he likes. And if the mule likes, too!**

Third Form flash: "In what battle was King Harold killed by an arrow through the eye?" asked Mr. Selby. "In the last battle he fought," replied Wally D'Arcy, after consideration.

**I got this from Kerr: There was once a Scot who said he liked his new wireless set very much, but he found the wee light verra hard to read by.**

Keep your seats: "I fell overboard," explained the one-legged sailorman to Grundy on holiday, "and a shark came along and grabbed me by the leg." "What did you do?" asked Grundy. "I let him have it," replied the old salt. "I never argue with sharks!"

**Back next Wed., chaps!**

Figgins & Co. remained at the gates, watching the road in the thickening dusk.

Taggles had come out of his lodge, jingling a bunch of keys, when three cyclists, riding hard, came whizzing into sight at last. They jumped down, and rushed their machines in before Taggles had time to shut the gates.

"Just done it!" exclaimed Clive breathlessly.

"Good luck!" said Levison. "Sorry, Taggles! You won't have to report us this time. I sympathise with you!"

Taggles grunted and slammed the gate.

Figgins stopped Sidney Clive as he came in.

"You'll be wanted soon," he said. "I've got to go in to Ratty now. Keep yourself handy in case you're wanted as a witness."

"Right you are!" said Clive, laughing.

Six o'clock was tolling out from the old clock tower. Figgins & Co. hurried back to their House, while Figgins made his way at once to his Housemaster's study.

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Dog's Chance!

MR. RATCLIFF gave George Figgins a severe glance as he presented himself.

It was one minute past six o'clock.

"I told you to come here at six precisely, Figgins!" he said acidly.

"Yes, sir."

"You will take fifty lines!"

"Yes, sir," said Figgins, suppressing his feelings.

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"You are probably aware of the reason I sent for you," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Have my instructions been carried out?"

"Ahem!"

"I commanded you, Figgins, to get rid of the useless animal you have been keeping. Have you done so?"

"Yes, sir. I've sold him."

"Have you sold him outside the school?" asked Mr. Ratcliff suspiciously.

"N-no, sir! A School House chap—"

"Figgins!"

"Clive's very fond of dogs, sir," said Figgins. "I've sold him to Clive of the Fourth."

Mr. Ratcliff compressed his lips.

"This is mere subterfuge, Figgins! You mean that you have nominally handed your dog over to a School House boy in order to evade my instructions?"

Figgins was silent. As a matter of fact, that was what the transaction did amount to.

"I shall not allow this!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "I refuse to take any notice of this pretended sale. I shall myself see that the dog is got rid of."

"Clive would object, sir!" gasped Figgins. "It's his dog!"

"I shall not allow him to object!" said Mr. Ratcliff icily.

"He—he will complain to his Housemaster, sir."

"Boy," thundered Mr. Ratcliff, "take a hundred lines, and leave my study at once!"

Figgins, with gleaming eyes, quitted the study.

Kerr and Wynn were waiting for him in the passage, but he did not stop. He ran out into the quad and across to the School House. He rushed into Study No 9 like a cyclone.

"Clive!" he gasped.

"Hallo!" said the South African junior coolly. "Don't knock the tea-table over, my son! What's the row?"

"Ratty—the beast—the rotter—the cad—the pig—" Figgins stuttered incoherently.

"Go it!" said Cardew.

"He's going to get rid of my dog!" gasped Figgins. "It's your dog now, Clive. Have you got nerve enough to go to your Housemaster about it? Railton wouldn't let him!"

"You bet!" exclaimed Clive, jumping up.

"He's going down to the kennels now, I believe!" groaned Figgins. "I can't stop the brute, Clive, but you could!"

"Leave it to me, old chap!"

Sidney Clive dashed out of the study. He did not stay for his cap.

Levison and Cardew, a little alarmed, followed him. Figgins remained in the study at the window. He was keeping an eye on the gates. If Mr. Ratcliff went out with his dog Figgins was going to stop him, if he was expelled from St. Jim's within ten minutes afterwards.

Clive arrived breathless at the kennels. His comrades were at his heels. But Spot was blinking peacefully on his chain, and the New House master was not to be seen.

"Not here yet, anyway!" panted Clive.

"Here he comes!"

Mr. Ratcliff came round the buildings, with a frowning brow.

He glanced at the juniors in the yard, and walked towards Spot's kennel.

Clive planted himself in front of it.

"Stand aside, boy!" rapped out the surprised Housemaster.

"That's my dog, sir!" said the Colonial junior quietly.

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"Stand aside! I intend to have that animal removed at once!" said the New House master angrily.

"I shall not allow it, sir!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"You have no right to touch my dog, and I shall appeal to Mr. Railton!" said Clive steadily. The New House master gasped with rage.

"Clive," he said in a choking voice, "you will follow me to your Housemaster at once!"

"I'm ready to do so, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff stalked furiously away, and Clive paused a moment to whisper to his chums.

"I don't know how it's going to turn out with Railton. Take care of the bow-wow, you chaps!"

Cardew chuckled softly.

"Leave it to us, old chap!"

Clive followed the Housemaster to Mr. Railton's study.

Mr. Railton and Mr. Lathom were both there, and they glanced in surprise at the New House master's furious face. In almost gasping accents Mr. Ratcliff poured out his grievance.

Mr. Lathom looked at the School House master oddly. It was not an easy problem for Mr. Railton to settle.

"If the dog is really Clive's, I cannot allow it to be interfered with, Mr. Ratcliff!" said the School House master firmly.

"It is a trick, a pretence, for the purpose of disregarding my authority in my own House!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Let the boy answer me! Clive, did Figgins give up his rights over the dog when he sold him to you?"

"He sold him," said Clive.

"Is it actually your dog, and are you at liberty to sell him to another person?"

"He is my dog."

"That is not a direct answer, Clive," said Mr. Railton gently. "You must answer Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Well, I shouldn't sell him to anybody else, of course," admitted Clive.

"In point of fact, you are simply keeping him for Figgins?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

Clive was silent.

"Will you give your word of honour that this is a genuine sale, and not a trick designed to defy my authority?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

No reply.

"You see for yourself, Mr. Railton! It is a trick!"

"I am afraid, Clive, I must take Mr. Ratcliff's view," said the School House master reluctantly. "I do not blame you, my boy, but I cannot recognise this transaction. You must give up the dog!"

Mr. Ratcliff strode from the study at that.

Clive made a movement to follow, but his Housemaster detained him, gently enough.

"Remain here," he said.

Clive, with burning cheeks, remained.

Mr. Ratcliff rustled out of the School House and hurried down to the yard. He reached the kennel and stooped to release Spot's chain to take him away. Then he gave a jump. The chain was gone, and the dog! The kennel was empty!

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

He glared round the yard, but there was no sign of Spot.

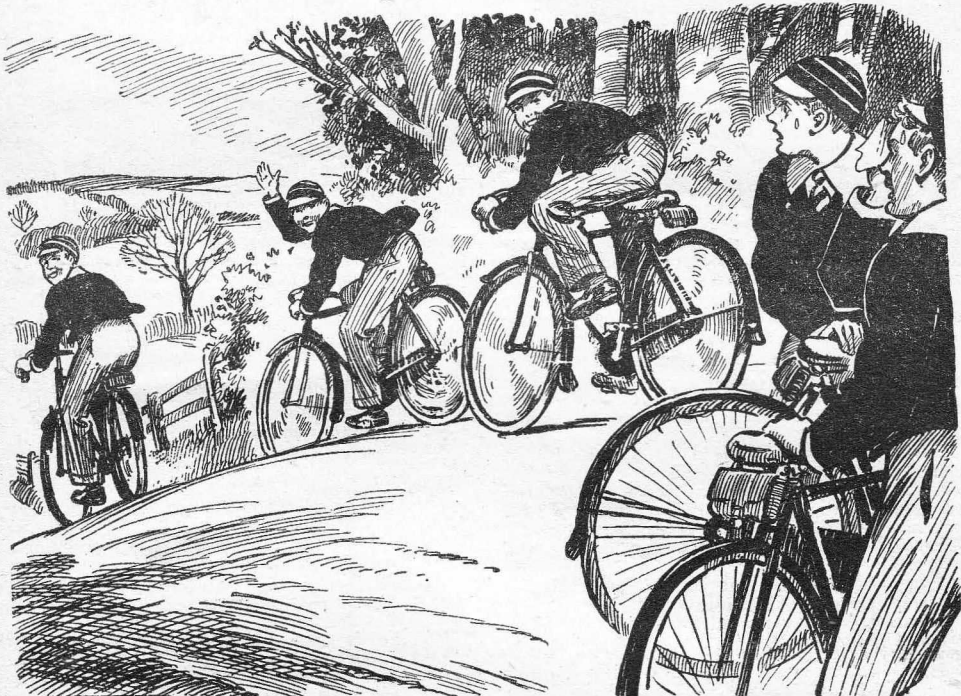
Figgins' dog had vanished. Like the Boojum in the story, he had "suddenly, silently vanished away," and Mr. Ratcliff was left to cast angry glares at the empty kennel.

CHAPTER 8.  
The Life-savers!

**F**IGGINS looked round eagerly, as there was a footstep in the doorway of Study No. 9. It was Tom Merry who came into the study.

The captain of the Shell was smiling. "I've got a message for you, Figgy," he said. "From Clive?" "Never mind whom it's from," said Tom. "You'd better know nothing about the matter, so that you can tell Ratty so if he asks you. Spot is as safe as houses, and you can rely on that. Are you willing to let it go at that?" Figgins drew a deep breath. "You're sure of that?" he asked. "Quite sure. If anything else should turn up

"Figgins!" thundered the Housemaster. "Where have you placed your dog?" "In the kennel, sir." "The dog is not in the kennel now!" "Isn't he, sir?" "I am perfectly well aware, Figgins, that while I was with Mr. Railton you removed the dog!" "I did not, sir!" "Where were you at the time?" "In the School House, sir." "Can you prove that?" "I spoke to Tom Merry, sir, if it's necessary to prove it," said Figgins quietly. "Do you not know where your dog is now?" "I do not, sir, unless he's in his kennel." "He has been taken away!" said Mr. Ratcliff, breathing hard through his long, thin nose. "Indeed, sir?"



To the amazement of Racke and Crooke, Cardew & Co. remounted their machines and shot away down the slope up which the two spies had just toiled. "They—they're going back!" stuttered Crooke. "Oh crumbs!" gasped Racke.

you'll be told at once. But at present it would be safer for you not to know details."

"I catch on," said Figgins. "It's awfully good of you chaps to take all this trouble!"

"All serene!" said Tom.

Figgins grinned, and quitted the study. He could guess that Clive and his friends had formed some scheme for the safety of Spot and confided it to Tom Merry, and, so long as he could rely upon them, it was certainly safer for Figgy to know nothing.

Figgins returned to his own House, relieved in his mind. He joined Kerr and Wynn at tea; but the three juniors had scarcely started when the door was thrown open and Mr. Ratcliff whisked in.

"Did you request another boy to remove him, Figgins?"

"No, sir."

"Kerr and Wynn, do you know where the dog is?"

"No, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff, compressing his lips. "I must accept your statement, Figgins, but the matter will not rest here!"

And Mr. Ratcliff whisked out again.

Figgins snorted contemptuously.

"The skinny reptile!"

"But what's become of the merry bow-wow?" asked Kerr.

"Goodness knows!" said Figgins. "I've got

reason to believe that he's safe somewhere, but I don't know where. And I shan't know till this has blown over. Perhaps Ratty will get another bee in his bonnet later on, and let my dog alone."

And Figgins & Co. returned to their tea.

Meanwhile, a number of School House juniors were gathered in No. 9 Study in the other House.

Levison and Clive and Cardew were there with Tom Merry.

The four were smiling cheerfully. On the arm-chair reposed a diminutive canine form—that of Spot. He was blinking at the juniors, quite unaware of the peril that menaced his doggy existence.

"Well, here he is!" remarked Cardew. "Now, the question is—what's goin' to be done with him?"

"He'll have to be got out of the school," said Clive.

"But at present——"

"There's the box-room," said Levison. "We can stow him away there in an empty box, and put on a cord instead of a chain so that there won't be any noise to give him away. And the sooner the quicker. Ratty might come here."

"Yes, rather," said Tom. "I'll take him, if you like, and if Ratty should come in you fellows can be doing your prep."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Spot was persuaded into a bag, and the captain of the Shell left the study with him.

He carried him to the upper box-room, a corner where he was not likely to be found or suspected. There Spot was made comfortable, with an old coat for a bed, in a trunk belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, which was very roomy. There was no opportunity of asking Gussy's permission; that had to be taken for granted.

As Tom Merry came back to his own study he heard voices in Study No. 9.

He smiled as he recognised Mr. Ratcliff's voice.

The hunted animal had been taken away only just in time.

The Shell fellow went into his own study: he did not want to see Mr. Ratcliff.

In Study No. 9, Levison and Clive and Cardew had risen respectfully as the New House master came in.

The Housemaster eyed them sharply and suspiciously.

"I have reason to believe that Figgins' dog is hidden in this study!" he said angrily.

"Figgins' dog?" repeated Cardew.

"Yes. Is he here?"

"No, sir."

"I shall search the study!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Shall we turn out our pockets, sir?" asked Cardew meekly.

Mr. Ratcliff did not reply to that question. He proceeded to make a thorough examination of the study, the three juniors standing and watching him with twinkling eyes.

The search did not reveal anything of a canine nature, and the New House master quitted the study at last with lowering brows.

#### SPEED MERCHANT!

How's this for a cycling record, lads? When Cyril Hopleston rode from Edinburgh to London he broke the former record by 1 hour 6 minutes and put up the amazing average speed of 20 miles per hour for over 385 miles—and that includes many terrific hills. He used a Hercules for this ride, and certainly proved the super quality of these machines. Incidentally, over 570,000 Hercules Cycles were sold during the year ended December 25th, 1937. What an achievement!

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"Looks like a reverse for Ratty this time," remarked Cardew. "Cheery old sport, isn't he?"

It certainly was a reverse for Mr. Ratcliff. His next step was to visit Mr. Raitton and demand a search of the School House for the missing dog.

The School House master, who was not at all sorry to hear that the dog was missing, declined to allow anything of the sort, and hinted very plainly that he considered that his colleague was making a very absurd fuss about nothing.

So the defeated Ratty returned to his own House, and found what satisfaction he could in caning Figgins.

Figgins took his caning philosophically. He did not mind a caning or two, so long as Ratty's designs upon his dog were frustrated.

#### CHAPTER 9.

##### Under a Cloud!

"THERE seems to be something on among the fellows."

Levison made that remark as he came out of the School House with his studymates, a couple of days later, after lessons.

Clive and Cardew nodded.

They had noticed it.

Racke, Crooke, and Mellish and Trimble were in the porch, and they grinned as the three came out.

"Put a bob on for me!" said Racke.

"And spare a few of the smokes for me!" chuckled Mellish.

"What does that mean?" asked Levison quietly.

"Why don't you ask a chap to join your little party?" grinned Trimble. "It's greedy keeping it all to yourselves, and we're all sports here, you know."

"You silly fat duffer!" exclaimed Clive. "What do you mean?"

"He, he, he!" cackled Trimble.

The three juniors went out, and a few minutes later were seen wheeling their machines down to the gates. Quite a large number of eyes followed them.

Racke & Co. had been talking.

The mysterious expeditions of Study No. 9 were noted by all the juniors now, and Cardew's reckless character and Levison's old reputation gave some weight to Racke's insinuations.

Racke's version was that the three were going out to "play the giddy ox," in the old style of Ernest Levison.

On the occasion when he had spied on the chums, Racke had had nothing but an uphill ride for his pains; but that did not prevent him from spreading his suspicions. Racke took a virtuously indignant attitude. He was a "bit of a sport," and fellows looked down on him for it; but, at least, there was no humbug about him. It was time the humbugs of Study No. 9 were shown up, Racke asserted. And he was doing his best to show them up.

Tom Merry & Co. had heard the yarn, without comment. Tom would have spoken to the three about it at once, but for the fact that he had seen Cardew at the lonely cottage on the hill.

Cardew's conduct on that occasion had been secretive and suspicious, and Tom could not help recognising the fact, and Clive and Levison were in the same boat.

Tom decided that it was no business of his, and when he heard the whispers and rumours he kept his own counsel. His chums followed his example.

That afternoon the chums of Study No. 9 returned to the school just in time for calling-over.



**Detective Kerr  
Investigates**

No. 22.

**THE MYSTERY  
OF THE  
CHRISTMAS  
SHOPPING!**

SEVERAL St. Jim's fellows availed themselves of the opportunity of visiting the Christmas shopping centres whilst on a week-end trip to London as Gussy's guests—among them Baggy Trimble, who was uninvited. Afterwards, Trimble, the slacker, surprised everybody by offering a new football for auction—the ball, so he claimed, having been autographed by half a dozen international footballers who were visiting Oxbridge's Store. There were several bids for the ball, Gussy himself offering two pounds. Trimble decided to wait a day or two for a still better bid—and, meanwhile, "Detective" Kerr felt inspired to investigate.

KERR: Well, Blake, did you go round Oxbridge's, as you wanted to?

BLAKE: Yes, Gussy, Herries, and Dig, and myself went in almost every department, I should think. There were a wonderful lot of things to see—and buy!

KERR: You visited the sports section, of course?

BLAKE: Yes. We saw two internationals—Don Hobbs, the English centre-forward; and Jack Bloom, the sharp-shooting inside-left—

KERR: Get any autographs?

BLAKE: Yes, both of them; but the crowd was too big to get near the others. I'd have liked to have got the whole half-dozen, as Trimble did.

KERR: Yes, it was certainly Trimble's lucky day.

KERR: Grundy, I believe I saw you in Oxbridge's?

GRUNDY: I dare say you did. I took Wilkins and Gunn to see everything. I bought two new footballs and some boots. Gunn said my old boots were quite good enough for the type of football I play. Well, even if I do play

among juniors far beneath my class, I like to have new gear once in a while—  
KERR: Quite. You didn't see any of the internationals, I suppose?

GRUNDY: I saw six, I think. Oxbridge's had advertised they would be there. Jack Bloom was one of them, I believe. And Edgar Wade, the English goalkeeper. Or perhaps it was Jock Johnson, the Scottish 'keeper. I can't remember now. I noticed in the paper one or the other of them was crooked playing in a club match that day.

KERR: Didn't you get any autographs?

GRUNDY: No. I couldn't get near enough.

KERR: That's what Blake said, Grundy. Well, cheerio!

KERR: Oh, Merry, you saw the six internationals at Oxbridge's, I believe?

MERRY: Yes. There was Billy Clay, Herbert Miljoy, Danny Paynter, and Jock Johnson, I remember.

KERR: Weren't there six altogether?

MERRY: Yes, as advertised. They went on a stand and signed balls galore. I got the four I mentioned—but it seems Trimble was luckier.

KERR: How's tricks, Trimble? Sold your ball yet?

TRIMBLE: Not jolly likely! With those signatures, it's worth three quid, at least.

KERR: Let's have a look at it. These the autographs?

TRIMBLE: Yes—the six international players Oxbridge's advertised. Anybody buying a ball could get it autographed—Oxbridge's were giving the money for the balls to a special charity.

KERR: There are six signatures here all right, Trimble.

TRIMBLE: Well, is three quid too much?

KERR: Not for a ball autographed by Jack Bloom, Billy Clay, Edgar Wade, Don Hobbs, Danny Paynter, and Herbert Miljoy, certainly.

TRIMBLE: Those are the actual signatures, Kerr. What about spot cash?

KERR: I think you're on the spot—in a different way, Trimble. Wait a tick while I call Tom Merry—

*(What has Kerr discovered? Is there some deception about the autographed ball? See the solution on page 33.)*

When the fellows came out of Hall, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stopped the three in the passage.

There was an expression of portentous gravity on Gussy's noble face.

"I wish to speak to you on a wathah sewious subject, deah boys," he said. "Shall I come to your study?"

"Oh, go ahead!" said Cardew. "If it's a sermon we can hear it here. Chuck it at sixthly; life's short, you know."

"Pway be sewious! I am goin' to tell you what some of the fellows are sayin'. You are pprobably awah that the whole House has noticed how you wun off after lessons neahly ewevy day now."

"Awfully kind of them to interest themselves in us, I must say!"

"Some of the fellows are sayin' that you go out blaggin'."

Clive flushed.

"Who says that?" he exclaimed.

"Nevah mind who says it, deah boy. But it is spweadin' ovah the school. Of course, your pwivate affaihs do not mattah to anybody but yourselves, but as a fellow of tact and judgment, I wecommend you to explain, if there is weally nothin' in the yarn."

"If!" exclaimed Levison.

"Yaas, Levison."

"So you really think there is something?" exclaimed Clive.

"Weally, Clive, I have not formed an opinion. I sincerely trust that your visits to this lonely

cottage on Abbotsford Hill are quite wight and above board."

"What on earth do you know about the cottage?" exclaimed Cardew.

"You know vewy well we saw you there, Cardew, the day we were widin' home from Abbotsford," said Arthur Augustus icily.

"Oh! You did see me, then?" said Cardew. "Yaas!"

"I wasn't aware of it. You haven't mentioned it."

"It is not my bisney, deah boy, and I have not referred to it to anybody, of course—"

"You silly ass, you're doing it now!" growled Cardew. "There's Mellish listenin' to every word!"

"Oh rats!" said Mellish, walking away.

"Bai Jove! I did not see Mellish there! How-evah, if there is nothin' to be ashamed of in the mattah, there is no reason why Mellish should not heah—or anybody else, for that—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Cardew gruffly; and he walked away.

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Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Clive and Levison.

"I have spoken to you as a friend," he said. "I shall not refer to the matter again. But I recommend you to be frank in the matter, otherwise the fellows will only be able to form one opinion."

And Arthur Augustus walked away in a very dignified manner.

Clive and Levison followed Cardew. They understood now. But whatever their reason was they did not make the explanation Arthur Augustus had recommended.

Study No. 9 continued to keep their own counsel.

Percy Mellish had gone up to Racke's study, with a gleam in his eyes.

He found Racke and Crooke there, both engaged upon lines Mr. Linton had given them for slackness in class.

"What about that quid, Racke?" asked Mellish.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Racke. "You're not getting a quid from me. Try somebody else."

"Lodgey's been dunning me."

"Let him!"

"I've found out something," said Mellish. "I know where Cardew and that lot go on their giddy expeditions, and I could run them down and find out the whole game to-morrow, if I liked."

Racke laid down his pen.

"I'll stand a quid for that," he said. "Willing, too!"

"Right!" said Mellish. "If they go to-morrow, rely on me."

"How did you spot anything about it?" asked Crooke.

"Never mind that," said Mellish coolly. "I've my own ways, you know. You'll have the whole story to-morrow, Racke. And, more than that, I fancy Tom Merry knows all about it, and you can call him as a witness."

"By gum! I've noticed he's not said a word on the subject, and he was rather chummy with Clive, too. Good egg!" said Racke, rubbing his hands. "He knows, and he's keeping it dark, I suppose. By Jove, it will be a show up all round!"

And that happy prospect quite consoled Aubrey Racke for the two hundred lines he had to do for the master of the Shell.

## CHAPTER 10.

### An Amazing Discovery!

**A**FTER lessons on Saturday Percy Mellish was on the watch.

Immediately dinner was over he strolled down to the school gates and waited there.

It was about half an hour later that he spotted Cardew, Levison, and Clive crossing the quad towards the gates.

They were on foot this time, and Cardew carried a large, closed basket. That big basket somewhat puzzled Mellish. It was too cold for an outdoor picnic.

The cad of the Fourth wondered what was in the carefully closed basket.

Tom Merry bore down on the three in the quadrangle.

"Hold on a minute, you fellows!" he called out.

"Hold on's the word!" said Levison cheerily.

"You're going out?"



"Yes."  
 Tom's lips set a little.  
 "We've got football practice," he said. "If you want a show at footer, Levison, you can't cut the practice. Same to you, Clive."  
 "Oh!" said Levison. "But we've arranged to go out this afternoon."  
 "You seem to arrange to go out every half-holiday, and nearly every day, after lessons," said Tom Merry dryly. "I believe Gussy's told you what is being said about it, so I needn't mention that. You'd do better, in my opinion, to practice with the other chaps."

Tom Merry walked away without waiting for a reply.

Cardew laughed, and Clive and Levison looked uncomfortable.

"This is a bit rotten," said Clive, in a low voice. "I suppose it's all due to Racke, but—"  
 "Oh, rot!" said Cardew. "Let 'em think what they like. Come on!"

The three Fourth Formers went out of the gates, Cardew smiling, and his two companions with somewhat clouded faces.

They glanced at Mellish, who strolled away in the opposite direction.

Mellish did not need to follow on the track of the three. From what he had heard Arthur Augustus say, he knew what their destination was.

He waited till Levison & Co. were out of sight before he followed them. He had been over to Abbotsford Hill often enough, and he knew the only building to which D'Arcy's reference could apply.

It was more than an hour later when Mellish, breathless from his tramp up the hill, came in sight of the lonely cottage by the roadside.

Keeping in cover of the trees that grew along the fence, Mellish surveyed the cottage.

He was quite sure that the three juniors were there by this time, and he had proof of it in a few minutes.

Cardew came out of the cottage carrying a large wicker chair.

Mellish squeezed himself behind a trunk and watched the garden through the privet hedge.

Cardew placed the big chair by a tree. He placed a footstool before it, and a cushion on the back. Then he returned into the cottage.

Mellish continued to watch, in a very puzzled mood.

"My hat!" he murmured suddenly, under his breath.

Clive and Levison came in sight in the cottage porch.

They were not alone, however. They were assisting an old man, who walked between them. One glance at him was sufficient to show his affliction. He was blind.

Mellish stared blankly through the hedge. What did it mean?

The two juniors led the old gentleman to the chair, and he sat down.

Cardew came out with a rug, and placed it over the old fellow's knees.

After him a dog came frisking, and Mellish recognised Figgins' dog Spot. He could guess now what had been in the big basket.

"My hat!" murmured Mellish.  
 "That all right, sergeant?"

Mellish could hear what was said in the garden. It was Levison who spoke, and Mellish would never have dreamed that Levison's somewhat hard and cynical voice could become so kind in tone.



## PROFESSOR SKIMPOLE'S HOROSCOPE

This Week :

### WALLY D'ARCY (OF THE THIRD).

"CHRISTMAS is a-coming, geese are getting fat—here comes old Skimpole to talk through his hat!" chanted Walter Adolphus D'Arcy—D'Arcy minor, Gussy's young brother in the Third. "On the contrary, D'Arcy minor, I have decided to include you as a subject in my astrological series," I announced. "But isn't casting a horoscope the same thing as talking through your hat, Skimmy?" insisted Wally, with a mischievous grin. "I don't think so," I replied, "and perhaps you won't, either, when I have consulted the stars on your behalf!" "Better begin with the founder of the family, Sir Guillaume Odo D'Arcy, who came over with the Conqueror in 1066," said Wally solemnly. "He was born on September 8th, 1032—" "Your own birthday will do very well, for a start, D'Arcy minor," I said gently.

Born under the sign of Pisces, the Fishes (birthdays February 19th to March 20th), Wally D'Arcy is under the kindly influence of the Sun. He is naturally of a fearless disposition, one who will fight hard and who will usually succeed in removing obstacles from his path. Renown should be his just reward. "You must be careful of taking risks," I warned him. "If anything, you are a shade reckless."

"Well, perhaps getting up that snowman like Mr. Selby—with one of old Selby's own mortar-boards perched on its napper—was a bit reckless," admitted Wally. "When Selby spots it under his study window there's bound to be trouble. But I think it will be worth it—if we can catch sight of old Selby's face while the expression lasts! Ha, ha, ha!" I left Wally D'Arcy and his chums convulsed with laughter. I fear D'Arcy minor's reckless spirit has yet to be curbed—if it ever is!

"Must be some giddy relation of Levison's!" murmured the astounded spy. "This beats the whole band, by gum!"

"Yes, thank you, Master Levison." The old gentleman's voice was still strong and hearty. "Where's the dog?"

"Here he is, sir!" said Cardew. Spot rubbed his black muzzle on the old gentleman's leg, and the sergeant, as Levison called him, bent and stroked the dog.

"You'll like him, sergeant!" said Clive cheerily.

"I'm glad to have him, sir," said the sergeant. "I've been offered a dog, but it ain't so easy to keep the licence paid. But if the young gentleman would like me to give him a home for a bit, why, I'd be glad. He'll get on with me, you can rely on that. Dogs know who like 'em and who don't."

"Then we'll leave him with you," said Levison. "Of course, we're going to make the arrangements about his grub, and Figgins will see to the licence when it's due again, if he hasn't had him back by then."

"Spot looks pretty cheery here, too," said Clive. "Figgins can come out here on his bike and see him, too. You won't mind our friend coming along sometimes, Sergeant Brockway?"

"I'll be pleased and honoured, sir. I'm sure it's very kind of you young gentlemen to come as you do. Neighbours are very good, but it's a bit lonely till my boy comes home."

"But he's coming?" asked Levison.

The old gentleman's face brightened up.

"Oh, yes, he's coming. He's been invalided out of the service and he may be home any day. He's lost a leg in Palestine, poor Dick! But that's not so bad as leaving your sight in Flanders. Dick will get about all right, and what with his pension and mine, and the garden, we shall get along comfortably. And he won't find his old father useless lumber, either. It's amazing how you can get used even to being blind. I'm as good a gardener as ever I was, when the rheumatics will let me. Dick and me'll be all right when Dick comes home."

"We shall be jolly glad to see Dick!" said Clive, smiling.

"What would you like to hear, sergeant?" asked Cardew. "The war news from China and Spain?"

"I don't mind," said the sergeant.

Cardew opened his paper, and sat on a stool, and began to read. His low, clear voice was the only sound heard in the garden there, save a clink or two from a hoe Levison was using.

Levison was weeding the garden.

Mellish stepped quietly away.

He was utterly disgusted at the discovery he had made—not at all the kind of discovery he had expected to make. But even his hard face was a little softened as he stole silently away.

That was the secret, after all—that was the mysterious business that drew Study No. 9 away from the school day after day. Cardew, the reckless scapegrace; Levison, the reformed black-guard, were devoting their leisure to comforting a blind old soldier till his son came home to care for him.

"By gad!" murmured Mellish a dozen times, as he tramped homeward. "By gad! What will Racke say?"

Mellish was amazed, and he knew how amazed Racke would be, and it soon occurred to him that Racke would be incredulous, too. The black sheep of the Shell simply would not believe such a story. And by the time he reached the school it also occurred to Mellish that, even if he could convince Racke, that shady youth certainly would not part with a quid for such information. That was not at all the kind of information Racke was expecting, and undoubtedly it was not worth the quid Mellish needed so badly.

Mellish was looking very thoughtful as he went into the School House.

Racke, of the Shell met him in the passage. He had been waiting for the Fourth Former to come in.

"Well?" he said.

"All serene," said Mellish. "Come up to the study."

Racke followed him eagerly. By the time they reached Racke's study, Mellish had quite made up his mind as to the story he would tell.

Racke closed the door, and regarded him inquiringly.

"You've seen them?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Where, then?"

"At the cottage on Abbotsford Hill."

"And what were they up to?"

Mellish held out his hand.

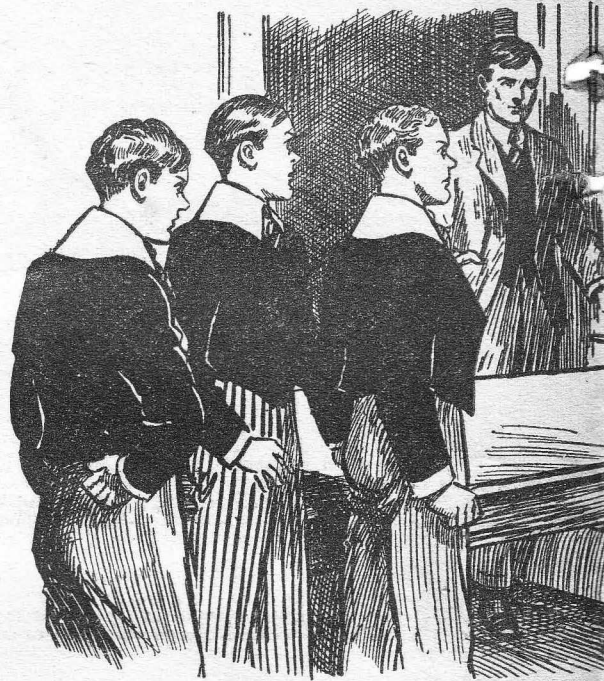
"You owe me a quid first," he said laconically. Racke sneered.

"Let's hear first whether it's worth it," he said.

"If you haven't found anything out, you can whistle for your quid!"

Mellish's eyes glittered.

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"You were gambling, drinking, and smoking in the garden of  
"By gad!" exclaimed a voice at the door. "That's a pretty

"I watched them in the garden," he said calmly. "There was a regular gang of them—boozy bouncers, worse than Lodgey at the Green Man. They were playing nap, and Levison was winning hands down."

"Just his style!" grinned Racke. "He used to win from me, lots of tin. I wondered what he was doing without it. He's found somebody else to pluck. I might have guessed that."

"What about Cardew and Clive?" asked Racke.

"They were in it, of course. Cardew was keen as mustard. Clive did not seem so jolly keen about it, though."

Racke nodded. He would have expected to hear that. As a matter of fact, that was why Mellish had put his story in that form.

"And Levison was drinking, as well as smoking," pursued Mellish. "I dare say he will be smelling of it when he comes home."

"He did once before," chuckled Racke. "My hat! What a show up!"

"Look here, don't mention my name, though," said Mellish anxiously. "That chap Clive is rather too handy with his fists."

"You needn't be afraid," said Racke contemptuously. "But I'm not afraid of him, and I'll show the whole set of them up before all the Common-room."

"What about that quid?" smiled Mellish.

"You're always sponging on me," growled Racke. "Look here, when are you going to settle up what you owe me already?"

"Never mind that. Are you going to lend me the quid or not? You promised you would."

"Oh, here you are!" said Racke scornfully. And he flung a currency note on the table.



of the cottage on Abbotsford Hill!" said Rake venomously.  
 petty story!" Knox of the Sixth strode into the Common-room.

Mellish picked it up, and left the study without another word. But his eyes were glittering. If he had had any compunction about the deception he had practised, Rake's manner quite dispelled it. Rake was about to bring an unfounded charge against the chums of Study No. 9, and if it resulted in the defeat and humiliation of Aubrey Rake, it would leave Percy Mellish quite dry-eyed.

#### CHAPTER 11.

##### Nothing for Baggy!

**T**OM MERRY & CO. were coming in from footer practice when Levison and his companions returned.

The three looked a little tired and dusty after their walk. They noted that some of the footballers gave them curious glances, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy carefully avoided looking in their direction.

Figgins of the Fourth, however, joined them. Figgins had not liked Ralph Reckness Cardew, but he felt quite friendly towards him now. The protection Spot had found in Study No. 9 made all the difference.

"You fellows missed the footer," remarked Figgins.

"Other fish to fry," yawned Cardew.

"I've heard there's a yarn going round about you chaps," said Figgins in his frank way. "Of course, it's all piffle. But if I were you I'd find out who started it and punch his head!"

Cardew laughed.

"That's a tip," he remarked. "Too much fag, though."

"Well, I'll do it. But about my dog—I mean your dog, Clive," said Figgins. "Old Ratty isn't letting that drop. He's got the idea fixed in his head that Spot is hidden in the school, and he's been jawing to me over it again. I believe he wanted the School House searched, only Railton wouldn't hear of it."

"Good old Railton!" said Clive.

"But that isn't all," continued Figgins. "He had Knox over to see him this afternoon, and you know what Knox is—a beastly bully! He gets on with Ratty, as they're two of the same kidney. Well, Knox is a School House prefect, you know; and if Ratty gets him to chip in—"

"All serene!" said Levison reassuringly.

"Knox can search the School House from cellar to roof if he likes. We've found a man to mind him outside the school. You needn't be alarmed about him; Spot's all right. All you'll do is to pay for his keep; and if you'd like to go and see the dog, you can any time you like. Of course, you can't keep him in the school any longer."

"Sure the man's all right who's minding him?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Right as rain! He's an old soldier and fond of dogs, only he can't afford to keep one himself. He's jolly glad to have Spot and Spot's taken to him like a duck to water."

"Good egg!" said Figgins. "Of course, I'd like to have him about; but so long as he's happy and comfy, that doesn't matter much. When can I go and see him?"

"To-morrow, if you like. Take your Sunday walk along with us, and we'll take you there."

"You're a good chap, Levison!" said Figgins gratefully. "I'm awfully obliged to you fellows. I might have got sacked over it if I'd dealt with Ratty my way."

Figgins went off to the New House in great spirits.

Cardew was looking a little restive as he went to his study to tea with his chums.

"Blessed if I half like this!" he grunted. "This means Figgins getting to know the whole yarn."

"Well, that won't hurt," remarked Clive.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"We weren't going to say a word about it. Dashed fools to be playing such a mug's game, if you ask me!"

"Oh bosh!" said Clive. "Why, it was you first dropped on old Brockway and took us there."

"I was an ass for my pains!"

"Bow-wow!" said Levison. "Never mind Figgins knowing. He won't jaw if we ask him not to. But it's a bit rotten the fellows getting suspicious about our clearing off every other day. We can't very well explain."

Cardew uttered a sharp exclamation.

"For goodness' sake, no! Do you want to be paraded round the school as a Good Little Georgie who does kind actions? Keep your mouth shut, whatever they say."

"I mean to. But it's rotten, all the same. All the fault of that spying cad, Rake!"

The three juniors had finished their tea when there was a tap at the door, and Baggy Trimble came in.

The fat Fourth Former gave them a genial grin.

"You fellows have been having a high old time, I hear," he remarked.

"Oh, toppin'!" said Cardew.

"How much did you win?"

"Eh?"

"Didn't you win, Cardew?"  
Cardew stared at Trimble, and then burst into a laugh.

"Yes, I won," he said coolly. "What do you think of a hundred pounds, Trimble?"

Baggy Trimble's eyes opened wide.

"A hundred pounds!" he gasped.

"Rippin', wasn't it?" said Cardew, while Clive and Levison chuckled.

Baggy was evidently persuaded that Study No. 9 had been on the razzle that afternoon, and Cardew was cheerfully pulling his fat leg.

"Oh, my hat!" said Trimble. "You have all the luck, Cardew!"

"Yes, I'm considered rather a lucky chap."

"You could lend a chap a quid or two out of that?" hinted Trimble.

"Now, that's exactly what I can't do!"

"I say, Levison, you won a lot, too! You could lend a chap ten bob—"

"I'll lend you a thick ear if you don't buzz off!" growled Levison.

"Did you have any luck, Clive?"

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed the South African junior angrily. "Do you think I've been gambling, you fat duffer?"

Baggy gave him a fat wink.

"Oh, don't you try to spoof me!" he said. "I know all about it. Look here, I think you might lend me ten bob among you. I'm rather short of tin. Can you make it ten?"

"There's the door!" grunted Levison.

"Look here," said Baggy Trimble, his manner growing threatening, "you wouldn't like me to mention what I know to Kildare or Darrell!"  
Cardew rose to his feet.

"You can mention what you like to Kildare and Darrell," he remarked. "While you're about it, mention to Kildare that I pulled your fat ear!"

"Yaroooooh!" yelled Trimble. "Leggo! Ow!"

"And mention to Darrell that I kicked you out of the study."

Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Baggy Trimble fled along the passage; and Cardew closed the door after him, chuckling.

"That fat idiot will spread over the House what you've stuffed into him, Cardew!" said Clive.

"Let him!" said Cardew.

And he returned to his tea.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Shown Up!

LEVISON minor of the Third Form tapped at the door of Study No. 9 and looked in.

The fag's face was troubled and clouded.

"Trot in, kid!" said Levison major cheerily. "What's the merry problem now? Got old Eutropius with you?"

"It isn't lessons," said Frank, coming into the study. "I—I say, Ernie, don't you know what's going on?"

"World coming to an end?" grinned Levison.

But the fag did not smile.

"I—I heard them in the Common-room," he said. "Racke's there, and Crokee, and—and all the fellows. And—and they're saying—"

"Talkin' about us?" asked Cardew airily.

"Yes, and where you've been this afternoon," said Levison minor. "Ernie, I—I know you

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haven't been doing anything of the sort, but—but they're saying—"

Levison compressed his lips.

"It's all right, Frank. Only a mistake—or, rather, a lie. It all comes from Racke."

"I knew it wasn't true!" said Frank eagerly. "But—but you'll be able to prove that it isn't, Ernie?"

"I don't know about that," said Levison glumly. "Don't you worry, Frank!"

"We might as well go down," said Cardew, with a smile. "This is rather entertainin'."

Clive nodded, and the three juniors left the study, Frank Levison following them.

Levison and Clive both looked and felt troubled, but Cardew seemed to enjoy the situation. His manner was quite airy and nonchalant as he sauntered into the Junior Common-room with his hands in his pockets.

Most of the School House juniors were there, and there was a buzz of talk, and the glances that were cast upon the trio as they entered showed that they were the subject of it.

"Here they are!" giggled Trimble. "Here comes the merry blades!"

And there was a laugh.

Racke came forward, his eyes gleaming under his bent brows. The cad of the Shell had been waiting, and he was ready.

"Listen to me, you fellows!" he began.

"Pway dwy up, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You are weally a feahful bore, Wacke!"

"Listen to me!" repeated Racke fiercely. "I've got something to say for you all to hear. I'm going to show up a set of dashed hypocrites—fellows who are down on me for smoking, while they're playing a worse game themselves, on the quiet. And there's fellows here who know it as well as I do, and D'Arcy's one of them!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And Tom Merry's another!"

"Leave me out of the silly rot!" snapped the captain of the Shell.

"But I won't leave you out," sneered Racke. "Why have you kept me out of the footer? You don't want 'smoky sports,' so you said. Well, if you don't want 'smoky sports' on the playing field, there's three more you can cut out."

"What do you mean?" demanded Clive, clenching his hands.

"Let him run on," said Cardew. "This is gettin' interestin'. You're quite an entertainin' chap, Racke!"

"What are you going to accuse us of, then?" asked Levison.

"You've been sneaking out secretly, every day nearly," said Racke. "You went, as usual, this afternoon. You go to a cottage on Abbotsford Hill. And Tom Merry and half a dozen other fellows have seen you there, and never said a word about it!"

There was a buzz. All the juniors were interested now.

"Is that so, Tom Merry?" asked Gore of the Shell.

"He can't deny it!" sneered Racke.

"I've seen Cardew at the place Racke mentioned," said Tom shortly. "I believe Levison and Clive were with him. It was by chance. I've said nothing about it because it isn't my bisney. It isn't Racke's, for that matter, and I can't guess how he knows anything about it."

"They make keyholes in doors, you know," remarked Lowther.

And there was a general laugh.

"But there's no great crime in going to a cottage!" said Bernard Glyn. "A chap may go to a cottage and yet be honest, Racke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They go there to gamble, smoke, and booze!" said Racke deliberately.

"Rats!"

"I cannot ccredit that, Wacke!"

Clive flushed crimson, and made a stride towards Racke.

Cardew laughed.

"Hold on, Clive! I told you Racke was going to be entertaining. Any more counts in the indictment, Racke?"

"That's all," said Racke. "You dare not deny it. It's proved by an eye-witness."

"An eye-witness!" ejaculated Clive.

"Yes. You're clean bowled out!" said Racke contemptuously. "I made up my mind to show you up, and I've done it."

"I suppose it isn't true?" said Tom Merry, looking at the three.

"True!" said Clive fiercely. "Do you suppose it is, then?"

"I don't suppose anything. But you've been acting very queerly, and if you choose to be mysterious, that's your fault. What are you

making a mystery about it for?" said Tom Merry tartly.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway-explain to the fellows, Clive. Ewevybody here will take your word."

Clive hesitated.

"I cannot very well explain," he said at last. "But it's nothing of the kind that Racke supposes."

"It's not exactly a secret, either," said Levison. "But we don't want to talk about it."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, you know your own business best," said Tom Merry. "You know what conclusions the fellows will draw."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let 'em draw any giddy conclusions they like," drawled Cardew. "I'm not goin' to be put on my defence by a fellow like Racke. I know that."

"You spoke of an eye-witness, Racke," said Levison. "If an eye-witness saw us at the cottage he saw that there was nothing shady going on. Trot out your eye-witness!"

"Yes, I should like to see that merry eye-witness," remarked Cardew.

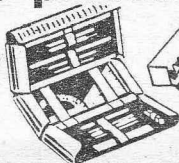
"It's Mellish," said Racke. "He saw them at it this afternoon."

(Continued on the next page.)

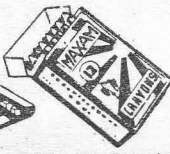
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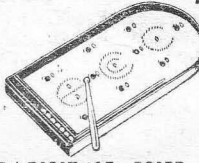
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"He saw us?" exclaimed Cardew.  
 "Yes. You were gambling, drinking, and smoking in the garden of the cottage on Abbotsford Hill!" said Racke venomously.

"By gad!" exclaimed a voice at the door. "That's a pretty story!" Knox of the Sixth strode into the Common-room. "What have you young rascals got to say?"

## CHAPTER 12.

### A Reverse for Racke!

**T**HERE was a sudden hush in the Common-room.

No one had seen the prefect at the door. He had heard every one of Racke's vicious words, and the matter was out now.

Racke, to do him justice, had not intended that; but it was done. No prefect was likely to let such a matter drop.

"I came here to see you, Clive," said Knox, with a grin. "I've got to ask you about a dog you're hiding in the House—against the rules. I seem to have stumbled on something a bit more serious."

"Yes, on a merry mare's nest," said Cardew coolly.

"You'll have to prove that," said the prefect. "Now, what's this about a cottage, and gambling and smoking? Where were you three kids this afternoon?"

Levison & Co. were silent.

"Well, it's out now," said Racke. "It's not my fault. I didn't know Knox was there."

"If it's true, it serves them jolly well right!" growled Jack Blake. "But I don't believe it, for one."

"Wathah not! Speak up, Clive!"

"You can answer me, or you can answer the Head," said Knox. "Now then, are you going to speak up? Tell me where you were this afternoon, Cardew, and what you were doing there."

Cardew hesitated a moment.

"We went for a little walk," he drawled at last.

"Where to?"

"Abbotsford Hill."

"To a cottage there?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To take a dog," said Cardew calmly. "The cheery canine you're inquiring after, Knox. You can tell Mr. Ratcliff that he's three miles away, quite safe, and in good company. I am sure Ratty will like to hear that, for he's so kind-hearted, and fond of dogs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox looked sharply at the three. Knox was not always able to carry out to the full his duties as a prefect because, being a good deal of a black-guard himself, he found it best to be on good terms with fellows like Crooke and Racke and Scrope, who knew some of his little secrets. But he was quite prepared to do his duty thoroughly in this case. He disliked all Study No. 9, and especially Levison, who, since his reform, had refused to perform any of the old shady services for him.

But Knox realised that it was necessary to be sure of the fact before he reported the matter to the Head. He did not want to put his foot in it.

The juniors were grinning now. Although it was plain that Racke of the Shell believed his accusation, it was quite probable that, judging others by himself, he had made a mistake.

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But for the secretiveness the three juniors had shown on the subject of their visits to the lonely cottage, Racke's accusation would have been regarded with contempt at once.

"You went there to take Figgins' dog?" asked Knox at last, taken quite aback by Cardew's statement.

"Not Figgins' dog—Clive's. Figgins sold him to Clive."

"Yes, I know all about that," growled Knox. "If the dog is really out of the school, never mind him."

"You can go and see him, if you like," smiled Cardew.

"What else were you doing this afternoon?"

"Readin'," said Cardew.

"Anything else?"

"Yes, talkin'. I'm rather a good conversationalist, you know, and I entertain people that way."

Knox frowned. The juniors grinned as they listened to Cardew's replies.

Knox turned to Racke of the Shell.

"I heard what you said, Racke. It is a serious matter. You will have to prove it!"

"I don't want to sneak about them," muttered Racke.

"Don't mind us, dear boy," said Cardew. "I wouldn't deprive you of the pleasure of sneakin' for anythin'. Go ahead!"

"He can't prove a lie," said Clive scornfully.

"Well, if you put it like that, I will go ahead!" exclaimed Racke savagely. "Mellish saw them at it, and he'll swear to it."

"Where is Mellish?"

The spy of the Fourth was not present.

"Go and find Mellish, some of you, and bring him here," said Knox.

Two or three of the juniors went in search of Percy Mellish. They came back with him in a few minutes.

Mellish gave Racke a very uneasy look. But a grin was lurking about his cunning face. He certainly did not intend to swear to an accusation that could easily be disproved, and he was not at all sorry for the coming downfall of the reckless accuser.

Racke's overbearing insolence did not cause devoted attachment among his friends.

"Mellish," rapped out Knox, "you seem to have been an eye-witness of what was going on this afternoon. Did you see Levison, Cardew, and Clive at the cottage on Abbotsford Hill?"

"Yes. Quite by chance, of course. I happened to be passing—"

"You happened to be spying, you mean!" growled Tom Merry.

"What did you see?" asked Knox. "The truth, mind!"

"The question is, can Mellish tell the truth?" remarked Monty Lowther musingly. "The age of miracles is past, you know."

"Silence! Answer me at once, Mellish."

"I—I saw them in the garden," said Mellish.

"Were they alone?"

"No. There was a man there—the man who lives at the cottage, I suppose."

"Who was he?"

"An old soldier, blind," said Mellish.

"What!"

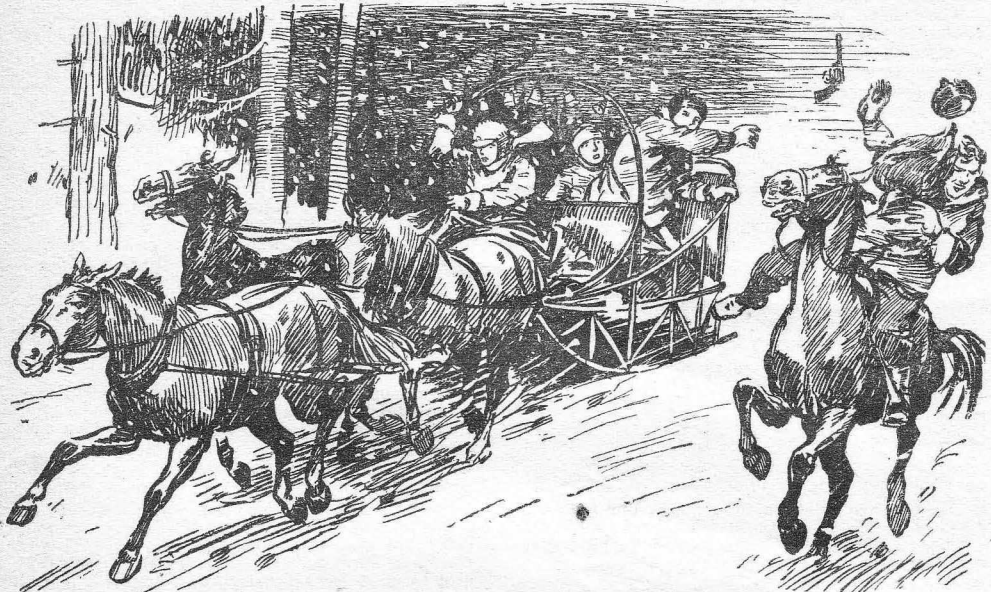
Knox stared blankly, and there was a general exclamation from the juniors.

Cardew bit his lip hard.

"Oh, you rotter!" he muttered. "You've been spying, you sneakin' worm!"

(Continued on page 36.)

**Powerful, Double-Length Yuletide Yarn of Thrilling Adventure  
And The True Christmas Spirit—Starring Frank Richards & Co.**



As the trail thief rode alongside, Frank Richards half rose in his seat and flung the coiled rug through the air. The rug struck the horseman on the side of the head, and he spun over the flank of his horse, dropping his revolver.

# Father Christmas Must Get Through!

A Canadian Christmas Eve!

"CHRISTMAS EVE—and jolly cold!" said Frank Richards.

The chums of Cedar Creek School were standing in the doorway of the ranch-house, looking out on the white plain.

The Lawless Ranch glimmered with white, under a sky of steel. Snow was still falling. The air was clear, keen and crisp, refreshing as wine. Far away in the distance the giant Rockies loomed on the horizon, snow-clad.

It was Frank Richards' first experience of a Canadian Christmastide. The cold was a new experience to him. But the gloriously keen, fresh air was health-giving, invigorating.

"Colder than Old England?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Yes, rather! But isn't it ripping?" exclaimed Frank, his eyes glistening.

"You don't want to smuggle indoors and sit on the stove?" grinned Bob.

"No fear!"

"That's lucky, for we've got to work this morning," said Bob Lawless, with a laugh. "A good four hours' sleighing. Don't come if you don't feel up to it, though."

"I feel up to anything," said Frank. "Where are we going?"

*Trail thieves—hungry wolves—and the dangers of ice and snow! Frank Richards & Co. face them all in their sixty-miles midnight dash on Christmas Eve to play the part of Father Christmas!*

**By Martin Clifford**

"School first, to see Miss Meadows and Mr. Slimmey. Then along to Cedar Camp to pick up the Cherub, and then round the clearings with messages from popper. We shall have a good crowd here to-morrow."

"Good!" said Frank Richards.

"Come and get your things on—and mind you wrap up well. Winter in the Canadian West is no joke, I can tell you."

Bob Lawless went back into the house to speak to his father. Frank Richards hurried up to his room for his fur coat, and a cap and leggings. He looked a bundle of furs when he came down.

Outside, there was a musical tinkle of sleigh bells. Billy Cook had brought the sleigh round, and Mr. Lawless had come out to see his son and nephew off.

"Don't land in a drift, Bob," said the rancher, "and don't try the ice at Indian Ford; it mayn't hold. Well, Frank, how do you like December in Canada?"

"Topping!" said Frank cheerily.

"Keep the rugs round you," said the rancher. "Now then, Bob!"

Bob Lawless got into his seat and took the "ribbons" and the whip.

"So-long, popper!"

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The whip cracked, and with a merry jingle of bells, the sleigh glided away down the trail.

The long, well-worn trail by which Frank Richards and his cousin rode to school was hidden from sight now under a thick carpet of snow.

With an easy, gliding motion, the sleigh slid along the smooth surface behind the two mettlesome horses.

Jingle, jingle!

The music of the sleigh bells rang far over the aside, crashing into the blackened larches to let as the gliding vehicle followed the trail through the timber.

Two horsemen coming along the trail drew aside, crushing into the blackened larches to let the sleigh pass.

Frank Richards glanced at them. He recognised them; he had seen them before at Cedar Camp. They were Euchre Dick and Dave Dunn, the two worst characters in the section.

"Merry Christmas!" called out Bob Lawless, in passing.

The two horsemen did not reply to the greeting. They sat their horses, staring after the sleigh as it dashed on up the trail towards the creek.

Frank Richards glanced back after the two riders as they rode on amongst the leafless trees.

"You know those galoots, Frank?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Yes, I believe"—Frank hesitated—"I believe one of them, if not both, were mixed up in the affair, some weeks ago, Bob, when you nearly got kidnapped coming home from school."

"I guess so," said Bob. "The hoboos were never found, anyway. It was the kind of gun-game Dave would be mixed up in. I guess I shouldn't care to meet those two bulldozers on the prairie on a dark night. They were charged at Kamloops once for holding up an emigrant in the Fraser mountains, and running off with his outfit—wagon, hosses, and all. But they crawled out of it somehow. Hallo, here's the school!"

Cedar Creek School was in sight. With a rattle and a jingle the sleigh dashed up to the lumber school.

Bob brought the steaming horses to a halt outside the gates, and jumped down, followed by Frank Richards.

The school grounds presented a very different aspect from that which the chums had been accustomed to during the school term. The wide enclosure was deserted, and carpeted with snow, and deep silence hung over the place.

Bob Lawless thumped on the schoolhouse door with his whip-butt, and it was opened by Black Sally.

"Merry Christmas, Sally!" roared Bob jovially, and in the exuberance of his spirits he threw an arm round the big negress and waltzed her round the porch.

"Loramussy, Mass' Bob!" gasped Sally. "You done took away dis chile's breff."

"Where is Miss Meadows?" asked Bob.

"Missy am out," said Black Sally. "Missy done gone visit de sick piccanniny, way down at White Pine."

"Oh, gum!" said Bob. "And I've got to take a message back. Where's Mr. Slimmey, in his cabin?"

"Mass' Slimmey done gone down wid missy." "We've drawn the school blank, Franky," grinned Bob Lawless. "We'd better buzz along to the shack and pick up Beauclerc, and then

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hustle for White Pine. We can give Miss Meadows a lift back, perhaps. Jump in!"

And once more the sleigh went merrily on its way, with cracking whip and jingling bells, whizzing gaily through the powdering snow.

### The Home of the Remittance Man!

VERE BEAUCLERC was seated on a log outside the shack by the frozen creek. An axe rested against his knee, and there was a flush of healthy vigour in his handsome, finely-cut face. Beauclerc had been at work that morning, chipping logs, and he had paused to rest.

The boy was thinking as he sat there, his far-away gaze fixed on the frozen forest. He thought of the Christmastides in far-off England, days that were like a dream to him now, before his father's fall—before Lascelles Beauclerc had become an unsuccessful emigrant, and a "remittance man."

Beauclerc had known more than one Christmas in the Canadian West—a time of grim hardship to the son of the remittance man. What work there was done at the little shack was mainly done by the boy. What time Lascelles Beauclerc could spare from roystering was generally spent in recovering from the effects of the latest "binge."

There was no other habitation near the shack, but there were distant neighbours, all willing and ready to be kind to the remittance man's son, and to show him the beauty and unbounded hospitality of Western Canada. But the sensitive lad always shrank from accepting kindly advances.

With all his father's faults, Vere was an affectionate and respectful son. He made allowances for his father that he could not expect others to make.

He knew how the remittance man was regarded by the quiet and hard-working Canadian settlers. They had no use for a loafer in the Thompson Valley.

And all his nature shrank from accepting kindness from people who, he could not help feeling, despised his father.

This was the first Christmas of his Western life that was to be anything like Christmas to him. He was to spend it at the Lawless Ranch with his chums, Frank Richards and Bob Lawless, and with a crowd of the neighbours.

Frank and Bob were to call for him that morning to take him on to the ranch, and Mr. Lawless had sent a kind message to the remittance man, asking him to come with his son and spend a homely but hearty Christmas at the ranch.

Mr. Beauclerc, though with great urbanity, had declined the invitation for himself. He had other engagements, as it happened.

Beauclerc knew that the other engagements probably were poker games and faro with Poker Pete and his set at Thompson. But it was not for a son to criticise his father, and he said no word.

He started from his deep reverie and looked up as there was a jingle of bridles and hoofs over the snow. His face brightened as he looked up the trail, expecting to see the sleigh from Lawless Ranch.

Then it darkened again. It was not the rancher's sleigh. Two horsemen rode out of the wood towards the shack.

A darkly troubled look came over Vere's face. Every time he saw Euchre Dick or Dave Dunn at the shack it gave his heart a chill. He knew their evil influence over his father. He had only



too much reason to know that Lascelles Beauclerc, once, at least, had almost been led into crime by his rascally associates.

A querulous voice called from the interior of the shack. It was the voice of the remittance man.

"Vere!"

The boy rose from the log.

"Yes, father?"

"Who is on the trail?"

"Two friends of yours," said Beauclerc, with an unconscious bitterness in his voice.

"Good!"

Lascelles Beauclerc appeared in the doorway. His face had an unhealthy flush; his eyes were heavy and the lids reddened. It had been a late hour the previous night when Mr. Beauclerc had come zigzagging home from Cedar Camp.

He glanced up the trail at the approaching horsemen, and then glanced rather uneasily at his son.

"Weren't your friends calling for you this morning, Vere?" he asked.

"Yes, father. I expect them any minute."

Lascelles Beauclerc frowned. It was easy to see that he would have preferred his son to be gone before his friends arrived at the shack. But the sleigh was not yet in sight, and Dave Dunn and Euchre Dick rode up through the powdering snow, and followed the remittance man into the little habitation.

There was a murmur of voices, and the sound of a bottle clinking on a glass within. Then Beauclerc's father looked out of the doorway again.

"You may as well go down the trail to meet your friends, Vere," he said, without meeting his son's eyes.

"Very well, father," said Vere, in a low voice.

He went into the shack for his coat and leggings, passing the two rustlers without a glance.

As he dressed himself in the inner room the murmur of voices came to Vere's ears. Euchre Dick was speaking.

"I guess the outfit's worth a thousand dollars. Look at us now—frozen broke. Poker Pete rounded up my last cent last night. A thousand dollars of the best, if we ran the outfit down across the line. And that kid could help. He's friends with them young scallawags. He could contrive—"

"Silence!" broke in Mr. Beauclerc's deep voice, with a note of anger in it. "Are you mad?"

"I guess I'm talking hoss-sense. I tell you the kid could help."

"Hold your tongue, confound you!" muttered Lascelles Beauclerc, as Vere came out of the inner room.

Euchre Dick scowled. Mr. Beauclerc followed his son from the shack, leaving the two ruffians muttering together.

"Good-bye, my boy!" said the remittance man, not unkindly. "I hope you will have a happy Christmas at the ranch."

"I wish you would come, father. Mr. Lawless would really be glad to see you there," said the boy wistfully.

"I should not care for it, my boy. I cannot come, anyway. Good-bye!"

"Father, I could not help hearing what that man said!"

"You must not hear what is not intended for your ears, Vere. But if you heard him you heard how I answered him."

"But, father—"

"Good-bye!"

Lascelles Beauclerc turned back abruptly into the shack. Vere, with a sigh, strode away down the trail to the forest. His heart was heavy.

What the outfit might be that Euchre Dick had alluded to he did not know, but he knew that some villainy was simmering in the mind of the ruffian, in which he would doubtless seek the remittance man's help—in which, indeed, his words showed that he thought Vere might help.

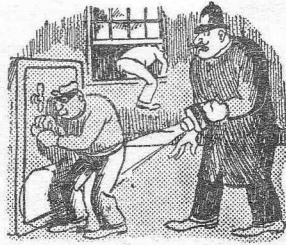
"Hallo, Cherub!"

Half a mile from the shack sleigh bells rang merrily out over the snow, and Bob Lawless' hearty voice called him. The sleigh halted in the snow.

"Coming to meet us, Beau?" asked Frank Richards.

Beauclerc smiled. The sight of his chums' cheery faces banished for the moment the dark doubts from his mind.

"Yes, Frank. What a ripping day!" he ex-



"Shine yer light a bit higher, Bill!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Tyler, 59, Findon Crescent, Wisewood Estate, Sheffield 6.

claimed. "And how ripping of you fellows to come along for me!"

"Bow-wow! Jump in!" said Bob. "Isn't your popper coming?"

"I'm sorry, no."

"Oh, rot!" said Bob. "I say, let's rush in on him and make him come."

"No, no!" Beauclerc thought of the two ruffians even now in discussion with his father at the shack, and shivered. He did not want his chums to see them there. "No. Let's get off, Bob."

"As you wish," said Bob.

"Are we going straight to the ranch?" asked Beauclerc, as he drew the buffalo robe and bear-skin about him, sharing them with Frank.

"Nix. We're going to White Pine first," said Bob. "Miss Meadows is there, visiting Muldoon's kid. The poor little beggar's ill, you know. Slimmey's gone with her. We're going to round them up, and I've got some messages to drop at half a dozen places. You're booked for a long drive, if you don't mind, Cherub."

"First-rate!" said Beauclerc brightly. "Go ahead!"

And the sleigh jingled away down the trail, halting at many a homestead on the roundabout way, where cheery Christmas greetings were given and received.

#### Bridget of White Pine!

"WHITE PINE," said Bob Lawless at last. It was still early in the afternoon, but shadows were gradually creeping over the snowy plains.

Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc looked

about them with interest as Bob drew up to White Pine. It was a lonely spot. There had once been several clearings in the district, but they had been abandoned by settlers, who had moved on to fresh fields and pastures new.

Only one habitation remained—a small cabin of mingled logs and lumber. It was plain at a glance that the place belonged to the poorest kind of unsuccessful emigrant.

Poor Micky Muldoon and his wife had come up from Chicago to take up a grant of land in the North-West. Life in the city of canned pork had not prepared them for a life on the land. Lacking both capital and experience, Micky Muldoon had a hard row to hoe.

But he worked hard, and kept up his Irish cheerfulness, and hoped for the best.

And there was the child. Little Bridget was six—a pretty and delicate child, ill-fitted to face the North-Western winter in a frontier cabin.

With the coming of grim winter little Bridget had become ill. Miss Meadows, the school-mistress of Cedar Creek, visited the lonely cabin regularly to help in tending the little invalid.

Frank Richards caught sight of burly Micky Muldoon at work at a distance from the cabin. In a foot of snow the hardy emigrant was hewing logs.

Bob drew the sleigh to a halt at a distance from the cabin in order not to disturb the sick child. The three schoolboys alighted and went softly towards the place through the snow.

Bob Lawless tapped on the door and opened it softly.

A fire, fed by pine chips, was burning smokily in the cabin. A pale and troubled woman was tending it.

Mr. Slimmey, the assistant master of Cedar Creek School, sat in a corner, very grave and quiet. He glanced at the boys with a nod and smile.

Miss Meadows was beside the little cot where the child lay, near the fire.

The schoolboys stopped, irresolute, just within the cabin, Bob closing the door softly to keep out the bitter wind.

The child was speaking in a low and weak voice:

"Mummy!"

The worn woman by the fire came to the cot.

"Yes, dearie?"

"It's Christmas to-morrow, mummy."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Muldoon, with a sigh.

"Is Father Christmas coming?"

Mrs. Muldoon did not answer.

Father Christmas was not likely to come to the lonely emigrant's cabin, bound in the grip of winter and poverty.

The child's pale face turned towards the troubled mother.

"Mummy, will Father Christmas come?"

"Sure, the snow's too heavy for Father Christmas to come, alanna," said poor Mrs. Muldoon.

"But Father Christmas doesn't mind the snow, mummy, and he always used to come at home."

"Yes, dear; but—"

"You'll hang up my stocking, mummy, for Father Christmas to-night," said Bridget, her bright eyes on her mother's face. "Sure, he'll come. He doesn't mind the snow."

In the far-off city Father Christmas had always come. There, a few pence had been enough to purchase some poor little gift to be placed in the stocking overnight. On the North-Western frontier it was different.

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Children's toys were not to be had in Thompson Valley. For those who could afford them, they came, at great expense, from distant towns.

But it was hard to tell the unsuspecting child that her old friend, Father Christmas, who had never failed her yet, would fail her at last.

The child's voice went on.

"I want Father Christmas to bring me a doll, mummy. Do you think he will bring me a doll if he comes, mummy?"

"Sure, I can't tell, alanna."

"I hope he'll bring me a doll, one that moves its eyes," said Bridget. "You'll hang up my stocking, mummy?"

"Yes, dear."

Miss Meadows rose quietly and moved towards the door. Bridget raised her head. She had caught sight of the three schoolboys inside the cabin.

"Bob! It's Bob!"

Bob Lawless came towards the cot.

"Hallo, Bridget, old girl!" he said. "You look ever so much better."

Bridget nodded, and smiled.

"I'm thinking about Father Christmas," she said. "Last Christmas I told mummy I wanted a teddy bear, and Father Christmas brought me one. Do you think he'll bring me a doll this time, Bob?"

"I—I guess—" stammered Bob.

"He's sure to come. I shan't believe in him any more if he doesn't. But he'll come, sure," said Bridget, with a confident nod. "You'll see."

"I—I hope he will," stammered Bob. Certainly Father Christmas would have come to the lonely cabin if Bob Lawless could have contrived it. But a doll was not to be obtained for love nor money in the Thompson Valley.

The child's look grew troubled with the expression on Bob's honest face.

"You don't think he'll come this time, Bob?"

"I—I guess he will, Bridget," said Bob, alarmed at the change of expression. "He's—he's a good sort, you know; he never forgets good kids at Christmas."

"You must sleep now, dear," said the mother softly.

"Yes, mummy."

Bridget's eyes closed. But they opened again immediately.

"Mummy!"

"Yes, dear?"

"You won't forget the stocking. I'm sure he'll come."

"I won't forget, alanna. Go to sleep now."

"Yes, mummy," said Bridget drowsily.

Her eyes closed again.

Bob Lawless and his chums quietly left the cabin. Miss Meadows and Mr. Slimmey were outside now.

Frank Richards drew the door shut. The three chums were strangely troubled. The child's faint words, her confidence in Father Christmas, had moved them to the very heart. And they knew that Father Christmas could not come. There were no children's toys on the banks of Thompson River.

"Poor little kid!" muttered Beauclerc.

"It's rotten," said Frank, in a low voice. "I—I suppose there's nothing doing, Bob. I'd ride twenty miles like a shot—"

"Nothing doing," said Bob, with a shake of the head. "Kids' dolls aren't quite in our line in this section. Things like that have to be ordered weeks ahead, and come up by the store wagons. Nothing nearer than Fraser, I reckon."

Miss Meadows was speaking to Mr. Slimmey in a low voice, evidently discussing the doll question. But their looks showed that no solution was to be found.

"I'm going to drive you back, Miss Meadows, if you'll let me," said Bob, "and Mr. Slimmey, too."

"Thank you—I shall be very glad," said Miss Meadows, with a smile. "I suppose, Lawless, you do not know of any way of satisfying poor little Bridget?"

Bob shook his head ruefully.

"Nothing nearer than Fraser," he said.

"And that is thirty miles—and across the river."

"Yes, ma'am. I—I wonder if we could get there—"

Miss Meadows shook her head at once.

"You must not think of that," she said. "The ice is not quite safe at Indian Ford. Poor little Bridget! I am afraid Father Christmas will not come, and she will lose her faith in her old friend."

Miss Meadows and Mr. Slimmey stepped into the sleigh, and the schoolboys followed. They were silent as they drove to Cedar Creek.

The clear sky was darkening in the direction of the Rockies, with a drift of clouds laden with a coming snowfall.

In the winter dusk they arrived at Cedar Creek. The schoolmistress and Mr. Slimmey alighted, and the schoolboys jingled away in the sleigh for home. But their faces were not bright now. Somehow the thought of the pale little face in

the emigrant's lonely cabin haunted them, and they were still thinking of little Bridget when the sleigh jingled up to the Lawless Ranch.

### A Reckless Venture!

FRANK RICHARDS was very thoughtful during dinner at the ranch. It was a late dinner for the schoolboys, for the drive had taken up the greater part of the day, and Mr. and Mrs. Lawless had dined long before, with the guests that had already arrived at the ranch.

Frank's thoughtful mood was shared by his chums.

After dinner Bob made his comrades a sign to follow him, and they left the ranch-house.

Outside deep dusk was on the snowy countryside. The snow was falling more heavily than before. Bob stopped at the opening of the porch, with a wrinkle in his brow. He looked at his chums.

"What are you thinking of, Frank?" he asked. "Bridget Muldoon and her doll," said Frank, half-laughing. "So were you, old scout."

"Same here," said Beauclerc. "I wish something could be done."

Bob Lawless drew a deep breath.

"Are you fellows game?" he asked.

"Game as pie!" said Frank. "But for what?"

"Look here!" Bob sank his voice. "I can't get that kid and her Father Christmas out of my mind. It will fairly knock her out, you know—she believes in Daddy Christmas. I suppose—"

"Well?" said Frank and Beauclerc together.



There was a sudden, shrill neigh from one of the horses, and the other two reared and plunged. It was a snowdrift, and the sleigh was fairly in it! Before the schoolboys knew what was happening they were flung into the snow.

"They've got dolls at Fraser," said Bob. "Heaps of 'em. We've got the cash—we'd pool supplies if necessary—"

"You bet! That's not the difficulty!"

"But—but Fraser's a good thirty miles away—and night's coming on." Bob wrinkled his brows again. "Are you fellows game for a run over to Fraser in the sleigh?"

"Bob!"

"I know it sounds potty, just for a doll," said Bob, colouring a little. "But—but that kid, you know—poor little beggar. She'd be no end chippy if Father Christmas came, after all. It's worth a bit of a risk."

"A bit?" said Frank gravely. "The snow's coming down heavier to-night, Bob. We couldn't get back before morning if—if—"

"If we got back at all," said Bob, with a nod. "I understand. I know the popper would jump on me if I suggested it to him. There's risk—"

"The ice isn't strong at Indian Ford," said Beauclerc quietly. "We should have to cross the river near there, or go fifteen miles round—and that would knock it on the head."

"I know! There's risk. I guess I'm not going to confide in the popper. He would be mad with me. But—but after we came back he would be pleased right enough. Are you fellows game?"

"Fathead!" said Frank. "Of course we're game. If it's barely possible to do it—"

"I think it is. We could get back to Muldoon's cabin before dawn—in time for the doll to go into the stocking. I want Father Christmas to come to Bridget Muldoon to-night—I do!"

"It's a go!" said Frank.

Beauclerc nodded quietly.

"It's a go," he said, "and a jolly good idea. I'm with you, Bob. I think it's a ripping idea."

"Not a word about it, though," said Bob. "I don't quite know whether the popper would object—he might and he mightn't—but mother would be anxious. I wouldn't like her to be anxious."

"Right-ho!"

"Then it's a cinch!" said Bob. "Get on your warmest things. I'll see to the sleigh."

The chums of Cedar Creek had made up their minds. It was perhaps a hare-brained scheme. Snow-covered plains and ridges barred with drifts lay between them and the distant railroad town—and the frozen river was between. And the ice was not known to be strong enough to bear.

There were risks. But the excitement of that wild drive through the winter night appealed strongly to the imaginations of the chums. They would be out all night—driving through blinding snow, facing many perils. And it was all for the sake of a child—in order that the sick girl might not be disappointed on Christmas morning.

But the motive could not have been a more generous one. And the schoolboy chums did not hesitate.

Half an hour later the sleigh was standing on the trail, with three horses this time harnessed to it.

Mr. Lawless was busy with his guests in the ranch-house, and he was not even aware that his son was arranging a sleigh-drive.

Frank and Beauclerc stepped into the sleigh, and Bob took up the reins, after wrapping the bearskin closely round him. The cold was bitter and intense.

"Look out for the drifts, Bob, if you're going to Cedar Camp," said Billy Cook, as the rancher's son gathered up the reins.

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"Right you are, Billy!"

"And if you see Dave Dunn and Euchre Dick on the trail give them a wide berth," went on the ranch foreman. "I passed those two scallawags half an hour ago, coming up from the creek."

Beauclerc started. He could guess that the "scallawags" had been coming away from the shack when the ranchman met them.

"Only those two, Billy?" he asked.

"Them two on their lonesome," said the ranch foreman. "What are they doing in the saddle at a time like this hyer? Looking for trouble, I guess. Steer clear of them."

"You bet!" said Bob. He hesitated a moment.

"Billy, when my popper asks after me to-night—he's bound to miss me at bed-time—tell him we've gone for a long drive and mayn't be back before dawn."

"What?" ejaculated the ranchman.

"Tell him we're all O.K., and mother's not to be anxious," said Bob. "Gee-up!"

The sleigh started.

"But—" shouted the ranchman.

But the sleigh was going now, and Billy Cook was left shaking his head very solemnly.

With a musical jingle of bells and harness, the sleigh glided down the snow-covered trail.

"Keep an eye open for those two bulldozers, you chaps," said Bob. "I don't trust them half an inch—I know they're ripe for mischief. They're not going to play the same trick with this outfit that they played once with an emigrant's wagon. They would if they got half a chance."

"This outfit!" muttered Vere Beauclerc, the word recurring to his mind. "That is what Euchre Dick was speaking of, then!"

"What did you say, Cherub?"

"N-nothing! But if we meet those two scoundrels, Bob, I'm certain they will try to stop us and collar the sleigh. They think they could sell it for a thousand dollars at a distance from here."

"I guess they could—easy," said Bob.

"They'll try it on if they get a chance."

"They won't get a chance," said Bob.

The sleigh ran on, away over the deeply shadowed plain—away at a spanking speed. Three splendid horses were pulling, and the sleigh glided behind them as if on glass. Snowflakes dashed in the faces of the schoolboys.

Far off, through the banks of clouds, there was a hint of a coming moon.

The well-known trail through the timber-belt lay before them, and as the gaunt trees loomed up there was a beat of hoofs in the snow, and a horseman rode alongside the sleigh.

A hoarse voice shouted from the dusk, and Bob Lawless cracked his whip and the sleigh drove on faster. The first danger of that wild night's drive was at hand.

### Rushing the Rustlers!

**B**OB LAWLESS sat like a bronze image, looking neither to right nor left, with an iron hand on the reins. All his attention was needed to handle three powerful and mettlesome horses.

But Frank and Beau looked round at the ghostly stranger who had so suddenly loomed up from the night. A squat figure wrapped in furs was all they could see. He sat his horse within two yards of the sleigh, keeping pace with it.

The hoarse voice shouted again.

"Halt!"

"I guess I'm in a hurry, Euchre Dick!"

"So you know me, hang you!" muttered the horseman, pulling a little ahead so as to ride abreast with Bob's team.

"I guess I'd know your gallow's face anywhere, Euchre Dick," said Bob coolly, "and your gaol-bird voice, too."

"Hang you! Halt!"

"Not this evening!"

Euchre Dick put his fingers to his lips, and a loud, sudden whistle rang far through the gloom of the timber ahead.

Well enough the schoolboys knew what the signal meant. The ruffian's partner was ahead of them on the trail, and Dave Dunn was warned to stop the sleigh as it came up.

The intention of the ruffians could not be doubted now. The sleigh and horses were too valuable a prize to be missed, now that prize had ventured fairly into their hands.

"Halt, you fool!" snarled Euchre Dick.

"You'll be stopped on the trail, anyway!"

"Rats!"

"Will you halt?"

"No!"

Euchre Dick's hand groped among his furs. Something that glittered came into view.

"Halt, you cub, or I'll bring down your leader!" the ruffian shouted savagely.

Bob Lawless did not answer. His teeth set, and he touched the team with the whip, and the horses leaped onward in response. Euchre Dick was left behind for the moment.

But he spurred on furiously, and in a few minutes was level with the team again, and his right arm swung up, the revolver in his hand.

Frank Richards half rose in his seat. In his hand was a thick rug, coiled up as hard as he could make it. His arm swung up as the rustler rode alongside, and the coiled rug flew through the air.

The unexpected missile struck the horseman fairly on the side of the head and sent him spinning. The revolver dropped in the snow as Euchre Dick spun over the flank of his horse, grasping desperately at rein and mane to save himself.

The horse dashed madly on, with the dismounted rustler clinging wildly to its back, panting out curses.

Bob Lawless lashed at it with the whip as it fled frantically by, and the startled animal wheeled from the trail, dashing off into the open prairie.

Horse and man vanished from sight among the whirling snowflakes.

"Good man, Frank!" muttered Vere Beauclerc, his eyes glistening.

"Good man, by gum!" gasped Bob Lawless. "I guess that rustler is sorry he spoke! Gee-whiz! Here's the other scallawag!"

Just as the sleigh entered the timber the schoolboys sighted a horseman ahead, halted in the middle of the trail, facing them.

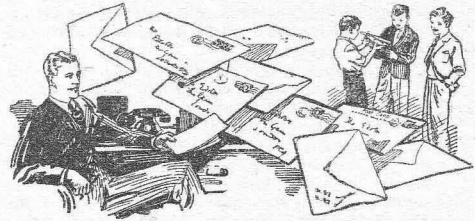
"Stop!" he thundered out.

Bob Lawless did not heed.

The sleigh rushed on, three powerful horses rushing right down on the rider in the trail. Had Dave Dunn stayed to await the shock of collision he would certainly have been swept over and trampled down, whatever had happened to the sleigh.

But he was too wise to wait. As the sleigh thundered down on him and he realised that Bob did not mean to stop, he turned his horse desperately out of the trail right into the frost-

*(Continued on the next page)*



## THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

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

**H**ALLO, Chums! Looking forward to Christmas? I'll bet you are! Visions of plum pudding, turkey, and jolly parties, and all the other good things associated with the festive season recur more frequently to the mind as time grows shorter.

Well, here's wishing you a bumper Christmas and lots of ripping presents! Don't forget what I said last week about a good book being the ideal gift. You'll find hours of enjoyment in the pages of the "Holiday Annual," or "Modern Boy's Annual," or one of the others displayed on page two. I can thoroughly recommend all four annuals. Make your choice.

### "CARDEW COMES A GROPPER!"

Next week the GEM is on sale a day earlier, and it contains another bumper programme of fun and fiction. Topping the bill is a splendid St. Jim's story starring Cardew. Ralph Reckness is a puzzle to the St. Jim's juniors—a mixture of bad and good. In next week's yarn Cardew is in one of his bad moods. Having been deservedly punished by Monsieur Mornay, he seeks revenge by trying to prove the French master guilty of theft. To give Cardew his due, he does not think Mossou is the culprit, but he might not have been so eager to try to prove it but for thoughts of revenge. What happens I will leave you to discover when you read this fine story.

### "FRANK RICHARDS & CO.'S GOLD-MINE!"

The chums of the backwoods figure in an unusual and exciting adventure in the next yarn. They become interested in a gold-mine which a Mexican called 'Frisco Jo has discovered. 'Frisco offers to sell them a share in the mine, but they are not a little sceptical—until they inspect the gold "strike." To their amazement the rock sparkles with the yellow metal, and they eagerly buy a share in the mine for fifty dollars. Have the Cedar Creek chums really struck lucky? Don't miss reading this tiptop tale.

After a week's absence from the GEM the Benbow boys return in another powerful yarn of the school ship. It's called:

### "DRAKE'S LAST CHANCE!"

Having neglected his studies for football, Jack realises at last that he has been playing into the hands of his enemy, Daubeny. Unless he makes a big effort he will never win the scholarship which means so much to him—and with grim determination he settles down to swot again. It remains to be seen whether he has not left it too late.

To complete the number, "Detective" Kerr has a most baffling mystery to investigate, Monty Lowther invites you to laugh off some more wisecracks with him, and there will be another batch of Pen Pals, and more prize jokes.

Lastly, I should like to remind readers of the latest craze in amusing and skilful games—"Stik-a-Stak." If you are making up a list of games to play at Christmas, you simply must include this one.

Chin, chin, chums! Don't eat too much Christmas pudding!

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blackened larches. It was the only way to escape, and he took it, and he was only just in time.

The sleigh swept by with a crash of bells and a thudding of hoofs.

Before the ruffian could turn his horse back into the trail the sleigh was gone, vanishing at terrific speed round a bend.

"Hurrah!" shouted Frank Richards.

Bob Lawless chuckled breathlessly.

"I guess those bulldozers are beaten this time!" he gasped. "We shan't see their merry faces again this side of Christmas!"

Frank Richards looked back. For some moments he thought he could hear the thud of hoofbeats in pursuit, but the sound died away into silence.

The rustlers were left far behind. The first peril of that wild night was past.

Cedar Creek School loomed up for a minute or two to the right as the sleigh swept out on the plain. Then they dashed on into the open prairie, with the bright stars above their heads now, the waste of untrodden snow round them, and the frozen river ahead.

### The Peril of the Ice!

**L**IKE points of fire in a velvet sky, the stars glittered down upon the wide waste of snow.

Warmly wrapped in furs and bearskins, the schoolboy chums did not feel the cold, bitter and searching as it was. Not a habitation, not a light was to be seen in the desolate and lonely waste. They were ascending the ridge now, and beyond the ridge lay the river, frozen fast.

As they came down the slope of the ridge the wide river came in sight. It was still and silent in the grip of King Winter. Snow lay on the ice like a mantle of white velvet.

Surely the ice would hold. For weeks it had been freezing. Up by the ford there was danger. But Bob Lawless had struck the river lower down, where the water was deeper and the ice thicker.

But hold or not, they were going to risk it. The sleigh never paused a second. The well-worn trail was hidden from sight under the carpet of snow, but Bob Lawless followed it as if by instinct.

And in the glittering starlight they could see traces of runners left in the snow, showing that another sleigh had passed before them.

The sight of the runner-tracks encouraged them. Where others had gone they could go. Down the slope to the frozen river went the sleigh. They were upon the ice now.

The schoolboys sat tight and waited with grim calmness. Under the runners the frozen river glided back.

Frank Richards' heart gave a throb as he heard a low wailing sound from the river. He knew that it was the sound of the ice-pack.

Crack!

Bob Lawless' whip rang out like a pistol-shot.

He, too, had heard that warning wail of the straining ice. The horses, as if they, too, realised the peril, were straining hard. The sleigh flew.

Crack!

The crack was from the ice, not from the whip. The schoolboys set their teeth. But the leader was trampling the frozen rushes on the bank now. The horses strained ashore, and the sleigh glided up the slope.

Frank Richards, his heart thumping, looked back at the surface of ice lighted by glittering

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stars. The runner-marks lay through the snow, clean-cut as if by a knife, but across the white surface there appeared a dark bar where the ice had split. Dark water was welling up through the snow-covered ice.

Frank caught his breath.

"A close shave, Beau!" he muttered.

Beauclerc nodded and smiled.

The danger had been very close, but it was past. The sleigh glided on. It was a clear run now, and the perils were from snowdrifts in the gullies. Bob Lawless slackened speed a little. He did not want to tire his team. There was hard work before them yet.

"Snow again!" muttered Beauclerc, pulling his fur cap closer to his head.

It came down in masses. The light of the stars was dimmed. In a ghostly twilight the sleigh plunged on like a phantom of the night.

Distant hills loomed like white spectres to right and left. Bob Lawless pointed with his whip to some landmark indistinguishable to his chums.

"Ten miles more to Fraser!" he called out.

"Hark!" exclaimed Frank.

From the silent waste there came a sudden, strange eerie sound—a long-drawn, wailing cry. So strange, so eerie, was that cry of the winter night that Frank felt his flesh creep as he heard it.

"Beau, did you hear—"

"I heard, but—"

"What was that, Bob?"

There was a moment's silence, and then Bob answered:

"Wolves!"

Frank Richards sank back into his seat.

He scanned the dim plain with his eyes. Wolves! In spite of his courage, it was a word to chill the heart.

"It's hunger that's driven them down from the hills," said Bob. "They're unknown here, but sometimes in winter—"

He drove on without finishing.

The wailing cry was heard again, but faintly, afar. The sleigh rushed on at greater speed, and there was silence. The mournful, echoing howl died away in the far distance.

Crash!

There was a sudden, shrill neigh from one of the horses, and the other two reared and plunged. It was a snowdrift at last, and the sleigh was fairly in it.

Before the schoolboys knew what was happening they were flung into the snow, and the sleigh rolled over in the drift amid the maddened, plunging animals.

### Shopping in Fraser!

**F**RANK RICHARDS sat up dazedly in the snow. For a moment or two he could not realise what had happened. His brain was whirling.

A strong grasp on his arm drew him to his feet. It was Bob's hand that helped him. Vere Beauclerc was scrambling up.

"All serene?" panted Bob.

"All serene, old chap! And you—"

"Right as rain!"

"Nobody hurt," said Beauclerc, "but the horses."

"I guess I missed the trail by a few yards," said Bob ruefully. "It couldn't be helped. I don't know this trail well."

"It's a miracle to me that you've kept to it at all," said Frank.

Bob laughed.

"Lend a hand," he said.

The sleigh was overturned and rugs and blankets were tossed in the snow. The three horses, almost buried in the drift, were kicking and plunging wildly.

It was no easy task to venture among the lashing hoofs of the maddened animals, but Bob Lawless had known horses from childhood, and he was at home with them.

Without a moment's hesitation he plunged into the drift to the rescue of the team. Frank and Beauclerc followed him at once.

With a steady hand and murmured words Bob soothed the leader, and dragged him up. The



"I've got you covered!" roared Mr. Phipps. "Now, if you don't want a charge of buckshot in your carcase, you light out! You hear me?" "I guess I'm not deaf, old scout," said Bob sweetly. "But I'm set on having that doll!"

horses were got upon their feet, trembling but soothed, and almost buried in snow.

The three schoolboys grasped the sleigh when the horses had been quieted, and with combined efforts righted it at last.

They stood panting, almost exhausted, when the sleigh was once more upon its runners, but Bob only paused a few moments to recover breath.

He examined the sleigh with an anxious eye, fearful that injury might have been done, but there was no damage from the tumble in the snow.

"All serene!" called out Bob, in great relief.

The rugs and buffalo robes were gathered up and shaken clear of snow, and the sleigh was hauled back to the trail. There the schoolboys took their seats again, and Bob Lawless drove on at a more cautious pace.

The snow had ceased to fall, and stars were shining out brilliantly once more. Bob Lawless pointed with his whip at last.

Far in the distance ahead a light glimmered.

"What is it, Bob?"

"Fraser," said Bob briefly.

"Oh, good!"

The sight of the distant town gladdened the hearts of the chums of Cedar Creek. The outward half of that perilous ride was nearly over.

It was long past midnight, and Fraser was silent and buried in slumber when the sleigh glided into the streets.

Bob halted before the door of a store.

"The gee-gees will be all the better for a rest," he said. "Shove these rugs over them. They've got a bit of a job before them yet to get back. And now for Bridget's doll!" added Bob, with a grin.

He dealt a thundering blow at the door with the butt of his whip. It rang and echoed down the silent street.

Bang, bang!

There was a sound of movement in a room above. An upper window was opened, and a nightcapped head, with a fur coat wrapped round the neck, looked out, and a fierce voice demanded:

"Who's there? Vamoose, you noisy jays, or I'll pitch a bucket of water on your dunderheads!"

"Good-evening, Mr. Phipps!" said Bob cheerfully.

"Great snakes! Is that young Lawless, from the Thompson Valley?" yelled the storekeeper.

"You bet!"

"Well, what in thunder are you knocking a



man up for at this hour?" demanded Mr. Phipps, in tones of deep indignation.

"I've come to buy a doll."

"You young coyote!" yelled Mr. Phipps. "You—you've come to me at one in the morning to buy a doll! Are you mad?"

"Nope!"

"Go home with you! I'll ask your popper to lay a cowhide round you for this!" shouted the storekeeper.

Slam! The window closed with emphasis.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Frank Richards, in dismay.

Bob Lawless laughed softly.

"The dear man doesn't quite savvy," he remarked. "After all, it's a bit disturbing to be woke up after midnight by a chap who wants to buy a doll."

"But he's going to sell us that doll, all the same," said Bob. "Dear old Phipps has got to come down. Here goes!"

Bang, bang, bang!  
The heavy butt of the whip crashed on the door of the store. Frank and the Cherub lent the aid of their boots, and the din was something terrific.

Dogs began to bark along the street. In five minutes the infuriated Mr. Phipps could stand it no longer. The window above the store flew up, and a red and wrathful face glared out, and the barrel of a shotgun came into view.

"I've got you covered!" roared Mr. Phipps. "Now, if you don't want a charge of buckshot in your carcase, you light out! You hear me?"

"I guess I'm not deaf, Phipps, old scout," said Bob sweetly. "I guess half Fraser can hear you. But I'm set on that doll!"

"I'll give you one minute to vamoose before I let buckshot into you!" shouted Mr. Phipps.

"We're not vamoosing, old pard. Look here, Phipps, it's something special. We've come all the way from the Thompson Valley for that doll."

"Wha-a-at?" stuttered Mr. Phipps. "You've loped thirty miles in the snow for a doll!"

"You see, it's for a sick kid, who won't be pleased with anything else," explained Bob.

"You don't want us to have the journey for nothing, Mr. Phipps. Be a white man, and come down."

"Waal, I swow!" said Mr. Phipps. "Wait till I get my trousers, young Lawless. I'll be down in a brace of shakes."

The window closed, and Bob smiled contentedly.

In five minutes there was a rattling of a chain and the grinding of a bolt, and the door opened. A lamp glimmered out into the snowy street, held aloft in Mr. Phipps' hand. The storekeeper seemed restored to good humour now.

"Amble in, you young scallawags!" he said amiably.

The three chums entered the store, and Mr. Phipps pushed the door shut. The snow was blowing in after them.

"Now, I guess you've surprised me some," said Mr. Phipps, looking very curiously at Bob. "You've humped all the way from Thompson to get a doll for the kid, hey?"

"That's it," said Bob. "Kid expects Daddy Christmas in the morning, and we're not going to disappoint her—see?"

"Waal, carry me home to die!" said the storekeeper.

He set down the lamp.

"Hyer's my stock," he said. "Purty near sold out, of course, but there's a few left. Take your choice, gents."

The storekeeper's stock of Christmas toys had been greatly depleted by the purchases of Fraser's citizens. But there were some goods left, and the schoolboys looked over them.

"I say, that doll looks a corker!" said Bob, picking up a huge doll, the eyes of which opened and shut of their own accord as it moved. "Why, it's a good two feet long! That's a good 'un!"

"You bet it is!" said Mr. Phipps. "That doll's fifteen dollars, and no galoot wanted to stump up to that tune, and I guess it goes back to the

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wholesaler after Christmas. It's a bit too rich for Fraser."

"I guess it doesn't!" said Bob Lawless emphatically. "I guess that doll goes to Micky Muldoon's little girl at White Pine."

"Fifteen dollars!" said Mr. Phipps laconically. "How are you fixed, Franky?" asked Bob. "I've got a ten-dollar bill the popper gave me for Christmas."

"I've got the same," said Frank, "and some odd dollars besides."

"And I have one dollar," said Vere Beauclerc quietly. "Little enough, but it goes in. Here you are!"

"Right you are, Cherub!" said Bob Lawless. "Change those bills, please, Mr. Phipps, and wrap up the doll."

"By gum!" said the storekeeper. The big, burly Canadian storekeeper hesitated a minute, and then went on: "I guess I'm not making any profit on that doll, young Lawless. I paid twelve dollars for it, and you're going to have it at that. So it's twelve you're stuck for, and not a cent over!"

"You're a white man, Phippy!" said Bob. "We'll tell Bridget that Father Christmas' other name is Billy Phipps."

The storekeeper laughed, and replaced the big, handsome doll in its cardboard box, and proceeded to wrap it up carefully.

The twelve dollars were paid over—five dollars fifty cents from Frank and Bob each, and one dollar from Vere Beauclerc—all he had.

Gladly enough the two chums would have refrained from using Beauclerc's little contribution, but he had a right to share, as far as he could, in helping Father Christmas to come to White Pine.

"There you are, sonny!" said the storekeeper, handing the box to Bob Lawless. "You've got a long run back."

"All serene, if Father Christmas gets in before Bridget wakes in the morning!" grinned Bob. "So-long, Mr. Phipps! Sorry we've spoiled your beauty sleep."

Mr. Phipps opened the door and the chums trooped back to the waiting sleigh, where the box containing the doll was packed safely away.

"Good-night, Mr. Phipps, and a merry Christmas!"

"Same to you! Good-night!"

The sleigh jingled gaily away into the starlight, and the storekeeper closed the door. Down the silent street of Fraser the sleigh-bells jingled, and once more the white waste lay before the adventurers. Through the lightly-falling flakes the stars glittered down upon the speeding sleigh.

### From the Jaws of Death!

JINGLE, jingle!

The snow had ceased to fall. The sky was like sapphire, the stars set in it like diamonds. The merry music of the sleigh-bells rang and echoed through the vast silences of the prairie.

The speed was not so great now. Hardy and strong as the Canadian horses were, the journey was telling upon them. But there was ample time to reach White Pine before the dawn whitened the summit of the Rockies, if all went well.

The chums were silent as the sleigh glided on. They were thinking of the wild and mournful howl they had heard on the prairie on the outward run. They swept the dim expanses on all sides.



Frank Richards caught Beauclerc's arm suddenly.

"Listen!" he muttered.

Eerily through the night came the howl, faint and afar. Without the crack of the whip the horses started into great speed. Well they knew the whine of the prowling wolf.

Driven by hunger from their lairs in the northern hills, the savage animals had ventured nearer to the habitation of man. Gaunt and hunger-stricken, they were terrible foes to approach.

And there was no weapon in the sleigh. The chums had not even thought of wolves.

The sleigh jingled on.

The howl was repeated again and again. It was coming nearer. With thumping hearts the chums realised that the prowling brutes had heard the sleigh-bells or scented the horses.

Beauclerc raised a hand to point.

In the distance, where the starlight lay on the drifting snow, a dark form appeared, looming through the shadows. Two fierce, red eyes glittered as they caught the light.

It was a wolf.

The whining howl sounded again, and there was a whinny of terror from the horses. Another and another dark figure leaped into view from the snow.

"They're after us!" said Frank, between his teeth.

Bob's whip cracked like a pistol. But it was hardly heeded. The horses were straining now. Fatigue was forgotten in the terror inspired by the howl of the wolf.

The schoolboys looked back as the sleigh fled on. Five wolves were in sight—gaunt, haggard, wasted by famine—the famine that had drawn them far from their accustomed haunts.

As they loped behind the sleigh the schoolboys could see the gleaming jaws, from which the hot breath poured like steam.

Bob Lawless sat as steady as a rock, holding his terrified team well in hand, and getting every ounce of speed out of the horses.

"How many, Frank?" he asked, without looking round.

"I can see five."

"We're not far off the river now," said Bob quietly.

Bob had taken a slightly different route, to cross the river lower down than before, to avoid the place where the ice had cracked. But the river was not yet in sight.

With fascinated eyes, Frank and Vere Beauclerc watched the gaunt animals that loped after the sleigh in ferocious pursuit. In the fierce race two of them dropped behind, and were lost to view amid the powdering snow. But three of the fearful animals were in close pursuit, and gaining on the sleigh.

"And we have no weapon!" muttered Vere Beauclerc.

"How far off now?" asked Bob, in tones of quiet calmness. He did not look round. He dared not take his eyes from the straining team and the snow-driven trail ahead.

"Twenty yards, the nearest," said Frank Richards quietly. "Only three keeping up."

"When they're half the distance throw out the bearskin rug."

"Right!"

The three schoolboys were calm and quiet. The very nearness of the danger seemed to calm them.

Frank and Vere loosened the bearskin rug,

ready to throw. They had heard of such a device to delay a pursuing pack. Bob Lawless had thought of it at once. Closer and closer came the ravenous three, with red, rolling eyes and snapping jaws.

"Now!" muttered Beauclerc.

Frank tossed the great, heavy bearskin into the snow behind. In a couple of seconds the three wolves had reached it, and were tearing it madly with their teeth. The three gaunt animals struggled for it, gnashing their teeth furiously, and the schoolboys heard the horrid sounds, as the sleigh flew on, unpursued for a moment.

Then came a wild uproar of snarling and yelling. Snapping teeth had caught a paw in the struggle for the bearskin, and the bitten animal turned savagely upon the assailant, biting in return.

Two savage brutes were rolling over in the snow, tearing, snarling, and foaming as if in madness. The third was rending the bearskin to tatters.

The sleigh raced on.

"The river!" panted Beauclerc.

The frozen river gleamed ahead in the starlight. There was a long, low howl behind, and Frank looked back. A single wolf was keeping up the chase, and faintly from the far distance came the echoes of the savage conflict still proceeding between the other two.

But the sleigh had gained a long stretch. It swept down to the frozen river, and glided out on the snow-covered ice. The juniors almost held their breath.

But the ice was thicker here. It stood the strain without a sound. Like an arrow the sleigh passed over the frozen surface and rushed up the bank. Frank Richards stood up to look back.

On the far side of the river the last wolf was disappearing from view in the snow. The sleigh had won the deadly race.

"All serene!" panted Frank, sinking back into his seat. "My hat! I don't want to go through that again!"

"All's well that ends well," said Beauclerc, with a faint smile. "Father Christmas has had a narrow shave, but he will get to White Pine now."

For several miles more the sleigh kept up a good speed. But the weary horses slackened at last. The danger of the wolves was past, and Bob allowed his team to fall into an easy trot.

## DETECTIVE KERR INVESTIGATES.

### Solution:

KERR: Trimble had taken a great deal of trouble over his deception—but he had not been quite observant enough. Obtaining a list of the six internationals due at Oxbridge's was easy enough, but when copying their signatures on his ball, Trimble forgot the possibility that all six might not have been able to attend at Oxbridge's. Grundy said he noticed either Edgar Wade or Jock Johnson was crooked that day—and, taking Blake's and Tom Merry's statements, the six internationals actually present at Oxbridge's were Hobbs, Bloom, Clay, Miljoy, Paynter, Johnson. So, obviously, it was Edgar Wade who was playing at the time Trimble was supposed to have been getting his signature. Evidently Jock Johnson was substituted by Oxbridge's in their "team"—a fact that landed Trimble, the twister, right in the soup!

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Clouds had hidden the stars again. There was darkness round the sleigh, save for the white gleam of the snow. But this was familiar ground to Bob Lawless, and he drove on without a doubt or a pause.

Through the dimness a pale gleam crept into the eastern sky; like spectres in the dark, the distant summits of the Rockies loomed into view, whitened by the dawn.

It was the dawn of Christmas.

Till now the schoolboys had hardly been conscious of fatigue. But as the pale winter dawn crept into the sky they realised that they were very tired. Darkness rolled away from the mountains and the plain. Trees loomed up dimly, and then more clearly. But they were close to White Pine now.

### Father Christmas at White Pine!

**A** YELLOW sun looked down from the sky as Bob Lawless brought his weary team to a halt at White Pine. Even as he halted the door of the emigrant's cabin opened, and Micky Muldoon came out.

The settler stopped and stared at the sight of the sleigh. Bob Lawless jumped down, followed by his chums.

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Muldoon!" he sang out cheerily.

"Merry Christmas to you, sorr, begorra!" said Mr. Muldoon. "And phwat are yez doin' so far from home at this hour?"

"We've just come from Fraser."

"Phwat!"

"And we've got the doll."

"The—the doll!" repeated the astounded backwoodsman.

"Lug it out, Franky!"

Frank Richards dragged the box out of the sleigh. Micky Muldoon was staring at them blankly. He did not understand it yet.

"Don't you catch on?" said Bob. "It's Father Christmas. He's brought the doll for Bridget."

"Oh, begorra!"

"Is she awake yet?"

Mr. Muldoon shook his head.

"Not yet."

"Good! Mrs. Muldoon up?"

"Yis, sorr! Sure, I'll call her."

The settler stepped back into the cabin, and reappeared in a few moments with his wife. The tired, troubled woman looked in amazement at the three schoolboys. Bob Lawless removed the lid of the big cardboard box.

Mrs. Muldoon's eyes fairly bulged at the sight of the great doll.

"Will that fill the bill?" grinned Bob, with great satisfaction. "We've brought it from Fraser for the little 'un, Mrs. Muldoon. You're to put it in her stocking before she wakes—if it'll go into her stocking, though!"

"Bless my heart!" said the amazed woman. "Oh, Master Lawless—"

"Father Christmas, if you please!" chuckled Bob.

"The blessings of the saints be on ye this Christmas, young gentlemen!" said Mr. Muldoon. "Sure, the little one would have broken her heart if Father Christmas had passed her by. And faith, it's little I could do. But—but—"

"You've been to Fraser?" said Mrs. Muldoon. "You've been sleighing all night for the sake of

the little one! And sure, I heard that there were wolves on the range, across the river!"

"Never mind the wolves!" said Frank Richards, laughing. "Shove the doll where the little one will see it when she wakes, ma'am."

"Heaven bless you all!" said Mrs. Muldoon, with tears in her tired eyes as she took the doll. The settler's wife went into the cabin.

"Now it's time we got home to bed," grinned Bob. "Come to think of it, I'm a bit tired."

"Hark!" said Frank.

They stepped closer to the doorway of the cabin.

A weak, childish voice could be heard. Bridget had awakened.

"Mummy!"

"Yes, dearie!"

"It's Christmas, mummy."

"Yes, dear, it's Christmas."

"Has Father Christmas come?"

Frank Richards and his chums looked at one another. But for the arrival of the schoolboys poor Mrs. Muldoon would have had a bitterly disappointing reply to make to the child's question.

At that moment the chums of Cedar Creek felt more than repaid for the stress and the danger of that wild night's ride through the snow.

In silence they listened.

"Has he come, mummy? I'm sure he would come. See if Father Christmas has been, mummy."

"Sure, I'll see, darling."

The poor woman's voice was happy now as she answered.

There was a pause, and then from the cabin came a cry of delight.

"Oh, mummy!"

It was a cry so full of infantile joy and satisfaction that it went straight to the hearts of the listeners.

"Begorra!" murmured Micky Muldoon. "Sure, Heaven will bless ye, young gentlemen, for phwat ye've done."

"Oh, mummy, isn't it a beauty? I knew Father Christmas wouldn't forget us, mummy. Oh, mummy!"

Mrs. Muldoon stepped to the door and signed to the schoolboys to enter. They looked in.

Little Bridget was sitting up in her cot, with the doll in her arms. It was such a doll as the child had never seen before, such a doll as she had never dreamed of possessing. Her pale face was flushed now, her eyes were sparkling. She hugged the doll and crooned over it.

She looked up brightly and smiled to the schoolboys.

"Bob, he's come!"

"Has he?" exclaimed Bob. "Who has, Bridget?"

"Father Christmas!" Bridget laughed happily. "I knew he would, Bob, and you said he would, too. Look what he's brought me!"

"It's ripping!" said Bob. "Good old Father Christmas! He was bound to come, Bridget."

"You can hold it if you like, Bob," said Bridget generously.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob.

He took the doll for a moment, Bridget watching him hungrily. And the child was evidently glad when her little arms closed once more on her treasure.

"Its eyes open and shut, Bob. Look!"

"Fancy that!" said Bob, in great surprise.

Bridget laid her head on the pillow again, the



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doll cuddled in her arms. Bob Lawless rejoined his chums:

"Come on, you chaps," he said. "By gum, it was worth that drive!"

"Heaven bless you!" was all poor Mrs. Muldoon could say.

With happy hearts the chums of Cedar Creek stepped into the sleigh. At an easy pace Bob drove away from the lonely cabin. They left happiness behind them there.

"Home now," said Frank.

"We'll call at the school," said Bob. "Miss Meadows was to be fetched to the ranch early this morning. We'll take her along, and the popper can't rag us with Miss Meadows looking on—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And they drove on merrily to Cedar Creek.

### A Merry Christmas!

MISS MEADOWS was expecting to be called for at the school that morning. The rancher's sleigh arrived a little earlier than was expected, that was all.

Miss Meadows and Mr. Slimmey entered the vehicle, and Bob turned his team in the direction of the ranch.

"You boys look tired," Miss Meadows remarked, as Frank Richards' chin was drooping on his chest.

Frank straightened up rather guiltily.

"Nunno—not at all!" he stammered.

"Not a bit," said Beauclere.

Miss Meadows looked at them rather keenly.

"The horses are tired, too," she said. "You must have been out a very long time; yet it is still early morning."

"Tell Miss Meadows and she'll make it all right with the popper, Franky," said Bob Lawless, over his shoulder.

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### PEN PALS COUPON

17-12-38

"What have you to tell me, Richards?" asked the schoolmistress a little severely.

Frank Richards told the whole story. He wondered whether Miss Meadows would be angry; but as he looked at the schoolmistress' face when he had finished he saw that her expression had softened.

"You should not have gone," said Miss Meadows. "It was too dangerous; but—but I am proud of you! I do not think Mr. Lawless will be angry when he knows."

"So Father Christmas came to White Pine, after all!" said Mr. Slimmey, wiping his spectacles.

"You bet!" chuckled Bob Lawless. "And if you'd seen the kid's face, Mr. Slimmey, you'd have thought it was worth it."

The sleigh jingled up to the ranch. Mr. Lawless ran to meet it, and Mrs. Lawless, in the porch, breathed a deep sigh of relief at the sight of her son, safe and sound.

"You young rascals!" shouted the rancher, as the sleigh halted. "Good-morning, Miss Meadows! Good-morning, Mr. Slimmey! Merry Christmas! You young rascals, where have you been?"

"You tell him, Miss Meadows—I can see he's going to be mad with us," said Bob.

The rancher was in rather a difficulty. His son's escapade could not be passed over, but a dozen guests were gathering round to see the returned wanderers as well as Miss Meadows and Mr. Slimmey.

But Miss Meadows hastened to explain, and the cloud cleared from the rancher's brow.

Several of the Cedar Creek schoolboys had arrived at the ranch with their parents for Christmas Day, and they gathered round Frank Richards & Co. There was a buzz of amazement as Miss Meadows told the story of Father Christmas' coming to White Pine.

"The young rascals!" gasped the rancher. "Oh, the scallawags! Bob, you young villain—suppose the wolves—" he gasped.

"They've had your bearskin rug," said Bob cheerfully.

"You young rascals!" repeated the rancher. "You ought to be cowhided for running such risks. But if your schoolmistress thinks you can be forgiven, I'd better think the same, I guess."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob cheerily. "I—I say, mother, I—I'm sorry if you were anxious. I—I thought you'd like that kid to get the doll. You're not waxy?"

Mrs. Lawless smiled and bent and kissed her son.

"I have been alarmed," she said. "I should have been terribly alarmed if I had known what

## THE MYSTERY OF CARDEW & CO.!

(Continued from page 22.)

"And what were they all doing?" gasped the prefect at last.

"Cardew had taken a dog to give the old chap—the dog that used to belong to Figgins," said Mellish.

"Is that all?"

"No, Cardew was reading to him—something from the newspaper."

"Is that all?" asked the prefect.

"Yes."

"Did you see anything else?" asked Knox.

"No."

Racke's face was a study. He strode towards Mellish, his eyes blazing.

"He's lying!" exclaimed Racke. "He told me he'd seen them smoking, playing cards, boozing—"

"Did you tell Racke that, Mellish?" asked the prefect.

Mellish nodded.

"Yes. I was stuffing him up," he said coolly. "Racke was so awfully keen on finding those chaps out in blagging, that I thought it was a pity he should be disappointed, so I made up a yarn to amuse him!"

There was a yell of laughter in the Common-room. The expression on Aubrey Racke's face was really extraordinary.

Knox himself grinned, though he was annoyed to see that serious accusation fade away into thin air in this manner.

"You—you—" stuttered Racke.

"Bai Jove! What a wotten twick!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "I must remark that it serves Wacke wight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you fellows have been going over there to look after a blind old soldier?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Well, yes," said Levison, colouring. "The poor old chap lost his sight in the War and his son has been away. His neighbours look after him a lot, and—we helped. His son's coming home in a day or two, though. There was no need to say anything about it."

you were doing. But—but I am proud of you, Bob, and of your friends, too."

"Three cheers!" roared Billy Cook.

And the crowd of guests and the ranchmen joined heartily in the cheers, till Frank Richards & Co. were glad to hide their blushes in the ranch-house. And that Christmas Day was spent by the chums of Cedar Creek in deep slumber.

But in the evening they were quite themselves again. It was a merry Christmas at the ranch—one of the merriest Frank Richards had ever known—and it was made all the happier to the chums by the knowledge that they had brought happiness to others. And a dozen times, at least, the story had to be told of how Father Christmas came to White Pine.

**Next Week: "FRANK RICHARDS & CO'S GOLD-MINE!"**

Racke stood overwhelmed with confusion. This was the end of his spying and accusing; he had succeeded in clearing Study No. 9 of every shadow of suspicion, and in acquainting the whole House with the fact that they had given up their half-holidays to perform a deed of generous kindness to a blind old soldier.

Knox was glad that he had not taken that precious accusation before the Head.

"So that's the whole yarn?" snapped the prefect.

"That's all!" said Mellish.

"Got anything more to say, Racke?"

Racke hadn't anything more to say. He made a furious rush at Percy Mellish.

That youth promptly dodged behind Clive.

"I'm your man, Racke!" said Clive.

Knox of the Sixth promptly walked out of the Common-room.

Blake shut the door after him.

"Go it, ye cripples!" he sang out cheerily.

"Yaas, watah! Give the howlin' wottah a fearful thwashin', deah boy."

Clive was doing that.

In about three minutes Racke of the Shell was on the floor, gasping and holding his nose, and not in need of any more.

A hiss followed him as he limped out of the Common-room.

Levison minor pressed his major's arm, his face very bright.

"Ernie, you bounder," he whispered, "you never told me!"

Levison laughed.

Arthur Augustus mounted upon a chair, and waved his eyeglass to draw attention.

"Gentlemen—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Gentlemen, I call for three cheechs for Study No. 9. I wegard them as havin' played the game in wescuin' Figgay's poor old dog fwom the fewocious Watty—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And in helpin' to look aftah a wippin' old Tommy who has had bad luck. Gentlemen, three cheechs!"

And the cheers were given with a will, and they sounded pleasantly enough in the ears of the trio of Study No. 9.

**Next Wednesday: "CARDEW & CO'S CROPPER!"**