

GRUNDY'S GUILT!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



IN CHARGE!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Grand, Long Complete Story in this Issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



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For Next Wednesday :

"THE WISDOM OF GUSSY !"

By Martin Clifford.

Ernest Levison has encountered stumbling-blocks in his path of reformation. It does not exactly please him—and apparently it does not suit the taste of some of our readers—that people should still be suspicious of him when he is really trying hard to do better. But consider the circumstances. Levison has lied, intrigued, shown brazen effrontery, offended the fellows whom he now asks to trust him, in a hundred ways. How can they be expected to feel confidence that his seeming improvement is anything more than a mere flash in the pan? It does not tend to make them the more ready to believe that externally Levison is the Levison of old. He looks healthier and fitter, it is true, but he talks in the old biting, sarcastic way, and is much more apt to reject sympathy than to welcome it. The spirit of bravado is still strong in him. But there is one fellow at St. Jim's who will never lose faith in him—his younger brother, Frank. And there is another who will always see the good in his strangely-mixed character, however much it may be obscured by the evil—Reginald Talbot. And there is a third fellow whose natural softness of heart and generosity are sure to make him ready to help any lame dog—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Gussy's attempts to help the erstwhile cad of the Fourth have proven a sorry failure so far. They have been too open; and, though it was not intended, there has been far too much condescension in them. Now Gussy sets his massive brain to work, and evolves a great idea. He puts Frank Levison up to a move that the guileless youngster

would never have thought of on his own account. The wisdom of the serpent is in our Gussy, for once! Taet and judgment show up markedly. What it was that Frank was put up to do you will read next week, and I think you will all applaud.

"THE WISDOM OF GUSSY!"

OUR NOTICES.

Below will be found the rules which must now be observed in sending in notices. I have more to say about the matter in the current issue of the "Magnet," and I would like to refer my readers to that. I have only to say that the measures which I took in the autumn of last year to rid myself for a time of what had become an almost intolerable nuisance were practically ineffective. I announced plainly, in both papers, that no notices except those about footer and those from soldiers and sailors would be accepted until the New Year. Did that stop the flow? Not a bit of it! The notices still poured in, each necessitating a letter to inform the sender that it could not be accepted. I sent hundreds of such letters in the last three months of the year. Had all the senders missed my last announcement? I really don't think so. Some of them had, no doubt; they don't look at the "Chat" page, I suppose. But I believe scores thought that I should think they had failed to see it.

Yours Editor

Yours Editor

OUR NOTICE COLUMN.

PAY HEED TO THESE RULES.

- 1.—In future, the only notices which will be accepted free of charge are those from soldier, sailor, and Colonial readers.
- 2.—All notices must be written—one word in each space—on the form below, and if more than 24 words are needed, another form must be obtained. But we will accept one form from the GEM and one from the "Magnet," or the forms from back numbers may be used.
- 3.—The charge is 3d. for any notice not exceeding 24 words. If exceeding 24 words, 6d. The fee must be paid by penny stamps pinned—not stuck—in the space provided.
- 4.—The Editor reserves to himself the right to refuse any notice sent in, and he will not accept in any case notices of articles to be

- 5.—Insertion at any specific date will not be guaranteed and no notice can be expected to appear in less than five weeks from its receipt while it may have to be held back much longer. Nor will the Editor undertake to insert any notice in the exact form received. Space is precious, and readers should do their utmost to keep notices as short as possible. The argument that more than 3d. has been paid will not be heeded.
6. Grumbling letters will go into the wastepaper-basket without being replied to.
- 7.—Mark envelopes in plain writing "NOTICE."

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GRUNDY'S GUILT!

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.
By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



There was a yell in the dormitory, and Arthur Augustus sat down with surprising suddenness, as Herries' pillow landed on his noble nose. (See Chapter 7.)

CHAPTER 1.

Trouble for Somebody!

"OUTRAGEOUS!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked round quickly as they heard that sharp, angry exclamation.

The Terrible Three of the Shell were studying the notice-board in the hall when Mr. Linton's voice fell upon their ears.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, had an open letter in his hand. The juniors had noticed him taking it from the postman a few minutes before.

Mr. Linton had stopped near the doorway to slit open the letter.

He was reading it now, with a face pale from anger, and eyes glittering under knitted brows.

"Shocking!"

Tom Merry & Co. could not help looking at him. Mr. Linton was a very quiet, reserved, and self-contained gentle-

Next Wednesday:

"THE WISDOM OF GUSSY!" AND "FOES OF FORTUNE!"

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man as a rule. It was but seldom that he betrayed emotion of any kind.

But he was evidently very much disturbed now.

"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Something's up, my infants! Two to one it's a dunning letter!"

But Tom Merry and Manners did not grin at Lowther's little joke. Judging by the expression on the Form-master's face, it was no time for jokes.

What there could be in the letter to produce such an effect upon this quiet, cold Form-master was a mystery. It was no business of the juniors, of course; but they could not help feeling surprised.

Mr. Linton finished reading the letter, and crumpled it in his hand.

"Outrageous!" he repeated. "Shocking! Infamous!"

He looked round him, and saw the surprised faces of the Terrible Three. With the letter crumpled in his hand, he strode towards them.

"Do you know anything of this?" he exclaimed.

"Of—of what, sir?" ejaculated Tom Merry, utterly astonished.

"This letter—this outrageous letter!"

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Manners.

Mr. Linton looked at them angrily and searchingly, his hand gripping the offending letter till his finger-tips were white.

"You know nothing of it?" he snapped.

"No, sir!" said Tom, in wonder. "How should we know anything about your letter?"

"Someone must know—someone in this school—doubtless in my Form!" rapped out Mr. Linton. "You are head of the Form, Merry—"

He broke off.

"However, it shall be examined into. The culprit shall suffer for it. Bless my soul, I have never heard of such a thing! Outrageous! Shocking! Infamous! Unheard-of! Unprecedented!"

And after that series of startling ejaculations the master of the Shell strode away, with rustling gown, towards the Head's study.

The Terrible Three exchanged glances of wonder. Monty Lowther tapped his forehead in a significant way.

"Fairly off his crumpet!" he murmured.

"Wandering in his mind!" said Manners. "What the merry thunder should we know about his letter?"

Racke of the Shell came along the passage, and stopped to speak.

"Anything the matter with Linton?" he asked.

"Off his rocker, I think," said Lowther.

"He's just passed me, looking like a Hun," said Racke.

"He's gone to the Head. It means trouble for somebody. He had a letter in his fist. You chaps been playing a joke on him?"

"No, fathead! Linton isn't a man to be joked with!"

"Well, it's queer," said Racke. "He seemed awfully upset. You're such a giddy humorist, Lowther—"

"Not guilty!" grinned Lowther. "I don't give Linton any of my humour. Too jolly dangerous!"

"Bai Jove, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, came from the direction of the Head's study. "What's the mattah with Mr. Linton?"

"Dotty!"

"Weally, Lowthah, that is hardly a respectful way to speak of your Form-mastah! Somethin' is w'ong. I was in the Head's study, when he came wushin' in without even knockin' at the door."

"He seems upset about a letter he's just had," said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I know why!"

"The Head was surprisid," said Arthur Augustus. "He told me to cleah off—not in those words, of course—so I cleahed off. Linton is simply wagin' about somethin'."

"It's jolly queer!" said Racke. "I don't see what there could be in the letter to send Linton on the rampage like that."

"Yaas, he is on the wampage, and no mistake! It's vewy queeah!"

"A dunning letter, most likely," said Lowther. "Perhaps it's to remind him that he hasn't paid the last instalment on something—"

"You uttah ass!"

Several other fellows had observed Mr. Linton's extraordinary behaviour, and they joined the group discussing it.

But, unless the master of the Shell was off his rocker, as Monty Lowther suggested, there seemed to be no explanation.

"It's a joke of some sort on him," said Racke. "I shouldn't like to be the joker if Linton spots him. Rather awkward just now to have a reputation as a merry humorist."

"Bai Jove! Surely you haven't been playin' a twick on

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your Form-mastah, Lowthah! I should wegard that as vewy bad form."

"I've already told Racke that I haven't," said Lowther, with an angry glance at the cad of the Shell. "If you can't take my word, Racke—"

Racke shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"The question is, whether Linton will take your word," he said.

"Linton will take my word, right enough—which is more than he would do with yours!" said Lowther disdainfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, that's a fact," chimed in Grundy of the Shell.

"You're known to be such a thundering Prussian, Racke."

"Oh, rats!" growled Racke.

"Did you say rats to me?" inquired George Alfred Grundy, pushing back his cuffs.

"Oh, shut up, Grundy!" said Tom Merry. "Don't begin scrapping here! There's going to be trouble for somebody!"

"I don't allow anybody to say rats to me! I never stand any rat," said Grundy. "I'll trouble you to put up your hands, Racke, you sneaky, sneaking, pub-hunting worm!"

"You don't allow anybody to say rats to you?" asked Monty Lowther, interposing.

"No, I don't."

"You lick 'em if they do?"

"Yes!" said Grundy, with great emphasis.

"Good! Rats!"

"What?"

"Rats!" said Lowther cheerfully.

"Rats!" chimed in Tom Merry and Manners, grinning.

"Yaas, wathah—wats!" chortled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Rats!" said Blake of the Fourth.

"Rats!" howled every other fellow present, in chorus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy looked round him. The great Grundy had a way of looking upon himself as a sort of privileged person, though upon what grounds nobody had ever been able to discover. And now his lordly pronouncement that nobody was allowed to say "rats" to him was followed by a general chorus of "Rats!"

"You silly asses——" began Grundy, rather taken aback.

"Rats!"

"Look here——"

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get on with the licking," said Monty Lowther encouragingly. "There's only seven—eight—ten of us here, and we're all waiting! Take us all at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've a jolly good mind to lick the lot of you!" roared Grundy. "If you say rats to me again——"

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy made a jump at Lowther. At the same moment everybody else made a jump at Grundy.

Bump!

The great George Alfred smote the floor with a resounding bump, and roared. His lofty person was handled without the slightest ceremony.

"Better give him another," said Monty Lowther. "Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Linton came rustling down the passage with a frowning brow. The juniors crowded back from the sprawling Grundy.

"Cease this at once!" snapped Mr. Linton. "Merry, kindly follow me into Dr. Holmes' study!"

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry followed his Form-master, wondering what was wanted, and feeling a little uneasy. Trouble was evidently in store for somebody, and it looked now as if that somebody was Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 2.

By Whose Hand?

DR. HOLMES was looking very grave and severe when Tom Merry entered the study at the heels of the Form-master.

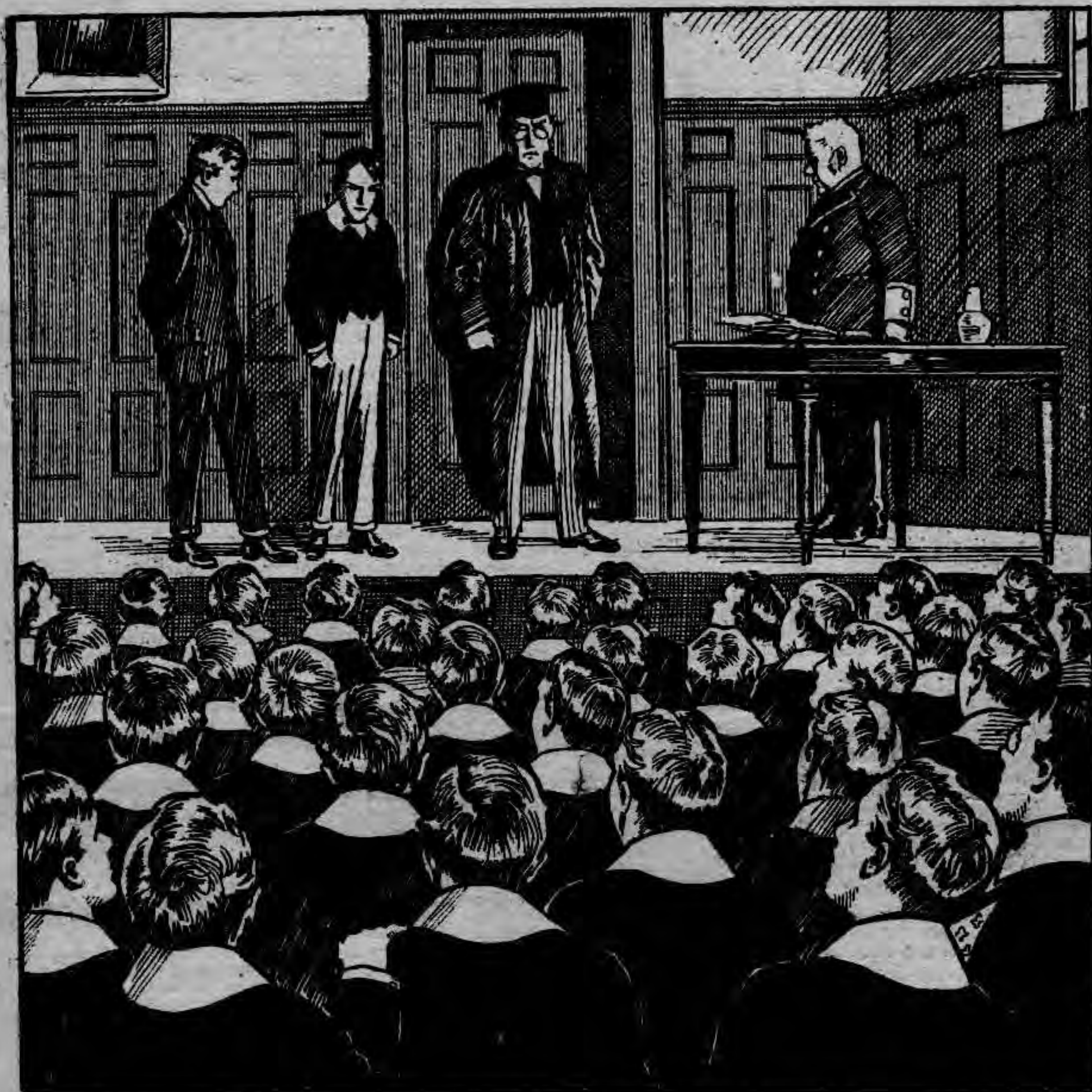
On the desk before the doctor lay the letter.

Tom Merry's eyes turned upon it at once. How that letter could concern him or any other St. Jim's fellow he could not guess. But it was easy to see that it was in connection with that mysterious letter that he had been sent for.

"Merry!" The Head's voice was deep and stern. "You are aware that Mr. Linton has received a—er—a letter this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

"Do you know anything about that letter?"



Big Hall was crowded with fellows, seniors and juniors, ranked in Forms. Dr. Holmes took up the birch. "Grundy!" he said sternly. "Yes, sir!" gasped Grundy. (See Chapter 12.)

"I have already told Mr. Linton that I do not, sir."

"Do not suppose, Merry, that I suspect you of having any concern in this matter. I am questioning you simply because you are captain of your Form!"

Tom Merry was glad to hear that.

"You may look at the letter, Merry. The author of it must be discovered. Perhaps, after reading the letter, you may be able to let in some light on the matter!"

In utter wonder, Tom Merry took up the letter from the desk, at a sign from the Head. There was silence in the study while he read it. His face changed as he read, for the letter ran:

"Mr. Linton,—Everybody is fed-up with you. It's high time you retired. Why doesn't the Head give you the sack? He ought to?—Yours truly,

"RATS."

Tom Merry gasped.

That anyone should have the audacity to write such a letter to a Form-master was astounding!

Naturally, the writer had not signed his name. Neither, evidently, had he written the precious epistle in his ordinary

handwriting. The writing was carefully disguised, sloping backwards.

Tom Merry had never seen it before, and he had a pretty clear general idea of every list in the Form he belonged to.

No wonder Mr. Linton had been disturbed when he received that astonishing letter. It was enough to make any Form-master's hair stand on end.

Tom could guess that it was some member of the Shell who had written the anonymous letter—some young rascal who owed his master a grudge, and had taken this method of paying it.

Certainly it must have been a St. Jim's fellow, and almost certainly one of the Shell. There was no reason why a fellow in any other Form should bear a grudge towards the Shell master.

Tom laid the letter quietly on the desk when he had read it.

Both the Head and Mr. Linton were watching him. Tom realised it, and the colour crept into his cheeks.

"What is your opinion of that letter, Merry?"

"It's rotten, sir!" said Tom.

"Ahem!" The Head coughed. "Quite so!"

"It's a rotten, caddish trick!" said Tom. "Nobody in

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the Shell thinks like that about Mr. Linton. We all respect him!"

"Thank you, Merry!" said Mr. Linton.

"But some member of your Form, Merry, must have written that letter, in order to insult his Form-master in a safe way!"

"I—I suppose so, sir," admitted Tom. "I can only say it was some rotten cad, sir, and we should all be down on it if we knew him!"

"You do not know the handwriting?"

"I've never seen it before, sir. I think it's disguised."

The Head smiled.

"It is very plainly disguised," he said. "If you could tell me anything as to the authorship of this letter, Merry, it would be your duty to do so. It is an insult and an outrage!"

"I don't know anything about it, sir."

"Very well, Merry; you may go."

Tom left the study.

His face was rather grim as he came down the passage. The crowd of juniors at the corner met him with inquiring looks.

"Well, what's the wow, deah boy?"

"Licked?"

"What's on?"

"It's a rotten trick on Mr. Linton!" said Tom. "Somebody here has written him an anonymous letter, insulting him!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What a rotten trick!" exclaimed Grundy. "Somebody in the Shell, do you mean?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I wegard that as a wotten, caddish twick!" said Arthur Augustus. "Only a mean, cwawlin' wottah would w'ite an anonymous lettah!"

"Nobody in the Fourth would do it," remarked Digby.

"Wathah not!"

"Rot!" exclaimed Grundy at once. "My idea is that it was most likely a chap in the Fourth!"

"Wats!"

"Fathead!"

"Levison, or Mellish, perhaps," said Grundy. "Nobody in my Form would do it; I'm convinced of that. This matter ought to be taken up. Of course, old Linton is rather a trial——"

"Shurrup, you ass!" muttered Tom Merry, spotting Mr. Linton at that moment coming away from the Head's study.

Grundy's back was towards the Form-master, and he did not see him. Grundy was not a fellow to shut up when he was told—not Grundy!

"Don't you jaw at me, Merry! I say, old Linton is rather a trial, and a chap gets fed-up with him at times; but writing an anonymous letter is a dirty, mean trick, and only a rotten cad would do it!"

"Grundy!"

George Alfred spun round at his Form-master's voice.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "Yes, sir!"

"Did you write that letter, Grundy?"

Grundy jumped.

"I, sir?"

"Yes, you, Grundy!"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Grundy indignantly. "Haven't I just said what I think of an anonymous letter-writer?"

"You have made use of a disrespectful expression towards me!"

"I—I didn't know you were listening, sir!"

"What!"

"I—I mean, I didn't see you coming," stammered Grundy.

"I—I didn't exactly mean fed-up, sir; only a way of speaking—ahem! I—I——"

"You must find some other way of speaking of your Form-master, Grundy! You will take five hundred lines, and remain in this afternoon to write them out!"

"Oh! What for, sir?"

"For speaking disrespectfully of your Form-master, Grundy!" thundered Mr. Linton.

And he passed on, frowning.

Grundy blinked after him.

"Well, I like that!" he gasped. "Fancy giving me five hundred lines when I was standing up for him, you know! Ain't it just like Linton?"

"I wegard you as an ass, Gwunday!"

"Five hundred lines!" growled Grundy. "And I was going to play footer this afternoon! Just think of it! Five hundred lines! My hat!"

"Did you write the letter?" grinned Racke.

"Why, you rotten cad—— Here, lemme get at him!"

Racke beat a hasty retreat. He did not want to argue the matter out with George Alfred Grundy.

The crowd broke up, discussing the matter. Tom Merry & Co. headed for the football-ground. But footer practice was destined to be interrupted that afternoon. About a quarter of an hour later the order went forth for the Shell to assemble in their Form-room.

Kildare and Darrel and Langton and other prefects shepherded the juniors into the School House. The story of the anonymous letter had spread, and most of the juniors knew what was coming.

The whole of the Shell, School House, and New House fellows were together, assembled in the Form-room. There was little doubt that the culprit was among the assembled juniors, but which one was the culprit was a deep mystery.

Some of the fellows suspected Lowther, whose sense of humour was not always restrained within due bounds. The Terrible Three were inclined to suspect Racke or Crooke or Clampe, whom they regarded as caddish enough to write an anonymous letter.

Some of the juniors, however, declared that the offender was not in the Shell at all, but that the letter had been written by a fellow in another Form altogether, in a spirit of mischief. Grundy was quite sure of it. When Grundy had an idea in his head, a surgical operation would have been required to get it out again. But on this occasion there were a good many who agreed with Grundy. Wilkins and Gunn, his faithful followers, agreed as a matter of course, to save argument. But Talbot and Kangaroo, and Clifton Dane and Glyn, and some more, held the same opinion. They did not like to think that an anonymous cad was a member of their Form.

There was a deep silence in the Form-room when the Head entered. Dr. Holmes' expression showed how deeply his anger had been stirred by the insult to the master of the Shell. There was no doubt that condign punishment awaited the culprit in the event of discovery.

"My boys, you are aware of what has occurred," said the Head. "An insulting letter has been sent to Mr. Linton, doubtless by a boy in this Form. The culprit is here. I command him to step forth."

Nobody stepped forward. Some of the juniors grinned a little, in spite of the seriousness of the situation. The Head could hardly have expected that command to be obeyed.

"Very well," said Dr. Holmes, after a brief pause. "Merry, take this letter. Every boy present will make a copy of it, and bring the copy to me, signed with his name."

For some minutes the Shell fellows were busy with pen and ink. Tom Merry collected the copies of the letter and laid them upon the Form-master's desk. The Head examined them one by one, comparing them with the original, the juniors waiting in grim silence.

The examination ended, and the Head's expression showed that he had discovered nothing. The writing of the anonymous letter had been too carefully disguised.

Dr. Holmes collected the papers.

"No one here has a confession to make?" he asked.

Silence.

"Very well. The culprit must be discovered, and he will receive a public and severe flogging. I shall send at once for a handwriting expert from London, as the only means to discover the truth. You may go!"

The Head left the Form-room, taking the papers with him.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "That looks like business!"

"Tremble, villain, that hast within thee undiscovered crimes, unwhipped of justice!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Bow-wow!" said Racke. "What's the good of a handwriting expert? They don't know anything!"

"Well, chaps have been sent to prison on the evidence of handwriting experts," remarked Kangaroo.

"I dare say they have—while the guilty parties went loose," grinned Racke. "Handwriting experts are spoofer."

"Well, I rather agree with Racke for once," remarked Grundy. "Experts are silly asses as a rule. Look at the military experts who write about the war in the papers—they never get anything right. Somebody a bit keener than an expert is wanted for this job, and I dare say somebody will turn up."

And with that mysterious remark, Grundy of the Shell

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walked away, a deep and thoughtful frown upon his brow. And Tom Merry & Co. went down to the football-ground, and dismissed the matter from their minds.

CHAPTER 3.

Grundy Takes the Matter in Hand I

"**H**ARD lines, old chap!"

"Very hard cheese!"

Wilkins and Gunn were sympathetic.

The great Grundy had to stay in his study that fine frosty afternoon, and grind out five hundred lines for his incautious remarks concerning Mr. Linton. It had not pleased Mr. Linton at all to hear that Grundy sometimes got fed up with him, and regarded him as a trial.

"I'd do some of the lines," said Wilkins generously, "only old Linton is so jolly keen. He'd spot my fist at once."

"Same here," remarked Gunn.

"We'll look in on you presently, Grundy."

"Don't go," said Grundy.

"Ahem! We were thinking of footer."

"I want you."

"Look here, we can't sit about the study like hens, watching you do lines, you know," said Gunn.

"I'm not going to do any lines," explained Grundy.

"Levison of the Fourth will do them at one-and-six a hundred. I can afford it, I suppose."

"Oh, I see!"

"I've asked him to come here— Oh, here he is!"

Levison of the Fourth entered the study, and nodded to the Shell fellows. Levison's peculiar gift of imitating handwriting had got him into trouble sometimes; but at other times it was a source of income to him. Fellows who had plenty of money—like Grundy—were quite willing to get their lines done at eightpence a hundred, and the needy Fourth-Former was glad of the chance of turning an honest penny in that peculiar way.

"Here you are," said Grundy. "Five hundred lines, Levison. I suppose you've got time to do them?"

"Certainly. That's seven-and-six."

Grundy tossed three half-crowns upon the table, and Levison picked them up.

"Give us a sample of your fist," he said.

Grundy scrawled a couple of lines upon a sheet of impot paper.

"By the way, I suppose you didn't write that letter to Linton?" he asked.

"No. Did you?"

"You cheeky ass—"

"Well, you asked me," said Levison.

"That's different. You're the sort of worm to do a thing like that," said Grundy, "and you're so clever at disguising your hand, too."

"Well, I can't say as much for you. You're not jolly clever at anything," said Levison. And he left the study, grinning.

Wilkins and Gunn grinned, too.

"I don't see anything to snigger at in Levison's cheek!" growled Grundy.

"Ahem! No. Coming out, old chap?" asked Wilkins.

"Might as well get down to the footer, as Levison's doing your lines."

"Something else on," explained Grundy. "Of course, old Linton is a bit of a Hun in some ways. But I don't believe in disrespect to a Form-master. I think it's a bad form."

"Well, if you think so, that settles it," remarked Wilkins, closing one eye at Gunn.

"Exactly!" assented Grundy. "The chap who wrote that anonymous letter was a sneaking cad. I don't believe it was anybody in the Shell."

"Looks as if it was, though."

"Somebody Linton has been going for," remarked Gunn. "He was ragging Crooke and Racke yesterday, I remember, no end, for missing prep. Racke was caned. And Clampe was licked the other day for having cigarettes in his pockets. Some chap Linton has been going for—"

"Rot!"

"Look here, I don't think it's rot. I think—"

"Rot!" repeated Grundy. "Linton goes for me more than for anybody else. If you go to work on those lines, you'll work out that it was I who wrote the letter, and that's silly rot! See?"

"Oh!" said Grundy's chums, rather taken aback.

"Why, only yesterday Linton was jawing me blind about my construe," said Grundy. "He was ratty because I hadn't done my prep. I told him plainly that I hadn't had time, and that only seemed to make him more waxy. He's rather an unreasonable old merchant. Now, I've got the honour of the

Form at heart, and I'm going to prove that it wasn't a Shell fellow who wrote that letter."

"But suppose it was?"

"I've already said it wasn't."

"But how do you know it wasn't?" demanded Gunn.

"There's such a thing as intuition," explained Grundy.

"Into which?"

"Intuition, fathead! I've satisfied myself that it wasn't a Shell chap. I can depend on my own judgment, I suppose? My idea is that it was some cad in another Form. Perhaps Linton has trod on his toes some time. Linton is a bit of a coughdrop sometimes, you know. For the honour of the Form, I'm going to find out who it was, and show him up. I regard it as being up to me."

"Oh! I—I see."

"But what about the giddy expert? Can't you leave it to him?"

"Experts are mostly fools, if not spoofers," said Grundy.

"Why, if they spring a handwriting expert on us, he may find out that the letter was written by some chap who never wrote it at all. Handwriting experts are a danger to the public. He may find out that you wrote the letter, Gunn."

"I!" ejaculated Gunn. "But I didn't!"

"I know you didn't. But the expert may think that you did. Or Wilkins, or me, or Merry, or anybody. You see, the Head will pay him a fee for his services, and he's bound to do something to earn the money; and, besides, he won't like to confess to a failure. So you may depend upon it that he'll find some chap who did it, and very likely it will be a chap who didn't do it at all."

"What a cheery prospect!"

"So, you see, it's up to any fellow who has a bit more brains than the average chap to find out the guilty party before the expert begins his rot. That's me!"

"Oh, that's you, is it?" gasped Wilkins.

"Me all over," said Grundy calmly. "I flatter myself that I'm a bit brainier than most chaps in this school. I don't brag of it; it just happens, that's all."

"You—you don't brag of it!" stuttered Wilkins.

"Not at all. No swank about me. I might just as well brag because I happen to be a better footballer than you or Gunn—"

"You happen to be a what?" yelled Gunn.

"Don't yell at me, Gunn! Now, I'm going to take up the matter, and see it through, and you chaps can help me," said Grundy graciously. "You remember I did some detective bizney once—finding Manners' camera when it was lost—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy jumped up wrathfully as his chums burst involuntarily into a roar.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded.

"N-n-nothing!" gasped Wilkins. "Quite right, Grundy, old scout; I remember. And you're going to detect the anonymous letter-writer, the same as you did the chap who hid Manners' camera?"

"That's it. I don't mind showing you chaps my method—"

"Your—your method?"

"My method," said Grundy. "First of all, there's the process of elimination."

Wilkins and Gunn looked at one another.

"That means, that you eliminate the fellows who couldn't have done it," explained Grundy. "I eliminate the Shell. I'm sure that nobody in my Form played a dirty trick like that; and for the honour of the Form, I'm going to prove it. Now, as it wasn't a Shell fellow, it was somebody else."

"Go hon!" murmured Wilkins.

"I eliminate the fags next. They never have anything to do with Linton, and a kid in the Third or Second wouldn't think of a caddish trick like that."

"Hadh't you better eliminate the rest of the school while you're about it?" asked Wilkins.

"Don't be a funny ass, George Wilkins! Having eliminated the Shell and the fag Forms, that leaves us the Fourth and the seniors. It's unlikely that it was a chap in the Fifth or Sixth; not impossible, mind, but unlikely. So we'll begin work on the Fourth."

"I think I'd rather begin work on footer."

"We start on the Fourth," said Grundy, unheeding. "First of all, I've got to have the letter. I saw it in the Form-room when I copied it out, but that was only for a minute or so. There may be finger-marks on it—"

"Did you take hold of it in the Form-room?"

"Eh! Yes."

"Then very likely there are finger-marks on it."

"I may as well warn you, Wilkins, that if you start being funny on a serious subject, there'll be a row in this study!"

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said Grundy darkly. "Now, you fellows stay here while I go and get the letter."

"You're going to the Head for that letter?"

"Of course. I need it for my investigations."

"And—and you're going to tell the Head that?"

"Certainly!"

Grundy left the study. Wilkins and Gunn regarded one another speechlessly for a moment or two.

"Well, this beats it!" said Wilkins, at last. "I say, Gussy, are we going to waste a ripping afternoon watching Grundy play the giddy ox?"

"No jolly fear!" said Gunn emphatically.

"Let's get down to footer."

"You bet!"

And they went.

CHAPTER 4.

Under Suspicion.

"COME in!" said Dr. Holmes, as a tap came at his door.

The Head was thinking over the mysterious affair of the anonymous letter when Grundy of the Shell arrived. The affair had disturbed the Head very much. It was a painful shock to him to find that there was any boy in the school who was audacious and disrespectful enough to insult his Form-master in that underhand way. He did not look pleased at the sight of George Alfred Grundy.

Grundy came in full of confidence. George Alfred lacked many things, perhaps; but he had never lacked confidence in himself.

"Excuse me, sir!" said Grundy. "It's about that anonymous letter, sir."

The Head fixed his eyes upon him.

"Have you come here to confess, Grundy?"

Grundy jumped.

"Confess! My hat! Oh, no, sir! Not at all. 'Tain't that."

"Then what do you want?"

"I should like to have the letter, sir."

"What? What do you mean?"

"I'm going to find out who wrote it, sir!" explained Grundy. "I regard that as my duty, for the honour of the Shell."

"Indeed?"

"Exactly, sir! I hope to be able to get a clue from the letter itself—"

"A—a clue?"

"That's it, sir; perhaps finger-prints, or something. I'm rather a keen chap, sir, and I'm pretty certain I shall find out the rotter. May I have the letter, sir?"

"You may not have the letter, Grundy! I intend to place it in the hands of the expert, who arrives to-morrow."

"Of course, sir, I should take every care of it."

"Possibly," said the Head drily.

"May I see it, then, sir, if I mayn't have it?"

The Head was looking very intently at Grundy. Naturally he knew nothing of Grundy's mighty brain-powers, which had led the Shell fellow to take up the matter; Grundy had never exhibited any unusual intellectual powers; rather the reverse, indeed. To the Head, this seemed a barefaced attempt to get at the incriminating letter, for the purpose of destroying it before it could reach the hands of the expert gentleman; which meant, of course, that Grundy was the writer of it. George Alfred little knew what suspicions he was laying himself open to.

"You may see it," said the Head, at last. "There!"

Grundy took the letter and examined it carefully. The Head watched him equally carefully. There was little doubt left in his mind as to the identity of the guilty party. Grundy's keen interest in the letter seemed to him to have but one possible explanation.

"I should like to take this with me, sir," ventured Grundy.

"Very probably. You will, however, do nothing of the sort!"

"Oh! May I see the envelope it came in, sir?"

"For what reason?"

"I want to see when it was posted, sir. There may be a clue in that."

"You may see the envelope, Grundy," said the Head grimly.

Grundy took the envelope, and examined it minutely. It was addressed in the same back-sloping hand as the letter; and the postmark was "Rylcombe," the date that of the previous day, Tuesday, and the hour of collection 9.30.

"Posted last night, sir," said Grundy, making a note in a big pocket-book.

"Undoubtedly," said the Head. "Were you absent from the school last night, Grundy?"

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"I, sir? Oh, no!"

"Did you give this letter to someone else to post for you?"

"I, sir?" said Grundy dazedly. "I never saw the letter, sir, till you showed it to all of us in the Form-room this afternoon!"

"I trust you will be able to prove as much, Grundy. Your conduct is very suspicious."

"M-m-my conduct suspicious?" gasped Grundy.

"Yes. I cannot believe that you were guilty of merely folly and impertinence in coming here, Grundy; I fear that you had a deeper motive. However, I shall leave the matter over till Mr. Spother arrives. You may go!"

Grundy left the study, almost dazed. The Head suspected him! Him, of all fellows! What possible grounds could the Head have for suspecting him? Grundy couldn't see any.

"Well," murmured Grundy, as he went down the passage, "of all the silly idiots—"

It is much to be feared that Grundy was alluding to his headmaster in those disrespectful terms.

"What do you think?" he began, as he entered his study. Then he stopped. Wilkins and Gunn were not there.

Grundy gave an impatient snort. He looked from the window, and saw Wilkins and Gunn busy on Little Side with the footballers.

"Talk about fiddling while Rome's burning!" murmured Grundy bitterly. "Playing footer, when I've told them I want them! Well, my hat!"

Levison of the Fourth came into the study with a bundle of impot paper, which he placed on the table.

"There you are!" he said.

"Thanks! Hold on a minute, Levison."

"Hallo! What's up?" answered Levison, pausing in the doorway.

"Were you out of bounds last evening before nine-thirty?"

Levison stared.

"I want to know," said Grundy.

"Lemme see." Levison reflected. "Yes; I had a little run. I went up to town—"

"To town?" ejaculated Grundy.

"Yes; and had a theatre, and a champagne supper afterwards at the Savoy. I got home at four in the morning. Ta-ta!"

Levison walked away, leaving Grundy staring. Her a little reflection, however, it dawned upon Grundy's powerful brain that the playful Levison had been pulling his leg.

"Cheeky rotter!" muttered Grundy. "This looks rather black against Levison—prevaricating when I ask him a plain question. I think it was most likely Levison; he's that sort of chap. But I'm going into it thoroughly—very thoroughly. Fancy the Head suspecting me! But I'll jolly soon show him he's mistaken."

And Grundy left the study to begin his investigations.

CHAPTER 5.

Grundy Sees It All!

"BAI Jove, heah's Gwunday!"

There was a general grin as Grundy arrived on the football ground. Wilkins and Gunn were to blame. They considered that Grundy's new effort in the detective line was too good a joke to keep, so they had generously taken everybody else into it to share their entertainment.

"Found the assassin yet, Grundy?" asked Jack Blako affably.

Grundy stared.

"I'm not looking for an assassin, you young ass! I'm hunting for that anonymous letter-writer. And I've got a clue—several clues, in fact."

"From the bloodstains?" asked Herries.

"There weren't any bloodstains, Herries."

"Have you found the weapon the crime was committed with?" questioned Digby, with owl-like gravity.

Grundy looked puzzled. It always took Grundy a considerable time to discover when anybody was making fun of him.

"You don't seem to understand," he said. "This isn't a murder case. It's about that anonymous letter—"

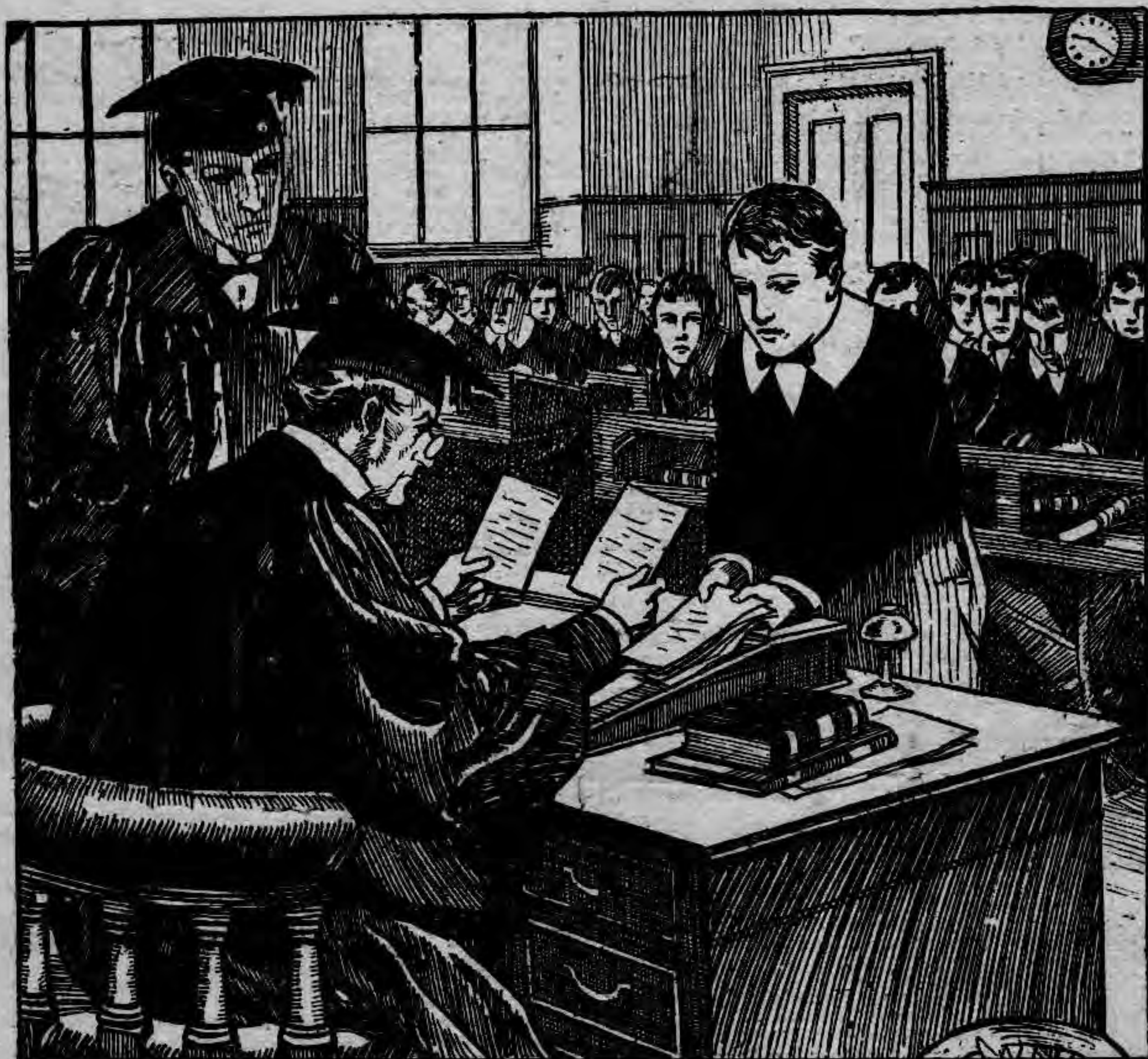
"Did anybody hear the report of the pistol?" asked Julian of the Fourth.

"There wasn't a pistol in the matter."

"What about the body, then?"

"Yes, have you found the body?" asked Blake. "You can't establish the crime without finding the body. That's law."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "I weally twust you will be able to find the boday, Gwunday. Have you looked in the dorm?"



Tom Merry collected the copies of the letter, and laid them on the Form-master's desk. The Head examined them one by one, comparing them with the original, the Juniors waiting in grim silence. (See Chapter 6.)

"And in the waterbutt?" asked Kerruish.
 "And under Linton's desk?" asked Reilly.
 Grundy looked bewildered.
 "There isn't a body in the case, you young asses!" he laboured to explain. "It's simply a matter of an anonymous letter, written by some chap in the Fourth."
 "Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Blake.
 "I've taken up the matter, and by my methods I have eliminated the other Forms. It was some kid in the Fourth."
 "Some what, you cheeky ass?"
 "Kid!" said Grundy.
 "I refuse to be called a kid, Gwunday! I regard you as an impertinent duffah!"
 "Don't prevaricate, D'Arcy."
 "What?" yelled Arthur Augustus.
 "I've come here to question you, and I warn you not to prevaricate."
 "Bai Jove! Will you hold my eyeglass, Blake, while I give that howlin' ass a feahful thwashin'?"
 "Oh, cheeso that!" said Grundy. "This begins to look rather suspicious to me, D'Arcy. Where were you last evening?"
 "Where—where was I?" gasped Arthur Augustus.
 "Yes, you." Grundy pointed an accusing finger at the swell of St. Jim's. "Mind, I'm not accusing you yet."
 "Accusin' me! Gweat Scott!"
 "But I require particulars of your movements last evening.

Did you post a letter in Rylcombe for the nine-thirty collection?"

"I refuse to weply to your impertinent questions, you uttah ass!"

"You admit it?"

"No, you cwass ass!"

"Do you deny it?"

"Wathah not! I don't deny anythin', you howlin' chump!"

Grundy made a note in his notebook, Arthur Augustus looking at him the while as if he would eat him. Other fellows were gathering round now, to look on, with grinning faces. George Alfred Grundy pursuing his investigations was a sight worth seeing.

"Blake!" rapped out Grundy, when he had made his note.

"Hallo!" said Blake.

"Are you aware whether D'Arcy went out of gates last evening?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, did he, or did he not?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"Of course it isn't, you young ass! You don't seem to have any sense," said Grundy impatiently. "I require to know whether D'Arcy went out of gates to post a letter. Did he or did he not?"

"Oh, I see! You want me to answer?"

"Yes, at once, you young duffer!"

"Because one rode a horse—"

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"Eh?"

"And the other rhododendron."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy stared blankly at Blake, whose face was quite serious.

"Isn't that the answer?" asked Blake.

"The—the answer! What do you mean?"

"If that one's wrong, I'll try another. Because the dog-rose when he saw the cowslip," said Blake cheerfully.

"You silly young ass!" roared Grundy.

"Wrong again?" asked Blake. "My dear chap, I'll keep it up as long as you do. Because one chalks the walks, and the other walks his chalks."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, delighted at the expression on Grundy's face.

"More prevarication!" said Grundy fiercely. "I can see that you are backing up D'Arcy. That makes it pretty clear. I suppose it's no good asking you, Digby, if D'Arcy went out of gates last night?"

"No good at all," grinned Dig.

"Or you, Herries? Do you know anything about it?"

"I know I'll dot your silly eye if you say that Gussy wrote that rotten letter, you potty chump!" grunted Herries.

"Prevarication all round!" said Grundy, closing his notebook with a snap. "I think I've worked it out pretty clearly. I rather suspected Levison at first, but it's pretty clear now that it was D'Arcy. A fellow doesn't prevaricate unless he's got something to hide."

"If you accuse me of pwevawication, you astoundin' ass—" began Arthur Augustus sulphurously.

"Come with me!" said Grundy magisterially.

"Eh?"

"I'm going to take you to the Head."

"Tut-tut-take me to the Head?" stuttered Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, now I've found you out. Come on!"

Grundy dropped a heavy hand on the shoulder of the dazed swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus simply blinked at him.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "Mad as a hattah! Mad as the Kaisah, bai Jove! The poor fellah ought to be undah westwaint!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you coming quietly?" demanded Grundy.

"Bai Jove, no feash! If you do not wemove your paw at once, Grundy, I shall have no wresource but to give you a feashful thwashin'!"

"Come on! Here, hands off, you cheeky fags!" yelled Grundy, as a crowd of the Fourth closed in on him. "Don't you dare to interfere with— Yaroooh! Hands off, I say! Yah! Oh—oh, jiminy!"

"You've been funny long enough," grinned Blake, as the crowd of juniors swept George Alfred Grundy off his feet. "Frog's-march, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha!"

"Take him in, and lock him in his study!" chuckled Reilly.

"Sure, the gossoon isn't safe to be let loose!"

"All hands on deck!" roared Blake.

All hands were laid upon the struggling Grundy. Grundy was struggling with all his strength, in a fury of rage and indignation. After discovering the guilty party in such a mannerly manner, Grundy had rather expected admiration; certainly he had not expected the frog's-march. But the frog's-march was what he received. His only comfort was the reflection that geniuses generally are misunderstood and misjudged by the many-headed multitude. But that reflection did not afford him much comfort at the moment. He went towards the School House in the grasp of a dozen pairs of hands, his arms and legs flying wildly, and his head occasionally tapping on the hard, unsympathetic quadrangle.

With yells of laughter, Grundy of the Shell was rushed up to the House. It was somewhat unfortunate that Mr. Railton stepped out of the House just as the merry juniors reached the steps. The procession halted suddenly.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Housemaster. "What does this mean? What are you doing? Release Grundy at once!"

George Alfred Grundy was dropped like a hot potato. He gave a roar as he landed on terra-firma. Grundy's head was hard, but terra-firma seemed a little harder.

"Yaroooh!"

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, frowning.

"Only—only a little game, sir," stammered Blake.

"Grundy's been—ahem!—playing the giddy ox, and we were—ahem!—taking him home."

"The uttah ass, sir—"

"What!"

"I—I mean the feashful chump, sir, thinks that I wrote that wotten lettah to Mr. Linton, sir, so we gave him the fwog's-march, sir!"

"Indeed! Grundy, get up at once!"

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Grundy was getting up, gasping.

"I'm sorry to have to accuse D'Arcy, sir," he spluttered; "but I feel it my duty to remove suspicion, sir, from innocent chaps. There's no telling whom that expert will pick on when he gets here. I feel it my duty, sir—grooh!—to report that D'Arcy wrote that anonymous letter, sir!"

"And what proof have you, Grundy, of this statement?" said Mr. Railton sternly, motioning the indignant Arthur Augustus to be silent.

"I've worked it out, sir. The letter was posted in Rylecombe last evening, and D'Arcy was out of gates—"

"Were you out of gates, D'Arcy?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"He prevaricated when I questioned him!" booted Grundy.

"I did not pwevawicate, you uttah ass! I refused to answer the ridiculous questions of a howlin' idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, please!" said Mr. Railton. "If you have no other grounds for your statement, Grundy—"

"It's proved that it was somebody in the Fourth, sir."

"Indeed! How?"

"Because it wasn't anybody in the Shell, sir!"

"And how do you know that?"

"Oh, I'm sure of it!" said Grundy confidently. "My judgment, sir—I may say that my judgment's never at fault!"

"Grundy, you have made a foolish and wicked accusation against a perfectly innocent person!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Grundy, in astonishment.

"You must be more careful, Grundy! In order to impress the necessity for care upon your mind, you may follow me to my study!"

"Wha-a-at for, sir?"

"To be oaned, sirrah!"

"M-m-me oaned!" said Grundy dazedly.

"Yes. Follow me at once!"

Grundy followed the Housemaster like a fellow in a dream, leaving the Fourth-Formers grinning. Although a great man had once declared that England expected every man to do his duty, this was what Grundy got for doing his duty. It was enough to discourage any fellow less determined than George Alfred Grundy.

CHAPTER 6.

Sticking To It.

RACKE of the Shell met Grundy as he came away from the Housemaster's study, rubbing his hands. Grundy was in a bad temper. The licking did not hurt him very much—Grundy was hard as nails. But the injustice and misunderstanding did. He felt bitterly—as he had felt a good many times before—that there was nobody at St. Jim's who really understood him. It had been just the same at Redclyffe, his previous school—nobody had really understood Grundy.

Racke looked sympathetic. As Racke of the Shell did not care two pins for anybody in the wide world but his own precious self, anybody but Grundy might have guessed that Racke had a motive for pretending sympathy. But Grundy did not guess it—he was not quick at guessing. Sympathy was grateful and comforting to George Alfred at that moment.

"Too bad," said Racke. "I couldn't help admiring the way you dealt with the matter, Grundy. Railton didn't seem to see it, though."

Grundy smiled bitterly.

"Railton isn't a bad sort in his way," he said. "A chap can overlook a lot, considering that he got winged fighting the Huns. Otherwise, I think I should have dotted him on the nose this time—I do, really! He's a born fool, Racke! He doesn't understand me in the least!"

"It's too bad! And you had worked it out that it was D'Arcy of the Fourth who wrote that letter."

"Well, on the whole, I don't exactly say it was D'Arcy, as he denies having been out of gates last evening. You see, he prevaricated when I questioned him—that was what made me suspicious. It may or may not have been D'Arcy—certainly, it was somebody in the Fourth. Did you see any Fourth Form kid out of gates last evening, Racke?"

Racke started.

"I? I wasn't out!" he said.

"Yes, you were! Don't you remember? Crooke bunked you up over the wall soon after calling-over—I came along when he was doing it!"

Racke drew a sharp, quick breath.

"I—I remember! You needn't mention that to anybody, Grundy. Fellows might jump to the conclusion that—that—"

"I sha'n't mention it, of course. I know it wasn't you wrote to Linton."

"You—you know that?"

"Certainly; it wasn't a Shell chap! Upon the whole, I rather think it was Levison of the Fourth. He's that sort!"

"I shouldn't wonder," assented Racke, his eyes gleaming curiously. "I suppose you haven't got any proofs against Levison yet?"

"I've got the matter in hand!" said Grundy loftily.

"Er—yes! I understand you've got the letter from the Head—that letter old Linton got to-day?"

"No; the Head wouldn't give it to me for some reason. I could see that he suspected me," said Grundy, more in sorrow than in anger. "Me, you know! I suppose he thought I'd written the letter, and got scared about the hand-writing expert seeing it, and wanted to get rid of it. Me, you know!"

"The expert is pretty certain to spot the writer, don't you think?" said Racke.

"I don't believe in those dashed experts!" replied Grundy.

"Still, he might."

"Oh, he might, of course! More likely to spot the wrong chap, in my opinion. People have been sent to chokey on experts' evidence!" said Grundy scornfully. "I wouldn't hang the Kaiser on an expert's evidence!"

"I suppose the Head wouldn't part with the letter till the expert's seen it. I—I don't suppose the chap who wrote it foresaw about an expert being sent for. It—it's rather a queer sort of thing for the Head to do," muttered Racke.

"Just the thing he would do, instead of leaving it in my hands!" sneered Grundy.

"And so the Head's got the letter, not Linton?"

"The Head's got it," assented Grundy.

"You saw it in his study?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I suppose he keeps it in a safe place? Did you see?"

"He put it back in his desk," said Grundy. "Are you thinking that I might take it, all the same? I wouldn't do that."

"No. I suppose the desk's kept locked?"

"Not that desk. I mean the desk he writes on," said Grundy—"not the big one he locks. He put it in the drawer—the writing-table, you know. But I shouldn't think of taking it without permission."

"He doesn't lock the drawer of the writing-table," said Racke. "I've noticed that. He doesn't keep important things in that."

"All the same, I shouldn't think of routing among his things," said Grundy. "Thanks for the tip, but that isn't in my line. I'm going to pursue my investigations without the letter."

And Grundy went his way. Racke glanced after him with a very peculiar expression. It had not dawned upon Grundy's powerful brain that the cad of the Shell had been pumping him for information.

When Grundy came into the Common-room that evening he was greeted by a general chortle.

"Who's guilty now, Grundy?" asked Gore.

"Never mind who!" said Grundy loftily. "I'm working up the case. I fancy I shall have the party before that expert chap arrives."

"Isn't it Gussy?" grinned Gore.

"I'm not sure. But I know one thing—it was a chap in the Fourth!"

Grundy was quite convinced of that. The frog's-march in the quad would have convinced him, if there had been nothing else.

"Which of us, Great Judge?" asked Julian.

"You'll know jolly soon!"

"You blithering ass!" said Tom Merry. "It's plain enough that it was a Shell chap. And I don't envy him when the expert gets to work to-morrow."

Racke looked up.

"You think the expert will spot the handwriting?" he asked.

"I suppose so; that's what he's for."

"Looks like a fair catch for the fellow who did it, then," remarked Racke carelessly.

"Yaas, wathah; and a jollay good thing, too!" said Arthur Augustus. "It was vewy deep of the Head to think of sendin' for a handw'itin' expert—vewy!"

Grundy snorted.

"The expert's no good. He's only going to see Shell chaps' handwriting, and the chap who did it is in the Fourth!"

"Grundy wants another frog's-march!" remarked Blake.

"All hands on deck!"

"Ha, ha! Collar him!"

Grundy executed a strategic retreat from the Common-room just in time. Wilkins and Gunn found him in his study at

bedtime, cogitating upon the knotty problem he had set himself to solve.

"Got him yet?" asked Wilkins facetiously.

"Wait and see," replied Grundy mysteriously.

And Wilkins and Gunn chuckled on their way to the dormitory. They were content to wait and see, convinced that at they would see would be George Alfred Grundy playing the giddy ox.

CHAPTER 7.

Gussy's Great Wheeze!

"I HAVE an ideah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that announcement in the Fourth Form dormitory when the juniors were turning in.

To Arthur Augustus' surprise there was no outburst of enthusiasm. There was not even a reply. The Fourth Formers went on taking their boots off quite sedately.

"I made a wemark, Blake," said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Did you?" yawned Blake.

"Yaas."

"Well, don't make any more, there's a good chap."

"I wegard you as a wude ass, Blake. I wepeat that I have an ideah!"

"Whose?" asked Julian.

"My own, of course, you duffah! Any of you fellahs feelin' inclined to get up to-night an' jape Gwunday?"

"Too jolly cold," said Blake. "Better go to sleep."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort! I considah—"

"Shush! Here's Darrel!"

Arthur Augustus shushed as the prefect came into the dormitory. Darrel of the Sixth saw lights out when the juniors had turned in. But when the door had closed behind Darrel, Arthur Augustus sat up in bed.

"Pway, don't go to sleep yet, deah boys! I have an ideah for pullin' Gwunday's silly leg."

"Oh, rats! Good-night!"

"It is a wippin' ideah, Blake!"

"Bow-wow!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligent wemark, Blake! Gwunday has been cheekay ass enough to suppose that I wote that wotten lettah to old Linton. I wegard it as bein' up to me to make Gwunday sit up. The silly ass is playin' the detective, and I am goin' to give him somethin' to detect. See?"

"No; I don't see," mumbled Blake sleepily.

"I am going to visit the Shell dorm when all those boundahs are asleep, and play a twick on Gwunday. As he is so awf'ly clevah at detectin' things, I think it would be wathah amusin' to set him detectin' who took his clobber away an' hid them in the box-room—what?"

Blake gave a sleepy chuckle.

"Wathah a wippin' ideah—what?" chortled Arthur Augustus.

"Topping!"

"You can come if you like, deah boy."

Blake yawned portentously.

"It's jolly cold," he said. "You can tell me all about it in the morning. That will be just as good."

"Don't be a slackah, Blake!"

Snore!

"Would you like to have a hand in that wippin' jape on Gwunday, Hewwies?"

Snore!

"What about you, Dig?"

Snore!

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and laid his head on the pillow. Evidently, ripping as the jape was, nobody wanted to leave his bed on a bitter winter night to carry it out. But Arthur Augustus was determined. Grundy's absurd accusation had made the swell of St. Jim's wrath, and he felt that one good turn deserved another.

Arthur Augustus settled down to sleep, intending to awaken at eleven sharp. As a matter of fact, midnight was striking when his eyes opened again.

He sat up at once and rubbed his eyes.

"Bai-Jove!" he murmured. "Is that eleven or twelve? I wathah think I have overslept myself."

He shivered a little. It was very cold. For a moment or two he thought of giving up that joke on Grundy, ripping as it was. But the anticipation of being chortled at in the morning stiffened his resolution. He slipped out of bed and hurried on his clothes and a pair of slippers. Then he approached Blake's bed and shook Blake by the shoulder.

Jack Blake came out of the land of dreams with a start, and blinked round into the darkness.

"Wha-a-at's that?" he stuttered.

"Don't be alarmed, deah boy! It's only I," said Arthur Augustus.

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Augustus reassuringly. "If you would care to come with me aftah all—"

"You frabjous ass—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Go back to bed, fathead, and let a chap sleep!"

"I will let you sleep if you choose to be a slackah, Blake; but I am not goin' back to bed. I am goin' to jape Gwunday."

"Br-r-r-r!"

Arthur Augustus left his chum to repose, and turned to Digby's bed. Dig woke up suddenly. Arthur Augustus meant to pull him by the shoulder, but in the darkness he caught Dig's nose by mistake.

"Gooooch!" was Dig's awakening remark. "What's that? Groogh!"

"Bai Jove! Is that your nose, Dig?"

"Gurrig! You silly ass!" came in sulphurous tones from Digby. "What are you pulling a chap's nose for in the middle of the night, you howlin' chump!"

"I wefuse to be called a howlin' chump, Dig!"

"Go away, fathead!"

"Weally, Dig, I was only wakin' you up to ask you—pway, don't go to sleep, Dig—to ask you if you'd like to come with me and jape Gwunday—"

"Go away!" hissed Dig.

"Wouldn't you like to come, deah boy?"

"No, ass! No, fathead! No, jabberwock!"

"I wegard those expressions as oppwobious, Dig, and I wefuse to discuss the mattah any furthah!" said Arthur Augustus with dignity.

Robert Arthur Digby snorted and turned over. Arthur Augustus crossed over to Herries' bed.

"Hewwies, old man—"

"Hallo!" grunted Herries, waking up. "What silly idiot is that?"

"Weally, Hewwies, it is I—"

"Knew it was some silly idiot! Go away!"

"If you call me a silly idiot, Hewwies—"

"Shut up!"

"Hewwies, if you would care to come with me and jape Gwunday—"

"Come a little nearer, will you?" asked Herries, blinking into the darkness, and taking a business-like grip on his pillow.

"Certainly, deah boy. What— Yawoooooh!"

There was a yell in the dormitory, and Arthur Augustus sat down with surprising suddenness as Herries' pillow landed on his noble nose.

"Now, come and have another!" said Herries.

"Yawoooh! You uttah ass—"

"You'll have the prefects here soon, Gussy, you chump!" growled Blake. "Why can't you keep quiet!"

"That uttah wottah, Hewwies, has stwuck me with a pillow! I am goin' to give him a feahful thwashin'!" panted Arthur Augustus.

"Come on!" snorted Herries. "I've got the bolster ready!"

"I wegard you as a wottah, Hewwies!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"For goodness' sake, shut up!" came Dick Julian's voice.

"You're wakin' the whole blessed dormitory!"

"Julian, deah boy, would you care to come with me and jape Gwunday, and set an example to these wotten slackahs?"

Snore!

"Bai Jove, you have gone to sleep vewy suddenly, Julian! Clive, are you awake? Clive, deah boy—"

"No; I'm fast asleep, old chap," replied the South African junior promptly, and there was a chuckle in the dormitory.

"Weally, Clive—"

"Will you go back to bed, Gussy, or shall I get up to you?" asked Jack Blake.

"I wefuse to go back to bed, Blake; and if you get up to me, as you express it, I shall give you a feahful thwashin'! Kewwuish, would you care to—"

Snore!

"Weilly, old chap, if you would care to—"

Snore!

"Oh, wats! I wegard you as a set of slackahs!" said Arthur

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Augustus in disgust, and he trod away softly to the door. Evidently he was to set out on his voyage alone. And the Fourth-Formers chuckled and settled down to sleep.

Arthur Augustus left the dormitory very cautiously, and closed the door behind him. The passage was pitchy dark. There was not a light in the whole building. The last door had closed for the night.

"Bai Jove, it's feahfully dark!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I twast I shall not wan into anythin'—"

He groped his way along the passage. Fortunately, he knew every inch of the old School House. His shippers made no sound as he trod softly along towards the Shell dormitory.

Suddenly he stopped.

From the direction of the stairs there came a sound as if a stair had creaked under a footfall, and then a slight bumping noise.

Then there was a muttered, suppressed exclamation.

Arthur Augustus stood stock-still.

His heart thumped wildly.

There was somebody on the stairs—somebody creeping about silently in the dense darkness.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus under his breath. "Burglahs!"

CHAPTER 8.

Arthur Augustus Frustrates a Knavish Trick.

BURGLARS!

Arthur Augustus's heart thrilled at the thought. It was the only possible explanation. Certainly, some other junior might have been out of bed on a japing expedition like himself, but such a japer would not go downstairs. And the unknown was on the stairs.

Arthur Augustus listened intently.

Whoever was on the stairs had bumped on a corner of the banisters in the dark. As he strained his ears he heard a faint sound, and he knew that the unseen one was feeling his way downstairs by the banisters.

"A wotten burglah, of course!" murmured Arthur Augustus, recovering himself after the first startled moment. "Pwobably he has got in by an uppah window, and is sneakin' down to the Head's studay for the safe. Or—or pewwaps it is some wottah like Cwooke or Wacko goin' to bweak bounds."

He paused.

His first impulse was to call Mr. Railton and give the alarm; but if the mysterious night-walker turned out to be one of the blades of the School House, that would certainly not do. Racke or Crooke was unlikely to go downstairs to get out—the box-room window was an easier exit. And even the blackest of black sheep was hardly likely to be breaking bounds after midnight.

But it was possible, and Arthur Augustus did not want to betray even a rank outsider like Racke or Crooke to punishment. He felt that it was necessary to be cautious.

But it was easily put to the proof. A burglar, certainly, would head for the room where the safe was. Arthur Augustus, on tiptoe and in dead silence, made for the stairs, quite forgetting his intended jape on Grundy of the Shell. He was very careful not to bump into the banisters. Slowly, silently he trod down the stairs, and his ears strained to listen.

There was a faint sound below, and he knew it came from the wide corridor upon which Dr. Holmes' study opened.

"It must be a burglah!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "He is makin' for the Head's studay, the wottah!"

He reached the lower corridor. A door opened softly. The unknown had gone into the Head's study.

Arthur Augustus trod softly along the passage. He heard a match scratch, and there was a glimmer of light from the open room.

"Bai Jove, that's queeah!" murmured the junior. It was queer that a burglar should strike matches.

He reached the open door, and, keeping carefully out of sight, peered in.

A figure in pyjamas was standing

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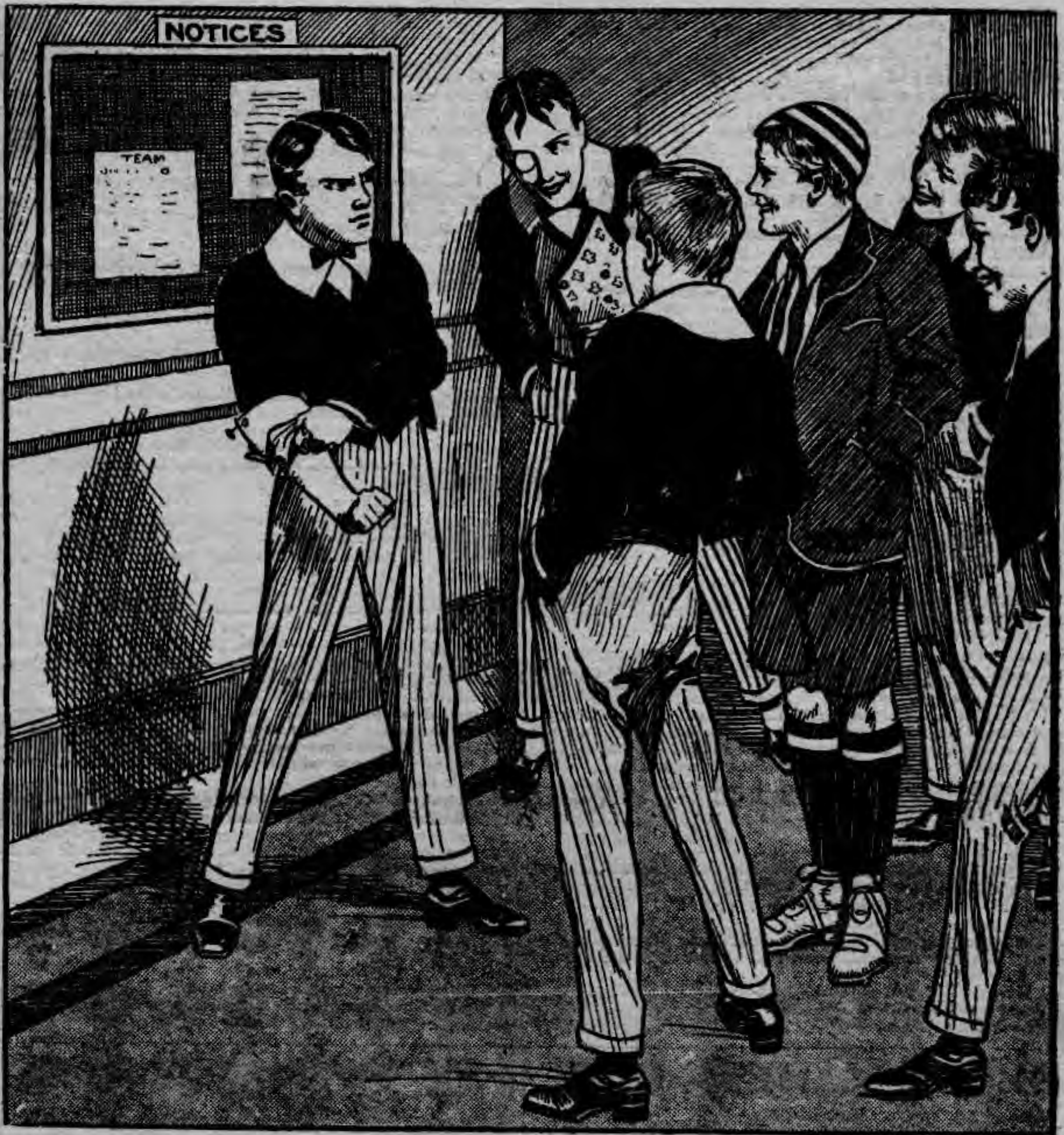
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"Rats!" howled every fellow present in chorus. George Alfred Grundy looked round him. "You silly asses——" began Grundy, rather taken aback. (See Chapter I.)

by the Head's writing-table, with a match burning in his fingers.

The drawer in the table had been pulled out, and the figure was bending over it, scanning the contents.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard with wrath. Evidently it was not a burglar. It was a junior in pyjamas, and D'Arcy recognised the loud pattern of the pyjamas. He had seen those striking garments before. It was Racke of the Shell who was rummaging in the drawer.

"The uttah wottah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

*The match went out.

Arthur Augustus strode into the study and turned on the electric switch. The room was flooded with light.

Racke of the Shell spun round with a gasp of terror.

There was a letter in his hand—a letter he had taken from the drawer of the table. Arthur Augustus did not need telling what letter it was.

"You—D'Arcy!" stammered Racke, in breathless relief. For a moment he had feared that it was the Head.

The swell of St. Jim's regarded him scornfully.

"You uttah cad!"

"Hang you!" muttered Racke. "What are you spying on me for?"

"I am not spyin', you uttah wascal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I thought at first it was a burglah!"

"Don't shont, you idiot!" hissed Racke. "Do you want to wake the house?"

"Weally, Wacke, I am quite indifferant on that point."

"Turn out the light——"

"Wats?"

"It may be seen!" gasped Racke, in an agony of apprehension.

"I wefuse to turn out the light, Wacke! You have taken a lettah fwom the Head's dwawah. You are a sneakin' thief!"

"You—you don't understand! Shut the door!" panted Racke. "If we're found here——"

"I wefuse to shut the door, Wacke!"

"The—the light may be seen——"

"Possibly," assented Arthur Augustus calmly. "You have stolen a lettah belongin' to Dr. Holmes, Wacke—"

"I—I haven't! It's nothing—you don't understand—"

"I undahstand perfectly well, Wacke. That is the lettah to Mr. Linton, and you are takin' it away."

"I—I—"

"I undahstand, you scoundwel!" pursued Arthur Augustus, with rising indignation. "You wote that lettah to Mr. Linton."

"I—I—"

Racke gave the swell of St. Jim's a savage look.

"Well, you are not goin' to steal it!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wefuse to allow anythin' of the sort. Aftah postin' a lettah, Wacke, it is no longah your pwoperty. Weplace that lettah at once!"

Racke's hand closed convulsively on the letter.

"I'm going to burn it, you fool!"

"You are goin' to do nothin' of the sort, Wacke! For one thing, there will be a feahful wow if the Head misses it, and somebody will be blamed for it. And I wefuse to allow a theft to be committed. I should wegard myself as a partay to it, undah the circa. And— Oh, you uttah wottah!"

Arthur Augustus broke off. He made a stride forward, and picked up a handkerchief that lay on the floor. There was a monogram in the corner of the handkerchief, with the letters "M. L."

Racke shrank back from the look on D'Arcy's face.

"You fwightful beast!" panted Arthur Augustus. "You bwrought this heah. You were goin' to leave Lowthah's handkerchief heah sq that he would be suspected!"

"I—I—"

"Bai Jove! I think I ought to call the Head at once—"

"You ass!" panted Racke. "Dry up, I tell you! I—I should get the sack! I—I—"

"Yaas, wathah! And you ought to get it, you uttah wascal! Put that lettah back in the dwawah, Wacke, or I will shout out at once for the Head!"

"You—you fool! I—I—"

Racke panted with terror and rage. At any moment some wakeful eye might detect the light in the study, and all would be discovered. And if the swell of the Fourth carried out his threat, there was no doubt of the discovery. Racke shivered at the idea.

"You—you can take the handkerchief away!" he stammered. "It—it was only meant as a joke!"

"Liah!"

"But—but I'm going to take the letter—"

Arthur Augustus stepped to the door, and opened his lips to shout. Racke gave a gasp of terror.

"Quiet—quiet! I'll do as you say. Quiet!"

"I'll give you one second, then."

The letter dropped from Racke's trembling fingers into the drawer. Arthur Augustus crossed the room to him, and closed the drawer.

"Now get out, you cad!" he said.

Racke gave him a look of hatred.

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"Get out!"

"It isn't your business! You—"

"Do you want me to thwow you out of this studay on your neck, Wacke?"

Racke clenched his fists convulsively, and moved towards the door. Arthur Augustus followed him out of the study. He changed the key to the outside of the lock.

"What are you doing?" muttered Racke, eyeing him with eyes of hatred.

"I am goin' to lock the doork, you thief!"

"Oh, hang you—hang you!"

"I wathah think you are more likely to be hanged than I, Wacke, some day."

Arthur Augustus turned off the switch, closed the door, and locked it. Racke heard him withdraw the key from the lock.

"Oh hang you, you meddling fool!"

"If you apply anothah oppwobwious expwession to me, Wacke, I will turn on the light, and give you a feahful thwashin' on the spot!"

Racke muttered something indistinctly, and moved away. Arthur Augustus followed him upstairs. The cad of the Shell went back to his dormitory, his object in leaving it quite frustrated. The Head's study was locked now, and the key in D'Arcy's possession, and there was nothing more to be done.

Arthur Augustus returned to the Fourth Form domitory. After what had happened he did not feel inclined to carry out the intended jape on the great Grundy.

"Hallo!" came Blake's sleepy voice. "Is that you, fathead?"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Blake!"

"What have you done with Grundy's clobber?"

"Nothin'."

"Then you haven't been and gone and done it, after all, duffer?"

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus went back to bed, and slept, with the key under his pillow. But the swell of the Fourth was up before rising-bell in the morning. He scuttled downstairs before anyone else was about, and unlocked the Head's study, and replaced the key on the inside. And he sauntered about the corridor till the housemaids came down, when it was too late for Racke to make any further attempt on the study.

At breakfast Racke gave him a bitter look, to which Arthur Augustus responded with a glance of withering contempt.

After breakfast he joined the Terrible Three in the quadrangle.

"Have you lost your handkerchief, Lowthah, deah boy?"

he asked.

Monty Lowther's hand went to his pocket.

"By Jove! Yes."

"Heah it is."

"Thanks!"

"I picked it up, you know," explained Arthur Augustus. And he walked away, without explaining when he had picked it up.

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CHAPTER 9.

Grundy Is Called In.

"THAT must be the merry expert!"

Morning lessons were over, and the juniors had come out of the Form-rooms, when the stranger arrived at the School House. The Terrible Three regarded him with some interest. They knew that the handwriting expert from London was expected at the school that morning, and they had no doubt that this was Mr. Spother.

He was a tall, thin gentleman, with gold-rimmed glasses perched upon the bridge of a long, thin nose. He had the manner of a gentleman who realised that he was a person of some consequence. As Monty Lowther remarked, he was evidently not "small potatoes" in his own eyes.

Toby showed him in to the Head's study, and a dozen fellows questioned Toby as he came away. From Toby it was learned that the gentleman was, indeed, Mr. Spother. Mr. Linton was seen going to the Head's study immediately afterwards.

"Now the circus is going to begin!" remarked Monty Lowther. "I suppose you really haven't left anything for the chap to do, Grundy—what?"

"Well, I haven't exactly finished the case," said Grundy. "I've worked it down pretty narrowly, however. It was either Levison or Mellish."

"Why, you silly ass!" ejaculated Levison of the Fourth.

"You howling idiot!" said Mellish.

Grundy gave them a lofty look.

"No good trying to wriggle out of it!" he said. "I've practically got you nailed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle, Tom Merry—"

"Thanks! I will! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom.

"Upon the whole, it looks blackest against Levison," said Grundy.

"You shrieking idiot!" said Levison.

"Any evidence?" grinned Blake.

"Lots. Levison is so jolly clever disguising his hand—that's a very strong point. Then he's the kind of worm who would do such a thing as writing an anonymous letter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then I've traced it out that he was late for calling-over on Tuesday night," went on Grundy. "That looks very suspicious. Of course, he was down in Rylcombe, posting the letter."

"I was helping my minor with his Latin, you howling ass, and forgot the time!"

"Perhaps your minor will bear witness, when you're had up before the Head!" sneered Grundy.

"Oh, go and eat coke, you dangerous lunatic!"

Levison strode away angrily.

"Gwunday, I wegard you as an uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It was not Levison who wrote that letter to Mr. Linton."

"Do you mean that you confess, D'Arcy?" demanded Grundy.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, come away!" said Wilkins, seizing his chum by the arm. "You're getting dangerous, Grundy. You'll be suspecting me next."

"I might," said Grundy calmly. "Only you're in the Shell, and I know it wasn't a Shell chap."

"Then we're safe!" grinned Manners. "It's something to be safe, at least, when Grundy starts as a detective!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yass, wathah! As a mattah of fact, it was a Shell chap, and I twust he will be discovered," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard him as an uttah cad!"

Racke joined the swell of the Fourth as he went into the quadrangle. Racke was looking pale and harassed. He received a glance of withering contempt from D'Arcy as he came hesitatingly to him.

"Don't speak to me, you wottah!"

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"I wefuse to have anythin' to say to you, Wacke!"

"Look here, I—I don't want you to say anything about last night," muttered Racke huskily. "You know what they would think—"

"I know what they would know, you mean," said Arthur Augustus scornfully. "But you need not be afraid that I shall betway you, Wacke. I am not a sneak."

"You won't say anything?" muttered Racke.

"Certainly I shall say nothin'. I should wefuse to sneak even about such a cwawlin', cwingin' worm as you, Wacke!"

Racke drew a deep breath of relief. He did not understand or share Arthur Augustus' scruples of honour; but he knew that D'Arcy's word was as good as his bond. He was safe in that direction, at least.

"But I wefuse to have anythin' to do with you, Wacke! You will oblige me by keepin' your distance. I wegard you as a Pwussian!"

Racke moved away, scowling.

"Bai Jove! I can't stand that chap!" said Arthur Augustus, as he joined Blake and Herries and Dig. "He makes me quite ill, you know. It's wathah disgustin' to have to keep his wotten secrets!"

"Whose secrets?" demanded Blake.

"That wottah Wacke's."

"What the dicken's secrets of Racke's are you keeping?"

"I am afraid I cannot answah that question, Blake, as I have told Wacke that I will say nothin'," said Arthur Augustus cautiously.

His chums stared at him.

"Off your rocker?" asked Herries.

"Pway don't make wude wemarks, Hewwies!"

"If you're getting mixed up with Racke, and keeping his shady secrets, it's time we took you in hand," said Digby.

"Now, what's the secret?"

"I feah that I cannot weveal that, Dig. You see, it is a secwet. I cannot betway even a Pwussian like Wacke."

"Oh!" said Blake, comprehending. "You bowled him out last night, I suppose. Found him breaking bounds when you were out of the dormitory—what?"

"He was not bweakin' bounds, Blake."

"Then you did find him?"

"I feah I cannot weply to that question, Blake. I do not intend to mention to anyone, even my own pals, that I found Wacke out of his dorm last night."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake and Herries and Digby.

Arthur Augustus put his eyeglass, and surveyed his hilarious chums frigidly.

"I fail to see any cause for wibald-mewwiment," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as cacklin' duffake, deah boys!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away with his noble nose in the air.

Meanwhile, the juniors were discussing the expert, who was still shut up with the Head and Mr. Linton, doubtless examining the various fists of the Shell fellows. There was a good deal of curiosity as to what Mr. Spother would discover, or whether he would discover anything.

Grundy was of opinion that he wouldn't discover anything. In fact, he couldn't, as the Head was only showing him specimens of Shell handwriting, and it was absolutely certain—according to Grundy—that the anonymous letter-writer was in the Fourth. Grundy had not yet decided whether the culprit was Levison or Mellish, but he admitted that it looked blackest against Levison.

Grundy was holding forth on this subject to a grinning group of juniors, when Mr. Linton looked out of the School House, with a grim brow.

"Grundy!"

His voice was hard as iron. Grundy looked round.

"Follow me to the Head's study at once!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Grundy brightly. "I suppose the expert wishes to consult me, sir."

"To—to what?" ejaculated the master of the Shell.

"To consult me, sir. I have been investigating the matter, sir, and I think I could render very valuable assistance."

"If this is effrontery, Grundy, it will not serve you. Follow me at once!" snapped Mr. Linton.

Grundy, considerably surprised at his Form-master's manner, followed him. He left the juniors looking very queerly at one another.

"You can see what that means!" said Manners. "Surely it couldn't have been Grundy, after all?"

"Rot!" said Wilkins.

"You can see what Linton thinks."

"Grundy!" said Tom Merry. "It can't have been poor old Grundy!"

Grundy of the Shell, as he followed his Form-master, did not seem to have the slightest suspicion what he was wanted for. But the other fellows knew what Mr. Linton's look and tone meant. Grundy was in for it!

CHAPTER 10.

Very Expert!

MR. SPOTHER had been very busy in the Head's study for some time.

Dr. Holmes greeted the somewhat pompous gentleman cordially, and explained the circumstances to him. Mr. Linton joined in with a word or two, and the famous expert was soon in possession of the facts.

"As there seems no doubt in my mind that the anonymous letter was written by a member of Mr. Linton's Form, I

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have collected specimens of the handwriting of every boy in the Shell," said the Head. "They are here."

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Spother.

"As you see, the writing of the anonymous letter is disguised—"

"That is easily apparent."

"I have compared it with the handwritings of all the Shell boys, but I cannot trace the slightest resemblance."

Mr. Spother smiled a superior smile.

"That is quite natural," he said. "The trained eye of an expert, however, is quite a different matter. What appears to you difficult, if not impossible, sir, is child's play to me."

The Head coughed. Mr. Spother's confidence in his powers was unbounded, and the Head could only hope that it was well-founded.

"I should like you to examine this paper first," continued the Head, taking up Grundy's copy of the anonymous letter. "The boy—Grundy—who wrote this paper has laid himself open to very grave suspicion, by an attempt to obtain possession of the letter."

Mr. Spother nodded, with a very wise look.

"Was the boy aware that you had sent for me?" he asked.

"Yes; I had informed them all of my intention."

"Then he knew what to expect," smiled Mr. Spother. "Doubtless it seemed to him the only resource, to obtain possession of the letter and destroy it. Of course, when writing it, he had not foreseen this step on your part."

"That is certainly how it appeared to me," said the Head. "But an examination of the handwriting will put the matter to the test."

"Undoubtedly!"

Mr. Spother, seated at the writing-table, proceeded to make the examination, the two masters watching him in silence. The anonymous letter which Arthur Augustus had so narrowly rescued the previous night lay before him on the table. Mr. Spother had studied it very closely. He compared it with Grundy's copy, and was observed to nod his head very solemnly. Then he went through the rest of the papers, examining and comparing each one closely.

The examination was not a brief task, and the Head was conscious that it was getting very close to lunch-time; but he did not venture to interrupt the great London expert.

Having examined all the papers in turn, Mr. Spother came back to Grundy's copy, and spent another five minutes upon it. He extracted a microscope from a pocket, and examined both letters again by its aid. There was deep silence in the study.

Mr. Spother turned to the Head at last.

"I have done!" he said.

"You have ascertained—"

"The anonymous letter was written by the person who wrote this," said Mr. Spother, laying his finger upon Grundy's copy of the letter.

"Grundy!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"His name is Grundy?" said Mr. Spother. "Ah, yes, I see it is written on the paper!"

"And—and there is no doubt upon the matter?" asked the Head.

Mr. Spother regarded him with a look of pained surprise.

"Doubt?" he repeated, as if he could scarcely believe his pompous ears.

The Head coloured slightly.

"I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Spother! Of course, there is no doubt, if you assure me that such is the result of your examination."

"My opinion is not usually questioned, sir," said Mr. Spother, with chilling dignity. "I am accustomed to giving evidence in courts of law. Men's liberties, and even lives, have depended upon the accuracy of my expert evidence. I should scarcely be likely to make a mistake."

"I am sure I beg your pardon; I did not mean to imply a doubt," said the Head hastily. It was evident that the great man was offended. "But—but to my eye—untrained, of course—there is not the remotest resemblance between this writing and that of Grundy."

Mr. Spother condescended to smile slightly—very slightly.

"My dear sir, the lack of resemblance is one variety of proof that it was written by the same hand."

"Oh!" said the Head.

"In disguising his hand, the writer has carefully avoided every familiar attribute of his own natural caligraphy."

"Ah! Quite so—quite so!"

"But under a microscopical examination, sir, certain resemblances appear, which have escaped your observation. In certain slight details, the writer has been unable to avoid betraying himself. It is upon such details, sir, that the expert must inevitably rest his theory. I will amplify. You

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see the tail of the 'g' in the word 'high,' in the original letter. It occurs again in the word 'give,' and again in the word 'ought.' The writer has sloped the letter backwards, like the rest. But compare it with the tail of the 'g' in the boy Grundy's copy. The down-stroke, though differently sloped, is exactly similar—a point which naturally eluded the observation of an inexperienced boy. But upon that detail, sir, I should have no hesitation in swearing an affidavit that Grundy was the writer of the letter, even if his life were at stake before a judge and jury."

"I accept your conclusion without the slightest hesitation, of course," said the Head. "I am not well versed in such matters, myself. Grundy, then, is the guilty party."

"I am quite prepared, sir, to stake my reputation upon what I have asserted!"

"Then there is no more to be said."

"Quite so," assented Mr. Linton. "Grundy is certainly not the boy I should have been inclined to suspect. But it is a fact that I had occasion to punish him severely on Tuesday, and there is no doubt, of course, that this letter was written from a spirit of revenge."

"Will you call Grundy here, Mr. Linton?"

"Certainly, sir!"

The master of the Shell left the study. Mr. Spother rose to his feet.

"My business here is concluded," he remarked.

"And I thank you very sincerely," said the Head. "You have enabled justice to be done, sir, in a matter that baffled me completely."

"My profession is to serve the ends of justice, sir," said Mr. Spother, quite gracious again now. "If you prefer—ahem!—to send on your cheque—"

"One moment, sir."

The Head took his cheque-book from his desk, and Mr. Spother left the study with his cheque in his pocket-book. Mr. Spother's fee was a somewhat heavy one, being in proportion to his celebrity; but the Head felt that it was more than worth it, to clear up an unpleasant mystery and visit punishment upon the right shoulders.

Mr. Linton arrived with Grundy as the expert gentleman left the study. Grundy came in with a very cheery and confident manner.

The grim, stern look of the Head abashed him a little, however. Grundy blinked at the Head. Inwardly he wondered what the old gentleman was looking at him like a gargoyle for.

"You—you sent for me, sir?" said Grundy.

"Yes, Grundy."

"If I can be of any assistance, sir—"

"Of—of any assistance?"

"Yes, sir. I am quite willing to collaborate with the expert, if necessary. I have no doubt—no doubt whatever—that I should be of the greatest service—"

"Cease this impertinent nonsense at once, Grundy!" said the Head sternly.

"Eh? I—I beg your pardon, sir."

"You have been sent for, Grundy, to receive your sentence!"

"Mum-mum-my sentence, sir?" stammered the astonished Grundy.

"Yes, sir!" thundered the Head. "Your guilt is proved!"

"Mum-mum-my gig-gig-guilt!" stuttered Grundy. "What have I done, sir?"

Dr. Holmes pointed to the anonymous letter.

"You wrote that infamous, insulting letter to your Form-master, Grundy!"

Grundy staggered.

"I did?" he gasped.

"Yes, you!"

"B-b-but I didn't, sir!" Grundy managed to articulate. "I've got my suspicions about some fellows—"

"You wrote that letter, Grundy! Doubtless you did not anticipate when you wrote it that I should employ a celebrated handwriting expert to detect the writer. But no trouble or expense was too great, in order to place the guilt upon the guilty person's shoulders. I was quite aware, Grundy, when you visited this room yesterday, that your audacious attempt to gain possession of the letter was dictated by a fear of the expert's examination of it—"

"N-n-not at all, sir!"

"In any case, Grundy, the matter is now proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. I trust you will not add falsehoods to your guilt."

"But—but I didn't do it, sir!" yelled Grundy, in utter dismay. "The expert must be a silly fool, sir—"

"What?" thundered the Head.

"Why, he must be a howling idiot!" exclaimed Grundy indignantly. "Do you mean to say, sir, that he's found out it was my hand—?"

"Precisely!"

"But it wasn't, sir! I swear it wasn't! The man's a silly ass! All experts are silly asses, sir! Look at the military experts who write in the papers—"

"Enough! Grundy, you are sentenced to be flogged!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Silence! The school will be assembled in Hall before afternoon lessons, and you will be flogged in the presence of all your schoolfellows. You may go for the present, Grundy!"

Grundy stood rooted to the floor.

"But—but—but—" he choked.

"Go!"

"But—I say—I—"

Mr. Linton took Grundy by the collar, and led him from the study. Grundy went like a fellow in a dream.

CHAPTER 11.

The Only Way!

"GWUNDAY!"

"Old Grundy!"

"That ass!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The news spread like wildfire. Grundy of the Shell had been adjudged guilty of writing the anonymous letter to Mr. Linton; Grundy of the Shell was to receive a public flogging for the offence.

The juniors were astonished. Wilkins and Gunn were quite dismayed. Old Grundy! It was incredible.

Grundy was every sort of an ass, known and unknown. That was admitted even by his best chums. But Grundy, with all his faults, had never been known to play a dirty trick, or a mean trick, or a cowardly trick. And such a trick as writing an anonymous letter of abuse was undoubtedly dirty, mean, and cowardly. The fellows could scarcely believe their ears. But the expert evidence of the celebrated scientific gentleman, Mr. Spothier, settled the matter. The man upon whose skill lives and liberties had depended in courts of law, was not likely to have made a mistake. Grundy had done it! Grundy must have done it!

"So that was why he was playing detective?" Racke remarked sneeringly. "That was why he said it wasn't a Shell chap!"

"Looks like it now," said Mellish.

"And that was why he was trying to fix it on some chap in the Fourth!" sneered Levison. "Jolly deep of Grundy. I must say! I thought he was simply playing the fool, as usual. I didn't know he was so deep."

"I—I suppose that expert knows what he's talking about," said Talbot of the Shell, with knitted brows. The crowd were discussing it in the quad in great excitement after dinner.

"I suppose he does, Talbot," said Tom Merry. "He's an expert. Experts see a lot of things other people don't see."

"And if they don't see 'em, they imagine 'em," grinned Monty Lowther. "I know how much I'd listen to a hand-writing expert if I were a judge."

"But—but the man couldn't be fool enough to make a mistake!" exclaimed Tom, aghast. "Why, it might be a more serious matter than a flogging!"

"I thought he looked a self-sufficient sort of bounder," said Talbot quietly. "I can't believe that Grundy did it. It's all rot to say he's been spoofing all this time. He's a born fool, but he's not a rotter!"

"I know he didn't do it!" shouted Wilkins.

"Of course he didn't!" said Gunn, almost tearfully. "Old Grundy play a dirty trick like that? He'd play any fool trick you like, but never a dirty trick!"

"Well, it's settled, anyway, that he did it," remarked Blake.

"Gwunday!" Arthur Augustus was repeating dazedly.

"Gwunday! Bai Jove, Gwunday!"

"Yes, it is a surprise," said Dig. "But there's no need for you to look so worried, old scout. You're not going to be flogged."

"Gwunday is not goin' to be flogged, eithah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Gwunday did not do it!"

"The expert's proved it," said Herries.

"The expert is an utter ass, Hewwies!"

Herries chuckled.

"I dare say he is, Gussy; and Grundy must have been an ass to write that letter to Linton. He might have known it would come out."

"He did not write it, Hewwies."

"How do you know, fathead?"

"I do know, Hewwies! I am quite sure of it!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Where is Wacke? I want to speak to Wacke!"

Racke had left the crowd, feeling very satisfied. If Grundy of the Shell was flogged for that insulting letter to Mr.

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Linton, there was no further inquiry for anybody to fear. Grundy's punishment, too, was rather gratifying to Racke personally. Racke was what Grundy called a smoky cad; and Grundy, who was convinced that it was his lofty duty to bring other fellows up in the way they should go, had sometimes been rather heavy-handed with the cad of the Shell. Having his cigarettes stuffed down his back had not pleased Aubrey Racke at all.

Grundy had gone to his study, quite overcome. In the midst of his wonderful investigations the matter had been settled without his assistance, and it had been settled that he was the guilty party. Grundy had, quite unintentionally, laboured to draw suspicion upon himself, and certainly he had succeeded.

The unfortunate Shell fellow was quite overcome. He sat in the armchair in his study, blinking before him dazedly. He was adjudged guilty—on the evidence of an expert gentleman, whose assertion could not be doubted. It was amazing, stunning, flabbergasting! And he was going to be flogged! Before the school went in to afternoon lessons he was to be hoisted in B.G. Hall, and flogged before St. Jim's!

He, George Alfred Grundy!

It was incredible, but it was only too true. Grundy wondered whether he was dreaming. It seemed like a bad dream.

Wilkins and Gunn came into the study looking very downcast. They often found George Alfred Grundy trying. There were many rows in Grundy's study. But now that he was down on his luck, Wilkins and Gunn forgot their many little troubles with Grundy, and they were all indignant sympathy.

"Grundy, old chap," faltered Wilkins. "I—I say, this is rotten!"

"Heavily shame!" mumbled Gunn.

Grundy looked at them with staring eyes.

"You chaps know I didn't do it?" he said.

"Of—of course you didn't, Grundy."

"The Head's an ass!" said Grundy. "Fancy believing an expert's evidence! I wouldn't hang a Hun on an expert's evidence. And I was getting on with the case rippingly, too. By this evening I expect I should have settled whether it was Levison or Mellish!"

"Ahem! I—I wish you hadn't taken it up, old chap," said Wilkins. "Most of the fellows think you were doing that to show it on somebody else."

"They think that, do they?" ejaculated Grundy. "Now I put it to you, am I that kind of a rotter?"

"No, you ain't, old fellow. You're only a born idiot," said Wilkins comfortingly. "You were bound to bring suspicion on yourself. It wouldn't be you if you hadn't!"

"What?" yelled Grundy.

"I—I mean it's very unfortunate, as it's happened," said Wilkins hastily. "But your own pals don't believe you did it, Grundy, old man. We stick to you."

"Like glue," said Gunn.

Wilkins and Gunn rather expected an outburst of grateful emotion from Grundy. But George Alfred only nodded.

"Of course," he said, "you chaps ain't very bright, but you can see that I didn't do it. Fancy the Head not being able to see it when you chaps can."

"Oh!" said Wilkins and Gunn together. Evidently there was to be no outburst of gratitude from Grundy.

"It beats me hollow," said Grundy. "Fancy anybody thinking I could do such a thing! Only a rotten Hun would write an anonymous letter. And the Head's going to give me a flogging—me, you know!" Even yet Grundy could scarcely believe it. "I don't mind that so much. I ain't soft. But fancy fellows thinking I'd do such a thing! What's the time now?"

"Quarter to two, old chap."

"And the flogging's fixed for two," said Grundy. "Not much time for me to find out the right party, and prove it. But I'm going to try."

"But—but you can't, you know."

"I don't know," said Grundy. "A chap of my abilities is never really beaten. It was Levison or Mellish—the question is, which?"

"I—I say, it must have been a Shell chap, you know."

"Don't talk rot, George Wilkins! I've said already that it wasn't a Shell chap. Upon the whole, I consider it was Levison. Come with me!"

"Where—where are you going?"

"I'm going to make Levison own up. Same as I did when he hid Manners' camera, and I had the job of finding it. There's no time for finesse, you know. I can't complete the case as I intended; it will be necessary to come down heavy," Grundy explained.

"But—but what are you going to do?" gasped Gunn.

"I'm going to hammer Levison till he owns up," said

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Grundy. "It's the only way. It may seem a little high-handed—"

"My hat! I should rather think so!"

"But you can see for yourselves that it's the only way, can't you?"

"But—but suppose Levison didn't do it?" howled Wilkins.

"He did; I've told you so already. Come on!"

Grundy strode from the study, quite brisk again now. He hadn't much time left, but a quarter of an hour was lots of time to a fellow of Grundy's abilities. Wilkins and Gunn followed him in an almost dazed state. It was safe to say that no other fellow in Grundy's situation would have acted as Grundy was doing. Grundy was always original. Though the skies had fallen, Grundy would still have been Grundy.

CHAPTER 12.

A Painful Predicament.

"WACKE, you uttah wottah!"

Arthur Augustus had found Racke of the Shell at last. Racke had been seeking to avoid the interview, but the swell of St. Jim's ran him down in a secluded corner of the quadrangle.

Arthur Augustus was fairly trembling with excitement and indignation.

"What do you want?" growled Racke, with a savage look.

"Gwunday's goin' to be flogged for w'itin' that lettah—"

"Serve him right!"

"Bai Jove! You know he didn't w'rite it."

"The expert says he did," grinned Racke.

"The expert is a sillay ass!"

"You'd better tell the Head so. No good coming and telling me."

"You w'ote that lettah to Mr. Linton, Wacke!"

Racke shrugged his shoulders.

"Wacke, you know you are the wottah who w'ote that wotten lettah! You tried to get it out of the Head's study and burn it last night. You admitted it then."

"I wasn't in the Head's study last night," said Racke. "You're dreaming! I was in my bed. And whether I was or not, you promised to say nothing about it."

"I am quite aware of that, Wacke. I pwomised wottah washly not to wefer to you. I did not foresee this."

"Well, a promise is a promise."

"Weally, Wacke—"

"And if you're going to break your word, remember that you've got to prove what you say," said Racke, between his teeth. "I shall deny it all."

"You can hardly deny the truth, Wacke, I pwesume?"

"You'll see, you fool."

"I will pass oveh that oppwobvious expression, Wacke. There is no time to thrash you. I am quite aware that I cannot bweak a pwomise; but that does not make any difference. You cannot allow poor old Gwunday to be flogged for what you know you did. You are goin' to own up."

"Rats!"

Arthur Augustus gazed at Racke, his eye gleaming behind his eyeglass. That the outsider of the Shell would remain silent while another fellow took his punishment seemed incredible to Gussy's simple mind at first. But that was very evidently Racke's intention.

"Is it possible, Wacke, that you are not goin' to own up?"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" growled Racke. "Do you think I want to be flogged?"

"You cannot let Gwunday be flogged, and disgwaced, too, for what you did!"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Then I expect you to welease me fwom the pwomise I made you, Wacke, as it was made undah a misappwewhension."

"You mean you're goin' to break your promise?" sneered Racke. "Well, if you do, I shall deny the whole yarn, and you can't prove it."

And he walked away towards the School House. The prefects were shepherding the juniors into Big Hall now, and every fellow had to be present. The swell of the Fourth stared after him in almost incredulous disgust.

"Bai Jove," he ejaculated, "I weally believe that fellah must be a Hun—a Pwussian Hun; I do weally!"

"Come on, Gussy!" shouted Blake across the quad.

"I'm comin', deah boy!"

There was a sudden sound of yelling from under the elm-trees in the quad. Kildare of the Sixth came out of the School House.

"Where is Grundy? My hat!"

Kildare dashed across towards the elms. Grundy was there. Levison of the Fourth was wriggling in his powerful grasp.

and Grundy was knocking his head against the trunk of a tree. Levison minor of the Third was dragging at Grundy with both hands, to help his major, but he had no effect upon the burly Grundy. Wilkins and Gunn stood looking on helplessly.

"Grundy!" shouted Kildare.

Grundy glanced round.

"All serene, Kildare!" he said. "Don't interrupt! I'm getting the truth out of him. Now then, own up, Levison!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" yelled Levison. "Leggo!"

"Bai Jove! What are you waggin' Levison for, Gwunday?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, dragging the Shell fellow by the shoulder.

"Keep off! And yank that silly fag away!" gasped Grundy.

"I'm getting the truth out of Levison."

"Yaroo! Help!" raved Levison.

The astounded Kildare seized Grundy by the collar and wrenched him away from his hapless victim. Levison reeled against the tree, his face crimson with rage.

"Leggo!" shouted Grundy, struggling. But even Grundy was not much use in the grasp of the stalwart captain of St. Jim's. Kildare held him easily.

"This isn't a time for bullying, Grundy!" said Kildare sternly. "You're to come in now for your flogging."

"I'm not bullying," spluttered Grundy indignantly. "I'm getting at the truth. Levison wrote that anonymous letter, you know."

"What!"

"I've not had time to complete the case properly, so I'm getting the truth out of him this way. I wish you wouldn't interfere. Another bang or two and he would have owned up. Leggo!"

"You silly idiot!" shrieked Levison, rubbing his head savagely. "I'm coming to see you flogged. I shall enjoy it."

"Bai Jove, you are a howlin' idiot, Gwunday!"

"Let me go, Kildare! Will you let me go?"

Kildare did not reply, but he marched Grundy away to the School House with a grip of iron on his collar. It was useless for Grundy to wriggle; he had to go. Still expostulating frantically, he disappeared into the building with the captain of St. Jim's.

"Well, of all the howling asses!" said Tom Merry. "Grundy really does take the cake! But it looks as if he didn't do it, all the same, you fellows."

"Into Hall, you kids!" called out Darrel of the Sixth.

Fellows were streaming into Hall now from all sides. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went with the rest, sorely troubled in his mind. He had promised Racke not to betray him, and with Arthur Augustus a promise was a promise not to be broken. He could not, as he would have put it, act like a Prussian. But if he kept his thoughtless promise to Racke, Grundy was to be flogged for what D'Arcy knew Racke had done. It was a painful predicament for Arthur Augustus.

Racke's action the previous night was conclusive proof. Certainly he had had no cause to fear the evidence of the expert, as it had turned out. But Racke had not known that the celebrated expert was a solemn donkey, and he had betrayed himself to Arthur Augustus, who could not betray him. But if Racke did not choose to own up, how could Arthur Augustus stand by and see an innocent fellow flogged? It was a predicament Gussy could see no way out of.

Big Hall was crowded with fellows, seniors and juniors, ranked in their Forms. There was a subdued buzz of voices.

Taggles, the porter, was there, ready to do his painful duty. Upon a table lay the birch, the instrument of punishment. Grundy stood by the table, Kildare close by him. Grundy was so excited that there was no telling what he might do, and a prefect's aid might be needed. There was a hush as the upper door in the Hall opened, and the Head came in with a very grave face.

Arthur Augustus glanced across at Racke, standing cool and quiet among the Shell fellows. Racke did not meet his eyes.

Dr. Holmes took up the birch.

"Grundy!" he said sternly.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Grundy.

"You are about to be flogged for a rascally, detestable, and cowardly insult to your Form-master. I trust the lesson will not be lost upon you. Taggles, take up Master Grundy!"

"Yes, sir."

Taggles advanced to do his duty. Grundy sprang back, putting up his fists.

"Hands off!" he shouted.

"Grundy!" thundered the Head.

"I'm not going to be flogged!" roared Grundy. "I tell you, I didn't do it—never thought of such a thing. If you'd give me time I'd find out the fellow who did do it. I'm not going to be flogged for nothing!"

"Another word, Grundy, and I will expel you from the

school instead of administering a flogging!" thundered Dr. Holmes. "Taggles, take this boy up at once!"

Grundy dropped his hands. The Head was in deadly earnest. Grundy did not want to be sacked from St. Jim's.

Taggles grasped him, unresisting, and hoisted him. There was a dead silence in the Hall as the Head raised the birch. It was broken by a sudden shout.

"Stop!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form rushed forward.

CHAPTER 13.

Arthur Augustus Chips In!

"D'ARCY!"

"Gussy! Come back, you fathead!"

"Gussy, you ass!"

Arthur Augustus did not heed. He strode right up the Hall, looking neither to the right nor to the left. The doctor, astounded, stood with the raised birch in his hand, as if turned to stone.

"Go back to your place, D'Arcy!" rapped out Mr. Railton sharply.

Still the swell of the Fourth did not heed.

He arrived breathless.

"If you please, Dr. Holmes—"

"Boy!" gasped the Head. "How dare you? How dare you interrupt these proceedings, I say? Kildare, take that junior aside. He shall be punished after Grundy!"

"I feel bound to speak, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "Gwundy did not write that wotten lettah to Mr. Linton, and I know who did!"

"By gum!" ejaculated Grundy.

Dr. Holmes looked fixedly at Arthur Augustus. He motioned to Kildare to stand back. There was a buzz of amazement in the crowded Hall, but it died away as Dr. Holmes raised his hand for silence.

"D'Arcy! As you have made such a statement, I am bound to listen to you. You state that you know who wrote that insulting letter to Mr. Linton, and that it was not Grundy?"

"Yaas, sir!"

"If you are speaking idly, D'Arcy, your punishment will be very severe."

"I am not speakin' idly, sir!"

"Then kindly tell me at once what you know about the matter."

Arthur Augustus drew a deep breath. Between the necessity of keeping his promise to Racke of the Shell, and the equal necessity of saving Grundy from undeserved punishment, he was upon delicate ground. But Arthur Augustus had unbounded reliance upon his own tact and judgment.

"I found out the twuth by accident last night, sir!"

"Then why did you not inform me or your Housemaster before?"

D'Arcy raised his head proudly.

"I am not a sneak, sir!"

"Good old Gussy!" murmured Blake.

"Ahem! But, now—"

"And aftahwards, sir, the wottah—I mean, the chap—asked me to pwomise not to give him away, and, without thinkin', I pwomised. But I can pwove that it was not Gwundy."

"I am waiting for you to do so, D'Arcy," said the Head grimly. "You may put Master Grundy down for the moment, Taggles!"

Grundy slid down to his feet. Taggles was not sorry for the relief; Grundy was no light-weight.

"I was out of the dorm last night, sir!"

"Indeed! And what were you doing out of the dormitory?"

"Of course, sir, I am mentionin' that in confidence."

"Wha-a-at!"

"I was goin' to jape Gwundy, sir, because he is such a widiculous ass. But I am awah that it is against the wules to leave the dormitory at midnight. But I am simply mentionin' that circumstance, sir, for the sake of justice. Undah the cires, sir, I expect you to tweat that revelation as confidential."

"As—as—as confidential!" ejaculated the Head, looking at Arthur Augustus as if he would eat him. "A confidence between a junior of the Fourth Form and his Headmaster?"

"No, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Between one gentleman and anothah, sir!"

A pin might have been heard to drop in Big Hall. The expression upon the Head's face was extraordinary for a moment.

The juniors held their breath. But the expected storm

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did not burst. There was something in D'Arcy's frank and quite dignified manner that disarmed the Head.

"We will pass over the matter of your being out of your dormitory at forbidden hours, D'Arcy," said the Head at last. "That is of no moment now."

"Yass, sir. I expected that," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Well, sir, while I was out of the dorm I heard somebody movin' about, and I thought pewwaps it was a burglar. But I could not verry well give the alarm, as I thought also that it might be some chap pweowlin' wound for somethin'. So I followed him to find out pweecisely what was up, sir, and I followed him to your study."

"To—to my study! Last night!"

"Yass, sir. He was fumblin' in the dwawah of your w'iting-table, with a match, and I turned on the light and cornahed him. He had taken that lettah out of your dwawah to destroy it. So I know, of course, that he was the chap who had w'itten the lettah, and he was afraid of the expert pweein' it when he came. In fact, he admitted it. I w'efused to allow him to do anythin' of the sort, and I made him w'ep'ace the lettah, and I locked your door on the outside, sir, and took away the key, so that he could not go back and do it, nstah all."

"That is a very extraordinary statement, D'Arcy!"

"Yass, isn't it, sir? I got down wathah early to unlock the door, and put the key back, sir, of course, as I did not want anythin' to be known about the mattah."

"Who was the boy you saw in my study, D'Arcy?"

"It was not Grundy, sir!"

"No jolly fear!" said Grundy. "I never went out of the dorm last night. I know that!"

"You need not speak, Grundy. D'Arcy, what was the name of the boy who attempted to purloin the letter from my study last night?"

"I am sor'wy I cannot tell you, sir. I wathah wathly p'romised him not to give him away. You would not p'commend me to bweak a promise, sir!"

The Head coughed.

"You had no right to make such a promise, D'Arcy."

"Yass, sir. I feel that myself! But I did make the p'romise, and the uttah wottah w'efuses to w'ease me f'rom it, and he w'efuses to own up, too!"

"To what form did this boy belong, D'Arcy?"

"The Shell, sir?"

"My hat!" exclaimed Grundy.

"Will you be silent, Grundy?" The Head paused, looking very curiously at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "D'Arcy, if I did not know you to be a truthful and honourable lad I should suppose that you had invented this story to save Grundy from punishment. As it is, I believe you."

"Yass, sir. Of course! I expect you to take my word."

Dr. Holmes coughed again, and Mr. Railton turned his head away to hide a smile. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was almost too much for him. But it was so evident that the Honourable Arthur Augustus had told the exact truth that the most suspicious of headmasters could scarcely have entertained a doubt. The Head was in a curious position. As he fully believed D'Arcy's statement, he could scarcely proceed with Grundy's punishment, in spite of the valuable evidence of the handwriting expert. Neither could the reverend gentleman very well command the junior to break a promise. He stood for some moments in deep thought.

"You may go, D'Arcy," he said. "You may also go, Grundy. The school is dismissed. The matter will be inquired into further."

The St. Jim's fellows streamed out of Hall. Arthur Augustus was immediately surrounded by a curious crowd in the corridor. Grundy pushed his way through them.

"D'Arcy, I'm much obliged to you for speaking up!" he began.

"Pway, don't mench, deah boy!"

"You're sure it was a Shell chap you saw in the Head's study?"

"Yee! Wathah!"

"That's jolly odd! I'd worked it out that it was a Fourth Form chap who wrote the letter!" said Grundy, looking puzzled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at. I've had a jolly narrow escape!" said Grundy. "It was jolly lucky D'Arcy got up to jape me last night, and I'm not going to lick him for it!"

"Bal Jove!"

"I'm not!" said Grundy magnanimously.

"You uttah ass!"

"You'd better look for the chap in the Shell now, Grundy," grinned Tom Merry. "Which of us was it, Sherlock Holmes?"

"You think I can't spot him?" said Grundy. "Well, that's just where I come in. I've got the cad! Upon the
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whole, I should have worked it out in the long run that he was in the Shell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In fact, now I come to think of it, I had a—sort of idea all along that he was a Shell chap!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wilkins.

"Don't interrupt me, Wilkins! I may say, I had practically worked it out that it was a Shell fellow. And I know who it was, too. I know who sneaked out of bounds on Tuesday evening. It was Racke. I saw him. Now I know why he was pumping me to find out just where the letter was in the Head's study, after I'd been there. And I've a jolly good mind to go to Railton—"

"Mr. Railton is here," said a deep voice.

"Oh, my hat!"

The Housemaster had come out of Hall as Grundy's loud voice resounded. A sudden silence fell upon the juniors. Racke was pale as death.

"Racke, you were out of bounds on Tuesday evening, it appears?"

"No, sir," panted Racke.

"I jolly well saw you, you Prussian!" roared Grundy. "Crooke was helping you over the wall. You asked me not to mention it, you Hun! And—"

"Crooke, come forward!"

Crooke came forward, flushed and uneasy.

"Did Racke go out of bounds on Tuesday evening, Crooke?"

"I saw him, sir," exclaimed Grundy. "I mentioned it to Wilkins at the time. Didn't I, Wilkins? I said the rotter ought to be scragged!"

"You did, old chap," said Wilkins.

"Silence! Answer me, Crooke!"

Crooke gave his confederate a helpless look. It was not easy to tell the lie direct under Mr. Railton's searching eyes.

"I—I didn't know what Racke was going for, sir," faltered Crooke. "I—I never knew anything about the letter. I—I guessed afterwards; but—but I didn't know. I swear I had nothing to do with it, sir!"

"That will do, Racke, you went out of school bounds on Tuesday evening, the time the letter was posted to Mr. Linton. You have denied doing so."

"I—I went out, sir," muttered Racke. "But I—I had nothing to do with the letter. I—I swear I hadn't!"

"Bal Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus involuntarily. Racke's powers as a liar took his breath away.

Mr. Railton glanced at him for a moment.

"Have you anything to say, D'Arcy?"

"Nunno, sir."

"Racke, there is no proof at present that you are the guilty party, but I warn you that you are under very grave suspicion. The matter will be investigated most thoroughly."

Mr. Railton passed on.

"There's not much doubt about it now," said Tom Merry, his lip curling as he looked at Racke's scared face. "It was Racke, Gussy!"

"I p'romised him not to tell the Head, Tom Mewwy, and I am not suah whethah I should be justified in tellin' you, deah boy, so, upon the whole, I will say nothin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen," said Blake, "Racke did it, and he's a crawling, cringing un. I vote that we give him the frog's-march round the quad."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yass, wathah! I wegard that as the pwopah capah, undah the circs."

And Racke of the Shell experienced the joys of the frog's-march, and he was very dusty and dishevelled when he escaped at last. But his greatest fear was that that was not the worst. There was little doubt in anyone's mind of Racke's guilt, but complete proof was lacking; and the Head was not inclined to put the matter in the hands of a self-satisfied expert again. So Racke's mind was set at rest, though he was left with an uncomfortable feeling that the eye of authority was upon him, and that it behoved him to tread warily.

As for Grundy, he was, of course, completely cleared, and in a very short time Grundy was quite convinced that he had been cleared by his own remarkable abilities as an amateur Sherlock Holmes. And he held forth upon the subject in the study to such length that Wilkins and Gunn came near to wishing that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hadn't chipped in, and George Alfred had got his flogging.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE WISDOM OF GUSSY!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

YOU MUST NOT FAIL TO TURN TO THE BACK PAGE OF THIS ISSUE.

A NEW ADVENTURE SERIAL.

START TO-DAY!



THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

CARTON ROSS, a lonely and friendless youth, is attacked while asleep by a party of brigands, led by DIRK RALWIN. He is disarmed, and narrowly escapes with his life by plunging into the roaring waters of the Amazon. He is picked up by a small boat, which is carrying HARVEY MILBURNE and his daughter, LORNA, to their home at San Ramo, a small settlement some miles away.

Carton's father (the son of CYRUS ROSS, a famous money magnate) has just died, and Cyrus Ross, with the rest of his sons and relatives, is drowned by the collision of the financier's yacht with a battleship in the Channel during a fog. Carton Ross is, therefore, the sole surviving member of the Ross family, and heir to millions, though he is unaware of it. Dirk Ralwin, who has stolen Carton's wallet containing papers which reveal his identity, hears of the great calamity which has befallen the family, and at once sets out for San Ramo, where Carton has gone with the Milburnes.

After destroying the house, the outlaws carry Ross away to their encampment. During the night, however, Lorna appears at his tent, aids him in recovering his papers, and together they escape. They succeed in shaking off their pursuers by swimming across the river to an island, where they come upon an old ruined building, occupied by an Englishman, RODDY GARRIN, and a Chinese, AH CHING. They are made welcome, and all lie down to sleep.

They are pursued by a gang of Dirk Ralwin's ruffians and HUXTON FENNER (a Yankee who has deserted his companions, Roddy Garrin and the Chinese), but leave the island by means of a raft.

Later they pick up with a steamer, and have just been taken on board, when a Mexican cruiser appears and forces the captain to hand them over.

A mutiny breaks out in the cruiser, and they succeed in making their escape. Later, the vessel is blown up. The party obtain shelter in a small settlement, with an old Spaniard, and the next day, while they are away from the hut endeavouring to make arrangements to get away from the country, the place is burnt down by some of Dirk Ralwin's men, and Lorna, who had been left in the old man's care, is carried away. They succeed in reaching Quito—a town which has been taken over by the outlaws—in their search for Lorna. Dirk Ralwin is standing upon the balcony of the Customs House, waiting for news of the cruiser.

(Now read on.)

The Messenger—The Spy's Report—A Terrible Ordeal—The Surprise.

The sound of footsteps caught his ear. Turning round, he came face to face with Ayton Aylman, whose nervous manner and pale, anxious face aroused his suspicions in a moment.

"Well," he said harshly, as the other hesitated, "are you dumb, man?"

"There is bad news of the Emperor," Aylman answered. "Last night some of her crew mutinied, and in the fighting that followed she was blown up, and nearly all on board perished. Captain Eshman, who has just arrived here, and three seriously injured men are the only survivors.

The Emperor lost! The full meaning of the startling intelligence imparted to him struck Dirk Ralwin like a violent blow. Unsteadily his hand sought the balcony-rail, and clung to it as if for support.

The fate of the cruiser and her officers and crew scarcely

troubled him at the moment. It was of Carton Ross, the English lad, who was heir to a colossal fortune, that he thought with feverish emotion.

"Where is Eshman?" he inquired. "I must see him immediately. Go, and bring him here at once!"

The order was carried out. Stepping across the balcony into the room beyond it, Ralwin confronted Captain Eshman with a curious stare. That unfortunate individual presented a sorry spectacle. His uniform—torn, soiled, and bedraggled—clung limply to his body. He was hatless, and without a sword.

His square beard, which he was wont to comb and curl with such pride, bristled raggedly from his chin. His puffy cheeks were pale and sunken, and as he looked at Ralwin he wrung his hands, and tears actually started to his eyes.

"My ship is lost!" he said, his squeaky voice raised to a high, tragic note. "My career is ended! What a calamity this is for me! All my years of service count for nothing. I shall lose my rank, my pension—"

"Your head, too," Ralwin interrupted him savagely; "and scr— you right! Stop drivelling, and tell me all about it, from beginning to end. No lies, mind, or you shall have cause to wish that you had gone down with your ship instead of living to meet me!"

This bullying exhortation gave Captain Eshman a more collected frame of mind, as well as inspiring him with a quaking dread of the redoubtable outlaw, with whom he had never previously come into personal contact.

With much dramatic gesturing, and frequent clutches with both hands at his beard, he told of the mutiny that had lost the Mexican Navy a fine cruiser, and him his command. Now and then he was on the verge of breaking down and giving vent to a noisy outburst of lamentation, but the cold, stern eye of Dirk Ralwin checked him in time, and started him off at express speed on some fresh explanation of the disaster that had overtaken him.

"That will do," said Ralwin at last. "You are to blame for the mutiny. That is plain enough to me. Had you guarded against it by observing ordinary precautions, it could never have taken place. But you must bear the consequences of your own stupidity. Go! Leave Quito at once. I have no further use for you!"

A ludicrous expression of terrified amazement creeping over his face, the unhappy captain stared at the other with eyes almost bulging out of their sockets.

"Leave Quito!" he said. "But I have nowhere to go to. You must protect me. The Government will order an inquiry into the loss of the Emperor. Then everything will come out. It will be known that for months past I have been working secretly for the revolutionary cause, and I shall be tried and shot as a traitor!"

"Bah!" exclaimed Ralwin contemptuously. "What may happen to you is no concern of mine. You have failed me, and I've done with you. The actual loss of the cruiser is a small matter to me. It is because you did not see to it that your prisoners were saved and brought to me that I have lost all trust in you."

At this moment the door opened, and Ayton Aylman came back into the room. There was an alert, eager look in his face that had not been there a few minutes before.

"A native, one of our secret agents," he said to Ralwin, "has brought in word to the effect that a young English girl is staying in a house occupied by a Spanish loyalist who has long been suspected by us of carrying information to the

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"THE WISDOM OF GUSSY!"

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale
of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Government authorities. From the description of the girl given to me, I have no doubt that she is Lorna Milburne."

Dirk Ralwin, a flush of excitement rising to his cheeks sprang to his feet.

"Lorna Milburne!" he exclaimed. "In that case, not only she but Carton Ross must have escaped from the cruiser. Ride at once with an armed force to the place, and capture all those you find there. Then burn the house to the ground, and return here with your prisoners. Take Captain Eshman with you. He will have no difficulty in identifying the girl."

The two men departed on their mission, and five minutes later a mounted force rode out of Quito towards the forest. Led by the native spy who had supplied Aylman with the information respecting Lorna, the outlaws were speedily at the log-hut where she had taken refuge.

The old Spaniard, who was walking to and fro in the clearing round the hut, saw them approaching. Realising at once who they were, and why they were there, he turned and ran towards the house, in a brave attempt to give Lorna warning.

It was in vain. A rifle shot, fired by Aylman himself, laid the Spaniard low within five yards of his own doorway.

The sound of the report brought Lorna quickly out of the house. A cry of horror burst from her lips when she saw her host lying motionless on the ground. Running to the spot, she knelt at his side, and peered into his face. A single glance was sufficient to convince her that he was dead.

"Stand up!" cried a hoarse voice. "You are our prisoner, and must come with us!"

Looking round, Lorna beheld Ayton Aylmer and his men surrounding her on every side. Escape was impossible, but she did not think of it. Overwhelmed with grief and anger, she gazed at the outlaws with flashing eyes.

"You cowards!" she exclaimed. "None but cowards would have shot down a defenceless old man. But his death will not go unavenged. Be sure of that."

Aylman put a rough hand on her shoulder.

"Enough!" he said. "The fellow brought his fate upon himself. Search the house," he ordered; "and look sharp about it. We've no time to waste!"

The search was soon made. Then the outlaws, satisfied that there was no one hiding in it, set fire to the hut and rode away, with Lorna as their prisoner.

From the balcony of his room at the Customs House, Ralwin watched the little cavalcade ride through the settlement. A fierce, cruel smile parted his lips as he caught sight of Lorna Milburne in the midst of the horsemen, and it was with that smile that he welcomed her when she was brought into his presence.

"So our truant bird has come back again?" he said, in a mocking tone of voice. "We must teach her that it is dangerous to leave her cage. She will be taken better care of by us than by her own friends even."

Proudly Lorna met the gloating gaze of her formidable foe. She was in his power, a helpless prisoner, but she did not fear him. Something of this truth Ralwin divined, and it exasperated the man.

"You have been caught," he said, an ominous glitter in his eyes, "but your companions have escaped for the time being. It will be well for you to tell me at once where they are."

Lorna shook her head.

"I will tell you nothing," she answered calmly. "No threats you can use, no punishment you may inflict upon me, shall ever make me speak!"

Ralwin frowned darkly.

"You say that now," he said, "but you will think differently in another moment."

He raised his arm in a quick gesture of command that was immediately understood by Ayton Aylman, who went to the door and gave an order to the guards stationed outside.

There was a shuffle of feet along the passage, and then—thin, worn, and emaciated by illness and privation, and with heavy iron fetters clanking from his wrists—Harvey Milburne was pushed roughly into the room.

One look told Lorna who the prisoner was, and instantly an expression of mingled delight, grief, and compassionate love irradiated her beautiful face.

"Father!" she cried, darting towards him. "Dear father!"

But before her outstretched arms could clasp him in a fond embrace she was seized and pulled back. Held by his captors, Harvey Milburne was likewise unable to move a step. So they stood, parent and child, kept apart by those who mocked at their emotion.

"Yes," said Dirk Ralwin to the girl, "there is your father, and it is for you to decide whether he shall live or die!"

Lorna gave a quick start of fear and surprise.

"You must know where Carton Ross is in hiding," Ralwin continued. "You know where he was when you last saw him. Give me that information, and your father shall be

set at liberty. Refuse to give it, and he shall be taken out and shot."

In the silence that followed Lorna, her face paling to the lips, looked at her father. He smiled as his gaze met her own.

"You must refuse," he said firmly. "You dare not betray the trust your comrades have placed in you."

"Silence!" thundered Ralwin furiously. "Let your daughter decide the question for herself!"

Under the terrible ordeal she was called upon to bear, Lorna Milburne was as a reed bent and shaken by the wind. Yet her strength and courage never failed her in that supreme crisis in her life.

All her love and devotion urged her to give Dirk Ralwin the information that he demanded. It was dreadful to know that the life of her father depended upon her will.

The mystery of what had happened to him during the attack made by the outlaws on their home at San Ramo was a mystery no longer. He was alive, though a prisoner, and she yearned passionately to speak the words that would set him at liberty.

But an indestructible sense of honour and loyalty intervened between her and her natural desire. She could save her father, but in doing so she would betray Carton Ross to a hopeless fate. There was no alternative choice to make. It must be one thing or the other.

"Come," said Dirk Ralwin impatiently. "I am waiting for your decision. Where is Carton Ross?"

"He is here!" cried a strong, resolute voice. "Look this way, Dirk Ralwin, and you will see him!"

There, looking through an open window at the far end of the room, was Carton Ross himself, a calm, fearless smile on his lips.

"Seize him!" cried Dirk Ralwin, his momentary sense of stunned amazement yielding place to fierce excitement. "Ten thousand dollars to the man who takes him prisoner!"

There was a furious rush of men across the room, but when they reached the balcony Carton Ross was nowhere in sight.

He had vanished as completely and inexplicably as he had come.

The Comrades in Hiding—Ross Returns—Ah Ching's Cunning—The Hostage.

Quito was a place set down on the banks of the Amazon and surrounded on every side by vast forests.

The illimitable growth of tree, bush, and grass started at the very boundaries of the settlement, whose residents were engaged in a ceaseless warfare with the encroaching jungle that, left alone, would have swiftly overwhelmed the little town.

In a dry hollow of the ground close to the river, where a tangled network of branching foliage overhead formed a roof impenetrable alike to sun and rain, Roddy Garrin and Ah Ching were engaged in a desultory conversation that had scant relation to what was at the back of their minds.

They were thinking of Carton Ross, wondering what was happening to him, and hoping fervently that he would soon be with them again.

Against their earnest advice he had gone off on a desperate venture with the object of ascertaining what had happened to Lorna. The hiding-place in the covered hollows of the forest where they had taken shelter promised them ample security from their foes, but to go outside it was to court the immediate danger of detection and capture.

But Ross, anxious and fearful as to the fate of Lorna, was not to be deterred from his purpose of finding out what had become of the girl by any risks that might imperil his own safety.

When they found that he was determined to go, his two comrades implored him to take them with him; but he refused to, pointing out that where one might succeed three would most assuredly fail in broad daylight and subjected to the observation of every curious onlooker.

Some hours had now passed since his departure, and there was no sign of his return. The growing fear that he had been captured strengthened in the minds of his comrades, although they would not openly admit it.

"He'll be here soon," said Garrin for the twentieth time. "It's a game of hide-and-seek that he is playing, and he has to be mightily careful how he plays it."

"That velly true," agreed Ah Ching. "Allee same, my think he do better to take us. Three-piecee heads are better than one-piecee head in a game of that kind."

"I'm not so sure about it," said Garrin, with a sly grin, "especially when your head—a regular number one in big sizes—is in it. Folks on the watch for us would spot your cranium a mile off, my son!"

A look of offended dignity appeared in Ah Ching's yellow face.

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

FOES OF FORTUNE!

(Continued from page 20.)

"My head have got plenty brain inside," he said, "and some people no can say that—you savee?"

Roddy Garrin laughed, and patted the little Chinaman on the shoulder.

"Guess I do," he said, "and I'll admit cheerfully that you have got a sight bigger think-box on your shoulders than I have, if that'll please you."

Before Ah Ching could make any response to this dubious compliment, the narrow entrance to the hollow was darkened by a tall, active figure.

"It's Ross!" cried Garrin, running to meet his comrade. "This is a relief! Ah Ching and I have been despairing of ever seeing you again for the last three hours. Where the dickens have you been to?"

"In Quito," Carton Ross answered, "having the time of my life! It was fairly easy work getting there, but to get out again was a different proposition."

"And have you heard anything of Lorna?"

"I've seen both her and her father," said Ross. "I'll tell you how I came to," he went on to say, as both Garrin and Ah Ching started in amazed surprise. "Nobody seemed to take any notice of me when I made my way into the settlement. Of course, I didn't do anything to attract attention, you may be sure, and kept under cover as much as possible. And there were plenty of bushes and tall grass growing by the roadside. Surprising how stuff does shoot up everywhere in these parts."

"Well, after a lot of dodging about, I came to the Customs House, a fine, big building, with gardens, open to the road, all round it."

"There seemed to be quite a lot of people about, and as I was watching them who should come clattering up on horse-back but a party of armed men with Lorna herself amongst them. It was a wonder I didn't run forward shouting her name. Fortunately for me, I kept quiet."

"Lorna was taken inside, and a few moments later I looked up to see her cross a balcony and enter a room that had several big windows to it."

"So I lost no time in climbing up a pillar to the balcony and hiding behind a wall. Peering through one of the open windows into the room, I had another startler. Not only was Lorna there, but her father as well, with iron chains hanging from his wrists, and looking like a ghost."

"Dirk Ralwin was speaking to Lorna. I heard every word he said, the blackguard. He demanded that she should tell him where she had last seen us, threatening that if she refused to do so he would have her father shot. Harvey Milburne, splendid old sport that he is, told her that she must refuse. Then Ralwin asked her again to state where I was, but before she could speak I was on my feet showing myself to the whole blessed crowd!"

"You were!" cried Roddy Garrin, while Ah Ching smiled and blinked his eyes. "That was a mad thing to do!"

"No doubt," said Ross, "but you'd have done the same in my place. I couldn't stop there and keep silent while Lorna was being tortured by Ralwin in such a fiendish way. Well, directly he saw me, Ralwin bounded across the room, shouting out a reward of ten thousand dollars to the one who captured me."

Ah Ching pursed his lips together and puffed out his cheeks. "Ten thousand dollars!" he murmured. "That belong too machee money."

"Shut up!" said Roddy Garrin to the little Chinaman. "How did you escape, Ross?"

"Blessed if I hardly know myself!" was the laughing answer. "But I reckon that with Ralwin and his crowd all mad to get hold of me, it was a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth. Anyhow, I was down off the balcony and scooting across the garden in amongst the bushes, before they had time to see where I'd gone to."

"When I reached the outskirts of the town I could hear the outlaws raising no end of a row. They were shouting and jabbering fit to beat the band, and bugles were sounding the alarm all over the place!"

"Well," said Roddy Garrin, his eyes sparkling. "I envy you the time you've had, I don't mind confessing. And you've saved both Lorna and her father. Now that he knows you're in the neighbourhood, Dirk Ralwin will leave them alone. All his thoughts will be given to the task of capturing you. But it means we'll have to remain caged up here pretty close until the hue-and-cry has died down. That's a bit unfortunate for us."

Ah Ching shook his head.

"You makee mistake when you think so, Mista Garrin," he said. "While you and Mista Ross lie low, my go to Quito and make all our fortune."

His comrades stared at Ah Ching in puzzled surprise.

"Explain your meaning, son," said Roddy Garrin. "We're too dense to catch it right off the reel."

"This fortune," answered Ah Ching, "is waiting to be gobbled up. Mista Ross say just now that Dirk Ralwin offered ten thousand dollars to the man who make him prisoner. Well, the intention of this chile is to have those ten thousand piecee dollars chop-chop, and my tellee you how I do it. My go to Dirk Ralwin, and say to him, 'Lookie here, old toff, you give me the money you promised, and my take your men to Carton Ross so that they can make him prisoner.' You savee?"

For one swift moment Carton Ross and Garrin both had the ghost of a suspicion that Ah Ching, tempted by the thought of possessing the ten thousand dollars, meant to betray them. It was gone, however, in an instant, and then, so comically serious and cunning did the wrinkled, yellow face of their Chinese comrade look, they roared with mirth.

"You rogue!" cried Garrin, slapping Ah Ching violently over the shoulder. "So you would sell Ross to the enemy for filthy lucre, would you?"

"You no savee," said the little Chinaman, with a crafty leer that made him look positively hideous. "My pretend to sell him. Then Dirk Ralwin pay me over the ten thousand dollars. My put myself at the head of his men and march off. But in the darkness my makee lose those men, and come on here with the money. Now you savee?"

He winked and chuckled prodigiously, and his comrades laughed until they were red in the face.

"A noble inspiration, 'pon my word if it isn't!" said Garrin. "And you're the lad, Ah Ching, to go through with it. What d'you say, Ross?"

"I'm inclined to agree with you," Carton Ross answered, "provided Ah Ching keeps his head cool, and doesn't make any blunder. It will be great business to bamboozle Dirk Ralwin, and money we're desperately in need of, as we've been all along. With that in our possession we sha'n't have so many difficulties to contend against."

There and then the comrades settled the details of the plot that Ah Ching proposed to carry out for Dirk Ralwin's discomfiture and their own enrichment. The conference on the matter was just at an end when on Roddy Garrin's quick ear fell the sound of a rotten twig snapping outside the entrance to the hollow.

"Be quiet!" he whispered. "Someone's out there."

The three comrades, immediately on the alert, crept in single file to the entrance and took a cautious look round. They beheld a surprising spectacle.

Kneeling in the tall grass, with his head bent in a listening attitude, was none other than Captain Eshman, the late commander of the lost cruiser *Imperator*. He was alone. There was no sign of another living soul in the vicinity.

"The bounder!" whispered Garrin. "We must catch him, Ross. He has tracked you here."

The comrades made a simultaneous dash at Eshman, who, before he could open his mouth to shout or attempt any resistance, was pounced upon and dragged through the bushes into the hollow.

"Now, you sit still and keep quiet," said Roddy Garrin, "or I'll pull out your nobby whiskers by the handful!"

To make the threat more effective, he secured a fine hold of the captive's beard, and hung on to it, while Carton Ross relieved the enemy of his revolver and a band of pouched cartridges.

However proud and bellicose Captain Eshman might have been on the deck of his own ship, there was little of the warrior about him now. Feverishly anxious to reinstate himself in the good opinion of Dirk Ralwin, he had flung himself into the pursuit of Carton Ross with youthful ardour and alacrity that were amazing in one of his ponderous bulk and advanced years.

More by luck than his own agility, he managed to keep Carton Ross in sight, and had succeeded in tracking the other to the hollow by the riverside. The snapping of the rotten twig under his weight as he knelt down to listen betrayed his proximity to the fugitives, and now, fickle Fortune deserting him, he was himself a prisoner.

"Why, hang me if it isn't our friend Eshman!" said Garrin, feigning astonishment. "This is a welcome surprise. What shall we do with him, eh? We owe him something nice for his kind treatment of us on board the *Imperator*."

"Suppose you askee my advice what to do with him," remarked Ah Ching, with an amiable clutch at the beard of the captured foe, "my suggest that we hang him from the nearest tree by his thumbs! They do that in China."

Shivering and quaking in terrified apprehension of what was to happen to him, Captain Eshman, entirely forgetful of his dignity, plumped down on his knees and clasped his hands together in fervent appeal for mercy.

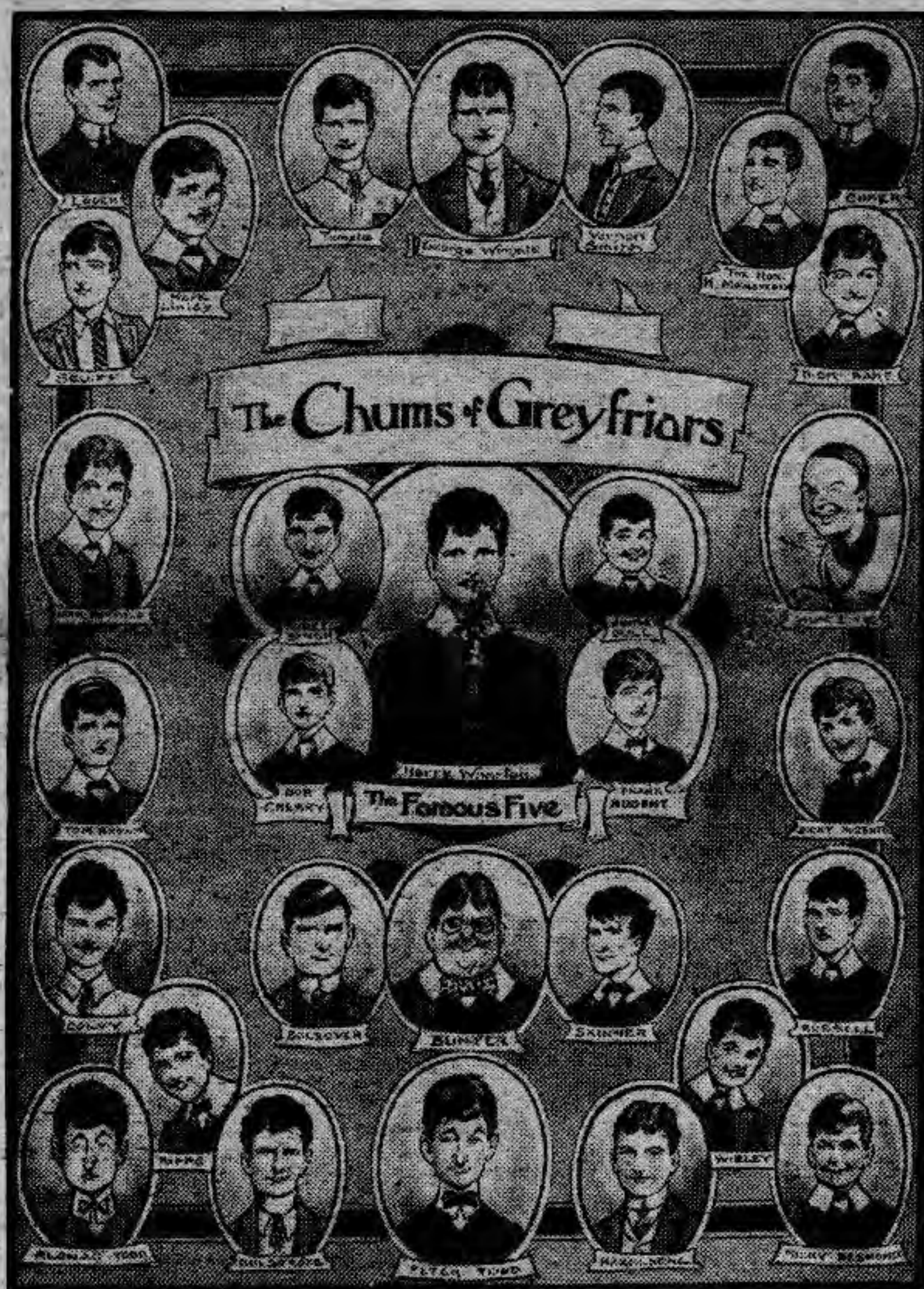
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