

THE MOAT HOUSE MYSTERY!

By
CHARLES
HAMILTON

Len Lex, schoolboy detective, on the track of a mystery is like a terrier after a rat—he never lets up until his quarry is in the bag!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

CLANKING CHAINS!

"I SUPPOSE I know whether my own uncle's house is haunted or not!" said Harvey warmly. "I tell you, Jerningham Moat House has been haunted since the umpteenth century—sportsman in white, clanking chains, horrid groans, and all that!"

"Seen it?" asked Banks, winking at Len Lex.

"I haven't exactly seen it, and I haven't exactly heard it!"

"I thought not," agreed Banks.

"Tell us about it, old bean," said Len Lex, gently restraining Harvey as he grasped a cushion to hurl at

the unbelieving Banks. "A haunted house, at Christmas, is simply jolly."

"Well, I don't want to put you off the place, as you're coming with me for the hols," said Harvey.

"My dear chap, a ghost is an extra attraction! I wouldn't miss it for worlds!"

"Same here!" murmured Banks. "Somebody get up and turn on the light, if Harvey's going to make our flesh creep! And shut the door—there's a draught."



Nobody got up. The three Fifth Formers, in Study No. 8 at Oakshott, were taking it easy after tea, and nobody felt disposed to move.

It was dim and dusky in the study. The December darkness had fallen on the school. The winter wind, whistling from the Sussex downs, pattered snowflakes on the window-panes. The study fire burned with a ruddy glow, gleaming on the faces of the three fellows sitting round the fire, casting strange lights and shadows.

Oakshott School was breaking up for Christmas the next day. After tea in Study No. 8, Pie Porringe had gone down to look for letters, and Len Lex, Harvey, and Banks sat round the fire talking of the holidays. As the dusk deepened, only the fire illumined the study, and shadows lurked in the corners and danced on the walls.

"Carry on, old man," said Len.

"I'm not guaranteeing that the story's true," confessed Harvey. "But I can tell you that lots of people round the Moat House believe it. It happened centuries ago. There was a Sir Lucian Jerningham then, same as there is now. He had a nephew, who was heir to the title and estate. This chap bagged him one dark winter's night, and parked him in the dungeon below the level of the moat—a dark, damp, dismal dungeon, where he——"

"Caught a cold," suggested Banks.

"Shut up, ass! Where he perished."

"Must have been perishing cold there!" said Banks. "That nephew must have been a bit of a perisher, too!"

"Will you dry up, idiot? The new man held high revel in the old oak hall," went on Harvey, "while the rightful lord of the mansion was perishing in chains in the deep, dark

dungeon. On Christmas night, when the new man was holding his revels with his boon companions, there came a sudden strange sound from the dungeon stair!" Harvey paused impressively.

"It was the sound of a rattling chain," he continued. "Clink, clink, clink! Clank, clank, clank! The new lord of the manor started to his feet. Slowly the sound approached the great oaken doors of the hall—and all within stood stricken silent, their eyes fixed on the doors, which slowly opened of their own accord!" Harvey paused again.

"From the darkness," he went on, "came a haggard figure, with hair white as the driven snow, and chains on its limbs that rattled and clinked as it moved, uttering deep groans at every step! Slowly, with rattling chains, it drew nearer and nearer to the new lord, who stood transfixed, gazing at it in frozen horror! An icy finger touched him!"

"Grooogh!" said Banks.

"And he fell upon his face amid the wine-cups! Then suddenly all was dark!"

The fire in Study No. 8 blazed up for a moment, and died down, leaving the study almost in darkness. Harvey's voice went on, in the shadows:

"Through the darkness came the sound of a groan, and then the rattle of chains—clink, clink!"

Clink!

Harvey broke off suddenly, Len Lex started, and Banks gave a startled yell as through the darkness and silence of the study came that sudden strange, startling clink of metal.

"Oh!" gasped Harvey.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Banks.

"What——" began Len.

Clink, clink! Groan!

For a startled second the three sat

there as if petrified, staring into the circling shadows. The ghost story had suddenly changed into reality. Then they bounded to their feet, and Len Lex leaped to switch on the light.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

NOT SO FUNNY!

PORRIDGE of the Fifth grinned. He had gone down to look for letters. Coming back with an unopened letter in his hand, he found the study in darkness, save for a glow from the fire, and heard the voice of Harvey telling the ghost story. Pie paused at the door—grinning!

He felt in his pocket for a bunch of keys. It seemed no end of a joke to Pie to weigh in with a clink and a groan at the psychological moment. He clinked the keys and groaned—a deep, hair-raising groan. It seemed fearfully funny to the goat of the Fifth. It seemed to him still more fearfully funny as he heard the startled exclamations of the fellows in the study.

He clinked the keys again, suppressing a chuckle, and stepping softly in, let out another hair-raising groan.

"What the thump——" yelled Banks as that fearful groan came directly behind him.

Crash! Len Lex, leaping for the switch, crashed into an unseen figure in the dark. It went over backwards, with a yell.

"Ow! Yaroooooh!"

"Pie!" yelled Harvey.

"That goat!" gasped Banks.

Len switched on the light. Pie, a bunch of keys in one hand, a letter in the other, scrambled to his feet.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he chortled.

"You priceless goat!" yelled Harvey. "Making a fellow jump nearly out of his skin!"

"Ha, ha!" chortled Pie.

"You benighted chump!" roared Banks.

"Ha, ha!"

"Bump him!" yelled Harvey and Banks together.

"Here, I say—hold on!" yelled Pie as his exasperated friends collared him. "I say, can't you take a—whoop—joke? Ow! Don't bang my head on the fender, you blithering idiots—yaroooooh!"

Pie struggled madly. The bunch of keys flew from one hand, clanging in the fender. The letter flew from the other, landing in the fire. Pie, heedless of either, struggled and roared.

"Here, look out!" exclaimed Len.

He made a jump at the fire to save the letter. It was rather unfortunate that, at the same moment, Pie got one hand free and hit out fiercely. Whether he was hitting at Harvey or at Banks was not clear; what was painfully clear was that Len Lex got it. Pie's lashing fist jolted on his chin, and he staggered back, stumbled over a chair, and went full length on the carpet.

"Oh!" gasped Len.

"Will you leggo?" yelled Pie, as his friends secured him again, and gave him another bump on the hearth-rug—what time Len Lex sprawled, and the letter blazed up in the fire and was consumed to ashes.

"There!" gasped Banks. "You goat——"

"There!" panted Harvey. "You fathead——"

"Oh! Ow!" Pie gurgled, and scrambled up. "You dummies! Can't you take a jig—jig—jug—joke? Ow! I've a jolly good mind—— Oh crumbs! Where's that letter?"

Pie picked the bunch of keys out of the fender and stared round for

the letter. A wisp of white ashes in the fire was all that remained of it.

"You goat!" gasped Len. "It went into the fire!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" snorted Harvey. "You've jolly well chucked your letter into the fire, you potty ass!"

"It—it's gone!" stuttered Pie, staring into the fire.

"Hadh't you read it?" asked Len.

"Eh? No, of course not! I was bringing it up to the study——"

"Well, it's your own silly fault!" said Harvey. "You couldn't drop a letter without letting it fall into the fire! You all over!"

"Well, I don't mind if you don't!" said Pie.

"Well, I don't!" hooted Harvey. "Not a rap!"

"That's all right, then!" said Pie. "I should hate to lose a letter, just before Christmas, but if you don't mind——"

Harvey jumped.

"Wharrer you mean, you ass? Wasn't it your letter?"

"No; yours. I brought it up to the study for you."

Harvey gazed at him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Len and Banks. They could not help it. The expression on Harvey's face was too much for them.

"Mum—mum—my letter!" stuttered Harvey. "Mum—mum—mine! Why, you—you goat! You ass! You unspeakable idiot! I—I—I'll——"

"You said you didn't mind——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'll show you whether I mind or not!" shrieked Harvey. He grabbed up a hassock and hurled himself at Porringe. "Now, you, ass——"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Here, I say—yaroooooh! Drag-gimoff! Stoppit! Oh, crumbs!" spluttered Pie, as he backed and dodged. "I say—— Oh, my hat! I say—— Whooop!"

Pie dodged out of the study and ran for it! Harvey pursued him to the doorway, still swiping with the hassock. He hurled it after him, and a wild yell floated back as Porringe vanished.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

PIE, AS PER USUAL!

LEN LEX breathed deep in the frosty air, and his face was as bright as the gleam of the winter sun that came from a steely sky. It was a cold and frosty morning. The snow had ceased to fall, but it lay like a white mantle in the Oakshott quadrangle, and ridged walls and roofs with gleaming white.

Fags of the Fourth were hurling snowballs at one another. One from Root missed its aim and knocked off the hat of Oliphant of the Sixth, captain of Oakshott—and Root stood petrified with horror at what he had done. But Oliphant only smiled as he picked up his hat. The spirit of Christmas was in the air—which was lucky for Root.

Len smiled as he walked on, tramping in snow. Nephew of Detective-Inspector Nixon of Scotland Yard, he had come to Oakshott School more as a detective than a schoolboy. But the case of the Sussex Man had been wound up successfully by the schoolboy detective, and Len remained simply as Lex of the Fifth. He liked Oakshott—he was enjoying life there; he liked Harvey and Banks; he liked even that goat Porringe. Study No. 8 was a happy family, from which Bill Nixon's nephew would have been sorry to break away.

There was going to be no parting with his friends this Christmas, at all events, as Harvey had asked his three study-mates home for the holidays at his uncle's house in Hampshire. It was a very welcome invitation to Len, not only because he liked old Harvey and the other fellows, but because he had no near relations but Bill—and Bill was a busy man.

So the Christmas holiday was going to be at the Moat House, which, from Harvey's description, was a most romantic and attractive old spot. His uncle, Sir Lucian Jerningham, had a liking, it seemed, for boyish company at Yuletide, which Study No. 8 agreed showed that he was a jolly old sportsman. He was, Harvey confessed, a bit ancient, but full of beans, wealthy and generous—and fond of his nephew Cedric. The only fly in the ointment, according to Harvey, was that the old baronet's other nephew, Captain Jerningham, would be there, and Harvey did not like the captain, who, he said, put on side.

In every other respect the Moat House was absolutely jolly. There was an ancient moat, a deep, dark, dank dungeon, where, according to the legend, a former Sir Lucian had been chained up and done to death by his wicked nephew; and the ghost of that ancient lord of the manor, who dragged his chains and groaned in the stilly night. There was a

jolly old butler, named Whishaw; there was the old bean's secretary, Mr. Chard, who, said Harvey, was chubby and jolly, though he was rather bald, and stacked with knowledge.

Altogether, it looked good to Len, and he was looking forward to the Moat House and Christmas there. And if there really was a spectre—which Len doubted—it would be rather fun to track him down, and an easier task than tracking down the Sussex Man. Len, thinking it over as he walked in the quad that cold, frosty morning, looked merry and bright as he came on Harvey and Banks in serious consultation.



Pie spotted Harvey at the open window; his arm went up and the snowball flew. "Oooooogh!" stuttered Mr. Chowne as the snowball caught him on the right ear.

" 'Phone ! " Banks was saying.

" What's up ? " asked Len.

" Well, I'm a bit worried," said Harvey. " You know that goat Porringe landed my letter in the fire yesterday. Well, I find that the fathead noticed that the postmark was Olkham, and that's where the Moat House is, see ? Looks to me as if it was a letter from my uncle. Everything's fixed up, of course—it's all right. Still, nunky must have had something to say, if he wrote."

" Quite ! " agreed Len. " Well, there's a 'phone in Common-room, and you can ask leave to ring up the Moat House."

" I think I'd better," said Harvey. " I rather wonder that nunky didn't ring me, if he had something to say at the last minute like this. I've a jolly good mind to kick that goat ! "

" 'Phone nunky instead," said Len, smiling.

Harvey nodded, and the three Fifth Formers walked back to the House. A whizzing snowball dropped a couple of yards ahead of them, and they glared round at the cheery Pie. Pie, clearly, was in great spirits, and expressing it in his usual goat-like way. He missed, of course ; Pie could not have hit the side of a house with a snowball or anything else.

" Hold on a minute ! " said Harvey. " Give that goat a few ! "

They held on a minute, and gathered snow.

Whiz, whiz, whiz ! Crash ! Smash ! Bash ! Porringe rolled in snow, and roared, as three snowballs, in swift succession, crashed and smashed and bashed on him. Grinning, the three walked on, leaving Pie to roar.

Porrige scrambled up, red and wrathful, gathered a snowball, and rushed in pursuit. By that time, however, the trio were in the House.

Chowne, master of the Shell, was standing at the tall open window of the Common-room, looking out into the quad. There was a slight frown on Chowne's face. He had spotted Porringe with a snowball grasped in his hand, and Mr. Chowne did not approve of horse-play in the quad.

" There's Chowne," said Banks, at the doorway. " Ask him, and get going."

Harvey, leaving his friends at the door, went into Common-room. He approached the master of the Shell.

" If you please, sir," said Harvey, in his most respectful tone, " may I use the telephone——"

Harvey was interrupted. Pie, at that moment, spotted him at the open window. Pie, with a snowball in his hand, was not likely to lose such a chance. His right arm went up, and his snowball flew.

Which would not have mattered very much had Pie's aim been good. But the snowball missed Harvey by a foot or more, and caught the master of the Shell on the right ear as he stood half-turned towards Harvey.

" Oooooogh ! " stuttered Mr. Chowne, very much surprised. He staggered, lost his footing and fell. From the quadrangle came a gasp and a pattering of feet. Pie saw what he had done. Horrified, he flew.

" What—what—what—— " stuttered Mr. Chowne dizzily. " A—a—a snowball ! Harvey ! How dare you ! You — you — you young rascal ! " Chowne sat up. " Upon my word, you—you—have dared——"

" I—I—I—— " gasped Harvey, while Len and Banks, in silent horror, gazed from the doorway.

Mr. Chowne staggered to his feet. Evidently he supposed that that snowball had been intended for him, as he had got it. Still worse, he

clearly suspected that Harvey had deliberately drawn his attention so that the snowballer could take him off his guard and get him. Chowne almost foamed.

"I shall report this to your headmaster, Harvey—you and Porringe and Lex and Banks—all of you. Upon my word——Groooooogh!" Mr. Chowne gouged snow from his ear.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Harvey. "I—I never——"

"Go! I shall report——"

"I—I—I—really, sir—I—I came to ask if I might use the telephone, sir——"

"You may not!" thundered Mr. Chowne. "Go! Leave this room! I shall report——"

Harvey joined his friends at the door and they faded away.

"That goat!" said Banks. "I say, what are you going to do now, Harvey, old man?"

"I'm going to look for Porringe!" he hissed. "Come and help me!"

They went and helped him. Oakshott School was breaking up that day, and from the fearful yells that proceeded from Porringe of the Fifth, when his friends found him, it might have been supposed that Pie was breaking up, too!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

SOMETHING WRONG!

THROUGH the winter dusk a few light flakes whirled on the sharp wind. Four fellows, coat-collars up about their ears, caps pulled down, bags in their hands, stood in the dim street outside the little village station at Olkham, and stared about them in the gloom.

They had been waiting about, and staring into the thickening gloom, for a quarter of an hour or more, since a slow train, after many changes,

had landed them at that remote Hampshire village. It had been a cold and rather tiresome journey, and Harvey & Co. were looking forward to stepping into Sir Lucian Jerningham's car and whirling away to the Moat House and bright firelight, warmth, and hospitality. But they waited in vain. There was no car at the station and no sign of one coming.

"It's weird!" said Harvey. "Blessed if I can make it out! Nunky knew my train, of course, and arranged to send the car to pick us up."

"I suppose the snow wouldn't stop it?" said Banks.

"Not enough for that. Besides, if it did, he would send somebody or something! Only—he hasn't."

"What about walking it?" suggested Len. "We've got legs."

"A mile and a half—through this!" Harvey looked glum. This was not the sort of thing he had planned for his friends. It was disconcerting and very perplexing.

"Any sort of lift to be got in this show?" asked Porringe, with a glance round at snow-roofed cottages, from which not a light glimmered.

"Not to save your life!" answered Harvey. "Wheelbarrow, perhaps!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Can't make it out! Nunky's not the man to forget. And even if he did, Captain Jerningham's there, and he would remember—and Whishaw, too. Whishaw would see to it, or old Chardy. The car must have started and had an accident—that's all there is to it!" said Harvey. "Rough luck on you men—looks as if we've got to hoof it."

"Rot!" said Len cheerfully. "We can hoof it all right!"

"Right as rain!" said Porringe. "Keep your peckers up! Look here,

let's trot, and do some snowballing as we go along——"

"Kill him!" said Banks.

"Look here, Banker——"

"Oh, come on!" said Harvey.

"The car's hung up on the road—that's it. We may pass it and get picked up. Better start, I think."

All four were tired of hanging about in the cold wind. They started to walk. In Olkham it was dim; outside Olkham, on the country road, it was almost as black as a hat. Through the darkness the powdery snow on the road glimmered and flakes whirled on the wind. Muffled up in their coats, swinging their bags, the four Oakshott fellows tramped.

Harvey was rather glum—personally, he did not mind very much, but he felt that it was rough luck on his guests. Banks and Len were cheery enough, and Pie kept up a merry whistle—out of tune, of course, and melodious only to Pie's own ears. After a half-mile of tramping through cold wind and whirling flakes, and dense darkness, however, Pie's whistle died away—rather to the relief of his friends.

No car was passed on the road. From the road they turned into a lane, which was muddy as well as snowy and windy. Leafless trees arched overhead and groaned in the bitter wind. Still there was no sign of a car, either as a going concern or hung up in a conked-out state.

It undoubtedly looked as if no car had left the Moat House to pick up Sir Lucian Jerningham's visitors. Which was perplexing to Harvey's friends, after what he had told them about the kind-heartedness and unbounded hospitality of that jolly old bean, his Uncle Lucian; and more and more disconcerting to Harvey himself, who could not help feeling a

little sore at what looked like careless neglect.

Harvey came to a halt at a gate, ridged with snow, under dark trees.

"Look here, you men, goodness knows how and why, but the car never started," he said. "We shan't get picked up. This is a short cut through the park, and will save half the distance. May as well take it, as we've got to leg it."

"Good egg!" said Len.

"Hear, hear!" said Banks. "I shan't be sorry to see a fire!"

The gate groaned on rusty hinges and they passed through. Beyond lay a footpath under leafless, frosty, old oaks and beeches. Snow and fallen leaves crumpled under their feet. If the lane had been dark, the footpath was darker, and there was a grunt from Porringe as he bumped into a tree.

"Wow!"

"Clumsy ass!" said Banks.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Len, startled. "What——" A sudden beam of light shot through the blackness. Someone was on the dark path ahead of the Oakshott men, and evidently he had heard them. The electric torch shone in their faces, almost blinding them with its sudden light. They blinked at the shadowy, burly figure behind it.

"Who are you?" rapped a sharp, authoritative voice. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Pie. "Is that a footpad?"

"You burbling blitherer!" hissed Banks. "It's a bobby!"

It was a figure in uniform that loomed behind the sudden light. Two keen eyes scanned their startled faces.

"Who are you?" repeated the sharp voice.

"We're going to the Moat House," answered Harvey. "I'm Sir Lucian



"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Harvey, as the Oakshott fellows stood outside the deserted station in the winter gloom. "Nunky arranged to send the car to pick us up."

Jerningham's nephew, if you want to know."

"What do you mean? Sir Lucian's nephew is a man of thirty—you look like a schoolboy——"

"You're a credit to the Force!" chuckled Harvey. "You've guessed it in one! I'm my uncle's nephew, all the same—on the other side of the family. Name's Harvey, if you're interested."

The constable made no reply to that. For a long moment he scanned the faces of the Oakshott quartet; then the light was suddenly shut off.

"You can go on, sir," he said civilly. And the Oakshott fellows tramped on, the burly figure of the constable vanishing in darkness.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

THE PHANTOM OF THE DARK!

LEN LEX had a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow as he tramped on with his friends. That sudden challenge from the darkness had

startled the whole party. Len could not help wondering why a constable was patrolling a footpath in Sir Lucian Jerningham's park, keenly on the watch. He had seen that the party were schoolboys, and allowed them to pass on. But for whom, or what, could he have been watching?

The other fellows were wondering also, and Porringe propounded a suggestion that was worthy of his brilliant intellect.

"Poachers!" said Pie.

"What?" yelled Banks.

"That bobby was watching for somebody!" said Pie. "Must have been poachers—what?"

"Goat!" said Harvey.

"But what the dickens was he at, though?" said Banks. "Can't be

walking about there because he enjoys the weather. And this is private land, isn't it?"

"Yes. Hallo! Look! Is that another?" exclaimed Harvey.

At a distance from the footpath a subdued light gleamed, moving among the trees. The Oakshott fellows came to a halt, staring at it, as it shifted and glimmered and finally vanished. They could not make out, in the distance and the darkness, who carried the light. When it was gone, they moved on again, in subdued silence, wondering.

Harvey broke the silence at last.

"I don't get this!" he said. "Something must be up—looks as if the police are searching the park! What the dickens for?"

"Poachers," said Pie.

"Fathead!" said his three friends together.

"Well," said Pie, "I jolly well think——"

"Listen!" muttered Len.

His keen ear caught a sound, close at hand. The four Oakshott men came to a halt, their hearts beating faster. The darkness—the silence of the desolate park—were having rather a creepy effect on them. The sound came again—a faint rustle in frosty thickets.

"Another bobby!" muttered Banks. But he spoke without conviction. It was not a constable who was moving so stealthily in the dark. A constable, too, would surely have turned on a light. It was somebody who had evidently heard the school-boys' voices and footsteps, but did not choose to make himself known. The rustle died into dead silence; and they peered into the darkness, seeing nothing, yet knowing that someone was close at hand.

"Who's there?" called out

Harvey. And there was a slight shake in his voice. They listened for a reply, but none came.

"Not a bobby this time!" muttered Banks.

"A poacher!"

"Idiot!"

"Hark!" breathed Harvey.

From the blackness, moaning on the wind, came a strange, eerie sound—a long groan. It caused the Oakshott fellows to jump almost clear of the ground. Pie clutched the arm nearest him—Len's.

"Look!" he breathed.

It was a glimmer of white from the black—the height of a man's face from the ground. But no features could be distinguished; only a patch of flat whiteness, ghostly and eerie. And from that patch of glimmering white came the sound of a groan, prolonged, rising and falling on the wind. Then the white glimmer vanished, and all was black again and silent, save for the moaning of the December wind in the bare branches.

"What—what—was it?" muttered Banks through his chattering teeth.

Harvey shivered.

"Let's get on!" he muttered. "It's nearly half a mile yet. Let's get on and get out of this!"

They hurried on. Harvey and Banks and Pie, if they were not scared, certainly felt their hearts beat very unpleasantly. In a lighted room by a ruddy fireside a ghost story was one thing; in a black and lonely wood at night it was quite another. And the thought of the phantom of the Moat House was in their minds. They did not run, but they walked very fast, without speaking. And as they went there came at intervals a faint sound—the cracking of a twig, or the brushing of a branch—behind them in the blackness of

the path, which hinted that that strange and mysterious presence was haunting their footsteps. Then, low and faint, came that shuddering groan, echoing eerily on the wailing wind.

"I—I say, it—it's jolly c-c-cold!" stammered Pie. "What about sprinting? It'll warm us up!"

They broke into a trot—the three of them. In the dense gloom, none of the three noticed that Len Lex dropped behind.

Len was not insensible to the eerie influence of that strange, unearthly sound in the lonely and desolate wood. But he pulled himself together. Superstition had no part in the make-up of Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew. Someone—or something—was haunting the footsteps of the Oakshott party as they hurried through the dark wood—and he was going to know who, or what, it was!

That it was trickery was clear to the schoolboy detective's cool and practical mind, though he had to admit that it was inexplicable. For no one, either at the Moat House or elsewhere, could have known that they were coming by that lonely path through Jerningham Park—no one could have planned to waylay them there to play upon their terrors with ghostly trickery. Some stranger, who could not even have seen them, but could only have heard their voices, was playing this ghastly trick! Why? Who could it be, roaming in the gloom at the risk of being spotted by the police who were searching through the park?

Whoever it was—whatever it was—Len was going to know. At that moment, Bill Nixon's nephew ceased to be a schoolboy and became a detective again. Quietly, he dropped behind his hurrying friends, backed under a

frosty beech by the footpath, and waited. The heavy tramping of three pairs of boots receded up the path, and Len calculated that the ghostly pursuer would hardly detect that it was not the sound of four. He waited—watchful in the darkness.

Len could have kicked himself for not having a flashlamp in his pocket. There was no time to unpack one from his bag. In black darkness he waited and watched, every sense on the alert.

A shadow loomed. Len heard deep, fast breathing. He smiled—grimly. It was not a phantom that was breathing so fast and hard as it trod on the track of the schoolboys.

He listened intently. Evidently the ghostly pursuer, knowing that he had the party on the run, did not know that one had dropped behind to wait for him. He had them scared, and was keeping them scared, no doubt intending to keep up that eerie trickery till they escaped from the wood. That he had no suspicion that one had stayed behind was quite clear—for the black shadow, and the deep breathing, passed Len as he stood backing against the beech, invisible. And as it passed, the schoolboy detective swung round the suitcase in his right hand, and it crashed on the back of a head.

The black shadow toppled forward. There was a grunt, and the sound of a fall. The scarcely seen figure was on its hands and knees in the snow, knocked spinning by that sudden crash. Len dropped the suitcase and leaped on the sprawling form.

His grasp closed on it—on a thick overcoat! It was human—there was no doubt about that. The groaning phantom of Jerningham Park was solid flesh and bone in a thick overcoat—and, in spite of the sudden

surprise and shock, as alert and active as a cat! Even as Len Lex grasped, the figure twisted over and grasped in return, struggling and wrenching. Len found himself struggling in a grip that was too strong for him, sturdy as he was. But he held on, and shouted:

"Harvey! Come back, you men! I've got the rotter! Stop!"

The trampling footsteps up the path ceased. A startled voice called back—Harvey's.

"Lex! Is that you? What——"

"Come back! Help!" shouted Len, exerting all his strength, as his unseen antagonist wrenched to free himself. "Help!"

There was a sound of running feet. The three Oakshott boys were running back along the footpath. A loud yelp told that Porringe had dashed into a tree. Harvey and Banks came running on.

A crashing blow caught Len under the chin. His grasp relaxed as he stumbled and fell, and the unseen one wrenched himself away. There was a rustle in the frosty wood as he plunged away in the darkness and vanished. A moment more, and Harvey and Banks were stumbling over Len as he sprawled, dizzy from that crashing blow.

"Lex!" shouted Harvey. "Where are——"

"Here!" panted Len.

He scrambled up, panting.

"I got him, but he's got away! He's nearly knocked my chin through the back of my head! He's got a hefty punch, for a spook! Your family ghosts must do a lot of physical jerks, Harvey! They've got muscle!"

"It—it—was—somebody!" gasped Harvey.

"Playing ghost!" said Len. "Goodness knows who, or how, or why—I

don't! I know he's given me a first-class jolt! Ow!"

Len groped for his suitcase and picked it up. Harvey and Banks stared round them in the dark. A rustle died away in the distant wood—the unknown was gone!

"I say!" Pie's voice came plaintively. "I've banged my dashed nose on a dashed tree, and the dashed claret's simply pouring——"

"You would!" said Banks.

"Let's get on!" said Len. "I don't think that sportsman will trail us any farther—he won't want another cosh on the napper from this bag!"

"Not a giddy spook, anyhow," said Banks. "But who the dickens can——"

"Come on!" said Harvey.

They tramped on—with no further sound of a ghostly pursuer. They emerged from the park at last. Harvey led the way through frosty gardens to a bridge that spanned the ancient moat encircling the mansion. They arrived in a high stone porch, and Harvey groped for the massive old knocker and crashed it with a thundering knock that must have awakened every echo of the ancient Moat House.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

STARTLING NEWS!

THE great oaken door opened to reveal the lighted hall within, with a log fire leaping and blazing in a wide old hearth, lights gleaming on polished oak walls, antlers, weapons, and holly and mistletoe.

Hospitable and welcoming looked the old hall of the Moat House. But the plump, portly, apple-cheeked butler who had opened the door stared at them wide-eyed in startled surprise.

"Master Cedric!" gasped Whishaw.

"You—and your friends!"

"Sort of!" said Harvey. "And glad to get in! Why the dickens wasn't the car sent, Whishaw?"

"The—the car?" stammered the butler.

"We've had to leg it," said Harvey. "What are you blinking at, Whishaw? Taking me for a ghost, or what? Where's my uncle?"

"Your uncle!" gasped Whishaw. "Oh, Master Cedric——"

Len Lex eyed the portly face of the Moat House butler curiously. Banks and Porringe exchanged a queer glance. It was evident that Whishaw was not expecting the party—that he was startled and surprised to see them walk in. Something, it was clear, was wrong, though they could not imagine what.

Harvey looked grim. He was as surprised as his friends, and still less pleased. A manservant came forward to help them off with their coats. In his face was reflected the surprise in the butler's. A door at the back of the hall opened, revealing booklined walls, and a rather tall and handsome young man looked out.

"What is it, Whishaw?" he called. "Inspector Shute again—what? Great Scott! Is that Cedric?" He stared at Harvey, jammed an eyeglass into his eye, and stared again. "You here, Cedric!" he barked.

"What the thump do you mean, Cecil?" hooted Harvey. "Why shouldn't I be here? Aren't I expected? What do you mean?"

Harvey's three friends could guess



"Come back, you men! I've got the rotter!" shouted Len Lex, hanging on to the dark figure.

that this was his cousin, Captain Jerningham, nephew and heir of the lord of the Moat House. His look expressed angry surprise and annoyance.

"Didn't you get my letter at the school?" he exclaimed. "You must have had my letter!"

"Your letter?" repeated Harvey. "Oh, it was from you, then—I thought it was from Uncle Lucian."

"Are you mad?" barked the captain. "If you had the letter——"

"I never read it—it dropped in the study fire before I had a chance to!"

"You young fool! Is this the place for a schoolboy party? Pah! Whishaw, has Chard come in yet?"

Captain Jerningham took no further notice of the Oakshott party.

"No, sir," stammered Whishaw. "I thought Mr. Chard was with you, sir——"

"We went separate ways in the wood," growled Captain Jerningham. "I got in a quarter of an hour ago. Tell Chard to come to me when he comes in—and Shute, if he calls again."

"Look here, Cecil Jerningham!" bawled Harvey. "I want to know what all this means?"

Slam! Captain Jerningham stepped back into the library and closed the door with a bang, without taking the trouble to answer. Harvey's face was red as he looked at his friends.

"That's my cousin," he said. "I've told you he is a sidey ass, but I've never seen him like this before. By gum, he's never had the nerve to carry on in this style in my uncle's house. Whishaw, you old ass, what's the matter with him?"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Whishaw. "Captain Jerningham wrote specially to tell you that in the circumstances it would be wiser not to bring your friends to the Moat House this Christmas, and to suggest that you should, if possible, go with one of them for the holidays, sir——"

"He wrote that?" gasped Harvey. "My hat! Is Cecil Jerningham master of this house, and undertaking to give orders whether I accept my own uncle's invitation or not? By gum! I'll tell him soon enough where he gets off, blow his dashed impudence! Where's my uncle, Whishaw?"

"Oh, Master Cedric——" stammered the butler.

A sudden change came over Harvey's face, and he grasped at the portly butler's arm.

"What's up? Speak, you ass! My uncle—is he ill or—or what?" Harvey's face had paled. "Whishaw, where's my uncle?"

"No one knows, sir," faltered the butler. "The police are searching for him everywhere. Sir Lucian Jerningham disappeared last Monday, Master Cedric, and has not been heard of since!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

A CRY IN THE NIGHT!

It was long past midnight, but Len Lex was not sleeping.

The December wind wailed in the leafless old trees round the Moat House, and the old house itself was full of strange sounds. Lying wakeful in the old four-poster, while the leaping and falling flame of the dying log-fire on the hearth filled the room with mysterious shadows, Len was thinking of the spectre that was said to haunt the Moat House—the restless spirit of the old lord of Tudor times, who had been done to death by a greedy heir in his own dark dungeons.

Len was thinking of it with the suspicion in his mind that perhaps history was repeating itself this Christmastide!

Harvey of the Fifth was, perhaps, sorry that he had brought his friends to his uncle's house for Christmas in the strange and tragic circumstances. Len Lex was far from sorry. What Banks and Porringe thought about it he did not know, but he was glad he was there—not as Lex of Oakshott Fifth, but as the nephew of Detective-Inspector Bill Nixon of Scotland Yard—as the schoolboy detective!

To his friends, and to everyone at the Moat House, Len Lex was a schoolboy, like any other Oakshott fellow; but that made his task easier as a detective. He had come to the Moat House as a schoolboy on holiday—he was going to stay as a detective with grim business in hand.

Poor old Harvey had been absolutely knocked over when Whishaw, the butler, told what had happened to his uncle. He was going to find Len Lex a friend in need—at least, so the schoolboy detective hoped.

The strange, eerie sounds of the old house echoed in Len's ears as he lay wakeful, thinking. But among those many and varied sounds there was none to fix his attention, until there came a metallic clank from the passage outside his room.

Len sat up, his heart beating with a sudden throb, his breath coming faster. That was no natural sound of the ancient building. It was the clank of a chain, rattling as it moved. According to the legend of the Moat House, the spectre of the old lord stalked abroad at midnight's hour, clanking and rattling the rusty chains that had held him a prisoner in the dungeon beneath his own mansion. Even the cool, clear-headed schoolboy detective felt, for a moment, a superstitious thrill.

The next, Len was out of bed, stepping swiftly to the door. Silently he opened the door and peered into the dark, oak-walled passage. The darkness was intense. He could see nothing. But he could hear, faintly but unmistakably, that clanking of an iron chain. Human or ghostly, the spectre of the Moat House was walking within a few yards of him.

The rooms of the four Oakshott fellows were together, two on either side of that old passage. Harvey's

was next to Len's. A faint glimmer, from a dying fire within, showed him that Harvey's door was open. Did he detect a moving shadow in that faintly glimmering doorway? It was from that direction that the jingle of iron came.

Len, with set teeth, stepped out into the passage, silent with his bare feet, heedless of the cold. Harvey's door was open—he could not have left it open.

From Harvey's room came a startled cry:

"Who—who—what—— Oh, good heavens!"

Light shone from the doorway. Harvey had flashed on his bed-lamp, and in the lighted doorway a strange, weird, startling figure stood. It was the figure of an old, old man, in the ruff and trunk hose of Tudor times, with long hair, white as the driven snow, a long, white beard, and a face of such ghastly whiteness that it was like a mask of death. Round the figure's waist was a chain, old and rusty, with loose ends that clinked and clanked as he moved.

Len Lex clenched his hands and ran forward. Man or ghost, he was going to know what it was. From Harvey's room came a cry of horror and dread. It seemed from the motions of the spectral figure that it was about to enter the room of Sir Lucian Jerningham's schoolboy nephew—but it stopped and turned, with a sudden clanking of chains, towards Len Lex, no longer silent as he came up the passage with a rush.

Instantly the figure disappeared from the lighted doorway and flitted up the passage. Len Lex rushed after it in the dark. He shouted as he passed Cedric Harvey's open door:

"Come on, Harvey!"

He was past the doorway in a

twinkling, dashing after the flitting spectral figure, unseen now in the darkness of the passage. Ghost or trickster, he had it now, for at the end of that passage there was no exit, only a tall window that looked out over the moat. Man or ghost, it must be cornered there. There were long, heavy hangings over the window to black out the light. His outstretched hands came in contact with them, and he groped to right and left.

"Harvey! A light!" he yelled.
"Porridge! Banks!"

A calling voice answered—that of Banks, from his room. A door opened, light gleamed into the passage and Banks ran out in his pyjamas. Another door opened, and Porridge looked out, rubbing his eyes. Harvey appeared the next moment—his face white, his eyes starting. Bright light illumined the passage from end to end, as Banks found the switch and turned it on.

It shone on four faces—the faces of the Fifth Formers of Oakshott—on glimmering old oak walls, the floor, the dark hangings at the windows—and on nothing more!

Len Lex stared round him. The spectre of the Moat House was gone. He had almost touched it as he rushed after it, but in the darkness it had vanished utterly; and the four Oakshott fellows were left staring at one another blankly in a passage otherwise empty!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

HANDS OFF!

CAPTAIN JERNINGHAM tramped in at the doorway, kicking snow from his boots. He threw down his hat, to which several white flakes clung, as Whishaw helped him off with his coat. It was a bitter morning; and to judge by the ex-

pression on Cecil Jerningham's face, his temper was as bitter as the weather.

His face, naturally rather handsome, was darkly clouded, his brows knitted. His glance shot to an open doorway across the hall, from which came a sound of boyish voices, and his look grew blacker. The plump, apple-cheeked butler of the Moat House coughed.

"The schoolboys, Whishaw!" muttered the captain.

"Yes, sir, they are at breakfast!" murmured Whishaw.

"Is Chard down yet?"

"Mr. Chard is at breakfast in his own room, sir!"

Captain Jerningham strode into the breakfast-room, where his cousin, Cedric Harvey, and his friends were at breakfast. A great log-fire crackled and roared in the grate, booming in the wide old chimney. The diamond-paned windows were rimmed with frost. The four schoolboys looked round as the captain appeared in the room.

Cecil Jerningham stood for a moment or two regarding the four schoolboys in silence. Harvey rather ostentatiously helped himself to rashers and kidneys, no doubt to show his cousin Cecil exactly how much he cared for his black looks. But the captain, when he spoke, was unexpectedly quiet and civil.

"It seems, Cedric, that you never got the letter I wrote you at the school before Oakshott broke up," he said.

"That's so," said Harvey.

"It's unfortunate, but I suppose I can't blame you for having come, as you never knew what had happened. But now you're here, you can see for yourself, Cedric, that this is no place for holiday-making."

"I'm not going!" said Harvey.

Captain Jerningham breathed hard. But he answered quietly :

"Sir Lucian is not here, Cedric. His fate is unknown. He may be dead—indeed, I fear he must be dead, for otherwise, how can his disappearance be accounted for?"

"I'll believe that when I have to," said Harvey. "Not before."

"Alive or dead, he is missing, and this is no place for schoolboys on holiday," said the captain sternly. "I tell you plainly, Cedric, since you seem to have no idea of the fitness of things, that I can endure nothing of the kind. I will order the car, if you tell me what train you are going by."

Len and Banks and Pie were silent. Harvey did not speak immediately.

He gave the captain a long, hard look, then glanced round at his friends.

"We'd better have this clear, you men," he said. "My Uncle Lucian asked us here for Christmas. We were booked for a jolly holiday. That's all washed out now. You can guess I'm not feeling jolly—and I don't suppose that the state of affairs here makes you fellows feel bucked. If you'd rather clear, I shan't take it amiss. In fact, speaking as a pal, I'd advise you to, if you want to enjoy your holidays."

"You're sticking on?" asked Banks.

"Like glue!" answered Harvey grimly. "I'm not going till I know what's happened to my uncle."



The tall young man jammed an eyeglass into his eye and stared at Harvey. "You here, Cedric!" he barked. "What the thump do you mean, Cecil?" hooted Harvey. "Why shouldn't we be here?"

"Same here—if you want us."

"Of course I want you, fathead, if you can stick it."

"Done!" said Banks.

"Done!" said Len Lex, like an echo.

"Brace up, old man!" said Porringe. "We're sticking to you! It will be jolly if we find nunky, old bean—no end jolly! And we're going to find him!"

Captain Jerningham started, and fixed his eyes on Pie.

"What do you mean?" he snapped harshly. "Do you imagine that you have the remotest chance of discovering what has become of Sir Lucian Jerningham?"

"Lots!" answered Pie cheerfully. "I know I'm jolly well going to root about till I jolly well put salt on his tail, and chance it!"

"Fool!"

Pie looked warlike.

"I'd jolly well boot you for that at Oakshott!" he said. "Who are you calling a fool, blow you?"

"If you can't speak to my friends civilly, Cecil, you'd better not speak at all!" exclaimed Harvey hotly. "You're not master of the Moat House and Jerningham Park, Cousin Cecil, so long as my uncle lives—and I'm his nephew as much as you are! You've got no more authority over me than I have over you. You can give orders till you're black in the face—and that's what I care for them!" And Harvey snapped his fingers contemptuously at the angry face across the breakfast-table. "I came here on Uncle Lucian's invitation, and I'm staying until Uncle Lucian washes it out—and I'd no more go at your orders than I'd go at Whishaw's!"

Len Lex sipped hot coffee, his eyes on the captain's face, watching it grow crimson with anger.

"By Jove!" Captain Jerningham almost panted. "You insolent young rascal! Do you want me to drive you out of the house with my riding-crop?"

"Try it on!" roared Harvey. "We'll handle you fast enough if you do. You're not master of the Moat House yet, Cousin Cecil—though you may think you've got good reasons for fancying you are! What do you want to get shot of me for? Are you afraid I shall find out what's become of Uncle Lucian?"

Captain Jerningham started as if an adder had stung him. His face paled and reddened, and paled again.

"You—you dare to hint——" He choked with rage, strode round the table, and laid his hands on Harvey.

"Now, you young scoundrel—now you——"

Len, Banks and Pie rushed to the rescue. Three pairs of hands grasped Captain Jerningham and he was wrenched away from Harvey. He went staggering across the room, stumbled over backwards and fell full length with a crash. He lay sprawling dizzily on the floor, spluttering for breath. The Oakshott fellows watched him warily. Whishaw's startled and amazed face looked in at the doorway, his eyes almost popping from his head.

"Hands off, you rotter!" panted Harvey. "Keep your paws to yourself, Cecil Jerningham! Wait till you're master of the Moat House!"

Captain Jerningham staggered to his feet. The Oakshott fellows lined up promptly. He looked for a moment as if he would hurl himself upon them in a burst of fury. But he choked back his rage. Perhaps the horrified gaze of Whishaw, at the doorway, recalled him to self-control.

He gave Harvey one long, bitter look, brushed past the butler, and tramped out of the room.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

PIE ON THE TRAIL!

THE stocky, red-faced man in uniform came across the bridge over the ancient moat, glanced at the four schoolboys who stood in a group under the mullioned windows of the library, and raised his eyebrows a trifle. Judging by that glance, Inspector Shute, of Holme, shared Captain Jerningham's opinion that the Moat House, with its shadow of mystery and tragedy, was no place for schoolboys on holiday. Pie Porringe looked round at him.

"That's the jolly old inspector, Harvey," he said. "Come on, and get the tip straight from the horse's mouth—what?"

Harvey nodded, and went quickly towards Mr. Shute, his friends following him. The inspector was going towards the great stone porch at the front of the old mansion, but he stopped and fixed a look of rather grim inquiry on the Oakshott fellows.

"Inspector Shute?" asked Harvey. "You've heard of me, perhaps—Cedric Harvey, Sir Lucian Jerningham's nephew. We came here for Christmas—to hear that my uncle had disappeared a couple of days before. I want you to tell me exactly what happened—so far as you know. You can guess that I'm worried and anxious!"

The rather grim expression on Inspector Shute's face relaxed as he read the lines of anxious trouble in Harvey's face. He could see that the boy was fond of his uncle, and that what had happened had been a heavy blow to him.

"I quite understand that, Master

Harvey," he said. "I'm sorry that there's no news, so far. As for what's known, I can put it in a nutshell.

"Sir Lucian Jerningham disappeared on Monday night. He was in the library with his secretary, Mr. Chard, dealing with matters of business, up to eleven o'clock. At that hour, Mr. Chard bade him good-night and went to bed, leaving Sir Lucian smoking a cigar and looking over the evening paper.

"In the morning, Whishaw found the french window of the library open when he came down. Sir Lucian's valet, Peek, reported that his master was not in his room, and that the bed had not been slept in. Captain Jerningham and Mr. Chard were at once called, and a search was made of the grounds on the supposition that Sir Lucian had gone out and for some unknown reason failed to return.

"This supposition was borne out by the discovery of a half-smoked cigar near the bridge-end, on the outer side of the moat. Nothing, however, was seen of Sir Lucian—and a fresh fall of snow had covered all footprints. As nothing was learned by lunch-time, the police were called in. Search has been going on ever since. That is all."

"Look here! If old Harvey's uncle was snaffled by somebody, ten to one there'd be signs of a struggle!" said Pie, when the inspector had gone.

"Inspector Shute may have thought of that!" murmured Len Lex. "He may have looked, old bean!"

"Oh! Think so?" said Pie.

"Fathead!" said Banks.

"Well, we want to know all the jolly old details if we're going to look for Harvey's uncle and find

him," said Pie. "And that's what we're jolly well going to do, if it takes us till the new term at Oakshott. You buck up, Harvey, old man!"

Harvey smiled faintly.

"Yes, that's a good tip, though it comes from Pie," said Len Lex quietly. "Buck up, old man! Your uncle is alive—and while there's life there's hope!"

"Feel sure of that?" asked Harvey. Of Len Lex's connection with Scotland Yard and detective business he knew nothing, but he had an instinctive faith in his cool, clear-headed judgment.

"I feel so sure of it," said Len, "that I'm going to back up old Pie all along the line—searching for your uncle till we find him—alive and well!"

"Lex, old man, you're talking sense!" said Pie approvingly. "I've thought sometimes I should make a pretty good detective! Between ourselves"—Pie lowered his voice—"we jolly well know where to look for the man. We jolly well know who comes into the whole bag of tricks if Sir Lucian never turns up, and who's already putting on the airs of a master in the house, as if it was his already—what?"

Harvey breathed hard. That thought was in his own mind; he could guess that it was in every mind at the Moat House. Pie was the man to jump at the obvious, and fancy that he was making wonderful discoveries.

"Detectives look for the motive first of all," went on Pie. "And there's the motive, sticking up like a goalpost! The old sportsman walks out to finish his cigar on the terrace before going to bed—a certain party follows him out—and has him just where he wants him. That party is

pretty hefty, easily able to handle an old man who's walked out of the reach of help!

"But he's not villain enough to knock his own relation on the head. So long as the old bean disappears and never turns up again, he snaffles the loot all right. What we've got to find is, where's he parked him—what?"

"If you've got it right, old man, the detective business must be a pretty easy job," said Banks. "It hasn't taken you long!"

"Easy to some chaps, not to others, Banker," said Pie. "It wants thinking out. Now, Harvey knows this place like a book. Any place in the grounds, Harvey, where a prisoner could be hidden away—outside the moat?"

"Not that I know of," said Harvey.

"Why outside the moat?" asked Len.

Pie gave him a pitying look.

"The old bean's cigar was picked up at the other end of the bridge," he said. "Didn't you hear the bobby say so? That's where the brute got him, and he dropped it, I fancy. Anyhow, we know he went as far as that. May have turned back there after his stroll and was grabbed by the other party. That party, naturally, wanted him as far from the house as possible when he grabbed."

"The police are still searching the park," said Harvey. "A body could be hidden there, but a prisoner—never!"

"What about a car?" said Pie. "The party I'm speaking of got him to a car and ran him off—place all ready to park him in umpteen miles away! Has that cousin of yours got a car of his own, Harvey?"

"Yes—it's in the garage here!"

"I fancy I'll stroll round to the



Three pairs of hands grasped Captain Jerningham and he went staggering across the room and fell full length with a crash!

garage," remarked Pie, winking at his friends. "I'd like to know whether that car was out on Monday night."

He walked away. Harvey glanced after him, with a faint grin, then looked at his friends.

"Come into the house," he said. "I want to see Chard, if he's down yet. I've got an idea, and I think Chard may be able to help."

As they went to the porch, Inspector Shute came out again with Captain Jerningham. Taking no notice of the schoolboys, they walked

across the bridge and disappeared into the snowy park beyond. Len Lex noted how lined, almost haggard the captain's face looked. Whether he had, or had not, a guilty secret on his conscience, it was clear that he was feeling the strain severely. They found Whishaw in the hall.

"Chard down yet, Whishaw?" asked Harvey.

"Not yet, sir. He has breakfasted in his room," answered the butler.

"That's a new thing for Chard, isn't it?" asked Harvey. "He was always an early bird!"

"Mr. Chard has caught a slight cold, sir, helping in the search in the park. He keeps to his room somewhat the last few days."

"We'll wait for him in the library," said Harvey. "Come on, Lex!" Harvey and Banks went to the library, but Len lingered a moment to speak to the butler.

"Which end of the bridge did you pick up that cigar-end on Tuesday morning, Whishaw?" he asked.

"The other end, sir," answered Whishaw. "But it was not I who found it—it was Mr. Chard!"

Len followed his friends into the library.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

WHAT HARVEY SUSPECTED!

LEN LEX looked about him with keen interest in the old library of the Moat House. It was a large, lofty apartment, with book-lined walls. Mullioned windows and a more modern french window looked out on the moat and the terrace before the house. Here and there, among the endless books, were ancient paintings of dead-and-gone Jerninghams.

Harvey stopped before one full-length portrait of a man in Tudor costume and made a gesture towards it.

"Old Sir Lucian," he said. "My uncle's jolly old ancestor, who was locked up in the dungeons by his nephew and died in chains." He shivered slightly. "You saw him, Lex, when I did—last night!"

Len nodded, eyeing the ancient, faded portrait curiously. It closely resembled the phantom of the night, except for the deathly paleness of the spectral face. If that strange apparition had been trickery, no doubt the trickster had taken that old portrait

as his model. The Tudor costume had been reproduced to the last detail.

"I never saw it, you know," Banks glanced dubiously from one to the other. "Sure you didn't fancy it, Harvey, old man? You were a bit upset, you know——"

"If I fancied it, Lex didn't!" answered Harvey shortly.

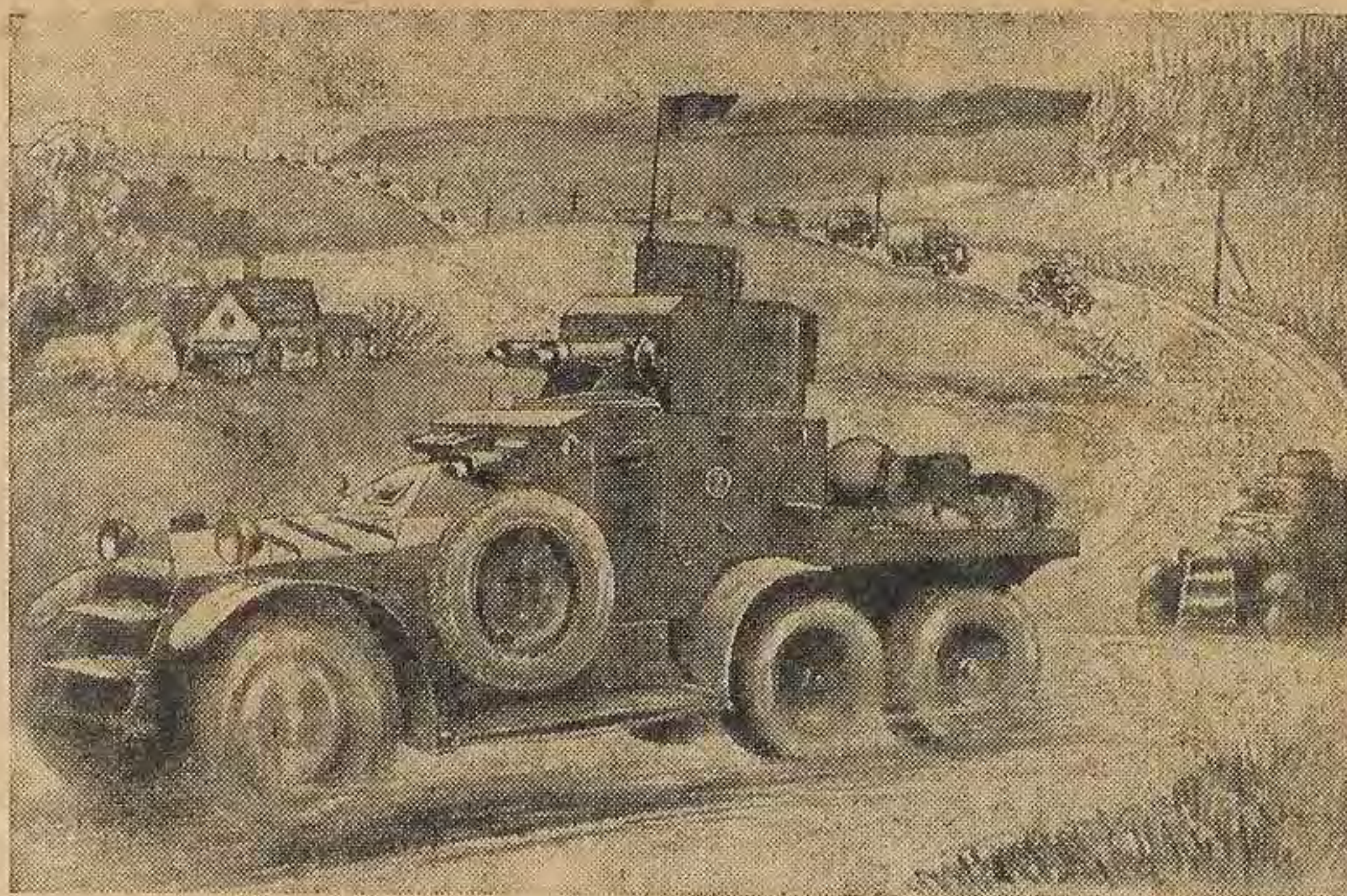
"But——" Banks shook his head. "Ghosts are a bit thick—and if it was some sportsman playing ghost, how did he get clear? We had him cornered, unless he glided through a solid wall."

"That's what I want to talk to Chard about," said Harvey. "Let's wait for him here—this is old Chardy's den."

With a swish of rings on a rod, he drew aside long velvet hangings that screened a deep alcove in the wall of the library near the great fireplace. It was like a small room, with a large writing-table, a roll-top desk, two deep leather armchairs, and a shaded electric lamp. A diamond-paned window admitted the wintry sunshine. From floor to ceiling the walls were of solid oak, black with age, in panels carved here and there with curious scroll-work.

Books and papers lay on the table, many of them obviously connected with the business of the estate. But among them was a black-letter manuscript, under a paper-weight, on which Len's eyes lingered. The strange old letters and monkish Latin were not easy to read, but Harvey had told him that this sort of thing was "pie" to Mr. Chard, who was librarian at the Moat House, as well as the old baronet's secretary. A pile of more modern manuscript, in a clear, beautiful calligraphy, indicated that Mr. Chard had lately been at

THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



The Mechanised Cavalry, besides using light tanks, is equipped with armoured cars of several different types. There is the "light" six-wheeled car weighing 5 tons, armed with two '303-inch machine-guns; the "heavy" six-wheeled car weighing 7 tons 5 cwt., armed with one '5-inch and two '303-inch machine-guns, and a lighter four-wheeled car of 4 tons armed with one Vickers machine-gun.

The illustration shows a troop of armoured cars escorting a convoy of lorries. The car ahead flies the "Squadron Column Flag," a blue pennant only carried by officers in command. The cars shown are Lanchesters, armoured against small-arm fire and shrapnel, carrying one '5-inch and two '303-inch

machine-guns, though if they are equipped with wireless only two guns are carried. They have a crew of four and weigh 6½ tons, with a cruising speed of 25 m.p.h. When necessary the plating of the cars can be electrified to prevent the enemy boarding them when operating in hostile towns or at close quarters with enemy infantry.

Not being equipped with caterpillar wheels it is easy for a retreating enemy to stop the advance of the armoured cars by digging pits or putting obstacles in their path, but to combat this the cars are equipped with detachable running boards for use as temporary bridges. In this way fairly difficult obstructions may be surmounted.

work on his projected volume on the "Antiquities of Jerningham."

"Chard works here," explained Harvey. "We always called it his cosy corner. Jolly little place for a bookworm, what?"

"Chard's a bookworm?"

"Live, moves, breathes, and has his being in stuff that would make an Oakshott beak's head ache!" said Harvey. "But he's a jolly good man

of business, all the same. Worth his weight in gold to Uncle Lucian. He does practically all his business for him. He's been with nunky for years. Decent old boy—always civil to a chap—a bit different from my Cousin Cecil."

"Thank you for an unsolicited testimonial, Master Cedric!" said a rather rich, truity voice, and the three looked round at a plump but sinewy

man with a bald forehead, who had entered the library and arrived at the "cosy corner." He carried a green baize bag in his plump hand.

"Oh, here you are, Chardy!" said Harvey, shaking hands with him. "These chaps are my friends from Oakshott—Lex and Banks. You'll see Porringe presently. He's gone off playing the goat. We're going to hunt for my uncle. I want you to help."

"I don't quite see what can be done, Master Cedric. Almost every foot of the grounds, and the park, has now been searched——"

"That's not what I'm thinking of," said Harvey. "Look here, Chard, I'm going to speak plainly. Once upon a time a Sir Lucian Jerningham was shut up in a dungeon by a nephew who couldn't wait. I want to know whether that's happened over again."

The secretary's plump face became exceedingly grave.

"That is a terrible suspicion to enter your mind, Master Cedric!"

"Terrible or not, it's there," said Harvey. "Look here, Chard, don't gammon—you must have thought of it, too! Who would want to get rid of my Uncle Lucian, except——" Harvey broke off. "You see what I mean? I want to spot that old dungeon where Sir Lucian of Tudor times was shut up. You get me?"

"I follow your meaning, certainly," said Mr. Chard gravely. "But you are aware that the old legend is only a legend—nothing is actually known of a secret dungeon beneath the Moat House." He smiled. "You will remember, Master Cedric, that when you have spent previous holidays here, you have explored, hunting for that non-existent dungeon. I remember once that Sir Lucian, in jest, offered you a motor-cycle as a prize

if you succeeded in discovering it. It has no real existence."

"Well, I jolly well believe it has," said Harvey, "and I'm jolly well going to find it, and you're going to help, Chard! And I jolly well believe, too, that the man who snaffled Sir Lucian knows that that's the very thing I should think of at once, and wants to clear me off, for that very reason."

Mr. Chard started.

"You think that?" he exclaimed.

"I jolly well do!" said Harvey. "It's not only because he doesn't want my company, Chard, though he's never liked me. He's afraid of what I may spot, taking that line in hunting for my uncle. That's not all. Somebody spotted us coming through the park on our way here last night and played ghost! Captain Jerningham was out of the house at the time!"

"He was in my company, searching the park, most of the time——"

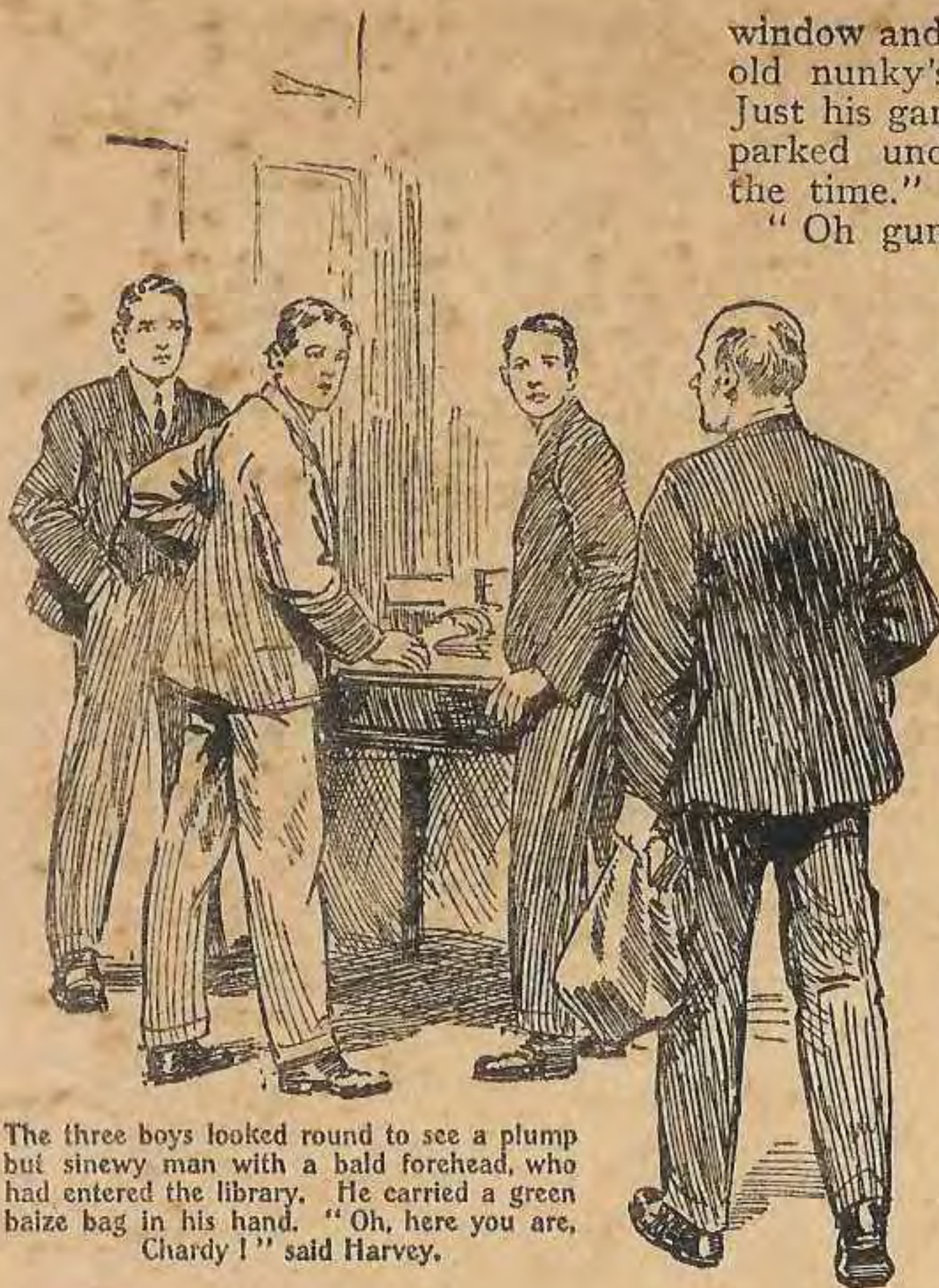
"But not all—he came in first and was here when we arrived, and you were still out!" said Harvey. "I heard him tell Whishaw that you separated and went different ways in the park."

"That is certainly true. But I cannot think——"

"Well, I can!" said Harvey. "And that's not all, either! Last night we saw the ghost of old Sir Lucian!"

"Master Cedric!"

"It gave me a turn, too!" said Harvey with a shiver. "Lex and I got after it, but it vanished through a solid wall. I'm going over that wall with a small comb to-day, Chard! It's pretty well known that there are secret passages in this old place. I want you to root through those dashed old parchments—there's a chest full in this library—and see if



The three boys looked round to see a plump but sinewy man with a bald forehead, who had entered the library. He carried a green baize bag in his hand. "Oh, here you are, Chardy!" said Harvey.

you can spot anything like a clue to the secret dungeon. It's a chance, at least—and you're the man to find it."

"I will certainly do as you wish, Master Cedric. But you appear to overlook the fact that Sir Lucian was out of doors, at a distance from the house, when he was attacked."

"Was he?" said Harvey. "For all I know, he might have been tackled in this very library!"

"Wha-a-t?" Mr. Chard stared.

"Well, think of it," said Harvey. "Easy enough to open the french

window and to chuck the end of poor old nunky's cigar across the moat. Just his game, if he'd got old nunky parked under the Moat House all the time."

"Oh gum!" said Banks, staring at his chum.

"I am afraid, Master Cedric, that you are allowing the ancient Jerningham legend to influence your judgment," said Mr. Chard, with a smile. "At all events, I will do what you have asked me to do, and— and hope that something may come of it. At the moment I have some matters of business to which I must attend."

The Oakshott fellows took the hint and left the alcove. Mr. Chard, still with the green baize bag in his hand, stood watching them, a faint smile on his plump face, as they went out of the library. Then, with a swish of rings, he drew the velvet hangings across

the alcove, shutting himself off from the apartment.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

A CLUE?

PORRIDGE grinned as the sound of Captain Jerningham's angry voice reached him. Looking into the library from the hall, he had a view of the back of the captain's sleek, well-brushed dark head over the top of an armchair.

It was near lunch-time, and the captain had come in tired from a weary tramp in the frosty woods. He

scowled at the sight of Harvey, Len, and Banks gathered round the fire, and threw himself into the armchair, his feet stretched out to the logs. The three Oakshott boys were also glad of the warmth of the fire, for they had spent most of the morning exploring the ancient vaults under the Moat House—dark and dank and dismal and chilly.

"You young fools!" The captain's voice was deep with angry annoyance. "I hear from Whishaw that you asked him for the key of the vaults. Is that where you have been?"

"That's where!" said Harvey curtly.

"And what, in the name of all that is idiotic, do you expect to discover in the vaults?" snapped the captain.

"I fancy you know," said Harvey. "Anyhow, you can't stop me—any more than the ghost can frighten me away from the Moat House."

Captain Jerningham stared at him.

"The ghost? Are you mad? Have you been fancying that you have seen ghosts?" He laughed harshly, and glanced round at Mr. Chard, in the alcove. The hangings were drawn back now, and the secretary was standing at the table, packing a number of documents into his green baize bag, apparently to take away to his room. "Do you hear that, Chard? These young fools——"

Mr. Chard coughed. His manner indicated that he did not desire to be drawn into the dispute between Captain Jerningham and his school-boy cousin. And with that non-committal acknowledgment of the captain's remark, he picked up his bag and left the library, passing the grinning Porringe at the door.

Pie strolled in. His three friends glanced at him, but the captain, seated in his armchair with his back

to Pie, did not notice his entrance. Pie moved along to the "cosy corner" that Mr. Chard had left. The fatuous grin on Pie's face would have revealed to his chums that Pie was going to play the goat, if they had given him their attention. But Harvey and Banks and Len were giving their attention to the angry man in the armchair. They hardly noticed Pie lounge into Mr. Chard's alcove, stoop by the writing-table there, and reach to the wastepaper-basket that stood under it.

"Play the fool if you like," went on the captain's angry voice. "I cannot at present, as you say, stop you. But there is one thing I will stop—with a horsewhip, if necessary. One of you—the young idiot who is not here now—went to the garage this morning, and asked questions that can have only one possible meaning. No doubt he was surprised to learn that the chauffeur sleeps over the garage, and is therefore able to bear witness that no car was taken out on Monday night."

"That goat Pie!" sighed Banks.

"You hear me, Cedric? I will not tolerate this!" Captain Jerningham's voice was louder, sharper, angrier. "You have already hinted pretty plainly that you suspect me of knowing more than I dare say of Uncle Lucian's disappearance. I've seen the same thought in that fool of an inspector's face. I've seen it in others——" He seemed to choke for a moment. "Now this fool of a boy asks the chauffeur questions which amount to as good as an accusation! Do you imagine that I will tolerate this?"

The three Oakshott fellows stood silent. They were listening to the captain, but they were looking at Pie now.

Pie had emerged from Mr. Chard's cosy corner with the wastepaper-basket in his hands. It looked as if the secretary had been rather busy that morning, for it was half-full of crumpled fragments. What Pie fancied he was up to, and what he was going to do with that wastepaper-basket, his friends could not imagine—till he did it!

Pie stepped quietly and swiftly behind the captain's chair. Up went the wastepaper-basket—and came down, up-ended, over Captain Jerningham's head, bonneting him!

"Ha, ha!" roared Pie.

"You goat!" shrieked Harvey.

From the interior of the basket came a suffocated gurgle. Captain Jerningham, utterly astounded, grabbed frantically with both hands at the surprising bonnet on his head.

Off came the basket with a wild wrench, and its contents flew far and wide, scattering like snow round the captain's chair. The wastepaper-basket went to the floor with a crash, and Captain Jerningham bounded to his feet, his face crimson with rage.

"Who——" he spluttered. "What the——"

"Ha, ha!" shrieked Pie, as he faded through the doorway.

"You—you——" Spluttering fury, the captain rushed after Pie.

Pursued and pursuer vanished, both going strong. Harvey and Banks and Len looked at one another.

Captain Jerningham had made himself thoroughly disagreeable, and this was Pie's idea of tit for tat! It was worthy of the goat of the Oakshott Fifth!

"Pick up the jolly old scraps," said Banks.

The three stooped to gather up the scattered contents of the wastepaper-basket and replace them. The school-

boy detective paused with a torn sheet in his hand. His eyes, for a second, were glued on that torn sheet. It vanished the next moment—though not back into the wastepaper-basket.

The fragments were cleared up, the wastepaper-basket replaced in Mr. Chard's cosy corner, and then the three Oakshott Fifth Formers left the library.

"Better go and see what's happened to Pie," said Harvey.

"Let's," agreed Banks.

But Len Lex did not follow his friends. He was equally interested to know what had happened to the goat of Oakshott, but he was still more keenly interested to take a second look at that fragment of paper he had slipped unseen into his pocket. He turned from the hall into the breakfast-room, now deserted, drew the torn paper from his pocket, and examined it with minute care.

Harvey and Banks, if they could have seen it, would have wondered how it could interest Len Lex or anyone else. But the glint in the schoolboy detective's eyes told that it interested him, deeply and keenly. Yet there was nothing on the paper but a list of apparently meaningless figures:

"34, 9, 8, 15, 32, 26, 0, 22, 8, 17."

That was all, but that was enough to afford Detective-Inspector Bill Nixon's nephew a clue to the mystery of the Moat House!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

CAUGHT IN THE GHOST TRAP!

PORRIDGE rubbed his eyes and grinned a sleepy grin as from somewhere in the deep silence of the Moat House came the stroke of twelve.

When Pie and his chums had

gone to bed at ten o'clock, it had been easy for Pie to make up his mind to stay awake, sitting on the bed, and wait for midnight. But he had fallen asleep in his clothes.

The night was frightfully cold, and Pie woke up shivering, his feet feeling like lumps of ice, as the last stroke of twelve died away. He listened.

All was silent in the Moat House. Everybody was—or should have been—in bed and fast asleep. Pie had no doubt that his three friends were deep in slumber. It was unlikely, he thought, that the idea of sitting up and keeping watch for the chain-clanking ghost of the Moat House had occurred to any of them, and if the ghost walked that night, as it had done the previous night, it was going to walk into his clutches.

And Pie had little doubt that the ghost would turn out to be Harvey's swab of a cousin, Captain Cecil Jerningham.

Pie did not believe in ghosts, but he believed that Harvey's cousin, for some reason of his own, would stop at very little to get rid of the school-boy visitors to the Moat House.

Sleepy but resolute, Pie got out a large cardboard box and stooped in front of the old-fashioned chimney of his room. Taking the poker in his other hand, he raked down soot into the box.

A lot went over Pie's arms and shoulders, and some flecked his face, and some settled on his hair. Some went into his mouth, and he gurgled. A few flecks found a resting-place in his nose, and he very nearly sneezed.

Pie had not foreseen this when he planned his scheme, and he did not find it nice. But he was a stickler. He lifted the cardboard box out of

the grate at last, nearly full of soot, resolutely regardless of the fact that he was approximating in appearance to a chimney-sweep who had had a busy day.

He jammed a handkerchief to his nose and stifled a sneeze. The quarter chimed from somewhere. Taking the box in hand, Pie silently opened the door and peered into the darkness of the passage outside.

Vague sounds came to his ears as he listened, but not the sound he expected. Leaning on the doorpost, the box of soot in his hand, he waited and listened.

Last night the ghost had walked, and Lex had gone after it and failed. Pie was not going to fail. With deep cunning, Pie had got that box of soot ready for the spectre of the old lord of Jerningham. For if the ghost was indeed, as he suspected, Captain Jerningham, trying to frighten the Oakshott fellows away, it would not be a lot of use grappling with him. Pie was no weakling, but Harvey's cousin could have tossed him across the passage with ease.

Pie was not going to collar the ghost; he was going to smother him with soot from head to foot, and he calculated that that would keep the trickster busy for a minute or two while his friends came on the scene. Even if he got away, he would be in such a state that it would be a complete show-up.

Standing in the doorway, Pie was prepared to wait well on into the small hours, if necessary. But he had not been five minutes on the watch when he heard a faint sound and felt a thrill of excitement.

It was the softest of footfalls. His grip closed hard on the box of soot.

Last night the ghost had walked with clanking chains. This time there

was no sound of a clanking chain. Very likely he was going to turn on the clank at Harvey's room. It was Harvey he wanted to scare away—if Sir Lucian's nephew went, naturally the fellows who had come with him for Christmas would go as well.

Pie listened, with thumping heart. Someone was in the darkness of the passage, and nobody had a right to be there except the Oakshott fellows—there were four rooms on that passage, occupied by Harvey, Banks, Lex, and Poringe.

To Pie's intent ear came a faint sound of suppressed breathing, and he grinned. Ghosts, if there were such things as ghosts, would hardly emit a sound of breathing. The ancient lord of Jerningham, who had been done to death in the secret dungeon by a greedy heir, and who was said to haunt the house, might clank his rusty chains as he walked; but he would not be heard breathing, neither would his footfalls be audible, however soft.

As the unseen prowler passed him, Pie woke to action. Judging

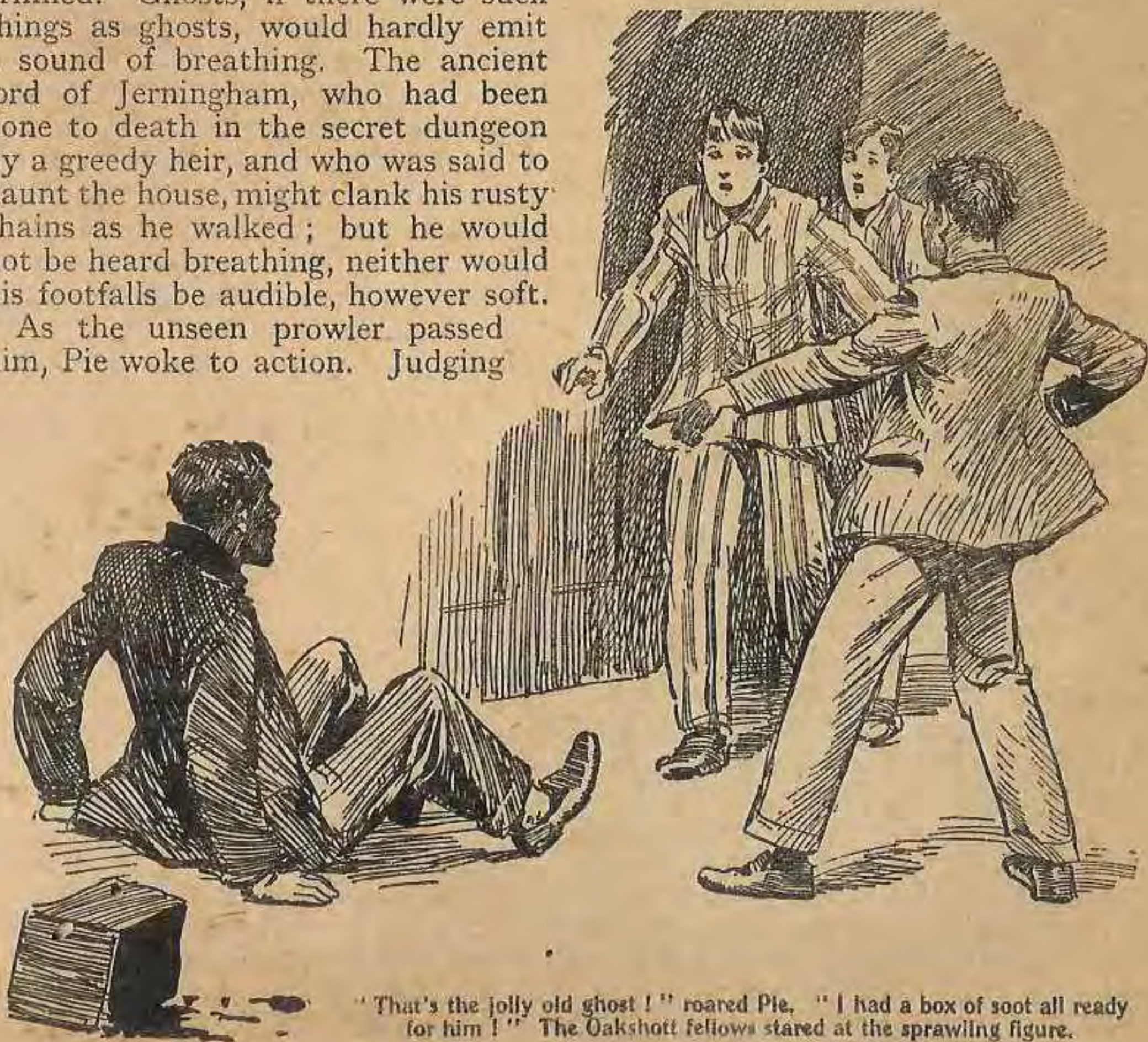
his movement by the faint sound he could hear, he made a step forward, the box of soot raised in both hands, and slammed it hard.

Crash! The cardboard box crumpled, and the soot flew out in black masses. There was a horrible gurgle from the dark, a sound of tottering feet, and a heavy fall.

"Got him!" yelled Pie.

Soot enveloped him, and he almost sneezed his head off.

"Urrggh! Got him! Wake up, you fellows! Atchooh—atchooh—atchooh! I say—yurrrrggh! I say—gurrgh! Got him—atchooooooh!"



"That's the jolly old ghost!" roared Pie. "I had a box of soot all ready for him!" The Oakshott fellows stared at the sprawling figure.

There was a sound of startled voices—of opening doors, and lights flashed on. From one doorway rushed Harvey, from another Banks. They stared in amazement at a sooty Pie, with a still more sooty figure sprawling at his feet, spluttering.

"Got him!" trilled Pie.
"Atchoooooh! Got him!"

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

TERRIFIC UPROAR!

LEN LEX, the schoolboy detective, was an extremely wary bird. But on the present occasion he was taken utterly by surprise.

Len had not turned in that night. He had only waited for his friends to settle down before he slipped out of his room, in rubber shoes, to keep watch in the dark passage. Last night the unknown trickster who played ghost at the Moat House had escaped—apparently through a solid wall. No doubt that would have been easy work to a genuine spectre; but to Len it indicated a secret door in the old panels lining the walls of the passage.

A long and careful scrutiny in the day time had failed to reveal any such secret; but Len calculated that if the ghost of the Moat House used that hidden door while he was on the watch, he would spot it. So for two hours Len had watched—till a faint sound in the dark guided him towards Porringe's door.

That the goat of Oakshott had the same idea of keeping watch he did not know—still less did he dream of the measures Pie had taken for identifying the ghost beyond the shadow of a doubt. When a box of soot crashed on him, smothering him, suffocating him, and knocking him over, Len Lex had received the surprise of his life.

When the light flashed on in the passage, it came dimly to his eyes through a veil of soot. Voices came to him faintly through ears bunged up with soot.

Heedless of his own sooty state, Pie danced round the sprawling figure on the floor.

"I say, the jolly old ghost won't walk again in a hurry!" he chortled.

"Who—who is it?" gasped Cedric Harvey.

"What—what is it?" stuttered Banks.

"That's the jolly old ghost!" roared Pie. "Ha, ha! I sat up to wait for him—and I got him! I had a box of soot ready for him! See?"

"Oh crumbs!"

The Oakshott fellows stared at the sprawling figure. Recognition was impossible. Len Lex's uncle, the keenest detective-inspector at Scotland Yard, could not have identified him at that moment. Only the whites of his eyes relieved the sooty blackness.

"Who are you?" roared Harvey.

"Gurrrrrggh!"

Len sat up, but he could not speak. Soot was in his mouth and throat, almost throttling him. He could only utter horrible gurgles.

"Needn't ask that!" chortled Pie. "I jolly well knew it was your swab of a cousin—Captain Jerningham. Ha, ha! He never knew I was waiting for him with a box of soot! Ha, ha!"

"You've woke the house!" said Banks.

Lights flashed on at the end of the passage. Startled voices and footsteps showed that others had been awakened by the alarm.

"O.K.!" chuckled Pie. "Let them all see the gallant captain! He's worth seeing! Ha, ha!"

Harvey and Banks, staring blankly at the sooty one, were struck by the fact that he did not look so tall as the Army man. But Pie was thinking of nothing but his triumph over the cheeky swab who had shaken him, and who had the neck to set up as master of the house because Sir Lucian Jerningham had mysteriously disappeared. Pie had no doubts.

"Call Lex!" chortled Pie. "I wonder he hasn't woke up, with all this row! Hallo, here they come!"

Whishaw, the butler, came round the corner of the passage from the landing. Others could be heard following him. Evidently the whole household had been awakened by the terrific uproar. Whishaw, half-dressed, startled out of his usual calm, jumped almost clear of the floor at the sight of what met his eyes.

"What—what——" he gasped.

"The jolly old ghost, Whishaw!" chortled Pie. "I got him with a box of soot! Know who he is, Whishaw? Ha, ha! They wouldn't know Captain Jerningham if he turned up on parade like that! What? Ha, ha!"

"Captain Jerningham!" gasped the butler. "But——"

"What-ho!" trilled Pie. "I say, look at him! Ha, ha!" Then his merry chortle broke off at sight of a figure that followed Whishaw round the corner. Pie stared, with starting eyes, at Captain Jerningham!

"What the dickens is all this disturbance?" roared the captain angrily, as he strode up the passage. "What silly schoolboy trick is this?"

Pie did not answer. Up to that moment he had not had the faintest shadow of doubt that Cecil Jerningham sprawled at his feet, smothered with soot. Now he could not speak! He could only goggle!

"What does it mean?" thundered

the captain. "Cedric, is this the kind of trick you play, a mad schoolboy joke, in the house of your uncle whose fate is unknown—for whose body the police are searching the park? Good heavens, have you no sense of propriety, no sense of shame?"

Harvey gave him a defiant glare.

"You can shut up, Cecil!" he retorted.

"You young rascal! You and your mob of silly schoolboys!" panted Captain Jerningham. "You shall leave this house to-morrow!"

"Chuck it!" answered Harvey. "You're not master here yet, Cecil Jerningham—and won't be, if my uncle is found. And——"

"How dare you play such silly tricks?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" snapped Harvey. "Somebody's been playing ghost here, and Porringe seems to have got him!"

"Who is that?" Captain Jerningham stared down angrily at the sooty figure. He made a movement to grasp at it, but drew back his hand; it was too sooty to touch. "Who—who is it? Whishaw, do you know who it is?"

"No, sir!" gasped the butler.

"Who are you?" roared the captain, and backed away a little as the sooty figure tottered to its feet, shedding clouds of soot.

"Oooooogh! Urrrgh! Groooooogh!"

A crowd of startled servants stared from the end of the passage. Whishaw looked round at them.

"I—I—I cannot imagine who it is, sir!" stammered the butler. "Everyone is here, except Mr. Chard——"

Mr. Chard was Sir Lucian's librarian and secretary.

The captain gave an angry laugh.

"It cannot be Mr. Chard! Who is it?" His eyes gleamed at the

Oakshott fellows. "Where is the other one—the boy Lex? Is he who has been playing tricks?"

"Rot!" snapped Harvey. "Lex is in bed in his room——"

"Blessed if I know why he hasn't woke up, with all this row!" said Banks. "I'll call him!"

"It is Lex!" thundered the captain. "Good heavens! This is the kind of thing your friends think appropriate in a house of mourning, Cedric! A stupid schoolboy practical joke!"

"It—it can't be Lex!" stuttered Harvey, and added as Banks came out of Len's room with a startled face: "Haven't you called Lex, Banker?"

"He—he—he's not there!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Urrgh! I—I'm—— Oooogh!" spluttered Len, trying to get the words out. "I'm—— Urrgh! Ooooch!"

"This is Lex!" snarled the captain. "A schoolboy prank—in such a place—at such a time! Pah!"

He turned on his heel and strode away. Harvey and Banks gazed at Len—they knew it was Len now, though they were as far as ever from recognising him. Pie blinked at him.

"That ass Lex!" gasped Pie. "That ass playing ghost—my hat! I thought it was that Army swab! Lex! Oh crumbs!"

"You fool!" came through the soot. "Urrgh! You dunderhead! Ooooch! You silly—grooogh—ass! Ooooch!"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Pie indignantly. "What were you playing ghost for, I'd like to know?"

"You born idiot!" Len was getting his voice back at last. "You goat! I was keeping watch for the ghost!"

"Oh!" gasped Pie.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Banks.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Whishaw, then grinned. "Really—ha, ha!"

"That goat Porringe!" said Harvey. He grinned. "Poor old Lex! That priceless goat Porringe has——"

"I—I thought——" gasped Pie. "Here, keep off! Keep off, Lex, you silly ass!" he yelled as the sooty figure leaped at him.

Generally, Len was very good-tempered and patient with the goat of the Oakshott Fifth. But his temper failed him now. He hurled himself at Pie, hitting out right and left.

Pie, yelling, landed on his back with a crash. Then, breathing wrath and soot, the schoolboy detective tramped away to the bathroom. He had plenty of work on hand for a considerable part of the night with soap and hot water!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

NO LUCK!

"BREAKFAST, sir!" hinted Whishaw to Len Lex, who was leaning on the oaken balustrade of the high gallery that surrounded the hall of the Moat House, deep in the columns of a newspaper, reading what it had to say about the mysterious disappearance of Sir Lucian.

Len glanced up from his newspaper, keeping his place with a finger-tip, and said:

"Tell the others I'm coming in two ticks, Whishaw!"

"Very good, sir!" said the butler, and disappeared down the staircase. Len was deep in his newspaper again before Whishaw was gone. Even breakfast on a cold and frosty morning, and the summons from his friends

to join them, seemed unable to tear him away from his perusal.

Little sleep as Len had had overnight, he had been up early in the morning. He had paced in the oak gallery over the hall while he waited for his friends to turn out; but when they went down he did not follow. Had anyone in the Moat House been aware that Len was a detective as well as a schoolboy, such a one might have inferred that he had some reason for remaining where he was, apart from his desire to ascertain all that the newspapers had to say about lost Sir Lucian.

Deep as that perusal was, Len was keeping watch and ward. Captain Jerningham passed him—emitting an audible sniff as he passed—and went down, Len apparently deaf to it. But when John, one of Whishaw's staff of menservants, came up with a well-laden tray in his hands, Len closed the newspaper and stepped right in John's way.

Like all the other menservants in the Moat House, John had turned out at the alarm in the night, and had seen Len sprawling in soot, and he grinned at the recollection. He ceased to grin, however, as Len very nearly barged into the tray. John halted, and jerked back the tray out of his way.

"Oh, sorry!" said Len. As if he feared that the tray would be upset, he caught hold of it. Finding it safe in John's hands, he let go again,



"Here, keep off, Lex, you silly ass!" yelled Pie as the sooty figure leaped at him, hitting out right and left.

flicking away the spotless table-napkin that covered what it bore. Breakfast—a very ample breakfast—was revealed on the tray.

"Well, I'm getting clumsy!" remarked Len, with a smile, as he put the table-napkin back in place. "Mr. Chard still breakfasting in his room, John?"

"Yes, sir," said John. "I'm taking it up now, sir!"

"Mr. Chard's cold does not seem to have spoiled his appetite!" smiled Len. "But I suppose most of that will be taken away again!"

"Oh, no, sir!" said John. "Precious little, sir! I think Mr. Chard

believes in feeding a cold, sir. Cook says it's wonderful how his appetite has improved since he caught that cold in the park, looking for the master!"

John marched on with his well-laden tray. Having seen him turn into Mr. Chard's rooms, Len went downstairs and joined his friends at breakfast. Captain Jerningham was not there; he did not choose to breakfast with the Oakshott party.

Len sat down with a good appetite, and a smiling glimmer in his eyes. Detective-Inspector William Nixon would have recognised that glimmer had he been present, and would have known that the schoolboy detective was satisfied with the way matters were going.

"The ghost never walked after all," said Harvey. "But I fancy he would have if that goat Pie hadn't kicked up a shindy and warned him that he was being watched for. I expect he heard it all from behind the secret panel in the passage. You might have got him but for that goat!"

"Well, I like that!" said Pie warmly. "I'd have got him if he walked—if Lex hadn't barged in and bagged the soot! Lex spoiled the whole thing!"

"Well, we mucked it up between us," said Len amicably. "I'll leave keeping watch to you after this, Porringe."

"Do!" said Pie, with a grunt.

Banks gave Len a penetrating look.

"You mean that you don't think the ghost will walk again, Lex!" he remarked.

Len grinned. Of his three friends, old Banker was the keenest, and he had read what was in Len's mind.

"It's rotten, you know," said Harvey. "It gives my dashed cousin a handle against us. Not that I

care what he thinks, blow him! Like his cheek to butt in! But he makes out that we've been going in for schoolboy larks, while my poor old Uncle Lucian——" Harvey's voice trembled a little, and he buried his face in his coffee-cup.

"Cheeky swab!" said Pie. "Look here! Let's go after him when he goes out and give him a jolly good snowballing—what?"

Pie's three friends replied together:

"Shut up, you goat!"

Pie snorted. The Oakshott fellows finished their breakfast—Len, who had started last, finishing first and rising from the table.

"Anything on?" asked Banks.

"What about another squint at those oak panels upstairs?" suggested Len. "We jolly well know there must be a secret door where the ghost vanished the other night!"

"We've had a jolly good look for that!"

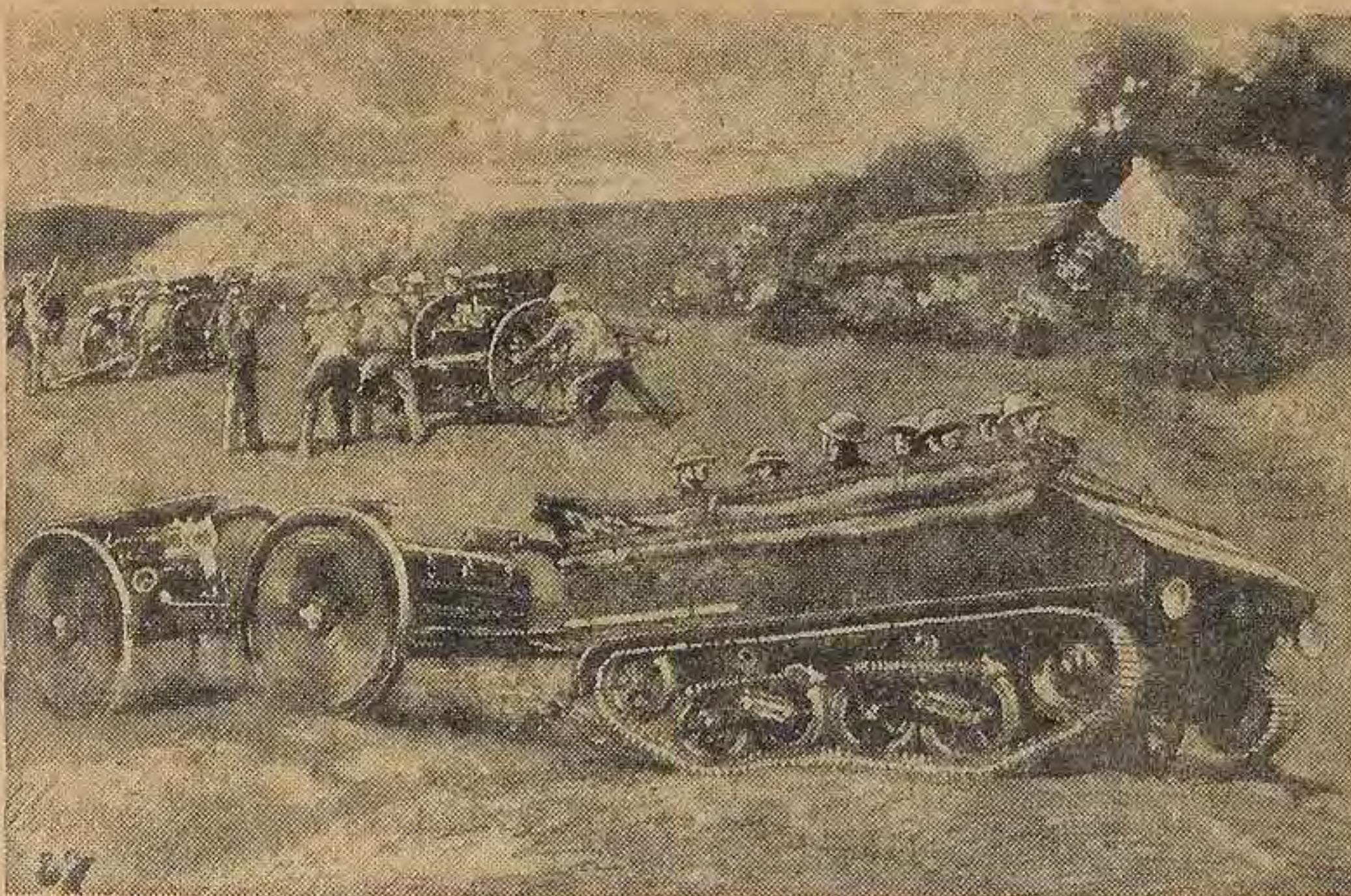
"Let's have another!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Oakshott fellows went up to where their bedrooms were. While his friends rooted up and down that passage, however, Len Lex gave his attention to the old oak wall of the gallery. If he hoped to spot any secret in that wall, he had no luck; and he ceased his scrutiny when Mr. Chard came along from his room, a green baize bag in his hand.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Len. And his friends came out into the gallery to bid Mr. Chard good-morning also. All of them liked the plump, good-tempered librarian of the Moat House. Len glanced at the well-filled bag in Mr. Chard's hand. The librarian carried books and documents from the library to his room in that bag. Harvey had told his friends that old Chard was a

THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



The use of mechanised transport has more than doubled the mobility of the Field Artillery. The average speed of horse-drawn guns is 4 to 5 m.p.h.; tractor-drawn guns can travel at 15 to 20 m.p.h.—a great advantage for a field battery forced to shift to a position miles away within a few minutes.

The illustration shows a battery of 18-pounder field guns in action. The gun in the centre of illustration is being hauled into position by its crew, while the gun and limber, at detachable front of gun carriage, is being drawn into place by a tractor. The type illustrated is the Dragon Light MK 2, which carries a gun crew of six besides ammunition for the gun, and has a speed of 16 m.p.h.

For ammunition an 18-pounder uses high explosive,

shrapnel, or "carrier" shell. Shrapnel shell is loaded with bullets which burst over a wide area. "Carrier" shells may contain chemicals for raising a smoke screen, or starting fires.

A battery of six guns fires 70 H.E., or 90 shrapnel shells per minute, the guns having a maximum range of 10,000 yards. The gun crew are numbered: No. 1 is in command—in left of illustration No. 1 is giving the signal to fire by raising his arm; No. 5 and No. 6 supply ammunition; No. 4 sets the time fuse of the shells and loads the gun; No. 3 aims the gun; while No. 2 opens and closes the breech and fires the weapon. The battery is commanded by a major and is divided into three sections of two guns, each under a lieutenant.

bookworm, and it certainly looked as if he was.

"Any luck yet, sir?" asked Harvey eagerly.

"I am sorry to say no!" answered Mr. Chard. "I am making a very careful search, Master Cedric, among the old parchments and plans in my charge. If the secret dungeon exists, as you fancy, I may chance upon

some hint concerning it. But I fear that I can hold out little hope!"

Harvey's face set obstinately.

"The secret dungeon does exist," he said. "That old legend was not founded on nothing. Sir Lucian of Tudor times was shut up in that hidden dungeon, and left to die in chains by his nephew and heir; that was the beginning of the ghost story.

Ten to one there's some clue to it in the Jerningham papers ! ”

“ There are a vast number of ancient parchments dealing with the records of the Jerningham family,” said Mr. Chard. “ I am going through them, annotating them for my work on the ‘Antiquities of Jerningham.’ So far I have found no allusion whatever to the existence of a secret dungeon. But I have very many yet to examine. I shall do my best, Master Cedric.”

“ I’m sure of that ! ” said Harvey.

“ We’re going down now, sir,” said Len, as the librarian turned towards the stairs. “ Please let me carry your bag down for you ! ”

He put his hand on the green baize bag as he spoke. Mr. Chard jerked it away quite sharply.

“ Thank you—not at all ! ” he said.

“ Going down, Lex ? ” asked Porringe, with a stare. “ I thought you came up here to hunt for—My hat ! ”

Why Len Lex gave him a sudden barge, Porringe did not know. It was not like Len to play such thoughtless tricks ; it was much more like Pie himself to barge a fellow headlong, and think it funny ! This time, however, it was Len who barged, so suddenly that Pie went staggering and crashed right into Mr. Chard—sending him staggering, too, and the green baize bag shooting from his hand.

“ You ass ! ” roared Pie.

“ Lex ! ” gasped Harvey and Banks together.

Len, unheeding, leaped for the green baize bag. Quick as he was, Mr. Chard was quicker. He jumped at the bag, grasped it, and pushed Len back with the other hand. For the moment, the good-humoured expression had quite left his face.

“ Sorry, sir ! ” gasped Len. “ I——”

“ You clumsy young fool ! ” gasped

Mr. Chard. Evidently his good temper had for once failed him.

Harvey reddened with annoyance. Captain Jerningham was coming up the stairs, and he stopped in the gallery, looking on with a sarcastic sneer on his face. It was intensely annoying to Cedric Harvey. Whatever might be said of the sooty episode of the night, there was no doubt that this was reckless skylarking ; extremely inappropriate in a house of which the master had mysteriously disappeared just before Christmas, and whom few expected to see in life again. This time, at least, Captain Jerningham had reason for his contemptuous sneer.

“ So you are getting the benefit of schoolboy high spirits, Chard ! ” said the captain. “ I heard you say that you liked youthful company in the house. I hope you find it enjoyable.”

Mr. Chard gasped for breath, but did not answer. And the young Army man, with a curling lip, walked away to his room.

“ You utter ass, Lex ! ” panted Pie. “ Gone mad, or what ? ”

“ I hope you’ll excuse me, Mr. Chard,” said Len penitently. “ I really hope——”

“ Really, such frolics are quite out of place in this house, Lex ! ” said Mr. Chard, in quite a good-humoured tone, however. He seemed to have recovered his temper in a moment. “ You might have scattered my documents all over the place, and some of them are of inestimable value from an antiquarian point of view. However, there is no harm done ! ”

Mr. Chard went down the stairs. Len’s friends looked at him expressively.

“ You frabjous ass ! ” Pie recommenced. “ Barging a fellow over—right into poor old Chard, too ! ”

"Oh, come on!" said Len.

He followed the librarian down the stairs, and his friends followed in rather grim silence. Mr. Chard went into the library and shut the door after him. The Oakshott fellows remained in the hall.

"Well, are we going down to the vaults again this morning?" asked Harvey, rather gruffly. "That was the programme."

"Let's!" said Len. "But—I think I'll speak to Mr. Chard. He might care to come with us!"

He went into the library to inquire of Mr. Chard. In the alcove in the wall by the fireplace the librarian had set the green baize bag on the table, and was about to draw the velvet hangings which shut off the alcove from the great room. In that cosy corner Mr. Chard did most of his work. As Len came up, the librarian glanced at him and sat down, taking up a pen and dipping it into the ink.

"We're going down to explore the vaults again, Mr. Chard," said Len. "I was wondering if you'd care to join us?"

Mr. Chard smiled.

"I am afraid I must decline," he said. "I have a slight cold, and the damp air of the vaults would hardly

do it good. Moreover, I have promised Master Cedric to go through the Jerningham papers. I shall be busy here till lunch-time."

"Then we'll see you again at lunch, sir," said Len. "We shall stay down till then."

Mr. Chard nodded and began to write a letter. Len left the library and rejoined his friends.



The schoolboy detective leaped for the green baize bag. But quick as he was Mr. Chard was quicker. He jumped at the bag, grasped it, and pushed Len back with the other hand. "You clumsy young fool!" he gasped.

"Chard coming?" asked Harvey, with a touch of sarcasm.

"No; he doesn't seem to like the idea."

"You must be an ass to think he would!" said Pie. "A man who has a cold, and has to breakfast in bed, going down into damp vaults—I must say you're an ass, Lex, old man!"

"Oh, come on!" said Banks. "Let's get going!"

Whishaw provided the key, and the Oakshott fellows proceeded to the old arched entrance of the vaults at the end of a dark stone passage. Dark and gloomy looked the old vaults as they descended the stone stair—far from inviting. Three of the fellows flashed on torches—but Len went through his pockets and failed to produce one.

"Mean to say you've forgotten your torch?" asked Pie. "Well, some fellows are blithering idiots!"

"Three will be enough," said Harvey. "Let's get on!"

"Well, you fellows get on! I'll cut back and get my torch and follow you," said Len. And he ran up the stone stair. Harvey grunted, and led the way through the series of gloomy stone arches, Banks and Porringe at his heels. Len emerged above ground; and perhaps he thought that he might have left his torch in the library, for it was to that apartment that he proceeded. He crossed over to Mr. Chard's cosy corner and looked in between the hangings.

"If you've seen a torch lying about, sir——" he said.

He did not finish the sentence. The cosy corner was unoccupied. Mr. Chard, who had said that he would be busy till lunch, had apparently changed his mind, for he was gone. The green baize bag also was gone.

For a long moment Len stood looking into the deserted cosy corner; then he left the library, a faint smile on his face. He went upstairs to his room, where he found the missing torch without difficulty, and hurried down to the vaults to join Harvey & Co.

Winking lights far down the gloomy vaults guided him. In a few minutes more he was with his friends. For

three hours the Oakshott fellows explored the dark vaults that stretched far and wide beneath the Moat House—tapping walls, peering into corners and cavities, Len as industrious in the quest as his comrades.

In Harvey's mind was the fixed conviction that the secret dungeon, in which the Sir Lucian of ancient times had been done to death, still existed—and almost as strong was his conviction that the Sir Lucian of the present day was immured in it, like his remote ancestor, and for the same reason—the ruthless greed of a nephew and heir who could not wait!

But if the secret dungeon existed, it was well hidden. The Oakshott fellows came up, grubby and tired and glum, in time to get a wash before lunch. And Mr. Chard, at the lunch-table, had no news—his search of ancient documents had been as futile as the schoolboys' search in ancient vaults. No discovery had been made by either party—unless, indeed, the schoolboy detective had made a discovery that morning, of which he said no word!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER

UNCLE BILL TAKES A HAND!

"Too thick for a car, Chard!" said Captain Jerningham. He was standing in the doorway, looking out into the dusk. All day the snow had been coming down, and the old roofs and red chimney-pots of the Moat House were hidden under it; the ancient moat was filled to its brim, and the leafless trees in the park were ridged with snow. Snow lay banked among the trees, and the search for lost Sir Lucian in that direction had been abandoned for the time. The drive—from the doorway to the bridge on the moat—was piled with snow.

Mr. Chard, looking out at the captain's side, nodded. It was obvious that no car could be taken out.

"I shall walk to the station!" said Mr. Chard.

"I'll walk with you, Chard," said Captain Jerningham. "I shall be glad to get out for an hour!" His glance rested as he spoke on the group of four Oakshott fellows standing by the crackling log-fire in the hall. "What train are you catching?"

"The five-thirty at Olkham—to change at Holme for London."

"Plenty of time, then! A rotten night for your journey, though!" said the captain.

"I shall not enjoy it," said Mr. Chard. "But it is a matter of duty. For many years I have never failed to spend one night a week with my aged father—nothing short of actual illness would keep me from it!"

"With your cold——"

"That is very slight!" Mr. Chard smiled apologetically. "If it were a matter of pleasure, sir, I should naturally forgo my accustomed weekly visit to London, in the present tragic circumstances here. But it is, as I have said, a matter of duty. I shall hope to hear good news when I return to-morrow."

"Not much chance of that!" muttered the captain. "I've been clinging to the hope that my uncle still lives. But what is the use? If he lives, where is he? Kidnapped? Nonsense! Who could have any imaginable motive——"

"That is hard to say, sir!" said Mr. Chard. "But I shall still hope and trust that Sir Lucian will yet be found alive and well."

"But how—where?"

"That is beyond me, sir! But I have great faith in the sagacity of the police."

Captain Jerningham gave a grunt which indicated that he did not share Mr. Chard's faith. They moved away from the door and went to prepare for the walk to the station. The Oakshott fellows exchanged glances.

"Ever hear such an awful humbug?" breathed Pie. "Doesn't he jolly well know all the time where your uncle is, Harvey, old man?"

"I believe so," said Harvey, between his teeth.

"Chard's a decent old boy," said Pie. "He's not a young man, and it's not every man of his age who would trip up from Hampshire to London to see his jolly old pater in weather like this."

"He's always done it ever since I've known him," said Harvey. "One night a week in London, regular as clockwork. My uncle would have been glad for him to bring his old father down here sometimes, but the old chap's too old—over eighty, I believe. Chard's a jolly good sort."

"I don't envy him the trip," said Banks.

"Same here! Look here, as Chard's going out, I'm going to squat in his cosy corner and root through some of those dashed parchments," said Harvey. "Might turn something up. You fellows like to help?"

"Like a shot!" said Banks.

"I say!" Porringe glanced round mysteriously and lowered his voice. "I say, I've got an idea, you men! That swab's walking to the station with Chard. Lots of time to get ahead of them and give him a few snowballs——"

"Fathead!" said Banks.

"Goat!" said Harvey.

And they walked away to the library, leaving Pie indignantly frowning and Len Lex grinning. Len touched the goat of the Fifth on the arm.

"I'm game!" he murmured.

Pie brightened again.

"Good man!" he said. "Let's get our coats."

Well ahead of Mr. Chard and Captain Jerningham, Pie and Len slipped out of the house. They crossed the bridge over the moat and tramped down to the gates on to the Olkham road.

"Frightfully parky!" said Pie, coming to a halt at last. "This will do, Lex. No need to go farther."

"Unless they take the short cut," murmured Len.

"Oh, crumbs, I hadn't thought of that!"

"Let's get on to Olkham. Bound to see them at the station."

"Oh, all right!"

Pie had not anticipated so long a walk, and he was tired of tramping through snow by the time the cottages of Olkham village glimmered through the December gloom. He trudged on wearily towards the railway station, without noticing in the dark that his companion dropped behind for a few minutes.

During those few minutes Len Lex was occupied in a way that would have surprised Pie, had he been aware of it. Len stopped at the window of a cottage on the outskirts of the village and tapped at the glass—three sharp taps. Immediately the lower sash was pushed up. A glimmer of firelight within dimly revealed a stocky, muscular figure. A voice whispered from the gloom:

"You young rascal! What's the game now?"

Detective-Inspector William Nixon of Scotland Yard peered at the half-seen figure of his schoolboy nephew outside.

"I'm glad you were able to run down here, Bill," murmured Len. "I

jumped for joy when you told me on the 'phone that you'd come. I thought a spot of country air would do you good, Bill. In this delightful weather, too!"

"Cough it up!" said Mr. Nixon briefly.

"I hate to take you away from these delightful rural surroundings, Bill. But you've got to catch the five-thirty, change at Holme, and carry on till you see the lights of London."

"Give it a name!"

Len whispered. The man at the cottage window listened without interruption. Once or twice he grunted; that was all. When Len had finished, Mr. Nixon said briefly: "I get you!" and shut the window.

From the darkness came Pie's calling voice:

"Lex, you ass! Where are you? Lost yourself, or what? Of all the blithering asses——"

Len hurried on.

"Blessed if I know how you missed me!" snorted Pie. "I thought you were at my elbow, and when I looked round——"

"Come on, old bean."

They tramped on to the station. Taking up a strategic position at a convenient corner, they watched. A few minutes later a stocky man muffled up in a thick overcoat loomed from the gloom. Pie made a movement—Len gripped his arm and pulled him back. Mr. Nixon passed on into the station without even seeing them, and disappeared. It was a quarter of an hour later that two figures appeared, and Pie made another movement. Again Len held him in check.

"Wait till Chard's gone!" he murmured.

"Oh, all right!"

Mr. Chard and Captain Jerningham

passed into the station. Ten minutes later the sound of the train was heard. The engine shrieked; the train rolled away, glimmering through the December dark, carrying away Mr. Chard and Mr. Nixon among its other passengers.

A minute or two more, and Captain Jerningham would be coming out of the station, to walk back to the Moat House. Pie gripped snowballs in both hands, and grinned in happy anticipation. He chuckled softly—but his chuckle was turned into a frantic howl as his companion suddenly wedged a handful of snow down the back of his neck.

"Yuuuurrgh!" gurgled Pie. "You mad ass—urrrgh—I'll—"

He whirled fiercely on Len, who, laughing, beat a retreat up the village street. After him rushed the infuriated Pie, hurling snowballs. They missed by yards. But a snowball that came whizzing back did not miss—it landed right on Pie's nose, and squashed there. Pie staggered.

"Oh, you swab!" gasped Pie, and rushed on.

He forgot that Captain Jerningham would be coming out of the station—forgot everything but vengeance on that swab Lex. That Len was leading him away from the spot, undesirous



Len whispered, and the man at the cottage window listened without interruption. Once or twice he grunted, that was all.

that Captain Jerningham should see anything of them, or that Pie should carry out his stunt of snowballing the Army man, Porringe did not guess—any more than he guessed that Len Lex had private reasons for taking that walk down to Olkham.

Pie had enough to think of in the way of snowballs, for Len, as he retreated, whizzed one after another. Snowball after snowball squashed on Pie's infuriated countenance—and a dozen times he nearly had the retreating enemy—but never quite.

A hand reached out of the darkness and grabbed his cap.

"Race you home!" said Len.

"Gimme my cap!" shrieked Pie.

The chase was breathless—right up to the porch of the Moat House. Then, at last, Pie had his enemy cornered. He grabbed back his cap, jammed it on his head, and punched and punched and punched.

Len, feeling that poor old Pie was entitled to some compensation, let him land a few punches, which did not do much damage on a thick overcoat. Whishaw opened the door and stared at them.

"Pax!" gasped Len. "Give you best, old man!"

"I've a jolly good mind——"

"Pax, old man! You win!"

And Pie, mollified by his victory, tramped in after Len, gasping for breath, under the disapproving eye of Whishaw.

Harvey and Banks, looking tired and dispirited after a fruitless search for mention of the dungeon in the ancient documents, met Len and Pie in the hall.

"So you're back!" growled Harvey. "I'm surprised at you, Lex. Everyone knows Pie's a goat, but you—surely there's been enough trouble in this house to-day, without you giving my cousin additional cause for going off the deep end!"

A hot retort sprang to Len's lips, but he bit it back. It certainly did look as if he'd been playing the fool, and it was impossible to account for his actions without disclosing the fact that he was a detective.

"Captain Jerningham will have no cause for complaint when he returns," he replied quietly, and went up to bed.

"Poor old Harvey's all strung up," he murmured, as he got between the

sheets. "But unless I'm hopelessly out in my reckoning, he'll be enjoying his Christmas to the full before very many hours have passed." And with a happy smile on his face he fell asleep!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

BEHIND THE SETTEE!

TWO mornings later Harvey, Banks and Porringe stood in the open doorway, looking out through the stone porch into the winter sunshine. Harvey's face was glum. The problem of his uncle's disappearance seemed more hopeless than ever.

"Where's Lex?" asked Pie.

"Gone out, I think," said Banks.

"Here comes Inspector Shute," said Harvey bitterly. "Lot of use his hanging round the place."

Inspector Shute, stocky, impassive, came across the bridge over the moat, and up to the porch. He glanced at the Oakshott fellows and came in. Captain Jerningham came out of the smoke-room and gave him a nod. He did not glance at the schoolboys.

"Anything new, Shute?" asked the captain wearily.

"As a matter of fact, sir, I have certain reasons for ordering a search in the corner of the park by the Olkham Lane," said the inspector. "If you would care to give my men your assistance——"

"Gladly! Anything is better than doing nothing," said the captain. "Whishaw, my coat, please." The butler helped him on with his coat and handed him his hat. "You are coming, inspector?"

"I wish to speak to Mr. Chard—but I will see you later, sir."

Captain Jerningham tramped into the snow and disappeared across the moat bridge. The inspector glanced at Harvey & Co.

"If you boys would care to help——" he suggested.

"Is there anything we can do?" asked Harvey in surprise.

"The search will be somewhat extensive, and every little helps," said the inspector. "If you are willing——"

"Of course!" said Harvey. "Come on, you men—we can help, and keep clear of my cousin all the same. I dare say we shall see Lex on our way."

Harvey, Banks, and Porringe put on their coats and followed the way the captain had gone.

"Is Mr. Chard down yet?" asked the inspector after they had gone.

"No, he is breakfasting in his room as usual," answered the butler. "No doubt in half an hour——"

"Then I will wait. Please tell Mr. Chard that I am waiting in the library when he comes down." The inspector went into the library, and Whishaw closed the door after him.

The officer stood before the fire, warming himself. Then he moved along to a great oak settee close by the wall, within a short distance of Mr. Chard's cosy corner. And, though the library of the Moat House was, to all appearance, untenanted by anyone but himself, he said in a low voice:

"Well?"

From behind the settee came an answering voice, in equally low tones. It was the voice of the schoolboy detective:

"You got my uncle on the 'phone after what I said to you yesterday, Mr. Shute?" he asked.

"Having — after communicating with Mr. Nixon—decided to accept your assistance, Master Lex, I have done exactly as you desired. Captain Jerningham and your friends are now on the other side of the park, and likely to remain there till lunch. I am here, finding you in concealment,

as you asked. I am acting on Mr. Nixon's assurance that you have information to give."

"Bill isn't letting you down, Mr. Shute!" came the quiet voice from the unseen schoolboy detective. "Thanks for getting here in good time. We've got a good twenty minutes before Chard blows in—more than enough."

"I presume that your presence here is unknown?"

"It is. I went out for a walk, nipped in by the french window, and here I've been for the last hour."

"What have you to tell me?"

"Sir Lucian is a prisoner in the secret dungeon under the Moat House, like his ancestor in the legend. His kidnapper visits him once a day, generally in the morning, to take him food."

"You accuse Captain Jerningham, as the boy Harvey suspects?" said Inspector Shute.

"No."

"Who, then?"

"Chard! And now look at this!"

A hand from behind the settee passed up a torn sheet of paper. Mr. Shute took it and fixed his eyes on it. In neat figures was a strange list:

"34, 9, 8, 15, 32, 26, 0, 22, 8, 17."

"That was found in Chard's waste-paper basket," murmured the voice from behind the settee. "Chard's fist! You don't need telling that it is a list of roulette numbers. The learned and respectable librarian of the Moat House sits at the green table, Mr. Shute, taking down the numbers when the ball spins on the wheel. And he sits in his cosy corner, not always at work, but calculating the run of numbers, planning a system, I've no doubt, for beating the jolly old croupier at his game."

"Having given that bit of paper the once-over, Mr. Shute, I had an idea

that our friend's weekly visit to London to see his aged father might bear looking into. Bill looked—at a tip from me! And the night before last Chard did not visit any aged father—I doubt if he has one—he spent the night, to a very late hour, at a certain roulette club in Soho, losing money hand over fist, with Bill looking over his shoulder!”

Mr. Shute slipped the paper into his pocket-book as the murmuring voice went on :

“ Somebody doesn't want school-boys here rooting over the place—especially old Harvey, with his belief in a secret dungeon. Somebody spotted us in the park the night we came, and put up a spectral performance. The captain was in the park—but so was Chard! That somebody carried on the game, got up as old Sir Lucian's giddy spectre, startling Harvey, and the whole household turned up—except Chard!

“ Whoever played ghost was behind a secret panel—and Chard was not awakened by a row that awakened everybody else.”

“ Is that all ? ”

“ Hardly! Chard managed to catch a bit of a cold, which causes him to take brekker in his room—he had to give some explanation of a new habit since Sir Lucian disappeared. John takes up his breakfast, and has confided to me that Mr. Chard's appetite has seemed to improve. Big breakfast—nothing ever left. Chard takes books to his room in a green baize bag—but does not, I think, bring the books down again in it. Very particular about that bag is Mr. Chard—flies into a temper if a fellow barges it out of his hand and tries to pick it up for him—as I happened to do one morning——”

“ Food ? ”

“ Exactly! A prisoner must be fed. Chard settles down in his cosy corner and tells an inquiring schoolboy that he will be busy till lunch; that inquiring schoolboy looks in a quarter of an hour later and he is gone—green baize bag and all. Chard's cosy corner is oak panelled, and that inquiring schoolboy has found opportunities to test the panels—no luck! Better luck this morning, I hope!”

“ I understand ! ”

“ Bill watched the good man losing in one night more than his year's salary as librarian and secretary here. He has charge of Sir Lucian's investments. Query: Whose money does he lose on the green table? Does he want a signature to a cheque or to a transfer of stocks and shares, and is Sir Lucian parked in a quiet spot till he decides to sign? ”

The murmuring voice ran on softly for a few minutes more. Then Mr. Shute left the settee, resumed his place before the fire, where he stood warming his coat-tails when Mr. Chard came into the library with a green baize bag in his hand.

He laid the bag on the table in his cosy corner and bowed politely to Inspector Shute. The inspector's eyes lingered on the bag.

“ Whishaw says that you desired to see me, Mr. Shute,” said the librarian. “ I am quite at your service.”

“ Thank you, Mr. Chard,” said the inspector. “ I am carrying on a search in the park close by Olkham Lane. Captain Jerningham and the boys are helping me, and if you would care to accompany me——”

“ I have every desire to help,” said Mr. Chard. “ Say, in half an hour's time——”

“ Very well, Mr. Chard. I will expect you,” said the inspector, and left the library.

Mr. Chard followed him to the door and watched Whishaw let him out of the house. Then he closed the library door, returned to his cosy corner, and drew the hangings across.

The velvet curtains completely shut in Mr. Chard's cosy corner. They also concealed from Mr. Chard a boyish figure that emerged silently from under a settee, slipped quietly across to the alcove, and applied an eye to a narrow slit in the velvet recently made by a penknife.

Unaware of that eye, Mr. Chard picked up the green baize bag and walked to the back of the alcove. Reaching the wall, he pressed a

certain spot in the ancient carved scrollwork, and a panel flew open on silent, well-oiled, hidden hinges.

Len Lex smiled as the secretary disappeared through the wall and the panel shut after him, strolled to the french window, opened it, and waved a hand to a stocky figure hovering on the terrace. Inspector Shute joined him, mutely inquiring.

"Follow on!" murmured Len Lex.

The secret panel flew open again, and Shute, breathing hard, followed the schoolboy detective through. As they trod softly down a seemingly endless spiral stair in the thickness of the ancient wall, there came,

"Sir Lucian!" gasped the butler. He gazed at the silver-haired man who leaned on the sturdy arm of Len Lex; and at Mr. Chard, livid with fury, the handcuffs on his wrists.



faintly from the darkness far below, the clank of a chain.

Whishaw almost fell down when the bell summoned him to the library, as he supposed, to answer the ring of Mr. Chard. The colour wavered in his cheeks, and his eyes bulged at what he saw.

"Sir Lucian!" he gasped.

He gazed at the silver-haired man who, pale, worn, haggard, leaned on the sturdy arm of Len Lex; at Mr. Chard, livid with fury, the handcuffs on his wrists, the grip of Inspector Shute on his arm; at a panel that stood wide open in the oak wall.

"Your master is found, Whishaw," said Len. "Inspector Shute has found him. Help him to his room."

"Help me, my good Whishaw!" said Sir Lucian Jerningham faintly. "Mr. Shute, will you take care of that scoundrel?"

"I have him safe, sir," said Mr. Shute stolidly, and Sir Lucian tottered from the library on the arm of the astounded butler—gazed at in awed amazement by startled servants, one of whom, at a word from the inspector, hurried away into the park to call Captain Jerningham and the Oakshott fellows to the house.

The master of Moat House was in bed, Whishaw had telephoned for the doctor, and Len Lex had seen Mr. Shute off in a car with his prisoner, when there was a tramp of hurried feet on the terrace. Smiling, Len opened the door to Captain Jerningham, Harvey, Banks, and Pie. They rushed in, breathless. The captain caught Len by the arm.

"My uncle——" he panted. "Is it true?"

"Quite!" said Len.

Harvey grabbed him by the other arm.

"Len—he's found?"

"Safe and sound in bed, waiting for the doctor. He's had a hard time, but he's pulling round all right."

"It was Chard," explained Len. "Acting from information received, Inspector Shute got him this morning. There is a secret panel in Chard's cosy corner that gives access to a spiral stair leading down to the secret dungeon, and Chard——"

"Chard!" stuttered Harvey.

"Old Chardy!" agreed Len. "Sir Lucian was tapped on the head from behind that night in the library, and woke up to find himself in the secret dungeon with a chain locked on him. And a man with a mask on his face came once a day with food——"

"But Chard!" gasped Captain Jerningham. "Why?"

"It seems that he wanted Sir Lucian to sign a paper—transfer of bonds, for a few thousand pounds," said Len. "Chard has been losing money. Your uncle never knew who the man was—never suspected Chard—till Mr. Shute followed him down into the dungeon to-day, slipped the handcuffs on him, and pulled the mask off his face."

"Where is the scoundrel?" panted Captain Jerningham.

"Mr. Shute has taken him over to Holme—charge of kidnapping and attempting to extort money," said Len.

Harvey looked at his cousin. His cousin looked at him.

"Sorry, Cecil!" muttered Harvey. The captain smiled faintly.

"A good deal was my fault," he said. "I was all nerves, with the anxiety and stress—and knowing what people suspected——"

"I was a fool——"

"So was I! Wash it all out! Come with me, kid—we must see him."

The cousins hurried up the stairs together.

"But how," gasped Pie, "did Shute spot the villain? I never dreamed of suspecting old Chard—and I'm a keen chap, as you know. How the thump did Shute do it?"

"From information received, I understand," said Len Lex. "That's what they call it, you know—information received!" For it had been agreed that nothing was to be said about his part in the case. The fact that he was a detective as well as a schoolboy was to remain a secret!

"Merry Christmas!" roared Pie Porringe.

Len roared, too, as a snowball caught him in the ear.

Bright and cheery was that Christmas morning. As bright and cheery was every face in the old Moat House. One accustomed face was missing—Mr. Chard was awaiting trial in a

cell no less secure than the ancient dungeon in which Sir Lucian had been a prisoner. But nobody at the Moat House wasted a thought on him.

Captain Jerningham, strolling on the terrace, grinned as Len staggered under Pie's snowball, stooped, gathered a handful of snow, and let Pie have it in turn—and Harvey and Banks, chuckling, joined in.

Sir Lucian Jerningham, looking from the library windows, laughed loud and long as the goat of the Fifth slipped in the snow and went head over heels into the moat—discovering that there was mud under the snow!

"Jolly, after all, you fellows!" said Harvey, when they sat down to Christmas dinner in the old oak hall, Sir Lucian at the head of the table, Captain Jerningham grinning under a paper cap, Whishaw hovering and benign. "Jolly, what?"

THE DUFFER'S DIARY

by Peter Cuthbert Gunner

(Champion Ass of Rookwood)

THEY all said, "Silver's up the pole!"

When he selected me for goal
Last week, against the Modern side.

"Just wait and see!
Leave this to me,"
I skornfully replied.

I took my stand inside the nett,
And round the goal, to my regret,
Specktators gathered, and began
To talk a lot
Of silly rot,
As only asses can!

I had to leave the goal to deal
With some of them, inkluding Peele;
And while I was thus ockupled,
The Moderns roared,
Bekause they skored
A goal against our side.

Then Silver had some words to say
In what I thought a nasty way.
I followed him, with self-kontrol,
Around the ground,
Until I found
They'd skored another goal!

Soon after that, I left the pitch
To deal with Lattrey, during which
The ball went in the nett from Doyle!
The crowd told me
I ought to be
Immersed in boiling oil!

Six-one we lost that giddy game!
For that, they all gave me the blame!
And so I tell them jolly plain——
They'd best beware,
And take good care,
Or I shan't play again!