

THE MYSTERIOUS "X"! WHO IS HE?

The
Penny Popular

No. 245.

Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.



THE MIDNIGHT ALARM!

(An Exciting Incident from the Long Complete Story of TOM MERRY & CO., contained in this issue.)

A Grand
Long Complete
Story, dealing
with the
Early Adventures
of
Jimmy Silver & Co.

HELD TO RANSOM!

By
Owen
Conquest

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Kidnapped!

JIMMY SILVER was missing! The news had travelled round Rookwood in an amazingly short time.

Tommy Dodd & Co. had been the first to bring in evidence which led to the belief that something serious had happened to him.

They had been lying in wait for Jimmy Silver in the lane, with the intention of playing a joke on him. They had seen him approaching; but instead of continuing along the lane to the spot where they were hiding, he had crossed the stile a short distance away, leading into the woods.

"We'll give him a chance to get a little way in," said Tommy Dodd, "then we'll follow him."

But shortly after, when they crossed the stile, they saw no sign of the leader of the Fistical Four.

They hurried on and searched around, but not a trace of the missing junior could they find. He had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

They had given up the search, and were making their way out of the wood, when, at the foot of some bushes near the entrance, Tommy Dodd had pounced upon a cap—a Rookwood cap—which, on examination, proved to be Jimmy Silver's!

They had hurried back to the school, and informed Lovell, Newcome, and Raby.

They had ascertained from Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, that Jimmy Silver had been given a pass to stay out after calling-over, as he was going to Latcham to buy some new films for his camera, which he was unable to obtain in the village.

Jimmy's chums were manifestly disturbed by the news which the Modern juniors had brought in. They decided, however, that the best course was to wait and see if Jimmy turned up later.

Bed-time arrived, but Jimmy Silver was still absent! The Head was informed, and a search-party of juniors was sent out; but they returned some time later, having been unable to discover any trace of the missing junior.

The police were informed, and the Head decided that nothing more could be done before morning.

A feeling of awe had spread over Rookwood by this time. Moderns and Classics alike were concerned and anxious.

Hardly an eye in the Fourth Form at Rookwood closed that night, and the early beams of the sun stole into the room and found the juniors still anxious and awake.

There were anxious faces round the breakfast-tables the next morning at Rookwood. Early in the morning the inspector from the Coombe police-station had been up to the school to see the Head. He brought the information that

his men were searching the wood for the missing boy, but that nothing had yet been discovered.

The news of Jimmy Silver's disappearance had been wired in several directions, and the police in Latcham had been notified. The inspector thought that something was certain to be heard of the boy soon. But breakfast was over, and there was still no news.

After chapel the boys wondered whether the morning classes would begin as usual. They did not feel in a mood for work, with the certainty now in their minds that something serious had happened to Jimmy Silver.

The Head announced after prayers that the Lower Forms would go into the classrooms as usual, and that the Fifth and Sixth were at liberty to join in the search for the missing junior.

Needless to say, this announcement was far from pleasing to the Modern chums and the remaining three members of the Fistical Four, and they decided to take the bull by the horns and go direct to the Head, and ask for permission to join the search-parties.

Dr. Chisholm received them kindly, and gave his consent provided they kept in close touch with the Sixth-Formers. They thanked him profusely, and were about to leave the study when the door was flung violently open, and a tall, slim gentleman, with a silk hat on the back of his head, rushed in. An astonished manservant was staring after him.

The Head started up in surprise.

"Mr. Silver!"

The juniors looked at the new arrival curiously. They knew James Silver senior well enough. Just recently he had been down at Rookwood for the juniors' sports.

"Doctor!" gasped the new-comer breathlessly.

"My dear sir!"

"Is it true?"

"Is what true?"

"My boy! Where is he?"

"How did you hear?" gasped the Head, in amazement. "I was keeping the unfortunate news back from you, in the hope of hearing something of the boy. I should have wired you at noon if he was not found this morning."

"Then—then it is true?"

"I am sorry to say that James is missing, but I sincerely hope and believe that nothing serious has happened to him!"

"True!" exclaimed Mr. Silver, sinking into a chair, his silk hat falling off the back of his head as he did so.

"True! The scoundrel!"

"Eh?"

"The villain!"

"What?"

"The blackmailing rascal!"

"My dear sir—"

"But, I won't pay the money!"

"Eh?"

"Or, if I do, I'll spend a thousand pounds, sir, in hunting down that kidnapping villain, and bring him to penal servitude!"

"What can you possibly be talking about?" exclaimed the bewildered doctor, passing his hand over his brow. "What—what do you mean, Mr. Silver?"

Both gentlemen seemed to have totally forgotten the presence of the wondering juniors. Mr. Silver groped in his pocket, and dragged out a crumpled and dirty sheet of paper, scribbled on in pencil.

"I got this by the first post this morning!" he gasped. "When I had read it, I ordered my car, and came down here as fast as it could bring me, sir!"

"That—what is that?"

"Listen to it, sir! This is what the scoundrel says—"

"What scoundrel?"

"The scoundrel who has kidnapped my son!" roared the irate father.

"Oh!" gasped the Head.

"Listen!"

"To Mr. Silver.

"Dear Sir,—Your son is in my hands, and I am keeping him safe. If the sum of one hundred pounds is paid to me he will be returned safe and sound to Rookwood School. Otherwise, you will never see him again, unless you fish up what is left of him from the river. If you decide to pay the money, I shall know your decision if you make a chalk cross on the big oak beside the stile in Rookwood Lane."

"There's no signature," said Mr. Silver. "What do you think of that for a note to get along with your morning cup of coffee? I thought it was probably a hoax, but I came down to see instead of wiring, so as to save time if it was really true. And you tell me that it is true?"

"It is true that Silver did not return to the school last evening," said Dr. Chisholm, "and the search has as yet failed to discover him."

"Then there is not the slightest doubt upon the point. He is in the hands of the scoundrel who wrote this letter, and being kept a prisoner somewhere for the ransom to be paid on him."

"It—it looks like it."

"I'm glad I came down," said Mr. Silver, fanning his heated brow. "I hope I didn't startle you by rushing into your study so suddenly."

"Well, you did somewhat. But it is of no consequence. Dear me, what an altogether unexpected and unpleasant occurrence! I— You boys, I thought you were gone!"

"Sorry, sir!" said Lovell. "We will keep this secret if you wish."

"Not at all!" exclaimed Mr. Silver. "Spread it everywhere, and somebody may guess what rascal it is who has gone into the kidnapping business. It's certain that it's some scoundrel known in the neighbourhood, I should think. The police may guess when they see this letter."

"It is possible," said the doctor.

"I think I'll run down to the station at once in my car!" exclaimed Mr. Silver;

and, snatching up his hat, he jammed it on his head, and was gone in a moment. The doctor, unused to such excitement, sank into his chair gasping. The juniors followed the visitor out. They were in time to see his long legs disappearing into the car. Then the car buzzed and hummed out of the gates of Rookwood and vanished in a cloud of dust.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Silver Senior Decides to Pay!

THROUGH that long day the search for Jimmy Silver went on, and when the dusk again fell over the landscape, the search-parties returned to Rookwood, baffled.

Mr. Silver had been to the local police-station, and interviewed the inspector there. The slow movements of the county police disgusted the gentleman. He accelerated them as much as possible by the offer of a hundred pounds' reward for the discovery of his missing son. But he told Dr. Chisholm plainly that he expected very little of the efforts of the local police.

"Then, what is to be done?" said the Head, clasping and unclasping his slim, white hands in a helpless way.

Silver senior rursed his chin thoughtfully. He was burning with impatience, and yet he could not think of a satisfactory way out of the dilemma.

The kidnapping of Jimmy Silver had fallen like a thunderclap on the Head.

Accustomed to quiet, scholarly ways, secluded from the main stream of life in the ancient walls of Rookwood, the Head seemed like a man rudely awakened from a dream by this breath, as it were, from the world of crime and violence.

Such a thing had never happened at Rookwood before, and now that it had come, the doctor simply did not know how to deal with it.

If the police failed, the Head was completely nonplussed.

Mr. Silver screwed his brows together in a great effort of reflection.

"We can't find the boy!" he exclaimed at last.

"It really seems so," murmured the Head. "The Fifth and Sixth Forms have been searching through the whole neighbourhood—"

"And the police can do nothing."

Apparently the boy is too well concealed for them to find him, or, probably, the kidnapper has taken him out of the neighbourhood."

The father shook his head decidedly.

"He is hidden somewhere close at hand, probably in the wood where he was kidnapped. A boy is not so easily carried away, and you must remember that it was daylight when he was kidnapped yesterday."

"That is true."

"I should imagine that there is some secret place in the wood."

"It is quite possible. It is an extensive one, and covers many miles, and, especially on the upper slopes of the hill, there are many parts almost unknown to the keepers themselves," said the doctor.

"But if he's there we can't find him," Mr. Silver drummed on the table with his knuckles. "If he's stuck away in some corner of the wood, he's probably tied up and gagged so that he cannot give the alarm."

"Poor, poor lad!"

"And as likely as not has had nothing to eat or drink since he was captured by this unknown scoundrel!"

"Dear me!"

"So I don't see what's to be done, unless we pay the money demanded," said Mr. Silver abruptly.

"Pay the money! But—but that is illegal!"

Mr. Silver made a gesture of supreme indifference.

"I'm not going to let my boy suffer for the sake of a hundred pounds. We can take it out of the kidnapper afterwards, for I'll spend a thousand pounds, if necessary, in hunting him down and bringing him to justice!" And the angry father thumped the table, and his eyes blazed.

"But the question now is to get Jimmy out of the hands of the kidnapper. If a hundred can do it, what's a hundred pounds to me?"

"But what guarantee have you that the ruffian will release the boy when the money is paid? May it not merely whet his appetite for more?"

"That's very likely."

"Well, my dear sir—"

"But by opening negotiations with him, we may get on his track; and that appears to be the only chance we have of getting into touch with him."

"Yes; there is certainly something in that."

"I will inquire."

The Head rang. He was soon informed that all the Fifth and most of the Sixth were in, and all reported failure. Bulkeley and Neville of the Sixth and the juniors were still absent, though the dusk was now falling thick.

"I can guess who the juniors are," Dr. Chisholm remarked. "The chief friends of your son and some of the best lads in the school. I gave them permission to be absent from classes to-day to join in the search. The other juniors have been searching, too, since school. The whole place is turning itself into a search-party, in fact. You will wait for the others to come in?"

"I think so."

"The inspector has promised to come up and make his report, too, this evening."

"I think I'll wait for him." Mr. Silver moved about the study restlessly. "I suppose it's no good hurrying. I haven't much faith in the police. The



Tommy Dodd's heart beat hard. Jim the Nailor stooped over the bound lad, and removed the gag from his mouth. But the boy's limbs did not move. Only the dark eyes stared wildly up at the ruffian.

"I think so. Either he gives up the boy when the money is paid, or he may be captured through coming to take the money."

"Very good!"

"The first step is to put the chalk mark on the tree as a sign that we are willing to open negotiations," said Mr. Silver. "That, at all events, commits us to nothing."

"Do as you wish, my dear sir. I can only say that I am overwhelmed by this unfortunate happening while your son was in my charge—"

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, Dr. Chisholm. The boys cannot be kept within the school walls, and this might have happened to any lad with rich parents, from whom money could be extorted."

"Yes; that is very true," said the doctor.

"Have all the searchers come in yet? I may as well hear the latest report before I put the mark on the tree."

inspector suggested putting the mark on the tree, and then watching there for the kidnapper. I won't have it. The fellow will be too cunning to show himself while the police are watching, and they won't be able to take him in. He's got more cuteness than the whole bunch of them!"

And the Head felt that it was probably true. They waited for the last of the search-parties to return.

The Rookwood fellows were at that moment leaving the wood, and turning their dusty and weary faces towards the school. Bulkeley and his companions, like the rest, had been unsuccessful.

Tommy Dodd had shown them the spot where Jimmy Silver's cap had been found, and they had endeavoured to find tracks in the wood, but entirely without success.

The hard ground bore no traces of the footsteps that had passed over it. Here and there the searchers thought they came upon a sign. But it led to nothing.

The day had passed in a weary, fruitless hunt.

They had had nothing to eat but sandwiches they had brought with them. In the dusk they turned their faces homewards, fatigued and dispirited, with a tale of failure to tell.

The Sixth-Formers strode on first, and the juniors, wearied in mind and body, dropped a little behind. They wore too tired to talk, and they plodded on dully towards the school.

Tommy Dodd glanced up carelessly as someone passed in the lane, and then gave a slight start. He had recognised the slouching, fur-capped figure that passed in the dusk.

It was that of a ruffian who had passed the ambush in the hedge the previous day—Jim the Nailor. The man glanced curiously at the weary schoolboys, and turned his head to follow them with his eyes.

The boys reached Rookwood, and went in at the gate wearily. To the questions of those who were waiting for them they could only reply with sad shakes of the head. Nothing had been discovered; there was nothing to tell.

Bulkeley went in to the Head's study to make his report, which was listened to in depressed silence by the two gentlemen there.

A little later the inspector from Coombe called, and he had only to tell that his men were making every effort, but had discovered nothing.

Mr. Silver shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I shall have to pay the money, if necessary; at all events, get into communication with the scoundrel," he said, when the inspector had gone. "I will make the chalk mark on the tree myself. There is nothing else to be done."

The doctor nodded.

"I suppose you are right?"

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Tommy Dodd Has an Idea.

A DISMAL party had gathered in the end study at Rookwood.

It was seldom that a day passed at Rookwood without some kind of a row between the Fistical Four and the Modern chums, but rows were "off" now.

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle had been the Fistical Four's keen rivals in the school, but now that the Fistical leader was in unknown peril, they would have braved anything to rescue him. They were quite as anxious about his safety as his own study-chums.

Tea in the end study was usually a pleasant and cosy meal, especially when there were guests; but it was a dull one this evening. The juniors were hungry after their long tramp, but they had hardly the heart to eat with the thought of their missing chum in their minds.

"Poor old Silver!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "Where can he be? That letter his father has doesn't throw much light on the subject, you know. We know he is a prisoner somewhere. But where?"

"Quite so," said Tommy Cook dismally.

"Somewhere in the wood on the hill, I imagine," said Lovell thoughtfully. "We haven't been over a tenth of the ground yet. It would take weeks to thoroughly search the wood, if the whole school and all the keepers turned out to the task."

"You're right!"

"If we could only——" began Tommy Dodd. Then he stopped, and jumped up suddenly from his chair—so suddenly that he sent a cup of tea flying off the table.

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"I've thought of something, and I believe—I really believe I've got on to the thing at last!"

"What have you thought of?" asked Lovell, not very hopefully.

Tommy Dodd looked greatly excited.

"You remember that ruffian-looking fellow we passed in the lane just before we came in a while ago?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. What about him?"

"He's a rotten bad character, who has been hanging about the village for some time. I have heard that he is called Jim the Nailor. Well, you remember that Tommy Cook, Tommy Doyle, and I had laid an ambush for Jimmy Silver, thinking he was coming along the lane

"Yes; you told us."

"He turned off at the stile, instead. But while we were ambushed there Jim the Nailor passed us, going towards the stile from the direction of the village."

Lovell gave a start.

"Then he must have met Jimmy!"

Either met him or seen him, at the least. When we went up the lane to look for Jimmy Silver it was empty. I was thinking only about Jimmy, and had quite forgotten the rough. But I remember now there was no sign of him in the lane, any more than there was of Jimmy Silver."

The boys were eagerly excited now.

"Then he must have taken the foot-path."

"It is certain that he did, or else we should have seen him."

"Then he followed Silver?"

"Evidently."

"My only hat! We've hit it, then! It was Jim the Nailor who kidnapped Jimmy Silver in the wood!" almost shouted Lovell.

Tommy Dodd's eyes were blazing.

"It's no good making too sure at first!" he exclaimed. "But it looks like it; and I, for one, believe it's true. Jim the Nailor, at any rate, must have been the last to see Jimmy Silver, as he was following him through the wood. He must have been near enough to see the kidnapping, as a matter of fact. The whole village is talking about the affair, and he must have heard of it. Why hasn't he come forward to say what he knows? He must at least have seen Jimmy Silver on the path."

"True!"

"We're on the track, I firmly believe," said Tommy Dodd, controlling his excitement. "If Jim the Nailor knows what's become of Jimmy, we'll jolly soon make him tell."

"Shall we go to the Head?"

"No."

"But what——"

"My dear chap, the Head would tell the police, and they would try to shadow Jim the Nailor, and would give the whole game away at the start."

"Yes, that's so."

"We're going to look into this matter ourselves," said Tommy Dodd, with an air of considerable importance. "If Jim the Nailor has kidnapped Jimmy Silver there's enough of us to deal with the scoundrel, I suppose?"

"Yes, if we can run him down."

"That's what I'm coming to. The kidnapper, whoever he is, has fastened Jimmy Silver up somewhere in the wood—in some cave up the hillside, I should guess—and left him there. He won't want to make it a hanging matter for himself, so he's pretty certain to go to him some time, to take him food and drink."

"I suppose so."

"He couldn't have gone through the wood in the daytime without being spotted by some of the scores of people who have been searching."

"Good! You think he'll go at night?"

"It seems to me pretty certain. Now, if it's Jim the Nailor, that's where we come in," said Dodd impressively. "We can easily find him at his haunts in the village. He is always hanging about the Bird-in-Hand. We'll spot him there."

"To-night?"

"This evening, certainly."

"That means breaking bounds after dark."

"Can't be helped. I fancy the Head will overlook that when we bring Jimmy Silver safe and sound back to the school. Anyway, I suppose we're all willing to risk a licking for the sake of poor old Jimmy?"

"Rather!"

"That's settled, then. We'll spot Jim the Nailor, and if he leaves the village we'll follow him. We'll track him wherever he goes. If he goes into the wood, we shall know he is the kidnapper, and then we shall only have to follow him far enough to find Jimmy Silver."

"Ripping! And capture the scoundrel himself!"

"If possible, yes. We'll take a cricket-stump each, and give him what-ho, if he makes a fuss," said Tommy Dodd, with a satisfied grin. "Now, if you've done tea, we'll get off. No good wasting time. We can get out now before the gates are closed, if we buck up."

Five minutes later the juniors, careless of calling-over, were speeding down the shadowy lane towards the village.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The Rescue!

THE gleam of light from the windows of the Bird-in-Hand in Coombe fell across the shadowy street, and glimmered upon the trunk of the big beech opposite the inn.

From the inn came the sounds of voices and the clinking of glass, plainly audible to the ears of the juniors lurking in the shadows behind the big tree-trunk.

"You are sure you saw him go in, Duddy?"

"Yes, certain."

"It's a long time."

Nino pealed out from the village church.

"Nine!" said Raby, with a deep breath. "I wonder what they think us at Rookwood."

"No good thinking of that now," said Tommy Dodd. "If we succeed, we're all right. If we fail, it means a licking. But we've got to run the risk for Jimmy Silver's sake."

"Look!" exclaimed Tommy Cook, in a suppressed voice, pointing across the street.

From the shadows where they lurked the juniors had seen the door of the Bird-in-Hand swing open many times, each time letting out a flood of light into the dusky evening and the sound of a chorus. But each time they had been disappointed in their hope of seeing Jim the Nailor reappear. But this time they were not disappointed.

The burly, though slouching figure, the fur cap and black pipe, clearly seen in the glare of light from the open door, were not to be mistaken.

It was Jim the Nailor at last!

He stood for some moments before the inn, lighting his pipe. Then he turned and slouched away up the dark street towards the darker lane.

"He's going out of the village!" muttered Tommy Dodd.

"Good! Follow him."

"Careful! If he sees us, all's up."

With great caution the juniors followed the ruffian. Their caution was needed, for Jim the Nailor was in a suspicious mood, and he looked round into

the shadows many times. But he did not see his pursuers.

He plunged into the starless darkness of the lane, and was lost to sight; but the juniors easily followed his heavy footsteps.

Their hearts were beating with wild excitement now. The manner of the ruffian, as well as the direction he had taken, seemed to hint that the suspicion that he was the kidnapper was correct. They heard him stop at the stile and clamber over it.

The stars were coming out one by one in the dark sky, and in the glimmer they made out the burly figure of the ruffian again. He plunged under the shadowy trees, and they heard his heavy footsteps ring upon the footpath.

In a few moments they were over the stile and following him. Deep into the lonely wood he went, till, somewhere near the spot where Jimmy Silver's cap had been found, he turned off into the thick trees.

The juniors halted on the spot where he had left the path, and listened. His heavy form brushing through the foliage was a sufficient guide. They fell into single file, and followed cautiously. There was a glimmer of light ahead.

"My hat!" muttered Tommy Dodd. "That settles it!"

He was right. The ruffian might have entered the wood to poach, but he would not then have lighted the lantern. He had evidently obtained a light to find his way to some remote and hidden recess which was inaccessible in the darkness.

The light gleamed weirdly on the bush and bramble and foliage. The wind rustling in the trees was sufficient to disguise any slight sounds made by the eager juniors.

But they were very careful. They had taken out the cricket-stumps from under their coats now, and gripped them ready for use. They would probably be wanted soon.

The light wound on through the wood, through thicket and bramble. They were now in a part of the wood always lonely and unfrequented, seldom visited even by the keepers. The light suddenly disappeared.

The Rookwood juniors halted. "Where's the brute got to?" muttered Lovell.

"I fancy he's reached the place, whatever it is," whispered Tommy Dodd. "Come on, and as quiet as mice."

Like spectres the juniors stole forward. The light glimmered into view again, coming from between the thick foliage of a green mass of bushes, through which Jim the Nailer had evidently passed.

What was beyond? As far as the juniors could see only the dark mass of the hillside rose behind the bushes. Tommy Dodd gave a sudden start as the truth dawned upon him.

"It's a cave!" he muttered. A cave it undoubtedly was—an earthen hollow in the hillside, the opening covered and hidden by the massive bushes. Tommy Dodd, his eyes blazing, cautiously parted the thick foliage.

He could look through now into the hollow opening beyond, and in the gleam of the lantern-light he caught sight of the rough earthen walls, and two figures, one that of Jim the Nailer, who had just set the lantern on the ground; the other that of a boy, lying on a bed of leaves, bound hand and foot, with a gag tied in his mouth.

Tommy Dodd's heart beat hard. Jim the Nailer stooped over the bound lad, and removed the gag from his mouth. But the boy's limbs did not move. Only the dark eyes stared wildly up at the ruffian.

"Hallo! I've brought you some food,

as I promised," granted the ruffian. "Wake up! What's the matter with you? Don't pretend you've fainted. You can't take me in like that."

"I—I—" It was the gasping voice of Jimmy Silver. "Oh, I am numbed and cramped! I have been in torture!"

"All your father's fault for not payin' up," growled Jim the Nailer. "When the money's in my 'ands you go free, but not afore then."

"Give me something to drink."

"Ere you are—water, with a dash of somethin' in it; and, I tell you, I'm bein' kind to yer to bring yer anythin'."

Jimmy Silver drank eagerly. His face, chalky white in the light of the lantern, showed how terribly he had suffered, lying a bound prisoner on the bed of leaves in the dark cave during the long day.

His bonds were not tied with extreme tightness, but quite securely; and he was tied in addition to a stake driven into the ground, so that he could not attempt to roll out of the cave.

The ruffian, probably for his own sake as much as anything else, had spared him as much as possible. But the cramped confinement had told upon the unfortunate junior.

"You—you scoundrel!" he muttered, finding his voice again. "I reckon you're more likely to get prison than a ransom over this."

Jim the Nailer grinned.

"We'll see," he replied. "The police hev been searching for you all day, but they hain't got a clue to you yet, and they won't 'ave. I've 'ad this in my mind for weeks, my young shaver, and a hundred pou' ain't all I'll have out'er your wealthy father, either."

"You had better let me go—"

"Ha, ha! I can see myself doin' that—I don't think! I—Hallo!"

The ruffian broke off with a yell of startled affright as Tommy Dodd rushed through the bushes into the cave, his cricket-stump whirling aloft.

Jim the Nailer threw up his right arm to defend his head, and the next moment his arm dropped numbed to his side as the stump crashed upon it.

The other juniors were after Tommy Dodd in a moment.

As the ruffian groaned with the pain of his injured arm, five more cricket-stumps circled over his head; and, though he dodged some of them, two crashed upon him, and he fell to the ground, half stunned. In a twinkling the juniors had hurled themselves upon him, and he was pinned to the ground under their weight.

"Hurrah!" roared Tommy Dodd. And the wood rang with the joyous shout of the Rookwood juniors.

"Hurrah!"

Jimmy Silver gasped in amazement.

"What the—how the—"

"It's all right, old chap," cried Lovell; "we've found you! We'll have you loose in a jiffy. Hold that rotter, kids, and we'll tie him up with his own rope!"

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"Good!"

Lovell had Jimmy Silver untied in a few minutes. Jim the Nailer was in no condition to offer much resistance, and he was quickly bound with the rope removed from his former prisoner. And the juniors did not spare the knots.

Jimmy Silver staggered to his feet. The chums of Rookwood hugged him ecstatically. Jim the Nailer glowered at them like a demon, but little they cared for his rage.

"Hurrah!" cried Tommy Dodd. "Come on, Silver; back to Rookwood, old chap!"

"I shall be jolly glad to get there, and to get outside a square meal," said Jimmy.

"I should think so. We'll leave this rascal tied up here for the police to fetch; they'll be glad of him," grinned Lovell. "Come along, old son! Lean on my shoulder."

And with the rescued junior in their midst, the successful and gleeful chums set out for the school, sure of a cordial reception there now.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm. "What can all that noise be?"

The sound of wild shouting in the Close and the Hall had interrupted the conversation in the Head's study.

Mr. Silver started to his feet.

"Is it possible that Jimmy—"

The door opened. Seven juniors presented themselves to view, with a cheering crowd behind them—Lovell, Newcome, Raby, Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle—and in the midst of them, muddy and worn and white of face—Jimmy Silver!

"My boy!" shouted his father, in amazement and joy.

"Hallo, pater!" said Jimmy, with his usual coolness. "Glad to see you!"

James Silver senior hugged his recovered son to his breast. The doctor stared almost dazedly at the juniors.

"Lovell, Dodd! What does this mean?"

"We found him, sir."

"And we've captured the thief, too!" exclaimed Raby.

"I hope you'll excuse us for breaking bounds, sir?"

The doctor could not help smiling.

"Under the circumstances, I must not only excuse but thank you," he said.

"Lovell, you tell me what has happened."

"And I'll get something to eat, if you don't mind, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "I've been tied up in a muddy cave for a night and a day, with only a crust and a drink of water all the time, and I'm rather peckish."

"Certainly, my boy! I cannot say how glad I am to see you again! Bulkeley, please see his wants attended to. Now, Lovell."

And the junior told the whole story. When he had finished Mr. Silver slapped him heartily on the back.

"These youngsters are the right stuff, doctor!" he said.

And the doctor smilingly acknowledged that he thought so, too.

Jim the Nailer had plenty of time, in the seclusion of a stone cell, to reflect upon the error of his ways, and it is to be hoped that he did so.

While at Rookwood the affair was a nine days' wonder, and for nearly a week there was not a single row between the Modern chums and the Fistical Four, a surprising result of the effect wrought upon the juniors by Jimmy Silver's peril.