

Burns

The PERIL of the HAUNTED TOWER! *Special inside!*

The POPULAR

EVERY
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December 29th,
1928.
New Series.
No. 518.

2d



"LOOK—A LIGHT IN THE HAUNTED TOWER!"
*The Rookwood Chums Scent a Mystery
See the Rousing School Tale inside!*

MYSTERY AND THRILLS!

A light gleaming from the window of a haunted tower—an eerie silence on the countryside—and four juniors eager for adventure!

The Peril of the Haunted Tower!



A THRILLING LONG COMPLETE
TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO.,
OF ROOKWOOD, ON HOLIDAY.

By

OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Convict!

"OLD on!" Arthur Edward Lovell held on.

He was so startled by the sudden, rasping words, rapped out in the winter darkness, that his heart beat in great jumps as he stopped.

A shadowy form loomed up before him in the lane.

The hour was not late, but it was very dark. The road was a lonely one. From the village of Hadley Priors, almost to the gate of the Priory, Jimmy Silver's home, Lovell had not passed a single soul. Snow was falling lightly, the flakes whirled on a biting wind. It was not weather to tempt anyone abroad.

Lovell, indeed, had regretted a dozen times already that he had walked down to Hadley Priors after tea to inquire about a parcel at the post-office.

The parcel had not materialised, and Arthur Edward had had his walk for his pains.

True, there was the solace in store of telling Jimmy Silver & Co. what slackers they were when he got in.

But he hadn't got in yet.

With his coat collar turned up, his scarf tied tightly round his neck, his cap pulled down as low as it would pull, Lovell bent his head to the wind and trudged on through the snow till that sudden call came from the misty, snowy darkness.

The prospective satisfaction of calling Jimmy Silver & Co. slackers for not turning out in such weather hardly consoled Lovell for having turned out in such weather himself. He was thinking yearningly of the blazing log

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fire and the circle of cheery faces at the Priory, especially cousin Phyllis'. And then that hoarse, husky, rasping voice bade him "Old on!" And the shadowy figure loomed in the darkness and the falling flakes, and Lovell jumped and halted, and peered uneasily at the half-seen man.

"Who—what——" he stammered.

"Old on!"

The man came closer, and Lovell's startled eyes scanned him in the gloom. He was a little man—a very little man, scarcely taller than the Rookwood junior, though he was forty years old, at least. His face was hard and harsh, and lined and savage—indeed, desperate. His eyes glittered at Lovell in the darkness like the eyes of a wild animal. And the reason was not far to seek. The man was in rags and tatters that almost fluttered in the searching wind. But on the rags and tatters Lovell was able to discern an alarming symbol—the broad arrow of convict garb. With a breathless throbbing at his heart, the Rookwood junior realised that this man was an escaped convict—a dangerous character to meet on a lonely road in the winter dark.

"Don't you be afeared." There was a mocking intonation in the rasping voice. "I ain't going to 'urt you."

Lovell pulled himself together.

"What do you want?"

He backed away a pace, calculating his chances of dodging into the hedge, thick with snowdrifts.

"Jest a little 'elp, sir," said the mocking voice. "Don't you try to cut your lucky! I've 'ad five years' stretch for garrotting. Like me to try my 'and on you?"

The Rookwood junior breathed hard.

"You've 'eard of me, maybe? I reckon it's been in the papers. Little Wilson, that's me."

Lovell felt a chill.

He had seen, scarcely heeding, a report in the newspapers that Jabez Wilson, otherwise "Little Wilson," had escaped from Dartmoor a few days before Christmas.

Certainly it had never crossed his mind that the wandering outcast had wandered into Wiltshire, and that he was destined to meet him on this dark road, a quarter of a mile from any habitation.

The hard, brutal face peered at him. "I ain't goin' to 'urt you. Not me! I only want your clothes and what 'rhino' you've got about you. Savvy?"

"I—I——" Lovell stammered.

"There's a shed in this here field. You come along!" muttered Little Wilson, stretching out a hand to grasp Lovell's arm. "I've been watching this 'ere road for hours, waiting for some bloke to come by on his own. You're my game. Come!"

Lovell breathed hard as the grasp of the convict touched his arm.

He cast a glance up the road towards the Priory.

Only a quarter of a mile. He was late back, too, and surely some of his friends might have come to meet him on the road—Jimmy Silver, or Raby, or Newcome, or Harry Wharton, or Greyfriars, who was spending the Christmas holiday with the Rookwooders.

But there was no sign of anyone coming in the gloom, no sound on the road, save the wail of the wind in the leafless trees.

Lovell set his teeth.

He allowed the man to draw him

towards a gap in the hedge, apparently surrendering, and the outcast was deceived. But Lovell was thinking of anything but surrender.

The bare idea of sneaking back to the Priory in the convict's rags, to confess that he had yielded up his clothes to the ruffian, was unendurable to Arthur Edward Lovell. His friends would be sympathetic, no doubt, but he could almost see their smiles. Worst of all, he could see the smile of cousin Phyllis.

What would Phyllis think of him?

That consideration, if no other, would have nerved Lovell to a desperate struggle.

The ruffian drew him towards the gap in the hedge banked with snow. He tramped through the thick snow, muttering exclamations, dragging the Rookwood junior after him by the arm. And then suddenly Lovell acted.

His free hand was clenched, and, with a suddenness that took Mr. Jabez Wilson entirely by surprise, Lovell drove it desperately at the ruffian's jaw.

Crash!

With a muffled howl Little Wilson pitched head-foremost into the snow, and Lovell was free.

He did not linger for an instant.

As the convict rolled in the snow Arthur Edward Lovell whirled away, and started up the road at a desperate run. And as he ran, through wind and darkness, he heard behind him the pat-pat-patter of rapid footsteps in fierce pursuit.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Fight in the Dark!

HARRY WHARTON stopped and listened.

The Greyfriars junior was tramping through the snow in the winter dark. The lights of the Priory had disappeared behind him. Wharton had left a cheery party behind him there. Cousin Phyllis was at the piano in the music-room, and Raby—perhaps not wholly displeased by the prolonged absence of Arthur Edward Lovell—was turning the music for her. Newcome and Jimmy Silver taking their ease in deep armchairs before a crackling log fire, were listening to Phyllis playing, and feeling cheerfully satisfied and contented. Harry Wharton had slipped away quietly, and put on his coat and hat to walk down the road and meet Lovell on his way home.

The Greyfriars junior was not, perhaps, specially keen on seeing Lovell in a hurry. He liked all the Rookwood party—Lovell as much as the rest—but there was no special reason why he should sally forth in the bitter weather to meet Lovell on his way. As a matter of fact, he wanted the walk and his own company.

From the darkness ahead there came the patter of running feet.

Someone, as yet unseen, was tearing towards him in the darkness—running as if for his life.

Wharton listened.

The rapid footsteps came closer and closer. He heard the laboured, panting breathing.

"Is that you, Lovell?" he called out.

Crash!

From the darkness a hurried runner came hurtling, so suddenly that he crashed into the Greyfriars junior and sent him spinning backwards.

"Oh!" gasped Wharton.

He sat down in the snow abruptly.

Arthur Edward Lovell reeled from the shock.

He lost his footing as he reeled, and went over in the snow, with a gasping cry.

"You young 'ound! I've got you!"

Lovell, sprawling breathless, gave a choked cry as a shadowy figure loomed over him and a savage grasp closed on him.

"Help, help!"

Harry Wharton scrambled up out of the snow.

Scarcely two yards from him, in the gloom, there was a fierce struggle going on—between Lovell and his unknown assailant.

Wharton rushed forward.

He stumbled over the combatants as they rolled, struggling, in the snow—Lovell silent, choking, with a grip on his throat, fighting desperately for his life, the convict panting out savage exclamations.

The man was uppermost. Wharton made out the diminutive but sinewy ruffian grasping the Rookwood junior, in the gloom, and he had a glimpse of Lovell's white, horrified face.

Then his grasp was on the ruffian, dragging him back from his victim.

The convict panted out a savage exclamation at the grasp of a new enemy, and turned on Wharton like a tiger.

A clenched fist, that seemed to Jabez Wilson like a lump of iron, crashed into the brutal face, and the convict dropped into the snow.

Lovell struggled up.

"Help!" he gasped.

"I'm here!" panted Wharton. "Back up, Lovell!"

"It's a convict—that escaped convict—"

"Collar him!"

Jabez Wilson was scrambling up. Probably the sinewy ruffian was a match for the two schoolboys in a struggle. But he did not stay to put the matter to the test.

He leaped back and eluded the rush of the juniors, turned, and fled into the darkness, panting out wild exclamations as he went.

"After him!" shouted Wharton.

"I—I can't! I'm winded!"

The Greyfriars junior, who had taken a hurried step after the fleeing convict, turned back at once.

Lovell was panting helplessly for breath, his throat still feeling the savage grasp of the garrotter.

Wharton caught him with a steady hand.

"All serene, old chap! We couldn't get him, anyway. Not much good chasing a man in darkness like this."

"It's Wharton, isn't it?" asked Lovell, peering at him dizzily.

"Yes. I came out to meet you—"

"Thank goodness you did!" Lovell's voice was husky and shaken. "The brute would have choked me, I believe—a regular wild beast! Ugh! I can feel his fingers on my throat now!"

"Let's get in," said Harry. "Mr. Silver will telephone to the police-station—that's the best thing. They'll be after him fast, enough. Come on, lean on my arm."

The convict had vanished into the winter night; his fleeing footsteps died away in the wind.

Lovell, leaning rather heavily on the Greyfriars junior, almost tottered on towards the Priory. And both the juniors were glad enough when the lighted windows gleamed through the darkness and the snow.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Mysterious Light!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were very active the following day.

The encounter with the escaped convict had caused quite a sensation at the Priory.

Mr. Silver had telephoned at once to the police; and through the windy, snowy night, men had been hunting for the man who was wanted.

But they had not found him. Which was not surprising, for the hunt was difficult enough in the wild and wintry weather.

The probability was that "Little Wilson" had made the greatest haste out of the locality since his attack upon Lovell had revealed his presence there. Nevertheless, it was possible that he was hiding in some secluded recess of the woodlands—perhaps in the very park at the Priory, as Lovell impressively told his comrades.

So that day Jimmy Silver & Co. turned out to join in the hunt.

Harry Wharton went with them, of course; and the five juniors spent a hard day trudging through snow, and looking for "sign"—quite keen to help in laying the garrotter by the heels.

It was after dusk when the five juniors came tramping home, tired, but in quite good spirits after their day in the frosty air. Finding the fugitive on the snow-clad countryside was a good deal like finding a needle in a haystack, as they realised; so they were not very much disappointed at having failed to trace Mr. Jabez Wilson.

"It's no go," said Lovell. "But I've thought of something. After tea we'll have a bit of a search nearer home. Of course, it's not likely that the brute would dare to come near the house, but he might—and nobody ever goes near the haunted tower. Just imagine his dodging in there and hanging about only a hundred yards from us."

"Not likely!" said Newcome.

"Well, I know it's not likely, but it's possible, and we'll jolly well have a look after tea," said Lovell.

"Not a bad idea," said Harry Wharton. "This is the first I've heard of the haunted tower. Is that the place?"

He made a gesture towards the ancient, half-ruined tower, massed with ivy, that loomed up dimly into view as they drew nearer the house.

"That's it," said Jimmy Silver. "It's haunted—hem—more or less, by the giddy ghost of the last prior. This show was a priory once, hence its name. Of course, it's been a lot altered. But that old tower is part of the original building."

"And the ghost?"

"It's been seen lots of times," said Jimmy with a smile. "You see, the old prior refused to travel when the order came down from the King to close the priory—jolly old Henry the Eighth, you know. He is said to have shut himself up in that tower, and bolted and barred the door, and at night his light was seen burning in the window. When his ghost walks it's heralded by a light in the tower. You can see it moving about, you know, as the ghost of the prior shifts from one place to another."

"What happened to the old chap at last?" asked Harry.

"According to one account he perished of hunger in the tower, and when they broke in at last they found him frozen stiff," said Jimmy.

"It happened at Christmas-time—these things always do, you know. According to another version, they broke in, and he was killed with a sword-stroke. Another story is that he fell or jumped from a high window. But all the yarns agree that he haunts the place, and he's been seen lots of times, though it's not easy to get hold of the chap who's actually seen him—everybody seems to have heard it from somebody else."

Harry Wharton laughed.

The juniors paused for a minute on the snowy drive, under the leafless trees, and gazed towards the old tower, hanging like a black shadow against the dark sky and the glittering stars.

"Why, what—" ejaculated Jimmy suddenly.

"A light!"

"My hat!"

"The giddy ghost!" breathed Lovell.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stood and stared. The blackness of the old tower was broken by a moving gleam of light.

It appeared, disappeared, and appeared again. The effect was strange and eerie.

"There it is!" breathed Newcome.

"It's gone!"

"There it is again!"

"It's moving about, and we see it from different windows," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"Somebody's there!" said Harry Wharton.

"I fancy I can guess what it is," said Jimmy, after a little thought. "The pater's had the idea of looking through the tower—the same idea that just occurred to Lovell."

"Oh, very likely," said Wharton.

"Unless it's the giddy convict looking for a camping-place," suggested Raby.

"We'll jolly soon see!"

The juniors hurried on towards the house, and the light in the tower was lost behind a mass of trees.

Cousin Phyllis met the party in the hall as they came in.

"Any luck?" she asked, with a smile.

"No," said Jimmy. "The jolly old convict has cleared, I think. Phyl, old girl, do you know whether anybody has gone to the haunted tower? Father—"

"No. Uncle is in the library," said Phyllis.

"Oh!" said Jimmy. "Any of the servants wouldn't be likely to go. They give the tower a wide berth after dark. There's a light in the tower, Phyl. We're going to see what it is."

"The giddy convict," said Lovell, with conviction. "I thought of it, you see. It never occurred to you fellows, but I thought of it."

"More likely a tramp looking for shelter," said Raby.

"Fathead! I think—"

"Well, let's go and see," said Jimmy.

And the juniors turned out again in the winter darkness and tramped through the snow towards the haunted tower.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Done in the Dark!

"HUSH!"

Arthur Edward Lovell whispered the word.

His comrades were making no sound. They did not speak, and their footfalls were inaudible on the snow. But Arthur Edward felt that it was up to him to give directions. Lovell generally felt that.

The juniors were close to the tower now.

From one of the narrow old windows—long since empty of glass—the moving light gleamed again.

It passed and disappeared.

A faint sound came from within the tower. It was an indefinite sound of someone moving.

"That isn't the ghost!" murmured Raby. "Ghosts don't wear boots, do they?"

There was a faint chuckle.

"Hush! He's coming down the stairs," whispered Lovell. "I fancy he finds it rather too parky up there. I'm going in!"

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"Careful, old man!"

Arthur Edward Lovell groped carefully and cautiously in the darkness to the foot of the rather shaky stone staircase.

There he waited, breathing softly.

There was a distinct sound of foot-steps on the stone stairs above him now, and a gleam of light.

The light gleamed from above the turn in the stair.

Footfalls!

Closer and closer, as the man—evidently too solid for a ghost—came slowly and cautiously down the shaky stone steps.

The light came and went. It was clearly from a pocket electric torch, and the bulb ceased to glow whenever the pressure of the finger was relaxed.

A boot came into view, followed by a trouser-leg, round the bend of the spiral stair. The gleam of the light above just showed the boot and the trouser-leg to Lovell's watchful eyes.

Lovell did not wait for any more of the man to appear.

He plunged forward and tackled the leg in Rugged style.

His grip fastened with sudden force on the ankle, and he dragged.

There was a yelp of astonishment and alarm, and a heavy body came hurtling down the lower steps.

Crash!

The electric lamp, instantly extinguished, crashed on the stone.

In the black darkness a heavy body rolled on Lovell, and he collapsed under it, still clinging manfully to his prisoner.

At the same time a fierce grip was fastened on Lovell—he was in the powerful grasp of the unseen.

"Help!" panted Lovell.

The four juniors in the arched entrance rushed in recklessly.

They stumbled and trampled over Lovell and the unseen man he was struggling with in the darkness.

"Collar him!" panted Raby.

"Oh! Owl! Geroff!"

"My hat! I— Yaroooooh!"

"I've got him!" shrieked Lovell.

"He's collared me—seize him! Collar the brute! Oh! Owl! Pin him, you duffers!"

"Here he is!"

"Got him!"

It was a wild and confused struggle

in the blackness. Raby had hold of a neck, and was holding on fiercely, till a frantic yell in Newcome's voice warned him that it was Newcome's neck he was clutching.

Jimmy Silver had a grasp on a rough, overcoated figure, and Harry Wharton succeeded in getting his hands on the collar of the same overcoat. Between them they dragged Lovell's assistant over, and he rolled on the ground with the two juniors sprawling over him and clinging to him like cats.

Lovell staggered up.

"Have you got him? Hold him! I'll get a light."

Lovell groped in his pocket for his electric lamp.

He jerked it out, and flashed on the light.

The sudden illumination shone on a strange scene.

Raby was panting for breath and rubbing his nose, upon which an elbow had crashed like a steam-hammer, as it seemed to George Raby. Newcome was sprawling on the stairs, where he had fallen after Raby had let go his neck. A powerful, rather stout man was struggling breathlessly in the grasp of Harry Wharton and Jimmy Silver.

Even at a glance Lovell saw that he was too big for Mr. Jabez Wilson, and the same glance showed that he was in uniform.

"Why, what—what—" stuttered Lovell.

"Who—what—" panted Wharton.

He released the stout man at once, and Jimmy Silver followed his example.

"Blumpy!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"A—a—a bobby!" stuttered Lovell.

Mr. Blumpy, the police-constable of Hadley Priors, sat up, pumping in breath with a crimson face. He was looking very dishevelled.

"You—you—you—" he spluttered.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Wharton.

"You—you—" Mr. Blumpy spluttered and sputtered, almost fizzing like a squib in his breathless indignation. "You young raskils! And me thinking that that blooming convict had got 'old of me! Owl! Gug-gug-gug!"

"Oh dear!" murmured Lovell.

"Oh, ow, ow!"

"What on earth are you doing here, Blumpy?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. He gave the breathless constable a hand to rise.

Mr. Blumpy snorted.

"Wot should I be doing?" he demanded. "I was searching the place, as my dooty was, in case that blinking convict was 'iding 'ere. I had your father's permission, young man, and I'll see that Mr. Silver 'ears about these 'ere tricks played on an officer of the law in the execution of 'is duty!"

And Mr. Blumpy puffed and blew with indignation.

"Looking for the convict!" breathed Lovell. "Oh, my hat! So—so—so were we! I—I thought it was the convict when I collared you and—"

"You young hass!"

"Of course, Lovell's done it!" said Raby, with a grin. "He would, you know. Just like Lovell!"

"Oh, just!" concurred Newcome.

"Lovell all over!"

"Well, how was I to know—" began Lovell warmly.

"Hold on a minute," said Jimmy Silver softly, and he signed to the other fellows to clear.

Arthur Edward Lovell, with a very red face, was glad to go; and Raby and Newcome and Harry Wharton followed him. Jimmy Silver remained a minute or two with Mr. Blumpy, soothing him.

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Perhaps it was the soft answer that turneth away wrath—and perhaps it was a couple of half-crowns, slipped into Mr. Blumpy's hand, that helped to turn it away. At all events, when Jimmy Silver followed his friends from the tower Mr. Blumpy's voice was heard saying in quite amicable tones: "All right, sir—all right, Master Silver! Mistakes will 'appen! Good-night, young gentlemen!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Light Again!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL grunted, and turned his head on his pillow; grunted again, and finally sat up in bed.

He couldn't sleep.

There were several bruises distributed over Lovell, and one or two bumps on his head—relics of the struggle with Mr. Blumpy in the haunted tower.

Lovell had gathered up some very hard knocks in that struggle, and he was left with some aches and pains, which seemed rather to increase than to diminish. Hence his sleeplessness.

"It's no good!" grunted Lovell. "May as well sit up and read. Blow that silly hobby!"

Lovell stepped out of bed, grunting. He struck a match to glance at his watch, and found that it was an hour past midnight. The house was very silent. The wind had fallen, and the snow had ceased—deep stillness lay over the Priory and the surrounding woodlands.

He threw on a jacket, and stepped to the window, and pushed open the shutters. His window opened on a balcony, with steps to the garden, and in the daytime gave a wide view of frozen woods. In the distance the haunted tower rose against the steely sky.

Lovell looked out. All was silent and still—he caught the glimmer of the frozen stream in the light of the stars. He frowned as his glance turned on the dim, half-ruined tower—the scene of his unfortunate encounter with Mr. Blumpy.

Suddenly Lovell gave a start.

The black mass of the haunted tower was broken by an evanescent gleam—a gleam of light.

It flashed and flickered and vanished.

Lovell felt a cold shiver, not due to the cold. At the solemn hour of midnight, when all was sleeping, the ghost story did not seem so absurd as in the daytime, and he remembered the phantom light which heralded the "walking" of the phantom prior. With a heart beating rather fast, Lovell stood quite still at his window, staring at the black mass of the tower.

The light did not reappear.

"What was it?" muttered Lovell.

He had not fancied it. He had seen that sudden, brief glimmer of light. If it was not the phantom of the old prior, what was it?

"I'm jolly well going to see!" said Arthur Edward to himself. He would tell his comrades in the morning. They could chortle if they liked; but Phyllis would think it was plucky.

Having dressed himself, Lovell stepped quietly out on to the balcony from his window. He noticed that the shutters of the next room were open, and started a little as he caught sight of a face in the gloom.

"What—is that you, Wharton?"

"Yes," came Harry Wharton's voice. "What's up?"

"I am!" grinned Lovell. "Couldn't sleep—too many jolly old bumps making my head sing."

The Greyfriars junior smiled. "Same here," he said. "My head banged once on the stone steps, and it's still singing. You're not going out?" "I've seen a light in the tower," said Lovell, in a low voice. "It was only for a second—but I saw it all right. Did you see anything?"

Wharton shook his head.

Although the old tower was only a hundred yards from the house, it seemed very lonely in the middle of the night, and the trees shut off the house from Lovell's view as he glanced round.

He stopped by the arched doorway, his heart beating, and listened.

It was lonely, dark eerie, uncanny. If—if after all there was anything in the ghost story—

With the electric-torch in his hand he stepped in—but his cautious plan was not carried out. For as he stepped into the blackness within a sudden grip was placed on him, and he was Lorne to the ground, and the clutch of fierce hands on his throat choked back the cry he would have uttered.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Lovell's Luck!

"**N**OT a word!"

It was a low, savage, hissing voice.

The tones of it came familiarly to Lovell's startled, throbbing ears. It was the voice of Jabez Wilson.



THE ESCAPED CONVICT! From his position at the window, Harry Wharton could see the figure draw nearer and nearer. With knitted brows he watched intently. Then he gave a start—it was the escaped convict who was approaching through the snow towards the Priory! (See Chapter 7.)

"No—I wasn't looking in that direction, perhaps. Are you sure—"

"Quite sure!" said Lovell, a little gruffly. "I'm not likely to fancy it, I suppose!"

"Oh, no," agreed Wharton politely. "Not at all."

Lovell gave him a rather suspicious look. He had an idea, in spite of Wharton's polite negative, that the Greyfriars junior thought that he had fancied the light in the tower.

"Well, I'm jolly well going to see what it was!" he grunted, and with that, he descended the iron steps to the snow below. He had had the thought of asking Wharton to go with him, but the mere idea of being supposed to have "fancied" the light in the tower was enough to put Lovell's back up.

He tramped away through the snow, and disappeared under the shadows of the trees, leaving a trail of footprints in the carpet of white, clear in the soft starlight.

As he drew nearer to the old tower, Lovell was conscious of a slightly unpleasant feeling in the region of the heart.

He regretted that his momentary annoyance had prevented him from asking Wharton's company.

Lovell's heart almost died within him, as he writhed on the cold stone flags, in the grasp of the convict.

"Not a word!" went on the fierce whisper. "You bring them on to me, and you won't live to 'ear tell of it arter. You savvy? I'll wring your neck like a chicken's, so 'elp me. Not a sound!"

Lovell gurgled.

A hard knee was planted on Lovell's chest. A match flickered and lighted—the convict held it up to look at the schoolboy.

"You!" he muttered.

Lovell gasped chokingly. He realised now that the light he had seen in the tower was the burning of a match, by which the convict had been finding his way in the darkness. Evidently the man had been hiding in the woods, dodging desperately the hunt that was going on for him, and at midnight he had stolen out of his lair—perhaps in search of food. His grim, stubbly face was gaunt, almost ghastly, with hunger.

"Ain't you the cove I came on last night, what knocked me down?" muttered the man.

"Yes," gasped Lovell.

The match went out.

"You're alone?" hissed the convict.
 "Yes," breathed Lovell.
 "Wot's this 'ere place?" muttered Jabez. "Some sort of a ruin?"
 "Yes."
 "Is there a 'ouse 'andy?"
 "Yes; the other side of the trees."
 "That's where you come from, is it?"
 "Yes."

"And they're all awake, are they, p'raps coming 'ere arter you?" Jabez's sinewy fingers groped on Lovell's throat again.

"No!" panted Lovell. "No! No-body knows you're here. I—I came from my bed-room window. There's a balcony and steps to the garden. No-body knows."

"That's all the better for you!" muttered Jabez. "S'elp me, I've a good mind to swing for you. So I will, if you make a sound. Tell me the truth, you young 'ound. You say you got out of a winder?"

"Yes!" panted the helpless Rook-wooder.

"Leave it open behind you?"

"Of course!"

"I reckon you'll 'ave left footmarks in this 'ere snow." The man was muttering to himself. "Yes, I reckon so. I reckon I shall be able to find that winder."

In utter, helpless horror the Rook-wood junior gave himself up for lost. But savage and ferocious as he was, the convict evidently did not want to "swing" for Lovell, as he expressed it. A bunch of rags was jammed into the junior's mouth, gagging him. Then, helpless in the man's powerful grasp, Lovell felt himself bound, by the wrists and the ankles, with strips from the convict's rags.

The grasp on him was suddenly released, and the dark shadow of the convict vanished.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Laid by the Heels!

HARRY WHARTON smiled faintly.

He was still at his window, hidden in the shadows as he sat there, looking out into the dim night. He felt no desire to sleep, and he was a little interested, too, to see Arthur Edward Lovell return from his visit to the haunted tower, crestfallen. For Wharton had little doubt that Lovell had fancied the light.

Now he was returning. A figure had appeared from the shadow of the dark trees, a figure about Lovell's size, stealing quietly towards the house, along the track that Lovell had left in the snow.

Wharton smiled as he watched the approaching figure.

But after a minute or two the smile died from his lips, and he started, knitting his brows and staring at the approaching figure intently.

Why was Lovell creeping along in that stealthy way? Why was he watching as he came along the track in the snow? Surely he knew the way back to his own window? And the figure, though much about Lovell's size, seemed rather larger than Lovell as it came nearer. It came nearer and clearer, and Harry Wharton discerned that it was clad in tattered rags. It was not Lovell!

Then he knew.

"Jabez Wilson!"

Wharton's heart beat heavily, and he breathed hard. But he did not lose his coolness for a moment.

He moved quietly to the fire-grate, and picked up the poker—a heavy one. He gripped it firmly in his hand and stepped back to the window, keeping in cover of the curtains.

There was a faint sound on the balcony, of feet scraping in snow. The Greyfriars junior peered out, and the tattered figure of the convict was black against the starlight.

The ruffian was hesitating.

He had expected to find the shutters of one window open, and he had found two open windows. He was standing with bent head, listening—like a wild beast for the hunters.

Wharton, listening intently, heard the faint sounds as the desperate man stepped into Lovell's room from the balcony.

With a cool, set face, Wharton stepped out of his own room, out into the powdery snow of the balcony, and along to Lovell's window.

There was a sound of movement in the room.

From the darkness within, Harry Wharton caught the glint of two startled, savage eyes glaring at him as he shadowed the open window. He heard a panting breath.

There was a muttered exclamation.

What happened next came like a lightning flash. It was fortunate for the Greyfriars junior, in that wild moment, that his heart was stout, and his nerve good.

Like a leaping tiger, the tattered figure of the convict came springing from the window. He was discovered. He was cornered within walls, and he leaped out like a tiger from a trap, his only thought escape. His savage face, his glinting eyes, his clutching hands came at Wharton like some dreadful vision from the darkness.

The junior reeled back in the ferocious grip.

He reeled, with clutching hands at his throat. But as he reeled he struck, and the heavy iron crashed on the convict's head.

Half-stunned, wholly dazed, the convict sprawled helplessly, and the next moment Wharton's knee was on him, pinning him to the sill.

"Help!" Wharton's ringing voice rang and echoed along the balcony and into the rooms.

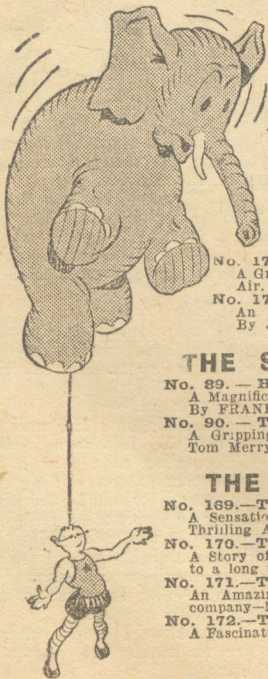
Jimmy Silver, in pyjamas, heedless of the cold, was out on the balcony in a twinkling. Raby and Newcome were not long after him. The house was in a buzz now. Mr. Silver's voice was heard calling. Startled servants were shouting.

Help—ample help was quick to come, but it was not needed. Jabez Wilson was already a prisoner in the hands of Jimmy Silver & Co. and Harry Wharton, and while the Rookwooders held him helpless, the Greyfriars junior tore strips from his rags and bound his hands behind his back. By the time Mr. Silver arrived on the spot Jabez Wilson, garrotter and convict, was a bound and helpless prisoner.

Police-constable Blumpy, roused by the telephone, came tramping joyfully through the darkness and snow to take possession of the man who was wanted, and who had so long defied capture. Jabez, filling the echoes with profanity, was handed over to him, and glad enough were Jimmy Silver's household to see the last of him. But before that Arthur Edward Lovell had been rescued from his bonds in the haunted tower, and had rejoined his friends—a little crestfallen, perhaps, but overjoyed to hear of the part the Greyfriars guest had played, and of the capture of the convict.

THE END.

(Arthur Edward Lovell is in the limelight next week in a rousing long complete story entitled: "WELL OUT OF IT!" You all know Lovell and his funny ways—ways which have brought trouble more than once on his and his chums' heads. Knowing this, you'll guess the story will contain a host of stirring incidents. And you'll be right!)



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