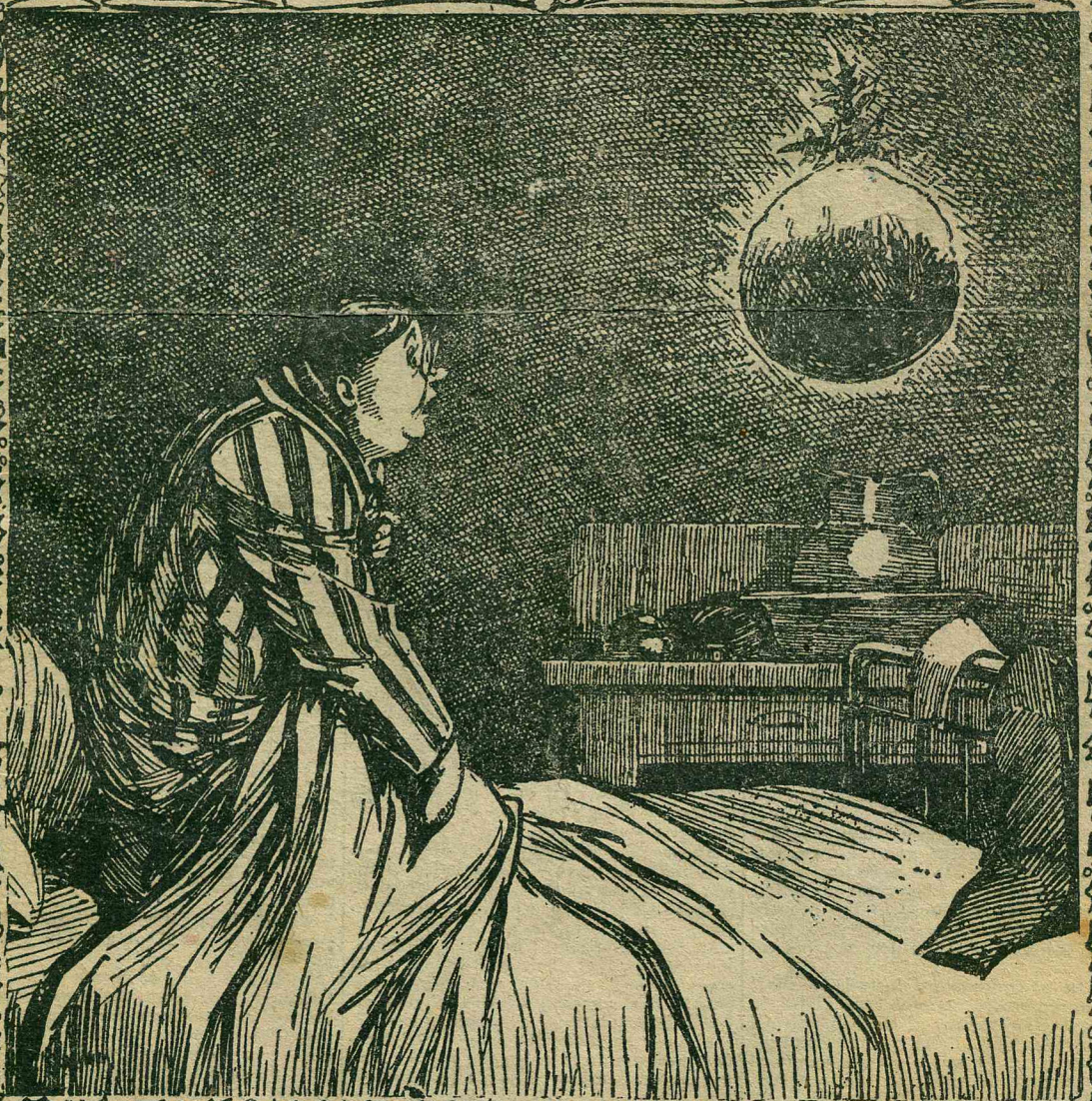


**4 Long Complete School Stories!**

**THE PENNY 2<sup>d</sup>  
POPULAR**

No. 269.

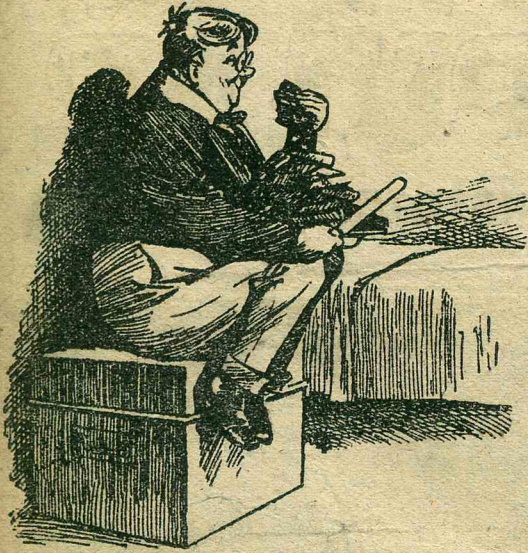
**Special Christmas Number**



**THE PHANTOM PUDDING!**

*(A Great Incident from the Grand Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.,  
contained in this Issue.)*

# Billy Bunter's Christmas Dream



A Magnificent Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co., the Chums of Greyfriars.

— BY —

**FRANK RICHARDS.**

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.**

**Billy Bunter Has a Little Scheme.**

**C**HRISTMAS!"

"Yes."

"But it isn't Christmas yet."

"I know it isn't," said Billy Bunter, sitting upright in the armchair in No. 1 Study in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. "I never said it was. But Christmas is coming—"

"So is bedtime," said Harry Wharton, with a glance at the clock on the mantelpiece; "and if you talk much longer, Bunter, we sha'n't get our prep done. We've left it very late as it is."

"Never mind the prep—"

"Mr. Quelch will mind in the morning," said Harry, laughing. "Never mind Christmas. Why, it's some time yet before we break up for the holidays."

"Yes, I know that, and therefore—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Frank Nugent, tipping his pen in the ink. "You're like the little brook, Bunter—you go on for ever."

Bunter blinked at Nugent through his spectacles. He was in a state of simmering indignation, but he managed to keep his temper.

It wasn't pleasant for a fellow who was making plans for the general happiness of the study to be sat upon in this way.

Bunter was always being sat upon, but he was always objecting to the process, too. Nugent said that some fellows were never satisfied, and Bunter was one of them.

"The go-on-for-ever-fulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh, in his expressive variety of English, learned under the best tutors in the land of Bhanipur. "It would be an esteemed and boonful blessing if the excellent Bunter would hold his honourable jaw."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Order!"

"But it's rather important, you know. It's because Christmas isn't here yet that I want to explain. You see, a Christmas pudding—"

"No, I don't see one."

"Do let me finish. A Christmas pud-

ding is an important matter. I've got a beautiful recipe, and I am a good cook. You'll admit that I cook jolly well!"

"Yes; and eat better than you cook."

"Oh, really, Nugent! You see, if you fellows would raise ten bob—I'd do it myself, only I've been disappointed about a postal order—just ten bob, I'd have the rippingest pudding that ever—ever—"

"Ripped?"

"That ever was made or tasted. I'd take the whole of the cooking upon my hands," said Bunter generously. "You could leave the pudding entirely to me."

"I expect you'd have the lion's share, anyway."

"I didn't mean that. I mean you could leave the cooking entirely to me. A hot Christmas pudding is just the thing, you know. I know it isn't Christmas yet, but it's Christmas weather. You can't deny that."

A terrific gust of wind shook the window as Bunter spoke, and certainly bore out his words.

There was a storm upon the North Sea that evening, and even from Greyfriars the sound could be heard of the great billows dashing upon the rocks of the Shoulder.

The usually calm bay was foaming and whirling, and great breakers rolled shoreward, and spray lashed up over the slate roofs of Cliff House, which was nearer to the sea than Greyfriars.

In the Greyfriars Close, the old elms, long stripped of their last leaves, were creaking and swaying, and a groaning bough was scraping at the window of No. 1 Study with its outermost twigs.

The chums of the Remove paused for a few moments to listen to the storm. The wind was howling round the roofs of Greyfriars and singing in the old, wide chimneys.

Billy Bunter thought he had made an impression upon the Greyfriars chums, and he proceeded eloquently:

"Now, you can't deny that a hot Christmas pudding would be ripping on a night like this. I've got a ripping recipe. Just ten bob, and the thing's done. You just plank down ten bob, and I—"

"You walk off with it," said Nugent, "and that will be the last we shall see of it."

"But the Christmas pudding—"

"I don't suppose the Christmas pudding would ever exist outside your imagination, Bunter," said Wharton. "Give us a rest!"

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"How the wind howls!" said Nugent, as a terrific gust rang round the old, grey building, and there was a crash of a breaking branch in the Close.

"By Jove, it does!"

"If you fellows can't trust me with money, this discussion had better cease," said Billy Bunter, with great dignity.

"A jolly sight better!" agreed Nugent. "Shut up!"

"The betterfulness would be terrific."

"I'm wasted in this study," said Bunter bitterly. "Other fellows would appreciate more what it was to have a good cook for nothing, and a fellow who's willing to spare no trouble. I've thought several times of changing out of this study into another."

"Pity you don't get further than thinking about it."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Sorry for any ship on the Shoulder to-night!" said Harry Wharton, in a low voice. "Hark! You can hear the breakers!"

"Look here, Wharton!" said Bunter aggressively. "What are you going to do?"

"Oh, I'm going to do my prep!"

Bunter rose from the armchair. He blinked at the three chums in turn, but they did not even see him; they were bent over their work, and busy.

"I thought I would give this study first chance," said Bunter.

"Declined with thanks!" said Nugent, without looking up.

"I'll go along to No. 13, and ask Bob Cherry—"

"Good! Buck up!"

"And if he won't hear of it, I'll raise a subscription in the Form, and make a big thing of it," said Bunter. "I sha'n't ask you chaps to taste the pudding."

"Horrid! Good-bye!"  
Bunter blinked wrathfully. But the juniors refused to look up, and utterly declined to be disturbed by his threats, and at last he went out of the study, and slammed the door behind him with unnecessary violence.

Nugent grunted.  
"I wonder if that chap ever thinks of anything but eating?" he remarked. "I think Bunter is getting more impossible every day."

"Hear, hear!" said Wharton.  
"The hear-hearfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

**THE SECOND CHAPTER.**  
**A Chess Problem.**

**T**HREE juniors sat round a chess-table in the junior common-room at Greyfriars. One, a long-legged fellow, with rough hair and a frank, rugged face, was Bob Cherry, and he was playing chess with a lad who was a good foot shorter and whose peculiar attire, equally unusual complexion, almond eyes, and pigtail, showed him to be a native of the Flowery Land.

Wun Lung, the Chinese, was a great chess-player, and Bob Cherry thought he knew something about the game. He was finding out now that he did not know as much as he had supposed.

Mark Linley, the sturdy lad from Lancashire, was the third of the trio. He was looking on. A student of chess, he was glad to watch a good game, and this game was a good one on Wun Lung's part, if not on Bob Cherry's.

"I think I've got you now!" said Bob Cherry. "I've been waiting for you to stick your queen over there, you know, and shove your king on bishop's fourth. What price moving my rook up two?"

Wun Lung smiled—that Celestial smile that was childlike and bland.

"Movee lookee," he said.  
"Wait a bit, though! Ahem! I should be leaving my king in check."

"Velly plenty muchee checkee."  
"Hum! Perhaps I'd better shove the bish on."

And Bob put out his fingers to the bishop and withdrew them again without touching it, and took another look. He had already learned that he must expect surprises in dealing with Wun Lung.

"I say, you fellows—"  
Billy Bunter had just come into the common-room. He blinked round the room for some minutes, and finally spotted the chess-players. He came rolling over to the corner, and halted by the table.

"Don't talk," said Bob Cherry; "I'm playing chess!"

"Yes, but—"  
"Shut up!"  
"Oh, really, Cherry—"  
"Kill him, Linley, old chap!"

Mark Linley smiled as Bob made that modest request. Billy Bunter started back a little, blinking at the Lancashire lad.

"Better shut up, Bunter," said Linley. "Cherry's busy."

"Look here, I've been up to No. 13 Study to speak to you chaps, and now I've taken the trouble to hunt you out here!" said Bunter, in an injured tone.

"Now go up to the study again, then, and stay there!"

"Oh, really, Linley—"  
"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry. "I've got this chap mate in four moves, if I'm not bothered."

"But it's important—"  
"Brain him, somebody!"

"It's about a Christmas pudding. I've got a scheme—"

Bob Cherry looked round wildly. There was a cushion behind him on the chair, and he grasped it.

"Will you shut up, or shall I biff you?" he shrieked. "I tell you I've got Wun Lung mate in four."

"Yes, but—"  
Bob Cherry made a threatening motion with the cushion, and Bunter dodged hastily behind Bulstrode, of the Remove, who had just come in. Bulstrode gave him a kick to get him out of the way, and Bunter gave a squeal. Wun Lung was grinning.

"No matee!" he remarked.  
"I'm working it out," said Bob Cherry, leaning his chin on his hand, and screwing up his brows as he gazed fixedly at the chessboard. "Lemme see! Bish to rook's fourth—then knight—ahem!—rook—ahem!—ah!"

"I say, Cherry—"  
"Get away!" shrieked Bob Cherry. "Buzz off!"  
"I've got a scheme—"

It was too much for flesh and blood to bear. Bob Cherry half started up, and grasped the cushion. With a deadly aim he hurled it at Bunter.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

And he hurled the cushion at Bob Cherry.

Bob instinctively put up his hands to protect his face, and the cushion crashed upon the chess-table. The round, one-legged table went flying, and the chess pieces scattered themselves in all quarters. Bob Cherry gave a yell of wrath.

"Ow! The chess!"  
"Gamee spoilee—"  
"You villain!" roared Bob. "Look at my chess! I had him mate in four!"  
"No matee. Me matee in thlee," murmured Wun Lung.

"Rats!"  
"Lats!"

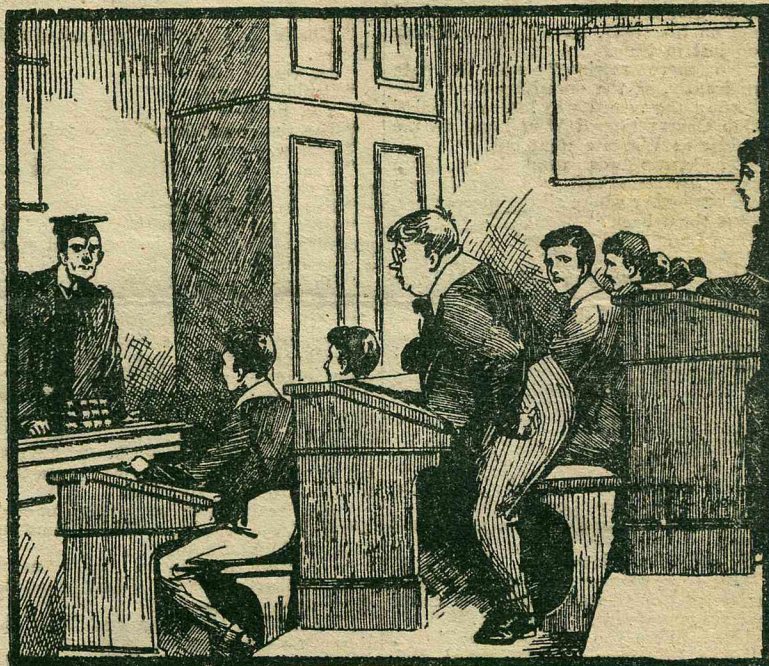
"Look here, you heathen—"  
"More lats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bulstrode. "Serve you jolly well right! You should be a little more careful before you sling cushions about!"

"You fathead—"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was chucking it at Bunter, and it hit you by mistake."

"Well, I was chucking it at you, and



"Stand out here, Bunter!" roared the Form-master. "If—if you don't mind, sir, I—I'd rather stay here," faltered Billy Bunter, who didn't like the look in Mr. Quelch's eye.

He dodged just in time. The cushion missed him by two inches, flew past his head, and crashed on Bulstrode's ear.

"O-o-o-oh!" yelled Bulstrode.  
He went spinning, and caught Hazeldene by the neck to save himself, and both of them went to the floor with a crash.

"Oh, oh, oh!"  
"Yaroo!"

Hazeldene sat up, looking dazed, and Bulstrode scrambled to his feet, furious. He glared round in search of a victim, grasping the cushion.

"Bunter—"  
"It wasn't me!" yelled Bunter quickly and ungrammatically.

"Who threw that cushion?" yelled Bulstrode.

"I did!" said Bob Cherry. "I didn't mean— Oh!"

"Then you can have it back again!" said Bulstrode.

it hit the chess-table by mistake. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling ass!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop that cackle!" roared the exasperated Bob. "Stop it, or I'll jolly soon stop it for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Will you shut it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob wasted no more breath in words. He wanted somebody to lick, and Bunter had already scuttled off. He went for Bulstrode.

In a moment they were at it hammer and tongs, and the juniors formed a ring round them. Wun Lung began to pick up the scattered chessmen.

"Go it, Cherry!"  
"Go it, Bulstrode!"

The young rascals were enjoying the fight, which lent a little agreeable

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

variety to the evening. There was a sudden voice at the door.

"Stop that! Bed!"

It was Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars. The juniors crowded back, but the two combatants were too excited to see or hear.

Wingate advanced into the room, and took Bob Cherry by the collar with one hand, Bulstrode by the collar with the other. In the powerful grip of the big Sixth-Former they had no chance.

With a wrench Wingate dragged them apart.

"Ow!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Yow!" murmured Bulstrode.

"What's this about?" demanded Wingate, shaking them.

"A—a little argument about chess, that's all!" stammered Bob Cherry.

Wingate grinned.

"Well, you must solve your chess problems a little more quietly," he remarked, as he brought their heads together with a crack. "Now get to bed!"

Bob Cherry and Bulstrode rubbed their heads. They were very subdued as they went up to the Remove dormitory. Wharton & Co., from No. 1 Study, joined them on the stairs, having finished their prep just in time.

"No more rowing," said Wingate significantly, at the dormitory door, "or I'll know the reason why! Get to bed!"

Bob Cherry tapped Wun Lung on the shoulder as Wingate went out.

"The game was mucked up, Wun Lung," he remarked. "I suppose you can't remember where all the pieces were, to put them back?"

Wun Lung shook his head.

"No savvy!"

"But, of course, you noticed that I was mate in four?"

Another shake of the head.

"No! Me matee in thlee!"

"Why, you young ass, I—"

"No savvy!"

"Well, of all the obinate heathens! It was mate in four—"

"Matee in thlee!"

"Rats!"

"Lats!"

The juniors tumbled into bed and Wingate came and turned out the lights.

From the darkness came a still, small voice.

"I say, you fellows—"

"By Jove, Bunter must have seen it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Did you notice that I was mate in four, Bunter?"

"Eh? Were you playing chess?"

"Was I playing chess?" roared Bob indignantly. "Didn't you see I was?"

"I really didn't notice. I'm sincerely sorry if it was of any consequence. What I was going to speak to you about was my scheme. You see, a Christmas pudding—"

"Oh, blow your scheme!"

"But a Christmas pudding—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Wharton—Nugent! I say, you fellows!"

Snore!

"I say, you fellows, about that scheme—"

Another snore, too deep and sonorous to be genuine. Bunter grunted, and turned over on his pillow, and began to snore, too.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Billy Bunter Makes Terms.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were up exceptionally early the next morning. And so was Billy Bunter, for that matter.

It was quite natural for Harry Wharton and his chums to get up half an hour or so earlier than usual. There had been a THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

heavy snowfall during the night, and they were anxious to have a snowball fight before breakfast.

Harry Wharton, Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Singh went out into the Close, and soon a fast and furious snowball fight was taking place.

Nugent and Wharton took sides against Bob Cherry and the Nabob.

"Go it, ye cripples!" yelled Bob Cherry excitedly, hurling a snowball at the head of Harry Wharton.

Wharton dodged in the nick of time, and the snowball flew wide.

Bob Cherry reached down for another handful of snow, but next moment he started back in surprise, for coming towards them was the form of Billy Bunter, a beaming smile spread over his fat face.

"Great jumping Jehoshaphat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, dumbfounded.

"What's the matter?" asked Wharton, who had his back towards the fat junior.

"Look! Here comes the porpoise!"

Wharton turned round and gasped.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Wonders will never cease!"

"What's the matter, Owl?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Couldn't you sleep?"

"Yes, but—"

"The rising bell hasn't gone yet."

"I know."

"Then what the dickens have you got up so early for?"

"I've been thinking—"

"Great Scott! Been thinking it's time you turned over a new leaf, and got up at a reasonable time?"

"Oh, no," said Bunter. "I've been thinking about—"

"Well, go on thinking," said Bob Cherry, reaching for a handful of snow. "Don't let us disturb your thoughts. We want to get on with our snow-fight."

"Oh, really, Cherry," said Bunter, stepping forward. "I'm surprised at your being so rude when I'm talking to you!"

"Rats!" growled Bob Cherry. "We've got something more important to do than to listen to your silly talk."

"But, really, I've been thinking—"

"Well, get on with it, then. Come on, Wharton! You ready?"

"Hold on a minute, Bob," urged Harry Wharton. "Let's hear what the silly ass wants to say."

Billy Bunter gave the captain of the Remove a savage glare.

"I'm surprised at you, Wharton," he said. "I don't know what I've done to be called a silly ass!"

"Go hon!"

"You know, I've been thinking seriously about that matter I mentioned to you last night."

Wharton looked at the fat junior in surprise.

"What matter?" he asked.

"You know what matter," said Billy Bunter curtly.

"How do you expect me to know when you don't explain," said Wharton. "You talked about a lot of things last night, and—"

"I'm referring to the Christmas pudding—"

"Oh!"

"You see, my scheme is to— I say, Wharton, I consider your manners are extremely rude!"

Wharton had turned away.

"Come on, Bob!" he exclaimed, as he made a snowball. "I'm ready!"

Whiz!

Snowballs hurtled through the air at lightning speed. Wharton had no desire to hear anything more about Billy Bunter's scheme for making a Christmas pudding.

"Beasts!" muttered Bunter, gazing at the snowballers with a vicious glare in his eyes.

Smack!

A snowball, aimed deftly by Nugent, landed full in Bob Cherry's face.

"Got you there, Bob, old son!" shouted Nugent, with a laugh.

"Ow! Groooogh!" grunted Bob, wiping the snow from off his face. "You wait a minute! Yarooogh!"

"Beasts!" growled Billy Bunter once again. "They wouldn't listen to my scheme. Very well, they shall be made to!"

Bunter glanced first at the woodshed, which was only fifty yards to the right of the snowballers. Then his face became wreathed in smiles.

Whiz! Whiz!

Still the snowball fight went on. The juniors were getting excited now, and almost forgot Billy Bunter's presence.

That just suited Bunter's little scheme. He didn't want Harry Wharton & Co. to pay too much attention to him at that moment.

Suddenly a faint cry came from the direction of the woodshed.

"Help!"

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Nugent.

The snowball fight stopped at once.

"Help! Oh, help!"

Again the faint cry could be heard.

"Sounds like somebody calling," remarked Bob Cherry. "Don't matter much, though. Let's get on with the game!"

"Listen!"

"Help! Help!"

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter, moving up to the Remove chums. "Did you hear that cry?"

"Help! Oh, help!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Wharton, agast. "Sounds as though somebody's shut up in the woodshed."

"I reckon we ought to go to the rescue," said Billy Bunter seriously.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Nugent. "Bunter wants to do something heroic all of a sudden. I guess you've performed one heroic act this morning, Bunter, in getting up early."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Listen!" urged Wharton.

"Help! Help!"

The cries were louder this time, and the faces of the Remove chums became concerned.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We'd better go and see what's up."

"Come along, then," said Bob Cherry, and the Removites hurried in the direction of the woodshed, their snowball fight forgotten entirely.

Billy Bunter ambled along after the chums.

"Wait for me, you fellows!" he urged. "I know you want to rescue the chap, and take all the credit for yourselves."

"Don't be a silly idiot!" said Wharton.

"But—"

The four chums rushed into the woodshed.

"Hallo, there!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, gazing round.

Bang!

"My hat! What's that?"

Bob Cherry looked round. The door of the woodshed had closed to, and there was a click as the key was turned in the lock.

Bob pulled at the door, but it would not budge.

The next moment the sound of a giggle could be plainly heard outside.

Harry Wharton went to the window and looked out, and gasped with amaze-

ment at sight of Billy Bunter almost rocking with laughter.

"Bunter, you fat ass!" he exclaimed wrathfully.

"He, he, he!" giggled the Owl of the Remove.

"The silly idiot's been pulling our leg," said Bob Cherry savagely.

"What do you mean, Bob?"

"Can't you see?" exclaimed Bob indignantly. "He made use of his ventriloquism to get us into here. Now he's locked us in, and—"

"The rotter!"

Bob Cherry peered through the little window of the wood-shed.

"Bunter!" he rapped out.

"Yes, Cherry," said the Owl of the Remove meekly.

"Let us out!"

"He, he, he!"

"Don't be such a silly young idiot," growled Bob. "What do you want to shut us in here for?"

"He, he, he!"

Bob Cherry banged on the window.

"Open the door, Bunter," he exclaimed. "There goes the bell for breakfast!"

Clang! Clang!

Usually at the sound of the bell for breakfast, Bunter was the first to take to his heels. On this particular morning, however, he did not move.

"Don't you want any breakfast, Bunter?"

"Oh, rather!"

"Well, aren't you going?"

"Not yet."

Bob Cherry gasped.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Bunter's gone mad for a cert. Buck up, porpoise, and let us out. We're hungry if you're not."

"I'll let you out with pleasure, Cherry," said Bunter; but, all the same, he made no movement towards the door.

"Well, buck up, then!"

Bunter grinned, but he did not move.

"What's the matter with you, you silly ass?" exclaimed Bob Cherry hotly. "Do you want us to miss brekker?"

"Oh, no! It all depends upon yourself."

"What?"

"I want to make terms first, that's all."

"My only hat!" said Nugent. "He's shut us in here, because he wants to get something out of us."

"What do you want, Bunter?" called out Harry Wharton, as calmly as he could.

"Well, you remember my scheme for making a Christmas pudding—"

"This isn't a time to talk about Christmas puddings," yelled Bob Cherry.

"Open this door, you fat idiot!"

"I want to settle about the Christmas pudding first, you know. It's important. I require ten shillings to work up to the recipe, and make a small one. Are you fellows willing to lend me ten shillings? I've been disappointed about a postal order, or I wouldn't ask you."

"You—you fat beast!" said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent, I don't think you ought to call me names!" said Bunter.

"Will you open this door?"

"Certainly. I'm sincerely sorry to keep you waiting for your breakfast, but I want to settle about that Christmas pudding, you know."

"We'll lend you ten bob," said Wharton.

"Thank you! But I've been thinking the matter over. I think, upon the whole, it's best to do things thoroughly. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Come and open the door, you toad!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Are you coming?"

"Certainly. But about that pudding. I think if you chaps made it a sovereign,

I could make it much better, and there would be more of it, you know. Think it over! I'm in no hurry; take your time."

"All right," said Wharton. "We'll make it a sovereign."

"Cash, of course!"

"Yes. I had a postal order from my uncle yesterday."

"Good! Hand it through the window."

Wharton passed the postal order through the window, and Bunter grabbed it eagerly.

"Now open the door!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Is it pax?" asked Bunter.

"No!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I'm going to give you the hiding of your life."

"Then I'm sorry I can't open the door."

"You—you worm!"

"Oh, make it pax!" said Wharton, laughing in spite of himself. "The beast's got us in a cleft stick. It's pax, Bunter."

"All of you?"

the lines, but the knowledge that he was the possessor of a postal order for a pound comforted him.

In fact, to Bunter's way of thinking, he would have run the risk of a thousand lines in order to get a postal order for the smallest amount.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Has Bad Luck.

BILLY BUNTER blinked at the chums of the Remove as they came into the class-room. The Owl was wearing an injured expression, and he began to whisper his woes to Harry as soon as the captain of the Remove sat down.

"Look out for Quelch this morning, Wharton; he's in a beastly temper! He's given me fifty lines, you know."

"Serve you jolly well right!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Mr. Quelch looked across.

"You are talking, Bunter!"

"Oh, no, sir!" denied Bunter promptly.

"I haven't said a word, sir! I haven't opened my mouth, sir! I just said to Wharton—I mean, I didn't say a word—"

"Silence, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, as the class giggled.

"Yes, sir; but—"

"Silence!"

"Yes, sir; but a chap doesn't like—"

"Take fifty lines, Bunter!"

"Oh, sir! The same fifty as you gave me at breakfast, sir, or another fifty?"

"Another fifty!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "And if you say another word, Bunter, I will double them!"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Two hundred lines, Bunter!"

"Oh, but—"

"Three hundred lines!"

And even Billy Bunter thought it time to shut up then. He sat glowering, his round eyes gleaming behind his spectacles.

He felt very much injured indeed, and when he felt injured, his usual way of getting his "own" back was by means of his gift as a ventriloquist.

Ventriloquism was one of the few things he could do well. But it was a risky business with a master like Mr. Quelch, though Bunter had sometimes driven poor Mossos almost crazy with it.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Shut up, you young ass!"

"I'm going to—"

"You dummy!" whispered Harry.

"Quelch has his eye on you!"

"Well, I—"

"You will show your three hundred lines before bedtime, Bunter!" said the master of the Remove, in metallic tones.

And Billy Bunter snorted as he saw the whole of his evening thus summarily disposed of. He schemed vengeance, and watched his opportunity.

A little later Mr. Quelch wanted to know what was one of the principal products of Canada, and a voice answered from the back of the class:

"Rats!"

The Remove-master gave a jump.

"What!"

"Rats!"

Mr. Quelch turned crimson.

"Who spoke?" he almost shouted.

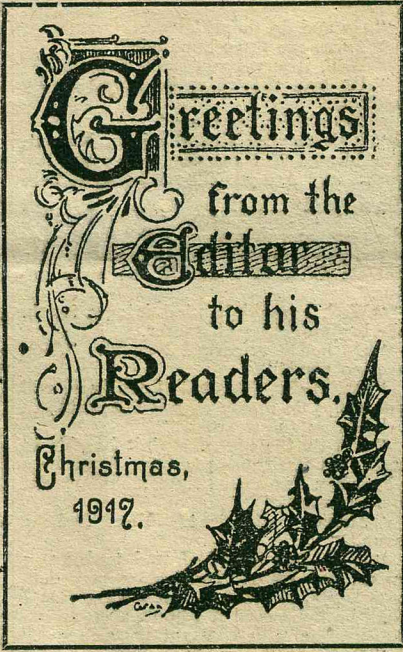
"Rats!"

There was a hush in the class. Three times that impertinent reply had been given, and each time in a different voice from a different direction.

The Remove-master was almost gasping for breath.

"Boys, what is this? What! This is a concerted piece of impertinence! What does it mean? Who spoke?"

"Rats!"



"Ye-e-es," said four unwilling voices.

"Good!"

Bunter edged towards the wood-shed, and turned the key in the lock.

Bob Cherry dragged the door open, and, after giving the fat junior a savage glare, tore across the Close.

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter, rushing after the Removites, "wait for me. I know you want to get into breakfast before me so that you can pinch all the grub."

The Remove chums did not answer. They were already entering the door of the house.

Billy Bunter ambled after them, his fat little legs working like machinery.

Harry Wharton managed to enter the dining hall in the nick of time.

Billy Bunter, however, came in a minute late, breathing heavily.

"Bunter, you're late!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir, I—"

"Take fifty lines!"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter grunted.

The Owl of the Remove did not want

"Stand out here!"

"Rats!"

"Boy!"

"Rats!"

The Remove-master was generally a grave gentleman, but he was nearly dancing now. He glared up and down the class.

Harry Wharton pressed Bunter's arm.

"You young idiot! Shut up!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"I know it's you! Shut up!"

Bunter grunted.

Mr. Quelch looked over the boys in search of a guilty face. But though all of them looked surprised and alarmed, no one looked guilty. Bunter kept his eyes on his desk.

"I do not know who the boys are who have thus insulted me," said Mr. Quelch, breathing hard, "but I—"

"Rats!"

The Form-master broke off.

His breath seemed to be taken away for some moments.

"I will find out—"

"Rats!"

"Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, in a voice of thunder.

The fat junior jumped.

"Ye-e-e-es, sir!"

"You were speaking!"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"It was you who were speaking all the time!"

"I—I—I—"

"I remember now, Bunter, that you have claimed to be a ventriloquist, and I have no doubt that you have been uttering these disrespectful words!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Do you dare to deny it?" thundered the Form-master.

"I—I—I—"

"Answer me!"

"You see, sir—"

"Stand out here, Bunter!"

"If—if you don't mind, sir, I—I'd rather stay here!" faltered Billy, who didn't like the look in Mr. Quelch's eyes.

"Stand out here!" exclaimed the Remove-master, in a voice that made the fat junior jump again.

And Billy Bunter stepped out before the class.

"If you please, sir—"

"It was you speaking, Bunter!"

"You see, sir, I—I—"

"Hold out your hand!"

"I—I—I—"

Mr. Quelch took Bunter by the collar with his left hand, and grasped his pointer in his right. The pointer made rapid play, and the dust rose from Bunter's garments. Wild yells rose from Bunter.

"Ow! Oh! I didn't speak! I never said rats! I only said it once! It was only a joke, sir! I didn't say a word! Ow! Ow!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh! Ow! Yow!"

"There, Bunter! That is for your impertinence, and telling me falsehoods!"

"Yow!"

"You deserve more than that, you absurd, ill-bred boy!"

"Yow!"

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Yow!"

"Go back to your place!"

Billy Bunter hopped back to his place, but he seemed unwilling to sit down there. He hardly sat still for a moment for the remainder of the morning's lessons.

"You young ass!" muttered Wharton.

"I warned you to chuck it!"

Billy Bunter only groaned. When the Remove were dismissed, and the juniors crowded out, Frank Nugent clapped the fat Removite on the shoulder.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

"Are you going to start the Christmas pudding now, Bunter?"

Bunter grunted.

"Am I in a state to make Christmas puddings? Oh, really, Nugent, I think you are awfully unfeeling."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! The Christmas pudding can wait."

And it did wait.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Diminishing Capital.

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Thus Billy Bunter, as the Remove came out after afternoon school.

It was early dark, and flakes of snow were falling in the Close, and whitened the branches of the old elms.

The fellows were grouping in the passages, or going to their studies for tea, and Bunter ran down the chums of No. 1, talking at the door of the junior common-room.

"I say, you fellows, about those lines."

"What lines?" asked Nugent.

"Those lines that Quelch gave me, you know."

"Go and do them!"

"There are three hundred!"

"Well, it serves you right, doesn't it?"

"He says they're to be shown up by bedtime."

"Show them up, then!"

"If that's your idea of a joke, Nugent, I'm blessed if I can see where the fun comes in. Are you fellows going to help me?"

"Stuff!" said Harry. "You deserved the lines, and so you can write them. Besides, you know, Quelch is so sharp. He detects different hands in the same impost."

"Well, I wouldn't mind doing a few in the beginning," said Bunter.

"Go on!" remarked Nugent. "You are too good!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! Look here, will you chaps do ninety each if I do thirty?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"If I do the lines I sha'n't be able to make the Christmas pudding. It seems a pity when I've raised sixteen shillings for the materials."

"Sixteen shillings! You had a pound!"

"Well, you see, I—I had to have a snack, you know. I'm feeling very delicate lately, and I've got a feeling that I shall be indisposed if I don't keep up my constitution with constant nourishment."

"Well, we'll manage a hundred lines between us," said Wharton. "You can do the rest."

"I can't possibly, and—"

"Tell Quelch so, then."

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know! I—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"But, really—"

"Buzz off!" roared Wharton, in a tone that made Bunter skip.

And the fat junior went his way grumbling. But he did not go up to the study to do his lines. He went to the tuckshop to fortify himself for the task.

When the chums looked in at No. 1 an hour later for tea, they found that Bunter had commenced his task.

He sat at the table, with a pile of buns on his left, and a pen in his hand. Of the three hundred lines he had written, so far, the following:

"Arma virumque cano—"

He blinked at the chums.

"Here, get off that table," said Nugent; "we want tea."

Bunter assumed a decidedly injured expression.

"Oh, I say, you fellows," he exclaimed. "you can't have tea now. I want the table. I've got three hundred

lines to do this evening, and I don't think it's fair for you to interrupt me."

"Take 'em into the Form-room."

"It's more convenient here, and—"

"And you've done three words out of the three hundred lines," grinned Nugent, jerking the foolscap off the table to the armchair. "Get out of the way!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

They laid the table and put the kettle on. Bunter sat in the armchair and ate buns.

When Nugent began poaching eggs, the fat junior's face cleared, and he began to show some signs of interest.

"I say, Nugent, I'll do that if you like," he remarked. "Of course, you fellows want me to have tea with you?"

"No, we don't!" said Nugent coolly. "But I expect you will have tea with us, whether we want it or not, so you may as well poach the eggs. Get a move on!"

And Bunter began to cook. It was an occupation that suited him down to the ground, and his fat face became quite contented.

"If you chaps like to do my lines while I'm cooking, I've no objection," he remarked. "It will save time. I should like to be able to tackle the Christmas pudding this evening. Mrs. Kebble is making Christmas puddings now, and I could get her to boil mine along with hers."

"Rats!" said Nugent, without looking up from the book he was reading.

"Oh, really, Nugent! You see, it seems a shame to waste the twelve bob I've got for making a pudding—"

"You've got twelve! Twelve!"

"Well, you see, some of it's gone. You know how money does go," said Bunter. "I think I shall return to my original idea, and make a ten-bob pudding of it."

Nugent grinned. The eggs were dished up, and the juniors had their tea, Billy Bunter disposing of the lion's share as usual.

During tea the fat junior made further attempts to enlist general aid towards getting the lines done, in vain. When the meal was over, he rose to leave the study.

"You can have the table now," Nugent remarked.

Bunter blinked at it.

"There's tea-things on it," he said.

"Well, clear them off."

"Oh, really, Nugent, you know that I don't like exertion just after a meal. I believe you wouldn't care if I fell down dead on the carpet this minute."

"Oh, yes, I should! I should have to roll you out into the passage, and you're no light weight."

Bunter sniffed indignantly, and went to the door. Like most people who make pathetic speeches as a habit, he never found his pathos taken seriously.

"What about the lines?" asked Wharton, laughing.

"I shall tackle them later," said Billy Bunter. "After all, there's plenty of time in the evening yet."

"Going to get the materials for the Christmas pudding?"

"Well, I don't know yet. I shall look in at Mrs. Mibble's."

And Bunter departed.

The chums of the Remove cleared the table and settled down to their preparation.

When that was finished they went downstairs, and the first person they met was Bunter, coming in with a smear of jam upon his face.

"Got the materials?" asked Nugent, with a grin.

The fat junior shook his head.

"No. Upon the whole, I don't see that

it would be much good trying to make a Christmas pudding for five bob."

"Ha, ha! Five bob!"

"Well, some of the money's gone. I've paid Russell a little debt I owed him, and spent a little at the tuckshop. I felt myself coming over faint, and I had to have a snack."

"You must have needed it, just after tea, and the tea you put away, too," said Nugent sympathetically. "But I suppose that's a joke about your paying Russell?"

"Certainly not. I hope you don't think I'm the kind of chap to leave a debt unpaid, when I've got cash in hand."

"Well, considering how you got the cash, it wouldn't make matters much worse," said Harry Wharton drily.

"If you don't want to stand that sovereign, Wharton, I'm quite willing to put it down on the account," said Bunter with dignity. "I'm not the kind of chap to be under obligations to anybody, I hope."

"The accountfulness of the honourable Bunter is terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Hallo, Russell!" sang out Nugent, as the Removite came by. "I hear that Bunter has been paying a debt?"

Russell grinned.

"He settled up twopence I lent him a week ago," he said. "Blessed if I know what's the matter with him!"

"Oh, really, Russell—"

"You young fraud!" said Wharton. "You've spent twopence in paying Russell, and six-and-tence in the tuckshop, to reduce your capital to five bob."

"Well, that's what I said—it was partly in paying Russell, and partly for a snack. I suppose you don't want me to fade away and become a walking shadow?"

"Ha, ha! I don't think that's likely to happen."

"About that Christmas pudding, though," said Bunter. "If you like to do those lines, and make this up to a sovereign again—"

But the chums were walking away, and Bunter did not finish that advantageous offer. He drifted up to the study, and did his prep after a fashion.

Then he wrote two lines out of the three hundred, felt exhausted, and went to Mrs. Mible's for refreshment.

At bedtime there was a gloomy expression on Bunter's forehead, and a big smear of jam on his mouth. Nugent poked him in the ribs, and he gasped.

"Done those lines, porpoise?"

"Oh, really, Nugent! How could I, when I've been busy all the time? I've done one per cent. of them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you think Quelch will be waxy in the morning?"

"He'll be waxy to-night, I expect, as he told you to show them up before bedtime," said Nugent with a chuckle.

"Oh, dear! It's curious how people pick on me to persecute," said Billy Bunter. "A good-natured, inoffensive chap like me. I've been worrying over those lines so much that I haven't had time to make the Christmas pudding, and now the capital's diminished. It's no good trying to make it now."

"How much have you got left?"

"N-n-nothing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I sha'n't be able to make the Christmas pudding now. It's rough, because I've got a ripping recipe. I suppose it's no good asking you to make up that sovereign again?"

"Not much."

"Some chaps are so selfish. I don't think a fellow ought to be selfish, you know. If you start a thing of that sort when you're young it grows on you, and you grow into a beastly unpleasant kind of man, you know."

"Bunter!"

Billy jumped.

"Yes, sir?"

"Have you done your lines, Bunter?" said Mr. Quelch, frowning. "You have not brought them to me, as I bade you, and it is now your bedtime."

"I haven't finished them, sir."

"And why not?"

"No, n-n-not exactly made it, sir."

The chaps in my study—wanted me to make a Christmas pudding for them, sir, and—and I didn't like to refuse."

"My only hat!" murmured Wharton.

"What next?"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch. "And have you made the Christmas pudding, Bunter?"

"Well, not exactly begun it, sir."

"Have you begun it?"

"I—I've done some of it, sir."

"Then how has it kept you busy?"

"Well, I—I've been turning it over in my mind, sir."

"I suppose you'll help me with the lines now?" he said.

"I suppose we shall have to, you troublesome little beast," said Nugent. "The next time you get an imput from Quelch, you'll get a licking from me, too."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

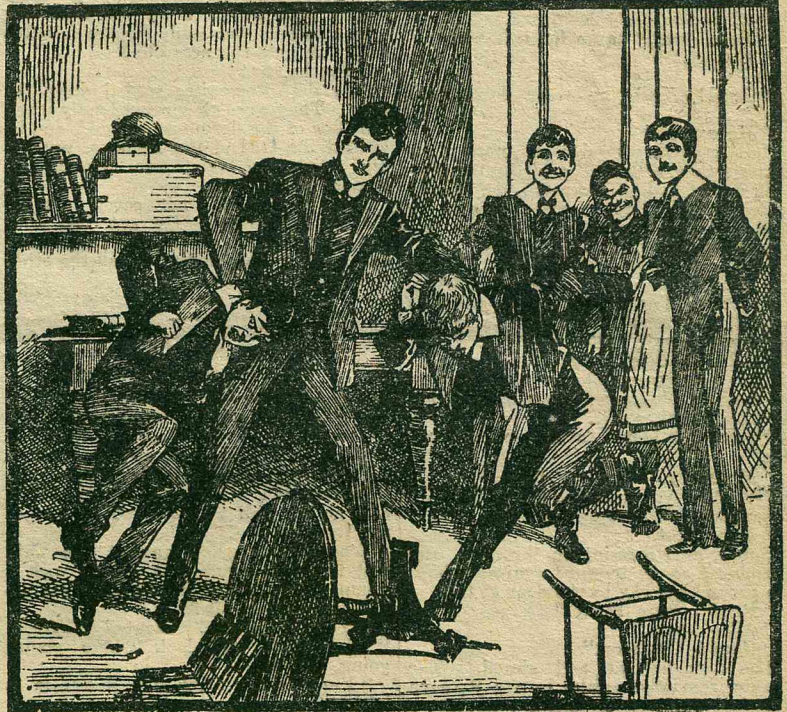
"Scat! Get off to bed!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Scheme.

THE Remove went to bed, but, contrary to his usual custom, Bunter did not drop off immediately to sleep. After the expenditure of a pound at the tuckshop, in instalments, even Bunter was not hungry. But he was thinking of Christmas puddings, or, to be more exact, one particular Christmas pudding.

After the prefect had withdrawn, and darkness reigned in the Remove dormi-



With a wrench Wingate dragged the juniors apart. "Ow!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Yow!" murmured Bulstrode.

Mr. Quelch smiled slightly.

"How much have you done of the imposition, Bunter?"

"I—I've done some of it, sir."

"How much?"

"I've made a good start, sir."

"How many lines have you written?"

"I—I didn't count them, sir."

"But you can form a rough idea, Bunter. How many?"

"About—about three or four, sir," stammered Bunter.

The Remove-master frowned.

"Ah! Very well. The imposition is doubled."

"Oh, sir!"

"And if you do not bring in six hundred lines to me to-morrow night, Bunter, I shall deal very seriously with you."

And Mr. Quelch walked away, shaking his head, leaving the fat junior the picture of dismay.

Billy Bunter blinked at the Removites.

tory, a still, small voice was heard from Bunter's bed.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, go to sleep!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"I've got a little scheme—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! It's about that Christmas pudding. I haven't been able to make it, owing to that imposition. But I find that Mrs. Kebble has made a big one, and has been boiling it this evening."

"I wish she would boil you."

"You see, I know where the pudding is—"

"Trust you for that!" grunted Nugent.

"I believe you know the latitude and longitude of every morsel of grub in the house."

"Well, a chap ought to keep his eyes open, you know."

"You do—and your mouth, too. Shut it."

"You see," went on Bunter, "if one of you fellows liked to come and help me, I'd raid that pudding, and we should have a feed all the same. How do you like the idea?"

"Rotten!"

"Oh, really, Brown! I think it's a splendid idea! Mrs. Kebble makes ripping puddings, and her Christmas puddings are certain to be good. After all the trouble I've taken about the matter, too, it seems a shame that I shouldn't have any pudding."

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"I say, Bulstrode—"

"Gro-o-o-o!"

"Will you come down with me and—"

Snore!

"I say, Hazeldeane—"

"Rats!"

"Ogilvy, old chap—"

"Boo!"

"I say, Wun Lung! Wun Lung, old fellow, you're not asleep, are you?"

"No sleepee," came the soft voice of the Celestial from his bed in the darkness.

"Good! Will you come down with me?"

"Me comee."

"Jolly good! You've got more pluck than all these fellows!" said Bunter, slipping out of bed. "I can tell you exactly where the pudding is—and I'll wait for you at the top of the stairs while you get it, you know."

"Me savvy."

"Rats!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Don't go, Wun Lung. Bunter will give you all the trouble and risk!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Allee lightee," murmured the Celestial, as he slipped out of bed and began to don his clothes; "allee lightee, my fiend. Me takee care."

"Bunter is bound to make some blunder."

"Me savvy."

"Well, if you will go, you will," said Wharton. "You're an ass!"

"Allee light."

Bunter was dressing in the dark, and grumbling as he bumped against things. He groped his way to the door at last.

"Ready, Wun Lung?"

"Allee leady."

"Good! Come on."

The door opened and closed. The juniors remained awake in the Remove dormitory, wondering how the adventure would turn out.

Few of them thought that Billy Bunter would succeed in getting hold of the pudding the housekeeper had made in preparation for Christmas.

It was certain to be locked up, for raids on the larder were not quite unknown at Greyfriars. Bunter was thinking only of the pudding and the feed, and did not take account of the difficulties in the way.

After about five minutes, the door of the Remove dormitory opened again and closed softly. There was a faint sound of footfalls.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Is that you, Bunter?"

"No Buntel!"

"Wun Lung!"

"Allee lightee."

The little Chinese crept back to his bed, and they heard him get in and settle down. There was also a sound suspiciously like a chuckle.

"But where's Bunter?" demanded Harry Wharton, mystified. "Is he getting the pudding?"

"No savvy."

"Is he coming back?"

"No savvy."

"Has he been caught?"

"No savvy."

"Look here, you young ass," exclaimed Wharton, sitting up in bed, "what's happened to Bunter? Why can't you explain yourself?"

"Allee lightee. We goee down to next passage, and me sayee to Buntel me heal something," said the Celestial.

"Well, and what then?"

"Me pushee Buntel in study. Tellee him to wait till coastee clear."

"And then?"

"Me comee back to dolmitee," said the Chinese simply.

"You—you young rascal! Then Bunter's still waiting in the study?"

"What you tinker?"

"And what was the sound you heard?"

"Windee blowee in tlee."

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose Bunter didn't know that?"

"Buntel no savvy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"It serves Bunter right, for being such a greedy little beast! I shouldn't wonder if he sticks in that study for ten minutes before he gets the nerve to look out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Removites settled down to sleep. They were all snoring loudly when the door of the dormitory opened, and in walked the Owl of the Remove, muttering threats of vengeance beneath his breath.

But Bunter did not carry out his threats that night. He got into bed, and was soon fast asleep, snoring loudly, and making more noise than all the other juniors put together.

#### THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. The Christmas Pudding.

**H**ARRY WHARTON and his chums were standing against the wall of the house just before lessons the next afternoon, when Billy Bunter came ambling along.

Bunter had a bundle under his arm, and he ran full tilt into the captain of the Remove.

Wharton staggered against the wall, and the fat figure sat down with a bump, and the parcel flopped upon the linoleum with a soft flop.

"You young ass!" shouted Wharton.

"Why don't you look where you're going, Bunter?"

"I'm sincerely sorry—ow—I was in a hurry!"

Bunter scrambled up, and glanced round nervously. He clutched his parcel, and was bolting again, when Harry seized him by the collar.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter, as he was swung back.

"What have you got there?"

"H'ah! The pudding!"

Wharton burst into a laugh.

"The Christmas pudding?"

"Yes! Keep it dark!"

And Bunter scuttled upstairs, with the precious pudding under his arm.

He did not stop to eat it when he reached the Remove dormitory. He knew that there would be a hue-and-cry for the missing pudding.

He wrapped it in an old newspaper, and hid it under the mattress of his bed, and dodged out of the dormitory.

He gave a yell as someone caught him by the sleeve.

"Ow! It wasn't I! I haven't seen the pudding!"

"Buntel—"

"Oh, it's you, Wun Lung! You startled me. It's all right! I've got the pudding!"

"Bad Buntel!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Bunter.

At that moment the bell for afternoon lessons rang out, and Bunter wended his way to the class-room.

He took his seat in the class, with an ecstatic smile on his face. The smile remained for some time, and Bob Cherry was forced to remark that it was the smile that wouldn't come off.

Mr. Quelch glanced at the fat junior several times, wondering.

There was an imposition of six hundred lines impending over the head of Bunter, with punishment awaiting him if he did not get it written out by bedtime that night. It was not a time for looking contented. But Billy Bunter was looking very contented.

He was thinking of the pudding concealed in the dormitory, and the feed he had in prospect.

The imposition had escaped his mind for the time being, but it was abruptly recalled when the class was dismissed. Mr. Quelch signed to him to stop as the Remove were filing out.

"Bunter!"

Bunter halted.

"You have an imposition to hand to me to-night, Bunter."

"Ye-es, sir!"

"If it is not ready I shall cane you severely."

"Certainly, sir!"

And the smile faded off Billy Bunter's face, and he was looking very serious as he went out into the passage.

"Come up and do your lines now, Bunter," said Wharton. "I'll lend you a hand."

"How many will you fellows do for me?" asked Bunter.

"I've told you. We can manage a hundred."

"That's not many out of six hundred."

"You ought to have done some at dinner-time, you young slacker. I suppose you know Quelch is in earnest. It means a licking if the lines are not ready to-night."

"Yes, I suppose so. You fellows might begin for me, and I'll go on. I—I've got to speak to Mrs. Mimble about something."

And Bunter scuttled off to the school shop before he could be further reasoned with. Wharton uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"It's enough to make a chap tired of trying to help the young ass!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe he will do a single line."

"Quelch will warm him if he doesn't."

"He's trusting to luck, I suppose. Well, we'll do a hundred to be shoved in with the rest, but I don't believe he'll do a dozen lines to put to them."

Billy Bunter came into the junior common-room presently. A good many of the Remove asked about the Christmas pudding.

It was generally known that Mrs. Kebble, the housekeeper, had missed a Christmas pudding from the larder, and it was not difficult for the juniors to guess that Billy Bunter had had a hand in its disappearance.

The fat junior shrugged his shoulders. "I don't see what I should know about Mrs. Kebble's pudding," he remarked.

"Rats!" said Skinner. "You've had it."

"Oh, really, Skinner. As a matter of fact, I do happen to have a Christmas pudding at the present time, and I was going to ask some of you fellows to have a feed with me."

"I'm on!" said Skinned promptly.

"Same here!" grinned Scott.

"Lead the way!" said Hazeldene.

"I say, you fellows—"

"It's all right," said Ogilvy. "We'll all come. Where's the pudding?"

"Yes, but first—"



"Faith, the pudding comes first," said Micky Desmond. "Lead the way to the pudding, ye gossoon."

"I've got six hundred lines to do, and I can't have the feed till they're done. It will weigh upon my mind, you know," said Bunter. "Any of you fellows going to help me with the lines?"

"Oh, hang the lines!"

"Where's the pudding?"

"I'm only going to invite the fellows who help me do the lines," explained Billy Bunter. "And I'm not going to have the feed till after the lines are done."

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode, walking away.

But the others lingered. They knew that Mrs. Kebble made splendid Christmas puddings, and some of them had seen the missing pudding. They wanted to sample it.

"Well, I'll do some for you," said Hazeldene.

"So will I!"

"Faith, and I'll lend a hand intirely."

"That's right," said Bunter. "Begin at different points in the Æneid, and mind you don't get mixed up, you know. Wharton's doing a hundred for me, and you'll only have to do five hundred between you."

"You lazy young rotter! Aren't you going to do any yourself?" demanded Russell.

"Well, you see, I'm going to get the things ready for the feed in the dorm."

"Oh, all right! Buzz along!"

And Billy Bunter, leaving the juniors busy with his imposition, scuttled off to the Remove dormitory, which was, of course, deserted at that hour.

The juniors, who were to earn their share in the feed, set to work hard.

Five hundred lines was a big number, but it was not so very much divided between nearly a dozen fellows.

Bunter had left them a specimen of his hand, and it was easy enough to scrawl big, sprawling characters that would pass for his, unless subjected to a close examination.

Mr. Quelch sometimes examined impots closely, but he was not likely to be too particular in the details of a six-hundred-line imposition.

The foolscap was swiftly covered by the juniors.

Meanwhile, Billy Bunter was just as busy, though in a different way.

He went up to the Remove dormitory, and took out the pudding, lighting one gas-burner to illuminate the feed. He opened his box, and extracted a plate, knife, and fork. Then he carved the pudding.

Bunter had really intended to share his feed with the juniors who were doing his lines in the common-room, as a reward for their assistance.

The pudding was a large one, and there was really enough for all.

Billy had simply intended to have a "snack" before the others came up. Merely that, and nothing more!

But the temptation was too great!

The pudding was a splendid one, though, perhaps, it was not quite cooked enough, Mrs. Kebble having really intended to give it another boiling.

But that made no difference to Billy Bunter.

It was delicious, and the fat junior took snack after snack, till his fat face was shining, and his very jaws seemed fatigued with exertion.

But then he did not stop.

The pudding was half gone when the dormitory door opened, and Nugent came in to fetch his coat. He stared at the fat junior, who gave a jump.

"Bunter! What on earth—"

"Hallo!" said Bunter feebly. "I—I

was afraid it was one of those chaps. Have you fellows done those hundred lines, Nugent?"

"Yes, long ago."

"Good! I—I'm just having a snack, you know."

"Have you eaten half a pudding that size?"

"Well, you see, I'm hungry."

"You'll make yourself ill."

"Oh, no, I'm never ill, except through insufficient nourishment," said Billy Bunter confidently. "That's all right."

"I shouldn't care to have your dreams to-night."

"Oh, I don't mind that! This is a ripping pudding."

"Young porpoise!"

And Nugent took his coat and went out. Billy Bunter went on with his snacks.

The Christmas pudding grew smaller by degrees and beautifully less.

Bunter was beginning to feel an uncomfortable tightness about his waist, and he had unfastened a few buttons of his waistcoat.

This gave him so much relief that he went steadily on, and at length there was nothing left on the plate but the mark where the pudding had stood.

Bunter rose to his feet.

"M-m-my hat!" he murmured. "I—I feel rather heavy! Perhaps I had better lie down a bit. Phew! The fellows would find me when they come here, though. They're bound to be a bit annoyed about that pudding. Some chaps are so selfish and greedy."

And Bunter reflected.

If the juniors slaving away at the imposition came and found the pudding devoured, they were pretty certain to rag Billy Bunter, and they would probably tear up the lines they had written for him.

That had to be prevented at any cost.

Bunter, with a slow and painful tread, descended the stairs, and looked into the common-room. A pile of written paper lay on the table.

"Finished, you fellows!" said Bunter heavily.

"Just on!" said Ogilvy, looking up. "Hallo, you've been at the Christmas pudding!"

"Well, I thought I'd better take a snack, you know, to see how it was."

"Good! Is it all right?"

"First-rate!"

"I dare say you've had the lion's share already, Bunter," remarked Russell.

"Well, I've finished," said Bunter. "Buck up with those lines, will you? I want to take them in to Quelch."

"No hurry before bedtime."

"Well, I want to get it over."

A few minutes later the lines were done. Bunter collected them up.

"We may as well get up to the dorm," said Trevor. "Bunter can join us there as soon as he's been to Quelch. Where's the pudding, Bunter?"

Bunter coloured.

"You'll—you'll see a plate on my bed as you go in the dorm," he said.

"Right you are!"

The juniors went upstairs.

Bunter scuttled on to No. 1 Study, and took up the hundred lines there, and with the whole imposition under his arm made his way to Mr. Quelch's study.

The Remove-master was not there, and Bunter laid the foolscap on his desk and withdrew.

He went upstairs again as far as the Remove passage in fear and trembling. There was a shout from further upstairs. He knew what it meant. The juniors knew that the pudding had gone.

"I—I suppose there'll be a row now," murmured Bunter.

He went into Study No. 1. It was

empty. To shut the door and lock it was the work of a few seconds.

Then Bunter, shivering on the inside of the door, heard the loud tramp of feet as the Removers came downstairs in search of him.

They passed the study, and went down to the common-room, but not finding him there they came up to the study door.

Someone tried the handle on the outside, and immediately made the discovery that the door was locked.

There was a sharp rap of knuckles on the panels.

"Open the door!"

Billy Bunter did not reply. He sank down in the armchair and rested. He was feeling very uncomfortable in body as well as in mind.

For, great as was the fat junior's stowage capacity, he had really seriously over-eaten himself this time, and he was very near to being ill.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

"Open this door!"

Bunter neither stirred nor spoke.

"All right!" yelled Ogilvy through the keyhole. "We know you're there, you fat worm! We know you've scoffed the whole pudding! We'll make you hop when you come out!"

"Begorra, and we will intirely!"

And the juniors tramped away.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### The Phantom Pudding.

**N**UGENT stopped at the door of No. 1 in the Remove passage, tried the handle, and then kicked forcibly.

"Hallo! What's this door locked for? Open it!"

"I—I say, you fellows, is that you?" came a faint voice from within.

"Yes, you fat duffer! Open the door!"

Bunter unlocked the door, and Nugent entered. Then the fat junior sank into the armchair again. He was looking quite pale.

"What's the matter, fathead?" was Nugent's sympathetic query. "What did you have the door locked for? A feed?"

"Oh, no! There was a misunderstanding about the pudding, you see; I—I ate it all, and the fellows seem to be grumbling about it."

"Porpoise—"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Well, it will serve you right if you get a licking. Do you mean to say that you have bolted the whole of that big pudding?"

"I—I wish I hadn't now," grunted Bunter, with a groan. "I—I'm feeling very queer."

"Ha, ha! You must be."

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I feel quite queer, and the fellows will be making a fuss, as if this isn't bad enough."

Nugent grinned, and settled down to his prep.

Billy Bunter remained in the study the rest of the evening. He did not dare to venture out. When bedtime came, and he could no longer remain in the security of No. 1, he left the shelter of the study with fear and trembling.

But, to his amazement, the Remove seemed to have forgotten his offence. For, so far from ragging him, the fellows who were to have shared in that feed did not even mention the matter to him.

Bunter was relieved as well as surprised.

He was glad enough to let the matter remain where it was, and he went up to bed with the Form in a more easy frame of mind.

Had he been a little less short-sighted,

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

and a little less occupied in his internal troubles, he might have seen that there was some joke on among the Removeites.

Wun Lung was grinning from ear to ear, and the fellows were constantly whispering to the little Celestial.

But Bunter observed nothing. He was only too glad to get peacefully to bed. He was feeling better now, but the pudding was weighing on his chest, as it were, and he felt beforehand that he was going to have a high old time in dreamland.

Wun Lung tapped him on the shoulder as he was taking his boots off. Bunter blinked at him inquiringly. The little Chinese was looking very serious.

"Buntel! Me solly."

"Eh! What's the trouble now?" asked Bunter peevishly.

"You takee Missee Kebble's pudding."

"Oh, don't bring that subject up now!" said Bunter, in alarm. "That's all over and done with, you know."

"No savvy!"

"Oh, go to bed, and don't jaw about puddings! I don't want to hear anything more about puddings for years and years—until Christmas, anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You commit lobbely, and the pudding hauntee you," said the little Chinese solemnly.

"Oh, don't talk rot, you know!"

"Me solly! Goodee-nightee!"

"Rats!"

And Bunter turned in.

Wingate turned the light out, and the Remove settled down. Billy Bunter was soon snoring. In at the high windows of the dormitory came the glimmer of cold moonlight and the reflection of the glare of the snow.

Bunter was sleeping too soundly to hear any slight sounds that disturbed the stillness of the dormitory.

The fat junior was in the land of dreams—Christmas dreams.

He was dreaming of that big pudding, of which a considerable portion was lying like lead upon his interior.

He was locked up in a study, with a Christmas pudding clamouring at the door trying to get in at him.

It was a curious dream, and a terrifying one, and Billy Bunter was mumbling in his slumber as he dreamt it.

Suddenly he felt a sharp pain, and woke.

He lay on his back, blinking up at the ceiling, and a glimmer of a strange phosphorescent light caught his eye.

He gave a gasp, and groped upon the chair beside his bed for his spectacles, and jammed them upon his fat little nose.

"Why—what—oh!"

Close before his eyes, floating in the air, as it seemed, was a Christmas pudding.

A large, almost round object, with a sprig of holly stuck into it, and a greenish glow surrounding it, floated before his gaze.

Bunter stared at it blankly.

The words of the Chinese came back to his mind, and he gave a gasp of terror as he realised that he was haunted by the Christmas pudding.

"Ow! Ow! Yow! Help!"

Bunter made a motion to spring from his bed, and in an instant the pudding

vanished, apparently floating away in the air.

The fat junior rubbed his eyes.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the row?" came Bob Cherry's voice.

"I—I don't know."

"What!"

"I've just seen a—a—a ghcet, Cherry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was a r-r-real ghost!"

"You young ass! What was it a ghost of?"

"A—a—a Christmas pudding!"

"Oh, rats! Go to sleep, you young duffer! It's that pudding you gorged lying upon your chest."

"I—I—I wonder if it is!" gasped Bunter, feeling that it must really be a dream, as the pudding had vanished from his sight.

"Oh, go to sleep!"

Bunter settled down again.

He was soon asleep; but the phantom pudding mingled with his dream. It was a most terrifying dream the fat junior was dreaming now.

He dreamed that Mrs. Kebble had discovered who had taken the pudding, and the Head had handed him over to her for punishment.

Mrs. Kebble proceeded to make a Christmas pudding of him. Bunter, in that easy way these things are accomplished in dreamland, stood by and saw himself mixed up in a large basin, and rolled up in a cloth, and put it on to boil.

Then, by a sudden change, he was in bed, and gazing upward again at a phantom pudding. It was floating before his gaze, lighted up by a strange phosphorescent light.

Bunter twisted and turned in his uneasy slumber, as the phantom pudding floated before his eyes, now rising, now falling, now almost touching his nose.

He gazed at her spellbound with terror.

And now it was slowly borne in upon his terrified mind that he was not asleep and dreaming at all, but wide awake—lying in bed with his eyes wide open, staring upward. Exactly when he had awakened he did not know; but he was certainly awake now.

And the phantom pudding!

It floated before his eyes, rising and falling—as his dream had pictured it.

Bunter lay quite still, scarcely breathing.

It was no dream now.

There was the phantom pudding!

He sat up in bed, transfixed, and gazed at the pudding.

Suddenly a terrific yell left his lips, and he rolled out of bed, and at the same instant the pudding vanished from sight.

Bunter rolled on the floor, still yelling.

"Ow! Help! Ghosts! Murder! Help!"

There was a sound of suppressed chuckle, and a further sound of hurried getting into bed. But Bunter did not hear it.

"Help! Help!"

Harry Wharton jumped up.

"Help! Help!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ghosts! Murder! Spectres! Spooks! Help!"

"Ass! You've been dreaming!"

"Help! Help!"

Wharton sprang out of bed. He had

little doubt that Bunter had been dreaming the dreams of indigestion, but the fat junior was terrified, dream or no dream. Wharton struck a match and lighted the gas.

Bunter picked himself up. Harry caught him by the shoulder and shook him severely.

"Now, what's the row?"

"The g-g-ghost!"

"Where, you young duffer?"

"The g-g-ghost!"

Wharton looked round the dormitory. There was no sign of a ghost. There was a sound of a chuckle from Wun Lung's bed, and that was all.

"Look here, Bunter—"

"It was the ghost of the Christmas pudding!" wailed Bunter. "I—I'll never raid a larder again! I'll never touch Christmas pudding! Ow! Yow! The g-ghost!"

Wharton laughed.

"It's all right, you fellows," he said. "It's only Bunter been dreaming."

"It isn't!" yelled Bunter. "It was a ghost!"

"Well, where was it?" asked Nugent.

"Floating over my head—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Look there!"

He pointed to a round, dark object close to the ceiling over Bunter's bed. The ceiling of the dormitory was very high, and it was no wonder that it had escaped observation.

There was a hook in the ceiling, and over the hook passed a cord, one end of which was fastened to the round object, and the other end ran down to Wun Lung's bed.

It was in the power of the Chinese to raise and lower the phantom pudding at will.

"It's that young beggar Wun Lung!" roared Bob Cherry, "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really—"

Wun Lung chuckled, and released the cord, and the phantom pudding came down with a run. It was manufactured of an ancient football.

Billy Bunter blinked at it, and his face was a study. The dormitory rang with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter's ghost! Ha, ha, ha!"

The door opened, and Wingate looked in.

"What's this row about? Why aren't you kids asleep?"

"It's all right, Wingate. It's only Bunter seeing ghosts."

"What!"

"The ghost of a Christmas pudding! Ha, ha, ha!"

Wingate looked at the phantom pudding, and his face relaxed. The stern expression changed into a smile, the smile into a grin, the grin into a laugh, and the laugh became a roar.

"You young sweeps!" he exclaimed at last. "Put out that light and go to sleep. Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter tumbled into bed. He did not say a word. But it was long before the Remove left off laughing and went to sleep.

The next morning not a word was mentioned about Christmas puddings. Bunter had had all the Christmas pudding he wanted—at any rate, for the time being!

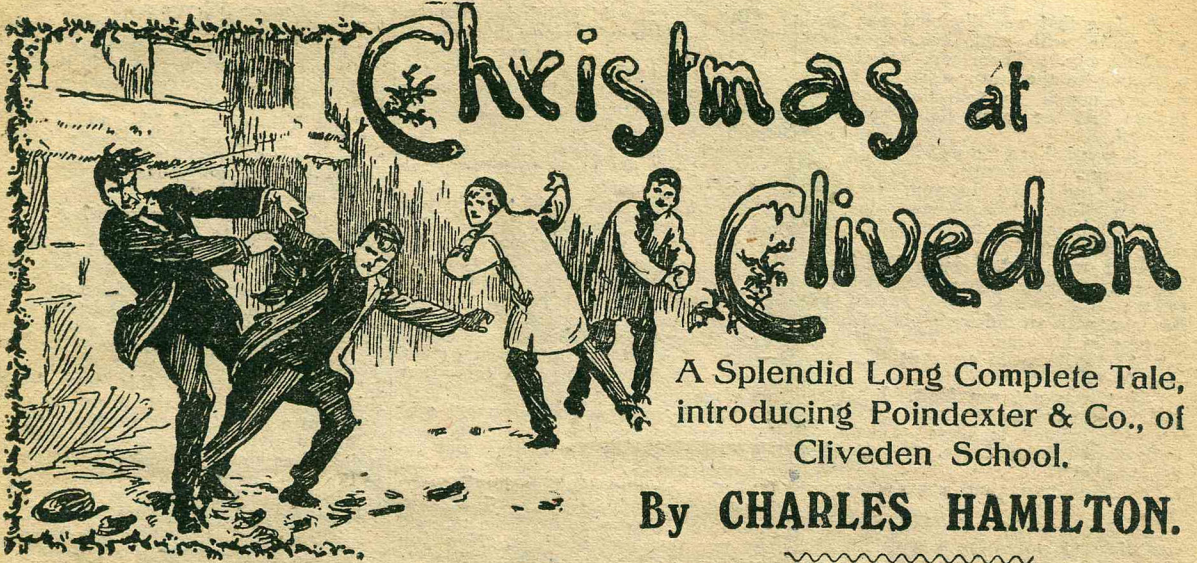
THE END.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. is entitled:

**"WINGATE'S SECRET!"**

By  
FRANK RICHARDS.

Please order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR in advance!



A Splendid Long Complete Tale,  
introducing Poindexter & Co., of  
Cliveden School.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.  
A Midnight Visitor.

**D**ICK NEVILLE, of the Fourth Form at Cliveden School, shivered as he sat up in bed.

Dick was feeling none too cheerful, for he and his chums, Poindexter and Flynn, were staying at Cliveden for the Christmas vacation. Unforeseen circumstances had prevented the chums from going to Poindexter's home.

It was a cold, dark night. But a gleam of white came in at the windows of the Fourth Form dormitory, and Dick Neville knew that it was snowing.

Some sound in the silence of the night had awakened Dick Neville. He sat up in bed, wondering what it was. Hark! There it was again!

Clang, clang, clang!

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

Dick Neville started.

Who could be ringing the school-bell at that time of night? He did not know the time, but he knew that it must be past midnight. Yet someone was certainly at the gates of Cliveden, ringing away with all his might.

Clang-ting-tang-tangle-ting!

"My hat!" muttered Dick Neville. "Who can it be? What can it mean?"

"Are you awake, kids?" came the drawl of Poindexter from the gloom. "Can you hear that galoot, whoever he is, making that row at the gate?"

"I can," said Dick. "I just woke up."

"Sure, and I'm awake also," said Flynn, sitting up. "My beauty sleep has been busted up by that fearful row. Who can it be?"

Dick felt for his jacket and extracted a box of matches. He struck one and lit the candle, and then looked at his watch. It indicated the hour of one, within a few minutes.

"Just on one o'clock," he exclaimed. "This is past a joke! Who can be ringing the bell at one o'clock in the morning?"

"It can't be a practical joker, out in the snow at this hour," shivered Poindexter. "I guess it means something wrong, Dick."

"Then we ought to go and wake Lanyon."

"I wonder the row doesn't wake him. But he sleeps like a brick, I guess. Let's go down."

The clanging of the bell continued. Through the still winter night it came clearly to the ears of the juniors. They

rose and dressed rapidly. Such a summons at such an hour was so amazing that they could only conclude that something was wrong.

"Ugh!" shivered Dick Neville, as he opened the door of the dormitory. "It's beastly cold! Get your scarves on; we may have to go down to the gate. Come along."

Well muffled up against the cold, the three juniors left the dormitory, and descended the stairs to Mr. Lanyon's rooms, which were on the lower floor.

Dick tapped at the bed-room door of the master of the Fourth Form. The stroke of one boomed out from the school clock. There was no reply. He knew that Mr. Lanyon was a sound sleeper, and he tapped again, and then thumped vigorously. A sleepy voice came at last from within.

"Who is there?"

"Us, sir—Neville, Flynn, and Poindexter. There's somebody ringing the bell at the gate, sir; he's been ringing a long time. We thought we'd better call you, sir," said Dick, through the door.

There was an exclamation of surprise within.

"Dear me! How excessively peculiar! I suppose I must see to this."

A light glimmered under the door of Mr. Lanyon's room. In a couple of minutes the Fourth Form master opened the door.

He was clad in dressing-gown and slippers, and had a smoking-cap on his head and a muffler round his neck, so he presented an appearance very different from what his pupils were accustomed to.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lanyon. "How excessively peculiar!" That was his favourite expression. "I can now hear the sound distinctly. Indeed, I am surprised that it did not wake me. It was quite right for you to come down and tell me."

Mr. Lanyon led the way downstairs into the hall. He opened the great door, and the wind instantly blew his lamp out. Flakes of snow came in on the gust.

"Dear me," said Mr. Lanyon, "how excessively unfortunate!" He set the extinguished lamp down. "Never mind, we must proceed without a light."

He stepped out into the snow. It was three inches deep in the Close, and still falling in light, feathery flakes. The wind whirled the flakes hither and thither, and whistled round the ears of the Form-master and the boys.

Mr. Lanyon led the way down to the gate. The gate was of iron bars, and between the bars, white now with snow, could be dimly seen a form muffled up against the weather.

"Dear me, there is someone there!" exclaimed Mr. Lanyon, as if that were really a most surprising circumstance. He halted in the snow on the inner side of the gate. "Who are you, my good fellow? What do you mean by ringing this bell at this time of night?"

A white face peered through the bars.

"I want to come in, you fool! Don't stand chattering there, but open the gate!"

Mr. Lanyon was a peaceable, inoffensive little man, but he bristled with wrath, naturally enough, at this address.

"I am not likely to let an entire stranger within these walls without a word of explanation," said Mr. Lanyon.

"Fool! I am a relation of a master at this school, and I have come to stay with him."

"Nonsense. There is only one master staying here during the vacation, and that is myself."

The other gave a start.

"Are you Owen Lanyon?"

"Yes," said the Form-master. "And I have no relations in England—and if I had, they would not visit me at this hour in the middle of a snowstorm."

"But you have a relation in America—"

"What has that to do with it?"

"This much—that I am your cousin Ralph from Chicago, and that I want you to take me in."

Mr. Lanyon gave a jump.

"My cousin Ralph! Impossible!"

"Not at all. Get a light, and look at me."

"I have a lantern here, sir," said Dick. "I can light it."

"Do so, my lad," said the Form-master in an altered voice.

Dick sheltered himself from the wind round the corner of the porter's lodge, and succeeded in lighting the lantern.

He brought it back to the gate and handed it to the Form-master. To his surprise, he saw that Mr. Lanyon's face was deadly pale.

The master of the Fourth took the lantern with a trembling hand and held it up so that its rays fell upon the face outside the bars. The stranger did not shrink from the scrutiny.

The face that was disclosed was hard and white, with cold, keen eyes and mocking lips. There was a faint resemblance to the features of the Form-master—enough to tell the watching juniors that the man's claim was well-founded.

"Do you believe me now?" exclaimed the stranger impatiently.

"Yes," said Mr. Lanyon, speaking with an effort. "How—how, came you here? I thought you were in employment in Chicago."

"So I was; but I have left it, as you see. I thought you would be glad to see me, cousin mine," said the stranger, with an indescribable inflection of irony in his tone.

"But to come—to come at this hour—"

"That was not my fault. I arrived in Clivedale by the last train, and could not find a vehicle to bring me here. I walked—and here I am. Come, open the gate."

The Form-master made no further demur.

The key grated in the lock, the bolt was withdrawn, and the iron gate swung open with a creak.

The stranger stepped in. He held out his hand to Mr. Lanyon; but the latter did not appear to notice it. He closed the gate and fastened it again carefully.

The new-comer gave a start as he saw the boys in the shadow.

"What are those brats doing here?"

Hot words leaped to the juniors' lips at the man's look and tone, but they restrained them.

Mr. Lanyon looked at them, and handed the lantern back to Dick.

"You may go back to bed, my lads," he said in that dull voice which told of a weight on his mind, in which he had spoken since his recognition of his cousin. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!" said the three juniors respectfully.

They did not speak till they were in the Fourth Form dormitory again. They heard the heavy door close downstairs. The quarter chimed from the school clock.

"What do you think of that, kids?" said Poindexter at last.

"There's something wrong about that fellow," said Dick, with conviction. "It's very curious his getting here in the middle of the night; and did you notice that Lanyon wouldn't shake hands with him?"

"Sure and I did," said Flynn. "Lanyon doesn't want him here—that's certain. He's forced himself on him."

The door of the dormitory opened. Mr. Lanyon looked in with a lamp. His face was pale and worried.

"Not in bed yet, boys?"

"Just in, sir," said Dick.

They tumbled into bed. The Form-master retired and closed the door; and the juniors were left to wonder at his curious looks till they fell asleep.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Unwelcome Guest.

MR. LANYON entered his study after coming down from the dormitory. The stranger was there, sitting at the table, upon which he had laid a small black bag. He had shaken the snow from his coat upon the floor, and was brushing his hat.

"Ralph," said the Form-master, "what do you want here?"

"Shelter," said Ralph coolly. "That's not much to ask of one's only relation in the world, is it?"

"N-no. You know I should never grudge you that. But—but—"

"But what?" said Ralph impatiently.

"What are your misgivings about?"

"You know," said Mr. Lanyon, speaking slowly and painfully, resting one unsteady hand upon the table—"you know under what circumstances you left England."

The other gave a short, hard laugh.

"Yes, I am not likely to forget; but that is years ago."

"I gave you all I could to help you to a fresh start," said Mr. Lanyon. "I sent you money whenever you wrote for it from your new home. Though you had disgraced your name and mine, I never deserted you. I helped you beyond my means; I faced difficulties you never thought or cared about in consequence. You returned me nothing; but I never asked it, content to know that you were doing well in a new land."

"And to have got rid of me," said Ralph mockingly, "and the danger of being disgraced by me among your respectable friends."

"I was glad of that, too. I never grudged you help, Ralph. I thought you were doing well in America, and that you were settled there. Now you have come back to trouble me. Why?"

The man from Chicago gave a hard laugh.

"You think I have come back to sponge on you, and screw away your paltry earnings?" he exclaimed. "Well, you are mistaken."

Mr. Lanyon's face expressed very strong incredulity.

"Bah, I will prove it to you! You helped me, you say—you sent me a great deal of your beggarly pittance. How much—fifty pounds—a hundred pounds?"

"Less than a hundred pounds in all," said the Form-master quietly. "But all I had—more than I could spare."

"I can, and will, repay every shilling."

"You can—and will?"

"Judge for yourself." Ralph Lanyon picked the black bag from the table and opened it. There was a crisp rustle, and he drew out a roll of notes. He tossed a bundle of them on the table. "Take them!"

The Form-master looked at the notes in wonder. There were ten of them for ten pounds, and he could see that they were genuine.

"Take them," repeated Ralph Lanyon. "You see, I have not come back a beggar. Your wretched pittance is safe from me. I have done well in Chicago—better than I ever told you in my letters. I ask nothing at your hands but shelter for a week or two. Why don't you take your money?"

The Form-master had made no move to touch the banknotes.

"Is that money yours, Ralph?"

"Mine? Of course it is."

"I mean, did you come by it honestly?"

Ralph Lanyon flushed with anger.

"You—you question that, then? Bah! money is money, wherever it comes from. But if you are so particular, the money was come by honestly. I made it by a speculation in Chicago, and every cent of it is mine."

"I suppose I must take you at your word," said the Form-master, with a sigh. "Heaven grant that you have not come here to bring fresh disgrace upon me. But—but you were rash to come as you did—if there is anything to conceal. The boys—"

"I did not guess that there were boys staying here over the holidays. But, after all, they are only boys—they will see and think nothing. Who are they?"

"Three boys in the Fourth. They may not stay here long, as Poindexter—"

Ralph Lanyon sprang from his chair.

"What name did you say?"

"Poindexter," said Mr. Lanyon, looking at him in wonder. "One of the boys is named Poindexter, and it is possible that his father may send for him, and for the other two."

"Not Poindexter of Chicago?"

"Yes, I believe Poindexter's father is a merchant in that city."

"Snakes alive!"

"What is the—"

"Bah! Where is my room? I am tired, and want to sleep."

Mr. Lanyon, without a word, but lost in amazement at his cousin's strange manner, took up a lamp and led the way from the room. He threw open the door of the bed-room belonging to the master of the Fifth Form, now away for the Christmas vacation.

"You will occupy this room," he said. "My friend East will not mind."

The man from Chicago grunted.

Mr. Lanyon's brow was darkly wrinkled as he slowly took his way back to his own quarters. The coming of his cousin had cast a gloom upon him that was not easy to be dispelled.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

### Christmas Eve—A Rough-and-Tumble.

THE three juniors were up early the next morning. Directly after breakfast they made their way into the Close, and soon a three-cornered duel was fought with snow-balls. At length Poindexter looked at his watch, and discovered that it was a quarter-past ten, and a rush was made for the house to look for letters.

The postman was coming away. "Any for me?" demanded the three juniors with one voice.

"One for Master Poindexter," said the postman, "that's all. I've given it in."

"It's from popper!" exclaimed Poindexter gleefully. "Perhaps he's going to send for us, after all. Let's get it and see."

They darted into the hall. The letter should have been in the rack, and Poindexter went towards it quickly.

The rack was empty, but near it was standing Ralph Lanyon, with an open letter in his hand.

A quick suspicion shot into Poindexter's mind—quickly verified, for a glance showed him that the letter was in his father's writing.

Ralph turned round quickly and thrust the letter behind him; but too late. Poindexter had seen it.

The boy was trembling with anger.

"Give me my letter!" he exclaimed sharply.

Ralph looked at him savagely.

"Your letter! What do you mean?"

"That is my letter you have in your hand! Give it to me at once!"

"It is not! It is—"

"I saw the writing, and the postman just told me there was a letter for me. Give it to me at once, you cad!" cried Poindexter.

Ralph's eyes glittered. He thrust the letter into his pocket.

"I shall not give it to you. It is not yours. Complain to Mr. Lanyon if you like."

Ralph Lanyon turned to stride away. Poindexter, flaming with anger, sprang towards him and gripped his arm.

Lanyon swung round his hand, and caught the boy a savage blow on the side of the head. Poindexter reeled, and fell heavily against the hall-stand. But that was a little too much for Dick and Micky.

Without stopping to think of the consequences or anything else, they sprang at the man from Chicago, and Ralph Lanyon found himself struggling with two

athletic juniors, who clung to him like cats.

Either of them he could have knocked out in a few seconds, but the two together were a larger order. He struggled with them furiously, dragging them to and fro.

Poindexter was springing to join in the fray the next minute, and his sinewy arms came round the rascal's neck from behind.

"G-r-e-e-r-r-r!"

Half-choked, and wholly overpowered, Ralph Lanyon was dragged backwards, and he went down to the floor with a crash.

All three juniors fell upon him, Poindexter on his head, Dick Neville on his chest, and Flynn on his legs. The unfortunate man was nearly crushed, and he gasped painfully under the three weighty forms.

"Hold him!" panted Dick. "We've got the beast now!"

Ralph Lanyon struggled frantically. He seemed to attach a great value to Poindexter's letter, for he fought like a tiger to retain it. But the odds were too heavy against him.

Dick and Micky pinned him down by sheer weight and strength, and Poindexter dragged the crumpled letter from his pocket.

"Got it!" exclaimed the American chum. "Look! 'My dear Lin,' that's how it begins. Isn't it my letter right enough?"

"Of course it is! Fancy the fellow being cad enough to read another chap's letter! My hat! He—he ought to be fed on tinned beef, or something fearful like that."

"Let him go now," grinned Poindexter, putting the letter in his pocket. "I've got it safe. Let the beast get on his hind legs."

The juniors released Ralph Lanyon. He staggered up, white with fury. The three chums drew close together, prepared for an attack; but the fellow seemed to realise the hopelessness of making one, and with a savage oath he turned away.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### A Letter from Popper.

POINDEXTER opened the letter slowly, a wrinkle of thought upon his brow.

"I don't quite get the hang of this, I guess," he remarked. "What should that chap want to read my letter for? He comes from Chicago, and it's plain he's a pesky rascal. Can he know anything about popper's business, I wonder? Can he be up to some game, and on the trail for information? I don't quite get the hang of it."

"Read the letter," suggested Micky Flynn. "Sure it may have something in it that'll explain."

Poindexter read the letter out. He had no secrets from his chums of the Combine. The note was a brief one:

"My dear Lin,—I am sorry I have not been able to fetch you away for Christmas as was arranged. It may be possible yet, but I don't know. I am in London now, and I think we are on the track of that rascal Phipps, who absconded from our Chicago counting-house with nearly fifty thousand dollars. The detectives have tracked him across the ocean, and it is known that he was in London as late as two days ago. He has been living here quietly under the name of Harris, and we should have had him if he had not somehow got a hint, and fled before we could seize him. He seems to have disappeared from London, but the detectives are still hopeful. As I am the only man in England who

knows him by sight, I am wanted on the spot; but I shall try and run down Christmas Eve to see you, whether the rascal has been captured or not. If that can't be done, I shall see you Christmas Day. Tell your chums I am sorry the affair has gone so awry, but we'll make it up to them, I guess. In haste, from your loving popper,

"CYRUS K. POINDEXTER."

"Well, I hope they'll catch him, that's all," said Dick Neville. "As for us, it doesn't matter. We seem to be getting some excitement this Christmas, anyhow."

"Sure and we are, Micky darling. As for that spalpeen Lanyon, he's a dirty scoundrel; and I shouldn't be surprised if he was a giddy criminal. Oh, crumbs!"

A heavy hand descended upon the Irish lad's shoulder. The three boys were standing by the angle of a building, and Ralph Lanyon had suddenly come round the corner. Whether he had heard the

ruffian "socks." They gathered snowballs like lightning, and pelted Ralph Lanyon right and left.

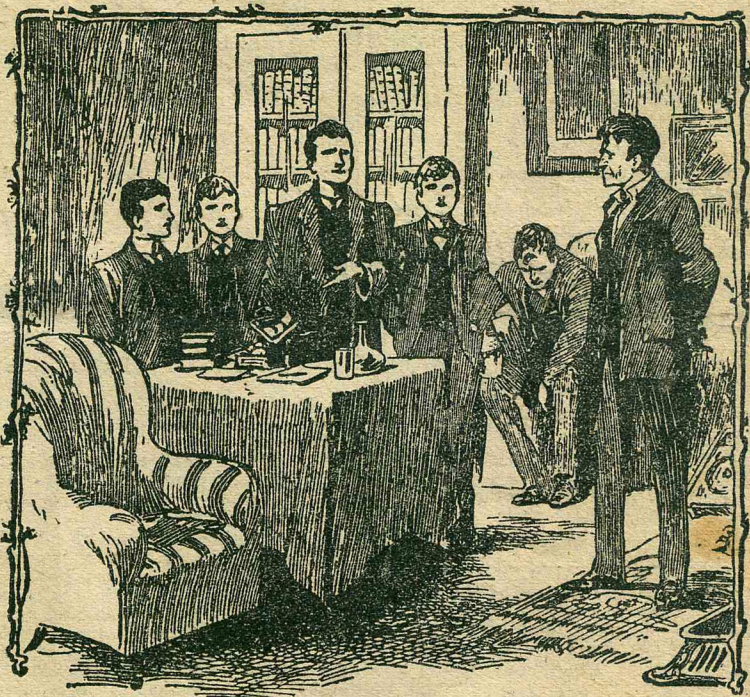
He sprang at Poindexter like a tiger, and grasped him; but a snowball in his left ear from Neville bowled him over, and as he staggered, Micky sent one in his right ear that set him upright again. He muttered savage oaths between his gritted teeth.

But he was getting the worst of the encounter, there could be no doubt about that, especially as the active juniors soon got to a distance, and pelted him with deadly aim, dodging all his frantic rushes and attempts to seize one or another of them. Muttering savagely to himself, he beat a retreat at last towards the house.

"Hurrah!" shouted Poindexter.

"Give him a send-off."

The chums were not slow to do so. They rained snowballs upon the hapless rascal, and he broke into a run, and was glad to gain the shelter of the porch



In a couple of minutes Poindexter returned with the black bag. It was opened, and the rolls of banknotes which had so surprised Mr. Lanyon were exposed to view. The Form-master groaned at the sight of this proof of his cousin's villainy.

American junior reading out the letter or not they did not know.

His hard face was inflamed with rage. He had certainly heard Micky's complimentary reference to himself, and he was furious. He boxed the Irish lad's ears right and left.

"Take that, and that, and—oooh!"

Micky was struggling helplessly in an iron grip, but his chums were not long in coming to the rescue. Poindexter and Dick stooped together, and gathered snow. Two snowballs flew at the same instant, and both caught Ralph Lanyon full in the face. He staggered back with a gasping grunt, and released Micky.

"The—baste!" gasped Micky, staggering away, and falling in the snow. "The baste! Give him socks, ye kippers!"

Dick and Poindexter were giving the

The chums were jubilant. They had routed the enemy, and though Micky at least had received some hard knocks, the victory was with them, and they were satisfied.

"The beastly ruffian!" said Poindexter. "I guess he was hiding there, and heard me read the letter, kids. What can his interest in the matter possibly be, I wonder?"

"Perhaps he's a friend of the chap who robbed your pater," suggested Dick Neville, struck by a brilliant idea.

Poindexter started.

"My hat! There might be something in that, kids. Why should he be so anxious about knowing what was in popper's letter? His looks and actions show that he's afraid of something. Specs said that he's come from Chicago without

warning. Specs didn't know why he had returned to England all of a sudden. By the Ghost of George Washington, kids, he may know something about the robbery! He may be a confederate of Phipps."

It was a startling idea. Yet, as they thought it over, it seemed to the chums that there was probably something of truth in it. Otherwise Ralph Lanyon's conduct was hard to account for.

"I'll tell you what," went on Poindexter. "I'm going down to the village to send a wire to my popper in London, asking him to come here, and telling him what I suspect."

"Good," said Dick Neville. "We'll all go. My hat! That chap's face makes my blood run cold. Let's get away before he comes this way again."

The chums ran through the snow towards the school gates. A few seconds later Ralph Lanyon glared out into the whirling snow.

The wind and snow blinded him for a moment; but he gazed again. The deep tracks of three pairs of boots in the snow caught his eye. He muttered an imprecation, and was about to rush from the house when a hand fell upon his arm.

"Ralph! What is it—where are you going?"

He flung off little Mr. Lanyon's detaining grip, and rushed into the snowy night. The master of the Fourth stood in amazement and dismay, wringing his hands, the snow blowing into his face as he stood there looking out.

Ralph Lanyon darted across the Close on the track of the Combine.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

#### A Startling Meeting—And a Merry Christmas!

"H'E'S coming!" Poindexter and Flynn looked round, to see the figure of little Mr. Lanyon, wringing his hands.

"Buck up, ye gossoons!" muttered Micky Flynn.

The chums ran out into the road. The wind whistled about their ears as they set their faces towards Clivedale and ran.

Thud, thud, thud! in the snow behind them came the footsteps of the pursuer. Ralph Lanyon was running hard, with desperate determination.

A wild Christmas Eve, and a wild way of passing it. The juniors' hearts were in their mouths as they ran through the whirling snow.

Deep was the snow under foot, and they sank to the ankle at every step; deep and thick were the whirling flakes.

"Keep it up!" gasped Dick Neville. They ran still harder, but the dull pounding behind them was louder and nearer. Good runners were the chums of the Fourth Form; but a desperate man, straining every nerve, was behind them.

Poindexter's foot slipped in the snow, and he went down on his hands and knees. Dick and Micky came to a halt instantly.

They knew only too well, how great their danger was, but they were not the fellows to desert their chum.

Dick caught Poindexter by the arm and dragged him to his feet again. The running figure behind loomed up, and two desperate eyes gleamed as a right hand rose and fell.

Dick gave a gasp of horror. A life-preserver was sweeping down upon Poindexter's head, when Dick flung himself recklessly at the scoundrel, to save his chum.

The shock diverted the blow; the weapon swept down, but met with no

resistance, while Dick clung tenaciously to the ruffian's arm to prevent him from again using the weapon.

Micky Flynn, his teeth hard set, fastened like a cat upon the scoundrel, and gripped his left arm. Poindexter scrambled up and gripped him round the body.

They struggled furiously. The juniors felt that they were fighting, if not for their lives, for something very like it. The ruffian fought like a tiger, striving to tear his hand free to use the life-preserver.

With a tremendous effort he succeeded, and the weapon rose, but a blow from the swift American knocked it from the savage hand.

It dropped into the snow, but the ruffian's fist clenched and was driven with fearful force into Poindexter's face, and he fell half-stunned.

With a snarl the ruffian tore himself from Dick, and Dick fell into the snow. Micky was still clinging to Ralph Lanyon like a cat, but a savage grip was on his throat now.

It seemed as if the ruffian was to win; he required but a few moments to free himself, and once the life-preserver was in his ruthless hand again—

A tall, fur-coated figure came into sight. A traveller, coming from the direction of the village to the school—a powerful form, stick in hand.

"Waal, what's all this, anyhow?"

A sharp voice, with a nasal twang.

Poindexter gave a yell of delight.

"Popper!"

"Help!" gasped Micky. "Help!"

He's— Dick Neville was springing to his aid again. But he was not needed. The tall stranger took in the situation in a second.

His heavy walking-stick circled in the air, and came down with a terrific crack on Ralph Lanyon's head. The ruffian dropped into the snow as if he had been shot.

"I guess he won't get up in a hurry," said the tall gentleman complacently. "I don't quite get the hang of this. Is that you, Lincoln G.?"

"Yes, popper," shouted the delighted Poindexter. "Lads, this is my father. Dad, these are the chums I told you about—Neville, Flynn. So you've come down after all, and just in time to save us—to save our lives, I believe, pop."

"This is mighty queer. I arrive at the village," said Mr. Poindexter, "and couldn't find a vehicle to make this trip in the snow for love or money, so I set out to walk, I calculate. But I never expected to meet you on the road, Lincoln G. What's the blessed game, anyhow?"

Poindexter hurriedly explained. While he was talking, Dick and Micky secured the hands of the stunned ruffian. He was showing signs of returning consciousness.

In a few minutes he was himself again, but his wrists were fastened together by a couple of stout neckties.

"Got him!" said Dick triumphantly. "You rotter, it's our turn now."

The ruffian, with his hands tied behind and his brain swimming, hardly attempted resistance. He was hurried along by the juniors, Mr. Poindexter bringing up the rear, with his stick ready for use. But it was not needed.

They passed through the gates, and tramped through the snow towards the door of the School House.

Ralph Lanyon was bundled into the hall. Mr. Poindexter fixed his keen grey eyes on the sullen, savage face. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"Gee-whiz! So this is where we meet again, George Phipps!"

Poindexter uttered a cry of amazement.

"Phipps?"

"Yes, my boy; that's Phipps, who was in my employ in Chicago, and bolted with fifty thousand dollars!" said the Chicago magnate. "He's got it still, unless I'm mistaken."

The Form-master smote his forehead. "Heavens!" he groaned; "I feared it—I suspected it! Oh, what shall I do? I am ruined!"

Mr. Poindexter looked at the little man curiously.

"How does it worry you?" he asked. "And who are you, anyway?"

"I am a master here," said Mr. Lanyon miserably, "and I have the misfortune to be that villain's cousin, and his disgrace is mine. Once before he brought me to shame. But after this I can never hold up my head again. I shall have to leave Cliveden. I am ruined! But I cannot ask you to spare him, after— Besides, what am I to you?"

"Not so fast," drawled Mr. Poindexter. "I don't know you, but—what sort of a galoot is this gentleman, Lincoln G.? I trust your judgment? Is he likely to have been in cahoots with Phipps?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Mr. Lanyon. "Sir, I—"

"Oh, no, dad," cried Poindexter hastily. "He's Mr. Lanyon, our Form-master. He's one of the best; we all like and respect him. Popper, he can't help that scoundrel being his cousin. It's rotten if he has to suffer for it."

Mr. Poindexter hesitated. Ralph Lanyon thought he saw a chance, and he spoke swiftly.

"Let me go—only give me a chance—the money is nearly all intact."

"H'm!" said Mr. Poindexter. "I don't know whether I ought to give way—but if what you say about the money is correct—"

"I swear it is. It's in a black bag in my room."

"I'll go and get it," said Lincoln Poindexter. And he ran off.

In a couple of minutes he returned with the black bag. It was opened, and the rolls of banknotes which had so surprised Mr. Lanyon were exposed to view.

The Form-master groaned at the sight of the proofs of his cousin's villainy.

"Now let me go—"

"I believe," said Mr. Poindexter slowly, "that this is something awfully like compounding a felony. But I'm not a pesky policeman, anyhow; and I don't let you off, mind; I only don't seize you, but leave it to the detectives to do their own work. For this gentleman's sake, and as it's Christmas-time, I give you a chance. On Boxing Day the hunt starts afresh!"

The rascal was released. In two minutes' more he was gone from Cliveden for ever. The boys never saw him again, and neither did the Form-master, whom he had so basely wronged, and so nearly ruined.

And so the Cliveden Christmas was a merry one after all. Mr. Poindexter had regained nearly all the stolen money, so he was satisfied.

Mr. Lanyon had got rid of his rascally cousin without an open disgrace, so he was satisfied.

The only dissatisfied person, probably, was Ralph Lanyon, fleeing through the winter weather for his liberty, but as he had received much less than his deserts, he did not count.

Mr. Poindexter carried off the boys on Christmas morning to his quarters in town, and they spent a happy Christmas after all.



A Splendid Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's  
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.  
A Mystery of the Night.

**S**NOW—thicker and thicker! The white flakes were falling incessantly. Walls and roofs at St. Jim's were gleaming white, and the old quad was wrapped as in a winding-sheet. Through the dusk of the winter evening, the leafless elms stood up gaunt and spectre-like, the white branches stretching ghost-like against the dim sky.

From the windows of the School House ruddy light gleamed out into the quadrangle. Bright and cosy the interior of the School House looked by contrast with the cold and wind and the falling flakes without.

At the door of the School House several juniors were standing, straining their eyes into the gloom of the quad.

There were footprints in the snow on the steps, footprints on the drive—rapidly becoming obliterated by the fast-falling flakes.

"How long is he going to be, I wonder?"

Jack Blake asked the question impatiently. He drew back his head from the open door as a gust of wind blew snowflakes into his face.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, rubbed the mist from his eyeglass, and adjusted it in his eye. He peered out into the quad, but even with the aid of his famous monocle he could see nothing but snow and leafless branches. Far away, across the quad, glimmered the light from the school tuckshop, but it was invisible to the juniors standing at the door of the School House.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "He's takin' his time, you know. I weally don't think I shall wait here for Goah any longer."

"No; it's getting jolly cold," remarked Tom Merry of the Shell.

"I wasn't thinkin' of the cold, deah boy, but of my twousahs," said D'Arcy. "The wind is blowin' the beastly snow on my twousahs, and—"

"Oh, hang your trousers!"

"I nevah hang my twousahs, deah boy. It spoils the shape. I always put them in the press before goin' to bed—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, shivering. "Where on earth can Gore have got to? It's all rot! It's not five minutes across to the tuckshop, even in the snow!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps he is stoppin' for some wewfeshment."

"We'll bump him if he does!" growled Tom Merry. "He knows jolly well that we're waiting for the grub to have tea!"

"Yaas, wathah! It would weally be most inconsiderate of Goah. Pewwaps we had better go and look for him," D'Arcy suggested. "He may have lost his way in the dark."

"Ass! He could see the School House lights half a mile away!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Tom Merry, holding up his hand.

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors stood suddenly stricken silent.

From the deep gloom of the quadrangle came a sudden, piercing shriek. Loud, sharp, clear, it rang through the air, and echoed from the darkness with a chilling sound upon the hearts of the listening juniors.

The juniors looked at one another.

Their ears were strained to hear, but not a sound came from the snowy quadrangle—not a sound save the soft moan of the winter wind and the almost imperceptible fall of the flakes.

"Good heavens!" Blake muttered, breaking the icy silence at last.

"Wh-what was that?"

"B-bai Jove!"

"It—it couldn't have been Gore!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Good heavens!"

Darkness and silence in the old quad, and it seemed to the startled juniors that that terrible cry must have been a wild fancy of their own, so still was the quad now.

Who had uttered it?

George Gore of the Shell had volun-

teered to cross the snow-driven quad to the tuckshop, to make the purchases for a study feed. He had been a long time gone, but there was no reason to suppose that anything untoward had happened in the old quad of St. Jim's.

What could happen there?

There were no pitfalls for the unwary; there was no danger of any kind. From the farther corner of the quadrangle the flare of lights from the School House could be seen, to guide Gore upon his return.

Nothing could have happened. Yet—yet what did that terrible cry mean?

"It—it must be a rotten jape!" Monty Lowther muttered. "It's a jape of the New House fellows, perhaps. They may have collared Gore and the provisions—"

Tom Merry drew a breath of relief.

"Of course!" he exclaimed.

"That's it!" said Blake, with conviction. "That's it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

It was as if a hard tension had been suddenly relaxed. The rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's—the School House and the New House—had been keener than ever of late at the approach of the Christmas holidays.

The rival juniors were anxious to prove beyond doubt which was the cock house at St. Jim's before they broke up for Christmas and departed on their various ways to the four corners of the kingdom. And this was a jape of Fig-gins & Co.; they felt sure of that. Gore and the provisions had been captured by the New House raiders. But—

"But that yell!" said Manners.

"It was howwid!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shudder. "I suppose it was one of the New House bounders, but—"

"I'm going to see!" exclaimed Tom Merry abruptly. "If the New House chaps are out for a raid in this weather, we can get out, too. We're as tough as they are."

"Yes, rather!"

"Come on!"  
 "Wait a minute, deah boys, while I fetch a waincoat—"  
 "Oh, rats!"

Tom Merry ran out of the School House. He slipped in the snow on the steps, and slid to the bottom, smothered with snow. He picked himself up at once, panting, and dusted the flakes from his face.

"Come on!" he shouted.

"We're coming!" said Blake.

Blake and Lowther and Manners were dashing after Tom Merry. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hesitated a moment, in doubt whether to go upstairs for his raincoat, and then dashed after them.

He objected very much to getting snow upon his elegant Etons, but he did not mean to be left out if there was a fight. As D'Arcy was never tired of explaining to the juniors of St. Jim's, it was a D'Arcy's place to lead.

Tom Merry dashed on into the quad.

The gloom was thick, save where it was lightened by the ridges and drifts of snow. He ran towards the old elms that hid the tuckshop from sight. Suddenly he stumbled.

"Look out!" exclaimed Blake. "My hat! You seem to have falling fits this evening, Tom Merry—"

"Stop!"

"What's the matter?"

"Heaven knows! Stop!"

The juniors halted, struck by the horror in Tom Merry's voice. Tom Merry had stumbled over something that lay in the snow—something that he knew, without looking at it, was a human form!

He dropped on his knees in the snow beside the inanimate figure. The other juniors gathered round with horrified faces.

"Good heavens!" muttered Manners.

"What—who is it?"

"It must be Gore!"

"Oh!"

"A match!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Quick!"

Blake, with a hand that trembled violently, struck a match. The wind caught it and blew it out.

"Under my cap!" muttered Lowther.

Blake struck a second match in the shelter of Lowther's cap. The light flickered upon the face that Tom Merry had dragged out of the snow.

It was a white, set face, with closed eyes, a face the juniors knew. The white, lifeless face was that of George Gore—Gore of the Shell!

For an instant the juniors gazed upon it in horror; then the match flickered out.

Tom Merry found his voice, but it was so broken and husky that he hardly knew its tones himself when he spoke:

"It's Gore!"

"Is he—?" Blake faltered. "Tom Merry, is he—?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Is he dead?"

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### An Unknown Danger.

**T**OM MERRY'S teeth clicked together—not so much with the cold as with the horror that was gripping his heart.

Dead!

Was it possible? It looked like it. Gore made no sound, no motion. What had happened to the Shell fellow in the darkness of the old quad of St. Jim's?

It was Gore who had uttered that terrible cry—the juniors knew that now. But why—why? What had struck him down? What terrible and unseen danger lurked among the shadows of the beloved old quadrangle?

At the thought, the juniors looked.

round them apprehensively. What had happened to Gore might happen to themselves.

"Bai Jove! It's howwible!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "Let's get him in."

"Yes—quick!"

Blake struck another match. In its momentary glimmer, Tom Merry and Manners took Gore up from the snow. Tom Merry taking his shoulders and Manners his feet. Monty Lowther lent assistance, and among them the Shell fellow was carried towards the House.

There was a crowd of fellows in the open doorway now. That shriek had been heard in a good many of the studies, and some of the fellows in the hall had seen Tom Merry & Co. rush out. Something was "up," and a crowd was gathering to see what it was.

There was a general exclamation as the juniors came in sight, bearing the Shell fellow in their midst, leaving a deep track in the snow behind them.

"What's happened?"

"Faith, and what's the matter with Gore intirely?"

"I guess he's fainted."

"Make room!" said Tom Merry abruptly.

Gore was carried into the hall. He was laid upon the couch there, and Monty Lowther ran to Mr. Railton's study door, and opened it without even knocking, in his haste and agitation.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, gave him a stern look.

"Lowther, what does this mean?"

"Oh, come, sir—quick!"

"What is the matter?"

"Gore, sir—I don't know—dead, I think!"

"Good heavens!"

With one bound the School House master was out of his study, pushing the terrified Lowther aside.

He ran towards the spot where Gore lay on the couch, his head supported by Tom Merry. The boys made room instantly for the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton stooped beside Gore. He breathed a deep breath of relief as he examined him.

"He is not dead!" he exclaimed.

"Thank goodness, sir!"

"He has fainted. Carry him up to his bed at once! He must be put to bed, and a doctor sent for. Kildare—Darrel—take him up to the Shell dormitory, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

The two sturdy Sixth-Formers lifted the insensible Shell fellow in their arms and bore him upstairs. Mr. Railton tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Go and help undress Gore, and get him to bed, while I telephone."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry ran upstairs after the seniors. Mr. Railton had a telephone in his study, and he hastened to it at once. In two minutes he was calling the local medical man to the aid of the unfortunate Shell fellow.

Dr. Hall replied that he would come at once, snow or no snow. Mr. Railton left the telephone and hurried up to the Shell dormitory. Tom Merry had already undressed Gore and got him into bed. Gore showed no sign of returning to consciousness. He was blue with cold, and Mr. Railton directed hot water-bottles to be placed at his feet and blankets to be piled on him.

The Housemaster's face was dark with anxiety. Gore was not one of his favourites, by any means; but Mr. Railton had a keen interest in all the boys in his House, and to all of them he was like an elder brother.

"How did this happen, Merry?" he asked, when all had been done for Gore that could be done.

Tom Merry shook his head dazedly.

"I don't know, sir."

"Tell me what you do know."

"We were going to have a feed in the study, sir," said Tom Merry, in broken tones. "Gore volunteered to go to the tuckshop and fetch the things. Of course, nobody wanted to go across the quad in the snow. We were waiting for him to come back, when we heard a shriek—"

"I heard it," said Mr. Railton quietly. "I did not understand what it was. Well?"

"We didn't know anything had happened to Gore, sir, but we went out to look for him," said Tom Merry. "We found him lying in the snow, sir, like—like that!"

Mr. Railton wrinkled his brow in puzzled thought.

"Unconscious?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"He was alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"He had gone out alone?"

"Yes, alone. There was not much to carry, only a bag of grub. I—I mean things from the tuckshop, sir," said Tom Merry, colouring.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Did you find the bag with him?"

"I never thought of looking for it, sir."

"Is it possible, do you think, Merry, that this is some more of the absurd rivalry between the Houses—that the New House juniors have somehow frightened Gore in this way?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Figgins & Co. wouldn't do a thing like that, sir."

"But some of the others?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Gore must have been frightened. He shrieked, and then fainted."

"I suppose he was scared in some way, sir."

"You have no idea how?"

"No idea at all, sir."

"Gore is not usually troubled with nerves, is he?"

"Oh, no, sir! He's as strong as a horse. I—I mean, he's very strong, sir."

"It is very curious."

"I can't understand it at all, sir. It's just as if Gore had seen a ghost; but, of course, we know he hasn't."

"No; that is hardly likely. But it is certainly very singular."

Mr. Railton was turning to the bed again.

Tom Merry looked at Gore.

The Shell fellow's cheeks showed a trace of colour now, and his eyes were open, but there was no understanding in them. His lips were moving, and low, broken words came forth. Mr. Railton stooped to hear.

"Oh, save me—save me!"

Then the pale lips were silent again.

The Housemaster rose with a stern brow.

Tom Merry silently quitted the dormitory.

The other fellows were waiting for him downstairs to hear what he had to tell.

"Gore is still unconscious," said Tom Merry. "It looks to me as if he's going to be ill. I can't understand it at all!"

"Bai Jove, that's sewious!"

"He was frightened somehow," said Blake.

"I suppose so."

"Could it be a New House dodge?"

"I hardly think so."

"Let's go and see Figgins and ask him," Monty Lowther suggested.

"Good egg!"

And Tom Merry & Co., putting on their coats and caps and scarves, and turning up their trousers, left the School House, and tramped through the snow across the wide quadrangle to the New House of St. Jim's.



THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Ghost of St. Jim's.

"SAUSAGES!" said Fatty Wynn.  
 "Yes."  
 "And bacon!"  
 "Yes."

"And jam tarts to follow!"  
 "Oh, good!" said Figgins and Kerr together.

There was a cheerful fire burning in Figgins' study, in the Fourth Form passage in the New House at St. Jim's. The table was laid for tea, and there were good things on the table.

Fatty Wynn had just unpacked a basket, and he was cleaning out the study frying-pan with an old newspaper. Figgins and Kerr had put their work away, to lend a hand in preparing tea.

"The wind's getting up," Figgins remarked. "Doesn't it howl! Like the ghostly monk of St. Jim's in the legend."

Kerr grinned.

"Yes, it's time for that giddy monk to be on the prowl now," he remarked. "He goes his rounds at this time of the year, so they say. That's the best of a jolly old school like St. Jim's. It has its legends. Not like your blessed new red-brick schools like Rylcombe Grammar School. The Grammar School chaps can't pretend that they have a ghost in a place that has only been built two or three years!"

"No fear! And we have a variety of them at St. Jim's," Figgins remarked, laughing. "There's the spectre who taps on the walls—tap, tap, tap!—and then there's the bloodstain in the old library, which always becomes crimson and fresh at Christmas-time, only nobody's ever seen it do so. Then there's the White Monk of St. Jim's, the giddy ghost who walks from the moment the snow falls on the ground."

"It's the first fall to-night," Kerr remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha! Time for the White Monk to put in an appearance," said Figgins. "I don't suppose we shall see him, though. Pass the sassingers."

"Here you are, Figgy."

"It would be rather a dodge to get up a sham White Monk, and give the School House bouders a turn!" said Kerr, with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tap!

Figgins started.

But it was only a tap at the door, and the door opened the next moment, and half a dozen juniors, in a considerably snowy state, came into the study.

"You fellows come to tea?" said Figgins.

"No," said Tom Merry. "We haven't come to feed. We've come to ask you some questions."

"Fire away!"

"Have any of you chaps been playing ghost in the quad?"

Figgins started.

"No!"

"Honour bright?"

"Yes, honest Injun! Why?"

Tom Merry explained.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Figgins, when he had finished. "And hasn't Gore come to himself yet?"

"No!"

"It's jolly odd," said Kerr. "Gore isn't a coward—like Mellish, for instance. He wouldn't be frightened without a reason, I should think. He must have seen something."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'd like to know what he saw. As a matter of fact," said Figgins frankly, "it had just occurred to me that the first fall of snow is the time when the White Monk is supposed to walk, and I was saying to Kerr that we might work off a

ghost wheeze on you chaps. But we haven't done it."

"Somebody else in the House may have thought of it, and done it," Blake remarked.

"It's possible, but—"

"But you don't think so?"

"Well, I don't," said Figgins.

"Where did Gore see the ghost, or whatever it was?"

"Well, we found him in the snow in a dead faint under the elms," said Tom Merry. "You can see the place from this window."

He pulled the curtain aside.

Figgins and Kerr looked out of the misty window. Fatty Wynn went steadily on with the last sausage. The ghost of St. Jim's did not interest him so much as that beautifully browned sausage.

Tom Merry pushed up the sash of the window. Through the falling snow a few stars were twinkling dimly, and the

The form—if form it was—disappeared in a moment.

Figgins let the curtain fall back into its place.

In the lighted study, the juniors gazed at one another with faces as pale as death!

"The ghost of St. Jim's!"

Figgins muttered the words in a low, husky voice.

Tom Merry nodded; for a moment he could not speak.

That, then, was what Gore had seen—that was what had caused that terrible shriek which seemed still to ring in Tom Merry's ears. That was what Gore had seen, at close quarters, alone in the dark! Perhaps it had touched him! Tom Merry shuddered at the thought. No wonder the Shell fellow had shrieked—no wonder he had fainted!

What did it mean?

For one moment—one dizzy moment—



Tom Merry stumbled over something that lay in the snow—something that he knew, without looking at it, was a human form. "Good heavens!" muttered Manners. "What—who is it?"

juniors could make out the distant row of elms.

Figgins strained his eyes in the gloom.

"That's where we found Gore," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!" muttered Figgins.

"What's the matter?"

"Look! Can't you see something? Look! Look!"

Figgins clutched Tom Merry's arm with one hand, and pointed with the other. Tom Merry strained his eyes.

Was it a vision; a wild fancy, conjured up by the gloom, the gleaming snow, and his excited and feverish imagination, or did he see a strange, ghostly figure, in monkish garb of the olden time, but white as the driven snow, glide for a moment from the shadow of the old elms?

"Good heavens!" muttered Tom Merry.

it seemed to Tom Merry that perhaps the old legend was true, that the ancient walls of St. Jim's were haunted by the phantom of the murdered monk.

"Good heavens!" Tom Merry muttered again.

"Bai Jove!"

"Did you see it, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you, Blake?"

"Yes," said Blake, in a low tone.

There was a long silence. Fatty Wynn had finished the sausages, and he left the last rasher of bacon. Even his appetite was a little affected. The study seemed cold, and its cheerfulness was gone. Figgins closed the window sharply, and stirred the fire.

But Tom Merry recovered himself quickly.

"I can't understand it," he said; "but I do not believe in ghosts."

"Of course not! It's all rot!" said Manners, but his voice was less steady than usual.

"It's impos, deah boys!"

"But what was it?" said Figgins.

"I suppose it wasn't a mere fancy?" said Tom Merry dubiously.

Figgins shook his head.

"I saw it," he said.

"Then it was somebody playing a trick!"

"I—I suppose so."

"But who?"

"Some silly young ass," said Figgins, forgetting for the moment that the same thought had passed through his own mind. "He ought to be jolly well licked for it, too!"

"I didn't see it clearly, but it was too big to be a junior," said Tom Merry.

"Ye-es."

"Surely we can't imagine that a senior—a Fifth or Sixth fellow—would be idiot enough to play such a trick!"

Figgins was silent.

"It might be somebody from outside," said Blake slowly.

"How could he get in?"

"Well, it's jolly odd."

"Bai Jove, it's a howwid mystery! I—I don't weally feel much inclined to cross the quad again to-night, you chaps," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, we've got to do that," said Blake. "But—but I think we'll avoid that—that special spot. We can go round."

"We ought to report this to Mr. Railton," said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll come across with you, if you like," said Kerr.

Tom Merry shook his head. None of the School House juniors felt inclined to cross the quad again in the dark. But they would never submit to such a slur as being accompanied by New House fellows because they were nervous. That would be too much of a descent for the dignity of the School House.

"We'd better be off," said Tom Merry.

"Good-night, you chaps!"

"Good-night!"

The chums of the School House tramped downstairs. At the doorway of the New House they halted. But they made up their minds to it, and, after a moment's pause, they tramped out doggedly into the shadowy, snowy quadrangle.

They might be excused for avoiding the spot where the strange figure had been seen. They were no cowards, but they felt a natural reluctance to face that terrible apparition, whatever it was.

Ghost stories in the daylight might seem ridiculous, but in the darkness and silence of the quadrangle their aspect was different. Glad enough would all the juniors have been to get into the shelter of the School House without the tramp across the quadrangle first.

But they tramped on doggedly.

They were near the School House, walking with continual backward glances, when Tom Merry paused suddenly and listened.

"What was that?"

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy's eyeglass fluttered at the end of its cord, and he started.

"Bai Jove, Tom Wewwy, I wish you wouldn't speak so suddenly! You have thrown me into quite a fluttah—"

"Hush!"

"Weally—"

"It's only the wind!" said Blake uneasily. "Let's get on!"

Doubtless it was only the wind moaning about the old roofs, but it seemed like a wild and demonic howl to the throbbing ears of the juniors.

They increased their pace—the walk

became a trot—finally a run. They ran on hard through the snow, and came up breathless, to the doorway of the School House.

A group of juniors were there, looking out into the falling snow. They stared as Tom Merry & Co. came charging up the slippery steps.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Kangaroo of the Shell. "Have you seen it?"

"What is it?"

"The ghost!"

"N-no," said Tom Merry, turning rather red. "We—we were in a bit of a hurry, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally D'Arcy—D'Arcy minor of the Third. "Ha, ha, ha! My only Aunt Janel! They were in a bit of a hurry—that's all! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wally—"

There was a roar of laughter among the juniors. Tom Merry was crimson, and so were his comrades. On second thoughts, they wished they had crossed the quadrangle with a slow and stately stride; but it was too late now.

"Where is Mr. Railton?" Tom Merry asked.

"In the dorm with Gore."

Tom Merry went up to the Shell dormitory. The doctor had not yet arrived, and Mr. Railton was seated by Gore's bedside. There was more colour in Gore's face now, and his lips moved at intervals; it was evident that he was coming to himself.

Mr. Railton looked at the hero of the Shell inquiringly.

"We've just been across to the New House, sir," said Tom Merry. "I—I went to ask Figgins if any chap there had been playing ghost. He says no."

"I am glad to hear that," said the Housemaster quietly. "Such a trick would be very foolish and very dangerous."

"We—we saw something in the quad, sir," faltered Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton gave him a sharp look.

"What did you see, Merry?"

"From Figgy's study window, sir—just for a minute—it—it—whatever it was, sir. It looked like the engravings of the White Monk in the school library, sir. A—a figure, dressed like a monk, but all white—"

"Are you sure you saw this, Merry, or was it a trick of the imagination?"

"Figgins saw it as well, sir, and Blake and D'Arcy. I thought I ought to mention it to you, sir, under the circumstances."

The School House master nodded.

"Quite right, Merry! If you saw this, as you suppose, it is undoubtedly some foolish fellow playing ghost, having heard of the legend of the White Monk. But hush!"

Gore's eyes had opened wildly.

He fixed a terrified stare upon Mr. Railton and shuddered. His white lips moved, and muttering words came forth:

"Save me! Save me! Oh, the ghost!"

"Gore, my poor boy, you are quite safe here," said Mr. Railton soothingly.

"The—ghost!" muttered Gore, shuddering violently.

"What did you see in the quadrangle, Gore?"

"The ghost—the White Monk!"

And Gore's eyes closed again.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Doubting Thomases!

**T**OM MERRY & CO. were in the common-room in the School House when Gore came down late in the evening. Gore was still looking very pale, and there was a harassed expression upon his face.

Evidently he had not yet fully re-

covered from the shock he had sustained in the quadrangle. But he was able to explain what had happened, and the juniors gathered round him eagerly to hear what it was.

Gore shuddered a little as he explained. "It was the White Monk," he said, in a low voice.

There was a general exclamation of incredulity.

"If it wasn't, it was somebody dressed up and playing ghost," said Gore. "It was a monk, but all in dead white, with a cowl over the face, and it came suddenly out of the shadows, without a sound, and almost touched me!"

He broke off, shuddering.

"Bai Jove, it must have thwown you into a fluttah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sympathetically.

"I—I think I fainted."

"You jolly well did!" said Jack Blake. "You had gone off when we found you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No wonder!" said Tom Merry. "You can chuckle if you like, Levison, but I expect you would have done 'the same'!"

Levison, the cad of the Fourth, sneered.

"It was some shadow or other, of course!" he exclaimed. "Gore was frightened by a shadow!"

"Rot!"

"Do you think it was the ghost, then?" sneered Levison.

"No; I don't know that," said Tom Merry slowly. "But it must have been somebody playing ghost."

"Rats!"

"Look here, Levison—we saw it ourselves from the window of Figgy's study!" said Blake hotly.

"Imagination, my boy!" said Levison loftily. "When fellows are in a state of nerves they see all sorts of things."

"You cheeky cad!"

"Don't argue with him, Blake, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "I am quite sure that if Levison saw it he would wun like anythin'!"

"Like you fellows did!" grinned Levison.

And there was a laugh.

Arthur Augustus turned red.

"You're afraid of a giddy shadow on the snow!" remarked Mellish of the Fourth. "Of course, it was snow drifting on the wind, or something like that."

"Wats!"

"It was great to see you come pelting in at top speed! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Levison.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye and regarded the cad of the Fourth Form with a withering glance.

"I may be afraid of ghosts, but I am not afraid of you!" he exclaimed. "And if I have any more disrespectful remarks, Levison, I shall give you a fearful thwashin'!"

Levison shrugged his shoulders, and walked away with Mellish.

But the laugh was certainly up against Tom Merry & Co. Their little run across the quadrangle was not likely to be forgotten in a hurry.

Gore was not much inclined to talk about what had happened. The horror of it was still strong upon him.

The Terrible Three discussed the matter, but without coming to any satisfactory conclusion. That somebody was playing ghost seemed the most feasible theory; but who he was, and why he should do it, remained mysteries.

"But one thing's jolly certain!" said Jack Blake, gritting his teeth. "He's got to be bowled out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we've got to do it," said Blake. Tom Merry nodded.

"What about a ghost hunt?" suggested Digby of the Fourth.

"The prefects have searched the quad, already with most of the masters," said Manners. "Mr. Raiton ordered them. They haven't found anything. I saw Lathom and Selby and Raiton himself with Kildare and Darrel and most of the prefects going out with lanterns. We sha'n't find more than they did."

"But it must be somebody in St. Jim's—and he can be found!" said Monty Lowther. "The question is how to get hold of the rotter."

And it was a question which seemed likely to remain unanswered.

There had been a thorough search of the quad and the outbuildings for any body who might have been there playing ghost.

But no one was found, and footprints, if they had been made, had been covered up and hidden by the fresh-falling flakes.

The matter was enveloped in complete mystery.

There were not wanting many fellows who ascribed the whole matter to Gore's nerves in the first place, and to the lively imagination of Tom Merry & Co. in the second.

The old legend of St. Jim's had it that the spectre monk commenced his walks abroad at the first fall of snow on the old school, and the knowledge of that had scared Gore, and made him take a shaver for a spectre.

Gore was still too much upset by his experience to take notice of or to resent the jokes on the subject; but they exasperated Tom Merry & Co. sorely.

And when the fellows heard that Tom Merry & Co. had collared Mr. Selby in the dark in mistake for the ghost, their merriment knew no bounds.

Tom Merry went to bed that night in a somewhat cross mood—not usual with him—and his temper was not improved by the chatter in the dormitory after lights out.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, put the lights out; and as he went out of the dormitory Croke of the Shell called after him, in anxious tones:

"Kildare! I say, Kildare!"

The prefect turned back in the doorway.

"What is it? What do you want?"

Croke whimpered artistically.

"I—I—I'm afraid of the dark!" he said stammeringly. "Would you mind leaving the light on to-night, Kildare?"

The senior laughed.

"Don't be an ass!" he replied.

"But it's Christmas-time, you know, and there's been a fall of snow, and ghosts come out at St. Jim's just like worms after rain," said Croke.

There was a chuckle all along the row of beds, and Kildare himself laughed.

The Terrible Three turned crimson with rage in the gloom.

"I—I think a prefect might come and sit up with us, anyway," said Kangaroo. "Would you mind sitting by my bedside and holding my hand all night, Kildare?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare went out and closed the door. There was immediately a yell from Croke.

"Ow!"

"Shut up, you ass!" growled Bernard Glyn.

"The ghost!"

"Where?"

"In Tom Merry's eye, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I feel so frightened!" murmured Croke. "I wish the St. Jim's ghost was like the chap in the song, who couldn't come home in the dark. A really decent ghost would always go about in the daytime—not upset a fellow's beauty-sleep like this!"

"Oh, dry up—do!" growled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, dry up! He wants to listen for

the ghostly footsteps!" chuckled Kangaroo.

And the whole dormitory roared.

It was a long time before the badinage ceased, and by that time the Terrible Three were furious, and longing to discover who had played ghost in the quadrangle that they might take summary vengeance upon him.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### A Strange Guest.

MR. SELBY, the master of the Third, crossed the quad the next morning with gingerly steps.

Taggles, the porter, was engaged in sweeping the drive, but it was a long task, and Taggles was not industrious.

Mr. Selby did not like walking in the snow, and he was afraid of slipping over. He paused to speak to Taggles in his usual manner.

"You should have had the path clear by this time, Taggles," he said harshly.

"Ho!" said Taggles. "I'm sorry, sir! If I 'ad three pairs of arms, sir, I'd be honly too pleased to do three men's work, sir. 'Aving honly one pair, sir, I can't do it, sir, begging your pardon."

"Don't be impertinent, Taggles!"

"Ho!" said Taggles.

He leaned upon his broom, and Mr. Selby walked on, frowning. Taggles spat upon his hands, and resumed his sweeping at a more snail-like rate of speed than before.

Taggles cast a look after the Form-master which showed that he shared the feelings of the Third Form at St. Jim's towards Mr. Selby.

"Ho!" growled Taggles. "You are a nice man, I don't think! Which I ain't under your orders, and don't you think it! Ho!"

Taggles took care not to make that remark till Mr. Selby was out of hearing. The master of the Third tramped on gingerly through the snow and reached his destination, a wing of the Head's house, with a door opening upon the quadrangle under a big, leafless elm. St. Jim's—the older part of it—was a mass of irregular buildings, and all sorts of doors and windows and rooms cropped up in the most unexpected places to a stranger.

The Head's house was a portion of the old School House, and attached to the Head's house were several other buildings, all parts of the ancient abbey that formed the nucleus of the great mass of buildings that formed St. Jim's.

Mr. Selby entered a deep, stone porch, shadowy even in the broad daylight, and knocked at an arched door and opened it. He stepped in, into a flagged passage, with two rooms opening off it, one on either side.

He coughed as he entered the passage.

A voice came from one of the rooms.

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Wynde."

"Come in, Selby."

Mr. Selby entered the room.

It was a comfortably furnished room, with a bright fire burning in the grate. On a sofa near the fire a man, clad in a loose, flowered dressing-gown, was seated, half reclining.

A book was open upon the table before him—a book of great age, to judge by the yellowness of the leaves and the peculiar form of some of the letters.

The man looked up, and motioned towards a chair. Mr. Selby sat down, and regarded him with a far from complacent expression.

The man upon the sofa returned Mr. Selby's steady look with one equally steady. He was not a common-looking man. His cadaverous face, his sunken eyes and hollow cheeks, his utter want of colour, told of the sick man, yet he seemed to be well in body.

His eyes, deeply sunken, were very bright, and seemed like diamonds glittering from dark hollows. He had a quick, peculiar way of moving his lips without speaking.

His hands, which were long and white and thin, seemed never at rest, the fingers moving and moving like the restless claws of a bird.

"How are you to-day, Wynde?" said Mr. Selby.

The other smiled.

"The same," he said.

"You do not feel better?"

"No."

"Or worse?"

"No."

"St. Jim's is very cold now," Mr. Selby remarked, "for one so weak as you are in health, Wynde. It is not a judicious place to select as a residence."

A peculiarly ironic smile came over the pale face.

"Do you wish me to go, Selby?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the Form-master hastily. "I—I was thinking of you. I—I, of course, shall be the better pleased the longer you stay."

"Then you will be very pleased, as I am going to stay a long time," said the other cheerfully. "You are very kind."

Mr. Selby bit his lip.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

Wynde pushed the book towards him.

"A very interesting old book," he said. "A history of St. James' College, Sussex, with its legends. Printed in 1740. Quite an old book."

"Stuffy nonsense!" said Mr. Selby peevishly, pushing the book away from him. "What interest can you find in it?"

Wynde laughed.

"I am interested in such subjects; but our tastes never were similar," he said. "I have been reading the story of the White Monk of St. Jim's. The legend seems to be as old as the school. It is a curious story."

"It is an absurd story, and has given rise to absurd fancies among the boys here," said Mr. Selby peevishly. "Never mind the White Monk of St. Jim's. I want to speak to you about yourself, doctor."

Wynde nodded.

"You have kept me very much in the dark," pursued Mr. Selby. "When I first obtained my appointment here I was in need of money, and you advanced me a hundred pounds. Without that, as you know very well, I might not have been able to take up my position as master at this college."

"Exactly."

"I hope I am grateful," said Mr. Selby, without, however, looking very grateful. "Any service I can render you in return I am willing to render."

"Thank you!"

"I have not been able to repay the money, and am not yet in a position to do so; and I admit that if you pressed me for it, it would make matters very awkward for me here," said the Form-master, flushing. "For those reasons—and out of friendship, of course—I acceded to the extraordinary request you made me a few days ago."

"Pure friendship, I am sure," said the other, with the same peculiar ironic expression upon his face.

Mr. Selby made an impatient movement.

"But I am entitled to know what it all means," the Form-master exclaimed, his voice rising a little. "I detest mysteries, and I dislike being kept in the dark. When I knew you before, you were a prosperous surgeon, wealthy, and well known, and the last man in the world, I should imagine, to indulge in a freak of this kind. Now you suddenly come to me and ask for shelter, without explain-

ing why you have left your practice, and your home, and your relations—without explaining anything!"

"Quite so."

"Dr. Holmes kindly placed these rooms at my disposal, when I represented to him that I wished to have a sick relation stay here for a time," said the Form-master, flushing again. "He has asked me no questions. He has passed no remarks upon your protracted retirement. It is understood that you are an invalid; but he has not referred to the fact that you never see a medical man. But he must wonder."

"Possibly."

"It is placing me in a most invidious position," said the Form-master, "and the longer it lasts the more invidious my position becomes. You have forbidden me to write to any of your connections asking for information. You have, to put it plainly, threatened to claim the money that is due to you, and which it is not convenient for me to pay, if I fail to observe your wishes. I have observed them in every way; but I say again I have a right to an explanation. Why are you thus in hiding—for that's what it amounts to?"

The other was silent.

"You have left everything, and buried yourself in the country, and you do not even venture outside the gates of this school. Why?"

No reply.

"Is it possible, Wynde, that you have broken the law in some way, and that you are wicked and unscrupulous enough to place me in the position of sheltering a criminal from justice?" Mr. Selby exclaimed, in a trembling voice.

Wynde burst into a strange laugh.

"No," he said; "I have broken no law."

"What have you done, then?"

"Nothing."

"Then why—"

"I have already stated my reasons. My health threatened to break down under hard study and overwork, and I required a change and complete rest. I have hung over my experiments till my brain was dizzy and my senses swimming. Here I find repose."

"And is that all?"

"That is all."

"Then why should I not communicate with your friends?"

"Because I do not wish to be disturbed or to receive troublesome letters."

"But your relations—"

"I desire to be left alone."

There was silence in the room for some minutes. Mr. Selby bit his lips, and Dr. Wynde turned the crackling, rustling pages of the old book. The Form-master rose to his feet at last.

"I suppose I must believe what you have told me," he said at last. "But I do not understand it—and I hate mysteries. I hope that you will explain to me; but I see that you are not in the humour to do so now. That is all."

Wynde did not reply. He watched the Form-master with a strange look as the latter quitted the room. Then he threw himself back upon the sofa, with a sigh, and stared into the fire with a strange, restless gleam in his eyes.

Mr. Selby, with a frowning brow, strode away towards the School House. He was in an irritable and captious temper; and he indemnified himself for the annoyance his curious guest had caused him by boxing the ears of two juniors as soon as he entered the School House.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### No Takers.

**B**ANG!

It was a kick at the door of Study No. 6, in the Fourth-Form passage in the School House. The time was evening, and Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were at their preparation in that famous apartment.

D'Arcy started, and shot a shower of blots from his pen upon his foolscap, as the door flew open under that tremendous kick.

Wally, of the Third, walked in.

"Hallo!" he said coolly.

"You weckless young wascal!" exclaimed his major. "Look what you have made me do! I have spoiled this exercise now."

Wally looked at it and nodded.

"Yes, it looks as if you have!" he remarked, with perfect calmness. "But I didn't come here to talk about exercises. I want—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy!" said his minor imploringly. "I came here—"

"You cheeky young wascal—"

"I want some assistance—"

"How much?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Wally laughed.

"Not tin this time, Gussy—though, now you speak of it, I'll have half-a-crown," he said.

D'Arcy silently laid the coin upon the table.

"Good!" said Wally cheerfully. "But what I want is help. I want a big chap to help me, and Herries would do rippingly."

"Oh!" said Herries, rather flattered. "What is it? Somebody been ragging you?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"Selby!"

"Your Form-master?" exclaimed Herries, in surprise. "You're not going to ask me to lick a Form-master, surely?"

Wally chuckled.

"Well, no," he said; "I should draw a line at that. I leave bumping Form-masters to you fellows, when you get scared with giddy ghost-stories—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"I've got a dodge for making up a White Monk, and giving Selby a scare," said Wally. "Will you let me dress you up for the part?"

Herries stared at him.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated.

"You see, it would scare Selby no end, and—Ow! What are you doing? Let my ear alone!" yelled Wally, as Herries grasped him by that appendage.

Herries led him into the passage by the ear, and released him there.

"Now, you buzz off!" he said impressively. "And don't bring any more of your rotten Third-Form wheezes to this study."

"Why, you fathead—"

"Buzz off!"

"You chump! You burbling ass!"

The study door closed, in the midst of Wally's Third-Form eloquence, and he ceased. He gave the study door a terrific kick, expressive of his feelings, and tramped away in the direction of the Shell passage.

He bestowed a fresh kick on the door of Tom Merry's study, but a gentler one, and opened the door and looked in.

The Terrible Three were doing their prep, and they all looked up as the door flew open. Wally chuckled softly.

"It's all right—it's not a ghost!" he said reassuringly.

"You cheeky young beggar—"

"I want some of you chaps to help me—"

Monty Lowther reached for the ink-

pot. Wally kept a wary eye on it as he proceeded.

"I'm not big enough for the wheeze, myself, so I want a chap who's bigger, though with less sense, and any of you fellows would do."

"What do you want us to do?" asked Tom Merry good-humouredly. "Don't waste that ink, Monty. And Wally's got enough ink on his fingers and collar already."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Wally. "Look here, we're going to give Selby beans—"

"Your Form-master?"

"Yes. He's been rattier than ever lately, and we bar him," said Wally. "I'm blessed if I know what's the matter with him, unless his sick relation is getting on his mind. But I'm not going to be ragged and caned for any of his old relations. It ain't reasonable. We're going to give him the kybosh."

"Honour your pastors and masters," said Manners severely.

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "Look here, we're going to rig up a White Monk, and give him a scare. There isn't a chap big enough in the Third."

"My hat!"

"Do you see we're in a fix?" explained Wally. "Will one of you chaps help me out?"

Monty Lowther jumped up.

"Certainly!" he exclaimed.

He proceeded to help Wally out—though not in the sense in which the scamp of the Third Form meant the words.

Monty Lowther used his boot—and Wally was helped out of the study—and he retired roaring into the passage.

"You—you dangerous ass!"

"I'm helping you out!" said Lowther blandly.

"Ow! Yow! Chuck it!"

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

"You cackling asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yarrah!"

Wally ran down the passage at last, and Monty Lowther returned into the study breathless and laughing, and sat down to the table again.

"I think we've put the stopper on those young duffers playing ghost," he remarked.

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

And the Terrible Three went on with their preparation. Wally, feeling considerably sore, in body as well as in mind, retired from the Shell quarters with a frowning brow.

It really looked as if the Third-Formers would be left to carry out their jape themselves, without any assistance, after all.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### No Luck!

**W**ALLY was frowning as he came into the Third-Form-room. The fags were all there; evening-preparation was over, and they had the room to themselves. Jameson, who was making toast at a blazing fire, to the accompaniment of a frequent crackling and an incessant smell of burning, looked round with a ruddy face as Wally came in.

"All serene?" he asked.

Wally grunted.

"No. I can't get any of the silly asses to lend a hand. It's a jolly good jape, too."

"They're all jealous of the Third Form," remarked Fane.

"I shouldn't wonder."

"You'll have to do it after all, Jimmy."

Jameson shifted uneasily.

"Look here, Wally—"  
 "You're big enough," said Wally—"big enough and old enough to be in the Fourth, for that matter. Besides, there's no risk."

"Oh, I suppose I could do it," said Jameson ungraciously. "But where are we going to get the monk's clothes?"

"From the school museum."  
 "They will be missed."  
 "Let 'em be missed."  
 "There may be a row."  
 "Let there be a row."

"That's all very well, Wally."  
 "My dear chap, we're going to work this jape," said Wally. "I want to see old Selby turn green and pink. You needn't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," roared Jameson.  
 "Or nervous, then."  
 "I'm not nervous."  
 "What's the matter with you, then?" demanded Curly Gibson.

"Nothing," growled Jameson. "I suppose I can work the wheeze. But if we can't get the monk's clothes—"  
 "We can get them easily enough," said Wally.

"Well, we'll go presently," said Jameson, with a considerable lack of enthusiasm. "Will you have some of this toast?"

Wally shook his head.  
 "The sooner we go the better," he said. "The library will be shut up soon. Come on, Curly; and you, too, Jim."

"I'm making toast."  
 "Frayne will look after your toast."  
 "Certainly!" said Joe Frayne.

Jameson reluctantly relinquished the toast and the toasting-fork to Frayne.  
 "Mind you don't burn it."  
 "Crikey," said Frayne, "I'm blessed if I see how it can be burned much more."

"Come on, Jimmy!"  
 And Wally & Co. went out of the Form-room. Wally and Gibson were quite keen about the matter, perhaps because they were not going to play ghost. Jameson did not seem at all keen; in fact, he was inclined to throw obstacles in the way all along. Perhaps he was thinking what a poor protection a monk's robe would afford if Mr. Selby started on him with a cane.

"I shouldn't wonder if there ain't any monk's duds there," he exclaimed, as the juniors quietly entered the school library and Wally, switched on the electric light. "There's a lot of old armour and stuff, but—"

"I remember there was one robe and cowl hanging up there last time I went to the cupboard," said Wally serenely. "That was the time I borrowed a helmet for the private theatricals, when I was Jim the Fireman."

"Yes, and a pretty ass you looked, playing fireman in a giddy Crusader's helmet," sniffed Jameson.

"More like a fireman than if I had worn a school cap or a silk hat, I suppose," said Wally warmly. "Look here, Jameson—"

"Don't argue, you chaps," said Curly Gibson. "If we're found here, some giddy prefect will want to know what we're doing here."  
 "Yes; shut up, Jamey!"  
 "You shut up!" said Jameson crossly.  
 "Look here—"  
 "Here's the cupboard," said Curly Gibson.

In one corner of the old library was a deep recess, and in that recess a deep cupboard where various lumber of some historical interest was kept.

Fragments of old armour, and helmets, old dented battleaxes, and many dusty garments that had belonged, or were supposed to have belonged, to the old monks of St. James' Abbey—the original institution which had occupied

the site of St. Jim's—in the days before King Henry VIII. had found an easy source of income by despoiling the monasteries.

Wally struck a match, and blinked into the depths of the cupboard.

"Get it out," said Curly.  
 "Blessed if I can see it!"  
 "Oh, rats! Look again!"

"It's gone," growled Wally, striking another match. "Some ass has put it away, I suppose. I remember hearing Railton say that the things here ought to be sorted out and labelled, and put somewhere where visitors to St. Jim's could see them. Blessed if I know why Housemasters can't let well alone!"

Jameson did not seem so disappointed as Wally.

"Well, it's all right," he said; "the jape's off."

"It isn't," said Wally crossly. "I

"Not if Jameson knows it, my son. If you're going to have a ghost in a white sheet, she is no object, and you or Curly can take on the job."

"Look here, Jameson—"  
 "I tell you—"  
 "Rats!"

"I'm not going to—"  
 "I say—"

"What are you rascals doing here?" exclaimed a sharp voice, as Kildare of the Sixth came into the library.

The three fags had left the cupboard, and were standing in the library as they argued. They ceased suddenly, and looked in dismay at Kildare.

"Hallo, Kildare!" said Wally feebly.  
 "What are you doing here?"

"Search of knowledge," said Wally, recovering himself. "Contemplating the works of the master minds of the various ages."



Wally D'Arcy sailed up, and swooped down into the blanket again. "Now will you promise not to play ghost again?" demanded Tom Merry. "No!" roared Wally. The blanket swung, and up went the fag once more.

can't find the monk's robe, but we can rig up something else. Look here, Jimmy, I suppose you haven't hidden it yourself, to get out of this jape?"  
 "Of course I haven't!" said Jameson indignantly.

Wally sniffed.  
 "You don't seem very keen about it," he said. "Well, perhaps we should have got into a row for chalking it white, even if we'd found it here."

"Very likely," grinned Curly. "But what are we going to do?"

"Oh, we can rig Jameson up in a white sheet instead."

"Can we?" said Jameson significantly.

Kildare laughed.  
 "I suppose you were up to some mischief," he exclaimed.

"Oh, Kildare!" said Wally, looking shocked.

Kildare pointed to the door.  
 "Get out!" he said tersely.

The fags were only too glad to obey. Kildare switched off the light and followed them.

Wally & Co. returned to the Third Form-room, Wally in a very dissatisfied mood. He frowned as he sat down, and put his boots on the fender; and Jameson

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

frowned when he saw the toast that Frayne had finished for him.

"Do you call that toast or cinders?" he roared.

"Cinders!" replied Frayne cheerfully. And then he dodged away out of Jameson's reach.

"I suppose you're chucking up the wheeze on Selby?" said Curly Gibson gloomily.

Wally grunted. "I'm not," he said. "I'm going to make the old bird sit up, you bet. Jameson is going to scare him in a white sheet."

"No fear!" said Jameson. "Look here, Jameson—"

"No white sheets for me!" said Jameson decidedly. "You or Curly can take it on, if you like. I don't raise any objection to that."

"Well, perhaps it would suit Curly just as well," said Wally, with an air of consideration. "Yes, perhaps Curly had better do it."

"Perhaps," said Curly; "but it's a jolly big perhaps. I'm not playing ghost at my time of life—not much!"

"Now, don't be a funk, Curly."

"You take it on yourself, D'Arcy minor."

"Well, you see—"

"Yes, you take it on!" exclaimed Jameson warmly. "Let's see you do something beside jaw."

"Good!" said Curly Gibson. "It's settled; Wally takes it on. Good!"

"Look here—" began Wally. "Of course, if you're afraid, we might ask Frayne or Pike," said Jameson sarcastically.

"I'm not afraid," howled Wally, "and I'll take it on. Yah!"

"Good!" said Gibson and Jameson together serenely. "We'll watch you from a distance. Good!"

Wally snorted. He did not seem to think that it was so good as Jameson and Curly Gibson supposed.

### THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

#### Wally Catches It.

**T**OM MERRY looked out of the window of the Shell dormitory, when the juniors of the School House went to bed that night.

"Looking for the ghost?" asked Kangaroo.

Tom Merry coloured.

"I don't suppose he'll walk to-night," remarked Clifton Dane. "According to the legend, he walks when there's snow on the ground."

"And there's a thaw to-night," grinned Bernard Glyn. "The ghost will most likely keep indoors."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sleep in peace," said Crooke. "Of course, if Tom Merry likes, we could keep a candle alight, to watch over his baby slumbers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Gore. "If you'd seen what I saw in the quad last night you wouldn't jaw about it."

"What was it—a shadow?" asked Crooke.

"Or a tree?" grinned Kangaroo.

"Or Taggles' cat?"

"Or Taggles himself?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or old Selby taking a walk?" Clifton Dane suggested. "He seems to trot round the quad at all hours, visiting that sick relation of his."

"Or perhaps it was the sick relation going out for a stroll in the snow," said Crooke.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore did not reply to the jokes of the Shell fellows. He grunted, and settled down to sleep. The Terrible Three looked very red. The more time that passed

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

without their hearing anything of the ghost, the more they began to think that perhaps their imagination had played them tricks.

Unless something more was seen of the White Monk, the chums of the Shell were not likely to hear the end of the jokes on the subject until the school broke up for the Christmas holidays.

"Good-night!" said Kildare.

"Good-night, Kildare! Could you stuff up the keyhole, to keep the ghost out?" asked Crooke.

Kildare laughed and retired. The talk ran on ghosts for some time. The Terrible Three were sick of the subject, but they could not stop it, and they could not close their ears.

Crooke related a blood-curdling ghost story, describing a horrid spectre with clanking chains and rattling bones, and several voices asked Tom Merry if that was anything like what he had seen. Tom Merry only grunted in reply.

In the midst of the chatter there came a faint sound from the passage outside. It was the creak of a board under a stealthy tread.

There was silence in the dormitory at once.

"Hallo!" said Lowther. "Who's prowling round, I wonder?"

"Hark!" muttered Gore.

It was a faint rustle from outside. In the dead silence of the dormitory the juniors heard it plainly. It sounded like the swish of some loose garment on the floor.

There was no sign of laughter in the dormitory now. Crooke put his head under the bedclothes.

"It's only somebody prowling," said Manners.

"Look out of the door, Crooke, and see what it is," said Monty Lowther maliciously.

"Go it, Crooke!"

"You're not afraid of ghosts, you know."

"Buck up!"

Crooke made no reply. But he did not make any movement to leave his bed. Wild horses would hardly have dragged Crooke out of bed at that moment.

Tom Merry jumped out of bed, and crossed the dormitory to the door. Whatever might be in the passage, Tom Merry was not afraid.

Tom Merry opened the door softly. A glimmer of white in the dusky passage struck him; but at the same moment a whispering voice, from farther up the passage, came to his ears, and effectually dispelled any thought of ghosts.

"That's ripping, Wally!"

Tom Merry laughed softly. He understood now.

Wally & Co. were carrying out their plan of playing ghost and scaring Mr. Selby. The figure in white that loomed up before him was Wally with a sheet over his head. Evidently the fag had not been able to obtain the monk's garb he had intended to wear.

Tom Merry made one spring at the white figure.

There was a startled yell from D'Arcy minor.

"Yaroo!"

"This way."

"Ow!"

"Come in, my son!"

Tom Merry dragged the fag into the dormitory, and shut the door. Wally was struggling desperately, but he was enveloped and almost suffocated in the folds of the sheet, and he was helpless in Tom Merry's powerful grasp.

The Shell fellows were turning out of their beds on all sides now.

"What is it?"

"Who is it?"

"What's the row?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"It's D'Arcy minor playing ghost," he said. "Strike a light!"

Matches flared out. Candles were lit, and a crowd of the Shell fellows gathered round the unfortunate spectre. Wally extricated his head from the folds of the sheet, and turned a crimson and furious face towards the juniors, gasping for breath.

"Lemme go!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly-ass, Tom Merry!"

"You're caught in the act," grinned Tom Merry.

"I wasn't coming here. I was going to give old Selby a scare!" howled Wally. "What did you want to interfere for?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's a rotten, dangerous trick," he said. "Supposing you had met a housemaid on the stairs or in the passage? You would have scared her into a fit."

"H'm! I didn't think about that. But—"

"Or suppose you had met Crooke, here—you'd have sent him into hysterics," said Monty Lowther. "He's only just taken his head out from under the bedclothes now."

Crooke scowled angrily.

"I'm going to scare old Selby. He's coming up to bed soon."

"You're not!" said Tom Merry.

"Look here—"

"You're going to promise, honour bright, never to play ghost," said Tom Merry impressively.

"I jolly well won't!" roared Wally.

"Get a blanket off my bed, Monty."

"Right-ho! Here you are!"

"Some of you take hold of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, what are you up to?" shouted Wally, beginning to struggle again. "What are you going to do?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'm going to chuck you into that blanket," he said. "You're going to be tossed in the blanket, my son, as a warning to you not to play rotten japes."

"Hold on! I— Oh!"

Wally bumped into the blanket! He struggled furiously to get out. Tom Merry turned him over on his back.

"Lemme gerrou!" roared Wally.

"Better lie still, or you may take a tumble," suggested Manners. "Now then, all together! Heave ahead, my hearties!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The blanket swung up, and Wally was tossed high. He had sense enough to lie still now; it was the only safe way to be tossed in a blanket. A struggling victim might easily turn over in the air, and come down in a most uncomfortable manner, or even miss the blanket and alight upon the floor.

Wally sailed up, and swooped down and came into the blanket. He gasped for breath, and glared at the Shell fellows. There was a shout of laughter.

"Up again!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

Up went the hero of the Third. He came down gasping harder than ever. Tom Merry gave him a cheerful grin.

"D'Arcy minor!"

"Ow!"

"Will you promise not to play ghosts again?"

"No!" roared Wally.

"Up with him!"

Whiz! Bump!

"Yaroo!"

"Will you promise?"

"No! Yes! Yaroo! Ow!"

"Honour bright?"

"Yow! Yes!"

"Right-ho! Roll him out!"

Wally was rolled out on the floor. He picked himself up, panting for breath, and glared at the juniors. They grinned at him.

"You—you—you—" gasped Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hero of the Third tramped out of the dormitory, and slammed the door. The Shell fellows, chucking, returned to bed. In the passage, Wally bumped into two shadowy forms. Jameson and Curly Gibson had crept as near as they could venture to learn what was going on.

"Ow!" murmured Jameson. "You're on my foot, Wally."

"Br-r-r! Keep your silly foot out of the way!"

"What's happened?"

"Oh, don't jaw!"

"I suppose we're going on with the jape?" said Curly Gibson.

Wally snorted.

"I suppose we're not!" he said.

"Let's get back to the dorm, and get to bed. We shall get our death of cold here. Playing ghost is a mug's game, anyway!"

"Look here, Wally—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Wally crossly.

"But—"

"Cheese it!"

And Wally returned to the Third Form dormitory, followed by his two comrades, who were wondering much at their leader's change of mind. It was not till the morning that they learned his reasons, as Wally did not condescend to explain.

They learned the facts from the Shell fellows, and they laughed so much that Wally chased them down the Third Form passage in a state of great exasperation, and they did not venture to approach him for some hours afterwards.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost Walks.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY gnawed the end of his pencil and glanced over the pages in his notebook, where he had been scribbling. It was the next evening, and he was in the junior common-room.

"I think that is about complete, dear boys!" said D'Arcy.

"What may it happen to be?" asked Blake.

"A list of friends I am invitin' to Eastwood for Christmas, when we bweak up," said D'Arcy. "My governah has given me special permish to have a few friends for the Christmas holidays." He glanced at the paper again. "Of course, you are comin', Blake?"

"I might be induced to do so, Gussy."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! And you are comin', Hewwies and Dig?"

"If our fares are paid," replied Digby.

"Please don't talk out of your hat, Dig. Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah, I twust I shall have the pleasuh of seein' you at Eastwood for the Christmas vac?"

"Your trust will not be misplaced, Gussy," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Vewy good!" D'Arcy closed the book. "I shall ask one or two more chaps, I think. My governah said a few—and I suppose that means ovah a dozen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare looked into the room.

"Bedtime, you kids!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

The captain of St. Jim's pointed to the clock.

"Half-past nine!" he said.

"I am not objectin' to the time, but to the expression 'kids,'" explained Arthur Augustus. "I weally considah

"Buzz off!"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Kildare"

"Exactly! Go to bed!"

And the St. Jim's captain walked away, aughing.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his

eyeglass upon his companions, who were grinning.

"I can see nothin' whatevah to gwin at, dear boys!" he said.

"Go hon!" Monty Lowther rose and yawned. "I wonder if the ghost will be walking to-night?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tom Merry. "I suggest that Gussy wraps himself up in a blanket and keeps watch in the passage all night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

The juniors trooped out of the common-room and went up to their dormitories.

They turned in, some of them discussing the ghost of St. Jim's and the probability or otherwise of his reappearance.

Gore did not take part in the discussion. Although Gore had come to the conclusion, like the rest, that the ghost he had seen was a practical joker in ghostly guise, the subject always made him silent and nervous after dark.

But to the juniors who had not seen the White Monk the subject was not awe-inspiring.

"I jolly well wish the ghost would walk!" said Crooke. "I should like to get a chance at it!"

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther unceremoniously. "You got under the bedclothes when young Wally was playing the giddy goat last night. You'd do the same now if you heard a footstep in the passage! Rats! Do shut up, and don't talk rot!"

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Oh, rats!"

And Crooke subsided, with a scowling face, and got into bed. Kildare came into the dormitory, and glanced along the row of beds.

"Now, then—all in?"

"Yes, Kildare."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

The light went out, and Kildare quitted the Shell dormitory. In the darkness the juniors did not feel so inclined to talk ghosts. They talked football instead, and Christmas holidays, till one by one they dropped off to sleep.

Outside, the wind was moaning through the leafless branches of the elms, and the flakes of snow were silently, steadily falling.

As the wind rose, the old gaunt branches brushed against the panes of the windows, and the flakes were whirled in white masses on the glass.

There was a glimmer of moonlight over the old clock-tower, gleaming upon the white mantle of snow that stretched over the quad and the roofs of St. Jim's.

Perhaps it was the wind that awakened Tom Merry.

He started from his slumber, and lay in his bed listening, wondering what had broken his sleep.

The low moan of the wind, the creaking of the branches, came from the quadrangle, and sometimes a faint, thudding sound, as a mass of snow rolled from a slanting roof down into the quad below.

There was a gleam of moonlight upon the panes of the dormitory windows, but the long, lofty room was in deep darkness.

Tom Merry closed his eyes again.

Creak!

He started, and his eyes came open again. Whether it was that sound that had awakened him before, he did not know; but decidedly there was no doubt about it now. He knew that creak of the loose board in the dormitory passage.

It was a footstep.

Tom Merry sat up in bed.

The White Monk—the Ghost of St. Jim's—rushed into his mind at once.

He shivered for a moment.

His eyes were strained in the gloom towards the dormitory door.

Was that door about to open and give admittance to the ghostly form? The boy shivered at the thought.

What was the hour? Were the elders of St. Jim's in bed? he wondered. In answer to the unspoken thought, there came a chiming from the clock-tower.

The four quarters, and then the hour! Twelve!

One after another the deep strokes boomed through the night, and died away into silence, until the last had sounded.

Midnight!

All St. Jim's was sleeping, then!

Who was it that had passed the door of the Shell dormitory when the rest of the school was wrapped in slumber?

Hark!

Creak!

Tom Merry caught his breath.

There was a faint sound at the door, and he knew that it was opening. The boy sat still in bed, with growing terror. What did it mean? Who was coming into the dormitory? Good heavens! What was going to happen?

His straining eyes were fixed upon the black aperture which was the doorway. The door was open now. The draught of cold air told him that.

Dimly, faintly, terribly in the gloom, a white figure loomed up.

Tom Merry uttered a cry.

Faint as the cry was, it sounded through the dormitory, and awakened several of the other juniors.

There was a creak as the door closed. The figure was gone.

Tom Merry sprang out of bed.

"Wake, you fellows! Wake up!"

"What is it?"

"What's the matter?"

"I've seen it!"

"Seen what?"

"The White Monk! Wake up!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost Hunters.

"BAI Jove, you know!"

Arthur Augustus murmured the words in slumber, as he felt himself shaken by the shoulder, without being fully awakened.

"Pway don't shake me, dear boy. It is not wisin' bell yet, and I wefuse to be disturbed. Pway go away."

"Gussy!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Wake up, you ass!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy opened his eyes wide.

He blinked in the darkness of the Fourth-Form dormitory. A shadowy figure was beside him, and a hand was gripping his shoulder. He could not make out the face above him, but he knew the voice.

"Bai Jove, is that you, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes."

"What's the mattah?"

"The ghost is walking."

"Gweat Scott!"

"I've come to call you chaps," said Tom Merry, in a low, determined tone.

"The ghost is walking, and I think it ought to be followed and shown up, whatever it is. I had a frightful scare. It looked into the dorm."

"Bai Jove!"

"What did you do?" asked Jack Blake, who was already out of bed.

"Nothing."

Blake chuckled softly.

"It vanished when I gave a cry," said Tom Merry. "Then I came along here, with Manners and Lowther."

"My hat, I shouldn't have cared to go out into the passage, I think!" said Hancock, with a shudder.

"We thought we'd call you chaps to help us."

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"B-b-but," stammered Digby, "I—I—"

"You're not going to funk it, Dig?"

"N-no! B-b-but it's c-c-cold, and—"

"Rats! Get up!"

"Let's have a light," said Herries.

"No, no!" said Tom Merry hastily.

"Somebody is playing ghost, and if we're going to catch him, we shall have to be careful. If he knows he's being looked for, he's only got to whip off his disguise, and he's safe. We've got to catch him in the act."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hark!"

The juniors stood quite still, listening tensely.

There was a creak from the passage. Tom Merry had left the door open when he came in with Manners and Lowther, and the sound was clearly heard by all who were awake in the dormitory.

Creak!

Someone was passing in the passage!

Every waking eye in the Fourth-Form dormitory was fixed upon the open doorway, a blacker space than the wall in the darkness.

Did they see, for a moment, something that was white and glimmering pass the doorway, with a faint rustle as of ghostly robes?

They could not be sure!

If so, it was gone in a second.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, under his breath.

"I—I think I saw something," muttered Manners.

"And I," said Monty Lowther, in a shaking voice. "I can't be sure, but I—I think I did."

Blake set his teeth to keep them from chattering.

"Let's go after it," he muttered.

"Ya-a-a-s, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, but in a hesitating tone.

"I guess I'm coming," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

"Come on, then," Tom Merry said firmly. "It must be a trick—it simply must be! It can't be anything else. Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. moved silently and cautiously towards the doorway. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy and Relly and Lumley-Lumley, made up the party. The other fellows preferred to remain in bed. But there were enough of them to tackle the ghost, if it proved to be of human flesh and blood.

If it proved to be otherwise—in the daylight they would not have entertained for a second the theory that it could have been anything but flesh and blood. But in the eerie silence and darkness of the night, matters seemed changed.

The darkness, the chilly wind, the glimmer of snow through the windows, the silence, all seemed to lend a colour to the possibility that a phantom might be haunting the dim old passages of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry reached the doorway, and paused as he looked out into the passage.

Darkness met his gaze.

Up and down the passage he looked, but there was nothing to be seen—nothing to be heard!

At the further end of the passage, a glimmer of moonlight through the window dispersed the gloom to some extent, and the darkness was broken.

Tom Merry gave a sudden start as his eyes turned again in that direction.

There was a glimmer of white in the gloom.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

With starting eyeballs, the hero of the Shell looked. There was a deep breath from the juniors round him—they could see what he saw!

From the darkness the figure emerged into dim view—the figure of a monk of the olden time, with the cowl covering the face, and white—white as are the dead!

In full, clear view the strange and terrible form passed before the vision of the juniors. Then it vanished into the darkness.

### THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

#### Run to Earth!

FOR a full minute there was a dead silence among the juniors.

All of them were pale, stricken with a strange horror by what they had seen.

The phantom had appeared soundlessly, and had disappeared again, leaving no trace behind. What was it? Whence did it come? Where was it gone?

What did the horrible mystery mean?

Tom Merry was the first to recover himself.

## OUT

On MONDAY, DEC. 10th,

# THE SPECIAL CHRISTMAS NUMBER

OF

## THE BOYS' FRIEND!

PRICE TWOPENCE.

*Make a Note of the Date,  
and Order Your Copy in  
Advance.*

He led the way from the Fourth Form dormitory.

There were few of the juniors who would not rather have remained in the dormitory; but they did not fail to follow Tom Merry's lead.

Tom Merry led the way up the passage, running quickly.

He reached the corner where the ghost had disappeared.

It was not in sight.

Darkness surrounded him, and nothing more. The juniors gathered round him again. All was dark and silent; the spectre monk had vanished, as if for ever.

"Bai Jove, it's gone, you know!" murmured D'Arcy.

"Come on!"

"Going to follow it?" muttered Lumley-Lumley.

"Yes."

The juniors tramped determinedly down the passage. Through that passage, and several others, they sought the ghostly figure.

But no trace of it was seen.

Angry and disappointed, and with a

peculiar creepy feeling of nervousness, they returned to the dormitory passage.

"It's vanished," Manners muttered.

"Gone downstairs, perhaps," said Blake.

"Or melted into thin air," said Monty Lowther, and he was not wholly joking.

Tom Merry set his lips.

"If it's finished for to-night, we can't find it," he said angrily. "But—oh!"

"Oh!"

"Good heavens!"

"Run!"

It was the White Monk!

From the darkness the white, ghostly figure had suddenly emerged, close to the juniors, and was advancing swiftly upon them.

In the sudden alarm they forgot that they were hunting for the ghost, and were anxious to encounter it.

With startled cries they bolted back into the dormitory.

They rushed in, and amazed cries from the other fellows greeted them, in answer to their own startled and terrified ejaculations.

But the phantom did not follow them into the dormitory.

It vanished.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped D'Arcy. "I—I think I've had enough of ghost-huntin', deah boys. I—I have been thwown quite into a fluttah."

"What's the matter?" shouted Jones minor.

"The ghost!"

"The White Monk!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

"Oh, dear!"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh, half amused and half exasperated. The sudden ending of the ghost hunt had been ridiculous enough.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I do not see anythin' to cackle at!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in indignant surprise.

"Well, I do," growled Tom Merry. "We went out to hunt the ghost, and as soon as we saw it, we ran like a lot of frightened rabbits."

"I wufuse to be called a fwightened wabbit—"

"Look here, come on—and no more funking—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I didn't funk—"

"What did you do, then?"

"Well, I was startled, you know—"

"Yes, and you ran—"

"Not exactly wan," said D'Arcy cautiously. "I wetweated—a stwategic movement, you know; not what you would call wunnin' away."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, come on, and mind there are no more strategic movements!" he exclaimed. "We're jolly well going to stop the ghost walking!"

"I'm ready!" growled Blake.

"Come on, then."

Tom Merry & Co. moved towards the doorway once more. They were in an angry and resolute mood now, and not likely to run again. But the ghost was not to be seen in the passage. They scanned the passage up and down, but there was no glimmer of white in the darkness. Blake uttered a sudden suppressed exclamation.

"Look!"

"Where?"

"On the stairs!"

"Ah! Loo-k!"

In the dense darkness of the big staircase there was a glimmer of white. The juniors crept towards it, noiseless in their socks.

The white figure flitted down the stairs. It made no noise, and it was a phantom-like in looks and movement.

That a weird and eerie feeling came over the ghost-hunters.

But they followed it bravely.



The phantom paused on the landing. The juniors passed on. They drew nearer and nearer. And then the strange figure appeared to become aware of their presence. It flitted on in the gloom, when they were almost within reaching distance of the ghostly, rustling, white robes. Tom Merry set his teeth, and ran towards it as it reached the foot of the staircase on the lower passage. His hand brushed against the floating, monkish robes, but they glided through his fingers, and the phantom fled on. Click! The door had closed, and the phantom disappeared. A moment more, and the juniors were outside the door that had hidden the White Monk of St. Jim's from their sight. They did not open it. Breathless, panting, they paused there in the darkness.

"Whose room is it?" muttered Blake. "I don't know." "Either Mr. Selby's or the next one to it," muttered Monty Lowther. "Strike a match! Who's got one?" "I have," said Herries. "Hold on!" muttered Lumley-Lumley. "It will make a row. I've got my electric torch here." "Good!"

Lumley-Lumley pressed the tiny pocket-torch, and a little gleam of brilliant light shot out. He turned it upon the doorway and the wall above, and they could see the number of the room. Tom Merry pointed to it.

"It's not Mr. Selby's room," he said; "it's the next—the vacant bed-room, you know."

"Bai Jove!" "What's the matter, Gussy?" "The bed-room is occupied now, Tom Mewwy. I wemembah seein' the maids gettin' it weady this evenin'!" "Oh!"

"Mr. Selby's fwient has moved into it."

"I—I didn't know that," muttered Tom Merry. "I—"  
Lumley-Lumley uttered a startled exclamation.

"Let me look at your hand, Tom Merry."

"My hand?" "Yes. Did you touch the ghost?" "I just touched him; that was all." "And he was solid—"

"His clothes were, at any rate." "I just caught the light on your hand," said Lumley-Lumley, switching the gleam on again. "It looked white! Yes—look yourself!"

All the juniors looked at Tom Merry's hand as the electric light gleamed on it. The fingers were white with chalk.

"Chalk!" muttered Manners. "Yaas, wathah!"

"That's what makes the ghost white," said Tom Merry with a slight smile. "He has taken the monk's robes out of the school museum and chalked them all over the outside. It's an easy way of making up as a ghost."

"Yaas, wathah!"

It was quite certain now. That the phantom of St. Jim's was a practical joker the juniors were now assured, and all fear of the supernatural had vanished from their minds. Yet they hesitated to enter the bed-room, outside the closed door of which they stood in a hushed group.

"We must go in," said Tom Merry at last. "If Mr. Wynde wakes up, we can explain. The rotter, whoever he is, has edged into this room to escape us, and may frighten Mr. Wynde to fits if he wakes up and sees him. He is not in good health, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! As a matiah of fact, Mr. Wynde is a little off his wockah

alweady, and a shock like that might send him right off!"

"Yes. We'll go in—"  
"What is that? Who is there?"  
It was a sudden, sharp voice from behind the juniors.  
"Bai Jove! That's Selby!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost is Laid.

MR. SELBY was half dressed, and he had a candle in his hand that glimmered upon the pale faces of the juniors and upon his own paler countenance.

The Third-Form master had not slept that night. The whispering voices in the passage close to his door had reached his ears, and he came out with an angry and frowning brow. He stared at the group

"In that room—the room next to mine?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"  
"Impossible!"  
"We saw him, sir."  
"But—but my friend, Dr Wynde—I—I mean my relation, is in that room, and—"

"The ghost went in there, sir." A strangely startled and scared look came over Mr. Selby's face. It seemed as if a dark and terrible suspicion had entered his mind. The candle fluttered in his hand—the wavering light threw long and grotesque shadows upon the wall.

In the silence a sudden sound came from the room outside which the juniors were grouped.

"Take it away! Take it—take it away!"  
Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.



"Here he is!" gasped Blake. Tom Merry & Co. looked at the strange figure, but the wildly-gleaming eyes were not turned upon the juniors. They were fixed in a wild, set gaze upon an empty corner of the room, where the juniors could discern nothing. "Take it away—take it away! Heaven help me!" came the muttered words from the weird figure in monkish garb.

of Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows in amazement.

"What are you boys doing out of bed?" he demanded sternly.

"The ghost, sir—"  
"Nonsense!"

"We have seen it, sir," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Really, Merry—"

"It is someone playing ghost, sir—he has the old monk's robes, and has chalked them white," said Blake eagerly. "Some of the chalk came off on Tom Merry's hand when he touched him."

"Oh, indeed! And do you know where the trickster is now?"

"He went into this room, sir." Mr. Selby started.

The words could convey only one meaning to his mind—that the occupant of the room had awakened, and had seen the ghostly figure, and was crying out in terror at the sight.

Quick as thought, Tom Merry threw the bed-room door open. Mr. Selby shouted to him.

"Stop! Stop! I forbid you to enter!" But it was too late.

Tom Merry had dashed into the room. Blake, the first to follow, felt for the electric switch inside the door as he entered, and turned it on.

There was a sudden flood of light in the room.

It disclosed a strange and startling scene.

The bed was unoccupied. Its appearance showed that it had not been slept in. There was but one occupant in the room. It was the White Monk!

The gaunt figure, in trailing, monkish gown, with the cowl hiding the face with the exception of two gleaming eyes, stood before the juniors, so close that they could have touched it. But in the glaring electric light it did not look ghostly.

The robes, the cowl, the figure, were all evidently solid, and in the light the juniors could see that the white was caused by chalk thickly daubed over the outside of the cowl and the gown.

"Here he is!" gasped Blake.  
"But—but—" Tom Merry staggered in surprise. "Where is Mr. Wynde? He is not here! There is no one in the bed."

Mr. Selby, in the doorway, heard the words, and groaned. They confirmed his suspicions. But it was too late to conceal the truth from the juniors—and from others, too, for the noise had been heard, and doors were opening and voices were calling.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at the strange figure.

Their only thought, at first, was that they had run down the practical joker who had scared the school, and they thought only of unmasking him.

But as they looked at him now their hands dropped to their sides, and they fell back farther from him.

It was not a phantom. But there was something weird, something terrible, in the figure in monkish garb, and in the wild, unnatural gleam of the eyes that shone under the ghostly cowl.

The eyes were not turned upon the juniors.

They were fixed in a wild, set gaze upon a corner of the room—an empty space, where the eyes of the juniors could discern nothing but the floor and the wainscot.

But to those wildly gleaming eyes something else was evidently visible—made visible by the impelling power of a diseased imagination.

"Take it away! Take it away! Heaven help me!"

The muttering words came from under the cowl.

"Good heavens!" muttered Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"Who is he?"

Tom Merry stepped desperately forward, and dragged back the cowl from the man's face. There was a cry of astonishment.

"Great Scott!"  
"Wynde!"  
"The sick man!"  
Mr. Selby groaned.  
"Gerald Wynde! I guessed it! And he is mad!"  
"Mad!" muttered the juniors, in hushed tones of horror.

"Mad! Oh, heavens!"  
They retreated instinctively to the doorway, their eyes upon the face of the insane doctor. Gerald Wynde was still staring fixedly at the empty corner of the room.

"Take it away! Mercy!"  
He muttered the words thickly, through white and quivering lips. He seemed to have forgotten that he was playing the ghost of St. Jim's. That strange and morbid fancy had given place to another in his unsettled brain.

"What is it?" muttered Tom Merry, and his voice was shaking in spite of himself. "What is it you fear?"

"The dog!"  
"There is no dog there!"

"You lie! Can you not see his eyes—his eyes? Oh, Heaven, take him away!" The man swung suddenly round towards the juniors, his gleaming eyes turning upon them wildly. "What do you want here? I am not mad—I am not mad! I am sane—quite sane! It is all lies—lies!"

"Go!" muttered Mr. Selby in a trembling voice. "Go—at once! I will look after him."

The juniors moved quietly away.

Mr. Selby entered the room and closed the door after him. With silent footsteps, Tom Merry & Co. returned to their dormitory.

"My hat! That chap's as mad as a hatter!" he said. "It's horrible! I'm glad we've laid the ghost. The lunatic might have done some harra if he had not been stopped."

"Yaas, wathah!"  
"Good-night, you kids!"

And the Shell fellows went on to their own dormitory. But there was little sleep for them that night.

The ghost of St. Jim's was laid! With hushed breath the juniors told the story the next day, and the strange, eerie tale thrilled all St. Jim's. There had been a ghost—not a phantom visitor from another world, but a victim of a diseased and deluded imagination, who was evidently not responsible for his insane actions.

The sick man, studying the old manuscripts of St. Jim's in his dull hours of leisure and idleness, had come upon the story of the White Monk, with strange old wood-cuts illustrative of the story, and it had taken a hold upon his diseased imagination.

With the peculiar tendency to cunning trickery that is characteristic of diseased minds, he had made up the ghostly garb. Yet while he was playing ghost at the school he was haunted himself by phantoms still more terrible—phantoms that were conjured up only by his own wild fancy, but real and fearful to him.

In the morning came Dr. Murray, and the strange guest of St. Jim's departed in his care; and, though many of the fellows felt sorry for him, they were glad enough when he had quitted the school.

And Mr. Selby, too, breathed more freely when he was gone. The presence of the unwelcome guest had been a burden upon his mind, which he had not been able to escape, and for which the unfortunate Third Form had suffered.

When the man was gone at last it was noticed in the Third Form-room that Mr. Selby's temper had undergone a decided improvement.

"Not that he's good-tempered," Wally confided to his major. "Of course, it's no good expecting miracles. But he's better. He doesn't rag us half so much, and upon the whole I'm not going to give him any fireworks in his fire, after all."

Figgins & Co. came over from the New House to see the ghost-hunters, and to hear the wondrous tale, with great interest.

"Look here!" said Fatty Wynn, when the story was told. "I've had a postal-order from my uncle in Anglesea, and it's a whacking good one. I was just wondering what we could celebrate when I heard about your ghost-hunting. I think we'd better celebrate that—with a feed, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good idea!" said Jack Blake. "What do you fellows say?"

And all the fellows said:

"What-ho!"

And the little celebration—which proved to be rather a big celebration—was duly celebrated; and over the festive board the juniors drank merry toasts in ginger beer, and especially a Merry Christmas to themselves and to everybody else, including the Ghost of St. Jim's!

THE END.

Next Friday's Long Complete Tale of TOM MERRY & CO. is entitled:

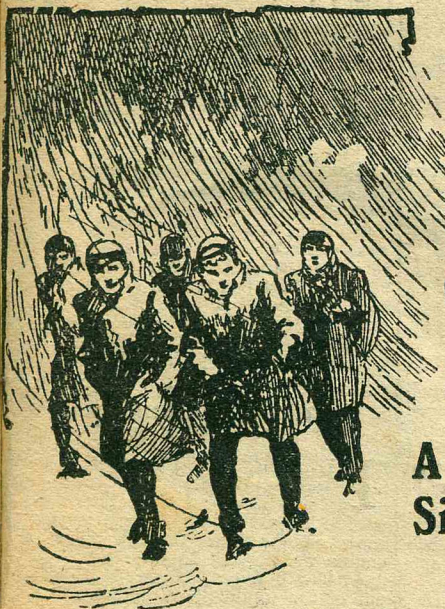
# "IN DEEP DISGUISE!"

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Please Order Your Copy of the PENNY POPULAR in Advance!

# Snowed Up!

A Grand Long Complete Tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., the Chums of Rookwood.  
By OWEN CONQUEST.



## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Caught in the Snow!

**B**Y Jove! It's coming down!"  
"You're right, old son! Nice half-holiday, this!"  
"We'd better be getting back to Rookwood, kids."

Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Newcome, and Raby, of the Fourth Form at Rookwood College—known in the school as the Fistical Four—were standing under a tree some three miles from the old school, looking with glum faces at the thick, whirling flakes of snow as they fell.

It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at Rookwood, and the four chums had left the school in high spirits, and spent a couple of hours in strolling round the town of Latcham.

Just as they set out for the homeward walk the snow began to fall. The Fistical Four cared little for a fall of snow, and they turned up their trousers and their coat-collars, and tramped on determinedly. But the snow was coming down now, as Jimmy Silver expressed it, in sacks full.

Thicker and thicker it fell on the unprotected road, whirling in heavy flakes in the bitter wintry wind. And at last the four chums had drawn into the shelter of a tree, and there, shaking the snow from their coats and caps, they debated that was best to be done.

While in the town, Jimmy Silver, who had a keen eye to business, had improved his shining hour by making various purchases of comestibles, which could be obtained at a much cheaper rate in Latcham than in the village of Coombe, near the school.

The result was that each of the juniors had a good-sized parcel to carry, as well as having his pockets stuffed.

They set their packages down as they lited under the tree, glad to be relieved of them for a time. Raby was slapping his chest vigorously to keep himself warm, swinging his arms like the sails of a windmill. Lovell and Newcome stamped savagely on the ground.

"We'd better be getting on," said Jimmy Silver. "It's a bit thick, I know, but we can't do anything by stopping here, and—Ow! You utter ass!"

The back of Raby's right hand caught the leader full on the nose as Raby gave arms another wide swing. Jimmy

Silver staggered back, and clasped his damaged nose.

"I wish you wouldn't get in the way, fathead!" exclaimed Raby indignantly. "You've hurt my hand, and—"

"I'll hurt your fat head!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

But Lovell stepped between.

"Now, then, pax, you two asses!" he exclaimed. "You can leave all that till we're safe in the study at Rookwood."

"He's nearly flattened my nose—"

"He's hurt the back of my hand—"

"Oh, shut up, both of you! The question is, what's to be done?"

Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose ruefully.

"I've said that we'd better be getting on," he replied. "It's no good waiting here for the snow to stop. It would be like the chap who sat down on the bank and waited for the river to flow past."

"You're right, old son! But we can't walk three miles through this beastly snow, you know!"

"We can't stay here."

"Wait, but there's another way. We can go home by train if we can find our way to Fernedge Station."

Jimmy Silver looked thoughtful. To go home by train would certainly be an improvement upon tramping three miles through a blinding snowstorm. Fernedge Station lay in a lane that led off from the high-road, but exactly where the leader of the Fistical Four did not know.

"It's a good idea," said Lovell instantly. "Fernedge Lane turns off to the right here somewhere. Let's look for it."

"Not the sort of weather to go wandering round in looking for it," Jimmy Silver remarked.

"Better than tramping three miles through this snow."

"Well, we'll see."

The chums of Rookwood picked up their packages once more, and shouldered them, and tramped on through the falling flakes.

The wintry wind blew hard and cold, and it was in their faces, dashing the snowflakes upon them as they tramped on. They bent their heads to the wind, and kept on doggedly. The snow was thick under their feet, and at every step their boots sank deep into it.

The going was hard and slow, and it

was borne in upon their minds that if they tried to finish the journey on foot, it would be something like midnight before they arrived at Rookwood.

"Hallo! I reckon this is the place!"

Through the blinding flakes the chums made out a turning to the right. But the discovery benefited them little, for a second glance disclosed two turnings branching off in different directions at the same spot from the high-road. And as there was no sign of a guide-post, it was a puzzle which turning to take.

One of them was doubtless Fernedge Lane, and would lead to the station they desired to reach, while the other was pretty certain to take them miles out of their way.

"I reckon," said Jimmy Silver, after a good look round, "that we're in a fix. I wish we had old Dobby with us now; he knows Fernedge Lane well."

Lovell grunted. It was useless to wish for Tommy Dodd just then. Tommy Dodd & Co., the Fistical Four's rivals in the Fourth Form at Rookwood, had spent the half-holiday in Latcham, and the Fistical Four had encountered them in the streets there, and exchanged volleys of more or less polite chaff.

After that they had lost sight of Tommy Dodd & Co., but at the present moment they would have given a great deal for Tommy Dodd's knowledge of the country.

"Well, you might as well wish for a finger-post, Jimmy," said Raby, "or for somebody to ask the way of."

"Hark!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, holding up his hand. "I think I heard somebody!"

"Not likely!"

"Shut up, while I listen!"

"Well, I tell you it's not likely that

"Quiet!"

"Yes, yes; but, all the same—"

Jimmy Silver seized Raby by the throat and ran him against a tree. Taken by surprise, Raby had no choice but to shut up. The sound of voices came floating through the dimness of the thickly-falling snow.

"I know we're on the track, Cookie!" Jimmy Silver gave a jump.

"My giddy aunt! It's Tommy Dodd & Co.!"

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

## The Raiders.

THE Fistical Four stood quite still under the big tree at the corner of the lane. They were almost concealed by it, and the three youths coming on down the lane did not observe them.

Three juniors from Rookwood, buttoned up in great-coats, with mufflers, and with caps pulled down tightly on their heads! From under the caps escaped a lock or two of hair, which was easily recognisable as that of Tommy Dodd & Co.

The Fistical Four remained silent, even Raby keeping his mouth closed, as the Modern chums came nearer. Tommy Dodd was still speaking.

"I wonder if they turned this corner, Cookie!"

"They'd be leaving the road to Rookwood, Doddy."

"Yes; but they might have made up their minds to go by train. It's a bit difficult to follow tracks when the snow's coming down so thick. But we've been right so far. You see, here are the tracks at the corner."

"Exactly!"

"We are close behind now, or the tracks would be nearly covered, with the snow coming down so thick," said Tommy Dodd sagely. "Mind, when we get in sight of one of them, Cookie, not to alarm the rotters! They're four, and we're only three, and so we shall have to take them by surprise if we're going to have a chance of raiding the grub."

"Quite so."

The hidden juniors exchanged a grin. Moved by the same thought, they stooped down to gather handfuls of snow, and commenced to knead snowballs. Tommy Dodd was stooping in the lane examining the tracks, and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle were watching him.

"Yes; they left the high-road here," said Tommy Dodd. "The question is, did they know the right way to Fernedge, or have they gone the other? But I'll soon see. They can't be far away now; in fact, I think we're pretty close to them."

"I reckon you're about right there!" remarked Jimmy Silver, as his right hand went up, and the snowball flew with deadly aim.

"Ow!" yelled Tommy Dodd, as the missile caught him behind the ear, and he went over in sudden surprise, and fell at full length in the snow.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle stared round in amazement, and as they stared, three snowballs came whirling from under the tree, and smote them simultaneously.

They each gave a gasp, and rolled over on the ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a roar of laughter, the Fistical Four rushed into view. Tommy Dodd & Co. were sitting up in the snow, looking dazed. They jumped to their feet at the sight of the Fistical Four.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver. "I reckon this is a case of 'the biter bit'! Are you going to raid that grub, Doddy?"

"Here it is, ready to be raided!" grinned Newcome.

"Oh, pax, you bounders!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, as Lovell took aim with another snowball. "We're going to have a snow-fight at Rookwood when we get in, and enough's as good as a feast. Sheer off!"

Lovell grinned, and dropped the snowball to the ground.

"Right you are, Doddy! As a matter of fact, we were just wishing for you, to show us the way to the station."

"Good! I can do that!"

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

The Modern chums dusted some of the snow off their coats, and Tommy Dodd led the way. The lane was narrow, and the snow piled deep in it, but the juniors faced it briskly.

"My word!" said Tommy Dodd. "It's a long time since we've had snow like this near Rookwood. I don't remember a fall so heavy since I've been there!"

"It is a bit thick," panted Jimmy Silver. "How far is it to the station now, Doddy?"

"Only a few minutes more, I think."

Tommy Dodd was right. A few minutes later the station came in sight, its roof gleaming one sheet of white in the gloom of the winter's afternoon.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Lovell. "Put it on!"

The juniors "put it on," and came up to the station with a rush. They dashed under the sheltering porch, and plumped down their parcels with great relief. Then they shook off the thick layers of snow, and knocked their caps on the wall to clear them. Then Jimmy Silver went to the booking-office.

It was open, showing that some train or other was nearly due. Jimmy Silver rapped, and a sleepy-looking man came and stared at him.

"Next train to Coombe?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Nearly due, sir, if the snow doesn't stop it."

Jimmy Silver stared.

"My hat! I never thought of that! Is there likely to be a block on the line, then?"

"There have been some already," yawned the sleepy man. "I don't know whether there will be another. Single?"

"Yes, seven," said Jimmy Silver.

"That's a jolly prospect!" growled Tommy Dodd. "Fancy being snow-bound at a dead-and-alive hole like this! Ask the image if he has any foot-warmers to give away, young Silver."

"None at this station," said the man in the booking-office. "You can get them at Latham and at Coombe."

"Oh, rats!"

Jimmy Silver put the tickets in his pocket, and they went on the platform. There was a fire in the waiting-room, and nobody there but the solitary porter of Fernedge, who was sitting on a stool with his feet on the grate.

"Got any fire to give away?" asked Jimmy Silver.

The porter looked round and blinked, and rose. The fire was at its last gasp, and Jimmy Silver carefully poked it, and began to pile on coal. The porter watched him dumbfounded, as if the coal were some highly-prized possession of his own. Then, as a train-whistle was heard, he went slowly out upon the platform.

"You won't get much benefit from that fire, Silver!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "It will take about an hour to burn through."

"Never mind, it will be all right for the next comer," said Jimmy Silver. "A good action is its own reward. I know that's true, because I read it in a copy-book. Here's the train, so come on."

The seven juniors of Rookwood crowded out on the platform. The train had come in, and the carriage windows glimmered with yellow light through the mist. Jimmy Silver opened a carriage door, and they bundled in.

"Right away!"

The door slammed, and the train jerked into motion. In the midst of the whirling snow, the train ran out of the station.

Jimmy Silver glanced from the window as the train, leaving the station

behind, hummed on through the gleaming countryside.

Embankment and track, field and wood and roof, were white with spotless carpeting, while it made a dazzling glare under the winter sun.

"I reckon we're in for it," remarked Jimmy Silver. "Just our luck to get it like this on a half-holiday! Still, there's good in everything, and this will be all right for the snow fight in the quad at Rookwood."

"Rather!" said Tommy Dodd. "There was plenty of snow in the quad already, as a matter of fact, but the more the merrier. Ugh! Isn't it cold? I want a footwarmer! I say, Silver, would you mind lying down here for us to put our feet on?"

"Br-r-r!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

## Stopped on the Line.

THICKER and thicker the snow came down. The train had slowed down, and the juniors knew that there were masses of snow on the line, through which the engine was forcing its way.

At length Jimmy Silver put his head out of the window, and observed, to his amazement, that the train was at a standstill.

The guard was coming along the train.

"Hallo!" called out Jimmy Silver.

"What's the matter?"

"The train's stopped."

"Snowed up?"

"Yes."

"Whew!"

The Rookwood juniors gave a simultaneous whistle.

They did not look alarmed, however. On the contrary, it was clear enough that the untoward happening was by no means unwelcome to them.

To be snowed up in a train was an adventure which would make them the envy of all Rookwood, and as yet they thought nothing of the privation and danger it might entail.

"I'm jolly glad we took this train," said Jimmy Silver, rubbing his hands.

"It will make us late for the snow fight at Rookwood."

"Oh, so long as we get in before dark, that will be all right, I reckon."

"We may not get in before dark," said Lovell—"or before morning, either, for that matter, my son!"

"Oh, don't croak, kid!" said Tommy Dodd. "We're not hurt yet, anyway. I suppose they will try to back the train, but if the snow's too thick in front, it will be too thick behind, I should think."

"I reckon so."

"Keep your seats!" called out the guard.

"That's it; they're going to back the train."

With a jerk the train was set in motion again. It was going backwards now, but ere long it came to a stop with a sudden jerk. The juniors were prepared for it, and kept their footing. "Stopped again!" said Tommy Dodd. "The train moved forward."

"Full steam on!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "But they won't get through the snow, I fancy!"

Tommy Dodd was right.

The speed slackened, and became slacker and slacker. Finally, the train came again to a halt, and it was evident that further progress was impossible.

Jimmy Silver opened the door, and the Rookwood juniors scrambled out. Other passengers were leaving the carriage. The guard was in consultation with the engine-driver. It was evident that they were helpless to deal with the matter.

"I reckon that train's fixed there for

bit!" Jimmy Silver remarked, and then he glanced up the line.

Snow had rolled down from the laden embankment into the cutting which lay before the train, and a huge mass of white rose to a height of several feet.

"That will want a lot of digging away, kids!"

"By Jove, rather!" said Tommy Dodd. "The question is, how to get help. It won't be easy for anybody to get away through this."

It was certainly true. Before and behind the train the cutting was blocked, and the heavy flakes coming steadily down added every moment to the depth of the pile.

On either side rose a steep embankment, crammed with snow, piled so thickly that it looked as if any moment masses of it might come tumbling down upon the track.

The faces of the juniors grew very grave.

The matter was more serious than they had imagined at first. If it was impossible to get away through the snow, it might be equally impossible for help to reach them.

That might mean imprisonment in the blocked train for days—perhaps longer. They had heard of snowbound passengers dying of hunger and cold, but never had they dreamed of such a peril being brought so terribly near to themselves.

"We shall have to get help," said Jimmy Silver resolutely. "I say, guard, what are you going to do?"

The guard shook his head helplessly. "They'll soon know at Coombe that we're blocked in," he said, "and they'll set a gang to work to clear away the snow."

"And when do you think we shall get away?"

"We may get away by morning," Jimmy Silver whistled.

"That's not good enough," he said coolly. "We've got a snow fight coming off at Rookwood this afternoon, and we've simply got to get in."

The guard shrugged his shoulders, and turned away.

"You're right, Jimmy!" said Lovell. "We're not going to stick here till the morning, if I know it! We should be giddy heroes, of course, by the time we got into Rookwood, but we should be too jolly cold and hungry to fully appreciate it."

"I should say so!"

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked Raby.

"Get out, somehow. I say, guard, I think you'd better go for help!"

"Can't get through the snow, you young idiot!" growled the guard, with scant courtesy.

"But somebody must go for help!"

"It can't be done, I tell you!"

"Well, if you can't do it, I can!"

"You can—eh?" said Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, cheeze it!"

"My dear Silver—"

"Look here," said Jimmy, "we're not going to stick here all night, that's certain! Besides, we must have help. There's some women here, and we must get word to Coombe at once for help for them. Who's game to try?"

"All of us!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm with you!" said Raby. "As for the grub we've got left, it must be handed over to the ladies, in case the poor dears get hungry while they're waiting to be rescued."

"Good for you, Raby!"

The remains of the provisions were packed out of the carriage, and the quantity was still considerable, for the chopping had been extensive in Latcham. Jimmy Silver took the bundles to the guard, and explained to him.

The man gave him a puzzled look. "That's very kind of you, young gent, but you can't go through the snow!"

"I'm going to try!"

"But you can't, and I can't allow it!"

"My dear chap, I don't want you to allow it. I can manage it all right without that! The only difficulty is the snow. I can—"

"You mustn't go!" exclaimed the guard. "I am responsible—"

"I hereby, thusly, and therefore relieve you of all responsibility," said Jimmy Silver. "You see, you can't stop us! We're seven to one, and I suppose you don't want to have your head snowballed off, do you?"

"Exactly!" chimed in Lovell. "You see, we are circumstances over which you have no control. Come along, kids!"

And leaving the guard still puzzled and doubtful as to what he should do, the juniors marched off to make their forlorn attempt to get through the snow to Rookwood.

"It stands to reason we must lead the way, Doddy! We'll put it to the vote, though, if you like! Fair play's a jewel!"

"Why, you rotters, you're four to three!"

"Quite so!"

"Well, someone must give in!" said Lovell. "The inferior party ought to do so, and so I call upon you to shut up, you Moderns!"

"I call upon you not to be a silly ass!"

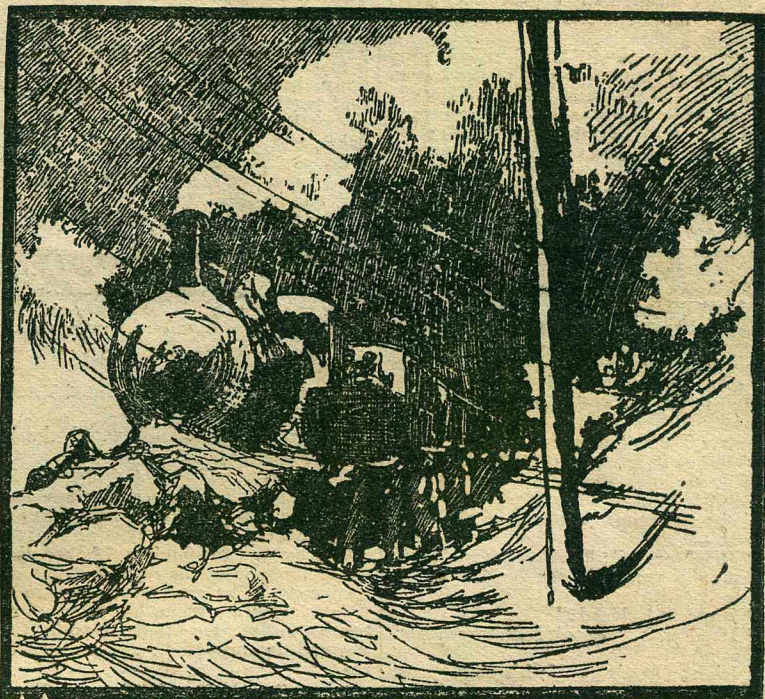
"You'll call upon me for a black eye if you don't take care, Doddy!"

"You're a set of silly idiots!" exclaimed Raby. "I'll lead the way. Here goes!"

And Raby scrambled up the bank.

The Rookwood juniors had been searching along the bank for some favourable spot to climb, and, after a long search, they had found one.

In this spot the embankment was less steep, and, under the snow, straggling bushes grew, which afforded some hold



"We shall have to get help," said Jimmy Silver resolutely. "I say, guard, what are you going to do?" "They'll soon know at Coombe that we're blocked in," replied the guard, "and they'll set a gang to work to clear away the snow." "That's not good enough," Jimmy Silver said coolly. "We've got a snow-fight coming off at Rookwood this afternoon, and we've simply got to get in."

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.  
Through the Snow.

"GIVE me a bunk up!"

"I think you'd better give me one!"

"Rats! Of course, a member of the Moderns is to lead the way!"

"My dear kid, the Fistical Four are always at the front. First in the field, first in the study, first in the—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Now, look here, Doddy—"

"I'm looking, and I can see a conceited ass—"

"First time I knew my face answered the purpose of a looking-glass!" said Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd had no reply quite ready for that, and Lovell struck in.

for hands and feet, and also held the snow more securely. The climb was certain to be a matter of difficulty, and might lead to an avalanche coming down.

"Here, come back, Raby!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"I'm not coming back! I'll show you how to do the trick!"

And Raby went plunging up the steep bank. Perhaps he was in too great a hurry to be careful. At all events, he came rolling down the next moment in the midst of masses of snow.

He sat up, looking quite bewildered, amid the fallen snow, and stared round him. The juniors burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

"If that's the way you're going to show us, Raby, you needn't trouble!"

"Well, I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The snow must have slipped!"

"Go on! Here, stand aside, and let me try!"

"Me, you mean!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Rats! Get out of the way!"

"No fear!"

"I'll jolly soon shift you if you don't!"

"I guess I'm ready to see you try!"

Tommy Dodd laid hold of the leader of the Fistical Four at once, and they staggered away and fell over Raby, who was getting up, jamming him down into the snow again.

"Now, then, you fatheads!" yelled Raby. "I'm getting crushed to death. Get off my chest, Silver, or I'll bite you!"

Lovell grinned, and, leaving the others to scramble up as they could, he tackled the ascent of the bank, followed by Newcome, Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle turning to their chum to help him rise.

Lovell clambered up the steep side, sending down showers of snow upon the juniors.

As the snow slid and rolled away under his feet, he grasped at the bushes growing under it, and held on. He was caked with snow and slush, wet and wringing from head to foot; but he stuck to it with dauntless pluck. Before the other juniors had sorted themselves out, so to speak, Lovell and Newcome had made good progress up the bank.

Jimmy Silver looked up after him. Lovell was half way to the top, and still going strong.

"I reckon that takes the cake!" exclaimed Jimmy. "But I'm next!"

And Jimmy Silver essayed to climb. Tommy Dodd reached out and grasped his ankle, and they went down together in a heap of snow.

Raby, giggling, followed Lovell and Newcome, and then Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle followed him.

"Make it pax, ass!" said Tommy Dodd, as he scrambled up. "We shall be left behind at this rate, and I don't enjoy your company enough to stay here for it."

"Head or tail?" said Jimmy Silver, claspng a penny in his hand. "First guess does it!"

"Right-ho! Head!"

"Head it is!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Get on!"

"Right. Don't growl; it's only proper that I should go first, as head of the Fourth Form at Rookwood!"

"Rats! Get on!"

"Here goes!"

Jimmy Silver sprang up the bank. The chief of the Modern chums followed. By this time Lovell had nearly reached the top, but the higher he rose the more difficult he found the ascent.

And suddenly, as he was almost at the level, his foot slipped, a tendril he was grasping broke in his hand, and he fell. Away he slid down the way he had come, gathering snow and speed as he rolled down the slope.

"Ugh! You ass!" roared Raby, as Lovell rolled into him, and sent him flying, too.

Tommy Cook was the next to suffer. He had no time to get out of the way, and he went down with the other two, rolling and gasping.

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd were a dozen feet from the start when the three flying juniors rolled into them, carrying them away as if they had been smitten by an avalanche.

Down they went, five juniors with flying legs and arms, amid a cloud of snow. It was fortunate for the Rook-

wood juniors that there was a deep carpet of snow in the cutting, or there might have been broken bones as the result of that wild slide. As it was, they plunged into the snow, nearly burying themselves, and lay there helplessly gasping for several minutes.

Jimmy Silver was the first to scramble up.

"My Panama hat!" he exclaimed. "What the dickens did you do that for, Lovell?"

Lovell spluttered the snow out of his mouth.

"Ass!" he ejaculated. "Do you think I did it on purpose?"

Tommy Dodd rubbed the snow out of his eyes.

"This is what comes of allowing one of you bouncers to lead the way!" he exclaimed. "I'm going first this time!"

And Tommy Dodd sprang up the bank.

"After him!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "He's not going to get ahead of us!"

And the juniors scrambled after Tommy Dodd.

The chief of the Modern chums was making good progress up the slope. As a matter of fact, the juniors, in rolling down, had almost cleared it of snow in that particular spot, and the bushes underneath were exposed to the falling flakes, and easy to hold.

Tommy Dodd was not long in reaching the spot where Lovell had lost his footing, and he here exercised great caution, feeling his way inch by inch.

Higher he rose and higher, till at last he stood breast-deep in the snow on the high level, which had already been reached by Newcome and Tommy Doyle. He waved his hand. He would have waved his cap, but it was buried somewhere in the deep snow of the cutting.

"Hurrah! It's done!"

"And we've done it!" shouted Tommy Doyle.

"Hurrah for the Moderns!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, dry up!" grunted Jimmy Silver. "There'll be another avalanche if you make that row, kids! Still, I'm glad we've got out."

One by one the juniors dragged their weary limbs upon the summit of the embankment. The snow was deep around them and before them, but after a brief pause to recover their breath they plunged on through it, and reached the road.

"A mile to Coombe!" said Jimmy Silver. "Here's for a long tramp! Come on!"

And the juniors, shivering and shuddering with the cold, were glad to get into rapid motion again to keep from freezing.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Welcome Home!

THE snow was thick on the road, and was still falling in heavy flakes. The seven juniors tramped on doggedly. Exactly how long that tramp took them they did not know, but the sun was sinking behind snowy clouds when they reached the village.

"The railway-station first!" said Jimmy Silver. "I dare say they don't know yet that there's anything wrong on the line; and, anyway, we can tell them exactly where the train is snowed up!"

And the wet and snowy juniors hurried to the station to report the mishap to the train there. In the stationmaster's room they were given something hot to drink, and they felt all the better for it

as they faced the snow again to tramp yet to Rookwood School.

It was useless to think of getting a vehicle, and, besides, they would have been frozen in their wet clothes had there remained still.

Fortunately, the walk to the school was not a long one. Rookwood College gate was surmounted with snow, rose into view at last, and the seven weary junior boys passed in.

It was very dark in the quadrangle, save for the glimmer of snow, with which the ground was carpeted.

They went into the House, and casted face to face with Bulkeley, the captain of the school.

Bulkeley stared at the woebegon juniors in amazement as they entered.

"Great Scott! Where have you been? What have you been doing?" he exclaimed.

"Snowed up!"

"Come into my study!" exclaimed Bulkeley, hurrying the juniors into his room. "Get those clothes off, quick! I'll get some towels and blankets!"

"I reckon—"

"Hurry!"

"Don't talk! Move!"

"Right-ho!"

Bulkeley did not allow them to waste a moment. They were stripped, and rubbed down with rough towels, and then they sat before a roaring fire, wrapped in blankets, while a change of clothing was brought to them. They had dressed, and by the time they were finished tea was ready in the captain's study.

Hot tea and muffins were grateful and comforting after their experiences in the snow. The juniors fell to with a hearty good will.

"My word!" said Tommy Dodd. "Bulkeley, old boy, you're a brick—a real, first-class, non-skidding brick, and no mistake!"

"Absolutely," said Jimmy Silver. "We're proud of you, Bulkeley, I can tell you! I don't know which to admire the most, your kindness or your—"

"Stuff!"

"Or your muffins," said Jimmy Silver serenely.

Bulkeley laughed heartily.

"You young rascals are always getting into some trouble," he remarked. "Now you are dry, you can tell me exactly how it happened."

"I'll tell you—"

"It was like this—"

"I think I can explain—"

"You see, Bulkeley—"

"Well, I'll—"

"No, I don't think I quite see," said the captain of Rookwood. "It's a bit difficult to do so, with all of you talking at once."

"I reckon so," said Jimmy Silver. "So, as head of the Fourth Form, I had better do the talking, kids—"

"Excuse me," said Tommy Dodd. "As head of the Fourth Form, I think I'll—"

"If you start that here," said Newcome, "I shall ask Bulkeley to sling you both out. Why can't you be quiet and—"

"Shut up, all of you!" said Bulkeley. "Tommy Cook can explain. He's about the only one that doesn't seem anxious to gloat on the sound of his own voice."

So Tommy Cook told the story.

"Well, you've had a rough time, and I hope the other passengers are safe on board of the snow by this time," said Bulkeley when Tommy Cook had finished. "You'd had all better stay before your fire to-night, and go to bed early."

Whereat the Fistical Four and the Modern chums exchanged a series of expressive winks.

The snow-fight in the quad had to com-

yet, but about that they did not think advisable to speak to Bulkeley just then. They left the captain's study feeling perfectly fit after the rest and refreshment, and ready for anything. "What a brick he is!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "I say, the moon's up to viewer the clock-tower, and it's left off juning." "Are you coming out?" "Rather!" "I should say so!" "Come on, then!" said Tommy Dodd. and he led the way into the white-carpeted quad.

**THE SIXTH CHAPTER.  
Something Like a Fight!**

IGH over the tower of Rookwood soared the moon, and the light streamed down in a sheet of silver upon the snowy quad and gleaming white roofs of Rookwood. The snow had ceased to fall, but it was foot deep in the quad. It was bitterly cold out of doors, but little cared the juniors for that. Jimmy Silver drew in a deep breath of keen air. "It's cold!" he exclaimed. "All the better! We shall soon be warm enough! It's go and look at the fort, and see if the kids have done it according to instructions." "It's all right," said Hooker, joining the Fistical Four, with several other fourth-formers. "Let's go and look, anyway. Get the rest of the Form together." The Fistical Four and the Moderns hurried over to the fives court and joined the snow fort. Jimmy Silver had laid out the plan of the fort, and it had been constructed by the juniors during the afternoon, there being plenty of material at hand, as only snow was used. Jimmy Silver looked at it with much satisfaction. "Good!" he exclaimed. "That's all right! By Jove, this will be ripping fun. Now we had better separate the sheep from the goats." The Fourth Form were nearly all in the fort, and they had already agreed as to their defence. The following of the Fistical Four were about equal to that of the Moderns. The rivals had never been quite able to decide which was the head of the Form, and the question probably never would be settled. There were about fifteen juniors on either side ready for the fray. Jimmy Silver examined the fort with a critical eye. It was really very well built. The walls, built of solid blocks of hardened snow, were high and thick, and there was only one entrance, which could be blocked up when the defenders were inside. "Now, which side is to hold the fort?" asked Jimmy Silver. "As the attack will be on the more difficult part of the business, I think you had better have the fort, Tommy, our side being a cut above your side." "Rats!" said Tommy Dodd. "We'll hold the attack, as it will need a better plan than your set to carry the fort!" "Toss up for it, and stop jawing!" suggested Hooker. "Chap who wins to hold the fort!" "That's a good idea," said Newcome. "Curious that neither of you two fat-heads could think of it!" "Here you are!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Best two out of three, or sudden death, Doddy?" "Sudden death!" said Tommy Dodd. Jimmy Silver threw up the coin, and it fell to fall in the snow. "Head!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Head it is!" exclaimed Raby. "You're to hold the fort, Doddy; but you won't hold it for long!" "We'll hold it till Doomsday for anything you fellows can do to get us out!" said Tommy Dodd disdainfully. "Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Lovell. "Time we got to business. I saw Monsieur Friquet nosing round a while ago, and I shouldn't wonder if he comes bothering us. Time we started!" "Sure, and you're right!" said Tommy Doyle. "If Jimmy Silver has done talking, we'll start!" "Well, I like that!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver indignantly. "I reckon that—" "If you like it, leave off grumbling, then. Come on!" "Five minutes' grace to get ready for the defence," said Tommy Dodd. "Then you can come on as fast as you like." "Agreed!" The Fistical Four and their forces drew off, and Tommy Dodd and his merry men poured into the snow fort, and blocked up the opening with snow. Huge piles of snowballs had been arranged in convenient places for the defenders. It

"We're—we're just going to have a little game, sir! Would you mind standing on one side?" said Jimmy Silver; and as the Frenchman did not move he drew him by the arm. "If you'd like to look on, sir, it will be fun!" "But vat—" "Charge!" shouted Lovell. "Hi!" roared Raby. "Come on!" And away went the Fistical Four and their followers at top speed through the snow in the quad. The little Frenchman gazed after them in stupefaction. "Mon ciel!" he murmured. "I have often zought viz myself zat zere is madness in all ze English boys, and really I zink zat eet is true! Ciel!" he exclaimed aloud in his alarm, as a terrific uproar burst upon the wintry air. Then he ran in the direction the juniors had taken, convinced that something terrible was happening. The Fistical Four had reached the snow fort. Right up to the walls of snow they dashed, their followers close behind. They covered their advance with volleys



**Biff! biff! came the whizzing snowballs from the fort, and Monsieur Friquet received as many as anybody. Thick and fast they fell, but the assailants were not to be denied. They swarmed around the snow walls, and fought a way through the defences, in spite of the efforts of the defenders within.**

would certainly be no easy task to take the fort, with the defence Tommy Dodd meant to make. But the Fistical Four were serenely confident of their own powers. They drew off for a distance to get room for a charge, and began making snowballs. A little fat figure looked up in the moonlight. "Mes garçons"—it was the voice of M. Friquet, the French master of Rookwood—"are you not cold in ze open air in ze evening?" "No fear, sir!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "And we're just going to have some exercise, sir, to keep us warm." "Oui, oui; but I really zink—" The school clock chimed out. "Time!" said Lovell. "Vat is eet zat you say viz yourself, Lovell?" "Time, sir!" "Time for vat?"

of snowballs, which fell thick among the defenders. But from within the fort came volleys in return. And here Tommy Dodd and his men had the advantage, for they were secure behind walls, and had piles of snowballs ready to their hands. The air seemed full of the frozen missiles as they flew. Thick and fast they fell among the oncoming juniors, bowling some of them right over on the slippery ground. "Forward!" yelled Jimmy Silver. And he made a spring at the snow wall. He dropped with his chest right upon it, but in a moment he was collared from within, and dragged into the fort, where two or three juniors sat on him, and held him a helpless prisoner. "Rescue!" Jimmy Silver bawled. And his chums came gallantly on. THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 269.

"They've got Silver!" shouted Lovell.  
 "Come on! Rescue!"  
 "Rescue!"

But on the snow-wall the assailants broke like a wave, and back they went surging, battered right and left with the snowballs from within.

Tommy Dodd gave a yell of glee.  
 "Beaten! Hallo, Silver! How do you like 'em done?"

Jimmy Silver grunted under the weight of three Moderns.

"Will you give your parole?" grinned Tommy Dodd. "Otherwise, we shall have to tie you up; and you'll find that rather chilly lying there in the snow."

"I'll give it," growled Jimmy Silver—"till I'm rescued, of course!"

"Of course; that's understood. But if those wasters are able to rescue you, Silver, I'll eat a snowball!"

"I'll remind you of that!"

"Ha, ha! It won't be necessary! Let him go, kids!"

Jimmy Silver was allowed to rise to his feet. He shook off the snow, and gasped for breath.

The defenders of the fort turned their attention to the enemy, and did not bestow a glance now on Jimmy Silver. They knew he would keep his word.

The assailing party had gone back with a rush, and collided with the French master, who was coming on at top speed.

Monsieur Friquet staggered back as Lovell ran into him, and clutched at Raby for support. He caught hold of Raby's hair, as it happened, and Raby gave a yell.

"Grrrr! You're scalping me!"

"Mille pardons!" gasped Monsieur Friquet. "Vat is ze maitair? Vat do you cry out for and run viz yourselves? Is it zat zere is anything wrong?"

"Yes!" growled Lovell. "Tommy Dodd is holding the fort, and he's captured Silver, and we are going to rescue him!"

"That's a fact we are, as sure as—"

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

"Stop! You vill hurt yourselves viz zis rough play. I will not allow—"

But no one took any notice of Monsieur Friquet. He remonstrated to the desert air, while the juniors, having recovered their breath, dashed forward to the attack again.

"Stop! Stop! Zis is too—"

But no one heeded.

In a body the Fistical Four swept up to the snow fort, the bewildered little Frenchman in the forefront.

"Stop! Ciel! It is horrible! I am lifeless! I am keel—"

Biff! Biff! came the whizzing snowballs from the fort, and Monsieur Friquet received as many as anybody. Thick and fast they fell, but the assailants were not to be denied. They swarmed round the snow walls, and fought a way through the defences, in spite of the efforts of the defenders within.

"Ciel! Eet is terreeble! Mon bleu!"

### TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.

*If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any newsagent to get it from:*

**Messageries HACHETTE et Cie.,  
 111, Rue Reaumur,  
 PARIS.**

The little Frenchman had completely lost his head now. He rushed to and fro, waving his arms and shouting and gasping, while the Fistical Four pressed the attack.

Assailants and defenders were hand to hand now, Lovell and Raby being over the wall, and their followers pouring on to back them up.

"Stand fast!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"Sock it into them!"

"Come on!"

"Hurry up, you rotters!"

"Hurrah! Throw them out!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

The next moment he was rolling in the snow, with Raby's grip on him.

Tommy Cook rushed to the rescue and Monsieur Friquet came blind between, and rolled over in the grip Tommy Cook.

"Ciel! I am assault—I am knocked down!" gasped the unfortunate Frenchman. "Mercy! I shall never see my muzzer any more! Mercy!"

Lovell rolled Tommy Cook over and collared him, unfortunately with Moss underneath them.

The fall of the leaders discouraged the defenders, and as the Fistical Four's followers dashed on, Tommy Dodd's defeated party poured out of the other side of the fort.

"Hurrah!" roared Lovell. "They beaten!"

"Fight it out!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"Rats, old chap! They're gone! You can get up! We've captured the fort."

Give your parole, and you can get up. The Modern chums reluctantly gave up, and were helped to their feet. It was victory to the Fistical Four this time with a vengeance.

Tommy Dodd grinned as he rubbed the snow out of his hair.

"Well, you've done us!" he exclaimed.

"You'd better come and feed in the study, as we left your grub in the tin way train. We've got a good fire going there, and it won't take long to get the grub ready."

The suggestion was too good to be adopted. Half an hour later the Fistical Four and the Modern chums were enjoying a ripping tea in the cheery, little study, as if such a thing as rivalry had never been heard of in the Four Form at Rookwood.

THE END.

Another Magnificent Long Complete Tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. in next Friday's issue of the PENNY POPULAR, entitled

# "THE SORROWS OF SMYTHE!"

By OWEN CONQUEST.

To avoid disappointment YOU must order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR in advance.