

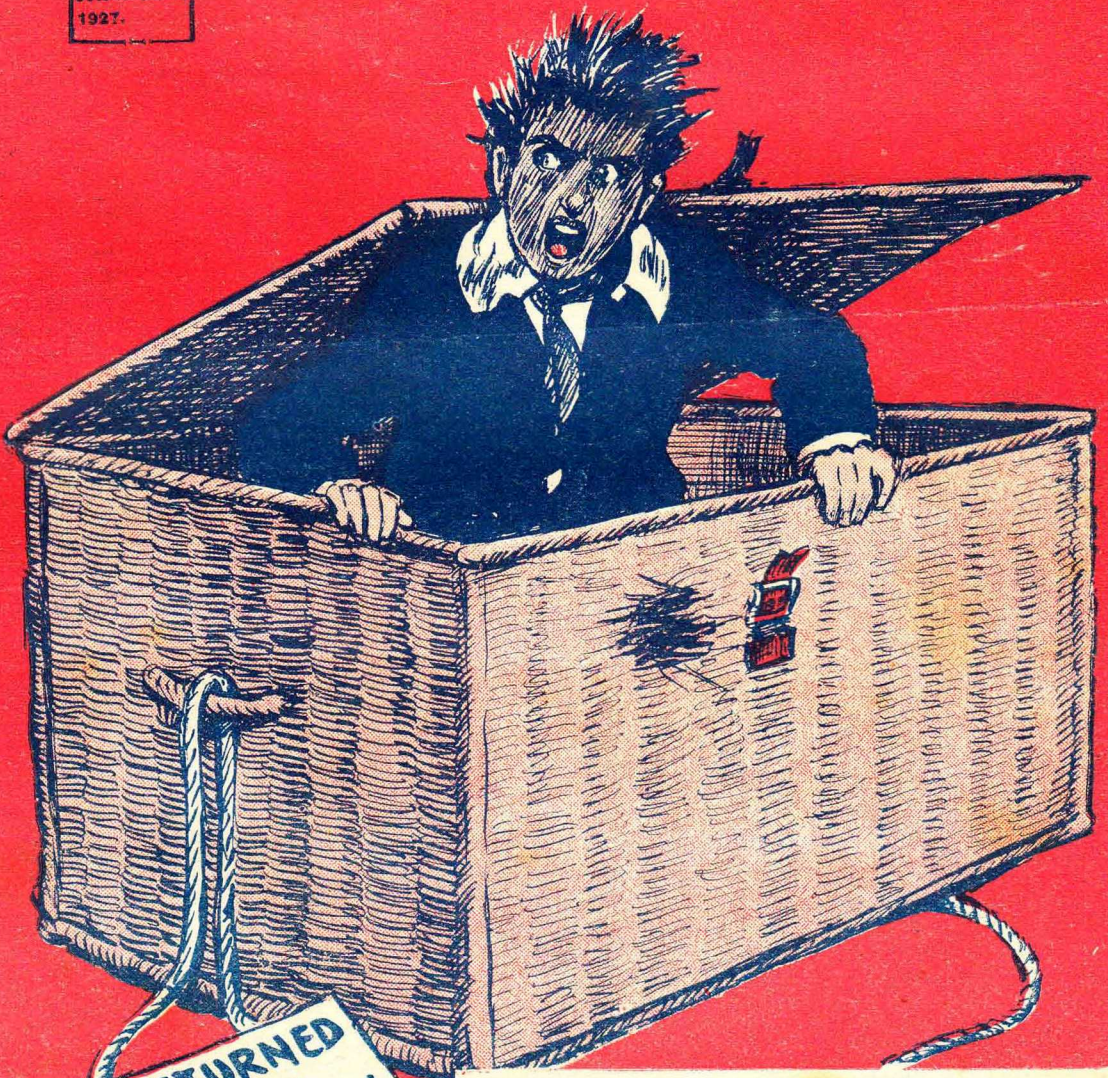
The

GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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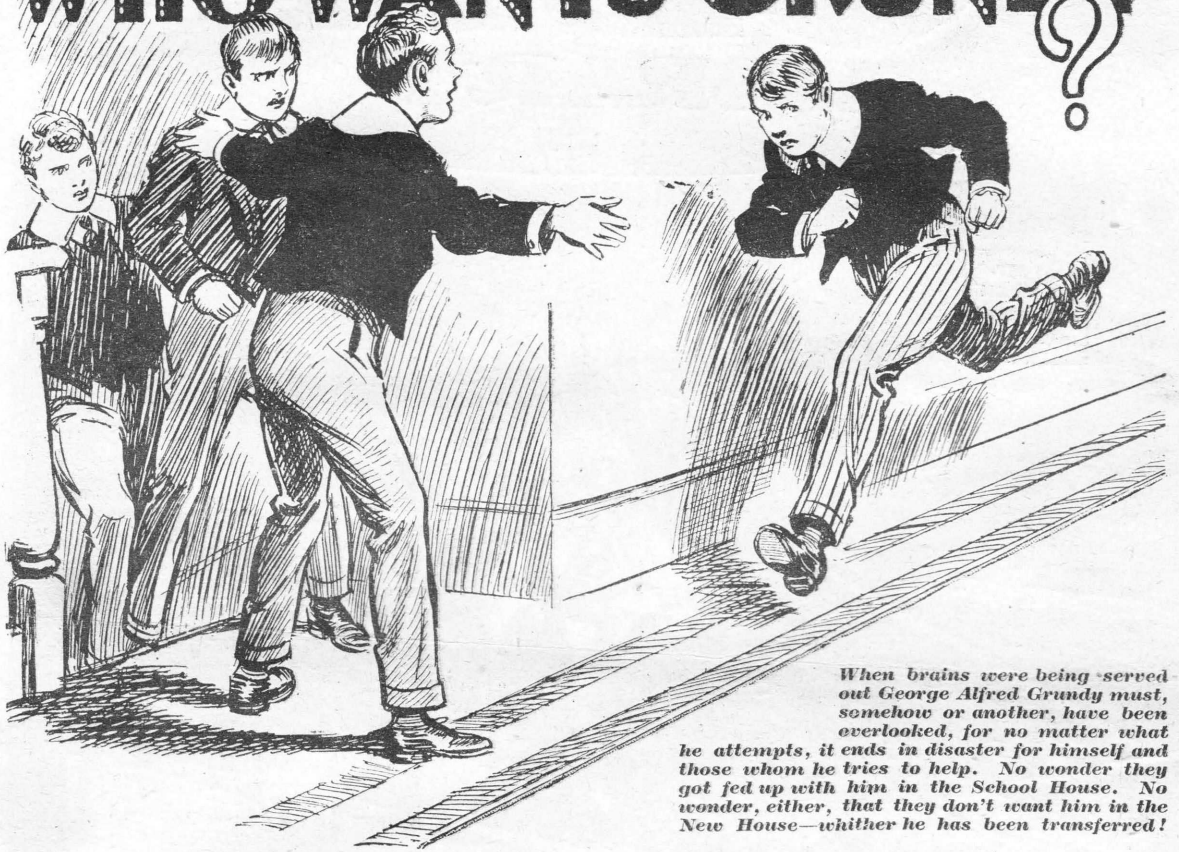
RETURNED
WITH
THANKS!

**NOT WANTED IN THE
NEW HOUSE!**

*(Read the grand school story featuring George Alfred Grundy
of St. Jim's—inside.)*

HERE'S A GRAND EXTRA-LONG SCHOOL STORY FEATURING—

WHO WANTS GRUNDY?



When brains were being served out George Alfred Grundy must, somehow or another, have been overlooked, for no matter what he attempts, it ends in disaster for himself and those whom he tries to help. No wonder they got fed up with him in the School House. No wonder, either, that they don't want him in the New House—whether he has been transferred!

CHAPTER 1. Rival Claims!

CCHEERIO, Tommy! Top of the morning, old son!" Jack Blake called the greeting to Tom Merry in the quad at St. Jim's. It was a pleasant, sunny morning, and Blake, Herries, D'Arcy and Digby were taking a stroll there during morning break. Blake & Co. wore broad grins, and they looked very cheery and satisfied with life on that fresh autumn morning.

So did the Terrible Three for that matter, and they exchanged grins with their chums of the Fourth.

"Cheerio!" returned Tom Merry. "Well, how do you fellows feel this morning—after last night?"

"In fine fettle," chuckled Blake. "I say, where is it? Got it safely?"

"Safe as houses!" grinned Tom Merry. "It's where those New House merchants won't get it back anyway."

"Where?" demanded Blake. "We can't afford to take any risks of losing it, Tommy. Figgy and his pals will never rest until they get it back again."

"They won't jolly well get it back," said Tom Merry grimly. "We've won it—by right of conquest! We licked those New House worms to a frazzle last night, and they've been kind enough to admit that School House is cockhouse, and that they can't hold a candle to us."

"Under compulsion!" grinned Herries.

"Yes, they admitted it under compulsion right enough," chuckled Tom. "But they did admit it! We've got their signed statement that School House is cockhouse. It's the biggest score over the New House this term, chaps."

"Thanks to dear old Grundy!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Yes, thanks to Grundy," smiled Tom Merry. "Grundy's the prime ass of the age! If you want a muck-up made of any wheeze or anything, just leave it

to Grundy. He'll make a good politician when he grows up—he fairly thrives on blunders."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"School House has been getting it rather in the neck from New House lately," said Tom. "But when Grundy was transferred over to the New House, I knew what would happen. It was Grundy who mucked up their raid last night—let 'em down fairly. Just what he would do. It's thanks to dear old Grundy that we put the kybosh on 'em and collared this as a permanent record that School House is cockhouse."

And Tom patted his jacket pocket with deep satisfaction.

"Then—then you've got the thing on you?" gasped Blake, staring.

"Eh? Yes. I haven't had time to put it in a safe place yet," said Tom. "It's going to hang—"

"Well, you silly ass!" snorted Blake. "It isn't safe to carry it about with you, fathead! Look here, hand it over to us. We want to have it framed at once to hang over the mantelpiece in our study."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it will be safah there than anywhere else, Tom Mewwy."

"Cheek!" gasped Manners.

"Awful cheek!" added Lowther.

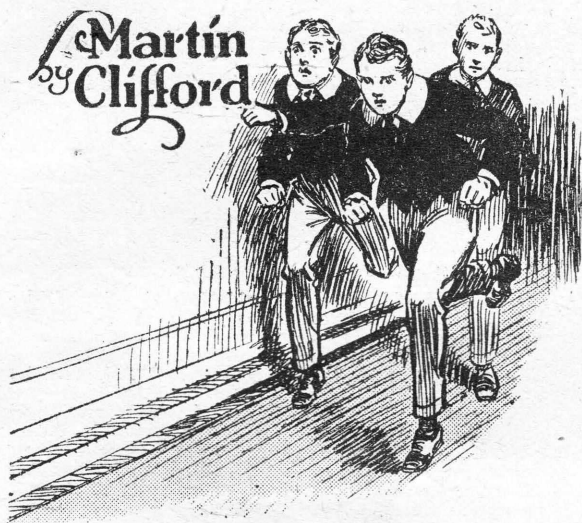
"What nerve!" said Tom Merry. "You Fourth chaps have a nerve and no mistake! This is going to be framed and hung up in our study! We would be idiots if we allowed you Fourth Form youngsters to take care of it."

"Look here," said Blake warmly. "Who the thump are you calling youngsters?"

"My dear kids, when you get to my age," said Tom Merry loftily—Tom was just three months older than Blake—"you can call yourselves men."

"You—you cheeky ass!" gasped Blake. "Why, for two pins I'd mop—"

"Peace!" murmured Tom hastily. "Sorry—I shouldn't have called you youngster's! Men is the right word, of course—little men! Well, my little man, as I was saying—"



"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
 "Mop the cheeky rotters up!" gasped Blake wrathfully.
 "We'll jolly well show you—"
 "Cheese it!" chuckled Tom. "Only pulling your giddy legs, old fruit! Hallo, here's your minor, Gussy. I fancy I know what he wants."

It was a welcome interruption, for Blake & Co. were getting rather excited and wrathful. If there was anything that really annoyed Blake it was being reminded that he was younger than Tom Merry—if only three months. But, fortunately, young Wally D'Arcy of the Third with several of his fellow fags came pelting across the quadrangle just then.

"Oh, here you are!" said Wally breathlessly as he rushed up. "Where is it, Tom Merry?"

"Where's what?" asked Tom.
 "You jolly well know what," grinned Wally. "We've just heard how you put it across those New House worms last night. Where's that giddy document? We want a squint at it!"

"You'll see it in due course," smiled Tom. "It's going to be framed and hung up in our study. I'll arrange a day for viewing it some time, so that all the House can file through the study and see it."

"But we want to see it now," snorted Wally. "Besides, it's not safe while you've got it!"

"You cheeky young rotter!"
 "Oh, come off it!" said Wally, glaring. "Look here, that document ought to be in the hands of the Third. Hand it over!"

"Bai Jove!"
 "Well, my hat!"

"Much better in the Third!" agreed Curly Gibson. "You fellows are bound to lose it, or let Figgy's lot get it back again. Hand it over!"

"I'll hand you my boot if you don't clear," snorted Tom Merry. "You cheeky fags—"

"Oh, cut that out!" snorted Wally. "Can't you let us see it, anyway? If you don't, we'll jolly well refuse to back you up in any more House rows! So there!"

Tom Merry chuckled—not very alarmed by that terrifying threat.

"Well, we'll let you see it, Wally," he grinned, feeling in his jacket pocket. "But no larks, mind!"

"All right!" agreed Wally, with a grunt. "Got it with you, eh? Might have expected that from you! Fancy carrying it about with you—a valuable document like that!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "I've a good mind not to show it you now for your cheek!"

"Look here—"

"Here it is," laughed Tom, and he took out a sheet of folded paper and opened it out. From the careful way in which he handled it it might have been a very valuable document indeed.

The Third Form fags crowded round to look at it. The paper was a sheet of ordinary writing-paper torn from a pad, and on it was inscribed in ink the following declaration:

"TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN!

"This is to Certify that we, the undersigned, members of that Casual Ward known as the New House, hereby admit that we have been hopelessly dished and done by the young

gentlemen of the School House, that we are hopelessly out-classed by them in Sports and in Japes, and that we hereby humbly acknowledge ourselves to be inferior and below their weight in every possible way, and that

"SCHOOL HOUSE IS COCKHOUSE!
 (Signed)"

Then followed the names of George Figgins, Fatty Wynn, Kerr, Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, Jimson, French, and practically all the leading lights of the New House Shell and Fourth.

Wally D'Arcy's face beamed gleefully as he read it. "M-mum-my hat!" he gasped. "Well, my word! You fellows have scored this time, and no mistake. And those New House worms actually signed it like that?"

"They had to," grinned Tom Merry. "We had them tied up prisoners, and we threatened to paint their chivvies and rub paint into their hair if they didn't sign. They had to!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"It was what they intended doing to us!" said Tom grimly. "It was Grundy's idea, I believe. He bribed some New House chaps to join him in a raid on us last night. They brought two pots of paint and brushes, and the wheeze was to tie us in bed while we slept, and to daub the paint over our hair and chivvies. But Figgy heard about it, and, knowing Grundy would make a muck of it, as usual, he hurried over with some more New House chaps."

"Yes; but how did it go wrong?" asked Levison minor. Tom chuckled.

"Grundy!" he said. "That prize ass Grundy, of course! He was just tying Blake to his bed when Figgy and his gang turned up. Grundy jumped to the conclusion that they were us chaps out of the Shell—it being dark, of course—and he went for Figgy bald-headed. The other chaps followed his example, and when Blake and the others woke up they found the two New House gangs fighting like billy-ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally & Co.

"Then Blake's lot went for 'em," added Tom. "Then we turned up, too, and between us we soon put the New House raiders on their backs. Well, that's how it happened! Prime, wasn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry folded up the precious document carefully and placed it in his pocket.

"Look here!" said Wally, laughing no longer. "You'd better hand it over, you know. Much better."

"If you mean my boot, here it is," said Tom.
 "And here's mine," added Blake.

Wally & Co., however, did not wait for the boots. They had not really expected to get the document. But they did not want the boots, and so they fled.

They had scarcely gone, when Tom Merry chuckled as he sighted a much bigger fellow hurrying across the quad towards them.

"Hallo!" he murmured. "Here's Grundy! Mind your eye!"

It was the great George Alfred right enough. He was still showing many clear signs of paint on his rugged features and in his tousled hair. Indeed, his face was still resembling a boiled beetroot in hue. For after the raid that had failed—owing to Grundy—Figgins & Co. had found comfort in taking it out of Grundy. They had used the paint which had been intended for the School House juniors on him—which punishment fitted the case, as it had been Grundy's idea in the first place.

The burly junior glared at Tom Merry & Co. as he came up.

"Oh, here you are!" he snorted.
 "Yes, here we are!" smiled Tom. "Top of the morning, old scout! Did you sleep well last night?"

"And what's the price of paint?" asked Lowther gravely.

"I hear you spent the night in the bath-room. But I see you're still wearing some."

"You—you—"
 "Mind the beaks don't see it," warned Lowther. "After all, you pinched the paint, and—"

"That's enough!" snapped Grundy, clenching his big fists. "I want no cheek! I'm not in the School House now, remember, and I shan't stand cheek as I used to. Mind that! Now, Tom Merry, you've got that rotten paper on you!"

"Really?"

"Yes, you have!" roared Grundy. "I saw you showing it to those cheeky fags. Out with it. I want it!"

"Go hon!"

"You hear me?" shouted Grundy furiously. "I'm going to have that dashed paper! My name's on it! Hand it over, or I'll give you the licking of your life!"

"Go it!"

"Think I'm going to let you keep it—to crow over me

and the rest of my House?" hooted Grundy. "Not likely! Why, Figgy and those rotters blame me for what happened—me, mind you, when it was Figgins himself, the rotter! If he hadn't chipped in last night I should have put it across you kids fairly, and I should have been the most popular chap in the New House now!"

"Oh crumbs! Would you?"

"I want no cheek! Hand it over, sharp! I know you've got it! I saw it. Cheek! My name's on it! Hand it over!"

"Not much! Run away and play!"

"You—you won't!" bellowed Grundy.

"Rats!"

"Oh, all right!" said Grundy, through his teeth. "Then I shall have to take it!"

And with that Grundy rushed at Tom Merry with his big fists whirling.

CHAPTER 2.

Wrathy Creditors!

CRASH!

Tom Merry went down with Grundy on top of him. Tom had expected trouble from Grundy, and he had warned his chums to expect it. But Grundy's sudden rush took him completely by surprise.

"Oh, my hat!" he roared. "Back up! Draggimoff! Oh crikey!"

Grundy was a strong fellow, and before Tom could defend himself he had whirled Tom over on his back, and was kneeling on his chest. Then he plunged his hand into Tom's jacket-pocket—obviously after the precious document.

"Stop him!" roared Tom.

"We'll stop him all right!" snorted Blake. "Over he goes!"

Crash!

Over went Grundy, with Blake and the other juniors swarming over him. Grundy struggled and roared furiously. Luckily he had not had a chance to touch the paper, and Tom Merry scrambled up, wrathy and breathless.

"Hold him!" he gasped. "Hold the cheeky rotter!"

"Bump him, you mean!" snorted Lowther. "Show him how we treat New House worms!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah Gwundy wequiah a lesson, bai Jove!"

So did the rest of the School House juniors. That Grundy should have expected, or hoped, to gain possession of the precious declaration in that manner was amazing. Yet he might easily have managed it, and the thought of the narrow escape made the juniors exceedingly wrathy.

They fell upon Grundy, and smote him hip and thigh, rolling him over and over in the dust. Then they bumped him hard.

"Yoooooop!" roared Grundy. "Rescue, New House!"

Standing over on the New House steps were several New House juniors, and in the ordinary way they would have come pelting over to the rescue.

But they did not do so now. They ignored Grundy's howls for aid and for rescue. The fact was that Figgy & Co. simply refused to accept the great George Alfred as a New House fellow, though officially he was one. Grundy wasn't wanted in the New House. Figgins & Co. looked upon his transfer as "cheek." They were not pleased at having one of the biggest "duds" in St. Jim's "planted" on them. It was, according to Figgins, an insult to the New House that School House rubbish should be shot there!

So Grundy went through the mill, and when Tom Merry & Co. had done with him he looked rather a wreck. Tom Merry & Co., breathless but smiling, left him grovelling on the gravel path, and walked cheerily away.

"It was a narrow escape," said Blake, shaking his head seriously. "The idiot might easily have collared the paper and destroyed it before we could have stopped him. I think you'd better hand it over into safer hands, Tommy."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am afraid you are wathah careless, Tom Mewwy. We cannot wely on you Shellfish to take care of such a valuable document. Wathah not! Pway hand it to me, deah boy."

"Me, you mean!" snorted Blake. "Great Scott! It would be safer with Trimble than with you, Gussy. Still, I agree that a Fourth Form chap should take care of it. Hand it over, Tom Merry!"

"Rats!"

"If you say rats to me, Tom Merry——"

"More rats!" said Tom Merry pleasantly. "That paper's going to remain in my possession—or, at least, in Study No. 10 in the Shell passage. It will be pinned up over the mantelpiece for all to see—except New House worms, of course. We shall have to watch it and guard it. We'll lock it up whenever we go out of gates."

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"But what about us?" snorted Blake. "I say we ought to have charge of it in turns!"

"I've got a better idea than that," grinned Tom. "I'm going to get Manners here to take a photograph of the giddy document. We'll have copies taken, and distribute them in the House."

"Good wheeze!" said Blake eagerly. "Ripping, in fact—so long as we have the original, of course!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's it!" said Herries and Digby together.

"Is it?" said Tom Merry, smiling. "I think not! That original, I tell you, remains with me—skipper of Lower School, and the chap who originated the wheeze to get it. You fellows were only going to paint those merchants. That was too crude for my liking. You must admit that it was a good idea."

"Oh, yes! But——"

"Then that should settle it," said Tom cheerily. "The original stays in No. 10, and you can have a print the moment Manners can get one done. Hang it, a photo of the thing should be as good as the original."

"Well, I suppose it is," grinned Blake. "Well, we'll let it go at that!"

And Tom Merry & Co. went indoors, having agreed upon that, though Blake & Co. did so rather grumpily. Being Fourth-Formers, they naturally felt that the honour of possessing the famous declaration should be in their hands—a feeling the Terrible Three were scarce likely to humour in the circumstances.

Meanwhile, Grundy had picked himself up, and tottered back to the New House. He was hurt, and he was exceedingly wrathy. In fact he was raging.

Ignoring the grins of the New House fellows on the steps, Grundy was about to enter the House when another group of New House juniors came out. They suddenly sighted Grundy.

"Here he is! Here's Grundy!"

It was a regular yell. Grundy stared at them.

"What the thump— Here, what's the matter?"

The juniors surrounded Grundy. Jimson, and French, and Thompson were there, and so were the rest of the fellows who had gone over to raid the School House with him the night before—though French and Jimson remained in the background.

"Oh, here you are, Grundy!" grunted Thompson. "Been hunting the House for you, old chap! What about shelling out now?"

"Eh? What for?" demanded Grundy, blinking from one to the other. "What's this silly game?"

"You know jolly well what we want!" said Thompson warmly. "What about our five bobs?"

"F-fuf-five bobs?" stammered Grundy.

"Yes. You promised us five bob each if we'd help you raid the School House dorms. Well, didn't we help you? Come along! Shell out!"

"That's the idea, Grundy! Shell out!" added Baker grimly.

"And when's the spread?" demanded Robinson. "You promised me a tip-top spread, too! Is it this afternoon?"

Apparently it wasn't "this afternoon," from the peculiar expression on Grundy's face. He glared.

"You—you cheeky cads!" he spluttered at last.

"Eh? What's that?" said Thompson.

"You cheeky cads!" gasped Grundy. "Well, of all the cheek! After what happened last night. After letting me down like you did! After helping Figgy and those other rotters to paint me! After turning on me and backing Figgins up! After—after——"

Words seemed to fail Grundy.

"Look here," said Robinson in a dangerous tone. "Does that mean you're jolly well going to try to dodge out of it?"

"If it does——" snorted Thompson.

"Of course it does!" spluttered Grundy. "Though I don't call it dodging out of it, you rotters! Well, I'm hanged! I said I'd pay you if you backed me up. You didn't back me up, you sweeps! You let me down! When Figgins chipped in and mucked things up you turned round and backed him up. You cheeky cads! Why——" gasped Grundy, almost overcome with indignation. "Some of you even helped to shove that filthy paint over me!"

"It wasn't Figgy who mucked things up, it was you!" snorted Thompson. "You went for him and upset the whole show! I'm blessed if I know why we were such asses as to back you up, you footling duffer!"

"But you didn't back me up, you rotters!" hooted Grundy. "You let me down! I'll jolly well see you boiled before I'll shell out, after what happened!"

"We did back you up!" shouted Robinson. "Think we got out of a comfy bed to follow a fool like you just for the fun of it?"

"If you call me a fool, Robinson," choked Grundy,

raising his big fists, "why, I'll—I'll mop up the Close with you! I'll—"

"Then you're not going to pay up?" gasped Thompson.

"No fear! You can go and eat coke, you cheeky cads!"

"Nor stand us the spread as promised?"

"No, not likely!" roared Grundy furiously.

"You—you mean that?" stuttered Thompson.

"Yes!" bellowed Grundy.

"Right!" said Thompson. "Then we'll take it out of your hide, you footling duffer! We'll have our money's worth out of you! Collar him, chaps!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Rag the cad!"

There was a rush for George Alfred, and had he been an ordinary fellow—or a wise fellow—Grundy would have doubtless taken to his heels before such a threatening rush. But Grundy was no ordinary fellow—and he was seldom wise.

He stood his ground.

The rush came, and Grundy laid about him with a will, hitting out right and left with his big fists. There followed a chorus of howls of pain. But Grundy's defiance only served to infuriate his "creditors" still more.

Robinson's suggestion met with the approval of all—excepting Grundy.

After rolling him over and over on the gravel path, and after stuffing handfuls of gravel down the back of his collar, they lifted him up and frog-marched him over the green to the lily pond, which was quite near to the New House.

"Duck his napper in!" gasped Robinson excitedly. "He's nearly closed my eye! It'll help to cool him down a bit!"

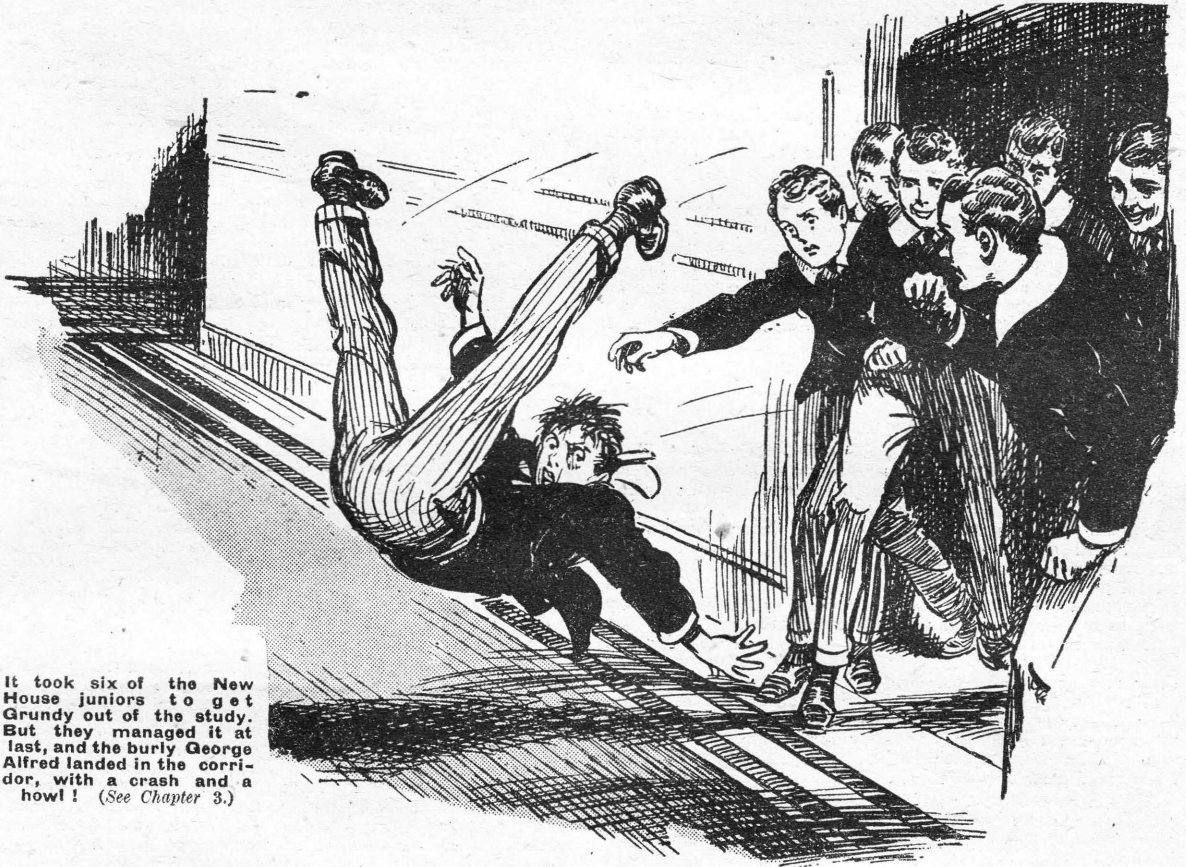
"You dare—" howled Grundy, struggling furiously.

"Why, I'll—I'll— M-mum-mummm! Groogh!"

Grundy's head went under with a splash, and a series of frantic splutterings followed, while the New House raggars held his legs. As he struggled to get free Grundy's arms and shoulders splashed in.

The lily pond was a very pretty pond, and the water was beautifully clean and clear. Yet Grundy did not appear to be relishing his morning dip—possibly because the water was cold, possibly because he hadn't wanted the dip at all. He floundered and wriggled with his head over the edge of the stone basin, and he bellowed and spluttered lustily.

But his tormentors released him at last—not because they



It took six of the New House juniors to get Grundy out of the study. But they managed it at last, and the burly George Alfred landed in the corridor, with a crash and a howl! (See Chapter 3.)

"Smash him!" roared Thompson.

But it was easier said than done. Grundy was a mighty fighter when he was really roused, and he certainly was roused now. Grundy felt his followers had let him down badly, and there was some truth in his point of view certainly. None the less, the wrath of his hirings could be expected. They had had a rough time the previous evening at the hands of the School House fellows—as had all the New House raiders.

In their view, it was all Grundy's fault from beginning to end. And now that there seemed no likelihood of getting either their pay or their feed, they intended to take it out of Grundy.

And they did—though the process proved a painful one for many of them as well as for Grundy himself.

One after another went down before Grundy's fists, but at last numbers told. Grundy went crashing down, bellowing and struggling, and the raggars piled on top of him.

"Give him socks!" panted Robinson, whose nose was streaming. "Oh, my hat! Duck him in the pond!"

"Yoooooop!" roared Grundy, his voice muffled beneath the scum. "Oh, won't I smash— Yarooooooogh! Ow! Yow! Lemme gerrup! You dare—"

Again Grundy's voice ended in a wail of woe. But

were tired, but because Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was bearing down on them with all speed, his gown fluttering in the morning breeze.

French & Co. fled, leaving Grundy to it.

"Grundy! What—what—what—"

Mr. Ratcliff stopped and stared transfixed at Grundy. That unfortunate youth crawled to his feet, and shook himself like a wet dog. The Housemaster's side-whiskers bristled with anger. It did not take much to make the irritable and unpopular Housemaster angry at any time.

"Grundy!" he thundered, getting his voice back again. "What does this mean? How dare you perform such idiotic tricks in the Close?"

"Grooogh! Mum-mum-mummm!" spluttered Grundy.

"Oh—grooogh! Oh—crikey!"

"Answer me, sir, instead of making those ridiculous noises!"

Grundy shook himself again and glowered at the master. "Can't you see what's happened?" he hooted, scarcely caring how he spoke in his fury. "Think I'm doing this for the fun of the thing? Think it was my fault?"

"Grundy—"

"I don't care!" spluttered Grundy. "I'm fed-up—sick of this sort of thing! I've been ducked—me—ducked in there! Could I help it? What are you blaming me for?"

"Grundy!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "How—how dare you speak to me, your Housemaster, in that insolent manner? I shall punish you most severely for this escapade and for your unexampled insolence!"

"Look here, sir—"

"Silence! Since you have been in my House, Grundy, you have given more trouble than the rest of the boys put together! You are nothing less than an imbecile!"

"S-sus-sir!"

"Silence! I did not approve of your transfer to my House in the first place; indeed, I was very strongly opposed to it, knowing what a troublesome and utterly irresponsible boy you are," said Mr. Ratcliff angrily. "I warn you that I shall not put up with much more of this nonsense from you."

"But it wasn't my fault—" spluttered Grundy furiously.

"I am aware that you did not get into that disgraceful state of your own accord," snapped the Housemaster. "Fortunately, I was in time to see those boys running away! If I discover their identity I shall punish them severely. I have not the slightest doubt, however, that you were the cause of the trouble, and that it was entirely your own fault. You are the most quarrelsome fellow in the school."

"M-my hat! Look here, sir—"

"Enough! Go indoors and clean yourself, you utterly absurd boy!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "Afterwards, you will report to me for punishment. Go!"

"But, sir—"

"Go!"

Grundy went. And a little later he was making the acquaintance of Mr. Ratcliff's cane—not for the first time by any means since he had been a member of the New House. And so vigorously did the Housemaster lay it on that Grundy had good cause to hope devoutly that this would be the last time. Grundy's late followers had certainly had their money's worth—and Grundy had undoubtedly had his!

CHAPTER 3.

A Ripping Wheeze!

W E'VE got to do something—absolutely got to!"

It was just after afternoon class the following day, and George Figgins was laying down the law in his study in the New House.

Figgins' own chums, Fatty Wynn and Kerr were in the study, and so were Redfern & Co. and several other important members of the New House junior element.

And all the juniors wore serious expressions—very serious expressions. The matter they had been called together by Figgins to discuss was a very serious matter.

It was to discuss the recent reverse sustained by the New House—though tragedy seemed a better word—in their rivalry with School House.

It really was serious. As the New House had expected, Tom Merry & Co. had made the very most of their victory—and especially had they made the most of the signed declaration which had been so ruthlessly obtained from their New House rivals.

All the school was roaring about it. Tom Merry had not been able to get the declaration framed yet, but he had pinned it up in his study, and practically every fellow in the Lower School in the School House had been there to gloat over it.

Nor was that the worst. Wherever the New House fellows went they were chipped unmercifully regarding it by their triumphant rivals. Figgins & Co. were getting "fed-up" with the subject, and they were getting desperate also.

Many and varied had been the suggestions put forward for the recovery of the luckless document, and several attempts had been made to get hold of it. But Tom Merry & Co. had proved far too wary, and each attempt had ended in dismal failure. Figgins had even bribed the New House page to go over and try to get it by any means. But that also had ended in failure. Whenever the Terrible Three had left the study unoccupied, they had either locked it, or taken the paper away.

It really seemed hopeless. Figgins was almost in tears about it. He regretted now that they had ever signed the document—regretted it bitterly. Even paint—blue and green—over a fellow's face and in his hair would have been better than this. Why, scarcely any of the paint showed on Grundy's person now. His hair was somewhat tousled and tufty—that was all!

But it was too late for regrets now.

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Tom Merry & Co. had the document, and the only thing to do was to try to get it back again—which was more easily said than done.

"Yes, we've got to do something, you fellows," groaned Figgins again. "I'm absolutely fed-up with being chipped by those School House cads! Can't you chaps think of a wheeze? Why should it always be left to me to get the ideas out?"

"Blessed if I can think of anything," confessed Kerr, wrinkling his brows in thought. "Blow Grundy! This is all his dashed fault!"

"Of course it is," said Figgins with a growl. "I knew that born idiot would bring bad luck on us! But it's no good ragging him now. We've got to find a way to get that silly paper back. Now— Here, outside!"

Figgins broke off and glared at the junior who had just marched into the study. It was Grundy.

"Talk of angels," murmured Kerr, "and you hear the giddy flapping of their wings!"

"You shut up, Kerr!" said Grundy. "Hold on, Figgins, I want a word with you!"

"But I don't," said Figgins pleasantly. "Outside, old bean!"

"But I've got a wheeze—"

"Go and bury it!"

"You cheeky ass—"

"Have you come looking for trouble?" asked Figgins, getting up from his seat. "Because if you have, you can have it, Grundy. I'm just in the right mood to make mincemeat of the chap who's let the New House in for all this."

"Oh, don't talk like a kid," said Grundy impatiently. "Look here, I've got a top-hole wheeze to get that dashed paper back! It's got to be done, and I'm the man to do it. But I shall need support for it. Now, my idea is to kidnap Tom Merry and his gang and to keep 'em prisoners until they hand over the paper. How's that for an idea?"

"Rotten! Take it away and bury it! Then go and drown your silly self."

"Look here—" Grundy was roaring, when he was interrupted. A knock came to the door, and Taggles, the school porter, appeared. Behind Taggles showed a gentleman with exceedingly sooty clothes, an exceedingly sooty face, and a bundle of brushes over one shoulder and a couple of sacks in one hand.

"Hollo!" chuckled Fatty Wynn. "Here's the giddy chimney-sweep."

"Oh, blow!" said Figgy. "Want this room, Taggy?"

"Which we does, Master Figgins," said Taggles. "Mr. Jupp 'ere's just finished the Fifth Form studies and 'e's ready now for these. As this is the hend study—"

"Can't he start on one of the others," growled Figgins. "We're just holding a very important meeting, Taggy."

"Well, I s'pose 'e can, Master Figgins," said Taggles, as he caught the glint of a shilling in Figgins' hand. "Come along 'ere, Mister Jupp. We'll go next door until Master Figgins 'as done with 'is study."

Taggles and the chimney-sweep retired, Taggles neatly catching the shilling Figgins pitched to him as he went out. Taggles was rather a cross-grained old gentleman, and a shilling would often do what kind words alone wouldn't. And as the juniors had been warned to prepare their studies for Mr. Jupp's visit, and as Figgins' study was the end study on the passage, Taggles would doubtless have insisted—but for the shilling!

"Worth a bob!" grinned Figgins. "Why the thump couldn't they do the dashed chimney-sweeping some other time. Anyway, now Grundy—"

"Hold on, Figgy," said Kerr suddenly.

Kerr's voice was excited, and he jumped to his feet as he spoke, his eyes gleaming.

"What's the matter, Kerr? You—you haven't got an idea?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Yes, I think I have," said Kerr thoughtfully. "The sight of that giddy sweep gave it me. What about one of us going over to the School House as a chimney-sweep?"

"Oh! You mean—"

"I mean dressing up as a chimney-sweep and calling on Tom Merry's study to do the chimney. I believe old Jupp's due to do their chimneys when he's done ours. See the idea? They're bound to clear out of the study while it's done. Then the chap—I'll do it if you like—can help himself to the paper and do a bunk with it, or destroy it right away. How's that?"

"Ripping!" said Fatty Wynn, who had a deep respect for Kerr. "What a brainwave!"

"It's great!" grinned Redfern. "Only—"

"Only it's jolly risky," said Figgins, though his eyes were sparkling. "Nunno! Just drop that idea for a bit,

Kerr! Put it right out of your mind. I don't approve of it for the moment."

"You don't?" said Kerr warmly. "Why, you ass——"
"I'm surprised at you thinking of such an idea, Kerr," said Figgins severely. "Fancy playing a trick like that on those fellows! Now, I've got a great idea I want to expound to you fellows. But I think we'd better say good-bye to our friend Grundy first. I think I've asked him to depart——"

"But, I say, Figgy," said Owen warmly. "I think Kerr's wheeze is jolly good! I think——"

"No doubt you do, old chap," said Figgins blandly. "But I think this is a most unsuitable moment to discuss such a sooty idea—if you'll pardon the pun. Now, Grundy, which do you prefer—the door or the window?"

"Look here——"
"We're looking, old chap. You're a blot on the landscape! Outside!"

"I'm jolly well not going until you've heard my idea!" shouted Grundy. "Why, you cheeky——"

"Then we'll have to chuck you out," said Figgins. "Help me chuck Grundy out, you fellows."
"Like a shot!"

The fellows were only too willing to handle Grundy. Though not a little mystified at Figgins' manner and words,

his chums backed him up eagerly enough as he rushed at Grundy. There was a few moments' wild scrimmaging, and then Grundy went out, struggling and bellowing, though it took six of them all their time to get him out.

But he went flying out at last, falling in the corridor with a crash and a howl. The door slammed, and when Grundy jumped up again, breathing fire and slaughter, he found it locked.

After thumping on the panels and shouting threats through the keyhole, Grundy turned away, seething with fury. It was jealousy again! Figgins knew it was a jolly good idea to kidnap the Terrible Three, but he daren't agree because he knew Grundy would get the credit for it, and he scowled bitterly as he tramped away. He seemed as far off as ever from realising his ambition of becoming leader of the New House juniors.

Getting his cap, Grundy went downstairs and out into the Close to think things

over. His wheeze was a wonderful idea—to Grundy—and he hadn't given it up yet. The trouble was how to get some New House fellows to back him up in it.

"Oh, the cads!" murmured Grundy. "They know it's a ripping idea; but they're afraid it'll make me popular with the chaps if it comes off! I shouldn't be surprised if they didn't pinch the idea and work it themselves. They're cads enough! If they do——"

Grundy's musings ended abruptly, and he stopped short in his gloomy pacing. His eyes had suddenly fallen upon a handcart standing unattended by the wall of the New House. On the cart was a sooty sack—obviously containing soot—and a bundle of sweep's brushes. In addition a very sooty raincoat was lying roughly folded on the cart.

"My hat!" breathed Grundy.

Privately Grundy had thought Kerr's wheeze quite good—splendid, in fact. But he had been too full of his own great wheeze to give it thought. Indeed he had forgotten about it until now.

"By Jove!" he murmured, staring at the cart and its contents. "I wonder——"

He paused and reflected for some moments.

"Figgins was a fool to chuck the idea away," he murmured to himself. "Just like him, though—no brains, and no idea of leadership. Why, it's the idea of a lifetime. Not as good as mine, perhaps. But it'll work easier, and I shan't need any help. By Jingo! I'm jolly glad now that ass Figgy did turn it down! I'm the man for this job! When I come back with that dashed document that rotter Figgins will be ready to drown himself. It'll just show the fellows what I can do!"

Grundy made up his mind in a moment. He gave a

swift glance about him, and, seeing nobody near, he grabbed the handles of the handcart and started off with the cart. It was very light, and he fairly ran it round the corner of the building. It was quiet here, and not a soul was to be seen. Grundy hurried on, rounded the chapel, and brought the cart to a halt by the door of the tool-shed.

In a moment he had the door open, and in another few moments he had carried the sack of soot, the brushes, and the coat into the shed.

"Lemme see," he breathed gleefully. "I shall only need an old cap, a scarf, and a pair of old trousers to do the trick. This old coat's just the very thing. Luckily, I've got a pair of torn bags, and if I cover 'em in soot and then rub my chivvy and hands and cap in it I shall do a treat. Here goes, anyway."

And, with that Grundy hid Mr. Jupp's coat and spare brushes, and then he hurried out and made for his study to get his torn pair of trousers and the rest of the things he needed for the part he intended to play. If Figgins was ass enough to chuck away a good idea he wasn't going to! Grundy already saw himself in possession of the precious declaration, and he already imagined himself the hero of the New House for having recovered it. Unfortunately Grundy was Grundy, and there always was a slip 'twixt cup and lip in Grundy's affairs.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S "HIDDEN NAMES" PUZZLE!

1. As we rush northward in our car, dew-spangled meadows meet our gaze; but no bleating of lambs greets our ears. The riverside and the rippling brook especially delight us. (North, Cardew, Noble, Rivers, Brooke.)

2. "Don't go recklessly; grip the rail, Tony! There is a grave risk, imp. O! Let's exercise caution." (Gore, Railton, Skimpole.)

3. "I owe not any man," said Levi, "so now I am happy." (Owen, Levison.)

4. It is fatal bothering, when troubles are on your track everywhere. When you are ill you will wish you hadn't! (Talbot, Racke, Reilly.)

5. It is an ugly night; the dank, noxious air, as we rush, denotes danger. (Glyn, Knox, Rushden.)

6. "I don't care a fig; gin solaces me," said Taggles. "I never go all of a trimble, or quail at homilies from the Head." (Figgins, Trimble, Lathom.)

CHAPTER 4. Interrupted!

GEOURGE FIGGINS gave a soft chuckle as he turned away from his study door after locking it.

"That's got rid of that silly duffer!" he remarked, with satisfaction. "Now we can discuss the giddy wheeze in safety."

"Let's hear it, then!" granted Kerr. "If it's better than mine——"

"It's no better than yours," said Figgins calmly.

"Then why the thump——"

"Simply because it is yours," grinned Figgins. "As the giddy song doesn't say, my wheeze is your wheeze, and your wheeze is my wheeze——"

"But you silly idiot," said Kerr, "you said you had a great wheeze."

"So I have—yours, old chap," said Figgins, with a chuckle.

"But you said you didn't approve of it," said Kerr,

greatly exasperated. "Are you——"

"Not at all," said Figgins. "I said I didn't approve of it for the moment. I meant for the moment while Grundy was here. I told you to drop this idea simply because it wasn't the moment to discuss it with Grundy about. See?"

"Oh!"

"Grundy's the biggest ass outside a strait-jacket!" said Figgins. "If he knew we were going to carry out such a wheeze he'd chip in and muck it up for a cert. We can't afford to take risks. I only told you to drop the idea for a bit—until Grundy had gone. Now he's gone we can discuss it."

"Oh!" said Kerr, with a chuckle. "I see now. So you do think it a good wheeze, after all?"

"It's the wheeze of a lifetime," said Figgins, with great enthusiasm. "Good man, Kerr! We're going to do it, my pippins! But you're the man for the job, Kerr. There isn't another fellow in St. Jim's to touch you at impersonations."

"Hear, hear!"

"I knew you couldn't chuck out an idea of Kerr's like that," grinned Fatty Wynn, in great relief. "It's ripping. Bound to come off with Kerr doing it."

"It's a jolly good idea," said Lawrence eagerly. "Let's do it."

"We're going to do it," said Figgins calmly. "All you need to do is to ask old Jupp to lend us his brushes and things for about ten minutes. He'll do that for a tip. We'll have a whip round for that. We can easily root out some old clobber from our property-box. And it wouldn't be a bad idea to wear a false moustache and eyebrows. Then, with

a touch of grease-paint and plenty of soot on your chivvy, you'll be fixed up."

"Good egg!"

"Then let's get going!" grinned Figgins. "No time like the present, as it'll soon be time for old Jupp to knock off work. Sure you can pull it off, Kerr?"

"Can a duck swim?" asked Kerr, with a chuckle.

"Then come on, and we'll tackle Jupp right away!"

Figgins and Kerr went out, and when they came back a few minutes later their gleeful faces gave the answer.

"All serene!" said Figgy. "He's doing it for five bob. He's bringing— Here he is!"

The door opened wider, and old Jupp came in with his brushes and a sack half filled with soot. He grinned and deposited them on the floor—the carpet already having been taken up by the juniors in readiness for Mr. Jupp.

"Now for the clobber!" said Figgins as Mr. Jupp withdrew. "Look lively!"

The juniors set about the job with a will, and soon they had rooted out an old lounge suit that was only fit for the ragman. Figgins made it less fit by rubbing coat and trousers in soot. Then Kerr hastily changed and started making up. It did not take him long, for he was an expert at the game. When he had finished his chums scarcely knew him. With his sooty clothes, his equally sooty face and hands, and with his straggling moustache and eyebrows, he looked the part to the life.

"Ripping!" said Figgins, amid a chorus of gleeful agreement. "They'll take you for old Jupp's assistant for a cert."

"Which I've come to clean this 'ere chimley!" said Kerr, in a deep voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr's voice was perfect for the part, and his chums roared.

"You'll do!" grinned Figgins. "And don't come back without that confounded declaration, or you'll get slaughtered!"

"I won't!" said Kerr coolly. "You leave this to me. Well, here goes. You chaps had better not follow me."

"Rather not! Good luck, old chap!"

With his chums' good wishes ringing in his ears, Kerr left the study and started down the stairs with cool confidence, his bag of soot over one shoulder and the brushes over the other. At the bottom of the stairs he came face to face with Mr. Ratcliff, and the Housemaster gave him a sour look and stepped quickly aside to avoid the brushes. Kerr felt sorely tempted to jab him with one, but he resisted the temptation. In the hall doorway several fellows were standing, and they moved aside, giving him scarcely a second glance. On the steps he met Monteith, and he passed the New House captain without arousing the slightest suspicion.

It was the same in the quad and in the School House. By the time Kerr reached the door of Tom Merry's study he was feeling quite confident and self-possessed. Masters, seniors, and juniors had seen him and had not "tumbled." Yet Kerr knew the risk he was running, and he meant to take no chances.

He knocked at the closed door, and Tom Merry's voice sounded from within.

"Come in, fathead!"

Kerr pushed the door open and marched in. The Terrible Three were apparently just getting tea ready, and they stared at their visitor.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What the thump—"

"Which I've come to clean this 'ere chimley!" said Kerr, dropping his bag without ceremony on the study carpet, despite his decision not to take chances. "If you young gents wouldn't mind liftin' up that there carpet—"

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Tom. "Here, look at our carpet now! I thought our chimneys were going to be done to-morrow. Hang it all—"

"Which I'm only doin' as I bin told," said Kerr. "I got to do this 'ere chimley afore leavin' off, young gents. It won't take me more'n five minutes."

"But, hang it all, we're just going to have tea!" snorted Tom Merry. "Mr. Railton told us they were to be done to-morrow, not to-day."

"I can't 'elp that, young sir," said Kerr, shaking his head. "I got to do what I'm told. I won't be long, an' I won't make no more mess than I can 'elp! Don't you bother about that there carpet. I'll turn it back, young gents."

And, dropping his brushes on the carpet, Kerr started to roll back the study carpet near the fireplace.

"Well, this is a bit thick!" snorted Lowther. "Look here, can't you come again or go to some other study? Where's old Jupp?"

"He's over in the other school," said Kerr, nodding. "But I've 'ad me orders, and I got to do this 'ere chimley afore I leaves off!"

"Oh, let him go ahead!" grinned Tom Merry. "We

can postpone tea for a bit, or, better still, we'll invite ourselves to tea with Blake. Good wheeze. We haven't enough butter to go round, and little else, except bread. It'll be a good excuse to invite our giddy selves."

"Well, that's a good idea," said Lowther heartily. "Go ahead, then, old top!"

And, chuckling, the Terrible Three cleared away the things near the fireplace and left the study to Kerr, little dreaming they were leaving their study to the mercy of an enemy. In fact, the Terrible Three never gave the celebrated declaration a thought just then. Valuable as it was, they could scarcely be expected to have it in their thoughts all the time.

They left the door open as they went, and Kerr closed it gently, with a silent chuckle. He had already made quite sure that the precious paper was on view in the study, and the success of his scheme so far filled him with joy.

"Here goes!" he murmured. "I'll just collar it, and then upset the soot over the carpet, just to show there's no ill-feeling. This is great!"

And after listening for a moment at the door, Kerr hurried across to the mantelpiece. Over it, in a neat little frame, was the precious "To all whom it may concern" document. Kerr scanned it over, chuckling as he noted the fretwork frame which had evidently been made in haste for it by Blake, who was a bit of a carpenter.

Kerr lost no further time.

He took it down, placing it on the table for a moment whilst he grasped the half-filled sack of soot and tipped it over the carpet, the soot-dust rising in clouds as he did so, and settling on practically everything in the room.

"A-tish-oo!" sneezed Kerr. "Oh, my hat! I nearly sneezed my giddy moustache off that time. Phew! What a mess! Now I'll—"

Kerr paused with a guilty start as a knock came to the door. Suddenly realising his danger, Kerr shoved the framed document behind him and hoped for the best. As he did so the door opened and someone entered.

The New House impersonator almost fell down as he sighted the newcomer.

It was the form of a chimney sweep, just about as sooty as himself, and carrying a half-filled bag of soot and a few brushes.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Kerr.

CHAPTER 5.

A Black Business!

"Oh crikey!"

From the individual in the doorway came an equally dismayed ejaculation. Then he seemed to collect himself, and he came into the room, closing the door after him.

Kerr blinked at him, wondering whether to make a bolt for it or not. But the sweep was standing before the door, and that was scarcely possible. He naturally imagined this was Jupp's assistant. And Grundy—for the newcomer was Grundy—naturally imagined Kerr was Jupp's assistant, not dreaming that Figgy had agreed to the wheeze, after all. Such a possibility did not occur to Grundy. Kerr recovered his self-possession first.

"Ere, mate!" he said. "What you doin' here? Mister Jupp told me to do this job."

Grundy gasped. He was not so quick witted as Kerr. "Look—look here—" he was beginning, when he halted, realising he was speaking in his natural voice.

But it was already too late—Kerr was staring dumb-founded at him. Not only had he recognised Grundy's voice, but he soon noted other little things. Grundy's sooty trousers were rather high, and below them showed a pair of silk purple socks—certainly not the kind of socks a sweep was likely to wear. Moreover, Grundy's sooty raincoat was open at the neck, showing his school tie, bearing the school colours. They were two little details Grundy had overlooked—he always did overlook little things like that. It was really a wonder Grundy had got so far safely.

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Kerr, in his natural voice. "Grundy! Oh, you awful idiot!"

"Eh? What—what—" Grundy stared blankly at him. Then he understood and gave a gasp. "Kerr, you awful rotter! Is—is it you?"

"Yes, it is!" hissed Kerr, glaring ferociously at Grundy. "Oh, you—you born idiot! Get out—hook it for goodness' sake! You'll muck up the whole show now!"

"What? Me clear out!" gasped Grundy. "Well, I like that! Why, you cheeky rotter—"

"Shut your row and get out!" hissed Kerr, almost beside himself with anxiety. "Here, let me pass, you fool!"

Grundy was only too willing to let him do that—until Grundy suddenly sighted the frame in Kerr's hand. He gave a startled yelp.

"Here! Why, you rotter, you've got it!" he almost

shouted. "Here, give it to me! Think I'm going to let you do me down after all the trouble I've taken? Hand it over!"

He made a grab at the frame, and Kerr jumped back. "You silly fool!" he gasped in alarm. "For goodness' sake chuck it, and let me get out, Grundy! Can't you see you'll muck up— Leggo!"

Grundy got a grip on the frame, and refused to let go. Grundy had his own ideas of right and wrong, and in his view he was entitled to the frame. Kerr had tricked him, pretending he wasn't going to do it, and, therefore, he, Grundy, had the fairest right to it. And he certainly wasn't going to lose all the honour and glory after all the trouble he had taken.

"Hand it over!" he hissed, trying to wrench it from Kerr's hand. "If you jolly well don't I'll smash you to little bits, Kerr. Hand it over!"

"I jolly well won't! Grundy, you awful fool! Chuck it, and let me get away with it! If you don't—"

Kerr broke off, and for some moments a furious tug-of-war took place for possession of the precious framed docu-

much hurt—and he forgot completely where he was, and quite lost interest in his errand. His head was singing, and all he thought of then was to hit Grundy, and hit him as hard as he could.

He scrambled up and went for Grundy with a ferocious rush.

Crash!

Grundy went down, being just a trifle too slow with his guard.

But he was up again in a flash, and he made a rush at Kerr in his turn. They closed, and after struggling and swaying a moment or two they crashed into the table, and then they tripped and went down.

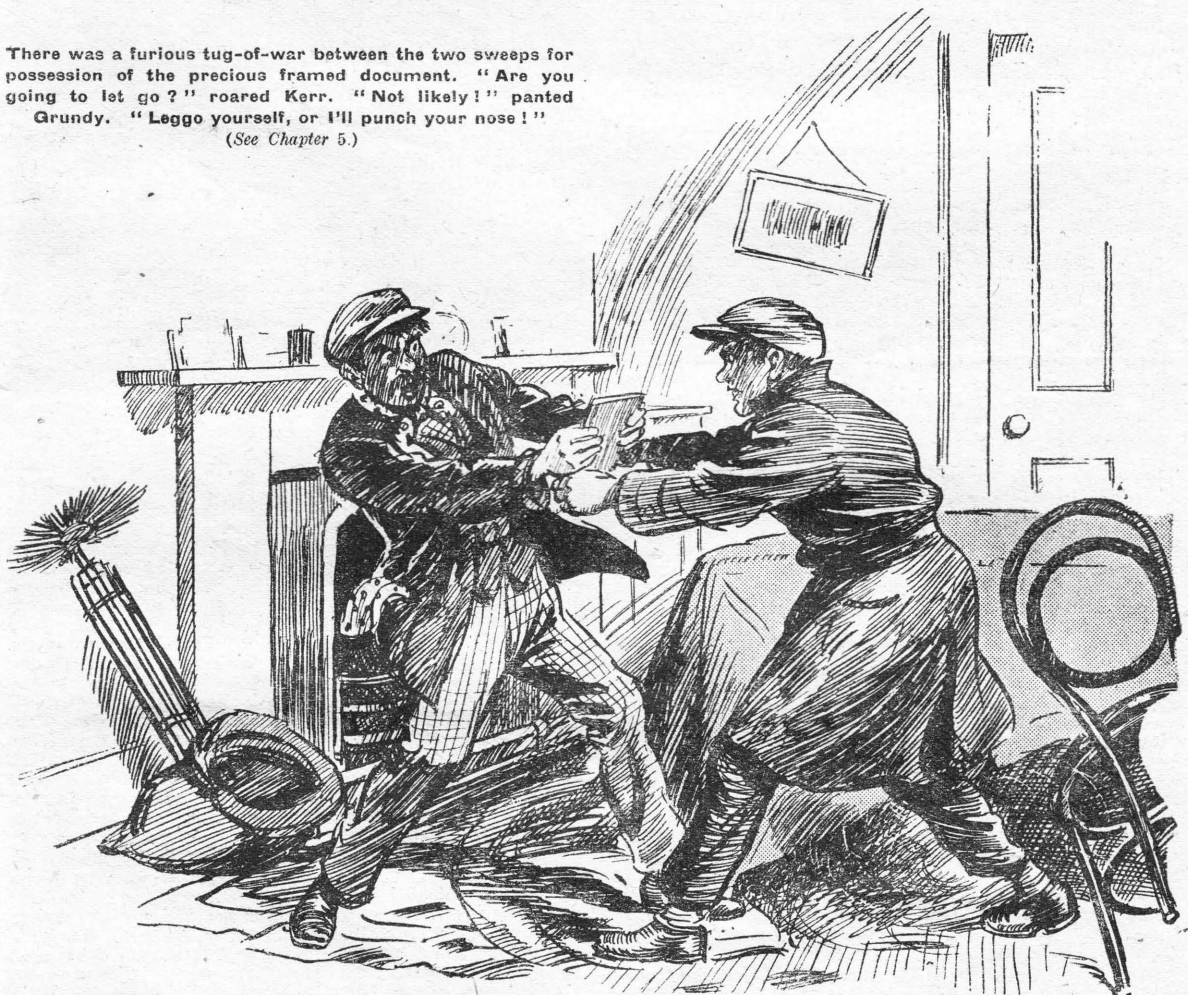
They continued the scrap among the soot on the carpet, rolling over and over in it, punching, gasping, and sneezing. Both were soon covered from head to foot with soot—fairly wallowing in it.

"You—you awful—atishoo!—idiot! Leggo!" panted Kerr, realising now how things would end. "Leggo, and let's get out of this, you— Groogh! Fool! Atishoo!"

But Grundy was beyond reason, or caring. He was by

There was a furious tug-of-war between the two sweeps for possession of the precious framed document. "Are you going to let go?" roared Kerr. "Not likely!" panted Grundy. "Leggo yourself, or I'll punch your nose!"

(See Chapter 5.)



ment. Both the rival sweeps were in a furious rage now. "Are you going to let go?" roared Kerr. "Oh, won't you just get it for this, Grundy! Leggo!"

"Not likely!" panted Grundy. "Leggo yourself, or I'll punch your nose!"

"I jolly well won't! You silly fool—"

"Take that, then!" said Grundy; and he punched Kerr on the nose as promised.

Kerr yelped—he could not help it. Then he punched Grundy on the nose in return, dragged himself free, and leaped for the door.

But Grundy was too quick—for once. He grabbed him, and then the trouble started. Kerr lost his temper with a vengeance. He landed Grundy another jab that sent Grundy's head back with a jerk; but even then Grundy didn't let go. He gave Kerr a terrific pile-driver that laid Kerr flat on the floor, the frame falling from his hand and smashing upon the floor.

That quite finished Kerr's patience. He was hurt—very

this time in a terrific rage, and Kerr was having the time of his life. Such a row, however, could not go on for long, and suddenly the door flew open, and Tom Merry appeared in the doorway with a crowd of startled School House fellows behind him.

"What the—what—what—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, my hat!"

Yells of surprise and gasps of utter amazement came from the fellows in the doorway. They stared and stared at the strange sight of two chimney-sweeps fighting on the carpet of Study No. 10. They also stared and stared at the shocking state of the study.

"Here!" howled Tom Merry, getting his breath back with a gulp. "Stop that! Stop that, you beastly cads! Why, you—you— Mum-my hat!"

As Tom advanced into the study he suddenly caught a glimpse of the sweep's face—the individual they had

allowed into the room. Something strange had happened to it. One of his eyebrows was missing altogether, and his moustache was twisted round at a ludicrous angle.

Then Tom's eyes fell upon the smashed frame lying among the soot. He blinked at it a moment, and then he gave a yell. He fancied he guessed what that twisted moustache meant.

"It's a jape—those dashed New House chaps!" he yelled. "Shut that door, somebody. We're looking into this."

He sprang forward, and tore the sweep's moustache clean away. It revealed a sooty, smudgy face, but a youthful face without a doubt.

"Kerr!"

It was a howl!

The next moment there was another howl as Grundy turned a sooty face towards them, his eyes fairly glaring out of the soot.

"Grundy!"

"Bai Jove!"

The fellows crowded into the study, their faces showing their utter amazement. Tom Merry hastily shut the door.

"I think I see the game!" he gasped. "Though why the beggars are scrapping beats me! Mind they don't get away!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Half a dozen School House fellows took their stand at the door. Grundy and Kerr—they had ceased scrapping now—scrambled to their feet. They were both utterly dismayed. It was all up—Tom Merry had already taken possession of the precious declaration. The Terrible Three were looking furious.

"Oh, you—you idiot!" panted Kerr, glaring ferociously at Grundy. "Oh, you—you fooling lunatic! You've mucked it all up. Just what I expected, you howling ass!"

"What? Blame me, do you?" hooted Grundy. "Why, you raving chump! You—you silly, fooling mugwump! You—you frabjous ass! You—you—"

Words failed Grundy. He started towards Kerr as if he were going to continue the scrap. But Tom Merry grabbed the study poker and jabbed at him to keep him back.

"No you don't!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Haven't you done enough confounded damage in this study, blow you? If you start again, I'll—I'll brain you with this poker, Grundy!"

"Impossible!" choked Blake, who, with the rest of the fellows was nearly helpless with mirth. "You'd only let air out if you tapped Grundy's napper with that!"

"Look here, Blake—" began Grundy, spluttering.

"Shut up!" howled Tom. "Look at the state of this study, you dangerous maniac! Look what you've done! What the dickens have you been playing at, Kerr?"

"Can't you guess?" said Kerr savagely. "That fooling ass—that born idiot—chipped in—"

"You rotten fibber!" snorted Grundy furiously. "It was you who chipped in! Figgy said you weren't going to try the sweep wheeze, didn't he? Well, I thought you weren't going to do it, and as I thought it was a jolly good idea I came to do it. Then I found you here."

"Come on, Kerr—out with it!" snapped Tom Merry. "I fancy I can guess, but—"

"No reason why I shouldn't tell you!" scowled Kerr, glaring still at the raging George Alfred. "It's all up now in any case. We were after that blessed paper, of course."

"We know that," said Tom. "But—"

"Grundy mucked it up—as usual," said Kerr. "You chaps let me in, and I should have got away with it, but for that—that thumping blunderer! He came in and tried to take it from me. Then he started punching, and I started, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then he tried the same game on?" said Herries, who was a bit dense.

"Yes; mucked it up, of course. He'll get flayed alive for this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House fellows roared with laughter. Even the Terrible Three had to laugh. Indeed, it was impossible to refrain for long from laughing at both Grundy and Kerr. They were covered from head to foot with soot, and they bore numerous signs of that terrific scrap in addition. Altogether they looked most woeful and fearful sights.

"It's nothing to laugh at!" roared Grundy. "Here, clear away from that door. I want to get out of this!"

"Then you'll have to go on wanting, my pippin," said Tom Merry grimly. "We haven't finished with you yet. Think you can come here, making a muck like this, and get away with it?"

"Not likely," said Manners. "My hat! It'll take a

week to get rid of this stuff. Make those rotten New House sweeps clear it away, Tommy."

"I'm going to," said Tom. "Now, my— Look out!"

Tom yelled as Kerr made a flying leap for the door. Kerr had evidently banked on the juniors scattering to make way for him, and they certainly would have done so had they had time; nobody wanted to be covered in soot. But they hadn't time to jump away, Kerr's sudden leap taking them by surprise. Moreover, as Kerr leaped Grundy saw the idea, and he leaped after him.

There followed a chorus of startled yells, and the next moment Kerr and Grundy and several of the guardians of the door were struggling in a heap by the door.

"Collar them!" hooted Tom Merry. "Don't let 'em escape, you idiots!"

Neither Grundy nor Kerr did escape. It was too late to think of escaping the soot, and now Grundy and Kerr were among them the wrathful juniors grabbed and held them.

"That's better!" gasped Tom Merry. "Jove, what a mess! Never mind, we've still got that paper, and we've got these beauties! Hunt out some cricket-stumps, Monty."

"Right-ho!"

Cricket-stumps were hunted out. Grundy and Kerr eyed them apprehensively. And their fears were well-founded.

"Now," said Tom, taking charge of one, "collar one each, some of you! These merchants are going to clean this place up—sharp! Every time they slack I'm going to tap 'em—like that!"

"Yooop!" Grundy howled fendishly as he took the tap. "Better not make too much noise!" warned Tom Merry.

"If we have Raitlon here there'll be more trouble than you or we want! Now get busy!"

Kerr groaned and got busy. He didn't want to, but he had the sense to see that he would have to. Grundy didn't see it, and it took several applications of the cricket-stump to make him see it. But he got down to it at last, and with a shovel and brush the hapless New House juniors started to put the soot back into the bags as best they could.

"We'll clear out now and leave 'em to it," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "If it isn't cleaned up in ten minutes, my pippins, we'll come and let you have twenty each. Mind that!"

"Oh, you rotters!" gasped Kerr.

"Oh, you—you— Oh, won't I just smash you fellows for this!" panted Grundy.

But he went on with the job, his face a sight to see. The juniors crowded out, for the atmosphere was beginning to get too thick for them. Tom Merry went out last, carefully locking the door after him. Kerr and Grundy, almost weeping with wrath and dismay, set to with a will. They did not want twenty with a cricket-stump. But several times during that ten minutes they nearly came to blows again. The thought of the stump deterred them, however.

Just after the ten minutes was up Tom Merry came in again, followed by a grinning crowd of School House juniors.

"That's better!" grinned the junior captain, as he glanced round the room. "I'll tip the maids to finish it off after the sweep's been to-morrow. We'll have to use the giddy Common-room to-night. Now collar 'em!"

"What-ho!"

Before Kerr or Grundy realised what was happening to them they were grabbed, and their wrists were tied behind them, despite their furious struggles.

"Now see if the coast's clear, and bring that form here!" said Tom Merry.

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

The coast was clear, all the masters and prefects being apparently at tea. Next minute Blake, Herries, Levison, and D'Arcy came in, carrying a short form, and Kerr and Grundy were seated straddle-legged across it, with their feet tied together underneath.

Then Monty Lowther fixed two big sheets of cardboard across their sooty chests. On each sheet was a printed notice bearing the words in red ink:

"NEW HOUSE SWEEPS!"

The next moment, with fellows at either end of the form, the hapless two were being rushed out of the House. It was a perilous journey for the New House prisoners—especially on the stairs—but they arrived safely in the quad at last. To their dismay they found a host of School House fellows gathered there awaiting them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Roars of laughter went up, and it was no wonder, for Grundy and Kerr looked ludicrous sights with the sweep's brushes across their shoulders.

Apparently Tom Merry had made arrangements for a procession to escort the hapless "sweeps," for immediately a dozen fellows with tin cans, saucepan-lids, and combs

wrapped in paper lined up in front, and the procession started off amid roars of laughter and a terrific noise from the "band."

Crash! Bang, bang, bang! Crash! Rum-tum-tum! It was an ear-splitting noise, and several New House fellows who were hanging about by the New House steps fairly jumped and looked round.

They were Figgins & Co. awaiting the return of Kerr from his expedition—waiting in hopeful anticipation.

They stared at the procession wending its way across the quadrangle. Then, as he sighted the two figures on the form, a terrible dread came to Figgins.

"It—it can't be old Kerr!" he gasped. "There's two of 'em! Am I dreaming?"

"It's up against us, anyway," growled Redfern, staring hard at the figures on the form. "Hark at 'em! By Jingo. I—I do believe it is Kerr—one of 'em, anyway!"

"And the other's Grundy, or I'm a Dutchman!" yelled Owen. "What the thump—"

"What the merry dickens—"

Figgins & Co. gaped in utter dismay at the procession as it wended its noisy way towards the New House. From one of the School House windows Mr. Linton was shouting something, but nobody heard him above the terrific din.

"Hurrah!"

"School House wins again!"

"School House is cock House!"

"What price New House sweeps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins heard that last, and now he could recognise the figures on the form.

"Oh crumbs!" he mumbled feebly.

"It is old Kerr! Something's gone wrong! Oh dear!"

"Rescue!" roared Kerr, sighting Figgins & Co.

"Rescue!"

"Come on!"

panted Figgins.

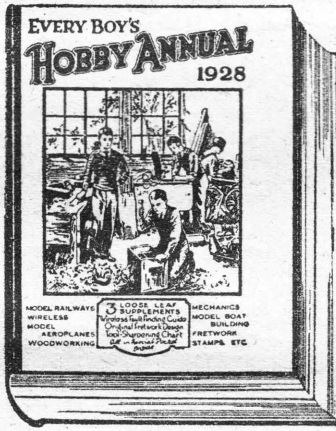
"They're about four to one, but we've got to rescue old Kerr somehow. Come on!"

"Yes, rather!"

And Figgins led his forlorn hope across to meet the procession with a rush.

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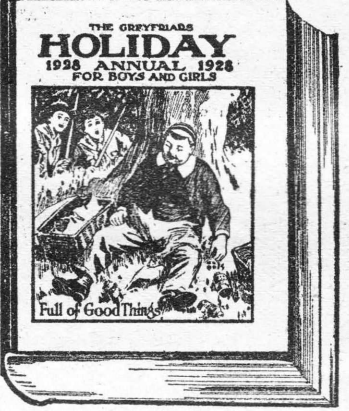


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"Kerr," he gasped, "what the thump does this mean? Is this another bit of Grundy's fooling interference?"

"Ow!" panted Kerr. "Ow-wow! Oh dear, I'm whacked! Yes, it was all that fool's fault," he added furiously. "He chipped in and mucked it all up."

"Why, you—you awful fibber!" gasped Grundy, almost trembling with rage. "It was you who chipped in and mucked it up, you frightful cad! Why, you—you—"

"Is that a fact, Kerr?" demanded Figgins, ignoring Grundy's outburst. "Did this awful idiot chip in? Is that why he's rigged up like that? Did he actually—"

"Yes, he did!" groaned Kerr. "I'd just got the blessed declaration, and was just about to get clear with it when that—born idiot came in dressed like that. He'd pinched the idea, and wanted to do it, I suppose. Anyway, he wouldn't listen to me, and because I refused to hand over the paper he went for me, the cheeky cad! Then Tom Merry and his lot came in and found us scrapping. They

collared us and put us through the mill. That's what happened, and that's the fool whose fault it is!"

"Well," said Figgins, drawing a deep, deep breath. "Well, upon my word! And—and they got the paper back, of course—didn't you get the chance to destroy it, Kerr?"

"No. It was framed. Grundy gave me no chance to do anything! Smash him—scalp him—boil the cad in oil!"

"Why, you cheeky—"

Grundy got no further than that. He halted abruptly, and then he turned tail and bolted for his life. It was as well he did so, for the looks on the faces of Figgins & Co., as they made one simultaneous rush at him, were terrific in their ferocity.

For once George Alfred Grundy was wise in his generation.

He took to his heels and fairly streaked across the quad, with the swarm of raging

New House fellows at his heels.

The steps of the New House entrance Grundy took in two enormous leaps, and then he pelted along the passages and on up the stairs, hardly knowing where he was making for.

"After him!" roared Figgins. "Don't let him get away!"

Figgins & Co. had no intention of doing that if they could help it. Grundy's latest blundering was the last straw for them. Kerr had joined in the pursuit. Despite his appalling state his one desire was to be in at the death when Grundy was run to earth. As was the case over in the School House all the prefects were at tea, and nobody in authority was met, fortunately.

"He's making for the box-rooms!" panted Figgins, as they tore along the Fifth Form corridor. "Go it, chaps!"

The chaps went it with a will. They saw Grundy, still going strong, leap the first few steps of the back staircase, and they followed with a rush. Grundy's idea was quite clearly to lock himself in one of the top box-rooms—if he could.

But, alas for his hopes in that direction! In his frantic haste he tripped over the top step, and went headlong. He jumped up again, gasping and panting, and made a flying leap for the nearest doorway on the

CHAPTER 6.

Returned with Thanks!

BUT it wasn't part of Tom Merry's game to end up with a scrap with the New House. He was quite content with the victory as it was. They were already in the enemies' country, and as he saw Figgins & Co. pelting across Tom gave the order to retreat.

"Drop these merchants and get back, chaps!" he shouted. "We don't want a row and the beaks brought in. Good-bye, you New House sweeps!"

Both Kerr and Grundy were beyond returning the parting greeting. The next moment they found themselves dropped with a thump, and then the band broke up amid hilarious howls of laughter, and the School House fellows scattered and returned to their own quarters.

The next moment Figgins & Co. pelted up, their faces showing their alarm and bitter disappointment.

In a flash both Kerr and Grundy had been released. Their fellow juniors from the New House eyed their condition aghast. Figgins glared at Grundy ferociously. He could guess who was the author of all the trouble.

landing. He shot through the doorway and slammed the door.

But, unluckily for him, Figgins was at his heels now, and as he slammed the door, Figgins' long leg shot out, and the door slammed on Figgins' right foot.

"Altogether!" gasped Figgins.

Grundy strove desperately to close the door, but a combined rush of the avengers sent it hurtling back and Grundy with it. He flew across the room and sat down with a bump that shook the floor. Next instant Figgins & Co. had him fast.

"Got you!" panted Figgins. "Here you are, Kerr! Now we'll rag him baldheaded!"

"Leggo!" yelled Grundy. "Lemme gerrup, and I'll smash you all to little bits! I'll fight the lot of you half a dozen at a time! Ow! Oh, my hat! Oh, you rotters! After doing my best for the House like I've done! Lemme go, I tell you!"

"Not much!" gasped Figgins grimly. "Jove, what a mess he's in! Now, what shall we do with the blithering idiot, Kerr?"

Kerr dropped down on a trunk, panting and spent. But one look at Grundy showed him that he was in a far worse state. Indeed, Kerr, as he blinked at him, almost felt sorry for the luckless Shell fellow. Kerr had suffered, but not quite so much as had Grundy.

"Ow!" he panted. "I'm about whacked! But—but look here, we'll let him off now. He's had enough, I fancy!"

"What?"

It was a howl.

Kerr grinned a feeble grin. He was a good-natured junior, and Grundy's hapless face was a most woeful sight—as was Kerr's own could he have known it.

"Oh, let him off!" he said. "For to-day, at all events! He got a good stumping from those School House cads, and I fancy he's had his whack!"

"Oh, all right!" grunted Figgins, glowering at Grundy, who still looked defiant as ever. "But we're not finished with him. We won't lick him, but I'm fed-up to the chin with his silly antics. Look here, I've got it. We'll pack him off back to the School House. The beaks had no right to shove such a born idiot on to us."

"Why, you—you—" Grundy spluttered, too overcome with indignation to continue.

"Good wheeze!" said Lawrence. "We'll pack him back there—returned without thanks! Perhaps"—he added hopefully—"they may keep him there!"

"What hopes!" grunted Figgins. "Still, we'll do it as a protest! I'll tell you what! We'll shove him in that old trunk there and tap old Taggy to cart him across and plank him in Tom Merry's study."

"Ripping!"

"Look here—" bellowed Grundy. "You dare! Try it on, that's all! Why, you frightful rotters— Leggo!"

Grundy roared as he was lifted, despite his struggles, and Redfern opened the lid of the big trunk. He was tied up hand and foot and planked inside a moment later.

It was an American basket-trunk, and there were plenty of slits and holes in it for Grundy to breathe through. Grundy roared with rage, but Figgins soon stopped that by tying a handkerchief across his mouth, and Grundy's protests ended in a gurgle.

"Now hold on while I write the message," grinned Figgins. "Here we are!"

Figgins tore a cardboard box up, and selecting the biggest piece he wrote: "Returned with thanks!" across it, and signed it with his name.

He slipped this inside the rope which bound Grundy's arms, and then the lid was closed down and the trunk strapped up again and bound round with rope.

After which Figgins got busy with his pencil again and wrote out a label, addressing the trunk to "Tom Merry, Study No. 10, School House, St. Jim's."

He tied the label on the box, and then Figgins was satisfied.

"That'll do!" he remarked, with a chuckle. "Now help me carry it downstairs, chaps! We'll leave it in the downstairs box-room, and tell Taggles to fetch it. He'll imagine it's been taken there by mistake."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

Handling the trunk carefully, the New House jokers started downstairs with it. The trunk itself was very light, but Grundy made it very heavy. They managed the job successfully, however, and, leaving the trunk on the floor of the lower box-room, Figgys & Co. left the room, Figgins rushing off to find Taggles, while his chums departed also, roaring with laughter—all that is, excepting Kerr, who hadn't a laugh left in him. It had not been a laughing matter for Kerr, and he did not regain his usual cheerfulness until he had spent an energetic half hour in the bath-room.

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CHAPTER 7.

Got It!

"WHICH this 'ere trunk's mighty 'eavy, young Marsh!" grunted Taggles.

"That it is, Mister Taggles!" assented Toby Marsh. "'Eavy as I don't know what!"

"You'd best go fust upstairs," panted Taggles, "in case as it overgets us, like!"

Which was very generous indeed of old Taggles—decidedly praiseworthy, in fact, on the old gentleman's part. If that big trunk did happen to "overget" them, the person below was likely to get hurt.

It was very heroic of Taggles to select that place of danger for himself, instead of shoving the page-boy into the line of fire, so to speak.

Clump, clump, clump!

With their boots clumping on the stairs, the old porter and Toby Marsh, the pageboy, started to negotiate the stairs, old Taggles puffing and panting and blowing.

The trunk was heavy—there was no doubting that. Moreover, it was decidedly awkward to handle, for the heavy weight inside—whatever it was—kept shifting and tumbling about, just as though there was some big article inside that had not been packed securely. Indeed, Toby the page-boy, vowed there was something alive inside, and suggested a corpse—it not occurring to Toby that corpses were usually dead. But Toby was certain he heard strange noises inside the trunk, and he was looking quite pale.

Taggles, however, being a bit deaf, scoffed at the idea. "It's clothes, that's what it is, you young idiot!" he told Toby. "You bin readin' them noospaper stories!"

So Toby said no more, for Taggles—rather an irritable old gentleman—was apt to box his ears if he persisted in arguing.

Thud!

As they started up the stairs the strange something in the trunk again shifted, thudding against the lower end of the inclined trunk. Toby went paler as he heard a strange, gurgling kind of sound from the trunk, and all but dropped his end.

"What you playin' at, you young donkey!" growled Taggles. "Be more careful!"

Puffing and gasping they went up step by step, but just as they had reached the first landing Kildare of the Sixth happened to come along, and he good-naturedly helped them for the rest of the way up the stairs.

Once up the stairs the rest was easy. They carried the trunk along the Shell passage and dropped it down on the carpet in Tom Merry's study.

"My heye!" gasped Taggles, staring about him. "Them young himps ain't 'arf bin up to something in 'ere! Jest look at the soot about! They'll get it 'ot if Mr. Railton sees this mess!"

And Taggles led the way out of the study again, Toby blinking back rather fearfully at the black trunk. It had a very sinister aspect to Toby Marsh, who was rather a morbidly-inclined youth.

"I s'pose we really oughter 'ave taken it up to Master Merry's dormitory," grunted Taggles, as they ambled downstairs again. "But I reckon I ain't takin' that there trunk no farther without horders! If it 'as to go it 'as, that's all, though!"

And Taggles parted from Toby grumpily. He had hoped Tom Merry would have been there to receive the trunk, which would have meant a tip. Still, he could easily drop a hint the next time he saw Tom. Had he only known what was in the trunk, Taggles would certainly not have expected a tip.

But he didn't know, and within the stuffy trunk Grundy groaned a hollow groan as he heard the porter and page-boy tramp away, closing the study door after them. He had hoped against hope that his frantic efforts to make a noise would cause Taggles to investigate the contents of the trunk.

Even as he groaned, however, Grundy's heart gave a sudden leap. He made the discovery that the cord round his wrists was quite loose.

How it had come about he scarcely knew. But the trunk had been dropped heavily on the floor, and he could only suppose that the sudden strain as he was flung against the side of the trunk had snapped the cord—had brought about what his wriggling and tugging had failed to do.

Actually, that was just what had happened, and the next moment Grundy found his arms free. Another moment, and he had torn off the horrible gag.

Then, with a gasp of relief, the Shell fellow took out his pocket-knife and started to cut his way out of the trunk. He had already realised that the study was unoccupied; none the less he worked feverishly, not desiring to be discovered in such a humiliating position. Grundy had had quite enough of being laughed at.

It was a simple job, for Grundy's knife was sharp, and the task of hacking a hole in the basket-work was easily accomplished. Grundy shoved a hand through the hole made, and fumbled until he felt the strap and the rope.

He hacked through the strap and the rope, and then a heavy sent the lid up, and Grundy clambered out, gasping. "Oh, good!" he panted. "Now I'll clear out, and have it out with that rotter Figgins! I'll—I'll spifficate the cad for this!"

And Grundy was about to rush out of the study, when he halted, a striking thought coming to him. Almost trembling with sudden excitement, he ran over to the mantelpiece. Then he groaned with disappointment.

"Oh blow!" he murmured, scowling. "I might have known the cads wouldn't shove it up again so soon, though! Blow! But—but, I wonder—"

Grundy glanced quickly about him. He had hoped the precious declaration would have been replaced on the wall over the mantelpiece. But it wasn't. Still, there was just a chance that it had been left in the room somewhere, unless Tom Merry had taken it from the broken frame and pocketed it.

Grundy felt it was worth the trouble of looking, and he started to search the room. He hunted in the cupboard, and he hunted in the lockers, and in vases, and looked behind the clock. Then he remembered the table-drawer, and he wrenched it open, and—it was there!

There it was before his eyes, still in the broken frame! Grundy grinned—a grin of delighted satisfaction. Apparently Tom Merry had shoved it there, feeling quite certain nobody would dare to attempt another raid upon it after what had happened. He had shoved it there until a new glass could be procured.

"Oh, good!" breathed Grundy. It was success at last! He, George Alfred Grundy, had done it—alone and unaided. Certainly, Figgins & Co. had put him in the way of doing it. Still, he had done it. Nobody could deny that. Why, he would be the hero of the New House after this. Figgins would be obliged to hide his diminished head, and make room for the man who had done it!

With trembling fingers, Grundy fumbled with the frame, and after he had taken out the loose pieces of glass the paper was at his mercy. A wiser fellow might have destroyed the document there and then. There was no fire in the study, but he could easily have torn it up and scattered the pieces to the four winds of heaven.

But that was not Grundy's game. Grundy wanted his full measure of glory, and he could only be certain of that by taking the precious paper over to the New House and showing it to all unbelievers and doubting Thomases!

He placed the declaration carefully in his pocket. Then, on a page from an exercise-book, he scribbled the following:

"RATS!
WHO'S COCKHOOP NOW?
GO AND EAT KOKE!
(Sined) GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY.
(New House Leader)."

"That'll made 'em squirm and just show 'em what I can do!" chuckled Grundy. "They'll wish they hadn't parted with a man like me when they discover what I've done. Now for it!"

Grundy placed the sheet of exercise-paper into the frame in place of the declaration, and then, with another chuckle, he put the frame in the drawer again and left the study.

Three juniors were just coming along the passage at the moment, and as they sighted Grundy, one of them—Tom Merry—gave a startled yell.

"Grundy! Why, he's been— After him!"

Tom Merry's voice ended in a howl, as Grundy, wise for once, took to his heels and bolted down the passage.

The Terrible Three followed at top speed, all of them remembering where the precious document had been left, and fearing the worst.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry, as he pelted along the passage. "He's got the paper, for a pension! Well, I'm blowed! After what's happened, too!"

"Grundy, of all people!" panted Lowther. "Stop him, Glyn!"

Glyn did his best—and suffered for it! He had just reached the top of the stairs, with Noble and Dane behind him, and he jumped in Grundy's path at once.

It was really brave of Glyn, for not many fellows would have attempted to stop Grundy in his present sooty state. At all events, Glyn did attempt to stop him.

It was like trying to stop a thunderbolt.

Like a bull at a gate, Grundy crashed into Glyn, sending that luckless junior hurtling back on top of Noble, who hurtled back on top of Dane.

There was a series of startled yells, and then followed a series of heavy bumps, as Glyn, Noble, and Dane rolled helplessly downstairs.

Luckily the stairs were wide and shallow, and the trio reached the second landing in a struggling heap with nothing worse than numerous bumps and bruises.

As they sprawled there in a yelling heap, Grundy nipped past them, and tore on down the stairs and along the passage beyond. Grundy had just saved himself by clutching the banisters, and now he was well away.

When the Terrible Three reached the quad he was just vanishing into the New House.

"No good!" panted Tom Merry, with a feeble grin. "He's done us this time, I fancy! Let's get back and see if the sweep has managed to find it. I was an ass to leave it in that drawer. Still, there's a chance he hasn't found it."

And the Terrible Three hurried back. They found Glyn & Co. rubbing themselves at the bottom of the stairs, and those luckless juniors were in an exceedingly wrathful state.

"You—you raving maniacs!" hooted Glyn. "You've jolly nearly broken our necks, you fathead!"

"You shouldn't have let him bowl you over!" snorted Tom Merry. "Fancy three of you letting him through like that!"

"Why, you—you—" Noble spluttered with wrath.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom. "How could we help it? That born idiot had to be stopped somehow. He's got that document, I believe! Anyway, we spotted him just coming out of our study!"

"What?"

"But it's not so very serious if he has," said Tom, with a chuckle. "It's been photographed, and we've got the prints of it, anyway. Let's go and make sure, chaps!"

"Yes, rather!"

The Terrible Three hurried to their study, and Glyn & Co., their hurts forgotten now, hurried after them. Tom Merry fairly blinked as he sighted the trunk. The hole in it, and the cut straps puzzled them mightily, until Tom sighted Figgins' message.

"Returned with thanks, eh?" gasped Tom Merry. "I see how that merchant came to be in here again. But the paper—"

Tom hurried to the table-drawer and opened it. Then he gave a howl of wrath.

"Gone! He's taken it, and left this!"

The School House juniors blinked in great wrath at the document Grundy had left in place of the declaration.

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Lowther, grinning. "Fancy old Grundy pulling it off, after all!"

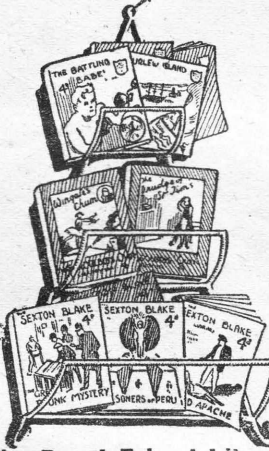
"The—the cheeky cad!" gasped Tom Merry. Then he laughed ruefully. "Never mind. We've lost the original, but we've still got the film and the prints. Figgy and his pals will be crowing now. But won't they just feel sick again when I tell 'em we've had photographs taken of it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors roared at thought of the disappointment in store for Figgins & Co.

"Find Toby and get him to take this

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ashed trunk away, Monty," said Tom at last. "I'm going to drop dear old Figgy a little note to let him know before he starts celebrating what he'll think is a giddy victory. I'll bet he'll tear his hair when he understands."

"Yes, rather!"

"Here goes, then!"

Getting pen and paper, Tom Merry started to write the note to Figgy. Both Grundy and Figgins were booked for an unpleasant shock!

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy Speaks Out!

"OH, here you are!" Grundy spoke quite cheerily. After some time spent in the bath-room, and more time spent in the dormitory, changing his clothes, George Alfred felt much better—very much better, in fact. And now, with the famous declaration safe in his pocket, he was feeling in very fine fettle indeed.

What Figgins and all the rest of the New House had failed to accomplish he had accomplished alone and unaided. At all events, Grundy had persuaded himself that he had done it alone and unaided. Some fellows might say he had been aided in the matter when he had been shoved in the trunk and sent to Study No. 10, and they might also have said that he had obtained it by a tremendous fluke.

But Grundy didn't think so, and that was all that mattered to Grundy.

"Oh, here we are!" grinned Grundy, as he looked into Figgins' study. "Having tea, what?"

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were having tea, as were Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, who were honoured guests. It was really a matter of combining business with pleasure, for Figgins had called Redfern & Co. in chiefly to discuss plans for getting back the terrible declaration. Even yet Figgins had not lost hope. He was not likely to lose hope so long as the declaration remained on view in the School House. Figgins had realised that life was not going to be worth living until that document was obtained and destroyed.

At the moment, though, the New House leaders were discussing Grundy, and chucking over the way they had sent him packing back to the School House. They were wondering what would happen to him there when Tom Merry opened the mysterious trunk.

Then Grundy walked in—Grundy as large as life, newly swept and garnished, and in his right mind, so to speak.

Figgins & Co. blinked at him as though he was a ghost.

They had not expected Grundy back for a long time. Yet here he was, quite clean and changed, and wearing a cheery grin.

Figgins felt he was dreaming.

He had fully expected to have a terrific fight on his hands when Grundy did return. Instead, Grundy's look was quite genial and friendly.

"Well, I—I'm blown!" gasped Figgy. "It—it's Grundy!"

"Yes, here I am!" grinned Grundy. "I'm much obliged, Figgins!"

"Eh?"

"Much obliged for sending me over there in that trunk," said Grundy, smiling. "You've done me a better turn than you could have dreamed of doing, Figgins."

"What the thump—"

"I never expected help from my rival," said Grundy. "You thought you were being screamingly funny, didn't you? Instead of that you've done yourself fairly. You'll have to take a back seat after this, I fancy. The fellows will know who to back up now. They won't want a leader who consistently lets 'em down when there's one who can do the job."

"You burbling idiot!" stuttered Figgins. "What on earth are you gassing about?"

"I'm sorry for you, Figgy," said Grundy kindly. "You're not a bad chap, just a silly, deficient dud, though! You're no thumping good at all as a leader, old chap! You'll see that now."

"He's gone clean off it this time," murmured Redfern, in a hushed voice. "Look out, in case he gets violent, chaps!"

"You shut up, Reddy!" said Grundy. "Don't try to be funny. You're funny enough without trying, old chap! Figgy knows what I mean. He knows I'm out to shift him from his job, not because I don't like him personally, mind you, but because he's no good, and because I'm a better man."

"Why, you—you—"

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"Let me finish," grinned Grundy. "I'm going to surprise you fellows presently. Now, the fellows are getting fed-up with you over that declaration affair, Figgy. You've tried to get it back and you've failed. I don't wonder, really, considering what a hopeless dud you are. Still, there it is. I want to ask you a plain question. If a fellow does what you've proved you can't do, are you willing to play the game and hand over your job to him?"

"Am I whatter?" stuttered Figgins.

"I'll put it plainer," said Grundy. "You've failed utterly to get that paper back from the School House worms. Well, if I succeed where you've failed, are you willing to do the right thing and resign your job as leader to me—a better man?"

Figgins stared at him, and then he grinned.

"Certainly, old chap!" he said soothingly. Figgins was beginning to wonder if recent events hadn't been too much of a strain for Grundy. "Quite so! If you can do it, Grundy, where I've failed, you deserve to be leader. Don't you chaps think so?"



"Oh, yes!"

There was a chorus of chuckles. Grundy smiled.

"You mean that, Figgy? Honour bright?"

"Certainly! If you can bring it off and get us out of this hole, you're welcome to my job, old bean."

"Right! You chaps are witnesses of what Figgy says?"

"Oh, rather!"

Again there was a chorus of chuckles. Figgins' chums were ready to back Figgins up in pulling Grundy's leg. That a born idiot like Grundy could bring off such a difficult task did not come within their list of things possible. Figgins & Co. felt quite safe in pulling Grundy's leg to that extent.

"Right!" said Grundy again. "I'll hold you to your word, Figgy. Just cast your blinkers over that, then."

And Grundy took the declaration from his pocket and laid it on the table before Figgins with a dramatic flourish.

"How's that?" he said. "Clean bowled—what?"

"M-mum-my hat!"

Figgins leaped out of his chair as his eyes fell on the paper. Then he snatched it up and examined it feverishly. Then he gave a whoop.

"Hip-pip! It's it! Hurrah! Good old Grundy!"

"What the dickens—"

"Look at it!" yelled Figgins excitedly. "It's it! Well, I'm jiggered! Grundy, you—you magician, where the thump did you get it? Did you find it, or what?"

Grundy chuckled as the rest of the juniors picked up the paper and scanned it in amazement, and then joined Figgins in a dance of joy round the room.

George Figgins' good-humoured face was a sight. He looked as if a gigantic load had been lifted from his youthful mind—as, indeed, it had. It looked as if there was going to be no more worried brows, no more sleepless nights for George Figgins.

"What price me!" exclaimed George Alfred Grundy, beaming around him. "That satisfy you, Figgy? You fellows didn't realise, I bet, the sort of chap you were getting when I was transferred here."

"But—but how on earth did you manage it, Grundy?" gasped Figgins.

"By strategy."

"What!"

"By strategy. Using my brains, you know," explained Grundy modestly. "I managed to get free from my bonds in that dashed trunk, and, cutting a hole in the side, I

Grundy glared at him.

"You asking for a thick ear, Figgy?" he asked warmly. "Not at all. My dear man, fluke or not, you deserve a putty medal, and also a soap statue, Grundy. You're the hero of the hour. You're a giant in intellect and your strategy deserves a coconut and a clock. You are awarded both."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy glared. He had expected jealousy and envy from Figgins, however.

"I expected this sort of thing from you, Figgy," he said loftily. "But I fancy I can afford to overlook it now. The fellows will know what to think after this."

"They will," agreed Figgins. "They'll begin to think that there's some consolation in having a born idiot planted on us, after all. Even a born idiot may have accidents—like this."

"You—you call it an accident?" spluttered Grundy.

"Nothing less. A fortunate accident for us, though."

"You—you cheeky cad!"

"Thanks! Now shut the door after you! I was thinking of asking you to stay to tea, as some little encouragement to go on being useful instead of a nuisance," said Figgy. "But now you're being abusive—"

"You—you worm!" gasped Grundy. "Does this mean that you're not going to stand by your word?"

"What about?" asked Figgins, tapping his egg. "Back up! Tea's getting cold, and this egg—"

"About the leadership!" hooted Grundy. "You said that—"

"Did I? Forget it, old chap!"

"Then—then," spluttered Grundy, his face going red with indignation, "then you're not going to keep your word and stand down? You said that if I did it you'd hand over the leadership to me, you rotter!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Figgins, his face breaking into a grin. "So I did. Well, all right. From now on you can be leader, old chap—that is, if the fellows will have you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's face went red. Instead of thanks and honour and glory, all he seemed to be going to get out of it was ridicule and laughter. The fellows were actually laughing at him—at his demands!

CHAPTER 9.

Terrible!

"SO that's it!" he gasped. "I see the game now. You're going to pretend to let me be the leader, and all the time you're going to turn the fellows against me!"

"Go hon!"

"Going to cause trouble, are you?" hooted Grundy. "I see what it is, Figgins. There'll be nothing but trouble between you and me until one of us has proved himself the master. I've proved myself the best man as regards leadership and brains. I've now got to prove myself the best man with my fists. Come out and put your hands up! We'll settle it here and now!"

And Grundy started to turn back his cuffs with grim determination.

Figgins waved his eggspoon.

"For goodness' sake let me finish my tea first, Grundy!" he said. "Business before pleasure, you know. Run away and play, old chap."

"You—you cheeky owl!" hooted Grundy. "I'm going to give you the licking of your life! I'll show you who's master here now. Put your hands up!"

"After tea," said Figgins. "Make a note that I've an appointment with Grundy after tea, Fatty, old chap. I'm so apt to forget these trifling matters."

"You cheeky owl!" roared Grundy. "Why, for two pins I'd lick you here and now!"

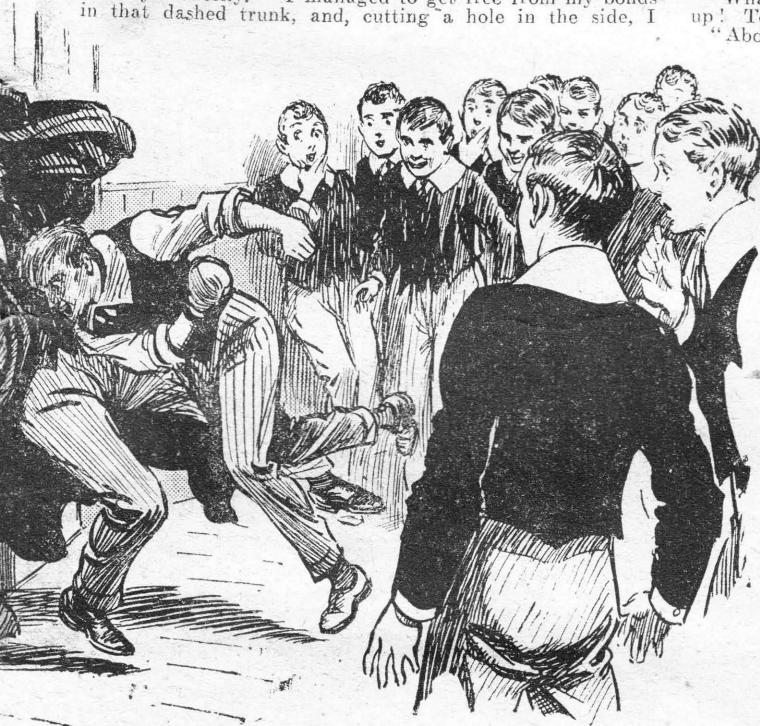
"No, you won't," said Figgins calmly. "You're the challenger, and it's my privilege to choose place and time. I'll meet you with the gloves on in the gym at five-thirty—that's in twenty minutes. Will that suit you?"

Grundy's eyes gleamed. It was just what he wanted. It would mean much more glory for him if he licked Figgins in public than in private.

"Right!" he said, with satisfaction. "That'll suit me down to the ground. I'll be there, and we'll settle who's to be the boss of this House. Now, hand back that declaration, Figgins. I want it!"

"Phew! Not much!" said Figgins, taking the paper from his pocket. "I'd forgotten for the moment. Sooner it's destroyed the better! Here goes!"

And Figgins tore the precious paper into small pieces,



Figgins and Grundy were just passing the doorway on their third circuit of the gym., and the scattering crowd prevented them seeing Mr. Ratcliff until it was too late. Figgins missed him by a hair's breadth, but, unfortunately, Grundy charged full tilt into him. Biff! "Ow!" panted the Housemaster. (See Chapter 9.)

managed also to cut through the strap and cord. Then I climbed out and started to hunt round for the declaration."

"Oh!"

"Many a chap would have cleared off right away, and never even thought of the paper," said Grundy. "But not me. That's not my line. I had the study at my mercy, and I made the most of my chance, I can tell you. I hunted and hunted until I found it—in the table drawer. Those rotters in Study No. 10 chased me, but I got away neatly."

"And—and you call that strategy?" ejaculated Figgins.

"What else was it?" asked Grundy warmly. "Now don't you start trying to belittle what I've done, Figgy. I'll punch your head if you start any games like that! Play the game!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Anyway, there it is!" grinned Grundy. "Bit of a score—what? I said I'd do it and I've done it!"

"By the most howling fluke that was ever fluked!" chuckled Figgins.

and opening the window he strewed them out, the wind scattering them.

"You—you cheeky ass!" howled Grundy. "I wanted to show the fellows that—proof of what I've done!"

"My dear man, the whole House shall know it soon enough. Now, kindly close the door—only get outside it first!"

Grundy breathed hard. But he knew Figgy was a man of his word.

"Oh, all right!" he grunted. "In the gym at five-thirty, then! I'll be there. I'm going to make mince meat of you, Figgy. You're not a bad sort, but you want the conceit knocked out of you!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Coming from the most bumptious and conceited fellow in St. Jim's, such a remark was rather staggering.

"That's what I'm going to do," said Grundy kindly. "For your own good as well as the good of the House! Well, I'll slip along the studies and let the fellows know just what I've already done, and what I'm going to do. Cheerio, you fellows!"

George Alfred Grundy went out—evidently quite cheery at the prospect of knocking the conceit out of Figgins.

"Well," remarked Redfern, "isn't that chap a prize packet?"

"And a prize ass!" said Kerr dazedly. "It beats me what he's doing outside a lunatic asylum. But you're not really going to fight him, Figgy. Hasn't the silly chump had enough?"

"Grundy's never had enough," said Figgins cheerfully. "He always begs and prays for more and more. The School House have tried to knock the conceit and swank out of him, but they've failed. We really must try our hand at it—for his own good. I shan't hurt him, though, and I'll see he doesn't hurt me."

"You'll be lucky if you do!" grinned Owen. "I believe he's got a four-point-seven punch that would floor an ox!"

"Leave him to me!" chuckled Figgins. "Why shouldn't we have a little entertainment when Grundy's so eager to supply it? Now, let's finish tea, and then we can get ready for the scrap."

And Figgins and his chums continued their interrupted tea in high good humour now. Figgins' chums knew him well, and they knew that he had some jape in store for Grundy, and that he wasn't taking the challenge at all seriously. Moreover, they were one and all overjoyed at the recovery and destruction of the declaration. Figgins said he felt a new man.

Tea ended at last, and then Figgins started getting ready for his fight with Grundy. He rummaged in the cupboard, and brought to light an old, battered pair of boxing-gloves. Then he took a large bottle of red ink from the study cupboard.

"You're not going to scrap in those awful old things?" said Kerr.

"Yes."

"Oh, my hat! But what's the ink for?"

"Wait and see," said Figgins. "Now, if you chaps are ready, we'll go and rally round the men to see the scrap. They'll enjoy it!"

But there was no need to do that. As Figgins opened the door he found a crowd of fellows just arriving.

"Is it true, Figgy?" demanded Thompson. "About that rotten declaration, I mean. Grundy says—"

"Quite true! Grundy got it back, and I tore the thing up several minutes ago. It's scattered to the winds of heaven!"

"Oh, thank goodness!"

"Ripping!"

Several fellows fairly danced with joy and relief. Like Figgins & Co., they were fed-up with being chipped by their rivals of the School House.

"But what are you scrapping with Grundy for, then?" demanded Jimson in amazement.

"Ask Grundy!" chuckled Figgy. "By the way, where is the ass?"

"Rooting fellows out of their studies!" grinned French. "He means business, Figgy. You'd better mind your eye!"

But Figgins didn't seem disturbed.

"Good!" he said. "I'm glad he hasn't turned up at the gym yet. Come along, chaps!"

And Figgins hurried off to the gymnasium. He found quite a crowd of grinning fellows waiting there, and there was a cheer as Figgins came in. Evidently Grundy had been very busy "rooting" out the fellows to see him knock the conceit out of Figgins.

Figgins entered one of the dressing-rooms, and as his chums followed him in he started to pour the red ink from the bottle into the washing basin. Then he dipped both of the old boxing-gloves in, and left them to soak.

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"What the thunder——" began Owen.

"Oh!" said Kerr. "So—so that's the game, Figgy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shurrup!" said Figgins. "Tell me when Grundy comes in, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha! Right-ho!"

Figgy went on thoughtfully soaking the gloves, and then Kerr gave the word.

"Here he comes, Figgy! Buck up! He's already got his jacket off!"

"Right-ho!"

Figgins raised the gloves in turn and put them on rather gingerly. Having kept the wrists clear, he scarcely got any ink on himself, though Fatty Wynn got plenty tying the gloves on. But the job was done at last, and then Figgy marched out of the dressing-room with his gloved hands behind him.

"Hallo! Here you are, Figgy!" said Grundy loftily, giving him a careless glance. "Buck up! I've set myself to finish the job in two minutes!"

"I've set myself to finish it in less!" said Figgins. "You ready?"

"Yes. Where's the thumping timekeepers and ref— Here—"

Grundy said no more, for just then Figgins rushed at him and landed a neat jab just under his nose. It left a horrid-looking patch of red.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a howl of laughter.

"Oh, you awful rotter!" gasped Grundy, who had seen nothing but stars. "I wasn't ready! Why, I'll jolly well— Yoooop!"

A second jab took Grundy under the chin, and where the rest took him Grundy knew less than anybody.

Figgins let him have them right and left, every blow leaving a vivid patch of red wherever it landed. The swarm of New House fellows were howling with laughter.

"Go it, Figgy!"

"Make him see red!"

"Look at the gore!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The blows were mere jabs, but they came swift and sure, and in rapid succession, Grundy being too dazed to do anything but defend himself for several whirlwind moments. Figgins' sudden and unexpected assault seemed to have dazed him completely.

But the howls of laughter filled Grundy with seething wrath, as did the fact that Figgins had taken him un-awares, without waiting for gong, or timekeepers, or seconds. It made Grundy very wrathful indeed. He had intended this to be a very official and serious affair. Instead, Figgins was turning it into a farce—and a very unpleasant farce for Grundy.

As yet Grundy hadn't noticed the ink on his opponent's gloves, nor had he noticed it on his person—though it was undoubtedly obvious enough. In fact, Grundy was looking a most shocking sight. Patches of red ink almost hid him. But for some time Figgins gave no pause—no chance to see anything except blurred, whirling gloves.

Then Grundy seemed to pull himself together suddenly, and he dropped defence, and went for Figgins with a furious rush and a roar of rage.

As he did so Figgins turned tail and bolted round the gym, amidst yells of hysterical laughter.

"Come back!" roared Grundy furiously. "Come back, you funk!"

He went in pursuit with a rush, brandishing his gloves. Round and round the gym went the pursued and pursuer, amidst a perfect uproar of laughter and cheers.

In and out of the hilarious spectators dodged Figgins, with Grundy hard on his track. Grundy was in a fierce temper now, and he did not mean to let Figgins off, funk or no funk.

There came a sudden shout of "Cave!" from the doorway, and the crowd parted as a form in cap and gown rustled into the gymnasium. It was Mr. Ratcliff, and a chorus of alarmed gasps went up.

Unfortunately Figgins and Grundy were just passing the doorway on their third circuit of the gym, and the scattering crowd prevented them seeing the Housemaster until too late.

Figgins missed him by a hair'sbreadth, but Grundy charged full into him.

Biff!

Mr. Ratcliff gave a queer sort of yelp and sat down hard on the floor. Grundy did likewise—his jaw dropping the next moment as he found himself sitting facing the Housemaster almost feet to feet.

"Oh!" gulped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ow! Oh, crickey!" gasped Grundy. "Oh, mum-my hat!"

To Grundy it seemed as if the Housemaster had suddenly dropped down from the skies.

A sudden silence fell on the gym, only broken by Mr. Ratcliff gasping for breath.

"Ow!" he panted. "Ow! Ow-wow! I—I am severely hurt! Grundy, you—you—"

Words seemed to be beyond the Housemaster. His eyes were glittering with outraged wrath as several fellows helped him to his feet. He stood and gasped as if for a wager. Then he found his voice.

"Grundy!" he choked. "Grundy! You again, wretched boy—rascal! I—I am hurt—severely hurt! Ow-wow! You—you shall suffer dearly for this, Grundy!"

"How could I help it, sir?" panted Grundy, who had scrambled to his feet. "How—"

Grundy paused, struck by the horrified look on the face of the sour-faced Housemaster—in fact, horrified was scarcely the word for the look on Mr. Ratcliff's face just then!

"G-goo-good heavens!" he articulated, with a shudder.

seemed. The Housemaster seemed on the point of fainting at the sight of him.

"It's all right, sir," said Figgins, stepping forward coolly and showing his gloves. "It's only red ink!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" bellowed Mr. Ratcliff, his face going almost as red as the ink. "D-did you say that—that it is only red ink, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir. Only a little rag, sir! No harm done, sir."

From the expression which came over the Housemaster's face a great deal of harm had been done in his opinion. He fairly glowered at Grundy and then at Figgins.

"Then—then Grundy is not seriously hurt?" he gasped.

"Oh, no, sir! Only a few knocks and a little red ink, sir!"

"Then you—you have attempted to play a stupid and insolent trick on your Housemaster, Figgins!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

That was just like Mr. Ratcliff.

GREENOCK MORTON, the Scottish club, have five players who are over six feet tall. Evidently the officials believe that good big ones are better than good little ones.

Here is a bit of "potted" advice which was recently given to a set of forwards as they went on the field: "Shoot hard, shoot often, and where the goalkeeper isn't." Very sound, but I take it that the manager who gave the advice didn't mean his forwards to shoot at the corner-flag!

The youngest club in the League is Torquay United, for they were only formed five years ago. Yet they play on the oldest football pitch in Devonshire, which was formerly used for the Rugby game.

Last season two Second Division goalkeepers went as far as the fifth match before they once had the "pleasure" of picking the ball out of the net. This season every Second Division goalkeeper was beaten at least once on the opening day.

There is a low wall behind the goals on the Burnley ground at Turf Moor. This has now been painted jet-black so that the white goalposts show up against it. That is what might be called showing the players the way to go "home."

By the way, perhaps you didn't know that there is nothing in the laws of the game telling what shape the goalposts and the crossbar shall be. Consequently, some clubs have round posts, others have square ones. And, of course, some of us have played when the "crossbar" has been made of tape.

George Harrison, the Preston North End winger, is said to be about the strongest kicker of a "dead" ball in England. Ability to do this is very useful when a man is wanted to take penalty kicks.

"Grundy—boy—wretched youth! Why, you are covered in blood! Good heavens! Terrible!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter went up—the fellows could not help it.

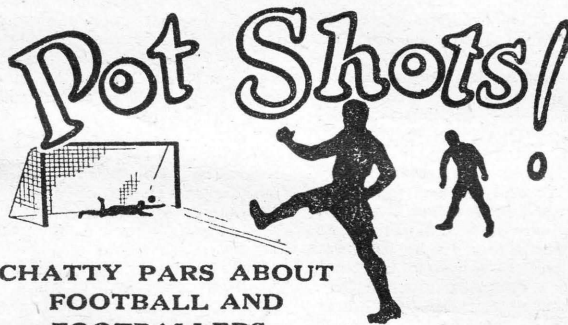
"Silence!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff, almost beside himself with angry indignation. "Are you aware—cannot you see that this wretched boy is in a terrible state? Look—look at his face—his clothes! Terrible! Silence!"

Mr. Ratcliff stepped back from Grundy, horrified.

"How dare you go to such lengths in this—this abominable and disgusting game of boxing?" he gasped. "I have never approved of—of such savagery, and my dislike of such a brutal and demoralising pastime is justified. Grundy—boy—"

"Oh, great pip!" gasped Grundy, looking down at himself. "Oh, mum-my hat! Oh, the—the frightful cad! Oh dear!"

The look on Grundy's face as he saw the state he was in sent the juniors into uncontrollable splutters of mirth. Grundy had only just made the discovery—amazing as it



CHATTY PARS ABOUT FOOTBALL AND FOOTBALLERS.

Ted Taylor, the goalkeeper of Everton, says that goalkeepers have to do fifty per cent. more running out since the off-side rule was changed. They are no longer "Home Secretaries," in fact!

Some of the whistles used by referees scarcely come under the heading of musical instruments. But the footballers must remember to play to the whistle all the same.

Early in the present season there was a discussion among the supporters of

Bolton Wanderers as to whether the directors were wise in playing Picken and Wright on the left wing. So far as the office-boy is concerned, he is with the Bolton directors, because he says they must be "Picken-Wright."

Jimmy Hanson, the trainer of Oldham Athletic, is no lover of what he calls the daintiness which has crept into modern football. We have seen some matches this season when the football was anything but dainty, though.

William Welsh, the Charlton Athletic forward, is a very fine singer. He is also a cousin of Mr. James Welsh, an M.P. who is also a poet.

Burnley may not win the championship this season, but it is said that the staff can supply the best musical entertainment of any club. Burley, a reserve centre-forward, is an expert pianist, Hargreaves a vocalist, and Somerville a banjo player.

Manchester United's red shirts used to be adorned with a big "V." This has now been left off, and the jerseys are just plain red. Yet surely the "V" stood for victory!

During the close season Nelson signed on a giant goalkeeper named Stoneham. When he first turned up for training he had to have a day off because there wasn't a jersey about the place which would fit him!

"Not at all, sir!" said Figgins. "I was just playing a trick on Grundy! It was only an innocent lark!"

"Innocent lark, you say?" hooted the Housemaster. "It is a disgraceful and abominable outrage! You are equally to blame, and I shall punish you both very severely indeed. I am hurt—I have been knocked down with great force and severely hurt."

"It was an accident, sir. Grundy couldn't help it, and if it was anybody's fault it was mine," said Figgins. "I played the trick on Grundy, and I got him to chase me."

"Well, I like that," said Grundy hotly. "Why, you were running away, you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And as for it being your fault," hooted Grundy, "think I'm going to let you shield me? Not likely! I'm not the fellow to try to sneak out of trouble by hiding behind another fellow. Let me tell you that—"

"Silence! Another word, Grundy, and I will take you at once before Dr. Holmes!" shouted the Housemaster, almost choking with anger. "This—this is too much! I am not likely to allow you to sneak, as you call it, out of trouble,

Grundy! I am well aware that you are a quarrelsome and utterly undisciplined young rascal! Considering the slackness and lack of discipline in the School House, I am not surprised at that. You have yet to learn, however, that such conduct will not be tolerated in my house for one moment."

"Sir—" began Figgins earnestly.

"Silence! Not another word! Both of you will clean yourselves without delay and report to me in my study in ten minutes! The rest of the boys in this gymnasium will do me two hundred lines each, to be brought and laid on my desk at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

With that Mr. Ratcliff rustled away, his gown streaming behind him as he went. Mr. Ratcliff had been hurt, and he was evidently resolved to hurt someone else.

He had scarcely gone, and Grundy and Figgins were just blinking at each other, when a School House bag came in the gymnasium.

He looked about him, evidently in search of someone. Then he sighted Figgins.

"Oh, here you are, Figgins," he said. "No larks, mind," he added, as several New House Third-Formers closed in on him. "I'm on a message for Tom Merry to Figgins. Here—mum-my hat!"

Curly Gibson—for it was he—nearly fell down as he sighted Grundy's striking condition.

"Oh, crikey!" he gasped. "Is that— Oh, it's red ink! I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought," snapped Figgins crossly. "If you've got a note for me, hand it over and clear, kid!"

Curly Gibson handed the note over and cleared, grinning, his curious eyes fixed on Grundy until he reached the door. The sight of Figgy's ink-covered gloves had told him all he wanted to know, and the yarn was likely to be all over the School House that evening as well as the New House.

As the bag vanished, roaring with laughter now, Figgins tore off his gloves and opened the note. He glanced at it and then it fluttered from his hand, and he gave a deep, hollow groan of utter dismay.

"What's the matter, Figgy?" demanded Kerr. "Bad news, or what?"

"Look at it!" gasped Figgins, his face showing the deepest disgust and hopelessness. "We're done—dished, diddled, and done! Done in the eye—absolutely done brown! Read it!"

Kerr read it, and like Figgins he groaned a hollow groan as he did so. The note was in Tom Merry's hand and read as follows:

"Dear old Fathead,—Thanks for the trunk, which I'll send back in the morning for you to bury your prize ass Grundy in! You can bury yourself in it, if you like, too! It was really good of you to offer to lend him to us, but we feel that you really need all the men you can get to help you to keep your end up over there. By the way, don't trouble to send that declaration bearing your signatures back again, as we do not need it now, Manners having taken photographs of it. I have already had two prints taken, and intend to have many more shortly as there is a great demand for them over here. I'm sure you will be so very glad to hear this, and to know that SCHOOL HOUSE IS STILL COCKHOUSE! Cheerio, old fruit.—TOM MERRY."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Kerr, in dumbfounded amazement and dismay. "I—I never thought of that! Oh, what a rotten sell!"

"I didn't think of it either!" groaned Figgins. "Oh, my hat! Done again! It—it's awful!"

"Simply awful!"

It certainly was awful from the New House fellows' point of view. And loud cries of disappointment and dismay went round the gymnasium as the note was passed from hand to hand. The recovery of the horrid declaration had brought joy and thanksgiving to the New House juniors. But now all was gloom again. Once again the School House star was in the ascendant, and once again the New House was hurled into the depths!

But for Grundy and Figgins it was the last straw. They tottered away to keep their appointment with Mr. Ratcliff with feelings too deep for words. In the New House that evening all was gloom and sorrow. Grundy especially did not have a happy time. According to the New House fellows, it was all his fault from the very beginning. And Grundy realised that he was as far off realising his ambition to be leader of the New House as ever!

CHAPTER 10.

Grundy's Great Wheeze!

"BY Jingo! I've got it!" Grundy slapped his knee gleefully as he made that statement. There was nobody within hearing to ask Grundy what he had got, but it was very evident something that pleased him highly.

It was the following afternoon. Grundy had just come

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in from classes and he was seated in his armchair in his study in the New House. He was alone, for French and Jimson had not come in yet.

Grundy was glad to be alone, as a matter of fact, for he wanted to think. When Grundy wanted to think it was highly important—in his view—for everybody to keep perfectly still and perfectly quiet. He would allow no talking whatever in the study—a little peculiarity that had led to endless trouble in his study. Grundy said he needed absolute stillness when he wanted to concentrate—though Wilkins and Gunn, his old study-mates of the School House, privately believed that what he really needed in order to concentrate was brains!

At all events, Grundy had what he wanted now. He was alone in the study, and all was quiet and peaceful. And possibly owing to this, Grundy had managed to get it—whatever "it" was.

"Ripping!" went on Grundy, with gleeful enthusiasm. "The wheeze of a lifetime! Just the very thing we want! My hat! I'll run and tell those fellows about it! I shall have to ask Figgins for the key of the property-box, in any case! I shall need make-up as well as suitable clobber! Gee-whiz! It's great!"

And Grundy leaped from his chair, tore open the door, and scudded along to Figgins' study. Luckily for his purpose, he found Figgins & Co. in the study. They all looked very thoughtful indeed.

"It's no good!" Figgins was groaning, as Grundy opened the door. "I'm blessed if I can think of anything, you fellows! The whole trouble is that those School House bouncers will be on their guard more than ever now! Besides, even if we manage to collar one of the dashed photos they'll have others, and the film as well."

"That's the trouble!"

"But we've got to think of something—simply got to," grunted Figgins. "They— Hallo, here's that ass Grundy! What the thump do you want?"

Figgins was not in the mood to be over and excessively polite to George Alfred Grundy. In their view Grundy was the Jonah of the New House. It was only since Grundy had joined that establishment that the tide had turned in favour of the School House. Indeed, Figgins blamed Grundy for it all—and there certainly was good reason for that.

But Grundy ignored Figgins' manner—indeed, he did not notice anything impolite about it. He hurriedly came in and closed the door.

"I've got it, you fellows!" he remarked eagerly. "The wheeze of a lifetime!"

"Go and boil it, then!" said Figgins rudely. "And boil your silly self at the same time!"

"Wait until you've heard my idea, and then you won't talk like that. I'll take no notice of your cheek this time, Figgins," said Grundy. "We've no time for that sort of thing now. Now listen! It's not a bit of good any of us chaps hoping to get hold of that dashed film and the prints in the ordinary way. Tom Merry's rather a dud, but he's more sense than to allow one of us to see 'em."

"Think we don't know that, you silly chump?"

"Well, I'm glad you know it, anyway. Now, my idea's this. What about one of us going over there as a visitor—somebody whom they look up to and whom they wouldn't refuse a favour. See? They ask him to tea, and during tea the chap leads the conversation on to the New House, and pretending he knows about the japes, asks to see the films and prints. Then when he's got 'em he can either scoot or chuck 'em in the fire."

Figgins' exasperated look faded away. He looked at Kerr.

The Scottish junior looked interested.

"Well, that's not so bad—for you, Grundy," grunted Figgins. "Yes, I believe something like that could be worked."

"Yes, I fancy it could," agreed Kerr thoughtfully. "But whom could we tackle?"

"That's the problem," said Figgins. "It would have to be—"

"My dear men," smiled Grundy. "I've thought all that out! What about old Gussy's pater?"

"Eh? What?"

"Lord Eastwood!" chuckled Grundy. "His giddy lordship takes an interest in all that goes on here—he knows about the japes that go on. Gussy's bound to tell him and show him the photo if he's asked. See the wheeze now? I impersonate his giddy lordship, and then—"

"You?" ejaculated Figgins. "My dear fathead—"

"Hold on!" said Kerr, shaking his head. "No go, my lad! For one thing, those chaps know him too well—Gussy wouldn't be taken in. And another point. Lord Eastwood's a very tall chap. We couldn't hope to pull it off successfully."

"Oh!" groaned Figgins. "I never thought of that!"

"What rot!" snorted Grundy. "I could pull it off! You

leave it to me! Hand me the key of the giddy property-box, Figgy. I'm bigger than you chaps, and not far short of Gussy's pater—only a foot or so, anyway! Leave it to me! Give me the key, Figgy!"

"Not much!" said Figgins promptly. "You burbling duffer, it couldn't come off! You're not getting that key, anyway. You've mucked up enough already. Go and eat coke!"

"Yes, chuck it, Grundy!" said Kerr, smiling. "Your wheeze isn't bad on the whole, but Lord Eastwood is a bit above our weight to impersonate. Perhaps we'll think—"

"Rats!" said Grundy obstinately. "Well, if you won't lend me that key, you won't, and you can get your own blessed ideas out, in future!"

With that Grundy marched out, banging the door behind him. But out in the passage he gave a deep chuckle. It had suddenly occurred to him that there were shops where amateur theatrical clothes could be purchased.

"I'll do it," he muttered, as he hurried away. "It's a splendid wheeze, and I'll get the clobber and make-up from Wayland. I'll just catch that four-forty at Rylcombe if I bike it."

And Grundy hurried round to the cycle-shed. Bates, of

"Yes, rather!"

"I'm sick about it for myself, too!" grunted Bates. "She's never been to St. Jim's, and I was looking forward to showing her round, blow it! Well, thanks, old chap!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Grundy, nodding carelessly. Bates jumped on his machine and rode away along the gravel path, careless of the rule against cycling within gates. Grundy got his own machine out, and was about to follow him, when he halted, a wonderful and amazing idea coming to him.

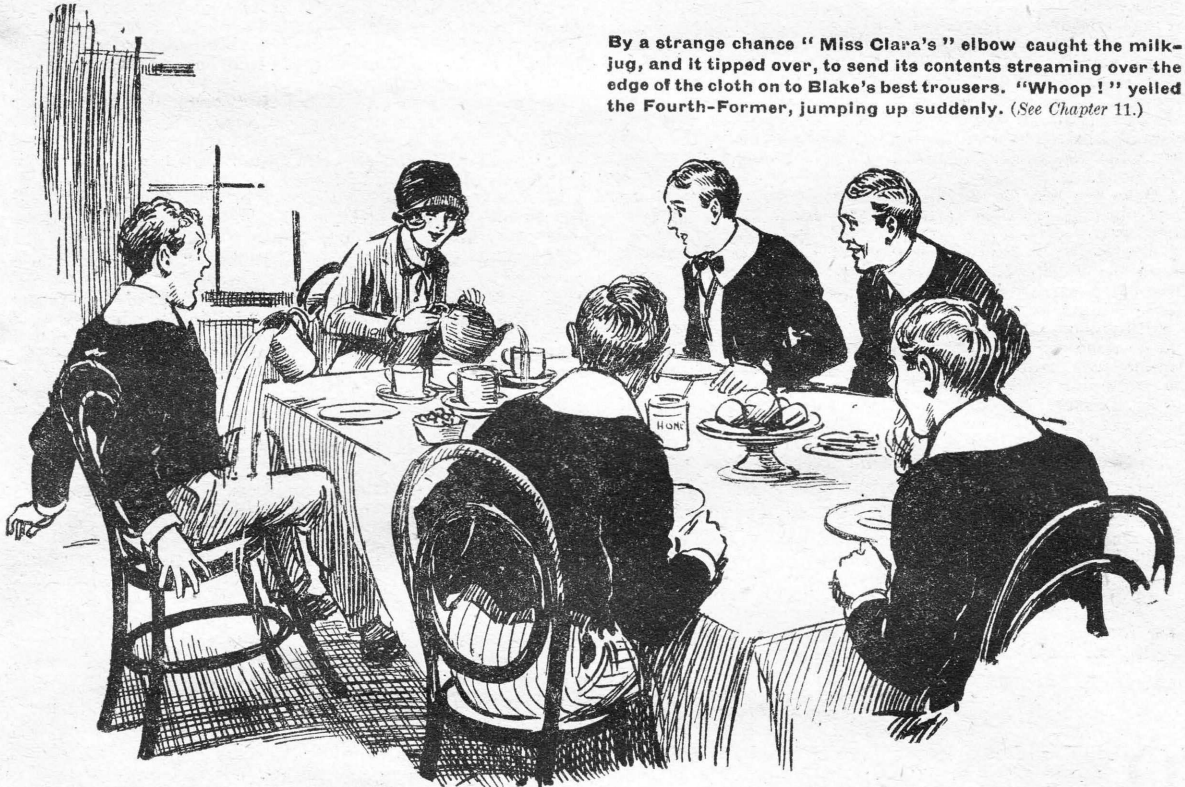
"Phew!" he breathed. "Now, I wonder—"

For some moments Grundy wondered, and then, with his eyes gleaming excitedly, he hastily hoisted his bike again and started off at a run for the New House. As a matter of fact, Grundy himself had become very doubtful about impersonating Lord Eastwood, since Kerr had pointed out the obvious drawbacks.

Now Grundy put away all thoughts of that scheme. He felt he had got a better one.

"I'll try that rotter Figgy again with this—he can't turn this one down," he murmured. "Phew! It's great! Clara, eh? I've just got the face and figure for a girl! And I've only got to let those chaps in Study No. 6 think

By a strange chance "Miss Clara's" elbow caught the milk-jug, and it tipped over, to send its contents streaming over the edge of the cloth on to Blake's best trousers. "Whoop!" yelled the Fourth-Former, jumping up suddenly. (See Chapter 11.)



the School House Fourth, was just wheeling out his bike as Grundy hurried up.

"I say, Grundy, old chap," he said eagerly. "You might lend me your bike-pump for an hour or so. I've got to get to Wayland by five-thirty—meeting my sister there. She was to have come here, but I've just had a phone message asking me to meet her in Wayland instead, and have tea with her there."

"Got a puncture?" grunted Grundy.

"Yes—a slow one," growled Bates, in deep disgust. "I shall miss that blessed train if it lets me down."

"Oh, all right," said Grundy. Grundy was a generous youth at all times, and though he was in a hurry, and though he was such a big mar he promptly assented, and went into the cycle-shed and got his pump.

"Here you are, kid," he said loftily. "Mind you shove it back on my bike when you get back. My hat! I hope you won't meet your giddy sister with a face like that!"

"Well, I'm feeling sick about it," said Bates, as he started to pump up his tyre. "You see, I happened to be stony when I got Clara's letter, and I was in a fine stew. Then Gussy offered like a brick to give us both a spread in Study No. 6. Jolly decent of him, you know—especially as we hadn't a blessed crumb of anything in the study. Anyway, those Fourth chaps got a heap of stuff in, and now this dashed phone message has come, saying Clara won't have time to come to St. Jim's after all. It's rather thick on Gussy and his pals after all their trouble!"

I've changed my mind again and come on to St. Jim's after all. It's a thousand to one against Blake or any of them ever having seen Bates' giddy sister. I haven't, anyway, and I've been here longer than Bates."

And Grundy fairly ran upstairs to Figgins' study, his face ablaze with eager excitement. He charged like a mad bull into the study, and without any preliminary remarks, related his wheeze excitedly.

Figgins and Kerr and Fatty Wynn had to listen, and when Grundy had finished, Figgins' own eyes were gleaming eagerly. Kerr also looked very keen and excited.

"It's a good wheeze, Figgy," he said quietly. "Grundy's struck a winner this time."

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn. "Top-hole!"

"It—it's great!" gasped Figgins. "Blessed if I can think how Grundy could think out such an idea. You're quite sure Bates said she hadn't been to St. Jim's before?"

"Quite sure!" grinned Grundy.

"And those Fourth chaps aren't likely to have seen her?" "I'm jolly sure they haven't," said Grundy emphatically. "I haven't, anyway!"

"Well, it's a winner all the way," was Figgins' comment. "It should be easy enough to work, and Blake and his pals will jump to the conclusion that she's changed her mind. And Bates won't be back till lock-up if he's having tea in Wayland."

"That's pretty certain," grinned Kerr. "It's the goods, Figgy."

"Then you'll do it, old chap?" said Figgy, addressing Kerr. "You're the only man who could tackle such a job successfully. You always take a girl's part jolly well in the theatricals."

"I'll do it," said Kerr. "Leave it to me."

Grundy stared, and then he exploded.

"What!" he yelled. "Here, what d'you mean, you rotters? It's my dashed wheeze, and I'm doing it. Think I'm going to allow you chaps to collar all the glory? Not likely! Cheek! My hat! What cheek!"

"My dear man—"

"Rot! Utter rot! Hand me that key and tell me where the clobber and stuff is kept, or I'll jolly well smash you, Figgins!" hooted Grundy.

"My dear man, it's impossible," said Figgins. "We're much obliged for your valuable idea, and I'll see you get the credit for it. But we're not going to have this wheeze mucked up!"

"Rot!" gasped Grundy. "Utter rot! You cheeky cads! Why, if you jolly well don't let me do it I'll do it on my own and get the clobber and make-up from Rylcombe. That's flat!"

Figgins looked at Kerr and winked.

"Oh, all right, if you really insist, Grundy!" he said. "Come along, then!"

He started for the door, and Grundy and the others followed, Kerr grinning. He knew Figgins too well to chip in and say anything. Figgins marched quickly to the stairs and led the way up to the top-landing, where the New House box-rooms were situated. Figgins unlocked the door and opened it.

"Here you are, Grundy!" he said grumpily. "As you're so pig-headed we'll have to see you fixed up, I suppose. Buck up!"

Grundy was not suspicious in the slightest. He knew where the School House juniors kept their things for the term-end theatricals, but he didn't know where the New House fellows kept theirs.

He marched all unsuspectingly into the room. No sooner had he done so, however, when Figgins, quick as lightning, slammed the door and locked it again. Then, heedless of the thumping and yelling from the box-room, the New House leader chuckled and led the way downstairs again.

"That's settled Grundy," he remarked, with another chuckle. "It's hard lines on Grundy. But we can't afford to lose such a wheeze, and we can't afford to let that born idiot muck it up."

"Rather not!"

"Come on, then! Let's get to work! It's a really tophole idea, and now Grundy's well out of the way there's a splendid chance of it coming off at last."

"Yes, rather!"

Figgins & Co. chuckled softly, and went downstairs to the junior Rag, where the property-box was, to prepare Kerr for the task before him. Hope once again gleamed brightly on the New House horizon.

CHAPTER 11.

Sister Clara!

"**Q**UITE a decent spread!" commented Jack Blake, rather moodily. "And all waster, more or less. It's rotten!"

"Feahfully wotten, deah boy!" added Arthur Arthur D'Arcy, frowning. "It is vewy disappointin' indeed! Still, it is not Bates' fault, you know, and it weally cannot be helped!"

"It won't be wasted, anyway," said Herries, with a chuckle. "I might tell you that I'm jolly hungry!"

"You are always hungwy, Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I am surprised at you always thinkin' about gwub, you know! Howevah, as I wemarked, it is vewy disappointin'. Bates is wathah a decent fellow, and I was vewy pleased at the pwspect of makin' his sistah's acquaintance, you know. Yaas, wathah!"

"Always thinking about the giddy ladies," said Herries in his turn. "I am surprised at you, Gussy! Still, I'm disappointed, too. I'm rather glad I didn't spend three hours getting myself ready to meet her like old Gussy, though."

"Weally, Hewwies," said Gussy indignantly. "That is wathah an exaggeration, you know. I did not spend more than a couple of hours dwessin' bai Jove!"

"That all?" asked Herries. "Only a couple of hours! Great pip! Supposing Gussy was really in love, you chaps! He'd have to leave school to give his whole time to the job of getting dressed to meet his girl."

"Pway do not be wedic, Hewwies," said Gussy, frowning. "Howevah, I have got an ideah, deah boys. As the lady and Bates will not be heah aftah all, why not ask those fellows fwom No. 10 to tea?"

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"Good idea!" said Blake. "I'll trot along and ask 'em now. I don't expect they'll have started their tea yet."

Jack Blake hurried out. He was not absent long. When he came back the Terrible Three were behind him, all of them wearing cheery grins.

"Oh, ripping!" said Tom Merry, as his eyes fell on the loaded table. "This is prime. Yes, we'll come and be the honoured guests! Hard lines on old Bates missing this, I must say. His sister wouldn't have backed out, either, if she'd seen this grub. Well, what's their loss is our giddy gain!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Sit down, deah boys," said Gussy cordially. "We are vewy disappointed that Bates and his sistah are not comin' aftah all. Still you fellows will—"

Knock!

Arthur Augustus was interrupted at that point by a soft knock at the door.

"Come in, fathhead!" bawled Herries. "Don't get cold feet standing on the mat!"

The door opened and the person who had evidently knocked obeyed Herries' rather crude invitation.

"Oh!" gasped Herries. "Oh—oh crumbs!"

Herries nearly dropped the teapot—getting the shock of his life. For in the doorway stood a smartly-dressed girl—a really pretty girl, too! Herries blushed to the roots of his hair, and longed for the floor to open and swallow him.

"Oh!" he gasped again.

The juniors, who had seated themselves, sprang to their feet at once. Blake sprang to the door and opened it wide, smiling at the girl, who smiled pleasantly back, seemingly rather amused at the crowded study. Blake was astonished—amazed. But he didn't need tell who the stranger was. Who else could it be but the girl they had expected before the phone message had come? Of course, it was Bates' sister who had arrived, after all.

"Come—come inside!" gasped Blake. "Then—then you—"

"I'm looking for Study No. 3!" exclaimed the young lady in a cheery, musical voice. "I think my brother said it was No. 3. My brother was expecting me—Bates of the Fourth. I—I would you mind telling me where I can find him," she added, looking at the juniors in turn as if in search of him. "Oh, I do hope he has not started already!"

"I'm sorry," stammered Blake. "Bates has gone to meet you in Wayland. But—"

"Oh, how very silly of me to risk it!" said the girl, shaking her head in annoyance. "I might have known he would start out before I could get here. It was most stupid of me to change my mind again—and more stupid still not to telephone again. Oh, poor dear Harold! I really must hurry back!"

"Oh, please don't do that!" said Blake hastily, blushing. "You see, Miss Bates, he would have to be starting back again by the time you reached Wayland. The fact is, you were to have come here for tea," added Blake, nodding to the table with no little pride. "We asked Bates to bring you. We were very disappointed when we heard you weren't coming, after all."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, bowing gracefully. "Pway accept our hospitality, Miss Bates! Your bwothah would be vewy upset if you returned without havin' tea with us."

"That's it," said Blake eagerly. "Bates would rather you stayed for tea, I'm quite sure, Miss Bates. We really couldn't allow you to go back without. Besides, Bates may be back before you have to go."

"Quite possible!" said Tom Merry, smiling, though he felt rather doubtful.

"Quite likely," added Digby. "Won't you sit down?"

"Oh, bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus hurriedly. "Pway sit down, Miss Bates!"

All the juniors suddenly remembered their manners. There was a scramble to place a chair for the honoured guest. Study No. 6 always had a special place for the guest to sit, and this was facing the window. For one reason this had a nice view of the green-carpeted quadrangle, and for another there were various patches of wallpaper missing from the other walls.

But apparently Miss Bates did not care to sit there—possibly she feared a draught.

"Oh, please don't bother!" she smiled. "This place will do quite nicely, thank you. You are very kind. Oh, I'm so sorry!"

Miss Bates, as she spoke, had calmly lifted another chair and placed it at the table herself. Unfortunately, she caught Tom Merry a fearful crack on the shin with the leg of the chair as she did so.

Tom Merry gave vent to an involuntary yelp.

"Oh dear, how awfully careless of me!" exclaimed Miss Bates, turning towards Tom in great agitation and catching Blake a hefty crack on the knee with the chair as she

turned. "Why, did I— Oh, how terribly careless of me! Now I have done it again. I do hope I did not hurt you?" "Nunno!" gasped Blake, setting his teeth to keep back an agonised yelp. "It—it's all right, Miss Bates. Only a— a tap, you know. Pour the tea out, Gussy! Sit down, you fellows! Some of you will have to sit on the window-seat and some of you on the coal-scuttle and the bookshelves."

There was an awkward scramble for seats. Having been taken by surprise, Tom Merry & Co. had quite lost their heads, and even Gussy seemed all at sea with his manners. But the juniors settled down at last, and Miss Bates, obviously the coolest person present, soon put them at their ease with her kindly smile and chatter. It wasn't often Study No. 6 or Study No. 10 had the honour of giving tea to a young lady, and they were all very keen indeed to make a good impression. And certainly Miss Bates appeared to be a very nice young lady indeed—a trifle careless perhaps, though the juniors put that down to nervousness.

They possibly would not have been so keen, or put it down to nervousness, had they only known the identity of their honoured guest. But they did not know, and Kerr—for the fair stranger was that clever impersonator—breathed freely and determined to enjoy himself as he realised the juniors had not the slightest suspicion that anything was not as it should be.

And there certainly was plenty to enjoy. The young lady's eyes sparkled as she glanced over the table.

"Oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed, with a merry laugh. "What a pity Harold— No, please allow me to pour out the tea!"

And before D'Arcy's hand could reach the teapot Sister Clara grabbed it. By a strange chance her elbow caught the milk-jug, sending it over the table, while the milk streamed over the edge of the cloth on to Blake's best trousers.

As she swung round in alarm, the teapot seemed to give a lurch to starboard, to use a nautical term, and a stream of scalding hot tea spurted over Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's fancy waistcoat and spotless trousers.

"Yawoooooooooh!"

Nothing could have prevented the strangled howl that came from Arthur Augustus. There instantly followed another howl as, turning again in alarm to see what had happened, Sister Clara sent a second stream of hot tea over Lowther's arms and shoulders.

"Yooooooooop!"

It really seemed most unfortunate. In her eagerness to be of use, Miss Bates certainly was unlucky, or the fellows who came in for her attentions were unlucky. At all events, accidents seemed to follow one another at that teaparty. Scarcely had D'Arcy returned from changing his trousers, and the rest of the victims finished rubbing themselves more or less dry, when Miss Clara upset a pot of rather watery honey over Herries' head.

It was a most unfortunate accident, and Herries departed hurriedly for the nearest bath-room, scarcely waiting to listen to the profuse and distressed apologies of Miss Clara.

A little later Tom Merry, who was sitting next to her, felt something rather uncomfortable under him, and as he raised himself and looked at his chair he found a couple of squashed jam-tarts adhering partly to his trousers and partly to the seat of the chair.

How they had got there was an amazing mystery, though not such a mystery as the manner in which nearly half a pot of strawberry jam found its way into Digby's jacket pocket.

It was really getting rather amazing, and the juniors were looking rather curiously at Miss Bates. Bates' sister might be a practical joker, but it was not the sort of joking that appealed to Tom Merry & Co., being the victims. Yet they could scarcely believe it possible that it could be Miss Clara. Her smile was most innocent and disarming, and she certainly seemed most distressed at the unfortunate series of accidents.

But after the jam episode things went smoothly, and soon the accidents were politely "forgotten" by the juniors as Miss Clara, having eaten an enormous tea, started to ask questions about St. Jim's, showing quite an amazing knowledge of school matters and sports. Then she gently led the conversation round to the New House, though Tom Merry & Co. were quite unaware that she had started them on the subject.

But it was a subject upon which Tom Merry & Co. were eloquent. They told Miss Clara, amidst much laughter, how they had recently scored over the New House, and tea being over now, she got up to look at the photograph over the mantelpiece of the famous declaration.

"Oh, what a perfect scream!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands together. "Oh, do let me see it closer!"

She reached up for the framed photograph, and, somehow, it slipped from her hands and crashed into the fire-

place. Then—how it happened none of the juniors could tell—as she stepped forward her dainty foot went clean through glass and photo.

Crunch! Smash!

"Oh, how extremely careless of me!" she gasped in dismay. "I do hope you have more, for I am afraid this is utterly ruined. I'm so very sorry."

She struggled with her hands to remove the frame and photo from her dainty shoe, tearing the photo into pieces in the process.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, though he was looking quite dazed. "Pway do not wowwy about that, Miss Bates. We have anothah print, and we have the film, so we can take lots more, deah gal."

"Oh, please let me see the other one!" begged the young lady, appealing to Tom Merry with a charming smile. "And I should so love to see the film. I do not understand much about photography, but I am so very interested. Perhaps—"

"I'll fetch the other print," said Tom Merry. "It's locked up in our study with the film."

"Oh, thank you so much!"

Miss Clara chatted cheerily with the juniors while Tom was away, seeming to take a keen interest in Manners' enthusiastic explanation of how films were developed, and Manners was quite shocked at her lack of knowledge of the subject. Manners was still expounding when Tom Merry hurried back with the film and the print.

"And have you only taken two prints, as you call them?" she asked innocently. "Will the film only make two?"

"Oh, no!" said Manners, laughing. "I've only done these two so far because I've had no time to do more."

"How very, very interesting!" exclaimed Miss Bates, holding up the film to the light, and then comparing it with the print that Tom had brought. "I must say that— Did I hear Harold then?"

She broke off, and, hurriedly opening the door, looked out into the passage. Then she tripped lightly away along it.

"Bai Jove! What—"

"Bates can't have returned yet," said Tom Merry.

He stepped out into the passage, and glanced up and down in search of their fair guest. She had vanished completely.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Tom. "Must have slipped in one of the studies."

He hurried along, opening doors and looking into the various studies. He came back looking quite mystified.

"It's jolly queer!" he exclaimed, frowning.

"Thumping queer!" said Blake, looking quite startled. "I say, I wonder if—if she's a bit potty? She struck me as being jolly queer altogether. All those dashed accidents over tea were rather queer, and— What in thunder!"

From somewhere outside came a sudden howl, followed by sounds of a furious scuffle. It sounded clearly through the open window of the study.

There was a rush for the window, and the juniors looked out, craning over each other's shoulders. The sight they witnessed nearly made them faint with horror.

Some yards away from the window was a girlish form. It was Miss Clara Bates, and she was struggling in the grasp of a burly junior, who was bellowing out wrathful remarks at the top of his voice. As the juniors looked out they saw the burly junior let out his left and hit the young lady clean under the chin. Then, as the young lady went crashing down, the burly junior jumped on her and started to punch her with a will.

"M-mum-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Good heavens! It's that maniac Grundy! He's gone stark mad! Quick, for goodness' sake!"

Tom Merry led the way out with a rush, and, followed by his scared chums, he went downstairs at a pace he had certainly never set before in his career at St. Jim's.

It was Grundy right enough. And he was raging. Solitary confinement had not improved Grundy's temper apparently. It seemed a miracle that he was here, though the explanation was simple enough. Getting really tired of being a prisoner at long last, Grundy had found some sacking in a corner of the lumber-room, and he had conceived the idea of tearing it into strips and making a rope of it. And, eventually, by means of this, and after risking his neck at least a dozen times in the descent, Grundy had reached the roof of an outhouse, and from thence he had dropped to the quad below.

He had then been just about to make for the New House when he had suddenly sighted Miss Clara Bates, otherwise Francis Kerr of the New House, hastily crossing towards the New House.

The sight of him had proved quite enough for Grundy. Kerr was in too much of a hurry to get clear of the School House now to mind his steps, and his long strides alone might have given him away. But Grundy scarcely

needed to note them. He knew at once it was Kerr, and with a bellow of rage he had gone for Kerr.

It was pretty plain that Kerr had succeeded in his mission, and the thought nearly drove Grundy frantic. Kerr had not only pinched his idea in a most barefaced manner, but if he had succeeded he had quite ruined Grundy's chances of making himself the hero of the New House, and thus paving the way for the consummation of his ambitious programme.

So Grundy meant to take it out of Kerr.

But the sight of the burly junior attacking a pretty young lady tooth and nail proved rather too much for all the fellows in sight, not to mention Tom Merry & Co.

Quite a score of fellows reached the spot at the same time as Tom Merry & Co., and Grundy suddenly howled as a dozen pairs of hands grasped him, and hauled him from his victim.

They were not gentle about it either. Grundy went to the ground with a thud that shook every bone in his body. Then a swarm of fellows fell upon him and held him fast.

"Hold him!" gasped Tom Merry. "Hold him for goodness' sake! Help Miss Bates up, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus and a couple more fellows helped Kerr to his feet.

"Stop the cad!" howled Grundy. "Lemme go, you interfering rotter! I'm going to smash him—I'm going to give the cheeky rotter the licking of his life! Can't you see it's that rotter Kerr?"

"Wha-a-at?"

Kerr saw every eye turn swiftly towards him, and quick as a flash he wrenched himself from the helping hands and made a leap to escape. But he was not quite quick enough. Blake was one of the helpers, and he had heard Grundy's frantic yell—just at the same moment that his eyes glimpsed the fact that Kerr's golden hair—which the juniors had admired so much—was half off his head, whilst Kerr's own dark hair showed clearly underneath.

"No you don't!" he panted, making a frantic leap.

Blake's grasp missed Kerr by an inch, but Blake's outstretched foot just managed to touch Kerr's heel.

Kerr stumbled, and went crashing down.

"Got you!" yelled Blake, and he jumped on the shoulders of Kerr and held him down.

"Bai Jove! Blake, you fwightful— Gwreat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's astounded yell ended in a gasp of amazement as—like Blake—he suddenly sighted the false hair and the real hair underneath. At the same moment a dozen other fellows saw it.

"Kerr!"

"It's that rotter, that spoofer Kerr!" howled Lowther. "Don't let him get away!"

"Not much!" panted Blake, kneeling on Kerr's back.

"Not much! We'll give you pouring scalding tea over a chap and playing your little games on us. Let that idiot go, chaps! This is the merchant we've got to deal with."

"Yes, rather!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway do not let the feahful spoofoah go, deah boys."

The "deah boys" were not likely to do that. The memory of the queer accidents—not such queer accidents now—in Study No. 6 made Tom Merry & Co., at all events, see to that point.

"Hold him!" panted Tom Merry, releasing Grundy and rushing up. "Hold him while I collar that film and print. That was what the spoofer rotter was after, of course! Oh, what asses we were not to see it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kerr groaned as he was held whilst Tom snatched the hand-bag looped over his arm, and wrenched it open.

The print was there, likewise the film.

Tom placed both in his pocket, for the second print wasn't framed, and then he looked grimly at the apprehensive Kerr.

"That's that!" he said chuckling. "Well, you New House spoofer, you've had your little joke, and now you've got to pay the piper!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway put the boundah through it, Tom Mewwy. The feahful wuffian has neahly wuined a suit of mine."

"Look here——" began Kerr uneasily. "It was only a lark!"

"Well, we're going to have our lark now, old nut! Frog's-march the beauty to the fountain, chaps. We'll give him a good bumping and a good rolling, and then we'll give him a bath."

"Good egg!"

Kerr howled for mercy, but the School House fellows were not in a merciful mood. Kerr had rather overdone it that afternoon. The next few exciting moments he felt that Tom Merry & Co. were overdoing it also.

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He was bumped and bumped and bumped again and again until he yelled with anguish. Then he was rolled in the gravel, and gravel and turfs stuffed down his neck. This procedure ended, he was lifted on high and dropped into the school fountain.

Splash!

"Yoooooop! Mum-mum-mum! Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle!"

The fountain was big and it was also not over clean, the flushing arrangements having been out of order for some time. Kerr had cause to regret this fact as his head went under. When he scrambled out in his drenched skirt, and minus most of the grease-paint and make-up, he looked a ludicrous sight.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House tormentors fairly howled with laughter.

Kerr spluttered and gasped, and panted, and then he took to his heels and tottered away, water squelching in his shoes and dripping from his clothes. And this time the School House fellows allowed him to go.

In the New House doorway Kerr met Figgins, Fatty Wynn, Redfern, and a score or more of New House fellows who had rushed out. They stared at the hapless impersonator as he ambled up dismally.

"Kerr!" gasped Figgins. "Then—then it didn't come off? Great Scott! What's happened, old chap?"

"What's happened?" hooted Kerr, almost beside himself with rage and dismay. "It was Grundy again—that— that frightful idiot!"

"Wha-at?" gasped Figgins. "You—you mean to say——"

"It was working a treat," almost wept Kerr. "I had a great time—spoofer 'em no end, and managed to get the film, and a print, and to destroy the remaining one. I was just crossing the quad with 'em safe and sound when Grundy rushed at me. He must have got free, and he mucked everything up. Those School House cads rushed up while we were scrapping and collared me."

"And—and the film——"

"They've got 'em back," groaned Kerr. "It's all up! And it's all Grundy's fault!"

And with that Kerr tottered indoors and left them gasping.

"Well," gasped Figgins, clenching his fist. "Well, my hat! Grundy's mucked us up again! Oh, where is the fooling cad? Let's find him! We'll give him the ragging of his life!"

There was an answering roar of wrath from the New House fellows. Then they went rushing off in search of Grundy.

But Grundy had made himself scarce, realising rather late just what he had done. Not until nearly bedtime that night did they find him. But they found him then, and when Grundy crawled into bed that night he had good reason to wish he had never seen the New House. He really began to wonder if he ever would realise his ambition to be the leader of the New House against their rivals of the School House. Things certainly did not look promising so far!

CHAPTER 12.

A Cycling Spin!

"I SAY, Figgy——"

Fatty Wynn rolled into Figgins' study in the New House, with rather jammy cheeks, and a gleam of excitement in his eyes. It was after dinner the following day—a half at St. Jim's—and Figgins was sitting in the study armchair with a very glum face. All St. Jim's had roared over the latest attempt to recover the famous declaration, and Figgins was feeling very depressed in consequence. It really began to look as if the New House never would get it back, and that School House was going to remain cockhouse at St. Jim's.

"Well," scowled Figgins. "What is it?"

"I've just been in the tuckshop," said Fatty.

"You look as if you had," said Figgins, grinning faintly as he noted his fat chum's podgy cheeks. "It doesn't require a Sexton Blake to see that, old chap."

"I say, don't rot, Figgy," said Fatty, in an injured tone. "I only had a few jam-puffs, and some toffee, and three or four cream doughnuts, and a couple of meat pies!"

"Is that all?" remarked Figgins, with heavy sarcasm. "As it's scarcely twenty minutes since we had dinner, you must be jolly hungry now."

"Oh, I say, Figgy. Don't rot, you know. Look here," said Fatty eagerly. "I've just heard something. I was in the tuckshop——"

"You've said that before, old chap—and your chivvy told me that, too."

"I was in the tuckshop," proceeded Fatty Wynn unheeding, "and Tom Merry and a crowd of his pals came in, Figgy."

The School House juniors fairly howled with laughter at the ludicrous sight Kerr presented as he stood up in the school fountain, spluttering and gasping and panting, in his drenched skirt.

(See Chapter 11.)



"Oh!" Figgins suddenly became interested. "Go on, old chap!"

"It isn't really very important," said Fatty. "Only I thought you might like to know that the bounders are going for a cycle ride this afternoon as far as Abbeylea ruins. Manners wants to take some silly photographs, or something. And they're going to take some grub and eat it there."

"Oh!" said Figgins. "A picnic, eh? Rather late for a picnic, I must say."

"Well, I suppose it isn't exactly a picnic—just a snack they're taking with them, you know," said Fatty Wynn.

"I—I thought perhaps it would be worth while going after them and raiding their grub, you know. It would be a score, wouldn't it?"

Figgins chuckled.

"I thought it was something to do with grub, you fat cormorant," he chuckled. "But—but I'm rather glad you did tell me this, Fatty. It may lead to something. I say, Kerr's the man for ideas. Know where he is?"

"I think he's with Reddy," said Fatty. "But look here—"

"No time, old chap! I want to see Kerr!"

Figgins lifted himself from the armchair and went to Redfern's study. Kerr was there chatting rather glumly with Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence.

"I say, Kerr," said Figgins eagerly. "Fatty's just told me something that may be useful. Those School House bounders are going for a cycle run this afternoon to Abbeylea ruins—taking some grub with them. Can't we work some sort of wheeze on them. Seems to be a chance."

"Looks promising, anyway," said Redfern. "Providing

the bounders don't know we know. I say, why not go after 'em and pinch their bikes, if we can? Then make 'em walk back. It's a good eight miles, and it would be no end of a score for us."

"Too crude, rather," said Figgins, "and really doesn't help us much in regard to the thumping declaration. That's really the only thing that matters now. I vote we follow the bounders, anyway, and perhaps an idea will come to us on the way!"

"We might!" said Redfern. "But we'd better go in force if we do. What time do they start?"

"I'll ask Fatty," said Figgins. "Oh, here he is! Fatty, what time are those merchants starting out? D'you know?"

"Two o'clock," said Fatty promptly. "I heard Merry mention that distinctly."

"Good!" said Figgy. "Do they know you heard 'em talking it over?"

"My hat! Rather not!" grinned Fatty. "I was sitting round the corner of the counter behind that stack of tinned stuff. They couldn't have seen me!"

"Good! Then we'll do it," said Figgins, his face eager. "I fancy that's not a bad idea of yours, Reddy. If we can think of nothing more useful, we'll pinch their giddy bikes, and make the worms crawl back! We've no need to follow 'em. Just start out about ten minutes after them. How many are going, Fatty?"

"Just the seven of 'em, Figgy—Merry's lot and Blake's lot."

"Oh, good!" said Figgins, with satisfaction. "Then we'll take two or three more chaps to be certain of licking them if there's trouble! Hallo, it's two now, my pippins! Better

go and scout round while you chaps get ready. Look lively!"

"Yes, rather!"

Figgins hurried away, his intention being to watch the gates from the quad. But while passing a landing window he suddenly sighted several figures going through the gates wheeling bicycles. There were seven of them, and Figgins recognised them at once and hurried back to his chums.

In a few moments he had warned them, and soon all were hurrying for the cycle-shed, their numbers augmented now by Jimson, Pratt, French, and Robinson.

"Ten of us," grinned Figgins. "That should be enough to handle those merchants. Buck up!"

In a matter of minutes bikes were hauled out of the shed and rushed out of gates. Then the juniors mounted and started off at a good pace, keeping a good look-out ahead. But they saw nothing of the enemy, and after pedalling for an hour or so, they sighted the ruins of Abbeylea, the late autumn sun glinting on the ancient stonework of the shattered walls.

"Carefully, now!" warned Figgins. "I don't see a soul; but I expect the bounders will be in the ruins scoffing their tuck, though it's rather early. Come on, anyway."

The juniors passed through a gateway, wheeling their bikes over the grass, and with their eyes scanning the fields and hedges about them. But they saw no signs of the enemy until they were less than fifty yards from the ruins. Then Figgins called a halt on sighting a heap of tumbled bikes lying on the grass in a hollow.

"Good! Those are their bikes, for a pension!" he breathed. "I tell you what! I fancy I've got the wheeze! Reddy, you and Owen stay behind with our bikes, and we'll go ahead and collar their bikes, for a start. We'll bring them here, and hide 'em in the hedge. This looks like being a giddy score for us. The asses little dream we're near, or they'd have left a giddy guard on the bikes."

There was a chorus of chuckles from the New House band. Owen and Redfern obediently remained to guard the bikes, and Figgins and his men crept cautiously forward, ears and eyes on the alert. But they reached the bikes safely enough, and Figgys grinned as he recognised them.

"Tom Merry's lot right enough," he chuckled. "Now, you fellows, collar them, and— What the— Oh crikey! Look out!"

It was a wild yell of warning, for at that instant figures seemed to rise all around them, and then came a sudden rush of feet on the grass.

The startled juniors yelled in astonishment as they recognised Tom Merry & Co., and Blake & Co.

But there were others, too—Glyn, Noble, and Dane, and Clive, Levison, and Talbot. Figgins & Co., too startled to move, blinked at them in amazement.

"Mop 'em up!" roared Tom Merry. "School House for ever!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The next moment the rival juniors were at grips. But Figgins & Co., though they fought desperately once they had got over their surprise, were hopelessly outnumbered.

"Give in, you cripples!" panted Tom Merry, helping Lowther to hold the fuming George Figgins down. "Give in! We've got you!"

"Oh, you rotters!" panted Figgins. "I believe you knew we were coming, hang you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "You New House worms think you can put a fight up against us! What an idea! Of course, we knew you were coming! Dear old Fatty little dreamed we spotted him. We spotted him enter the tuckshop, and we spotted him listening, through a mirror hanging at the back of the counter. We knew you'd tumble for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

One by one the prisoners were trussed up by the triumphant School House fellows. They had just finished, when Reilly, Lumley-Lumley, and Julian came up, leading Redfern and Owen, both of the latter with their hands tied behind them. Figgins' last hope fled as he sighted them.

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "Oh, you rotter, Merry! What are you going to do with us?"

"Just what I fancy you intended to do to us," smiled Tom. "After we've had tea."

And Tom Merry led his men away cheerily. They vanished over the brow of the hill towards the ruins, and as they did so Figgins heard a rustle behind him. He twisted his head round swiftly, and then he nearly yelled aloud in astonishment.

A burly form was creeping stealthily through the long grass. It was none other than George Alfred Grundy.

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CHAPTER 13.

Honours Even!

"GRUNDY!" gasped Kerr, suddenly sighting him. "Well, I'm blown!"

"Grundy!"

It was Grundy—Grundy, of all people!

He came crawling up to Figgins.

"Shut up!" he panted. "Shut up, you footling lot of moulting owls! Quiet! Mind your eye, Figgys!"

Grundy's knife was out, and in a couple of slashes he had cut the New House leader free. Then Grundy went along the row, and cut each of the others free in turn.

"Grundy," gasped Figgins, "how on earth—"

"Dry up, Figgys!" snorted Grundy. "You can gas as much as you like when we're clear! Come on! After me, you burbling lot of idiots! Fancy being taken in like that! Bah! I'm ashamed of you! Nice leader you've got, too! I don't think!"

Figgins felt strongly tempted to jump up and smite the snorting Grundy hip and thigh; but he resisted the temptation, fortunately. Grundy stopped at last in a little hollow, and the juniors crawling after him stopped also.

"Now you can gas," sniffed Grundy. "It's all some of you chaps are fit for! I was jolly nearly letting you go to pot!"

"But how the thump did you know?"

"Trimble!" said Grundy, with a chuckle. "That fat clam must have known their plans, and was gassing in the quad about the game. He must have forgotten I'm now a New House chap. Anyway, I jumped on my bike and came here at top speed. But hadn't we better be moving, instead of gassing here? If you want to be collared—"

"Here's some of 'em now!" hissed Redfern. "Better hang on here, Figgys!"

Figgins gave a cautious peep over the edge of the hollow. Then his eyes gleamed.

"My hat!" he breathed. "What a chance! There's only four of 'em coming back now. Look here! After me—quick! If we can collar them and truss them up first, we'll turn the tables nicely. Come on!"

He started to crawl back towards the bikes with the stealth of a trained Scout. The rest followed at his heels with equal stealth, even Grundy managing to take care for once. They reached the spot scarcely twenty seconds before the four School House fellows, who were Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy.

They came tramping along, and just as they stopped on sighting the New House fellows, Figgins gave the word.

"On them, chaps!"

"What-ho!"

Blake & Co. just had time to give vent to startled gasps, and then they went crashing down, the New House fellows swarming over them. It was a fierce fight but a very brief one indeed. In a couple of minutes all four were flat, and their wrists were being tied behind them.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake, getting his voice at last. "Rescue! Help!" he roared.

There was an answering shout from the ruins, and next instant several figures came charging across the grass downhill. Figgins & Co. lay low until they were almost on the spot, and then they leaped up and attacked with terrific vim and energy.

Taken completely by surprise, the School House juniors fell easy victims to their rivals. They were hopelessly outnumbered without Blake & Co., and Grundy was a terrific fighting man to contend with alone. For a few whirling minutes the School House heroes put up a stout fight, and then they went down one by one.

"That's better," grinned Figgins, wiping a flushed and heated face. "I fancy— Hallo, here's another of them!"

It was Manners, and he came charging downhill, his camera in his hand. He did not realise what had happened until he was almost up to the group. Then he turned to bolt—too late!

Figgins, Kerr, and Lawrence leaped after him and brought him down.

"Mind my camera!" he shrieked. "You dare damage it, you—"

"We won't damage it, old chap," said Figgins, panting heavily. "We'll need it presently, old top."

"If you dare to touch—"

"Put the little dears in a nice little row, and we'll take their photographs as a little memento of this memorable occasion," chuckled Figgins. "They're very fond of taking photographs of documents and footling things like that. We believe in taking photos of something more interesting and lively."

"Good wheeze!"

The captured juniors were lined up in two rows, their hands fastened securely behind them, their faces full of fury and dismay. Figgins went along the rows and ruffled the hair of each one until it stood up in tufts. Then, at a word from him, handfuls of mud were collected from a ditch and daubed over the faces of Tom Merry & Co., despite their howls of wrath.

"Much better than a declaration," murmured Figgins. "Now I'll make a little offer before I waste some of Manners' films on you. Do you happen to have that film on you and any prints?"

"No!" gasped Tom Merry, glowering. "Oh, won't I just—"

"It scarcely matters," smiled Figgins. "Now this is the idea, Tom Merry. We want that film and any prints you've taken from it and still possess. If you don't hand 'em over, or promise to destroy them this very day, then we'll take your giddy photos as you are now. I fancy they'll bring more smiles at St. Jim's than did that giddy declaration. Is it a go?"

"Oh dear!"

"Oh, great Scott!"

Tom Merry gasped and panted with overwhelming wrath, and then quite suddenly he gave a feeble grin and nodded.

"Yes, blow you! Yes."

"You give your word to destroy the film and all prints, and not to mention that declaration at St. Jim's again?"

"Yes, yes, yes."

"That's good enough, then," said Figgins. "We'll make it pax, then. Honours even, I fancy. Cut 'em loose, you chaps!"

The "chaps" cut them loose amid many chuckles, and Tom Merry & Co. staggered to their feet looking very sheepish indeed. But they took their defeat like sportsmen, and they even invited their rivals to join them in tea amid the ruins. A few minutes later the rivals—deadly enemies only a few minutes ago—were on the best of terms as they had tea amid the dusky, shadowy ruins.

But the happy and peaceful state of affairs was not likely to last on reaching St. Jim's.

"I hope you fellows won't forget that the credit for all this belongs to me," said Grundy.

Figgins & Co. were cycling homewards, and Grundy was laying down the law.

"We won't forget it, old nut!" said Figgins, quite cordially. "You fairly saved our bacon that time, Grundy. I really feel I ought to hand over the giddy leadership to you and take a back seat after this."

"I don't want the job," said Grundy.

"What!" Figgins nearly fell off his bike. "You—you don't want it?"

"No. Why should I?" he demurred. "I'm after Tom Merry's job now, not yours. Think I want a measly New House leadership? Not likely."

"Well, I'm blown!"

"But I forgot," said Grundy, smiling cheerily. "I didn't tell you fellows that this is my last day as a New House chap."

"Your—your last day?" said Figgins faintly.

"Yes. I'm not sorry, either," said Grundy. "I'm blest if I understand how I've stood the measly, rotten New House as long as I have. After all, I never really felt it was the place for a fellow of my capabilities, you know."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I've told Railton," said Grundy. "He said that Ratty had actually complained about me every dashed day; said he'd resign his job if I stayed in his House another day! Check! Just the New House style, though, all over. Of course, Railton agreed because I asked to be transferred, not because of old Ratty."

"Oh—oh, quite!" gasped Figgins.

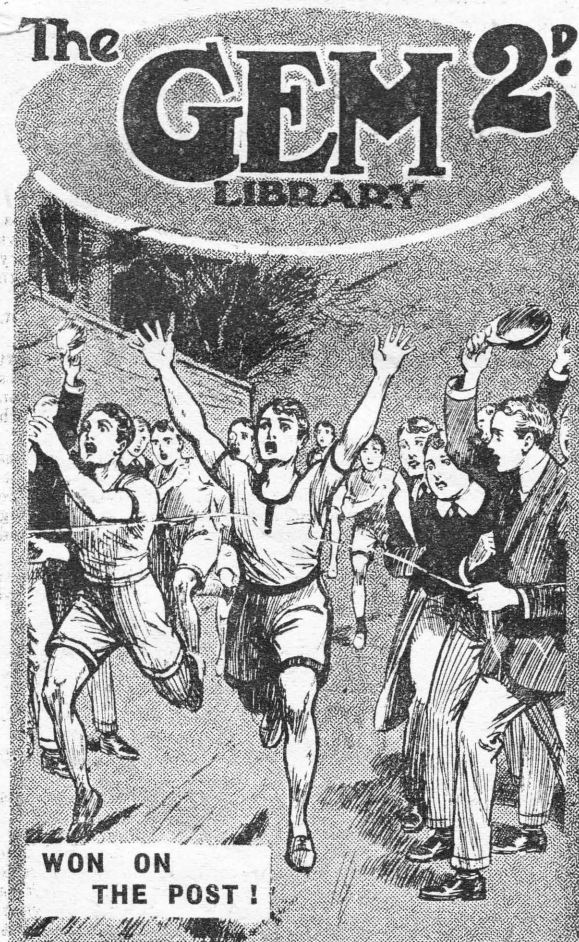
"Well, there it is," said Grundy. "I finish here to-day. I shall be a School House man to-morrow again, thank goodness! If this affair had happened to-morrow, mind you, I wouldn't have saved you, of course."

"Oh, of course!"

"For to-day I'm a New House man. I remembered that. I had my duty as a New House man to do. I did it. Don't expect my help again, because you won't get it. From to-day I'm up against you for all I'm worth. Mind that! It's a fair warning. I'm going to put you New House worms in your proper places. I'm going to show you that the New House is no class, and that it can't hold a candle to the School House either in games or anything else. So you'd better look out!"

And with that Grundy put on speed, evidently not having any further desire for the company of the New House "worms." It was just as well he did so, for Figgins & Co. could not just then have stood much more from George Alfred Grundy.

THE END.



NEXT WEEK'S STUNNING SCHOOL YARN!

Aubrey Racke, the cad of the Shell, has never shone in any sport, being content to frown in his study whilst his Form fellows indulged in healthy exercise.

Yet when it comes to a cross-country race Aubrey Racke, the slacker, turns out to be a champion runner—beating such formidable opponents as Tom Merry, Blake and Figgins!

How does he manage it?

Next Wednesday's glorious story tells you, boys. Don't miss

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THE ROOKWOOD DICTATOR!

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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

Jimmy Silver & Co., the Chums of Rookwood, angered by the persecution of Mark Carthew, a bullying prefect of the Sixth, form a secret organisation called the Fascist Band of Rookwood. In due course, Carthew and his cronies are given the ragging of their lives, the Fascists being careful to cover up their tracks by electing only a few of their numbers to act on each occasion.

Later, Lattrey bumps into Captain Punter, a rascally bookmaker, who expounds a scheme to get Jimmy Silver & Co. expelled from Rookwood. Unable to pay his debts, Lattrey falls an easy victim, agreeing, together with Punter, to mask and robe in the garb of the Fascist Band, waylay Carthew in the lane, and stun him with a blow from Lovell's stick which is to be left behind to throw suspicion on the shoulders of the Fourth-Former.

The two are lying in ambush when Lattrey shows funk at the sight of Carthew approaching.

Under Suspicion!

"STOP trembling, you fool!" hissed Captain Punter. "You've only got to show yourself. I'll do the rest!"

"You—you can't!" gasped Lattrey, realising the dastardly nature of the plot now that he was face to face with its accomplishment. "I'll shout!"

"A whisper, and you're expelled!" snapped the captain, his eyes fixed on the oncoming figure in the lane.

Lattrey was silent.

Carthew came on; till he was abreast of the ambush.

The thought of Captain Punter's twenty pounds, still unpaid, was occupying the prefect's mind. He did not think that the captain was lying in ambush for him.

"Now!"

Carthew spun round.

He had little more than a glimpse of two oncoming figures—white-robed, hooded, and black-masked figures. How many more there might be, he did not know.

"You little villains—"

Carthew had no time for more.

Punter was upon him, and the stick thudded down on the prefect's head. Carthew dropped in the lane with a grunt. Lattrey, almost swaying, stared at him with fear written in his face.

The captain dropped on his knee, and felt inside the senior's jacket. He rose, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Quickly! Give me the card!"

Dumbly, Lattrey handed him a section of white card-board.

The captain bent over the still form in the lane and affixed the card to Carthew's chest.

Then he grasped the prefect's collar and dragged him to the side of the road.

"He will be out of the way of traffic there," said Punter coolly. "Now clear—and if you breathe a word, you know what will happen!"

Captain Punter hastily doffed the robe and mask, and Lattrey feverishly did the same. Then the captain took a glance up and down the lane. There was nobody in sight. With a nod to Lattrey, he strode quickly down a narrow cart track, to return to the village by a devious route. He did not want to be seen in the lane just then.

Lattrey, with a glance of horror at Carthew, slipped behind the hedge and turned his trembling footsteps towards Rookwood.

"Finished packing, Jimmy, you slacker?"

Jimmy Silver glared.

Raby grinned, and Newcome chuckled.

Three juniors were busy packing away the crocks after a pleasant picnic in Coombe Woods, and they were making all haste. Call-over was not far distant, and unless the Fistical Four wanted "lines" for missing it, it behoved them to hurry.

In those circumstances it was just like Arthur Edward

Lovell to ask if they had finished packing. He himself was lounging at full length in the grass.

"Slacker yourself!" retorted Jimmy. "Oh, bust!"

"It's busted all right!" agreed Lovell. "That leaves us only two cups to the whole study. Clumsy!"

"Perhaps you'd like to come and pack up yourself, you funny idiot?" demanded Jimmy Silver, breathing deep.

"Not at all, old man. It's time you had some practice. Without a handy chap like me you men are lost, you know!"

"Put a bun in it!" suggested Raby.

"Or a sock," added Newcome. "And help instead of criticising."

It was Lovell's turn to glare then.

"If you chumps can't pack a picnic basket without my help—"

"Peace, my infants," interposed Jimmy Silver. "Do you squabblers realise that it wants only a quarter of an hour to call-over?"

"Well, get a move on, then!" grunted Lovell. "I've been waiting for the last ten minutes for you asses!"

"Shall we bump him?" breathed Raby.

"He wants it—badly," added Newcome.

"But we don't want lines," said Jimmy Silver finally. "Put your best feet forward, you cripples, and stop arguing."

And "Uncle James" took one handle of the picnic basket, while Newcome took the other.

As they strode through the wood the juniors realised that they had cut it rather fine—rather too fine, to be truthful. Laden with a basket, their progress was necessarily slower. They were hardly out of the wood and into the lane ere Arthur Edward Lovell glanced at his watch.

"Call-over at this moment," he announced.

"Unless somebody says 'Adsum' for the lot of us, we're booked," remarked Raby.

"Keep smiling. Like a turn at the basket, Lovell?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"What, tired already?"

"No, ass."

"I'll relieve you when you're fagged. Don't be a slacker, you know."

Jimmy Silver breathed long and deep.

It had been an exceedingly pleasant picnic in the woods, but there was, as in most human affairs, a fly in the ointment. On this occasion the fly was undoubtedly Lovell. Perhaps he was worrying a little over his minor's dealings with Captain Punter, and wondering whether the fag would manage to keep clear of the disreputable sharper in future. His chums gave him the benefit of the doubt. But certainly Lovell was a little awkward that afternoon.

The Fistical Four swung along the lane at their best pace, and passed the old stile. Lovell glanced round, but the captain was not to be seen.

"If that rotter doesn't clear out of this district after what we gave him this afternoon—"

"He will, old chap," said Raby.

"If he's got any sense," added Jimmy Silver.

"I think I persuaded him that he'd better," went on Lovell musingly.

"You gave him a prize nose and two lovely black eyes," agreed Newcome. "What more do you expect?"

"And we all helped to rag the life out of him," assented Jimmy Silver. "I should chuck worrying about your minor, old chap. Punter wouldn't touch him with a barge pole after two raggings. Besides, the kid's had his lesson. He'll keep clear by himself."

"Who's worrying?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell, coming out of his reverie suddenly. "Who's that says I'm worrying?"

"Well, aren't you?"

"No!" roared Lovell.

"Oh, my mistake! You must be moulting or something."

The Fistical Four relapsed into silence after that. Lovell was worrying; there was no doubt about that. But he was convinced that he was not worrying; there was no doubt

either about that. And his chums wisely gave Arthur Edward his head.

They reached the gates at last, quite twenty minutes after the time for calling-over. The quad was deserted, but old Mack, the porter, called from the doorway of his lodge.

"Which I was told to send ye straight to Mr. Dalton in 'is study, Master Silver."

"All right, Mack."

"It's all in the day's grind," remarked Raby, as they entered the House. "By Jove, there seems to be some excitement about something. Ahoy, Morny! What's up?"

"By gad! So you've come back?" ejaculated Mornington. "Did you think we were stopping out for the night?" asked Jimmy Silver humorously.

"No. But somethin' happened. You don't know anythin' about it, I suppose?"

The Fistical Four looked puzzled.

There was quite a crowd of fellows in the Hall, and they were all looking at the four juniors who had just come in—looking at them in a very peculiar manner.

Jimmy Silver glanced at Mornington for an explanation.

"I don't catch on. What's happened, Morny?"

Mornington appeared relieved at that.

"You men had nothing to do with it, of course. But you'll have to see Dalton about it."

"About what?" demanded Lovell, puzzled.

"An' if you can prove an alibi it will clear you finally," added Mornington. "Did you happen to meet anybody you know while you were picnicken'?"

"Only that man Punter," said Lovell.

"Oh gad! He's not a reliable witness, especially as he's a friend of Carthew's. I'd better tell you—"

"Much better, I think," agreed Lovell. "There's enough mystery over this."

"Puttin' the matter in a nutshell," said Mornington, "Carthew has been found lyin' stunned in the lane. Bulkeley an' Neville happened on him—"

"My only hat! Do you think we did it?" roared Lovell.

"I'm sorry for Carthew, of course," said Jimmy Silver; "but if any fellow thinks we had a hand—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Mornington coolly. "A card was found pinned to Carthew's coat. It ran: 'Hands off the Fourth!—The Dictator.'"

Jimmy Silver stared at the dandy of the Fourth.

His chums were silent.

That information put a different complexion on the matter. They had no idea who could have had reason to stun Carthew. But the presence of that message turned suspicion on to the Fourth at once.

(Look out for the continuation of this splendid Rookwood serial in next week's GEM.)

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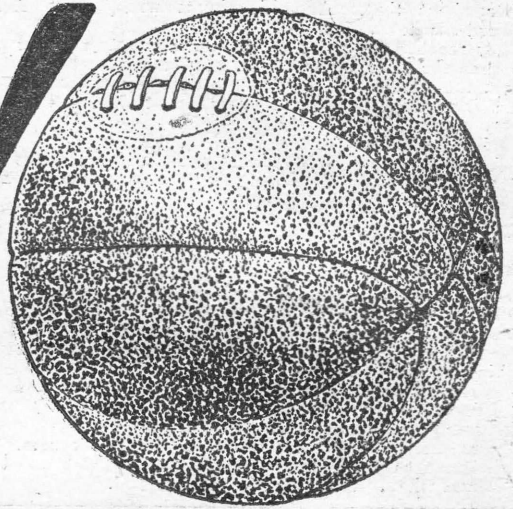
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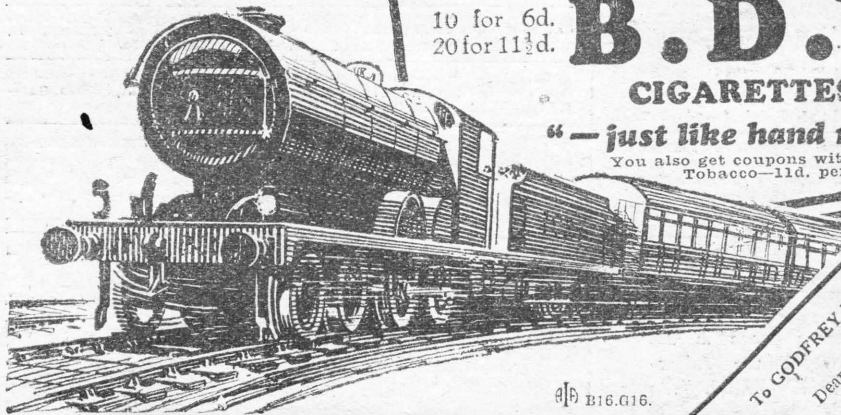
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