

12/25  
Kearns Gate

GRAND ENLARGED XMAS NUMBER!

*The*  
**MODERN BOY**

2<sup>D</sup>

EVERY SATURDAY  
WEEK ENDING  
DEC 12<sup>TH</sup> 1936  
N° 462 VOL 18



*Back to the  
Olden Days!*

Looking forward eagerly to the Christmas hols, **LEN LEX**—the Schoolboy Detective—and his chums find themselves speedily involved in the—

# MYSTERY OF

## Clanking Chains!

"I SUPPOSE I know whether my own uncle's house is haunted or not!" said Harvey warmly. "I tell you, Jerningham Moat House has been haunted since the umpteenth century—sportsman in white, clanking chains, horrid groans, and all that!"

"Seen it?" asked Banks, winking at Len Lex.

"I haven't exactly seen it, and I haven't exactly heard it!"

"I thought not," agreed Banks.

"Tell us about it, old bean," said Len Lex, gently restraining Harvey as he grasped a cushion to hurl at the unbelieving Banks. "A haunted house, at Christmas, is simply jolly."

"Well, I don't want to put you off the place, as you're coming with me for the hols," said Harvey.

"My dear chap, a ghost is an extra attraction! I wouldn't miss it for worlds!"

"Same here!" murmured Banks. "Somebody get up and turn on the light, if Harvey's going to make our flesh creep! And shut the door—there's a draught! That goat Porringe might have shut it after him!"

Nobody got up. The three Fifth Formers, in Study No. 8 at Oakshott, were taking it easy after tea, and nobody felt disposed to move.

It was dim and dusky in the study. The December darkness had fallen on the school. The winter wind, whistling from the Sussex downs, pattered snowflakes on the window-panes. The study fire burned with a ruddy glow, gleaming on the faces of the three fellows sitting round the fire, casting strange lights and shadows.

Oakshott School was breaking up for Christmas the next day. After tea in Study No. 8, Pie Porringe had gone down to look for letters, and Len Lex, Harvey, and Banks sat round the fire talking of the holidays. As the dusk deepened, only the fire illumined the study, and shadows lurked in the corners and danced on the walls.

"Carry on, old man," said Len.

"I'm not guaranteeing that the story's true," confessed Harvey. "But I can tell you that lots of people round the Moat House believe it. It happened centuries ago. There was a Sir Lucian Jerningham then, same as there is now. He had a nephew, who was heir to the title and estate. This chap bagged him one dark winter's night, and parked him in the dungeon below the level of the moat—a dark, damp, dismal dungeon, where he—"

"Caught a cold," suggested Banks. "Shut up, ass! Where he perished."

"Must have been perishing cold there!" said Banks. "That nephew must have been a bit of a perisher, too!"

By  
**CHARLES  
HAMILTON**

"Will you dry up, idiot? The new man held high revel in the old oak hall," went on Harvey, "while the rightful lord of the mansion was perishing in chains in the deep, dark dungeon. On Christmas night, when the new man was holding his revels with his boon companions, there came a sudden strange sound from the dungeon stair!" Harvey paused impressively.

"It was the sound of a rattling chain," he continued. "Clink, clink, clink! Clank, clank, clank! The new lord of the manor started to his feet. Slowly the sound approached the great oaken doors of the hall—and all within stood stricken silent, their eyes fixed on the doors, which slowly opened of their own accord!" Harvey paused again.

"From the darkness," he went on, "came a haggard figure, with hair white as the driven snow, and chains on its limbs that rattled and clinked as it moved, uttering deep groans at every step! Slowly, with rattling chains, it drew nearer and nearer to the new lord, who stood transfixed, gazing at it in frozen horror! An icy finger touched him!"

"Grooogh!" said Banks. "And he fell upon his face amid the wine-cups! Then suddenly all was dark!"

The fire in Study No. 8 blazed up for a moment, and died down, leaving the study almost in darkness. Harvey's voice went on, in the shadows:

"Through the darkness came the sound of a groan, and then the rattle of chains—clink, clink!"

Clink!  
Harvey broke off suddenly, Len Lex started, and Banks gave a startled yell as through the darkness and silence of the study came that sudden strange, startling clink of metal.

"Oh!" gasped Harvey.

"Oooogh!" gasped Banks.

"What!" stuttered Len.

Clink, clink! Groan!

For a startled second the three sat there as if petrified, staring into the circling shadows. The ghost story had suddenly changed into reality. Then they bounded to their feet, and Len Lex leaped to switch on the light.

## Not so Funny!

PORRINGE of the Fifth grinned. He had gone down to look for letters. Coming back with an unopened letter in his hand, he found the study in darkness, save for a glow from the fire, and heard the voice of Harvey, telling the ghost story. Pie paused at the door—grinning!

He felt in his pocket for a bunch of keys. It seemed no end of a joke to Pie to weigh in with a clink and a groan at the psychological moment. He clinked the keys and groaned—a deep, hair-raising groan. It seemed fearfully funny to the goat of the Fifth. It seemed to him still more fearfully funny as he heard the startled exclamations of the fellows in the study.

He clinked the keys again, suppressing a chuckle, and stepping softly in, let out another hair-raising groan.

"What the thump—" yelled Banks, as that fearful groan came directly behind him.

Crash! Len Lex, leaping for the switch, crashed into an unseen figure in the dark. It went over backwards, with a yell.

"Ow! Yaroooooh!"

"Pie!" yelled Harvey.

"That goat!" gasped Banks.

Len switched on the light. Pie, a bunch of keys in one hand, a letter in the other, scrambled to his feet.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he chortled.

"You priceless goat!" yelled Harvey. "Making a fellow jump nearly out of his skin!"

"Ha, ha!" chortled Pie.

"You benighted chump!" roared Banks.

"Ha, ha!"

"Bump him!" yelled Harvey and Banks together.

"Here, I say—hold on!" yelled Pie, as his exasperated friends collared him. "I say, can't you take a—whoop—joke? Ow! Don't bang my head on the fender, you blithering idiots—yaroooooh!"

Pie struggled madly. The bunch of keys flew from one hand, clanging in the fender. The letter flew from the other, landing in the fire. Pie, heedless of either, struggled and roared.

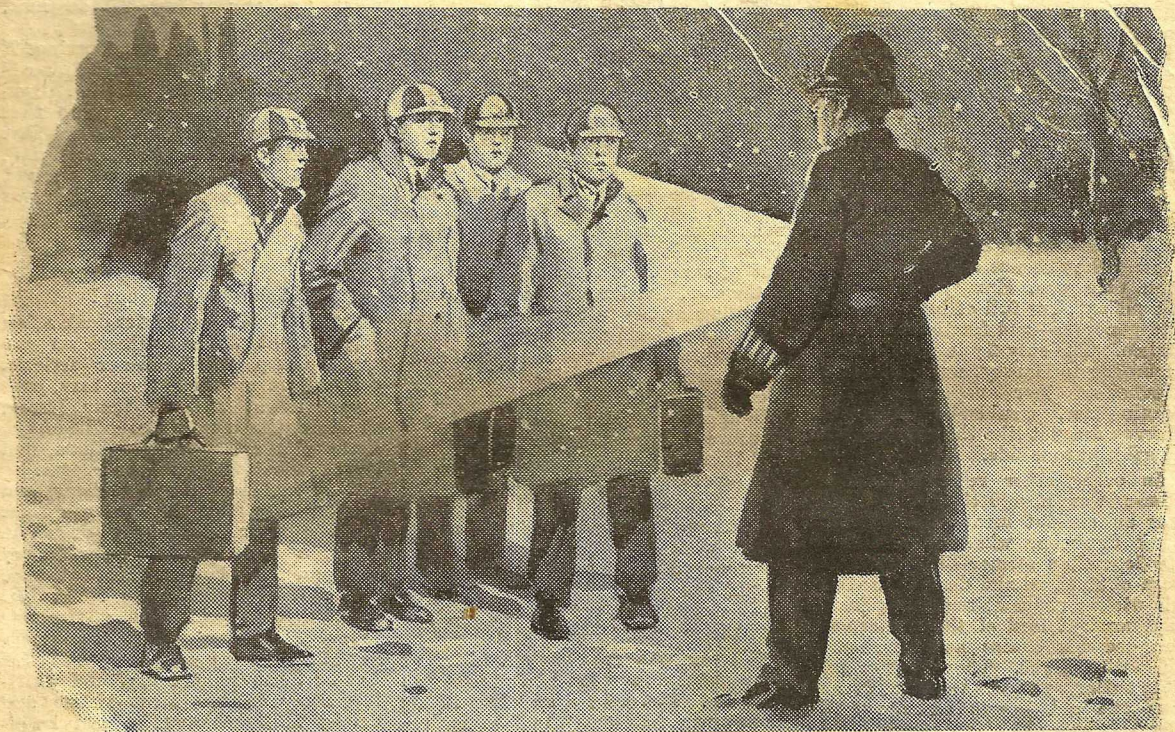
"Here, look out!" exclaimed Len.

He made a jump at the fire to save the letter. It was rather unfortunate that, at the same moment, Pie got one hand free, and hit out fiercely. Whether he was hitting at Harvey or at Banks was not clear; what was painfully clear was that Len Lex got it. Pie's lashing fist jolted on his chin, and he staggered back, stumbled over a chair, and went full length on the carpet.

"Oh!" gasped Len.

"Will you leggo?" yelled Pie, as his friends secured him again, and

# THE GOAT HOUSE!



A sudden beam of light shot through the darkness from the policeman's torch. "Who are you?" he rapped out. "What are you doing here?"

gave him another bump on the hearthrug—what time Len Lex sprawled, the letter blazed up in the fire and was consumed to ashes.

"There!" gasped Banks. "You goat—"

"There!" panted Harvey. "You fathead—"

"Oh! Ow!" Pie gurgled, and scrambled up. "You dummies! Can't you take a jig-jig-jug-joke? Ow! I've a jolly good mind— Oh crumbs! Where's that letter?"

Pie picked the bunch of keys out of the fender, and stared round for the letter. A wisp of white ashes in the fire was all that remained of it.

"You goat!" gasped Len. "It went into the fire!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" snorted Harvey. "You've jolly well chucked your letter into the fire, you potty ass!"

"It—it's gone!" stuttered Pie, staring into the fire.

"Hadh't you read it?" asked Len.

"Eh? No, of course not! I was bringing it up to the study—"

"Well, it's your own silly fault!" said Harvey. "You couldn't drop a letter without letting it fall into the fire! You all over!"

"Well, I don't mind if you don't!" said Pie.

"Well, I don't!" hooted Harvey. "Not a rap!"

"That's all right, then!" said Pie.

"I should hate to lose a letter, just before Christmas, but if you don't mind—"

Harvey jumped.

"Wharrer you mean, you ass? Wasn't it your letter?"

"No. Yours. I brought it up to the study for you."

Harvey gazed at him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Len and Banks. They could not help it. The expression on Harvey's face was too much for them.

"Mum-mum-my letter!" stuttered Harvey. "Mum-mum-mine! Why, you—you goat! You ass! You unspeakable idiot! I—I—I'll—"

"You said you didn't mind—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'll show you whether I mind or not!" shrieked Harvey. He grabbed up a hassock and hurled himself at Porringe. "Now, you ass—"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Here, I say—y a r o o o o h! Draggimoff! Stoppit! Oh crumbs!" spluttered Pie, as he backed and dodged. "I say— Oh, my hat! I say— Whooop!"

Pie dodged out of the study and ran for it. Harvey pursued him to the doorway, still swiping with the

hassock. He hurled it after him, and a wild yell floated back as Porringe vanished.

## Pie, as per Usual!

LEN LEX breathed deep in the frosty air, and his face was as bright as the gleam of the winter sun that came from a steely sky. It was a cold and frosty morning. The snow had ceased to fall, but it lay like a white mantle in the Oakshott quadrangle, and ridged walls and roofs with gleaming white.

Fags of the Fourth were hurling snowballs at one another. One from Root missed his aim, and knocked off the hat of Oliphant of the Sixth, captain of Oakshott—and Root stood petrified with horror at what he had done. But Oliphant only smiled, as he picked up his hat. The spirit of Christmas was in the air—which was lucky for Root.

Len smiled as he walked on, tramping in snow. Nephew of Detective-Inspector Nixon of Scotland Yard, he had come to Oakshott School more as a detective than a schoolboy. But the case of the Sussex Man had been wound up successfully by the schoolboy detective, and Len remained simply as Lex of the Fifth. He liked Oakshott—he was enjoying life there; he liked Harvey and Banks; he liked even that goat Porringe. Study No. 8 was a happy family, from which

## Mystery of the Moat House!

Bill Nixon's nephew would have been sorry to break away.

There was going to be no parting with his friends this Christmas, at all events, as Harvey had asked his three study-mates home for the holidays, at his uncle's house in Hampshire. It was a very welcome invitation to Len, not only because he liked old Harvey and the other fellows, but because he had no near relations but Bill—and Bill was a busy man.

So the Christmas holiday was going to be at the Moat House, which, from Harvey's description, was a most romantic and attractive old spot. His uncle, Sir Lucian Jerningham, had a liking, it seemed, for boyish company at Yuletide, which Study No. 8 agreed showed that he was a jolly old sportsman. He was, Harvey confessed, a bit ancient, but full of beans, wealthy and generous—and fond of his nephew Cedric. The only fly in the ointment, according to Harvey, was that the old baronet's other nephew, Captain Jerningham, would be there, and Harvey did not like the captain, who, he said, put on side.

In every other respect the Moat House was absolutely jolly. There was an ancient moat, a deep, dark, dank dungeon, where, according to the legend, a former Sir Lucian had been chained up and done to death by his wicked nephew; and the ghost of that ancient lord of the manor, who dragged his chains and groaned in the stilly night. There was a jolly old butler, named Wishaw; there was the old bean's secretary, Mr. Chard, who, said Harvey, was chubby and jolly, though he was rather bald, and stacked with knowledge.

Altogether it looked good to Len, and he was looking forward to the Moat House and Christmas there. And if there really was a spectre—which Len doubted—it would be rather fun to track him down, and an easier task than tracking down the Sussex Man. Len, thinking it over as he walked in the quad that cold, frosty morning, looked merry and bright as he came on Harvey and Banks in serious consultation.

"Phone!" Banks was saying.  
"What's up?" asked Len.  
"Well, I'm a bit worried," said Harvey. "You know that goat Porringe landed my letter in the fire yesterday. Well, I find that the fat-head noticed that the postmark was Olkham, and that's where the Moat House is, see? Looks to me as if it was a letter from my uncle. Everything's fixed up, of course—it's all right. Still, nunky must have had something to say, if he wrote."

"Quite!" agreed Len. "Well, there's a phone in Common-room, and you can ask leave to ring up the Moat House."

"I think I'd better!" said Harvey. "I rather wonder that nunky didn't ring me, if he had something to say at the last minute like this. I've a jolly good mind to kick that goat!"

"Phone nunky instead," said Len, smiling.

Harvey nodded, and the three

Fifth Formers walked back to the House. A whizzing snowball dropped a couple of yards ahead of them, and they glared round at the cheery Pie. Pie, clearly, was in great spirits, and expressing it in his usual goat-like way. He missed, of course; Pie could not have hit the side of a house with a snowball or anything else.

"Hold on a minute!" said Harvey.

"Give that goat a few!"  
They held on a minute, and gathered snow.

Whiz, whiz, whiz! Crash! Smash! Bash! Porringe rolled in snow, and roared, as three snowballs, in swift succession, crashed and smashed and bashed on him. Grinning, the three walked on, leaving Pie to roar.

Porrige scrambled up, red and wrathful, gathered a snowball, and rushed in pursuit. By that time, however, the trio were in the House, out of range.

Chowne, master of the Shell, was standing at the tall window, open on the quad, looking out into the frosty morning. There was a slight frown on Chowne's face. He had spotted Porringe with a snowball grasped in his hand, and Mr. Chowne did not approve of horse-play in the quad.

"There's Chowne," said Banks, at the doorway. "Ask him, and get going."

Harvey, leaving his friends at the door, went into Common-room. He approached the master of the Shell.

"If you please, sir," said Harvey, in his most respectful tone, "may I use the telephone—"

Harvey was interrupted. Pie, at that moment, spotted him at the open window. Pie, with a snowball in his hand, was not likely to lose such a chance. His right arm went up, and his snowball flew.

Which would not have mattered very much had Pie's aim been good. But the snowball missed Harvey by a foot or more, and caught the master of the Shell on the right ear as he stood half-turned towards Harvey.

"Oooooogh!" stuttered Mr. Chowne, very much surprised. He staggered, lost his footing and fell! From the quadrangle came a gasp and a pattering of feet. Pie saw what he had done. Horrified, he flew.

"What—what—what—" stuttered Mr. Chowne dizzily. "A—a—snowball! Harvey! How dare you! You—you—you young rascal!" Chowne sat up. "Upon my word, you—you—have dared—"

"I—I—I—" gasped Harvey, while Len and Banks, in silent horror, gazed from the doorway.

Mr. Chowne staggered to his feet. Evidently he supposed that that snowball had been intended for him, as he had got it. Still worse, he clearly suspected that Harvey had deliberately drawn his attention so that the snowballer could take him off his guard and get him. Chowne almost foamed.

"I shall report this to your headmaster, Harvey—you and Porringe and Lex and Banks—all of you. Upon my word—Groooooogh!" Mr. Chowne gouged snow from his ear.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Harvey. "I—I never—"

"Go! I shall report—"

"I—I—I—really, sir—I—I—I came to ask if I might use the telephone, sir—"

"You may not!" thundered Mr. Chowne. "Go! Leave this room! I shall report—"

Harvey joined his friends at the door and they faded away.

"That goat!" said Banks. "I say, what are you going to do now, Harvey, old man?"

"I'm going to look for Porringe!" hissed Harvey. "Come and help me!"

They went and helped him. Oakshott School was breaking up that day, and from the fearful yells that proceeded from Porringe of the Fifth, when his friends found him, it might have been supposed that Pie was breaking up, too!

### Something Wrong!

THROUGH the winter dusk a few light flakes whirled on the sharp wind. Four fellows, coat-collars up about their ears, caps pulled down, bags in their hands, stood in the dim street outside the little village station at Olkham, and stared about them in the gloom.

They had been waiting about, and staring into the thickening gloom, for a quarter of an hour or more, since a slow train, after many changes, had landed them at that remote Hampshire village. It had been a cold and rather tiresome journey, and Harvey & Co. were looking forward to stepping into Sir Lucian Jerningham's car, and whirling away to the Moat House and bright firelight warmth, and hospitality. But they waited in vain. There was no car at the station and no sign of one coming.

"It's weird!" said Harvey. "Blessed if I can make it out! Nunky knew my train, of course, and arranged to send the car to pick us up."

"I suppose the snow wouldn't stop it?" said Banks.

"Not enough for that. Besides, if it did, he would send somebody or something! Only—he hasn't."

"What about walking it?" suggested Len. "We've got legs."

"A mile and a half—through this!" Harvey looked glum. This was not the sort of thing he had planned for his friends. It was disconcerting and very perplexing.

"Any sort of lift to be got in this show?" asked Porringe, with a glance round at snow-roofed cottages, from which a light here and there glimmered.

"Not to save your life!" answered Harvey. "Wheelbarrow, perhaps!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Can't make it out! Nunky's not the man to forget. And even if he did, Captain Jerningham's there, and he would remember—and Wishaw, too. Wishaw would see to it, or old Chardy. The car must have started and had an accident—that's all there is to it!" said Harvey. "Rough luck on you men—looks as if we've got to hoof it."

"Rot!" said Len cheerfully. "We can hoof it all right!"

"Right as rain!" said Porringe. "Keep your peckers up! Look here, let's trot, and do some snowballing as we go along—"

"Kill him!" said Banks.

"Look here, Banker—"

"Oh, come on!" said Harvey. "The car's hung up on the road—that's it. We may pass it and get picked up. Better start, I think."

All four were tired of hanging about in the cold wind. They started to walk. In Olkham it was dim; outside Olkham, on the country road, it was almost as black as a hat. Through the darkness the powdery snow on the road glimmered and flakes whirled on the wind. Muffled up in their coats, swinging their bags, the four Oakshott fellows tramped.

Harvey was rather glum—personally, he did not mind very much, but he felt that it was rough luck on his guests. Banks and Len were cheery enough, and Pie kept up a merry whistle—out of tune, of course, and melodious only to Pie's own ears. After a half-mile of tramping through cold wind and whirling flakes and dense darkness, however, Pie's whistle died away—rather to the relief of his friends.

No car was passed on the road. From the road they turned into a lane, which was muddy as well as snowy and windy. Leafless trees arched overhead and groaned in the bitter wind. Still there was no sign of a car, either as a going concern or hung up in a conked-out state.

It undoubtedly looked as if no car had left the Moat House to pick up Sir Lucian Jerningham's visitors. Which was perplexing to Harvey's friends, after what he had told them about the kind-heartedness and unbounded hospitality of that jolly old bean, his Uncle Lucian; and more and more disconcerting to Harvey himself, who could not help feeling a little sore at what looked like careless neglect.

Harvey came to a halt at a gate, ridged with snow, under dark trees.

"Look here, you men, goodness knows how and why, but the car never started," he said. "We shan't get picked up. This is a short cut through the park, and will save half the distance. May as well take it, as we've got to leg it."

"Good egg!" said Len.

"Hear, hear!" said Banks. "I shan't be sorry to see a fire!"

The gate groaned on rusty hinges and they passed through. Beyond lay a footpath under leafless, frosty, old oaks and beeches. Snow and fallen leaves crumpled under their feet. If the lane had been dark, the footpath was darker, and there was a grunt from Porringe as he bumped into a tree.

"Wow!"

"Clumsy ass!" said Banks.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Len, startled. "What—"

A sudden beam of

bright light shot through the blackness. Someone was on the dark path ahead of the Oakshott men, and evidently he had heard them. The glare of the electric torch blazed in their faces, almost blinding them with its sudden light. They blinked at the shadowy, burly figure behind it.

"Who are you?" rapped a sharp, authoritative voice. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh crums!" gasped Pie. "Is that a footpad?"

"You burbling blitherer," hissed Banks. "It's a bobby!"

It was a figure in uniform that loomed behind the sudden light. Two keen eyes scanned their startled faces.

"Who are you?" repeated the sharp voice.

"We're going to the Moat House," answered Harvey. "I'm Sir Lucian Jerningham's nephew, if you want to know."

"What do you mean? Sir Lucian's nephew is a man of thirty—you look like a schoolboy—"

"You're a credit to the Force!" chuckled Harvey. "You've guessed it in one! I'm my uncle's nephew, all the same—on the other side of the

family. Name's Harvey, if you're interested."

The constable made no reply to that. For a long moment, he scanned the faces of the Oakshott quartet; then the light was suddenly shut off.

"You can go on, sir," he said civilly. And the Oakshott fellows tramped on, the burly figure of the constable vanishing in darkness.

### The Phantom of the Dark!

LEN LEX had a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow as he tramped on with his friends. That sudden challenge from the darkness had startled the whole party. Len could not help wondering why a constable was patrolling a footpath in Sir Lucian Jerningham's park, keenly on the watch. He had seen that the party were schoolboys, and allowed them to pass on. But for whom, or what, could he have been watching?

The other fellows were wondering also, and Porringe propounded a suggestion that was worthy of his brilliant intellect.

"Poachers!" said Pie.

"What?" yelped Banks.



The butler who opened the door of the Moat House stared at them in startled surprise. "Master Cedric!" he gasped.

## Mystery of the Moat House!

"That bobby was watching for somebody!" said Pie. "Must have been poachers—what?"

"Goat!" said Harvey.

"But what the dickens was he at, though?" said Banks. "Can't be walking about there because he enjoys the weather. And this is private land, isn't it?"

"Yes. Hallo! Look! Is that another?" exclaimed Harvey.

At a distance from the footpath a light gleamed again and again, moving among the trees. The Oakshott fellows came to a halt, staring at it, as it shifted and glimmered and finally vanished. They could not make out, in the distance and the darkness, who carried the light. When it was gone, they moved on again, in subdued silence, wondering

Harvey broke the silence at last. "I don't get this!" he said. "Something must be up—looks as if the police are searching the park! What the dickens for?"

"Poachers," said Pie.

"Fathead!" said his three friends together.

"Well," said Pie, "I jolly well think—"

"Listen!" muttered Len.

His keen ear caught a sound, close at hand. The four Oakshott men came to a halt, their hearts beating faster. The darkness—the silence of the desolate park—were having rather a creepy effect on them. The sound came again—a faint rustle in frosty thickets.

"Another bobby!" muttered Banks. But he spoke without conviction. It was not a constable who was moving so stealthily in the dark. A constable, too, would surely have turned on a light. It was somebody who had evidently heard the schoolboys' voices and footsteps, but did not choose to make himself known. The rustle died into dead silence; and they peered into the blackness, seeing nothing, yet knowing that someone was close at hand.

"Who's there?" called out Harvey. And there was a slight shake in his voice. They listened for a reply, but none came.

"Not a bobby this time!" muttered Banks.

"A poacher!"

"Idiot!"

"Hark!" breathed Harvey.

From the blackness, moaning on the wind, came a strange, eerie sound—a long groan. It caused the Oakshott fellows to jump almost clear of the ground. Pie clutched the arm nearest him—Len's.

"Look!" he breathed.

It was a glimmer of white from the black—the height of a man's face from the ground. But no features could be distinguished; only a patch of flat whiteness, ghostly and eerie. And from that patch of glimmering white came the sound of a groan, prolonged, rising and falling on the wind. Then the white glimmer vanished, and all was black again and silent, save for the moaning of the December wind in the bare branches.

"What—what—was it?" muttered Banks through his chattering teeth.

Harvey shivered.

"Let's get on!" he muttered. "It's nearly half a mile yet. Let's get on, and get out of this!"

They hurried on. Harvey and Banks and Pie, if they were not scared, certainly felt their hearts beat very unpleasantly. In a lighted room by a ruddy fireside a ghost story was one thing; in a black and lonely wood at night it was quite another. And the thought of the phantom of the Moat House was in their minds. They did not run, but they walked very fast, without speaking. And as they went there came at intervals a faint sound—the cracking of a twig, or the brushing of a branch—behind them in the blackness of the path, which hinted that that strange and mysterious presence was haunting their footsteps. Then, low and faint, came that shuddering groan, echoing eerily on the wailing wind.

"I—I say, it—it's jolly c-c-cold!" stammered Pie. "What about sprinting? It'll warm us up!"

They broke into a trot—the three of them. In the dense gloom, none of the three noticed that Len Lex dropped behind.

Len was not insensible to the eerie influence of that strange, unearthly sound in the lonely and desolate wood. But he pulled himself together. Superstition had no part in the make-up of Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew. Someone—or something—was haunting the footsteps of the Oakshott party, as they hurried through the dark wood—and he was going to know who, or what, it was!

That it was trickery was clear to the schoolboy detective's cool and practical mind, though he had to admit that it was inexplicable. For no one, either at the Moat House or elsewhere, could have known that they were coming by that lonely path through Jerningham Park—no one could have planned to waylay them there to play upon their terrors with ghostly trickery. Some stranger, who could not even have seen them, but could only have heard their voices, was playing this ghastly trick! Why? Who could it be, roaming in the gloom at the risk of being spotted by the police who were searching through the park?

Whoever it was—whatever it was—Len was going to know. At that moment, Bill Nixon's nephew ceased to be a schoolboy and became a detective again. Quietly, he dropped behind his hurrying friends, backed under a frosty beech by the footpath, and waited. The heavy tramping of three pairs of boots receded up the path, and Len calculated that the ghostly pursuer would hardly detect that it was not the sound of four. He waited—watchful in the darkness.

Len could have kicked himself for not having a flashlight in his pocket. There was no time to unpack one from his bag. In black darkness he waited and watched, every sense on the alert.

A shadow loomed. Len heard deep, fast breathing. He smiled—grimly.

It was not a phantom that was breathing so fast and hard, as it trod on the track of the schoolboys.

He listened intently. Evidently the ghostly pursuer, knowing that he had the party on the run, did not know that one had dropped behind to wait for him. He had them scared, and was keeping them scared, no doubt intending to keep up that eerie trickery till they escaped from the wood. That he had no suspicion that one had stayed behind was quite clear—for the black shadow, and the deep breathing, passed Len as he stood backing against the beech, invisible. And as it passed, the schoolboy detective swung round the suitcase in his right hand, and it crashed on the back of a head.

The black shadow toppled forward. There was a grunt, and the sound of a fall. The scarcely seen figure was on its hands and knees in the snow, knocked spinning by that sudden crash. Len dropped the suitcase, and leaped on the sprawling form.

His grasp closed on it—on a thick overcoat! It was human—there was no doubt about that. The groaning phantom of Jerningham Park was solid flesh and bone in a thick overcoat—and, in spite of the sudden surprise and shock, as alert and active as a cat! Even as Len Lex grasped, the figure twisted over, and grasped in return, struggling and wrenching. Len found himself struggling in a grip that was too strong for him, sturdy as he was. But he held on, and shouted:

"Harvey! Come back, you men! I've got the rotter! Stop!"

The trampling footsteps up the path ceased. A startled voice called back—Harvey's.

"Lex! Is that you? What—"

"Come back! Help!" shouted Len, exerting all his strength, as his unseen antagonist wrenched to free himself. "Help!"

There was a sound of running feet. The three Oakshott men were running back along the footpath. A loud yelp told that Porringe had dashed into a tree. Harvey and Banks came running on.

A crashing blow caught Len under the chin. His grasp relaxed as he stumbled and fell, and the unseen one wrenched himself away. There was a rustle in the frosty wood as he plunged away in the darkness and vanished. A moment more, and Harvey and Banks were stumbling over Len as he sprawled, dizzy from that crashing blow.

"Lex!" shouted Harvey. "Where are—"

"Here!" panted Len.

He scrambled up, panting.

"I got him, but he's got away! He's nearly knocked my chin through the back of my head! He's got a hefty punch, for a spook! Your family ghosts must do a lot of physical jerks, Harvey! They've got muscle!"

"It—it—was—somebody!" gasped Harvey.

"Playing ghost!" said Len. "Goodness knows who, or how, or why—I don't! I know he's given me a first-class jolt! Ow!"

Len groped for his suitcase and

picked it up. Harvey and Banks stared round them in the dark. A rustle died away in the distant wood—the unknown was gone!

"I say!" Pie's voice came plaintively. "I've banged my dashed nose on a dashed tree, and the dashed claret's simply pouring—"

"You would!" said Banks.

"Let's get on!" said Len. "I don't think that sportsman will trail us any further—he won't want another cosh on the napper from this bag!"

"Not a giddy spook, anyhow," said Banks. "But who the dickens—"

"Come on!" said Harvey.

They tramped on—with no further sound of a ghostly pursuer. They emerged from the park at last, and there was a glimmer of lighted windows. Harvey led the way through frosty gardens to a bridge that spanned the ancient moat encircling the mansion. They arrived in a high stone porch, and Harvey groped for the massive old knocker and crashed it with a thundering knock that must have awakened every echo of the ancient Moat House.

### Startling News!

THE great oaken door opened to reveal the lighted hall within, with a log fire leaping and blazing in a wide old hearth, bright lights gleaming on polished oak walls, antlers, weapons, and holly and mistletoe.

Hospitable and welcoming looked the old hall of the Moat House. But the plump, portly, apple-cheeked butler who had opened the door stared at them wide-eyed in startled surprise.

"Master Cedric!" gasped Whishaw. "You—and your friends!"

"Sort of!" said Harvey. "And glad to get in! Why the dickens wasn't the car sent, Whishaw?"

"The—the car!" stammered the butler.

"We've had to leg it," said Harvey. "What are you blinking at, Whishaw? Taking me for a ghost, or what? Where's my uncle?"

"Your uncle!" gasped Whishaw. "Oh, Master Cedric—"

Len Lex eyed the portly face of the Moat House butler curiously. Banks and Porridge exchanged a queer glance. It was evident that Whishaw was not expecting the party—that he was startled and surprised to see them walk in. Something, it was clear, was wrong, though they could not imagine what.

Harvey looked grim. He was as surprised as his friends, and still less pleased. A manservant came forward to help them off with their coats. In his face was reflected the surprise in the butler's. A door at the back of the hall opened, revealing book-lined walls, and a rather tall and handsome young man looked out.

"What is it, Whishaw?" he called. "Inspector Shute again—what? Great Scott! Is that Cedric?" He stared at Harvey, jammed an eyeglass into his eye, and stared again. "You here, Cedric!" he barked.

"What the thump do you mean, Cecil?" hooted Harvey. "Why shouldn't I be here? Ain't I expected? What do you mean?"

Harvey's three friends could guess that this was his cousin, Captain Jerningham, nephew and heir of the lord of the Moat House. His look expressed angry surprise and annoyance.

"Didn't you get my letter at the school?" he exclaimed. "You must have had my letter!"

"Your letter?" repeated Harvey. "Oh, it was from you, then—I thought it was from Uncle Lucian."

"Are you mad?" barked the captain. "If you had the letter—"

"I never read it—it dropped in the study fire before I had a chance to!"

"You young fool! Is this the place for a schoolboy party? Pah! Whishaw, has Chard come in yet?"

Captain Jerningham took no further notice of the Oakshott party.

"No, sir," stammered Whishaw. "I thought Mr. Chard was with you, sir—"

"We went separate ways in the wood," growled Captain Jerningham. "I got in a quarter of an hour ago. Tell Chard to come to me when he comes in—and Shute, if he calls again."

"Look here, Cecil Jerningham!"

bawled Harvey. "I want to know what all this means?"

Slam! Captain Jerningham stepped back into the library and closed the door with a bang, without taking the trouble to answer. Harvey's face was red as he looked at his friends.

"That's my cousin," he said. "I've told you he is a sidey ass, but I've never seen him like this before. By gum, he's never had the nerve to carry on in this style in my uncle's house. Whishaw, you old ass, what's the matter with him?"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Whishaw. "Captain Jerningham wrote specially to tell you that in the circumstances it would be wiser not to bring your friends to the Moat House this Christmas, and to suggest that you should, if possible, go with one of them for the holidays, sir—"

"He wrote that?" gasped Harvey. "My hat! Is Cecil Jerningham master of this house, and undertaking to give orders whether I accept my own uncle's invitation or not? By gum! I'll tell him soon enough where he gets off, blow his dashed impudence! Where's my uncle, Whishaw?"

"Oh, Master Cedric—" stammered the butler.

A sudden change came over Harvey's face, and he grasped at the portly butler's arm.

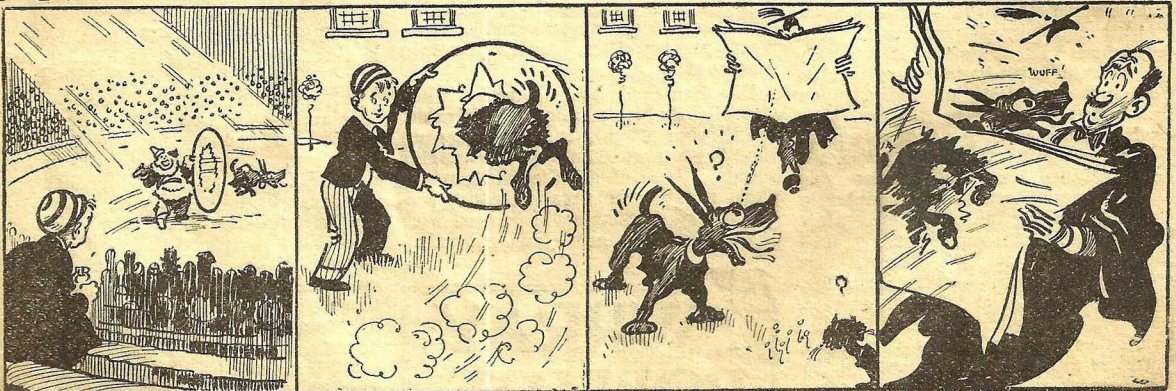
"What's up? Speak, you ass! My uncle—is he ill or—what?" Harvey's face had paled. "Whishaw, where's my uncle?"

"No one knows, sir," faltered the butler. "The police are searching for him everywhere. Sir Lucian Jerningham disappeared last Monday, Master Cedric, and has not been heard of since!"

*That's a staggering sort of welcome to the Christmas feast—and more surprises come thick and fast to make this the most exciting Christmas the chums have ever spent. Next Saturday they become Ghost-Hunters, determined to solve for themselves this puzzling mystery of the old Moat House!*

## DON DRAKE'S DIARY

Circus Fun at St. Michael's, drawn by the Schoolboy Artist



Perkins, visiting the local circus, was thrilled by the cleverness of a dog which jumped through a paper hoop.

When he got back to St. Michael's, he started teaching the gardener's dog, Tozo, to do the same trick.

Tozo was a keen little chap, and eagerly awaited his chance to do the trick again. It soon came along—

—when one of the masters strode across the quad reading a newspaper. Tozo went through in style!—Don Drake.