

Special Christmas Number - Wonderful Free Gifts Inside!





GET STARTED ON THIS GRAND SCHOOL-ADVENTURE STORY. YOU'LL LAUGH—YOU'LL BE THRILLED, AND YOU WON'T BE CONTENT UNTIL YOU HAVE FINISHED IT!

By Famous FRANK RICHARDS.

(Author of the Greyfriars stories appearing in the "Magnet" every Saturday.)

JIM DAINTY, THE REBEL, IS IN TROUBLE AGAIN. HE'S GOT TO STAY AT SCHOOL DURING THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS. THAT DOESN'T SOUND VERY EXCITING FOR JIM; BUT AN ESCAPED CONVICT PROVIDES THE GRIMSLADE JUNIOR WITH ALL THE EXCITEMENT HE WANTS—AND A BIT OVER!

Left Behind!

THUMP!
"Ach! Tat you pang me not!" roared Fritz Splitz. Terrific yells rang and echoed from Study No. 10, in White's House, at Grimslade.

Dr. Samuel Sparshott, headmaster of Grimslade, started.

Except for the uproar from Jim Dainty's study, all Grimslade School was strangely silent.

Grimslade had broken up for the Christmas holidays; and the Grimsladers had scattered to north and south, east and west.

Masters as well as boys were gone; the quad was deserted, the studies vacant, the passages silent.

Of all the beaks, only the headmaster was still there. Of all the crowd of fellows, only two remained—both juniors of the Fourth Form—Jim Dainty and Friedrich von Splitz. But those two, at the moment, were making enough noise for a dozen—at least, "Sammy" Sparshott thought so as he walked into White's House from the snowy quad.

The door of Study No. 10 was half open. Sammy Sparshott, coming up the passage, had a view of the interior. Rather a startling scene met Sammy's gaze.

Fritz Splitz was extended on the study carpet, face down. His fat and podgy features were grinding into the carpet, and it was only with difficulty that Fritz contrived to yell, for Jim Dainty was sitting on the back of his head.

In Dainty's hand was a heavy book. This was rising and falling, hard and fast. Every time it fell it smote the seat of Fritz's baggy trousers! And as it smote him so the fat Rhinelander yelled, though with a

fellow sitting on the back of his head it was rather hard to yell.

"You pie-faced Prussian porker!" Jim Dainty was saying, as the Head looked in from the passage. "You've got me stranded here over the Christmas holidays! All the fellows are gone except you—which is worse than nobody being left! Take that!"

Thump! came the book.

"Ach! Pang me not on mein trousers!" roared Fritz. "I have vun colossal bain in mein trousers! Mein goot Tainty—"

"You had to stick here over Christmas, as your fellow-porkers in Deutschland had too much sense to send you your fare home! And you wangled it for me to get left along with you! Take that!"

Dr. Sparshott, unobserved in the passage, looked in silently. His first thought had been to intervene. Now it occurred to him that perhaps Fritz von Splitz had asked for what he was getting. Sammy was not the man to prevent a fellow from getting what he asked for.

"Mein goot Tainty," wailed Fritz, "you preak pounds, and tat Sarmy say tat anyun tat preak pounds shall be detained ofer Christmas! Isn't it?"

"You dared me to break bounds, you fat freak, and I should have known why if I'd known you had to stay here for the hols. You wanted to get a fellow landed along with you, and you pulled my leg. Take that!"

"Yaroo! Tat you leaf off!" shrieked Fritz. "You vill veer out mein trousers! Also I have vun colossal bain! It is all Sammy's fault; tat Sammy is a peast and a prute."

Dr. Sparshott smiled grimly.

"Sammy's all right," said Jim Dainty, unconscious of the ears that heard. "He ordered us to stay in bounds, because there's a convict loose from Blackmoor Prison, and a fellow's not safe on the moors with Slim Tim around. I was the only fellow who was ass enough to go out of bounds, and I shouldn't have done it if you hadn't pulled my leg! Take that!"

"Ach! Leaf off! It was because I was so fond of you, mein tear Tainty—because you are so ferry nice! I could not bart mit you!" wailed Fritz Splitz. "It was not because I vant somevun to stay ofer te holidays mit me, or because I think tat your peoples send you bies and buddings—"

Thump!

"Whooop! Vill you leaf off?" shrieked Fritz. "Mein gootness, I vish tat tat gonvict, Timothy Gage, go to catch you and preak you te pones! I vish tat he trow you into Grimslade Water tat day he gum along! I vish—Whooop!"

Thump!

"That's a dozen!" said Jim Dainty. "I'll make it a baker's dozen!"

Dr. Sparshott turned away from Study No. 10, and strolled out of White's House. There was a thoughtful expression on Sammy's face.

In the snow-mantled quad Sammy paced to and fro, thinking. Fritz Splitz spent his holidays at the school, having no choice in the matter. But it was hard on Jim Dainty—now that Sammy knew, from what he had heard at the study door, how it had happened that Dainty had provoked that severe punishment.

Sammy seldom or never let a fellow off a sentence. But he was thinking now whether he might not let off the rebel of Grimslade, in time to get home for Christmas.

Meanwhile, Jim Dainty, having finished giving Fritz his baker's dozen, rose from his perch on the back of Fritz's bullet head. The podgy Rhinelander staggered up.

"Peast and a prute!" he howled. "Now I am more glad tan ever vas tat you are detained ofer te holidays! And if you pang me vunce more on mein trousers, I vill go to Sammy and say—Mein gootness! Whooop! Yaroooh!"

Fritz von Splitz, roaring, travelled out of the study, with Jim Dainty's boot behind him. There was a bump in the passage, where Sammy had been standing a few minutes before.

Jim Dainty slammed the door after the fat German.

He was feeling a little better—after giving Fritz what he deserved for his trickery. But his face was rather glum as he stepped to the open window and looked out.

Grimslade was white with snow; every roof, every chimney-stack, every window-sill was thick with it. Against a steely sky Grimslade Pike loomed snowy in the distance, and Grimslade Water, which in the summer sang and bubbled down from the Pike, was frozen hard. The keen air from the Yorkshire moors was like wine.

Jim's eyes fell on the stalwart figure of Sammy, pacing in deep thought

before the House. And his eyes gleamed.

The Head appeared very deep in thought—on what subject, of course, Jim knew nothing. The temptation was strong, and Jim fell to it! If Sammy did not like a snowball in his ear, he shouldn't detain a fellow over the Christmas holidays!

Jim Dainty gathered snow from the window-sill in a double handful, and kneaded a snowball, watching the Head as he did so.

As if to help him to get a good aim Sammy came to a halt. As a matter of fact, Sammy had reached a decision. He had decided to go into the House and tell Dainty he could cut! He stopped, and turned towards the House!

At the same instant the snowball flew! Jim had intended it for Sammy's ear. But the Head, turning towards the House at that moment, got it on his nose.

It crashed and smashed there, taking Sammy quite by surprise.

He gave a startled bound, his foot slipped in the snow, and he sat down with a heavy bump.

Jim Dainty vanished from the study window like a ghost at cock-crow.

Whether the Head had seen him or not he could not be sure. But he did not stay to ascertain.

Sammy struggled up. He felt his nose, as if to make sure that it was still there. It felt as if it wasn't!

"Dainty!" he roared.

If Sammy had not seen, Sammy had guessed. But there came no answer—Jim was out of hearing by that time.

Dr. Sparshott walked away to his study. He was no longer thinking of letting Jim Dainty off! He was thinking of giving him six of the best next time he saw him!

In Desperate Hands.

DECEMBER mist came drifting thickly over the Grimslade quad, over the lanes and the rugged moor. Jim Dainty, with his coat-collar turned up, a scarf tied round his neck, and his thickest boots on, tramped through the mist. Often those sudden mists came sweeping down from the Pike. Fritz Splitz was frowning over a roaring fire; but the frosty air called Jim out.

He went rather warily, for Dr. Sparshott had ordered both the juniors to keep within school bounds. With a desperate convict lurking in the vicinity, Fritz was more than willing to obey that order to the very letter. But now all the fellows were gone. Jim Dainty was fed-up with the solitude of the school.

Detention over the Christmas holidays was a heavy sentence—and Jim was more than half-inclined to bolt. At any rate, he was not going to keep within the school walls, and that was that! Sammy could keep him in—if he could!

Thicker and thicker the dim mist drifted down the Pike. Jim Dainty was cutting across the moor to Grimslade Water, intending to find a little vigorous, and rather risky, enjoyment in sliding down the frozen stream in the rugged, rocky, deep ravine. He halted suddenly as a voice came through the clinging mist, and dropped into cover behind a frozen mass of brambles. It was Sammy Sparshott's voice. Sammy, evidently, was out on the moor that misty morning.

"You believe the man is still in this vicinity, Mr. Rawson?"

"I am sure of it, sir!" Jim recognised the voice of Inspector Rawson, of Blackmoor. "A few days ago he was seen, and chased into the ravine of Grimslade Water—and lost there. How he escaped is a mystery. He has some hiding-place."

"To be plain, you fancy that Timothy Gage is hiding near Grimslade, because many years ago he was a Grimslade

boy!" There was a sharp note in Sammy's voice.

"Well, sir, having been a schoolboy here, he may know a good deal that may be useful to him," the inspector said. "Grimslade is an old place, full of nooks and crannies. Isn't there a legend that Margaret of Anjou hid in the Grimslade vaults, after a defeat in one of the battles of the Wars of the Roses, and escaped by way of a secret passage with an outlet on the moor?"

Jim heard Dr. Sparshott laugh.

"Oh, quite!" said Sammy. "But no such secret passage is known nowadays. Still, you may be right in supposing that Gage may remember some hidden nook or cranny, from his schooldays at Grimslade—"

The voices passed on. Jim Dainty had not seen the speakers in the mist, and they had not seen him.

He tramped on his way when they were gone. In dim, damp mist he reached the ravine where Grimslade Water came down from the slopes of the Pike. He tramped up the steep banks of the frozen stream.

Back into his mind came an incident of a few days before break-up at Grimslade. The escaping convict had almost come on him and Fritz Splitz; he remembered how he had heard the man's footsteps coming up the ravine, the police at a distance after him; and suddenly the footsteps had ceased, and "Slim Tim" had apparently vanished into air.

Jim had been forced to believe that somehow the fugitive had crept past unseen; but now other thoughts were in his mind. Gage had been a Grimslade boy in old days; was it possible—as Mr. Rawson evidently suspected—that at

that time he had chanced to discover the secret passage, and was now in hiding there?

Was it possible that the outlet of that old tunnel was in the ravine of Grimslade Water, and that that was how the man had vanished so suddenly and strangely?

Jim Dainty did not slide on the ice of the frozen stream. With that idea in his mind he explored the rugged, rocky sides of the ravine. He had brought a rucksack with him, packed with a substantial lunch, and was in no hurry to return to the school.

For two or three hours, he roamed up and down the rugged bank of Grimslade Water; but if there was any discovery to be made he did not make it. But at least, he had a busy morning, and grew as hungry as a hunter in the keen air. At last, as a glimmer of the noonday sun came through the mist, he stopped to rest and eat his lunch.

He brushed the snow from a boulder near the steep side of the ravine where it was mantled with thick, wild ivy powdered with snow, he sat down and unpacked his rucksack. Deep silence and solitude lay over Grimslade Water and the surrounding moor.

Suddenly, from behind the schoolboy as he sat, came a faint rustle. It sounded like the wind stirring the wild ivy on the cliff. With a sandwich half-way to his mouth, Jim Dainty glanced round. Then he leaped to his feet with a startled cry.

A figure—a strange, wild figure—was leaping at him.

"The convict!" panted Jim.

The man was slightly built; he was wearing the overcoat he had seized from

(Continued on page 348.)



A sound came from the silence among the ancient arches of the vault. From the darkness Fritz Splitz had a glimpse of a creeping form. He gave a gurgling gasp of terror. The glare of the torch fell full on the creeping figure—a slight figure in convict garb, covered by a schoolboy's overcoat!

THE SECRET OF THE VAULTS!

(Continued from page 343.)

Fritz Splitz a week since, and Fritz's cap was on his close-cropped head. But the convict garb could be seen. His face, bristly with several days' beard, was savage and desperate, the sunken eyes glittering like a wild animal's.

Jim had time only for a glimpse—then the man was upon him, and he was down on his back on the rocks, struggling.

"Help!" shouted Jim Dainty. His shout rang and echoed in the ravine. The next moment a knuckly fist struck, and the savage blow stunned him. The steely sky, the snowy rocks, the savage, haggard face of the convict, swam before his eyes, and he sank back to the ground insensible.

How long he lay senseless he never knew. Probably it was only a matter of minutes. His eyes opened dizzily, and he stared round him.

He was alone in the snowy ravine. The convict was gone. Gone also was the rucksack and the food. Jim Dainty staggered to his feet. He wondered dazedly why the ruffian had attacked him—then, as he saw that the rucksack was gone, he understood. It was for the food that Convict 39 had leaped on him like a wild beast. The hunted convict was little better than a famished wolf.

Jim pressed his hand to his bruised, aching head. There was a footstep, a clinking of stones, down the ravine. He stared round, and dimly sighted Inspector Rawson in the damp mist. The inspector from Blackmoor came quickly towards him.

"Was it you who shouted?" he snapped.

"Oh! You heard me?" gasped Jim. "Yes—I've seen him—he was here—he's bagged my lunch."

"The convict?" exclaimed the inspector, his eyes ablaze.

"Yes," panted Jim. "He knocked me out."

Inspector Rawson glanced round him quickly, and then tramped on up the ravine. That was the only way the hunted man could have gone.

But Jim wondered. He had a suspicion that Slim Tim's hiding-place was not far away, and that it was from his hiding-place that the convict had seen him, sitting down to his lunch, and crept on him. But his head was aching and spinning, and Jim Dainty tramped down the ravine and took the path across the moor to Grimslade School.

Fearful for Fritz!

FRITZ SPLITZ blinked into the porter's lodge at Grimslade with his saucer-eyes. Old Sykes, toasting his toes before his fire, and smoking a pipe, glanced round at him and grunted.

"Toctor Sparshott vant to see you at vunce!" said Fritz.

Snort from Sykes! He did not want to leave his pipe and his cosy fire. But Sammy's word was law; and old Sykes rose, put on his coat and hat, and left the lodge, tramping away through the snow towards Big School.

Fritz watched him go with a gleam in his saucer-eyes. Then he whipped into the lodge and picked up a parcel that lay on the table. That parcel was addressed to Jim Dainty, and Fritz knew what was in it; Jim was expecting a Christmas pudding from home, and it had arrived. Since the parcel had been handed in to Sykes, Fritz had been on the watch, cudgelling his fat brains for a scheme to get hold of it. Now he had hold of it!

Friedrich von Splitz disappeared from Sykes' lodge, with the parcel under his fat arm. Sykes came back five minutes later—having made the interesting discovery that Dr. Sparshott did not want him, and had not sent for him. In a very crusty temper Mr. Sykes sat down

to his pipe. Ten minutes later, Jim Dainty's cheerful face looked in. "My parcel come, Sykes?" he asked. "It's coom," answered Sykes; "and if tha wants it tha'd better find that blooming 'Un who's took it away."

But it was not easy to find the "blooming Hun!" Friedrich von Splitz did not intend to be found until that Christmas pudding had gone the way of all Christmas puddings. Jim Dainty, in red wrath, hunted up and down and round about Grimslade, in vain. It really seemed as if Fritz Splitz and the Christmas pudding had vanished from the surface of the earth.

As a matter of fact, they had! The astute Fritz had dodged into Mr. White's deserted study and abstracted therefrom an ancient iron key. A minute later he was standing at a nail-studded, arched oaken door at the end of a dusky corridor.

The key creaked as it turned in the ancient lock. The key to the stairs down into the ancient vaults, which extended far under all the buildings of Grimslade School, was seldom used. But the heavy old lock turned, and Fritz pushed the oaken door open and flashed on the light of an electric torch.

He stepped through the little arched doorway, and closed the heavy oak door behind him. He did not lock it—Fritz had no fancy for locking himself in the vaults. Dainty was not likely to track him there, and if he did it was easy enough to keep out of sight. With the parcel under one arm and the torch gleaming in his hand, Fritz descended the old stone stair, grinning.

From the bottom of the stair the vaults stretched away in an almost endless series—dim and gloomy, cold and draughty. Strange lights and shadows danced among the dim old arches from the light of the gleaming torch.

Fritz blinked round him rather uneasily with his light-blue saucer-eyes. He did not like solitude and silence and shadows, and once the oaken door was closed he seemed shut off from all humanity. But he liked Christmas pudding—very much indeed did the fat German like that! And his thoughts were concentrated on Christmas pudding now!

"Tat Tainty is vun peast and a prute!" murmured Fritz. "Tat peastly pounder peat me mit vun book till I pellow like a pull! Now I vill eat his Christmas pudding, and tat Tainty can go and eat goke!"

And Fritz chuckled.

He sat down on the lowest step and stuck the torch into a crevice, keeping it turned on. Then he unwrapped the parcel. His fat face beamed in the light, and his saucer-eyes shone as the Christmas pudding was revealed to view.

It was a large pudding, a rich pudding, a luscious pudding! There was enough for at least four or five fellows, so there was almost enough for Fritz Splitz. Great slices disappeared at a record rate, and there was a steady sound of crunching and munching in the silence of the vaults.

Jim Dainty was hunting him high and low, but not, as it happened, low enough. Fritz grinned and munched and crunched, and reflected with great satisfaction on the success of his trickery in keeping Jim Dainty at Grimslade over Christmas—with his supplies from home! This was worth a few kicks.

"Mein gootness!" gasped Fritz suddenly.

There was the sound of a footfall. He was so startled that he ceased to munch Christmas pudding.

Fritz rose to his feet. He laid the remnant of the Christmas pudding, in its wrappings, on the stair, lifted the torch, and blinked round him with scared and startled saucer-eyes. A sound came from the silence among the ancient arches. From the darkness Fritz Splitz had a glimpse of a creeping form.

He gave a gurgling gasp of terror. The glare of the torch fell full on the creeping figure—a slight figure, in convict garb, covered by a schoolboy's overcoat!

Fritz Splitz stood as though rooted to the stone flags. It dawned upon his fat brain who it was, and that the convict, lurking in the vaults, had been guided to the spot by the gleam of the torch. While the hapless Fritz had been devouring the pudding that hideous figure had been stealing along the vaults towards him, guided by the light.

As the light gleamed on the glittering eyes that looked from the haggard, sunken face, Fritz gave a gasp of horror and shut off the torch. Madly he plunged up the stone steps to escape.

He heard a savage snarl behind him, and a pattering of rapid feet. He tore up the stair in terror, missed his footing in the darkness, and fell. As he scrambled up there was a breathing in the darkness close by. A groping hand came in contact with him and grasped him. In another moment a grip was on the podgy throat of the German junior.

"Silence!" hissed a husky voice.

"Mein gootness!" groaned Fritz.

The next moment he was choked into silence.

The Secret Passage.

"**O**H, crikey!" gasped Jim Dainty. It seemed to Jim as if the solid globe had suddenly given way under his feet.

The dim December afternoon was deepening to dusk. Since the morning Jim had seen nothing of Fritz Splitz. Fatty Fritz had not turned up to dinner, which Jim had with the housekeeper in White's House. Jim Dainty certainly did not miss his company.

After dinner he donned coat and scarf and cap, and slipped quietly out of the school. Partly because the adventure appealed to him, and partly because he was fed-up with doing nothing, he headed for Grimslade Water to explore the ravine and hunt for a trace of the convict's secret hiding-place. He slipped a fives bat into his coat pocket before he started.

He was as watchful as a cat as he clambered along the slippery rocks and stones, and explored amid the masses of wild ivy that clung to the steep side of the ravine. And then, suddenly, it seemed to him that the earth opened under his feet, and he found himself plunging and rolling and falling, amid a shower of falling stones and powdered snow.

Bruised and breathless, Jim Dainty sprawled on damp earth. For some moments he lay gasping and panting, dazed and bewildered.

Then he struggled to his feet and stared round him with dizzy eyes.

From an opening far above him came the dim glimmer of the dying day. He had fallen into a slanting shaft, hardly bigger than a chimney, the opening of which had been hidden by the masses of frosty ivy.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jim.

By sheer accident he had stumbled on the secret—literally stumbled on it.

His heart beat faster as he realised that he had stumbled into the hunted man's hiding-place. He jerked the fives bat from his pocket and stared round him in the blackness.

But there was no sound, no movement in the darkness. With his left hand, keeping the fives bat gripped hard in his right, Jim drew an electric torch from his pocket and turned on the light.

The bright beam played on the rough earthen walls of the narrow shaft, and on an opening close by him—the mouth of a tunnel leading away into the solid earth. The sides of the tunnel were bricked, the ancient bricks thick with moss, reeking with damp.

Jim Dainty gave a low whistle. It was no natural rift in the earth, but a

bricked passage, so narrow that his elbows almost touched the sides as he stepped into it.

The junior's eyes gleamed with excitement.

He had heard the legend of the secret passage from Grimslade to the moor, by which the "She-Wolf of France" had escaped the Yorkists in ancient days. Now he knew that he had found it, and at the same time he realised that he was not the first to find it.

Timothy Gage, once a Grimslader, had made that discovery in the old days when he had been at the school, and had evidently kept the discovery to himself. That was why Convict 39 had headed for Grimslade when he escaped from Blackmoor Prison.

Jim flashed the light along the tunnel, and watched and listened. But there was no sign of the convict.

The junior hesitated a few moments. Then he moved along the tunnel.

On the damp, earthen floor there were traces of mud and snow, which could only have been left there by the feet of the hidden convict. If the man was not there now, it was clear that he had been there quite recently.

Jim Dainty advanced slowly, but steadily, along the brick tunnel.

He had little doubt that the hunted man had made his den in the vaults under the school, only venturing out at night, or in the day-time when the mist was thick on the moor, in search of food. During the past week there had been several robberies at the lonely moorland farms, which had been put down to the hunted convict.

But for the fact that the door leading to the vaults was strong and thick, and always kept locked, the desperate man might have gained an entrance into the school, and obtained possession of the money and change of clothes he needed for flight.

Perhaps Slim Tim had some such hope in his desperate mind; and, in the meantime, he had a safe hiding-place from the police and warders who were scouring the country for him.

Jim's heart was beating a little more quickly than usual as he trod along the subterranean tunnel.

But if the ruffian was there, he did not fear him. Slim Tim was a small man, hardly more than a match for the sturdy Grimslade fellow, and Jim Dainty was quite ready to knock him senseless with the fives bat. The ruffian could not take him by surprise, as he had done before. He kept the light of the torch gleaming steadily before him as he advanced along the tunnel. The fives bat was gripped hard in his right hand.

Suddenly dark and shadowy space opened out round him. He had reached the end of the narrow tunnel, and emerged into a spacious vault.

Vault after vault, soaring into the shadows, opened before him. He could not doubt that he was now under Grimslade School. These were the vaults of the ancient Norman castle, of which little now remained, save a few walls that were built into White's House.

More watchful than ever, Jim Dainty trod on along the series of vaults. At the end of the last vault he glimpsed a stone stair leading up. He reached it, flashed the light up the stair, and discerned an arched oaken door at the top. That, there could be no doubt, was the door that gave access to White's House. Jim grinned at the thought of the House-dame's astonishment, when he hammered at that door to be let out. He had no intention of returning the way he had come.

Suddenly he started, and his heart leaped. There was a sound in the darkness, and he spun round, flashing the light to and fro, the bat gripped in his hand.

The flashing light revealed nothing. No haggard face, or stealthy, creeping figure met his eyes. Cool and steady,

though his heart beat fast, Jim Dainty stood and watched and listened.

Again he heard a sound—a faint, brushing sound, as of some helpless body that strove to drag itself on the slimy stone flags. And from the silence and darkness came a low, faint, inarticulate moan.

Jim Dainty to the Rescue!

"MEIN gootness!" Fritz's teeth chattered. How long he had been in the Grimslade vaults Fritz Splitz hardly knew. It seemed like days, weeks, if not years and centuries. That December day was short—but to Fritz von Splitz it seemed longer than the longest midsummer day. Minutes that seemed hours, hours that seemed centuries, had dragged dismally by.

Fritz lay slumped at the foot of a buttress, his hands tied, and his ankles knotted together with strips torn from his own clothes. In the darkness he could hear the restless movements of the convict.

After securing the fat German, Slim Tim had taken the key from him, crept up the stair, and locked the

deep vaults night and day were one; but the crawling hands of the watch indicated at last that the day was done.

"At last!" Fritz heard him mutter.

With the torch gleaming in his hand, the convict came towards the German junior. Fritz's saucer-eyes goggled at him in terror.

"Goot Mister Gonvict—" groaned Fritz.

"Silence, fool!" It was a snarl from the convict. "It is dark now, and I am going! You will stay here—there's no help for that! Later, I may be able to let it be known, and you will be found—but you will have to take your chance."

"Mein gootness! I tink tat I die if you leaf me here in te tark!" gasped Fritz. "Goot Mister Gonvict, you let me go, and I say notting—I geeep it tark!"

"Fool!"

With a bunch of rags the ruffian gagged Fritz Splitz, tying the gag with a strip of cloth. Fritz gurgled and mumbled, and his saucer-eyes blinked beseechingly at the ruffian. Having gagged him, the convict rolled him away into a corner behind a buttress, and, with strips torn from his jacket, secured him to a jutting stone. Evidently Slim Tim was taking no chances.

Now that the winter night had set in, he was making his desperate venture. For days and days the desperate man had lurked in the vaults, hoping against hope to find some opportunity of getting into the school to lay hands on what he needed for flight, and the fatuous Fritz had given him the opportunity he wanted.

With one of the loose flagstones he could have beaten a way through the oaken door into White's House—but not without alarming the whole school. But now the key was in his hands—thanks to the hapless Fritz and the Christmas pudding! At long last Convict 39 saw before him a chance of flight and freedom.

He knew that the school had broken up for the Christmas vacation; but he had learned from Fritz that Dr. Sparshott was still at Grimslade, and in the Head's house he would find clothes, money, all that he needed—and he was prepared for any desperate deed to obtain possession of them. The hunted ruffian was not likely to give much thought to Fritz—except to leave him safe and silent!

Almost fainting with terror, Fritz heard the convict glide up the stone stair to the arched doorway above. The key grated in the lock. The light was shut off; all was blackness. With straining ears the fat German heard the faint sound of the closing door, the grating of the key again. The escaping ruffian had locked the door after him.

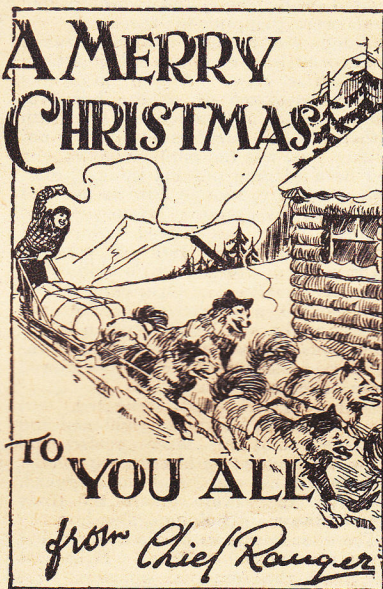
He was gone!

Fritz mumbled and moaned. A yell from the vaults might have been heard in White's House; but the convict had taken care of that. The gagged junior could utter no sound but a faint, moaning mumble.

Deep silence, black darkness, lay round the wretched Fritz. He wriggled on the icy flags, chewed at the gag, and strove to yell, but in vain. Suddenly his saucer-eyes goggled with amazement. From the blackness came a dancing gleam of light! For a minute or two Fritz Splitz wondered if he was dreaming. But it was no fancy. From the distance, far down the long line of vaults, came a gleam of light, steadily advancing.

Fritz goggled at it in sheer amazement.

The convict had gone by the door into White's House. It was not the convict. But someone was coming, holding an electric torch that sent a steady beam of light before him as he came. Who it could be—how he could have got there—was an utter mystery to Fritz! But the light spelled hope, and Fritz watched it with his saucer-eyes.



oaken door—thus destroying Fritz's faint hope that Jim Dainty, in quest of the missing pudding, might think of the vaults, and follow him down. Then, sitting on the lowest step, Convict 39 had finished the Christmas pudding to the last plum and the last crumb—under Fritz's mournful saucer-eyes. Fritz's only comfort was that he had already eaten nearly half of it.

After that, the convict shut off the light of the electric torch. Hours of darkness followed. It seemed to the wretched Fritz that Christmas must have passed, and that the New Year was well under way, so slowly did the long minutes drag. Every now and then the convict spoke from the darkness, rapping out some question, to which the fat German mumbled an answer. But for several hours now he had not spoken, and Fritz wondered whether the ruffian was sleeping.

Fritz was not likely to sleep. He was almost as well protected by fat as a Polar bear; but the cold of the vaults was intense and penetrating. Fritz groaned and mumbled and shivered as the long minutes crawled by. Then he heard the convict stirring again.

The convict had taken his watch, and at intervals Fritz saw a gleam of light as the man looked at it. It dawned on his podgy brain at last that Timothy Gage was waiting for dark. In the

Closer and closer it drew, and he could hear the sound of footsteps! He wriggled frantically, and his eyes almost bulged from his head in his efforts to speak.

But the light passed on, and he heard the footsteps stop at the foot of the stone stair.

Wildly, frantically, the fat German strove to make himself heard. He wriggled and squirmed, and his fat neck seemed on the point of bursting with his efforts to cry out. But only a faint moan passed the gag jammed in his mouth. The bulging buttress concealed him from the unknown person who carried the light. Madly he wriggled and squirmed and mumbled.

Jim Dainty, at the foot of the steps, listened in utter amazement. That eerie moan from the darkness had sent a thrill to his heart. He could see nothing—but as he listened, with intent ears, he made out that the strange sound came from behind the great buttress. He left the stair at last and came round the buttress, his weapon gripped in one hand and the torch gleaming in the other.

The next moment a yell of astonishment broke from him.

"Fritz!"

Bound hand and foot, gagged, tied to the jutting stone, the fat German lay at his feet, his saucer-eyes goggling up beseechingly.

Jim stared at him spellbound for a moment.

"Fritz!" he gasped. "You! Great pip!"

Fritz mumbled frantically.

Jim Dainty stooped and freed his mouth from the gag. Fritz Splitz gasped with relief.

"Ach! Is tat Tainty? Mein gootness! Tat you untie me, isn't it? Ach!"

The amazed junior opened his pocket-knife and cut through the knotted bonds. He gave the shivering Fritz a helping hand to rise.

"My only hat!" said Dainty. "How on earth—"

"Ach! It vas tat gonvict!" groaned Fritz.

Jim flashed the light round.

"Ach! He is gone—he go up into te House," mumbled Fritz. "Ach! I am ferry gold and ferry hungry! Mein gootness! Tat peast and a prute eat tat Christmas pudding!"

"You fat chump! You came down here with the pudding, and he got you." Jim Dainty understood now. "Then he's in the school?"

"Ach! Ja, ja! He vait till dark, and ten he go."

Jim gave a low whistle. If the convict had waited till dark he could not have been gone a quarter of an hour.

Jim Dainty ran up the stone steps and tried the door. It was locked on the other side. It was useless to hammer on it, if the convict had the key. Jim hurried down the steps again and flashed the light over the cracked and broken flags of the floor. He wrenched out a large stone.

"Mein goot Tainty—"

"Hold the light for me, fatbead!"

Fritz held the torch, while Jim, taking the heavy stone in both hands, crashed it on the lock of the oaken door at the top of the stair.

Crash, crash, crash!

With all his strength he beat on the ancient, rusty lock. The din rang and thundered through White's House. With a rending crash the lock burst, and the door flew open.

"Come on, Fritz!" panted Jim Dainty. "We may get him yet. I'll get to Sammy and call him—come on!"

Jim Dainty raced away down the passage into White's House. Two or three startled voices called to him, but he did not heed. He dashed out of the House and sped across the dusky quad to call Sammy. But Fritz Splitz did not follow. Fritz was not interested in

the escaping convict. Fritz was interested in getting something to eat. And Friedrich von Splitz gave all his attention to that much more important matter.

In the Nick of Time!

DR. SAMUEL SPARSHOTT stared. "What the dickens—" he ejaculated.

Sammy had been tramping on the moors, helping the Blackmoor police in the hunt for the elusive convict. He came in tired and damp and muddy, and went up to his room to change.

As he opened the door he switched on the light. Then, in great surprise, he stared at his room. Wardrobe and chests of drawers were open, all sorts of garments, collars and ties, socks and boots, were strewn and scattered. It looked as if some reckless ragger had been at work, and Sammy's brow darkened. If this was that young rascal Dainty—

Dr. Sparshott strode into the room. As he did so a figure leaped from behind the door. Before the Head of Grimslade knew what was happening he was down on the floor, a knee was planted on his chest, and two desperate hands were gripping his throat.

Seldom was Sammy Sparshott taken by surprise. But he was taken utterly by surprise now. Almost in stupefaction, he stared up at the haggard, desperate face of Convict 39. The truth flashed into his dazed mind. It was not a "rag"—it was the hunted convict who had been turning out his things. Slim Tim was there, though how he had got there was an amazing mystery. And Sammy had interrupted him—half through his hurried task of changing his prison garb for Sammy's clothes.

Swiftly the Head of Grimslade understood—but it was too late to save him. The man who had leaped on him like a tiger was desperate, and there was murder in the haggard eyes that glared down on Samuel Sparshott.

Sammy struck and struggled, but the pressure on his throat tightened and tightened, and his senses reeled and swam. Savagely, ruthlessly, the convict compressed his grip, and the haggard, desperate face swam before the dizzy eyes of the man choking under him.

The door had been left half open; but there was no one at hand. Byles was out, and the servants' quarters were

distant. There was no help—no help—and Sammy, resisting with failing strength, knew that nothing could save him. Then suddenly there came a shout from below. It was Jim Dainty's voice—shouting.

"Dr. Sparshott, the convict's in the school somewhere!"

The junior came racing up the stairs. There was a growl of rage from Convict 39 as Jim Dainty appeared in the doorway.

Jim stared blankly for a second. Then he leaped into the room. Convict 39 sprang away from the prostrate Head and leaped towards him. His thought was to prevent the schoolboy getting away and giving the alarm. But Jim Dainty was not thinking of getting away. The fives bat was in his hand, and as the ruffian leaped at him he struck with all his strength. The blow landed full on the close-cropped bullet head, and Timothy Gage staggered back and fell.

Before he could rise Jim was upon him, and the bat struck again. Half stunned, the ruffian struggled with the sturdy junior. Sammy Sparshott, breathless, gasping, panting, scrambled up and grasped the struggling ruffian. The desperate wretch struggled and fought, but he had no chance. In three minutes he lay helpless, with one of Dr. Sparshott's neckties knotted round his wrists and a handkerchief twisted and tied round his ankles.

"Got him!" gasped Jim.

Sammy Sparshott sank into a chair, his hand to his bruised throat, breathing hard and deep. But there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"Dainty," he said, "I was feeling rather sorry yesterday that I had detained you over Christmas! I'm feeling rather glad now!"

Jim Dainty was not, after all, detained over Christmas! The next day was Christmas Eve—and that day Timothy Gage was back at Blackmoor Prison, and Dr. Sparshott was driving Jim to the station to take the train for home—home, and a merry Christmas!

(Jim Dainty enjoys a sensational as well as a Merry Christmas! See next week's yarn entitled: "The Foe From the East!"—it's a corker! Also look out for six more Super Picture-Stamps.)

Senders of all jokes published are awarded handsome prizes.

LAZY.

Smith: "That fellow Jones always strikes me as being a lazy sort of chap."

Robinson: "Lazy! Why, I went out for a ride with him on Christmas Day, and he ran his car over the bumps to knock the ash off his cigar!"

(A Combination Knife has been awarded to K. Chapman, Shilton, near Coventry.)

POLITE.

Mother had particularly impressed upon Tommy to be polite at the Christmas party. Therefore she was very distressed when, turning to his neighbour, he said:

"Hi, Bill, pass the cakes!"

"Tommy, if you—what?" said his mother reprovingly, hoping her son would add the word "Please."

"If he doesn't I'll punch him on the nose!" finished Tommy.

(A Combination Knife has been awarded to W. Mansey, 22, Sidney Road, Feltham.)

AN UNFAIR REQUEST.

Fussy Gent (in restaurant, to neighbour): "Please don't make so much noise chewing that Christmas pudding!"

Neighbour: "I can't help it. You

don't expect me to have rubber heels on my teeth, do you?"

(A Grand Prize has been awarded to L. Bradley, Ballintason, Tamlaght, Ireland.)

TWO HUNDRED YEARS OLD!

Customer (to shopkeeper): "I say, you've let me down badly over that tortoise I bought from you yesterday. You said it would live for two hundred years, but when I came to give it to my nephew to-day as a Christmas present, it was dead."

Shopkeeper: "Sorry, sir, but the two hundred years must have been up!"

(A Pocket Wallet has been awarded to J. Ellis, Parker Arms, Newton, near Clitheroe.)

THE THREAT.

Mother: "You naughty boy, Tommy! If you don't behave yourself I shall send for a policeman."

Tommy: "Right-ho! And I'll tell him we haven't got a wireless licence!"

(A Combination Knife has been awarded to R. Worby, 9, Ellis Street, Manchester.)

Ranger Dan's—