

GRAND CHRISTMAS STORIES FOR ALL INSIDE.

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THE POPULAR

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GRAND
CHRISTMAS
NUMBER!



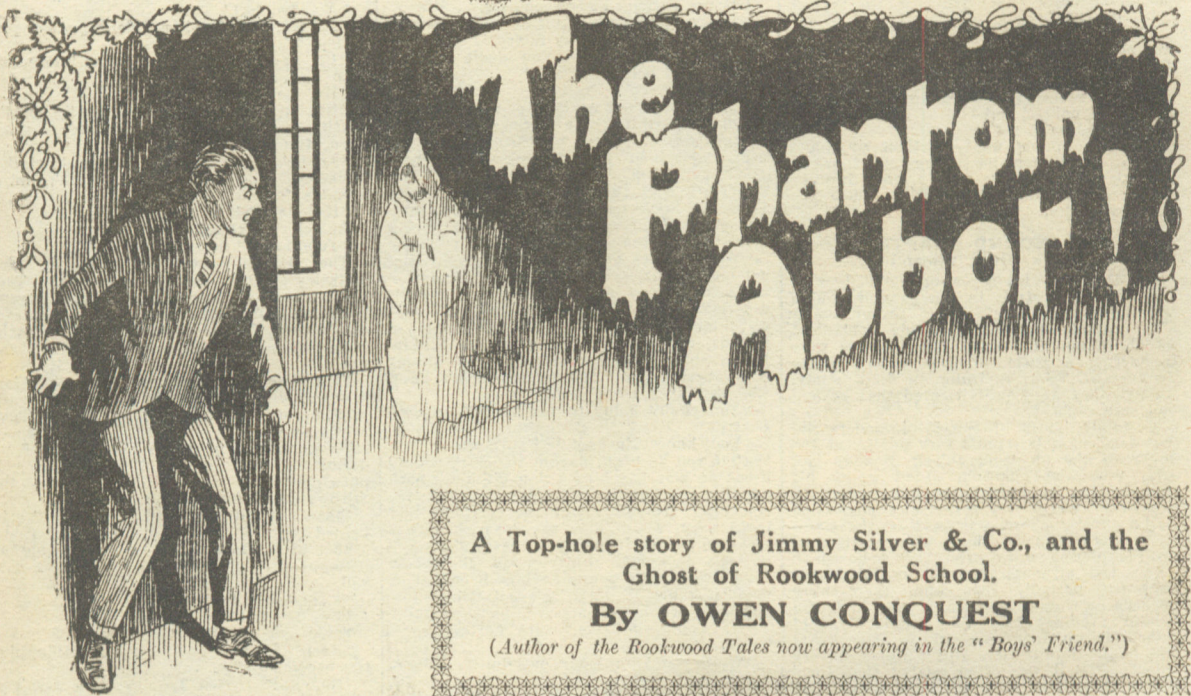
THE
NIGHT-
RIDER!
BY
MORTON PIKE

THE DARING ESCAPE OF CLAUDE DUVAL, HIGHWAYMAN!

(A Dramatic Episode from the Wonderful, New Highwayman Story in this issue.)

THE PROWLER OF THE NIGHT!

Jimmy Silver & Co. are the first to scoff at the idea of there being a ghost at Rookwood. But they see it with their own eyes, and it is left to "Uncle James" to get on its trail. He does so, with startling results!



A Top-hole story of Jimmy Silver & Co., and the Ghost of Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST

(Author of the Rookwood Tales now appearing in the "Boys' Friend.")

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.
What Tubby Muffin Saw.**

O Crash!
"Help!"
The door of the end study in the Fourth flew suddenly open, and Jimmy Silver & Co. started to their feet in surprise and wrath as Tubby Muffin raced in. It was close on bed-time, and the Fistical Four had been demolishing a supper of toasted cheese, while they chatted over the study fire—their talk running on the Christmas holidays. Rookwood was to break up for Christmas in a few days, and that subject naturally occupied the juniors' minds. The chat was suddenly interrupted by the study door flying open, and Muffin of the Fourth rushing blindly in in a state of wild excitement. He collided with the study table, and set it rocking, and there was a roar from Arthur Edward Lovell as a plate, laden with toasted cheese, went to the carpet.
"You silly ass!"
"Help!"
"What's the matter, you fat duffer?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.
"Keep it off!" shrieked Tubby Muffin.
"What?"
"Save me!"
Tubby Muffin dodged round the rocking table, and seized hold of Jimmy Silver. He clung to him frantically.
"Keep it off!" he yelled.
"Keep what off, you ass?" roared Jimmy Silver. "Let go! Are you potty?"
"The gig-gig-gig—"
"What?"
"The gig - gig - gig - ghost!" spluttered Tubby.
Jimmy Silver & Co. blinked at the fat Classical. Tubby, still clinging to the captain of the Fourth for protection, stared with distended eyes at the open doorway, as if in dread of seeing some grisly phantom present itself there from the passage.
"The ghost!" repeated Lovell blankly.
"Ow! Help! Keep it off!"
"Potty!" said George Raby. "Kick him out, Jimmy!"
"I'll lend a hand—I mean, a foot!"

marked Newcome. "Now, then, all together, and kick hard!"
"Yaroooh! Help! The—the ghost!" shrieked Tubby. "You keep in front of me, Jimmy! Lock the door! Why don't you lock the door?"
"What's the good of locking doors against ghosts?" grinned Lovell. "They can come through doors. Besides, we're going to sling you out!"
"Yow-ow-ow! D-d-don't!"
"Hold on, you chaps," said Jimmy Silver, looking very curiously at Tubby's fat and frightened visage. "Something's scared the silly ass. Some chap playing ghost, perhaps!"
"It—it wasn't! It—it was the ghost of Rookwood!" babbled Tubby. "I—I—I was s-s-s-o frightened! Ow!"
"You needn't tell us that!" grinned Lovell. "We can see that. Hallo, is that the ghost coming along?"
Footsteps were heard outside.
Tubby Muffin gave a wild yell, and bolted under the table. But it was not a ghost; it was Valentine Mornington of the Fourth who looked in at the doorway.
"What on earth's up?" asked Mornington, staring in. "Tubby's just bolted past my door as if a bear were after him. I thought he came in here—"
"Ha, ha, ha! He's there!"
Tubby peered out from under the table.
"Oh! Is it you, Morny? I—I thought it was the—the gig-gig-ghost—"
"Tubby's seen a ghost!" explained Jimmy Silver. "Of course, we all knew that Rookwood was haunted, but Tubby's the only chap who has seen the giddy spectre. What was it like, Tubby?"
Mornington chuckled.
"Go it, Tubby! Let's hear what it was like! Was it a fire-breathin' demon with hoofs and horns and tail?"
"Nunno!"
"Not really?" grinned Lovell.
"It—it was the abbot's ghost!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "You—you know they say that Rookwood is haunted by the old abbot in spotless white. He turns up at Christmas, and—and—and—"
"Oh, we know—we know!" said Jimmy Silver. "He was killed in the Wars of the

Roses, but though he's dead he won't lie down!"
"I—I say, 'tain't a laughing matter, Jimmy. Of—of course, I don't believe in ghosts. I'm not afraid of them, anyhow—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"But it was awful!" said Tubby Muffin, regaining courage a little now, as the appearance of the phantom abbot was still postponed. "I—I was just going into Peele's study, in the dark—"
"What were you going into Peele's study in the dark for?" demanded Newcome.
"I—I—I—"
"Oh, that's plain enough!" said Jimmy Silver. "Gower had a parcel to-day with a pudding in it, and Gower shares Peele's study. Tubby was after the pudding!"
"I—I may have been going to—to glance into the cupboard," said Tubby Muffin cautiously. "I—I may, or I may not."
"With the odds on the may!" observed Mornington. "What else?"
"I—I had opened the door," said Tubby, with a shiver, "and—and I was going to creep to the cupboard—I—I mean, I had stepped in casually, and then I—I saw it!"
And the fat Classical shuddered.
"Good! What was 'it' like?"
"It was the—the ghost! The—the abbot, you know—cowl, and robe, and all that—white as snow!" gasped Tubby. "I—I think there was a smell of sulphur and brimstone—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I—I'm not sure about the smell of sulphur, but I know I saw him—white and silent, and—and awful—and he raised his hand and pointed at me! Oh, dear! I—I was so frightened—I—I mean, I was startled. So I—I strolled along here to tell you, Jimmy—"
"My hat! You rather put on speed for a stroll," said Mornington. "If that was a stroll, what are you like when you're sprinting?"
"And now you're in the light, you know you only fancied it, I suppose?" said Jimmy Silver, laughing.
"I—I didn't! It was real—an awful, unreal phantom—"

"Real and unreal at the same time?"
"You know what I mean!" roared Tubby Muffin. "I—I say, suppose we see it to-night in the dorm—"

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

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

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

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

THE SECOND CHAPTER. The Black Sheep!

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

Certainly, most of the Rookwooders did not scoff, or only scoffed very mildly, at the story of the phantom abbot going his rounds; but a special ghost belonging to the school was a very respectable possession—the ghostly abbot was part of the tradition of Rookwood. There were small fags in the Second Form who half believed in him. And although the oldest inhabitant had not actually seen him, there were legends of former inhabitants who had. On winter evenings the story would be told round the common-room fire, or after lights out in the dormitories, with a proper shivery effect. And it was often related that some fellow who had left, or some master no longer at Rookwood, had beheld the phantom staking the corridors in trailing robes of white.

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

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

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

He glanced up none too amiably, as the juniors looked in.
The blackguard of the Fourth was not on good terms with Jimmy Silver & Co.

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

"Looking for the ghost," answered Jimmy Silver.

Lattrey stared.

"The what?"

"Ghost."

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

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

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

"Well, Tubby says he saw a ghost here," answered Jimmy Silver. "We came to investigate. I daresay he saw a reflection of the snow in the quad, and took it for a figure in white."

Lattrey laughed.

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, rats!"
Lattrey blew out a cloud of smoke.
Jimmy hesitated. He was greatly inclined to take Mark Lattrey by the scruff of the neck and rub his head in the coal-locker.

But the ameliorating influence of Christmas was making itself felt in the Fourth Form at Rookwood, and Jimmy restrained himself. He did not want to wind up the term by thrashing Lattrey.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jimmy Silver turned away without replying, once more restraining his impulse to take Mark Lattrey by the scruff of the neck. Lattrey shrugged his shoulders as the door closed after the captain of the Fourth. He finished his cigarette, over the sporting paper, and threw the stump into the fire. Then he rose and paced the study, with a thoughtful line in his brow.

Lattrey was quite resolved to go on his own shady way, and he was not thinking of repentance; but the primrose path was not all primroses, so to speak. There was, if the cad of the Fourth had only realised it, more worry and anxiety than pleasure in playing the amateur blackguard at a school like Rookwood.

The little card-parties at the Bird-in-Hand might be enjoyable—from Mark Lattrey's peculiar point of view; but the risk of detection was great, and the punishment in case of discovery was severe. And if Lattrey was caught some night breaking bounds after lights out he would—

The door opened, and Cyril Peele looked in.

"Dorm!" he said.

And Lattrey locked up his sporting paper and his box of cigarettes and followed his chum to the dormitory.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

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

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

Tubby Muffin had told, and re-told, his story, and the more he told it the more wonderful it became, and the less the juniors believed it.

Outside, the quadrangle and the old leafless beeches were thick with snow, and the juniors did not doubt that Tubby had caught some reflection of the snow at the window of Peele's study, and taken it for a figure in white, and they laughed uproariously at him.

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

"When!" grinned Conroy.
"If you wake up to-night with an icy finger on your nose—"

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

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Not in bed yet?" said Bulkeley of the Sixth, coming into the dormitory. "Now then, time!"

"Tubby's been telling us ghost stories, Bulkeley," said Teddy Grace. "We're all a-tremble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Bulkeley laughed.
"Tumble in!" he said.

The Fourth-Formers turned in, and Bulkeley put out the light and retired. Then there was an immediate demand from several beds for Tubby Muffin's ghost story over again, and Tubby retold his thrilling tale, with still more thrilling details added thereto.

This time the ghost had been shrieking, and wringing his hands in despair. And the juniors, still unimpressed, chuckled themselves to sleep.

There was no alarm in the Fourth Form dormitory that night. The phantom, if phantom there was, did not disturb the healthy sleep of the Rookwood juniors.

When the rising-bell rang, and the Fourth turned out of bed, Lovell awoke Tubby Muffin by dabbing a wet sponge on his fat little nose. Tubby started up with a wild yell.

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

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

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

"Oh!" gasped Tubby.

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

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

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

"Eh? No! Not that I know of," said Jimmy Silver. "Anything up?"

"Oh, never mind!"

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

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

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

"Looks seedy!" remarked Jimmy Silver.
"I know!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin excitedly.

"Well, what do you know, fathead?"

"He's seen the ghost!" said Tubby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"Bow-wow!"

But, amazing as it was, it was discovered that morning that Tubby Muffin was right.

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THE PHANTOM ABBOT!

(Continued from page 12.)

for there were inquiries by the Form masters, there were remarks and whispers among the seniors; and before lessons were over that day, all Rookwood was in possession of the story.

Carthew had seen the ghost!

So far as Jimmy Silver & Co. were able to learn the details, Carthew had been on the dormitory staircase when the thing dawned upon him.

What he had been doing in the dormitory staircase was pretty clear; he had been watching—not for ghosts, but for breaker of bounds.

Possibly the prefects of the Sixth, in their lofty way, were unaware that the juniors knew so much, but, as a matter of fact, the Lower School knew quite as well as the Upper that a fellow was suspected of breaking bounds at night, and that the Head had requested the prefects to exercise unusual vigilance. Apparently Carthew, as a prefect, had been taking his turn on duty, and so he had seen the ghost!

What Carthew had done when the ghost dawned upon him wasn't clear. It was certain that he hadn't tackled it. It was fairly certain that he had boited.

Carthew was not a hero. It was understood that he had burst into Bulkeley's room and awakened the captain of Rookwood. And some of the juniors declared that he had remained quaking there while George Bulkeley went to look for the phantom with a cricket-bat.

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

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

"Rot!" was Luttrely's reply.

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

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost Walks!

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

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

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

And then suddenly he caught his breath. Unconsciously, he half-rose in bed, all his nerves quivering. The dormitory door was open.

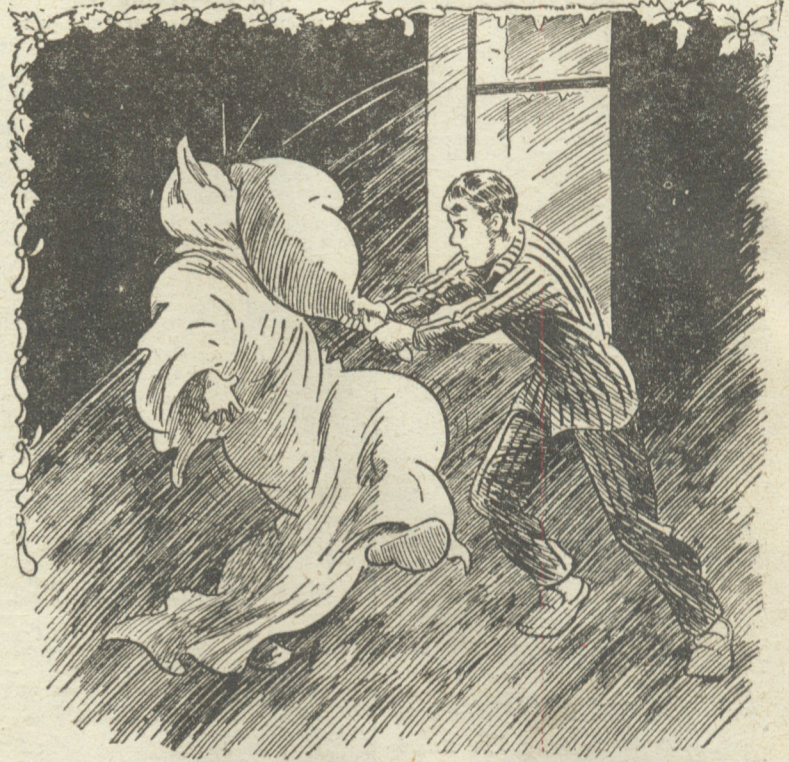
And in the doorway—what was that? Jimmy quivered.

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

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

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

"Wake up, you fellows!" he panted.



GOING FOR THE GHOST! The pillow swept through the air straight at the cowed head of the ghostly figure in white. "Yooooop!" Jimmy Silver chuckled breathlessly. (See Chapter 5.)

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

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

"The ghost!"

"Wha-a-at?"

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

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

"But— Hold on! What—" stuttered Lovell.

"It's the ghost!"

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

"I saw it, I tell you! It's a trick!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Are you fellows coming with me?"

"Well, I'm going!"

"I say, it's cold—"

"Well, I'm going!"

Jimmy Silver ran to the door.

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

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

"Where is it?"

"Where?"

"Look!" panted Jimmy.

He pointed in the darkness.

At a distance, just disappearing down the back staircase, was a blur of white in the shadows.

"Great Scott!"

"It's gone!"

"Oh crumbs! I'm going back!"

"Follow me!" panted Jimmy.

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

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

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

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

A grass like iron closed on Jimmy Silver. "Got you, you young rascal!" said a deep voice.

Jimmy gasped.

"Neville!"

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

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

"Let go!" gasped Jimmy. "I'm not—"

"Hallo! A crowd of you!" exclaimed Neville in amazement, as Erroll, with the candle, came down the stairs with a crowd at his heels. "What are you all doing out of your dormitory?"

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

"Lookin' for a merry ghost!" said Mornington, with a chuckle. "Jimmy's seen a spook, and we're after it!"

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

"What about the ghost?" asked Conroy.

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

"There was something, Neville," said Jimmy Silver quietly—"something in white."

I saw it in the dorm, and it came in this direction. Didn't you see anything of it?" Neville started a little.

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

"I don't know; but—"



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

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

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

"If he's so jolly sure it's a kid playing a trick, why don't he look for it alone?" he murmured.

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

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

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

Lattrey shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps I've got as much nerve as anybody here," he said.

"More, in some ways," said Jimmy Silver. "Well, you can show your nerve by helping hunt for the ghost when Neville comes back." "I'll hunt for him as long as you do."

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

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

"No!" snapped Neville. "What woke you up, then?"

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

"We found Neville here," said Mornington.

"Here! What the thump was Neville doin' here, more than an hour after bed-time?" asked Lattrey, with well-assumed astonishment.

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

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

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

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

"D-d-d-d-did you find him?" gasped Tubby. "Wasn't anything to find," yawned Conroy.

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

"You were dreaming, old chap."

"Fathead!"

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

And the Australian junior turned in.

"Ow! I shan't sleep again to-night!" mumbled Tubby Muffin. "This is awful, you fellows! I—I say, leave the light on! You beast, Silver, what are you turning the light out for? I say—"

"Dry up!" grunted Jimmy.

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

"Rats!"

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

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THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Uncle James Sees It Through!

HERE was excitement at Rookwood the next day.

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

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

It did not seem to be so much of a laughing matter now. Tubby Muffin's ghost story had been voted funny; but since then Carthew of the Sixth had seen the ghost, and now Jimmy Silver had seen it. Tubby was an ass, and Carthew might have been nervous; but Jimmy Silver was not troubled with nerves. What he said he had seen, he certainly had seen. And even Neville of the Sixth admitted having caught a glimpse of "something white."

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

It was not a pleasant thought.

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

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

"Well, it isn't!"

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

quavered Reginald Muffin.

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

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

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

"But rats!" said Conroy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He was listening—more intently than ever now.

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

It was the creak of a bed.

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

Creak!

Then a fainter sound, indefinable, but

unmistakably the sound of someone moving cautiously.

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

Jimmy moved at last.

With infinite caution, taking the greatest care that the bed did not creak, he slipped out of the bedclothes on the side furthest from the faint sounds he had heard.

His bare feet touched the floor without a sound.

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

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

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

Suddenly there was a glimmer of white.

Jimmy's heart beat.

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

Closer and closer came the spectral vision.

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

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

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

"Yooooop!"

A wild howl awoke the echoes of the dormitory.

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

The ghost of Rookwood staggered back.

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

Crash! Bump!

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

Jimmy Silver chuckled breathlessly.

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

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

"The—the ghost!"

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

"What is it—"

"Who is it—"

"What—what—"

"Get a light!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Ah! Would you?"

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

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

In a breathless crowd, the juniors surrounded Jimmy Silver and the spectral form stretched on the floor. Lovell held up the candle.

The Rookwood Fourth stared blankly at the strange apparition. Seen gliding along a dark corridor, it would certainly have been a terrifying vision. Seen sprawling on the dormitory floor, and gasping for breath, the phantom was far from terrifying.

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

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

"Oh, my hat!"



"Who is it?" Jimmy Silver stooped and jerked the concealing cowl from the head of the hapless phantom. Then there was a howl. "Lattrey!" The Ghost of Rookwood was Lattrey of the Fourth!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost is Laid!

LATTREY!" "You silly ass!" "You spoofin' cad!" "Ow!" Mark Lattrey sat up, gasping for breath. Pillow-swipes might not have damaged the genuine article in ghosts, but the ghost of Rookwood had been rather severely damaged. He seemed in rather a dazed condition, as he rubbed his head and splattered for breath. "How the thump did you know it was Lattrey, Jimmy Silver? How did you catch him?" Jimmy Silver grinned. "I worked it out, of course! The ghost turned up first in Lattrey's study—we found Lattrey there. Of course, he had been trying on his ghost rig, when Tubby came sneaking in after Gower's pudding and caught him." "I say, I wasn't after the pudding—" "Shut up, Muffin!" "That's how Lattrey was out of the dorm last night," continued Jimmy Silver. "He was the ghost, and when we got after him, he whipped off the rig and stuck it away somewhere, and then turned up—you noticed that he had all his clobber on." "I thought he'd stayed behind to dress," said Lovell.

"You can't think, old chap," answered Jimmy Silver affably. "That was what made me suspicious, when I thought about it afterwards. Then I thought I tumbled to the game. Lattrey's got appointments to keep after lights out—he was nearly spotted phantoming one night, and the Head has set the prefects on the watch." "We know that. What's that got to do with Lattrey?" "Ass! This ghost rig was a dodge to keep him from being recognised if anybody should spot him outside the dorm." "Oh!" "By gad!" exclaimed Mornington. "A jolly good dodge, too! I never thought of that!" "Well, I thought of it, old top!" said Jimmy Silver. "I can't say I thought of it at once; but it came into my head at last. Lattrey invented this ghost bizney so that he could sneak out of bounds unrecognised if he was seen—especially as anyone who saw him was more likely to bolt than to investigate. Carthew would have had him the other night but for his ghost rig." "Phew!" "Just a dodge for breaking bounds," grunted Conroy. "And he was trying it on again to-night, because he couldn't get clear last night or the night before." "Exactly. I thought he would." "Well, you ain't such a silly ass as I thought you were, Jimmy Silver," said Arthur Edward Lovell, after some reflection. "Thanks! I wish I could say the same of you, old fellow." "Look here—" Lattrey scrambled to his feet at last, his face sulky and savage. As he did so, there was a sound of footsteps without.

"Cave!" murmured Mornington. "Prefect! Lattrey, you ass, get that foolery off—quick!" The Fourth Formers had been on the point of punishing Lattrey for playing ghost. But the footstep outside changed all that. Nobody wanted to give away even the black-guard of the Form to the powers that were. Jimmy Silver himself lent Lattrey a hand in dragging off the ghostly robe, and it was stuffed into a bag—which was already open beside Lattrey's bed. The bag had just closed on it when the door opened and Bulkeley looked in. "I thought I heard a row here," said the Rookwood captain grimly. "What are you all out of bed for at this time of night?" "The ghost—" said Jimmy Silver. "What?" "Jimmy thought he saw a ghost," said Lovell, with a grin; "but it's all right—there wasn't any giddy ghost." Bulkeley frowned. "Get back to bed, and don't let's hear any more of this nonsense," he said. "Right-ho!" The Fourth Form turned in, and Bulkeley, frowning, closed the door and strode away. The ghost was not likely to walk again that night. And indeed, the ghost of Rookwood did not walk again at all. In the morning, a severe bumping was administered to the phantom abbot; and Lattrey of the Fourth was still aching from it when Rookwood School broke up for Christmas. THE END. (There will be another splendid long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co. next week, entitled "The Prefect's Guests!" by Owen Conquest.)

A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR!

All about next week's wonderful programme of stories.

GOOD CHEER!

That is what you will find in the splendid issue of the POPULAR now in your hands. I feel it is a Christmas Number of which we all may be proud. But before I say a word more about the old paper, let me offer the best of good wishes to all my chums. May you have the jolliest, happiest Christmas you ever knew, and may the New Year bring along with it loads of good luck, and leave chunks of it at every door.

FOR 1924!

There is great news for the New Year. The POPULAR programme will simply bristle with novelties. My list of new yarns contains some brilliant surprises, so look out. For a very long time now the POPULAR has been sweeping onward to more pronounced successes. As a laughter-maker it has no fear of rivalry, and our coming serials will be pitched in the real dramatic key. No wonder there is always a rush at the shop for the "Pop."

"THE BOUNDER MAKES GOOD!"

By Frank Richards.

As you know, the Bounder, Vernon-Smith, has fallen back into his bad old ways. He is changeable as the chameleon. But a change comes o'er the spirit of the dream, so to speak. This fascinating series shows the Bounder really eager to make good at last. He feels a sense of shame for his delinquencies, and at the eleventh hour he makes up his mind to reinstate himself in the opinions of his former friends. Exactly how Vernon-Smith goes about the business you will see next week. The new tale is a positive treat—good characterisation, wit, sympathy, everything a story needs.

"THE MAN FROM CHICAGO!"

We shall have a rousing yarn of the lumber school at Cedar Creek next Tuesday. Nobody can read these tales of Frank Richards & Co., far away amidst the pine forests and the mountains, without wanting more. The adventure described next week shows the cheery chums in good fettle, always ready for what turns up.

THE BEST BOYS' STORY BOOKS!

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NOW ON SALE!

"GUSSY IN THE TOILS!"

By Martin Clifford.

Gussy is frankly fed up with the irritabilities and the irascibilities of Mr. Ratcliff. In the next issue of the POPULAR we get a real New Year sensation at St. Jim's. "Old Ratty" has been extra trying, and D'Arcy is non est. The dignified fellow has vanished into thin air. Where is he? What is passing in his noble mind? That you will hear.

"THE PREFECT'S QUESTS!"

By Owen Conquest.

Our topping Rookwood stories are the catch of the season. Next week's issue of the "Pop" will contain a real sparkler about Jimmy Silver and his comrades.

"THE NIGHT RIDER!"

Claud Duval is a true friend to Jack Oldacre. Your sympathies will get stirred more than a bit by the coming instalment of our romantic serial of the highwayman. Jack gets entangled in a network of difficulties, but he finds a stout-hearted friend who never dreams of deserting a pal in trouble. This is where you get quite a new idea of the fearless Night Rider, whose name is known in every corner of the world.

"BILLY BUNTER'S WEEKLY!"

There is only space left me for one more reference, and that is to the screamingly funny Supplement which will adorn our next number. Everybody will acclaim the return of "Billy Bunter's Weekly." It has been eclipsed too long. Not the fault of the porpoise, nor of anybody. Only circumstance is to blame, so we can give the bit of bad luck a miss, and revel in the treat ahead. Bunter has designed a New Year Number. In it he wishes his friends all they wish themselves—as I do. Bunter does something like justice to the arrival of the nifty, untried newcomer—to wit, 1924. The amazingly humorous personality of the Owl is writ large over the whole issue. There are laughs in it without number. So take sage advice—always take as large a helping of such counsel as possible—and get next week's superb issue of the unfailing "Pop."

Your Editor.
THE POPULAR.—No. 258.