

## For Little Folks

## The Christmas Truants

By CHARLES SCHEUER

Christmas was coming a long time ago, and the boys in a certain far-away school were talking and thinking about it. Eleven of these youngsters, who were all great friends, and generally kept together, whether at work or play, held a secret meeting, at which they resolved that they were tired of the ordinary ways of spending Christmas.

"We are bored to death," said one of the older boys, "with Christmas, with Christmas games, with Christmas carols, and with the hanging up of stockings on Christmas Eve. Such things may do very well for children, but we have grown out of them."

"That's true!" cried the others. "We've grown out of that kind of nonsense."

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed the smallest boy of all, who was generally known as Tomtit. "We've grown out of that."

"Of course," said the biggest boy, who was called by his companions Old Pluck, because he had never been found to be afraid of anything, "there will be this Christmas childishness at the school, just as there has always been; and I propose that instead of staying here and submitting to it, we run away, and have a Christmas to suit ourselves."

"Hurrah!" cried the other boys. "That's what we will do. Have a Christmas to suit ourselves."

In consequence of this resolution, on the afternoon of the next day but one to Christmas, these eleven boys ran away from school, with the intention of finding some place where they would be free to celebrate the great holiday in whatever way they pleased. They walked as fast as they could, little Tomtit keeping up bravely in the rear, although he was obliged to run almost as much as he walked, until they were at a long distance from the school. Night was now coming on, and Old Pluck called a halt.

"Boys," said he, "we will camp at the edge of that forest, and those of you who have brought bows and arrows had better look about and see if you can't shoot some birds and rabbits for our supper. The unarmed members must gather wood to make a camp fire. But if you are tired, Tomtit, you needn't do anything."

"Tired!" exclaimed the little fellow, standing up very straight and throwing out his chest, "I should like to know why I should be tired. I'll go and bring some logs."

Tomtit was very anxious to be considered just as strong and active as the other boys. Every morning he used to get one of his companions to feel the muscles of his arms, to see if they had not increased in size since the day before.

The camp fire was burning brightly when the boys with the bows and arrows returned, stating that they had found it rather too late in the day for game, and that it would be better to postpone the shooting of birds and rabbits till the morning. Old Pluck then asked the members of his little company what provisions they had brought with them, and it was found that no one except Tomtit had thought of bringing anything. He had in his coat pocket a luncheon of bread and meat. It was thereupon ordered that Tomtit's luncheon should be divided into eleven portions, and the little fellow was given a knife with which to cut it up.

It was at this time that there came through the forest a band of robbers—five men and a chief. These men, on their way to their castle, had been talking about the approach of Christmas.

"I am getting very tired," said the chief, "of the wild revelries with which on great occasions we

## BUDDIE AND HIS FRIENDS

By Robt. L. Dickey



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make our castle ring. It would be a most agreeable relief, methinks, if we could celebrate the coming Christmas as ordinary people do. The trouble is, we don't know how."

"You speak well, replied one of his followers. "We would be glad enough to have the ordinary Christmas festivities if we did but know how such things are managed."

The conversation was cut short at the point by the discovery of a camp robber crouched close to the ground, and crept silently to the spot where the boys were gathered around Tomtit, watching him as he cut up his luncheon.

In a few moments the chief gave a whistle, and then the robbers rushed out and each of the men seized two of the larger boys, while the chief stooped down and grasped Tomtit by the collar. Some of the boys kicked and scuffled a great deal; but this was of no use, and they were all marched away to the robbers' castle, little Tomtit feeling very proud that it took a whole man to hold him by the collar.

When they reached the castle the boys were shut up in a large room, where they were soon provided with a plentiful supper. Having finished their meal, they were conducted to the great hall of the castle, where the robber chief sat in his chair of state, a huge fire blazing upon the hearth, while suits of armor, glittering weapons and trophies of many kinds were hung upon the walls.

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The boys were now ordered to tell their story, and when Old Pluck had finished it, the chief addressed his captives thus: "I am sure that you young fellows could never have imagined the pleasure you were going to give to me when you determined to run away from school at this happy season. My men and myself have a fancy for a Christmas like that of other people. We want a Christmas tree, Christmas carols and games, and all that sort of festivity. We know nothing about these things ourselves, and were wondering how we could manage to have the kind of Christmas we want. But now that we have you boys with us, it will all be simple and easy enough. You shall celebrate

Christmas for us in the manner to which you have always been accustomed. We will provide you with everything that is necessary, and we will have a good old school-and-home Christmas. You shall even hang up your stockings, and I will see to it that Santa Claus for the first time visits this castle. And now, my fine fellows, to bed with you, and tomorrow we will all go to work to prepare for a good old-fashioned Christmas."

The boys were conducted to a large upper room, where they found eleven mattresses spread out upon the floor. They threw themselves upon their beds, but not one of them could close his eyes through thinking of the doleful plight which they were

in. They had run away to get rid of the tiresome old Christmas doings, and now they were to go through all those very things just to please a band of robbers. The thought of it was insupportable, and for an hour or two each boy rolled and moaned upon his mattress.

At last Old Pluck spoke. "Boys," he said, "all is now quiet below, and I believe those rascally robbers have gone to bed. Let us wait a little while longer, and then slip down stairs and run away. We can surely find some door or window which we can open, and I, for one, am not willing to stay here and act the part of a Christmas slave for the pleasure of these bandits."

"No," exclaimed Tomtit, sitting up in bed, so as to expand his chest, "we will never consent to that."

The boys eagerly agreed to Old Pluck's plan, and in about half an hour they quietly arose and stole toward the stairs. The full-moon was shining in through the

windows, so that they could see perfectly well where they were going. They had gone a short distance down the great staircase, when Old Pluck, who led the way, heard a slight noise behind him. Turning to inquire what this was, he was told it was the cracking of Tomtit's knees.

"Pass the word to Tomtit," he said, in a whisper, "that if he can't keep his knees from cracking he must stay where he is."

Poor little Tomtit, who brought up the rear, was dreadfully troubled when he heard this, but he bravely passed the word back that his knees should not crack any more, and the line moved on.

(Continued Next Week)

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