

THE ST. JIM'S PARLIAMENT!

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



IN THE HOUSE OF PEPPER!

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THE ST. JIM'S PARLIAMENT

A Magnificent
New, Long, Complete Story of
Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's.

By
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CHAPTER 1.

Quite a Brilliant Idea!

"B Al Jove! I've got a wally wippin' ideah!"

So spake Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, looking up from his prep in Study No. 6.

"Bury 'it, Gustavus! We've had some," replied Jack Blake.

"But this is—"

"They all are!" said Herries. "There never were such ideas—outside a lunatic asylum!"

"Weally. Hewies!"

"Oh, let him tell it, you chaps!" Digby said. "If he don't let off steam there'll be a giddy explosion."

"Ring off, you asses!" growled Blake. "I haven't finished my English into Greek yet. How would you put strong palisades," Herries?"

"Any way you like, old scout," answered Herries generously. "I don't mind."

"How have you put it?"

"That won't help, because I'm wrong, and I know it. Have a shot for yourself, and you may be right—though it's a hundred to one against. Rotten language. Greek! The people who speak such a lingo very nearly deserved to have a king like Tino—but not quite."

"How have you got it, Dig?"

"I haven't got it at all. I left a blank to put it in if anybody else happened to know."

"I can tell you, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus.

He told them. And he seemed to be right, too—or nearly enough right for the Greek words to pass muster with Mr. Lathom.

"Gustavus, you're not quite the absolute ass you look," said Blake kindly. "I can now give you exactly one minute thirty-five and one-tenth seconds for the telling of your latest luno-ahem!—idea."

"Wats, Blake! I have a great mind—"

"There's no evidence of that," said Dig, shaking his head.

"But I didn't mean—"

"Right-ho! Glad you're willing to take back such an unsupported statement."

"Do not be idiotic, I pway, Digby! I do not wetwact, an' you are vewy well awaah that I nevah intended to wetwact. 'What I have said, I have said.'"

"Won't do, Gussy. The only point of resemblance is the monacle," remarked Monty Lowther of the Shell, looking in at this moment, and catching the last sentence.

"Remembrance to what?" asked Herries.

"Say rather whom. Who was it that said 'What I have said, I have said'?"

"Why, Gustavus did, you ass! You heard him," replied Dig.

"D'Arcy merely quoted."

"Oh! Might have known he'd cribbed it somewhere!"

"You are positively pweevil, Digby! It is impos to conduct a weasonable conversation with you!"

"It is—for you," retorted Dig pointedly.

"But Lowthah has got it. Bwavo. Lowthah! You have tumbled while all these othah asses are wefusin' to listen!"

"What have I got, Gussy? Nothing catching. I do hope and trust! Don't say it's German measles. I could never begin to respect myself again if I had anything so frightfully Hunnish as that!"

"You've got my ideah, I mean, Lowthah!"

"I can't help that. I didn't ask for it, and I'm not responsible for the consequences. I hope the other fellows won't be too rough on me for an accident like that. These things are like the rain, they fall alike on the just and the unjust. But I'm awfully sorry for you, old fellow—you may never have another!"

"Oh, wing off, Lowthah! I believe you are even a biggah idiot than these fellahs," rapped out Arthur Augustus, while Blake and Herries and Digby roared.

"That's the result—the dreadful result—of having your idea," said Lowther sadly. "I'm not sure that the Hunny measles wouldn't have been better after all."

"Weally you are positively widdle! Did you not mention a certain vewy famous statesman as you came in?"

"Did I?"

"Yes, Titus Oates, Bill Bailey, or Harry Lauder?"

"It was Chambahlain."

"Ah, now I see! As a matter of fact, I didn't mention him. I merely alluded to him—made what our dusky friend at Greyfriars calls a suggestive remark. But that is quite in accordance with your usual charming inaccuracy, Gussy."

"What about Chamberlain? Are you in possession of his mantle, so to speak? Remember that he left a son in the same line of business—and a good man, too!"

"Well, it's just this, Lowthah. I have been thinkin'—"

"Say no more! That is enough! That accounts for everything! You shouldn't. Gussy—you really shouldn't; your poor head was never designed to stand such a strain."

"I have been thinkin' that it would be a wippin' good ideah to have a St. Jim's parliament!" blurted out the indignant swell, in sheer desperation.

"Rot!" snorted Digby.

"Played out!" said Blake.

"I would only be a rotten debating society," added Herries. "And who wants that?"

"Hold on!" put in Lowther. "I'm not so sure that there's not something in it. You don't mean a mere debating society, do you, Gussy?"

"Wathah not! A pwpah Parliament, with elections, an—an—an' all that, you know!"

"A Cabinet and a Speaker and a

Prime Minister and an Opposition," went on Lowther.

"Plenty of opposition. If old ass Gustavus thinks he's going to be Prime Minister," said Digby.

"It's Gussy's sort of do—it ain't my sort, by long chalks," Herries said. "Gussy ain't happy unless his jaws are going like clappers. Much better start a band!"

"You can be a silent member, Herries," Lowther said.

"What? So that you can gas all the time Gustavus ain't doing it? But you wouldn't wait for him to stop. I know that. Duet on asses' jawbones—Messrs. D'Arcy and Lowther!"

"It's a wippin' good ideah," said Gussy stammering. "Lowthah, ass it an' I have no doubt whatever that Fou. Mewwyan an' Talbot an' the west will see it also."

"If you're going to hand over your giddy idea to the Shell—" began Blake warmly.

"Oh, let 'em have it! It's the sort of mouldy notion that ought to suit the giddy Shellfish," said Dig.

"Wait till the elections, my boy," said Lowther. "Then we shall have you fairly boiling over with excitement—rushing down the corridors, shouting, 'Vote for Lowther!' and—"

"Vote for the merry old Kaiser, you mean, ass!"

"Oh, certainly, Dig, if he's a friend of yours! But I didn't know you'd turned pro-Hun."

"You bounder!" snapped Dig. "I'll give you pro-Hun!"

"Don't get giving yourself away like that, old scout," replied Lowther soothingly.

"Elections ain't half a bad notion," said Herries. "There's nothing much except footer going on this term. Footer's all right, but it isn't everything."

Digby groaned. Here was Herries going over to the enemy!

"Premier's about my line," said Lowther modestly. "I'll give you a place in my Cabinet, Gussy, even if you have to come in without a portfolio."

"Oh, weally! That is altogether too thick, Lowthah! You will not be allowed to butt in like that, let me tell you."

"Of course he won't. Like his blessed cheek!" growled Blake. "I shall take that job, naturally."

"You will do nothin' of the sort, Blake!"

"Why not, Gustavus? The idea came from this study, so it's only right that a member of this study should have the Premier's job. Dig ain't keen, Herries is quite impossible—"

"Oh, is he?" roared Herries.

"Of course you are! Do have a little sense! As for our Gussy—"

"An' what about me, pway, Blake?"

"Ask yourself, old scout! If we are going to carry this wangle through, we must start by getting the school to take it seriously. And who could possibly take it seriously if we let the biggest

as at St. Jim's—well, no, I ain't sure about that: I don't want to be unfair to Grundy—"

"Wats! I am sowdy that I evah said a word about the scheme to a set of howlin' idiots like you fellahs, and if you do not change your tone, Blake, I shall atrially wats to have anythin' whatevah to do with it!"

"Hooray! There'll be a chance for the giddy scheme, then!" yelled Herries. "Come and talk it over with Tommy and Talbot, Gussy," said Lowther. "Manners won't try to bag all the offices, because he's out with his camera."

"If Gustavus goes, we all go," said Blake firmly. "We know you Shellfish. You'd bag our scheme, and swear blind you'd thought of it yourselves."

So they all went.

CHAPTER 2.

A Slight Mishap to Grundy.

DIGBY crept on tiptoe to the door. He opened it quickly, and seized by the neck someone who was crouching outside.

"Yoooh! Yaroooh! Oh, don't, Digby! That hurts!" howled Baggy Trimble.

"Listening at the keyhole, the rotten!" growled Dig, shaking the hapless Baggy till his fat cheeks quivered like pale jellies.

"I—I never even dreamed of such a thing. I was only tying up my boot-lace. Grooh! Stoppit, Digby!"

"Let this be a lesson to you not to have your bootlaces coming undone in the Shell passage, Trimble," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Nothing at all loose is allowed in these proper precincts."

"Yah! I suppose I can walk along here if I choose?"

"You suppose wrongly. At some time in the past you may have been capable of walking, Baggy; but that time was before you came to St. Jim's. No one here has ever seen you do anything but waddle."

"Does the blessed passage belong to you, I'd like to know?" demanded Baggy, puffing out his cheeks and trying to look defiant.

"Well, it does in a way," replied Tom Merry, the junior captain of the school. "But we ain't a bit greedy about it. You shall have the use of the floor, anyway. Bump him, you fellows!"

And Digby and Blake and Lowther and Herries bumped Baggy with zeal and vigour.

"Yaroooh! Cads!" burred Baggy, as he lumbered off. "Who cares about your rotten, puffing old parliaments? Silly kids' game, I call it!"

But Gussy's idea was not thus contemptuously regarded by most of the members of the Shell and Fourth. Talbot, whose opinion carried weight, said that it wasn't half a bad notion—much more in than in the ordinary debating society wheeze. Manners, coming in, gave it his support. Noble and Dane and Glyn were summoned to the conclave, and pronounced it good. Later on some of the now enthusiastic disciples of the great Arthur Augustus saw Levison & Co. in No. 9, and Julian & Co. in No. 5.

Levison and Clive said it was all right, and Cardew added that it ought to be "doodid comic," anyhow—an opinion which caused Gussy to frown upon him severely. The fellows in No. 5 were unanimously in favour.

No one thought of asking Grundy's opinion. That was a deplorable omission, for George Alfred Grundy was quite the greatest man in the Shell—in his own estimation, at least. And he did not forget to let others know it.

And the New House juniors were told. They would be told later, for already they were cast for parts in the minds of some of the promoters of the scheme.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a little bit disgruntled when a crowded second meeting was held later in the day. Tom Merry and Lowther and Blake appeared to think the scheme quite as much theirs as—rather more so, if anything. It had proceeded from his massive brain; but already everyone seemed to have forgotten that fact, and he feared that there would be no unanimous movement to make him Premier. In fact, it seemed likely that if there were to be any movement at all in that direction, he would have to start it himself. No one else showed any signs of doing so.

thin' so howdid as that!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shocked look upon his face. "We must awrange matials so that it is quite impos."

"No, no!" said Clifton Dane. "We must have a square deal, Gussy. No wangling."

"I should not think of suggestin' anythin' that could faially be called a wangle, Dane; but I must say that it would be wathah wuff if my administration should be turned out—"

"Who says it's going to be your administration, Gustavus?" asked Digby, who stood near the door. He had stood there all the time, and he had something hidden under his jacket. It looked rather as if he were anticipating another visit from the inquisitive Baggy.

"Weally, Dig—"



Grundy's Mishap.
(See Chapter 3.)

Even Dig, who had poured scorn upon the idea at first, now talked as though he were at least an equal partner in it, and had as much right to be cast for the Premier's part as anyone else!

"What about the New House crowd?" asked Kangaroo. "Do we take them in?"

"Oh, rather! Let's get everything fixed up, and then invite Piggy & Co. to be the Opposition," replied Tom.

"Oh, good egg!" cried Blake. "I was wondering where we could get our Opposition from; and, of course, there would be no fun without it."

"This is not funny, Blake. You are takin' it entirely in the wrong spiwit," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"If it isn't funny, it won't be a bit like the merry House of Commons," remarked Lowther. "That's funnier than a giddy circus, if you look at it the right way. There's real humour in the notion of paying some of the members £400 a year to impede business by spouting rot, I think."

"Suppose the Opposition arises in its strength and chucks out the Government?" asked Talbot, smiling.

"Oh, weally, I evah dreamed of any-

But Digby had turned, taken from under his jacket what he had concealed there, and placed it against the keyhole.

Two or three of those nearest had heard steps in the passage. Now they saw Digby's right elbow more quickly forward.

There followed a roar like the roar of a bull. The door burst open, and Grundy rushed into the room.

The waistcoat and trousers of George Alfred Grundy were liberally splashed with red ink from the squirt which Digby had kept ready for Trimble.

But Digby did not appear at all taken aback.

"Who did that?" bellowed Grundy.

"I did," answered Dig, grinning.

"But, of course—"

He had no chance to say more. Grundy gripped him in a hug like the hug of a grizzly bear, bore him to the ground, and started upon what looked like a rough, scientific experiment designed to elucidate the question whether Dig's head or the floor was the harder.

But that scientific problem was never solved. Kangaroo, Herries, Levison, and Blake yanked Grundy off. And the four

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of them, all pretty hefty, had their work cut out to do.

The great George Alfred was really angry. He struggled hard, and made various remarks by no means of a complimentary character.

When at last he had been wrenched off, and was suffered to stand without hands upon him, though a living barrier between him and Digby, his wrath was by no means appeased.

But no one had expected it to be, so no one was disappointed.

"I'll have an apology for that!" he roared. "You can't treat me, in that fashion—me, you know!"

"Hanged if I'll apologise!" retorted Dig.

"You've spoiled my bags, you silly ass!" hooted Grundy.

"Well, they weren't much before they were spoiled," replied Dig. "You ought to be grateful to me for making you get a new pair. You needed 'em."

"Yaas, Gwunday, you weally do dwess in the most shockin' slovenly style! An' there is no excuse for it in your case, as there might be if you were poohah—"

"Dry up, you tailor's dummy!"

"Don't grumble, Grundy," said Monty Lowther. "I'm not grumbling, and it was my ink that Dig used to decorate your clobber with. And it's war-time, you know, and ink's up, like everything else. Be a philosopher, Grundy—like me!"

"I'd sooner be dead!" howled Grundy. "You are the silliest ass I ever knew, bar none, Lowther! What did you do this for Digby, you utter idiot?"

"You do not appear to understand, Grundy," said Lowther blandly. "It was my ink—"

"Hang your ink!"

"I have not the slightest objection to that course. It will entail hanging you, Grundy—unless you take off the bags, which might be considered improper. But I don't think anyone present will raise any difficulty about such a minor detail as hanging you with the bags."

"Ass! I want to know what you did this for, Digby?"

"It does not seem wholly an unreasonable query, Dig," remarked Talbot. "If you can make it clear to Grundy that it was done quite in a friendly way—"

Grundy snorted.

"Well, it was meant for Baggy," said Dig. "But Grundy's only got himself to thank. If he comes playing Baggy's tricks—"

"Playing Baggy's tricks? What do you mean, you raving lunatic?" hooted Grundy.

"Listening at doors, and all that sort—"

"You rotter! I'll teach you—"

"Gently, gently, Grundy!" said Kangaroo, interposing a stalwart frame just in time. Harry Noble was somewhere near Grundy's fighting weight, and was one of the few who could thrash him. Digby would have had no chance at all.

"Well, I'll admit you don't seem to have been listening at the keyhole," said Dig generously. "If you had been, you'd have got it in the neck instead of the bags."

"But there's so much neck about Grundy, Dig," said Lowther. "He cannot be judged by ordinary anatomical standards. Still, really, think he would have had to stoop in order to negotiate the keyhole."

"Oh, ring off! You're one of those funny merchants who want kicking badly!" snapped Grundy, who never could stand Lowther's japing, partly because he could not understand half of it.

"No job for you then, Grundy! You never do anything otherwise than well, do you?"

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"I say, Grundy, what did you toddle along for?" asked Tom Merry.

"I've come to the meeting," answered the great man of the Shell.

"Who invited you?" demanded Blake.

"And who told you anything about the meeting?" inquired Dig.

"This game," murmured Lowther, "is called Questions and Answers. But the answers are in the dim future. Everybody's asking questions. It says something for the inherent optimism of human nature that they all appear to be expecting answers."

"Baggy Trimble told me, if you want to know," said Grundy.

"The man has no manners," remarked Lowther sadly. "No sooner do I make an observation full of profound knowledge of human nature than he proceeds to controvert it."

"There you are!" cried Dig. "And you got what I meant for Baggy, and it serves you jolly well right for listening!"

"I asked you who invited you, Grundy," repeated Blake.

"This ain't a blessed teaparty, is it? I've as good a right here as anyone else, I suppose—eh?"

"Oh, let him stay!" said Manners.

"It's no use arguing with the chump!"

"Let me?" snorted Grundy. "I'd jolly well like to see anyone put me out!"

"Is that a challenge?" asked Tom Merry, with a glint in his blue eyes.

"Look here, I came—"

"So we perceive," said Lowther. "But you are not the great Julius, you know, Grundy. Caius Julius Cæsar might say, 'Veni, vidi, vici,' but Georgius Alfredus Grundius, though he has come and seen, cannot claim as yet to have conquered. Shall we put him out, Tommy?"

"No, let him stay," replied Tom Merry. "After all, he really has a right to be here if he wants to. There's no reason why we should make a deep, dark secret of this bizny. 'Tain't like old Grundy's secret society, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy snorted. He did not care much for being reminded of the secret society.

It had not been a distinguished success.

But Grundy stayed, and added his powerful voice to the rest. In fact, Grundy did his share of the talking and a bit over. And, though they did their best to get the notion out of his head, and were certainly candid enough about the determination to see the Prock down at the projected St. Jim's Parliament—or to make it hot for everybody!

CHAPTER 3.

Not Wasted.

BAGGY TRIMBLE went rolling disconsolately down the Shell passage.

These were bad days for Baggy. No one loved him, and the war went on without any regard for his feelings.

Now and then he would peck down at his all too ample waistcoat, and see there signs of wasting that were quite invisible to others. Lowther, indeed, maintained that there was no vestige of waist about Baggy. But then, Lowther had no sympathy—none at all.

It was not the endeavour to keep inside the foot of trousers that troubled Grundy. He did not try to. All his plans were for getting outside them—for circumventing them.

But money was the trouble. Baggy talked of his big remittances from Trimble Hall; but no one ever saw them—nor even Baggy. In fact, no one—not even Baggy—had ever seen Trimble Hall!

With money, one could get round the regulations, and forget the war. Without

it— But what avails to discuss so sorrowful a case?

Baggy was determined not to remain without cash if by any means he could get it—any means that did not involve too much risk.

And before now it had chanced to Baggy to find out things which had a market value to someone.

Wherefore, hearing the sound of voices within Story No. 10, he stooped to the keyhole, impelled doubly by inquisitiveness, and by greed of gain.

Probably it was not much of a secret. There seemed to be several fellows present besides the Terrible Three. But it might be saleable. And, anyway, Baggy wanted to know, you know.

So Baggy listened. Baggy heard something, and stayed to hear no more. Baggy rolled away, chucking fat chuckles.

"Old Grundy will like to hear this," he said to himself. "The worst of it is that you never know how Grundy will take things. He's as likely as not to chuck you out on your neck, when he ought to be grateful. But he ain't mean when you get on the right side of him. I'll say that of Grundy."

It did not occur to the very obtuse mind of Baggy Trimble that on the very rare occasions when he had managed to get on the right side of Grundy it had never been by retailing the proceeds of his eavesdropping.

With all his faults, George Alfred Grundy was as straight as a gun-barrel, and had an utterly honest and abounding contempt for sneaks, spies, informers, and all such creatures.

Trimble halted for a moment before the door of Study No. 3. Then he pushed it open.

"Yarroogh! Ow—yow!" he howled.

Three distinct streams of dark and abominably-smelling liquid had descended upon his round head.

"You've gone and spoiled our booby-trap!" yelled Grundy.

Trimble had certainly spoiled the booby-trap. But he had not done it intentionally, and it was insult added to injury to reproach him for it.

Wrath flared up in the breast of Baggy, and he made a dash at Grundy.

In another moment Trimble would as soon have thought of attacking a tiger in its native jungle as of going for Grundy.

And at another time George Alfred Grundy would as soon have thought of running away from a mouse as from Baggy Trimble.

And now Baggy dashed to the attack, with an evidencing liquid running down him, and Grundy ran.

"Here, you keep off, Trimble, you fat worm! I'll slaughter you if you don't! Keep off, I say! Don't come near me!"

Wilkins and Gunn had scuttled at once. They grinned as they saw the agitation of their great chief.

"He's hot!" said Wilkins. "You ain't running away from Baggy, surely, old ecout?" chortled Gunn.

Grundy, dodging round the table, gave no reply, save a scathing glance.

Gunn and Wilkins had to dodge, too. It was not safe to take it for granted that Baggy's ire was aroused solely against Grundy.

Wilkins came into collision with Grundy. Wilkins was offered as a sacrifice. Grundy pushed him into the arms of Baggy, and Baggy parted with a considerable whack of the horrible stuff. He rubbed his face against the face of Wilkins, and left it there.

"Ouch! Yoop!" yelled Wilkins. "Cheese it, you fat beast! Cheese it, I say!"

Gunn dodged under the table. It

seemed the safest place. Grundy cleared the table in a wild vault, but Baggy pursued still, making strange sounds, and looking very much like a tarred Pekimo.

Then Baggy perceived Gunn, and stooped to conquer.

Baggy was always clumsy. That he should drag down the cloth was only to be expected. And Grundy was clumsy, too. That he should trip over the cloth was wonderful.

But it was the hardest of hard luck for Grundy that the basin in which the terrible mixture had been made should still be on the table, and half full. In their zeal the three had overrated the amount needed.

Perhaps Wilkins might have arrested the fall of the basin. But Wilkins could not see very well. The stuff was in his eyes. And it is not quite certain that Wilkins would have wanted to stop it, anyway. Wilkins had a great belief in fair shares.

"Splash!"

"Oumunch!"

Right upon the devoted head of George Alfred Grundy came the awful mixture, filling his eyes and nose and mouth, almost stifling him.

"Ow, wow! Keep off, Baggy, you rotter! Owwww!"

That was Gunn, under the table. Baggy had clutched Gunn lovingly round the neck. And, on the whole, Gunn thought that he would rather have walked under the booby-trap than have had this thing happen to him. For he got all that the greediest fellow could have wanted of the stuff, with Baggy in addition. And being kissed by Baggy was not what Gunn considered a luxury.

"There! Now you've all three got it, you beasts!" bellowed Baggy.

Then the frenzy departed from him, and he was greatly afraid because of what he had done.

He tried a bolt, but Grundy caught him by the leg and pulled him down.

Then Grundy lifted himself partly up, and sat down hard upon Baggy's fat form.

"Gerroff! You're squashing me!" bellowed the heir of the house of Trimble.

"Shut up, and stay there till we've made up our minds how we're jolly well going to kill you!" retorted Grundy.

Gunn crawled from under the table, moaning. Wilkins, having gouged the stuff out of his eyes, found humour in the situation, and gave a weak and watery smile.

"After all, you chaps, the stuff wasn't wasted!" he said.

"It was meant for Digby, and this bloated worm came along and spoiled it!" bellowed Grundy.

"Oh, you chaps are silly asses! Digby's with the rest in No. 10—you might have known that!" burred Baggy, from under him.

"How should we know? We don't go about listening at keyholes!" retorted Grundy. "I sent a messenger to Digby, and he and Grundy expected him to come!"

"That's just why he wouldn't!" bellowed Baggy.

"And, when one came to think of it, there was something in Baggy's argument. Digby was not to be caught quite so easily. The three saw that now.

Grundy let Baggy get up. In his own peculiar way, the great George Alfred was really quite a sportsman. And Wilkins and Gunn were sportsmen, too. They were not half as angry with Trimble as might have been expected, now it was all over.

"But you ain't jolly well going to hook it till you tell me what you came here for!" said Grundy, with immense resolution.

"What is this beastly stuff?" asked Baggy, rubbing his face with his hand,

and looking at the hand, perhaps surprised to find that the mixture had made it even dirtier than usual. There was some excuse for his surprise, for the usual state of the hands of Baggy was grubbiness.

"All sorts!" replied Gunn, with a grin. "There's soft soap in it, and vinegar and ink and soot, and a bottle of some nice-smelling medicine that Wilky had, and some milk that had gone sour, and some sardine oil and calcium carbide—I forget the rest. But it wasn't wasted, anyway!"

"He, he, he!" chuckled Baggy. "No; you chaps don't look as if it had been wasted! He, he, he!"

"Not so much of your 'He, he, he'!" said Grundy darkly. "Now, just tell me what you came in for. We don't want you here, you know, you fat rotter!"

"I came to tell you something, but I'm not sure that I'll tell you now!" replied Trimble importantly.

"If it's anything you found out by—" "But it ain't really 'found out' by—" bellowed Baggy. "This was told me by—by—oh, by a chap who don't want his name mentioned."

"Who is the chap?" demanded Grundy.

"I say, old fellow, if he don't want his name mentioned, Baggy can't tell you!" said Wilkins.

Wilkins and Gunn, though straight enough, were not quite as lofty as Grundy in the matter of refusing to listen to news got by eavesdropping methods.

"It's about this Parliament dodge," said Trimble. "He, he, he! They'll jolly well score over you if you don't hear, so you'd better listen."

"We're listening," said Gunn. "Buck up! It's about time we got this stuff off our dials. If it sets there's no telling whether it will ever come off!"

"Oh, come along to the bath-room!" said Grundy. "I don't want to hear the fat worm's rubbish!"

CHAPTER 4.

Three Run Amok!

"HALLO!" cried Blake. "Blessed if three diggy niggers haven't strayed into the place!"

"There ain't no niggers. They're a new race—a piebald race."

"Niggers—niggers!" Lowther said. "They've been using Someone-or-other's World Renowned Soap to make them white, and the black's coming off in spots."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy elevated his celebrated monocle. "What's that?" he said. "What's that? These extraordinary crotchets? Is there a circus in the village, deah boys?"

"Where did you get that face, Grundy?" sang out Manners.

The trio from Study No. 3 had chosen an unfortunate moment for transferring themselves from the study to the bath-room. They had run right in, Blake & Co., who had just left No. 10, while the Terrible Three stood in their doorway.

Baggy heard, and scrambled under the table in No. 3. Baggy had had enough. He saw no reason why he should be exposed to further outrage and insult. He would wait until the coast was clear.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he said, as it done, Grundy "inquired Digby politely.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. Blake put finger and thumb to his nasal organ, and screwed up his face.

"My hat, it smells!" he said, in muffled tones. "You shouldn't do it, you chaps! 'Tain't civilised to smell like that."

"Smells is hardly the word, Blake," corrected Lowther. "It—or—"

"Niffs!" said Digby, holding his nose.

"Reeks!" said Herries, doing ditto. "Hums is the correct expression," Lowther said. "It fairly hums!"

"Yooop!" howled Grundy. And he rushed at them.

Wilkins and Gunn rushed too.

Grundy was not the brightest junior at St. Jim's. But he was not so obtuse as some might think him.

In a general way, Grundy would have scorned to take a lead from Baggy Trimble. But in this particular case he took one.

He flung his arms around the neck of Robert Arthur Digby, and pressed his face lovingly to the countenance of that youth.

"Ow! Stop! You beast—you rotter!" roared Dig.

"Weally, Wilkins! This is an outrage—a positive—"

"Chuck it, Gunn! Wjarrar doing?" spluttered Blake.

Herries bellowed. So did the Terrible Three.

But they did not beat in time. Grundy & Co. realised the necessity of haste if they were to make a really good job of this thing. And the burly body of George Alfred Grundy hurled itself against the door of No. 10 before those within could get it quite closed.

Then did Grundy take vengeance for terms of chipping at the hands of Monty Lowther. Had Lowther been Grundy's brother, he would have expected him from long captivity in the land of the Huns, Grundy could not have hugged him harder. In fact, Grundy had no brother, and would not have hugged him if he had had. But Grundy hugged Lowther.

And Gunn had Herries in his grip, and Wilkins was pressing his loathsome embraces upon Manners.

Tom Merry snatched up a chair, retired into a corner, and howled defiance. "I'll jolt well-brain you if you try that game with me!" he yelled.

The three released their victims, and went as one man for Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake and Digby and D'Arcy.

"You've got to go through it, Tommy!" cried Manners.

"Go it, Grundy!" shouted Lowther. "He can't brain you—no one could!"

"There ain't no niggers!"

"Pax!" roared the leader of the Shill. "Oh, Tomm! Tommy, how could you fall so low?" wailed Lowther.

"Pax be hang'd! P'raps you'll stop your chortling now!" hooted Grundy, as he tore the chair from Tom's grasp, and seized him in deadly grip.

"Lemme get at him!" Don't bag it all, Grundy, you pig!" howled Wilkins.

Gunn said nothing. But he was getting at Tom. And Wilkins really had little cause for complaint. He also was doing his share.

"There!" said Grundy, in triumph. "That's enough, you chaps! If they feel like chortling after this, let 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It appeared that they did feel like chortling. The running amok of Grundy & Co. had its comic side. To their victims it was a real surprise that Grundy should have been so ready of action. They did not know that they owed that to Baggy Trimble.

Tom Merry roared as heartily as the rest. On Arthur Augustus failed to see the affair as a joke.

"Bai Jove!" he panted. "This is weally too bad, Gwunday. It is beyond the giddy limit! You—"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!" snapped Blake. "Go and look at your phiz in the glass! That'll make you grin, if you've any notion of what's really funny."

"H! I look funniah than you do, Blake—"

"Well, you do! You had something to start on, with a face like yours!"

"I hope you fellows are satisfied now," said Grundy, with heavy sarcasm.

"We've had enough certainly," admitted Tom Merry. "We'll make it pax now, Grundy, and all go and clean up."

"I say, Grundy, was that little lot meant for me?" asked Digby. "Young Frayne said you wanted to see me in your study."

"Yes, you blessed fathead! Why didn't you come?"

"Because I ain't quite such a blessed fathead as you take me for, old chap! Who got it? For I suppose you weren't quite asses enough to walk under it yourselves. I dunno, though—you might be."

"Trimble got it," replied Grundy grimly.

"Good gods! Where is the bounding Baggy?"

"How should I know? I'm not worrying about Baggy."

Baggy was not in the bath-room, and he did not arrive there till some time after the rest. They left him still at it when they had finished, though that was some little time later, for the stuff clung.

"I shouldn't worry about doing any more, Baggy," said Monty Lowther. "It isn't really necessary, having regard to your ordinary standard of uncleanness. Nobody's likely to notice."

"It's so!" wailed Baggy.

"Oh, I didn't think you'd mind a little thing like that."

When Grundy & Co. returned to No. 3 they found a pencil scrawl on the table.

"Tom Merry and those rotters think they are going to hie the barn in the field between hear and Glyn House for their old Parliament. They imagine it belongs to Mr. Rodwell, but it doesn't—old Pepper has it, that lives in the little house behind the post-office. Rodwell gave up the field at Midsummer. If you look sharpe you can be ahead of them.—B. T."

Gunn read it out aloud. Grundy snatched it from his hand as soon as he had finished.

"So, that's what Baggy came to tell me," he growled. "Like his blessed cheek, I must say! We know well enough how he got hold of the news!"

"Well, that don't matter a heap, as I see it," said Wilkins, who had a practical mind. "And I don't see that the thing itself matters unless you really mean all the stuff you've been giving us about running an opposition show."

"Mean it? Of course I mean it, you fat-headed chump!" hooped Grundy. "Do I ever say anything I don't mean?"

"I should hope so," replied Wilkins. "If you mean the things you say sometimes you're a sillier ass than you—"

"None of your cheek, George Wilkins! I'm not jolly well going to stand it, so that's straight."

Grundy never had been able to get Gunn and Wilkins into a proper attitude of respectful awe towards him; but he still resented their treating him as if he were one of the common herd, and slinging at him the doubtful compliments that were so frequent among the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Hallo, Trimble, what do you want?"

So ferocious was the face that Grundy turned upon Baggy that that heroic youth wished he had not come along again.

"I—I—oh, it's nothing, Grundy. At least, nothing much," faltered Baggy, backing.

"Oh, you can say what you've got to. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 566.

say! I sha'n't eat you. I like my grub clean!"

"He, he, he! You're the wittiest chap I know, Grundy; but that ain't true, you know. I'm not dirty—not any dirtier than anyone else!"

"What? Mean to tell me that I'm no cleaner than you are?" hooped Grundy.

"Nun-nun-no! I wouldn't go so far as that, Grundy. But, then you're such an exceptionally particular chap. I'm as clean as Gunn or Wilkins, anyway!"

"Oh, are you?" roared Wilkins.

"And Gunn moved forward in a threatening manner.

"Stop it, Wilky! Don't, Gunn! I—I never meant you fellows—I meant to say—er—Herries and Blake!"

"Go down on your knees and say that you're a dirty pig, and you apologise to us, and you'll never do it again, and we'll forgive you!" said Wilkins authoritatively.

"Here, stop that bullying, you two!" snapped Grundy.

"Wha-a-a-t?" gasped Wilkins and Gunn together.

"Stop that bullying, I say! I don't approve of bullying, and I won't have it in this study!"

The faces of George Wilkins and William Cuthbert Gunn were full of rebellion and wrath. It was quite true that Grundy always said that he objected to bullying; and there was no doubt that he meant what he said. Yet there were people at St. Jim's who called Grundy a bully—and meant what they said. And certainly the hand of Grundy had been heavy upon Wilkins and Gunn often enough, though his heavy-handedness had never disturbed their friendship badly.

"Yes, you stop it, you two!" said Baggy, taking heart. "Grundy ain't going to let you do as you like, you know. Beastly bullies, both of you! But my pal Grundy won't let—"

"If you call me your pal again I'll skin you alive! What do you want here, you bladder of lard?"

"I—I— Did you get my note, Grundy?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"I—I— Well, you know, it's what they call exclusive information, and—and it ought to be worth something. Don't you think so, Grundy? You were always a fair-minded chap. I'll say that for you!"

"Yes, I'm a fair-minded chap. Trimble," answered Grundy darkly.

"And your blessed information is worth something, and I'll give you what I think it's worth!"

"I'm in his greedy obtuseness, grinned, and held out a podgy hand.

"That ain't where I'm going to give it to you!" hooped Grundy. "Turn round!"

Baggy turned. But it was to flee, and Grundy only got in one kick.

CHAPTER 5.

Mr. Pepper.

"WHO is this chap Pepper?" asked Grundy, after he had kicked the door to behind him.

He spoke as if his mind was made up to something.

"Don't know him," replied Wilkins.

"You never know anything, of any use," said Grundy scornfully. "I never saw such chaps as you are!"

"Yes, you do know him, Wilky," said Gunn. "So does old Grundy. I hadn't heard his name before; but he must be that weird merchant who gets his clobber out of a rag-bag."

"Oh, I know now, Gunny!" replied Wilkins. We saw him the other day—

don't you remember, Grundy? The Johnny with the knickers that looked as if they had been made out of an old horse-rug, and a shiny frock-coat, and button boots, and a straw hat with the brim half gone!"

"And the bike, with one solid tyre and one pneumatic, and the spokes tinkered up with umbrella-ribs, or something of the sort," grinned Gunn.

"It can't be that chap," said Grundy. "That chap can't have any money, I'm sure!"

"But you he has, though!" answered Gunn. "They say he's a miser, and has bags of sovereigns hidden away somewhere!"

"Who says so?"

"Folks in the village."

"It's rot!"

"Why? There have been misers before now," said Wilkins. "What is there against any of them coming to live at Rylcombe?"

"But he couldn't keep sovereigns like that! All the gold was called in long ago!"

"Yes; but they didn't search for it," said Gunn. "This ain't Germany. They trusted to people's honour. Well, a miser wouldn't have any honour—'tain't likely."

"I can't have anything to do with a man of that kind," said Grundy loftily.

"He's got no patriotism!"

"But he's got a barn, and if you don't hire it, Tom Merry and that crowd will," replied Wilkins.

Wilkins and Gunn had not been consulted about the St. Jim's Parliament, or invited to the meetings, and they were by no means loth to stir up Grundy against the scheme.

Of course, any opposition scheme that Grundy tried to run would turn out a dismal failure. Grundy's schemes had a way of turning out dismal failures, though it was always the fault of someone else—according to Grundy.

But there would be some fun in it first. And it would be one up against Tom Merry & Co. if Grundy barged in and secured the barn before they had discovered about the change of ownership.

Wilkins and Gunn bore no malice against Tom Merry & Co., but they welcomed the opportunity of scoring over them, nevertheless.

"Yes; he's got a barn, as you say—that is, if he has got it," replied Grundy slowly.

"Merry and that crowd. It's the old story over again. Everything goes by favouritism, not by merit. There's no chance of their electing me Premier—not a scrap!"

"But there might be if you hired the barn before they could get it," said Gunn.

"There ain't another like it anywhere near. They began to build for a bungalow, you know; but then they changed their minds. It didn't turn out a bungalow, but it's a ripping fine barn!"

"Let's cut along and see this merchant Pepper at once," said Grundy. "I never saw such chaps as you two are for wasting time in gassing!"

They got out their bikes, and hurried off to the village.

Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper was at home.

A rap at the door of the dirty little cottage behind the post-office brought him to it.

The knickers of which Wilkins had spoken were noticeable at once. Both in material and in cut they were quite unlike any other pair the three had ever seen.

But they were at least a pair, which was more than could be said of his stockings or his boots. One of the boots was a boot of the heavy, nail-studded type worn by agricultural labourers, the other was a shoe. One of the stockings was heather

mixture, the other blue, with a chaste yellow turn-over.

His waistcoat appeared to have been made out of a piece of sackcloth, and he wore a purple smoking-cap with a green tassel.

He was skinny, and sharp of nose. Dirt seemed engrained into the very pores of his skin. His little grey eyes, overhung by fierce grey eyebrows, gleamed with greed. His grey moustache was yellow with tobacco, and he was chewing as he stood there.

They did not like the look of Mr. E. Z. Pepper at all. But, after all, this was not a social call. They had merely come on business.

"What d'ye want?" he snapped.

"I say, about your barn—"

"Speak up, can't you? I'm a bit hard of hearing," said Mr. Pepper, with one hand curved behind his right ear.

This was unkind. Mr. Pepper's hearing was as good as his sight, and had had nothing the matter with it. But it suited him to pretend deafness.

"I say, you know, that barn of yours, you know!" shouted Grundy.

"You needn't yell at me in that fashion. Speak clear, if you can, and I'll make shift to hear you. I must say boys' manners ain't what they used to be in my time."

"Ner their habits," whispered Gunn to Wilkins. "They've taken to washing their ears since that. Perhaps that will keep them from going deaf."

Grundy heard, and guffawed. Mr. Pepper heard also, but his face remained quite stolid. He would get even for that speech in his own way if the chance offered; but he was not going to argue the matter. Perhaps he knew that no argument would convince anyone who saw him that he was not dirty.

"Your barn, you know," said Grundy. "Barn? I haven't any. The Government won't let a man brew these days."

"Barn, I said—B-a-r-n!"

"What barn?"

"The one in the field near our show."

"Oh, you come from a show, do you? I took you for schoolboys. Don't you go telling me that you've burnt that barn of mine down, now!"

"We haven't burnt your barn down, and we're not from any show," replied Grundy impatiently. "We're from St. Jim's—St. James's—the school, you know!"

"What show are you talking about, then?"

"I wasn't talking about any show. It's only a way of speaking."

"Well, I don't take it to it. I like the plain truth. I may be deaf—"

"You jolly well are!" muttered Grundy.

But therein Grundy was wrong.

"And I may be poor—"

"But you ain't!" murmured Wilkins.

And therein Wilkins was right. Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper was so far from being poor that he could have bought up half Rylcombe parish.

"But if I'm deaf and poor—"

"And dirty!" whispered Gunn.

"If I'm deaf and poor, I ain't to be insulted, nor to be told lies to! And you've been telling me lies. If you're from the school you can't be from a show; you ain't from the school, and contrivance!"

"Q.E.D.," remarked Wilkins. "Go it, Barn."

"Oh, hang it, I've had enough!" snapped Grundy. "Come along, you chaps! This fellow's too—"

"Here! Hold hard!" said Mr. Pepper.

"What was it about the barn? You can come inside if you want to talk about that—at least, if it's in the way of business. I've got no time to waste, and

nothing to give away, so you may as well understand that from the start."

"Oh, never mind about the old barn! We didn't come along to ask you to give us anything!" said Grundy huffily.

"Look here, don't go off like that!" pleaded Mr. Pepper. "My temper ain't what it might be to-day—I don't mind owning that. I had a bad sixpence given me in change this morning by some rascal; and when I tried to pass it, the baker was rude about it."

"But, apa he thought you were a rascal for trying," Grundy suggested.

"Eh? Why should he? That ain't reason. I couldn't afford to be a loser on it. But, come in—come in!"

CHAPTER 6.

A Deal with Mr. Pepper.

THEY went in. The place was dirty, but not dirtier than one might have expected after seeing its owner. A half-starved dog lay on the sacking which served as a hearth-rug. On a table lay a package of what the butchers call "bits," which were evidently intended for the evening meal of Mr. Pepper. One glance at the dog was sufficient to make one sure that he never fed so luxuriously.

Mr. Pepper thrust the dog aside with his foot, and planted himself in front of the cold, untidy grate, with his hands in the pockets of those very remarkable knickers.

"Well, what about my barn?" he said.

"I want to hire it," replied Grundy bluntly.

"Ah! And what for?"

"To hold meetings in."

Grundy did not care to attempt explaining to Mr. Pepper about the St. Jim's Parliament.

"Ho! Meetings—eh? Stop—the war meetings, d'ye mean?"

"No!" hooted Grundy. "Do I look like that sort of thing?"

"I can't judge people by what they look like. For the matter of that, you look—but, never mind that! That barn, you know—well, properly speaking, that ain't a barn. You might call it a commodious and eligible residence. I was thinking about going to live in it myself. If I let it to you, that'll have to be considered in the price. I deesay you've noticed that I've had a window or two put in?"

They had not. But, on the whole, they thought that the barn would certainly be a more desirable residence than Mr. Pepper's very dismal little cottage.

"How much do you want for it—by the week, I mean?" asked Grundy, going direct to the point.

"How much will you give?" asked Mr. Pepper.

"I'd rather you put a figure on it," said Grundy.

"Ah! But I might not ask enough!"

"Well, I shouldn't mind that."

"But I should," said Mr. Pepper.

"They found it easy to believe him."

"You might ask too much, you know!" said Gunn.

"That ain't likely. My conscience wouldn't let me. Besides, it couldn't be too much if you were willing to pay it. That's a beautiful barn—more like a mansion!"

"Shall we say ten bob a week, for four weeks certain?" inquired Grundy.

He had a lever from his Uncle Grundy in his pocket, and knew that more was easily obtainable from the same generous source.

"Ten bob a day?" asked Mr. Pepper, with hand to ear.

"Yes, that's a fair price, I think!"

"Ten bob a week," I said!" howled Grundy.

"Yah! Why don't you say twopence-halfpenny?"

"I will, if you will!" replied Grundy promptly.

"Ah! You will have your little joke. But it's no good talking about ten bob a week. My conscience wouldn't let me let that at."

"Same old conscience that made him try to pass the bad tanner," murmured Wilkins.

"Mr. Pepper means his conscience wouldn't let him take so much, I think!" said Gunn politely.

"Then you think wrong!" snapped Mr. Pepper. "Look here, young sir! I'm no haggler. You're well-to-do; I can tell that from the cut of your jib. I'm a poor man. You wouldn't try to drive a hard bargain, I'm sure. Done with you for double the money, and two months certain!"

Wilkins nudged Grundy. But it was no use nudging Grundy when he had made up his mind to do anything. And now he had made up his mind to hire that barn, whatever it cost him.

"That will be eight pounds," he said.

"I suppose two on account will do you?"

Mr. Pepper's hearing seemed now to have improved wonderfully.

"You don't reckon right, young sir," he said. "Thirty-one and thirty-one make sixty-two nine weeks, as near as a teacher! We'll call it nine. And five in advance is a fair thing."

"Don't you be had like that, old chap!" whispered Gunn.

"Just you keep your breath to cool your porridge with!" snapped Mr. Pepper, who heard that quite well. "This affair is between me and the young gentleman opposite—I didn't catch your name, sir!"

"Grundy—George Alfred Grundy."

"Ah! And a very nice name, too—for them that like it. Now, let me put it all down in black and white. We don't need a lawyer—he would make a five guinea job of it. And I know as much as any of 'em."

Mr. Pepper produced a very scratchy pen, some pale and muddy ink, and the fly-leaf of an old book. He wrote quickly, and in a clear, good hand, an agreement as between Erasmus Zachariah Pepper on the one part, and George Alfred Grundy on the other, whereby the said Pepper did, on payment by the said Grundy of £5, being part—And so on, and so on.

Mr. Pepper evidently knew all about it. Grundy did not, and he was rather impressed. Wilkins and Gunn looked on sadly. They had not realised, when they urged upon Grundy the hiring of the barn, that it meant his parting with the five in his pocket at once, and thereafter a period of plain living in Study No. 3.

"I'd rather have gold," said Mr. Pepper, looking at the five-pound note doubtfully.

"What's the odds?" asked Grundy.

"That's a Bank of England note—as good as gold any where."

"Gold's good, too, the world over!" said Mr. Pepper. "These things would be waste paper if the Germans came out on top."

"That's impossible; and if it happened nothing else would matter a scrap!" replied Grundy, who was, in his way, as staunch and thoroughgoing a patriot as could well be imagined.

"Nothing—except money," said Mr. Pepper. "Money always matters. But if you haven't the gold I must take this."

He took it, and rustled it, and looked at the water-mark, and behaved generally in a manner that put the great Grundy's back up.

"I don't like that chap. He's not much."

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better than a Hun!" remarked Grundy, as they rode back to the school.

"You were a silly chump to shell out all that whack!" said Wilkins candidly. "He'd have taken ten bob a week if you had stuck out. And that's a blessed sight too much!"

"Well, it will be a score over the other crowd, anyway," said Gunn. "I say, you chaps, I'll bet that yarn about the bags of gold is true! Pepper's got the cut of a miser all over!"

"If I found his bags of gold I'd jolly well denounce him!" snapped Grundy. "No one's got any right to have gold these days. It's rotten unpatriotic."

"Well, he ain't likely to let you find them," answered Wilkins. "You bet that merchant hangs tight to what he's got!"

CHAPTER 7.

Another Deal with Mr. Pepper.

"I'M weally frightfully sowwy, Tom Mewby, but this is every so I've got at the pwicise moment!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, producing a ten-shilling note.

"Oh, Gusey, Gusey! And we counted on you as the one giddy plutocrat among us!" said Tom reproachfully. "Bai Jove! I'm feashfully sowwy! I had a fivah last week, an' I may have anothah next week—I hope so, anyway. But they are not so fwequent as they used to be. How much have you collected altogether, deah boy?"

"This makes two quid, I dare say it'll do. The barn isn't in use for anything, and Rodwell ought to jump at a chance to let it for a few shillings a week."

"We had bettah go along an' intah-view Rodwell at once. Thwee of us will be quite enough—you an' I, deah boy, an' Lowthah or Talbot; that should do!" "Right-ho!" said Tom Merry.

But four went, after all. Talbot was busy; but Blake insisted that if Gusey were going, he must go to look after him.

They met Grundy & Co. about half-way to Rylcombe.

"What were those bounders grinning at?" asked Blake after they had passed.

"Were they?" said Lowther. "When Nature has treated fellows so badly in the way of faces it really isn't easy to tell. But now I come to think of it Grundy's gorilla physiognomy did look rather different from usual."

"Of course they were grinning!" snapped Blake. "And they've got something up their sleeves against us, I'll bet."

"Oh, they may only have smiled at Gusey, you know. You couldn't blame anyone for smiling broadly when he looked at Gusey, Blake."

"Weally, Lowthah, I fail to see—" "Try goggles instead of the monocle, old chap! I always said that thing was no real use to you."

They found Mr. Rodwell at home, but that carried them no farther on their way.

"My lease ran out at Midsummer," he said. "The field an' the barn were bought by a man named Pepper. An' if he don't soon look out an' do something with the land he'll have Government on his track, I'm thinkin' Queer chap as ever I saw—both ends an' the middle of a regular miser, I should say. He'll let you the barn, I fancy. But you'd better look out that he don't do you down."

"What would be about the right figure?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, it's a first-rate barn, an' it might be worth a good deal to anyone who wanted it badly. But no one about here does. As things are, I'd have been glad to take twenty pound a year for it."

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if I hadn't been usin' it. If it's for a shorter time that would make a difference. But you hadn't ought to let the old hunk get more than nine bob a week out of you—ten at the outside."

"Thanks, very much, Mr. Rodwell," said Tom.

"You're welcome, my lad. Good-day to you."

They rode off. In the village they made inquiries as to the domicile of Mr. Pepper, and were directed thither.

The door of the cottage stood open, and Erasmus Zachariah was to be seen within, preparing a meal.

"Butcher's bits" were now in a frying-pan on the fire, and what looked like a home-made loaf baked by someone who didn't know how, stood on the table. The lean dog sniffed hungrily, and watered at the mouth. The four St. Jim's juniors did not water at the mouth.

"What d'ye want?" demanded Mr. Pepper, looking up from his cooking. "We've called to see you on business," said Tom. "But if it's an inconvenient time we can look in later."

"No time's wrong for business. Come along in, and in half a minute I'll be ready to attend to you."

The fragment of a cupboard the broken fragment of a big dish. A cinder from the hearth served to tilt this, and he turned the contents of the frying pan on to it.

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"I ain't one that lives in luxury, like you young gentlemen," he said, perhaps noting the fact that the fastidious nose of Arthur Augustus had lifted just the veriest trifle. "This is wholesome meat, and my stomach ain't proud. Now what can I do for you?"

"But you'll let your grub get cold while we're talking," said Blake.

"That don't matter. Maybe I sha'n't eat so much."

"It's about the barn in your field we called," Tom said.

"Ah! Oh, indeed! The barn," said Mr. Pepper. He picked up one of the unsavoury morsels from the dish between a dirty finger and a dirty thumb, and peeped it into his mouth.

"Are you willing to let it?" asked Tom.

"I am," replied Mr. Pepper, without a moment's hesitation.

He made no pretence of being deaf this time. Nor did he mention his conscience. That was perhaps as well, all things considered.

"What's your price?" asked Tom.

"What do you want it for?"

"Oh—well, you might say for meetings?"

"Prayer meetings?"

"No. Nothing of that sort."

"Ah! I might have let it cheaper if it had been for that," said Mr. Pepper piously. Then he looked at them in a very suspicious way. "Not for gambling, I hope?" he said severely.

"Certainly not for gambling," replied Tom.

"Oh, no. That would naturally make it more expensive," put in Lowther.

"I shouldn't think of letting it for such a purpose. A-betting?"

"Well, we're not going a-betting, or yet a-gambling," Lowther cut in. "Such gambling as there may be will be quite

of the young lamb type, I assure you. Perhaps you would come and gambol with us one day, Mr. Pepper? You appear of an innocently playful nature."

Mr. Pepper answered the humorist of the Shell only by a scowl.

"Just you four?" he asked of Tom.

"Oh, no. Forty-fifty—perhaps more."

"You'll be damaging the place. That's got to be considered, you know."

"Not beforehand, I think. The fairest way would be that we should pay for an' damage we do after it's done. But do you think there will be any worth speaking of?"

The half-starved dog had jumped on to a chair, and was wistfully contemplating his master's unappetising meal. Mr. Pepper had turned his back. D'Arcy pushed the dish nearer to the dog. The animal sniffed the meat. But as yet it was too hot for him.

"But we'll fix it that way—if we come to terms. I'll look in every now and then, and let you know what the bill for damages is. That's the best way to keep straight."

"But we haven't fixed the price yet," Tom said.

"Oh, the price! We sha'n't haggle about that, I reckon."

As Mr. Pepper had already let the barn for more than it was worth, he could afford to be generous. But he had no intention of being so.

Now the dog, greatly daring, put his nose into the dish and gobbled up a scrap of the meat. He looked at D'Arcy with something as near like a wink as a dog could give, and annexed another morsel. His master did not see.

Encouraged by the expression on D'Arcy's friendly face, and lured on by the delectable flavour, the dog proceeded to make short work of Mr. Pepper's meal.

"Go it, old cripple!" murmured Blake, who had just twigged.

"We won't haggle," said Mr. Pepper.

"Say a pound a week, and no extras."

"I don't see what extras there can be except any damage that's done, and we've agreed to pay for that," Tom replied. "As for your price, it's a heap too stiff."

"Well, we'll say nineteen—and six," said Mr. Pepper, with a gush of generosity.

"You may say that—we sha'n't! It will be nearer the figure if you say nine-and-six. And that's really too much."

The dog had now cleared up every scrap of meat, and was licking the fat from the dish. His stump of a tail wagged with delight.

"Eh?" said Mr. Pepper, with his hand to his ear.

"He's developed deafness. A bad sign, I fear, Tommy," murmured Lowther.

"I—said—nine—and—six!" yelled Tom.

"Well, I said nineteen-and-six, too. What are you arguing about?"

"Chuck it, Tom! He's a land-shark," said Blake.

"We aren't buying the barn; we only want to hire it," Tom said firmly.

"Half-a-sov. a week is our limit, and you can't raise me a threepenny bit on that."

Mr. Pepper reflected. That would make thirty shillings a week—at the rate of seventy-eight pounds a year—which will rent a good-sized house in a good neighbourhood, and is by no means bad, even for a barn that is half a bungalow.

As for the double tenancy, Mr. Pepper meant to let his tenants fight that out between them. It was none of his business, he held. And the agreement to which Grundy had appended his illustrious autograph bore no date. That

was another point in Mr. Pepper's favour. He did not intend to date this one unless he had to.

"Make it three months, cash down, and it's a deal," said Mr. Pepper. "But you drive a hard bargain with a poor man, I must say."

As Tom had only two pounds, he could not make it three months, cash down. And he would not have done so in any case. It was very unlikely that the St. Jim's Parliament would have a life of three months.

"No," he said. "Four weeks down, and payment weekly after that, with a week's notice, good on either side."

Mr. Pepper saw that he had to deal with a more businesslike fellow than Grundy, and he regretted it. But it was too much to hope for two Grundys in one day.

"We don't want a contract, I s'pose," he said. "That's a job for a lawyer, and they charge like—the Light Brigade at Balclava."

"A receipt ought to be enough," said Tom.

"I'll give you that, and you can give me an undertaking to pay for any damage done."

Mr. Pepper turned to get pen and ink and find a book with a blank flypage available as paper. He still failed to notice that his dog, for once in its poor, starved life, had had a meal.

"I shouldn't sign any agreement to pay for damages, Tom," said Lowther. "He'll do you down some way if you do, I'm jolly sure. He's a shark!"

"That's actionable language, young man!" said Mr. Pepper sharply. "If I hear any more of it, my solicitor—"

"You'd better be deaf again," replied Monty Lowther. "Especially if it's the same solicitor who charges like the Light Brigade."

Mr. Pepper scowled. But he did not let his resentment stand in the way of business. In a few minutes he had drawn up a brief agreement as to damages, which Tom signed, and Blake witnessed, Lowther refusing point-blank to put his name to it in any way; and two pounds had passed, and a receipt for that sum had been given.

As he put the notes and silver carefully in his pocket, he turned and saw the empty dish.

CHAPTER 8.

And Yet Another Deal with Mr. Pepper.

WITH a howl of rage, Mr. Pepper rushed at the dog. The creature fled to a corner, and cowered there, quivering all over.

"Here, hold on!" cried Blake. "We're not going to have you knock that dog about, you know."

"Who's going to stop me? He's my dog, I believe! Come here, Binks, you cur, and I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

But Binks had sense enough not to move. He looked at the four juniors in a way that appealed to all their hearts.

"Weally, Mr. Peppah, I do not considah that you should thrash the poor fellow for wolfin' his grub a twifle too soon," remonstrated Arthur Augustus.

"He's never been taught to say grace, I suppose?" added Lowther.

"His grub? Do you think I buy butcher's meat for a cur like that? That meat was cooked for my own eating, and it cost me sixpence!"

"If you will allow me to pay for it, I shall be happy to do so, Mr. Peppah," said Gussy politely. Gussy felt rather guilty, but he could not feel sorry. It was so evident that Binks had stood in real need of that meal; and, in spite of all the warnings of amateur Food Con-



Binks on Guard.
(See Chapter 10.)

trollers, Arthur Augustus was still of opinion that no one should keep a dog and starve him.

Mr. Pepper was gracious enough to accept the sixpence—without thanks.

"I shall drown the brute!" he said vengefully. "That's the third lot of grub he's sneaked, and I've only had him a fortnight. I took him for a bad debt—chap going into the Army—but he'll never be any good to me. He's no watchdog. He'd as soon bite me as the next man!"

"He must have been feebly hungry, Mr. Peppah," pleaded the tender-hearted Arthur Augustus.

"If he tried to make a meal off that merchant he must have been in an acute state of starvation," murmured Monty Lowther.

"I do weally beg that you won't down him, Mr. Peppah! It was weally more our fault than his. We encouraged him to eat the grub, you know."

"Ah! That's where you signed his death-warrant!" replied Mr. Pepper grimly.

It was more than Gussy could bear. He felt his responsibility acutely. Binks must not die!

"But, weally, Mr. Peppah—"

"You'd better buy him. That's the only way out of it!"

"But I do not want a dog. I like dogs no end; but it isn't poss. I am sush they will not allow anothah dog at the school just now."

There had been trouble with Mr. Ratcliff about Figgins' dog; and, though old Spot had escaped, it was pretty well understood that, while the food regains lions lost the canine population of St. Jim's must not be added to.

"Ah, well, he ain't worth much—a mere common cur—cheap as dirt, his sort! He may just as well be got rid of."

But if Binks had no pedigree, if even his breed was a bit doubtful, he had a

pair of very eloquent brown eyes, and was quite a presentable dog, apart from his extreme thinness. And he had been the property of a man who had now gone to fight for his country—that counted, too. The man in khaki would not like to hear of the slaughter of Binks, D'Arcy felt sure.

"He don't mean it!" whispered Blake. "He wouldn't kill the dog while there was a chance of getting some ass to give tenpence-halfpenny for him!"

"But he is starvin' the poor fellow, the wretch!" answered Gussy.

"Are you going to buy him, or am I to drown the cur?" inquired Mr. Pepper.

"Well, at the present moment I am feebly hard up, Mr. Peppah; but if you will give me credit—"

"You're young D'Arcy, Lord Eastwood's son, ain't you? Yes, I'll give you credit, sir."

They stared, amazed that Mr. Pepper should know so much. But Mr. Pepper knew more about St. Jim's and the fellows there than they imagined.

"Very well, then, I'll buy him. Come here, Binks!"

Binks came at once, wagging his tail delightedly. He seemed quite to understand.

"Five pounds will pay for him," said Mr. Pepper pleasantly.

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"You mean five bob?" said Blake bluntly.

"And that's a liberal price for a worthless cur," added Tom.

"That was only a manner of speaking," explained Mr. Pepper.

"I will give you ten shillin's, though I considah you are showin' most unwelcome gweed, Mr. Peppah," said the swell of the Fourth, caressing Binks.

"I'd sooner drown him!" snapped the hard bargainer.

"Well, then—"

"Hold on, Gustavus!" chipped in THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 506.

Blake. "Leave this to me! I'm Yorkshire, you know!"

"He turned to Mr. Pepper.

"Ten shillings, and that's the last word!" he said.

"Cash down, then!" was the reply.

They had not that amount among them.

"Oh, weally, Mr. Peppah, I suppose you will take my I O U?" said Gussy.

"Yee—for fifteen. I wouldn't take his—he's Yorkshire!" answered Mr. Pepper, with a wrathful look at Blake.

"I was done down by a Yorkshireman once!"

"Must have been a long time ago," said Blake.

"I honour that Yorkshireman!" murmured Lowther.

Gussy signed an I O U for fifteen shillings, promising to redeem it within a week.

As Lowther pointed out, the interest was the mere trifle of 2,500 per cent. per annum, which was calculated to beggar a millionaire.

But Mr. Pepper said that was not the way to look at it, and, for his part, he would not mind beggaring all the millionaires in creation—

which they found it easy to believe.

They departed. Binks seemed very willing to go. He never even looked back at his master's face.

Perhaps he had not forgotten that other master, now in khaki; but certainly he had taken to D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus slipped into a shop to buy some dog-biscuits.

"That's a downy old bird, that Pepper," said Blake, while Tom Merry negotiated the entrance of the key of the barn—which key weighed nearly a pound—into a pocket.

"He's a culture—a regular bird of prey," said Lowther. "I can't get rid of a dread suspicion that there's some do in all this. But Tommy has the key, and the barn's certainly there, so it's hard to see how there can be."

"We ought to have asked him whether Grundy had been to see him," said Blake, who could not forget the grins on the faces of Grundy & Co.

"Grundy wouldn't have come away without the key," said Tom. "Besides, what could Grundy want with the barn?"

But Grundy had forgotten all about the key.

D'Arcy came out of the shop, Binks trotting at his heels as if he had run there ever since puppyhood.

"Where are you going to lodge Binks?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, he will have to be put in the barn, I guess!" said Tom.

"But that will be frightfully lonely for him," protested Arthur Augustus.

"Well, you can go and sit with him," replied Tom, grinning. "You can't very well have him in your study—not that I mind."

"Or that it matters much in a menagerie like that," remarked Lowther blandly.

"Lowthah, I shall refuse any lough to regard—"

"Ring off, Gustavus! They want to bag Binks for the monkey-house—otherwise No. 10, Sholl passage," said Blake.

"But they can't. We won't have the manners of Binks spoiled by contact with Lowther."

"I thought you were going to say Manners, Blake. You missed a chance there."

"A Yorkshireman, old scout, prefers the truth to a pun," replied Blake.

CHAPTER 9.

Baggy Blabs!

THE Terrible Three were discussing arrangements for the election in Study No. 10 next day.

Thus far the united wisdom of all concerned had not managed to hit upon a feasible scheme.

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There would be candidates in plenty, but where were the voters coming from?

Everyone would want to stand for election. Everyone, that is, in the Lower School—the Forms below the Fifth.

The Fifth and Sixth would look upon the whole scheme from a standpoint of lofty superiority, no doubt; but in matters of this sort nobody minded about the opinion of the two senior Forms.

The fags had caught on. A deputation consisting of Wally D'Arcy, Frank the Regio Manners, and Jameson had waited upon Tom Merry & Co.

put in a strong claim for representation for the Third—and plenty of it!

"Waited upon" sounds polite; but it cannot be said that Wally & Co. sounded specially polite, and in the event they had to be put out by force.

The New House had rallied well.

Figgins was quite ready to lead the Opposition, and did not trouble to conceal his belief that the Opposition would soon become the Government if it had fair play.

Even Racke, Crooke, and their set were interested. There were rumours that they proposed to form a party of Irreconcilables, pledged to give the Government all possible trouble, but not to support the official Opposition.

Grundy also was said to be trying to get together a party of his own. He had Wilkins and Gunn as a nucleus, of course. It had not transpired thus far that they had won any recruits.

But all this was no help towards settling the election problem. For that problem was just this—who were the voters to be when everyone proposed to stand for election?

And, arising out of that question, as Monty Lowther said in his best parliamentary style, was this—who was to settle which of the horde of would-be-candidates should be allowed to stand?

The Terrible Three were giving the knotty problem their very best attention—even Lowther taking it seriously—when there came a modest tap at the door.

"Come in, if you care to risk it!" yelled Tom. "But if you're anyone we don't want to see, you'll jolly well go out on your neck!"

It was Baggy Trimble who responded to this hospitable invitation.

"That's truly heroic, Baggy!" said Lowther. "But it won't save you. We don't want to see you—we never do—and you know that. So it wasn't a risk you were taking. You were bucking against a dead end, which is foolish."

"Oh, I say Lowther, don't be an ass!" pleaded Baggy. "I've got something to tell you, you know—something it's important you should hear! He, he, he!"

"You can't have anything important," said Lowther, gripping him by the ear.

"But if you have, tell it in three words, and bunk before worse befalls you!"

"Yaroooh! Leggo my ear!" howled Baggy.

"Got the earache?" inquired Lowther kindly.

"No, ass! Why should I have the earache?"

"Vexis—also draughts through key-holes. Very much the same thing, come to that."

"I haven't—"

"In three words, fatty!"

"About the barn!" spluttered Trimble.

"What about the barn?" snapped Tom.

"Oh, leggo my ear, Lowther! That hurts!"

"Leave the worm alone, Monty, and let him tell what he's got to tell, will you?"

"To hear, Thomas, is to obey. Proceed, Bagley Trimble of Trimble Hall!"

The egregious Baggy smirked at that. "Look here, you know, if you chaps mean to get that barn you'd better hurry up," he said.

Now it was rather remarkable, seeing how well-posted Baggy made it his business to be about other people's business, that he should not yet have discovered the hiring of the barn by either of the rival parties. But so it was.

"Why?" asked Tom, looking at him very hard.

Baggy was not very reliable; but he had a way of getting advance information, and it sometimes paid to give heed unto him.

And across Tom's mind there flitted the memory of Jack Blake's doubt about Grundy. Moreover, Tom was not inclined to trust the grasping Mr. Pepper a yard. Perhaps he had come to that frame of mind rather late; but that was how he felt now.

"If you haven't got it already, you'd better look sharp, or Grundy will be before you, you know. I thought I'd just give you a warning. He, he, he!"

"How does Grundy know anything about it?" rapped out Tom.

"I—I—Oh, I should I know? Somebody told him, I suppose," faltered Baggy.

"And how do you know he knows anything about it?" asked Manners. "He wouldn't tell you."

"I—I—Well, then, I heard him talking it over with Gunn and Wilkins."

"Where were you when you heard?"

"Never mind that, Manners. I don't care a lot for Baggy's ways of finding out things, I'll own. But if there's anything in this, I must say I think Grundy is playing it rather low on us," Tom said.

"It ain't like old Grundy to be spiteful!" Manners remarked. "But it's uncommon like Baggy to tell whoppers."

"I'm not telling whoppers, Manners. I should scorn the action. You fellows know very well how truthful I am!"

"It wouldn't be spite," said Lowther. "Grundy would think it a fair score over us; and I'm not prepared to deny it myself. After all, we rejected with deepsire Grundy's offer to be Prime Minister, with half-a-dozen or so portfolios. It wasn't exactly a modest offer; but one doesn't expect figs from thistles!"

"That's what it is," said Trimble, nodding. "Grundy says if you won't let him be Prime Minister you shan't have the barn."

"Did he tell you so?"

"Nan-no. Not exactly. But I heard him say so to Wilkins and Gunn."

"Baggy's knees are dusty. Grundy & Co. are slovenly beggars. Herlock Sholmes deduces that Baggy may be telling the truth, unlikely though it seems," said Lowther. "He has just come from under the table in No. 3."

"Tain't Grundy & Co. If there's dirt under the table it's the housemaids' fault," Manners replied. "We don't dust out our own studies. I think it's because Baggy's too big a clown to use the clothes-brush, and he's been down on his knees begging someone's pardon."

"Jotson, you amaze me! You are developing the rudiment of a brain!"

"Drop it, Monty! This may be serious!" said Tom.

"How so, Thomas? What does it matter what Grundy attempts when we—"

"Don't say too much! Baggy ain't to be trusted, you know that! Look here, you fellows, if there's anything at all in your giddy yarn, how did Grundy come to know anything about us meaning to hire the barn?"

"I—I—someone must have told him. Didn't I say so before?" stammered Baggy.

"Who? That's the question! There

ain't such a heap of chaps here who are mean enough to listen at keyholes. And we know jolly well that none of the fellows who were in the secret would go blurring it out to Grundy."

"There's Mellish," said Trimble sulkily.
And it was true that Percy Mellish of the Fourth was quite capable of conduct of that kind. He was a fating study-mate for Baggy.

"You say Mellish told him. Manners, you go and look for Mellish. If he's not guilty he ought to know what Trimble's saying about him. And if he is, there's no use in putting off his execution!"

"Right-ho, Tommy!" said Manners.
"Here, I say, Manners, don't cut off like that! I never said it was Mellish, did I?"

The Terrible Three grinned. Baggy was the only fellow in the Fourth or Shell who could not lick Percy Mellish. Even Baggy had accomplished the feat once. But that was under the spur of a misplaced affection. And evidently Baggy had no desire to be confronted with Mellish now in order to make an accusation to his face.

"It wasn't Trimble, by any chance?" asked Lowther.

"Nun-no! Of—of course not! If I had told Grundy, should I have come along to warn you chaps?"

"Just what you would do, you Hun!" snapped Manners.

"My hat, yes!" said Tom. "Of course, the worm tried to make Grundy pay for the news. He may have brought it off, or he may not."

"Not!" said Lowther decidedly. "Grundy don't care for that kind of thing. He has no use for sneaking eavesdroppers. I dare say he told you so, didn't he, Baggy?"

"Yes, he—I mean, no, he never said anything of the sort! How could he when—Oh, stoppitt, Manners! Stoppitt, Lowther! Ow—ow!"

Baggy had given himself away. If not Mellish, the eavesdropper must almost certainly have been Baggy; and Baggy refused to confront Mellish, which was suspicious. And now Baggy had as good as admitted the crime—at least, so the Terrible Three considered.

"Bump him!" said Tom.

"Yaroooh!"

"Hallo, deah boys! Bein' kind to Baggy?" asked the voice of Arthur Augustus at the door.

"You can go now, you fat worm!" said Manners.

Trimble went.

"How's Binks getting on, Gussy?" asked Lowther, who was a good deal taken with D'Arcy's latest purchase.

"He seems quite all right in the barn. He was no end pleased to see me; but he does not make a ridiculous fuss about bein' shut up in the barn between times. I say, deah boys, if you get any bones or gwisht at dinnah that you can't eat—"

"We never get any bones or gristle that we can eat, Gussy," said Lowther. "If you find that you can make away with such things, I should like to examine your teeth."

"Save them for Binks, will you? You can stick them in your pockets, you know!"

"Nice for our pockets—I don't think!" remarked Manners.

"That's all right, if you take an old envelope in. Oh, I say, Tom Mewwy, I must have cithah dropped the key somewhere or have left it in the lock; it isn't in any of my pockets!"

"Crowded out by the old envelopes—full of bones and gristle," suggested Lowther.

"Look here, Gussy, you idiot, this won't do!" snapped Tom. "Baggy says Grundy is after that barn, and Blake

rather fancies he saw Pepper before us. If he—"

"Now that I come to think of it, I remember that I did meet Grundy and Gunn an' Wilkins on their way—"

"You chump! You fathead! Why didn't you say so before? Come on, you chaps!"

CHAPTER 10.

Disputed Possession.

"WHAT'S the row?"
Blake hailed the four as they dashed across the quad.

Tom Merry leading, Lowther, Manners, and D'Arcy close upon his heels.

"Grundy! Gone to the barn! You were right, Blake; he's after it! And this fabulous idiot has left the key there!"

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ring off! There's nothing to be said for you, Gussy, so don't try to say it!"

"Dig! Herries!" roared Blake.

And Digby and Herries came rushing up, and added themselves to the little band.

At the gates stood Levison, Cardew, and Clive.

"Seen Grundy?" asked Tom.

"Yes. He went past a little while ago," replied Levison.

"Come along, then! You may be wanted!"

"Can't you seven handle Grundy without help?" asked Cardew lazily.

"Of course we can! Don't come if you don't want to, Cardew!"

"Oh, I'll come! Only Grundy an' I aren't on speaking terms, an' I wasn't sure that it would be strict etiquette to help in handlin' him, that bein' so. If you say it is, I've no more to say, by gad! But I hope you aren't goin' to run all the 'Runnin' don't suit my delicate constitution."

Cardew was running alongside as he talked, and talked easily as he ran. Cardew's delicate constitution did not prevent his being able to do things that most fellows could not. And there was no particular reason why it should, as its delicacy was only a figment of his imagination.

There were ten now, and they ran hard.

When the barn came into sight over the hedges there was no sign of Grundy & Co. But when Tom Merry's band reached the gate of the field they were visible at once.

They had not got inside the barn, and for this Binks was responsible.

Grundy had unlocked the door, in which Arthur Augustus had so carelessly left the key. But he had been halted on the threshold by Binks.

Every hair on Binks' small body bristled, and his white teeth showed in a grin that Grundy did not like at all.

Binks evidently regarded himself as in

charge of the barn, and was not disposed to admit intruders.

"Aho! there, St. Jim's bounders!" came a voice from down the road.

"Oh, hang it all, there are the Grammars, and we simply haven't got time to attend to them now!" said Tom.

"We'll collar the key, and then give them socks!" Blake replied.

"St. Jim's, aho!" sang out Gordon Gay, the leader of the Grammarian juniors.

By Gordon Gay side were Frank Monk and the two Woottons, and behind them were Carboy, Mont Blanc, the French boy, and several more.

"Go to Jericho!" yelled Tom Merry.

And he sped on through the field.

Grundy was trying to coax Binks. He appeared to have spent a considerable time in trying; but Grundy liked dogs, and was not so impatient as might have been expected. He would not have devoted so long to coaxing an inferior animal like Trimble.

"Good old doggie! Nice old boy!" said Grundy.

"Br-r-r-r," said Binks.

"Oh, come along, then! Good old fellow!"

"Br-r-r-r—"

Grundy took a step or two nearer.

Binks advanced to meet him.

Grundy took a step or two back. The good old doggie really had rather business-like teeth, and though Grundy was in a hurry for that key, he had unlocked the door; but then, Binks had gone for him, and Grundy had retreated, leaving the key in the lock.

Binks halted. He did not want to hurt Grundy & Co.; but they had to understand that there were limits.

"I say, Wilky, I'll draw him, and you can slip behind and grab the key," said Grundy.

"No jolly fair!" answered Wilkins promptly.

"Don't be a funk! He's only a little chap, and I can hold him all right."

"Well, I'd rather see you holding him before I slip in behind him, and I don't know that I should be keen then."

"Whose dog is he?" asked Gunn.

The other fellows were close up now, and they heard Grundy's reply.

"Dunno. Yes, I do, though. I saw him at that rotter Pepper's cottage. The swindler needn't think I'm jolly well going to pay rent for his barn, and be jolly well kept out of it by his dog!"

"Then you are!" said Tom. "That proves it! Baggy was telling the truth for once!"

"And I hope the shock of doing it will make him ill," Lowther said charitably.

"It ought to."

Grundy heard, and faced round upon them, his massive brow gleaming.

Binks allowed his wicked-looking teeth to go into retirement, and greeted Arthur Augustus with a friendly wag of his tail-stump. But he did not desert his post.

"What do you chaps want?" demanded Grundy, looking hostile.

"We've come for the key of our barn," said Blake. "Gustavus here had it to pay a visit to his dog, and, being a born silly ass, left it in the door."

"But the dog, not being a silly ass, plainly didn't intend to allow outsiders to annex it," added Lowther.

"Oh, weally, Blake—weally, Lowth—"

Grundy broke in upon Gussy without ruth.

"So it's D'Arcy's dog, is it?" he growled. "You'd better call your dog off, D'Arcy, or he'll be sorry for himself! As for the barn, that's mine—for the time being. I've paid rent for it, and I'll jolly well see that you chaps don't."

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Eat less Bread

intrude. "It's you who are the outsiders, you know."

"Better collect the key, as it's your barn," replied Lowther, grinning.

"Rot!" growled Grundy. "Just you call that dog off, D'Arcy."

"Off what, Grundy?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently. "I weally cannot perceive that Binks is meddlin' with anythin' or anyone whatevah."

"I want to get that key, and I mean to get it, too!" roared Grundy.

"Well, get it!" hooted Grundy. Grundy made a movement forward.

"Br-r-r!" said Binks warningly. Grundy concluded that victory did not lie that way.

"What do you mean about its being your barn?" he snapped.

Arthur Augustus stepped past Binks, who made no objection, seized the key, and put in a pocket of his trousers.

"Now, Tom Mewey," he said, "we can discuss matters with Grundy on a propah an amicable footin'."

But Grundy did not appear to see things in that light. The collaring of the key by D'Arcy seemed to make him feel even less amicable.

"Gimme that dashed key!" he hooted. The Grammar School juniors were coming in at the gate now.

But Grundy, though he had been hard up against the Grammar School in his time, and had indeed suffered as much at their irreverent hands as most fellows at St. Jim's, paid no heed to that.

"Hold hard, Grundy!" said Tom Morran. "You can't convince us by bellowing, you know."

"It may be tansful, but it's not argument," remarked Lowther.

"I don't want to argue with you. I ain't going to argue with you!" yelled Grundy. "I hired this barn, and paid the rent in advance. Is that good enough?"

"Not likely!" replied Tom. "We've hired it, and we've paid the rent in advance. And here's the giddy receipt!"

Grundy clutched at it.

"No fear!" said Tom, putting it behind him. "You may look, but I can't trust you to touch."

Herries, Digby, and Manners seized Grundy. He began to struggle.

"Not a word, Grundy!" said Cardew, in his cool, mocking way. "It's really a compliment to your very determined character, by gad! If I were in your boots they wouldn't hold me. They would know that I hadn't resolution enough to tear the thing up."

Grundy seemed to understand. He ceased to wriggle, and looked hard at the receipt. His jaw fell when he saw it was in due form. He had thought Tom Morry & Co. might be bluffing.

But then his face lighted up again.

"Rot!" he said. "Not half good enough! A measly couple of quid—why, I paid the swindler five!"

"Somebody's been had, then," said Blake. "Show us your receipt, Grundy."

"It rather strikes me, do you know, that everybody's been had—except, of course, the dear Pepper," said Lowther.

"Show it, old scout," said Gunn. "He's got it, you fellows; we saw it written. And we were first, too."

"We met you as we came back," added Wilkins.

"I'm not going to show these bounders any receipt," said Grundy obstinately. "If they can't take my word for it—"

"We'll take your word all serene," said Tom Morry. "But we ain't going to let you take the barn. That ain't quite our notion of a fair exchange."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 505.

CHAPTER 11.

United Against the Fo!

"YOU chaps had better submit the matter in dispute to arbitration," said Gordon Gay, coming up behind them. "We'll be pleased and proud to settle it for you, I'm sure."

The Grammarians were in force. More of the tribe had come along, and now outnumbered the St. Jim's crowd, which totalled thirteen, if Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn could be relied upon to back up. There were fifteen of the Rylecombe juniors.

"Hear, hear, old chap!" cried Frank Monk. "They'd have been clawing each other's giddy hair in a moment. We've come in time to play the kind roles, and prevent that. Their little hands were never made 'you know the rest.'"

Probably Gordon Gay & Co. had no belief that their kind offer would be accepted.

But if they had any such belief they were soon disillusioned.

"Oblige us by being pleased and proud elsewhere, Gay," said Monty Lowther politely.

"Hop it!" snapped Tom. "We've got business to attend to. Come along for a hiding later on, when we have the time to spare."

"Run away and play marbles," said Blake. "That's more in your line than sticking your little snubby noses into the affairs of your betters."

"Yes, wadiah!"

"Yes, run away and play, you silly louts!" hooted Grundy.

Grundy had declared himself. After that he could not shy at doing his bit for St. Jim's in the combat that was bound to follow.

"Oh, sock it into them!" roared Gordon Gay. "They've fairly asked for it!"

"Put them out, the interfering bounders!" shouted Tom.

And then the battle closed.

Grundy rushed straight at Frank Monk, locked his arms around him, and strove with might and main to bear him to the ground.

Tom Morry tackled Gordon Gay. Ralph Reckness Cardew, with a cry of "Here's for you, Algy, dear boy!" went for Lacy, his schoolfellow of old days at Woodhouse.

Arthur Augustus went for Wootton major, Manners for Wootton minor, and Levison for Carboy.

There began a succession of single combats, with the odd two on the Grammarian side hovering on flank and rear, where they saw a chance to help, and making themselves a nuisance.

Binks, at the open door of the barn, danced up and down, barking wildly. But he seemed to know that he must not take part in the fray.

The first success fell to St. Jim's. It was not a big one. No one on either side had any high opinion of the prowess of Carboy, and when Gunn, despatching Morland, dashed at Carboy and got him down, no one was surprised to hear Carboy yell "Pax!" and announce that he had had enough.

So was disposed of one of the Grammarian skirmishers. And now Lacy was out of the fight. He had lashed out savagely at Cardew with fists—seldom resorted to in these battles, at least until tempers ran high—and Cardew had retaliated in kind. A little of that proved enough for Algernon Lacy, and Cardew proceeded to seek out and engage the other skirmisher.

"There's for you!" hooted Grundy, as Frank Monk staggered in his beaklike hug, and went over.

"Rescue!" yelled Manners.

Someone had tripped him up, and Wootton minor was sitting on him.

"Vesque!" panted Arthur Augustus. Wootton major had borne him to earth. "Help, Gay!" sang out Carboy. He had found Levison an unexpectedly tough opponent, and was now struggling with him on the grass, with Levison on top.

But there was no help from Gordon Gay. He had his hands full.

Wilkins' antagonist had him down; but Grundy hurried himself into the fray, pulled the Grammarian off, yanked Wilkins to his feet, and returned in hot haste to renew his conflict with Monk, now on his feet once more.

Clive bundled over Wootton minor, and Manners arse. But Blake was down, with two of the rival school on top of him. And Digby had hit someone elbow with his nose, and had gone aside to staunch the flow of the red, red blood.

"Good old Grundy!" yelled Gunn, as Frank Monk sprawled again.

"Alas for the Entente Cordiale!" puffed Lowther, as he seated himself upon the heaving bosom of Mont Blake—or perhaps rather farther down than the word "bosom" can correctly be used to indicate.

"Arise off ze stomach of me!" urged Mont Blake.

"Non, non!" answered Lowther. "Parlez-vous Francais? Nah poo!"

"Pile in, St. Jim's!" shouted Tom.

"Keep it up, Grammarians! Sock them!" yelled Gordon Gay.

The two leaders were looked in deadly grip. They were so well matched that so far neither had been able to get the other down.

To and fro the tide of battle swayed, and none might tell as yet to which side victory would incline.

Lacy had stalked off, and Carboy had slunk away. The numbers were now equal. Digby was back, the battle was on. He went to the help of D'Arcy, and Wootton major had to shift. But Levison had deserted Carboy to attend to someone else, and Carboy sailed in to the aid of the Australian junior. Then Wootton minor, having lost Manners somewhere, tackled Dig; and Gussy was borne back to the very door of the barn by two fellows of superior weight.

He sprawled. It was more than Binks could bear. Binks had evidently become strongly attached to his new master already. He showed it now by attaching himself to the trousers of Wootton major in the region which may be described as the sit-downs.

Yoop! howled Wootton.

There followed a rending sound. Tom Morry and Gordon Gay, who had just rolled over together, relaxed their mutual grip, and sat up, roaring with laughter.

Wootton major was struggling frantically to tuck in his shirt-tail. Grundy, sitting near, with Frank Monk breathless beside him, had grabbed it.

"Yoo!" yelled Wootton major. "Kill the beastly dog, somebody! Leg-go of my shirt! Oh, it's you, is it, Grundy? I'll give you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Saints and the Grammarians in one great hilarious chorus as Binks capered around with a section of excellent grey trousers in his mouth, and Wootton major tried to drag himself away from Grundy, and Grundy, quite unsmiling, held on grimly.

"Oh, ring off, Grundy, you rotter! Oh, I say, this is too beastly thick! We didn't bargain for dogs, and it ain't a straight do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The combat had ceased, and more than half the warriors were rolling on the ground in ecstasies of delight.

Only two faces were without grins. Wootton major didn't feel like grinning, and Grundy's face was as solemn as an owl's.

Lowther declared afterwards that Grundy did not see anything funny in it. He said Grundy had looked at his own countenance so often in the mirror that his sense of humour—if he had ever possessed one—had been killed, and he didn't know anything funny when he saw it. But that was doubtful. For Grundy held on, in spite of Wootton's frantic squirming. And Wootton could do no more than equivocate, lest he should lose the tail of his shirt.

"Oh, chuck it, Grundy! Pax!" howled Wootton.

"You own you're licked?" demanded Grundy.

"No—yes! Anything you like—only logged!"

"Own you're licked Gay?" asked Tom Merry.

"Not likely, Tommy! We haven't begun to. But we'd better chuck it—after poor old Wootton's awful loss! Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy let go, and Wootton major sat down at once.

"What on earth am I to do?" he moaned.

"Sit there till someone fetches you another pair of bags. Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Lowther.

"Collar D'Arcy's bags! Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Frank Monk.

"Take 'em off and borrow a needle," suggested Herries.

"Weally Monk, I am supwised at such a suggestion! I assuredly should not allow—"

"I'll have them, though!" yelled Wootton major. And he rushed at Arthur Augustus.

But Binks rushed at him, and Wootton sat down again in a hurry—which Lowther, with tears streaming down his face, said was like locking the stable-door after the bird had flown. It was a trifle mixed; but that was no time for being cool and calm.

"The white flag!" shouted Blake.

"Where?" Wootton ain't showing it. He's taking no end of care not to, replied Gordon Gay.

"Oh, cheese it, Gordon! I say, go and fetch me a pair of bags!"

The order was addressed to Wootton minor, whom his bereaved brother had seized by the leg.

"No fear! Don't you think I know a joke when I see it?" retorted Wootton minor.

"Find the grass coolin', Wootton?" inquired Cardew blandly.

"He'll get rheumatism," chuckled Levison.

Wootton major gave a sudden deft jerk, and capsize his brother across his legs.

"Come on, dog! Have some more!" he shouted. "This chap thinks it's no end of a joke. Come and be funny with him!"

But Binks had no further use for samples of trousering, and he ignored the invitation.

"We'd better call it a draw, Gay, I think," said Tom. "All things considered, it can't be said that the white flag was really hoisted on your side, can it? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come along, Wootton. We'll protect you from rude eyes on the way back," said Frank Monk.

"I want a pair of bags! I don't want any of your rotten protection!" howled Wootton major.

But he had to be satisfied with that. The Grammarians marched off in a compact body, of which the victim of Binks' devotion formed the centre.

Grundy turned to Tom Merry.

"Now we'll settle our affair, Merry," he said loftily.

Tom looked at his watch.

"Not before dinner, old chap," he said cheerily. "We shall have to scot and we're to be late."

And it was not settled that day, and the terms of settlement cannot be told here. More was to come of the double dealing of Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, as will be related in due course. And more—much more—was to come of the St. Jim's Parliament, in spite of all the difficulties that beset it at the outset, as will also be recounted.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"GRUNDY THE PATRIOT!" by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"GRUNDY THE PATRIOT!"

By Martin Clifford.

There is more about the projected St. Jim's Parliament in this story, and although the schemes for it do not get very much further, other things happen in connection with the boys which George Alfred Grundy and Tom Merry have both hired from Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, whom Rylcombe calls a miser. Grundy discovers that the village yarn is true. How he discovers it, we shall next week, as also of the patriotic determination to which he came in consequence. You will also read how Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins were all sent to sunny and charming Marie Rivers, of whom some of you complain you don't hear enough, fits across the scene, and the great Grundy actually condescends to ask if it is given. But he does not talk after it is given. But does Grundy ever take advice?

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

This will be dated November 17th, so we are not so very far from it now. There will be the usual extra-length ripping story, of course; and gets almost without saying. And there will be a good, long instalment of "The Twins from Tasmania," which bids fair to rival in popularity any serial we have ever published. But it is of something else I want to tell you now.

Many will remember, and nearly all will have heard of the supplement which was given with the Christmas Number of 1915. It gave a lot of information relative to St. Jim's, including a list of all the boys who are at all prominent in the stories. The number containing it has long since been out of print, but there is no week when we do not receive requests for a copy of it.

With a supplement of that kind brought up to date, will be a feature of the Christmas Number this year. Those of you who have cherished the earlier supplement need not fancy that the space given to it will be wasted as far as you are concerned. This will not be a reprint of the former budget of information, but a new one on slightly different lines. You will all want it, I am sure, so don't forget that you had better order the issue containing it that for November 17th—in advance!

NOTICES.

Back Numbers, etc., Wanted.

By T. Donovan, 27, Bute Street, Liverpool. —"Boys' Friend" 3d. Library, Numbers 301, 302, 313, 320, 327, 370, 375, and 380.

By J. J. Gregory, 119, Leeson Street, Ardwick, Manchester. —"Boys' Friend" 3d. Library. Back numbers. State price.

By Jas. Green, 50, Devonshire Road, Prince's Park, Liverpool. —GEM and "Magnet" Christmas Numbers, 1914 and earlier.

By Reggie Booth, Swinton House, Swinton, Manchester. —"Britain Invaded," "Britain at Bay," and "Britain's Revenge," in "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library. Full price offered.

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Your Editor

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 506.



THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA

Our Great New Serial Story.



NEW READERS START HERE.

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA are PHILIP and PHILIPPA DERWENT, known to their friends as FLIP and FLAP. They have with them a remarkable cockatoo, whose name is COCKY. Flip takes the bird to Highcliffe, to which school he is bound, while Flap goes to Cliff House. They fall in on the way with some of the Highcliffe nuts, and GADSBY forces a quarrel on Flip, and is well thrashed. The Colonial boy, however, makes friends with the other nuts, and especially with PONSONBY, TUNSTALL, and MERTON. But VAVASOUR and MONSON MIXOR are less disposed to like him, and MR. MOBBIS does not take to him at all. Flap meets MARJORIE HAZELDENE, PHYLLIS HOWELL, and CLARA TREVLIN, of Cliff House, and finds chums in them. She gets to know that PETER HAZELDENE, of Greyfriars, Marjorie's brother, is in some trouble—he is, in fact, in debt to Ponsonby, with whom he has been gambling during the holidays. She writes to her brother, warning him against Ponsonby, and Flip does not like it. By the contrivance of Gadsby, Ponsonby sees the letter, but does not appear to mind. He keeps it. Marjorie and Tunstall go along to Cliff House with a message from Flip to Flap, and play hockey with the girls. Ponsonby and Vavasour turn up, but the game stops on their arrival. Flap gets Langley, the Highcliffe captain, to give Flip a place in the school foot eleven, with a view to depriving Courtenay's team of his help. Some of the nuts get into a scrap with the Famous Five of Greyfriars, and Flip, Merton, and Tunstall come to their rescue. The upshot is that Flip fights and beats Bulstrode, and has an inconclusive combat with Rob Cherry. Ponsonby arranges a five-a-side battle—the nuts versus Harry Wharton & Co.

(Now read on.)

Squiff and Hazel.

"GOING to Highcliffe, Squiff?" It was Peter Hazeldene, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, who spoke, and he addressed Sampson Quiney Field, the Australian junior. "Yes. Are you?" "That's why I asked," replied Hazel, a trifle sulkily. He had his bicycle, as Squiff had, and had waited at the gates for Squiff to catch him up. "Shouldn't if I were you," said Squiff bluntly. "Why?" snapped Hazel. "If you want it straight—but you don't, I know, because you ain't the sort that does—because Pon and his gang are no good to you." "That's my look-out!" answered Hazel, scowling, as he mounted. "Granted. I'll say no more." "I get enough of that sort of thing from Wharton!" Hazeldene grumbled. "Wharton's a better friend to you than I make any pretence of being. I've said all I care to say." They rode in silence for a few minutes after that. Then Hazel burst out with: "You think I'm a fool?" "Thought 'fraid," said Squiff coolly. "But you do think it?"

"Not exactly that, either. Say I know it; that's nearer the mark."

"Why should I be blamed for doing what Vernon-Smith does?"

"So you're going on that tack, are you, Hazel? It's a rotten poor one. You and the Bourfier are very different chaps."

"But that's no reason why he should do things—"

"I'm not excusing the things the Bounder does, my good ass; I don't agree with half of them."

"But you're chummy with him?" protested Hazel.

"Wrong again! I like the Bounder; but he's no chum of mine."

"I'm sick of it!" dashed out Hazel. "Smithy does as he likes, and the whole Form thinks a heap of him! Even the chaps that aren't friendly with him think a heap of him! But—"

"Don't be such an absolute ass, Hazel! Yes, we do think a lot of him. At his worst he's got pluck, and he'll do generous things—risk his life for the sake of a cad like Skinner; stand up to a rotten tyrant like Jeffrey; play the game at a pinch, whatever he may do when he's fooling round."

"Do you mean that I don't play the game?" Hazel snarled. "You certainly don't—except by fits and starts. If I'd been in Wharton's shoes, I'd have thrown you over long ago."

"He would if it wasn't for Marjorie. 'Tain't me he cares anything about."

"I dare say that's true," said Squiff frankly. "There's your sister again. There ain't a decent fellow in the Form who doesn't think a heap of her. She's real bona—nice and good a little girl as ever stepped! And you're nothing but a blessed nuisance to her. That don't make us love you any better. You asked for this, Hazel, and you needn't blame me if you get more than you like."

Hazel's flushed face bent low over his handles for a moment. Then he straightened himself up, and his eyes met Squiff's for the first time during their talk. Peter Hazeldene's eyes were not good at meeting others.

"I— Look here, Squiff, I know that's true about Marjorie. I own it. I wish it could be—well, then, a better brother to her!"

"That's a sign of grace," said Squiff drily. "Oh, it's easy enough for you to say that sort of thing, and be heartily superior, and all that! If you were me—"

"I'd go and ha— No, never mind! I don't want to jump on you too hard, Hazel. They've got to do it, I can see. Don't tell me unless you want to; but I'll listen if it will do you any good to tell it. Mind, I don't promise to help. Wharton's money may go to his pockets. Mine don't—I'll see to that!"

"Who said I owed Pon anything?"

"I didn't. But I wouldn't care to bet they do. After that, I can see how I can get a chap as you are for giving yourself away. Hazel. Cards ain't in my line; but if I played with you I should jolly well know whether you'd get the best of trumps. I don't wonder the nuts took you!"

"Well, then, I do owe him some. We were together part of the holidays, and a chap must do something to kill time."

"So he must," Broomey and Delaney and a score of other chaps killed it in the

harvest-field. But that ain't your sort of amusement, I know, Hazel."

"I don't call it amusement at all. What are holidays for?"

"Not for gambling and piling up debts you can't pay."

"That's true, too. And a fellow don't really enjoy it. You know how it is, Squiff—it gets hold of you—"

"No, I don't know. It never got hold of me, and I don't fancy it ever will, Hazel. So you owe Pon money, and I suppose you're going over to see him about it?"

"Yes. He asked me to come along."

"Ordered you, you mean."

"I don't! Do you think I'd take orders from Ponsonby?"

"Of course I do. You have to, while he's creditor and you're debtor. It's no catch for any fellow to be owing money, but it's the merry dickens for a chap like you, Hazel!"

"He's been very decent about it, so far, I must say."

"Then it's to suit his own ends. Pon never was decent for the sake of decency, and if I ever fancied I twiggid him being so I should reckon there was something wrong with the works in 'is brain-box."

"I don't believe Pon's as bad as all that. Marjorie detests him, I know; but that's only because she thinks he's bad for me. But that new chap at Highcliffe—Derwent—is no end chummy with him."

"And I guess his sister feels very much the same about it as you do."

Hazel nodded, looking thoughtful.

"Yes," he said; "she does. Marjorie let that slip when I saw her last. I don't think she meant to. But they are only girls; they can't judge."

"Miss Derwent's quite a nice girl, though."

"Of course she is!" said Squiff. "Ain't she Australian?"

"No, Tasmanian."

"Same thing."

"Not likely! Tasmania ain't Australia. Any ass knows it's an island."

"And everyone who ain't an ass knows that it's a State of the Australian Commonwealth."

"Oh, I didn't!"

"Well, I didn't include you," replied Squiff.

"You're going over to arrange about that fight, I suppose?" said Hazel.

"Guess again, and you'll guess wrong."

"Are you?"

"I am not. Rather wish I was."

"A silly nugs' game, I call it!" said Hazel, with lofty contempt.

"I can't do any bit harder work than nap or banker," Squiff answered. "But, on the whole, not more dangerous, I think."

"I wonder what Pon proposed it for?"

"So I. If you can find that out, Hazel, it may be worth while your going to Highcliffe, after all."

"Pon ain't likely to tell me if he's got any shad."

"Oh, he doesn't trust you to all that extent?"

"Look here, Squiff, do you think I'd be rotten enough to bet on my own side?"

"Needn't get ferocious, Hazel. No, on the whole I don't think that's your precise line of country. Here we are."

Frank Courtenay and Rupert de Courcy stood at the gates of Highcliffe together.

"Why, it's Field, by gad!" said the

Caterpillar, ignoring Hazel entirely. "Doosid, pleased to see you, Field, as long as you haven't come along to invite me to do anything strenuous, by gad! Franky, here, keeps me up to the mark, 'know'; but I rather bar my more. I chased the boundin' ball for a solid hour this mornin', an' I really haven't got over it yet."

"You worry your talking apparatus too hard, Caterpillar—that's what tires you out," said Squiff. "But I haven't come to see you chaps at all, as a matter of fact. It's Pon I'm after."

"Pon's popularity increases by leaps an' bounds, Franky," remarked the Caterpillar.

Hazel had wheeled his machine in past them, and had now met Gadsby and Vavasour.

"Is it right about this fight business, Field?" asked Frank Courtenay.

"Yes; that's what I've come about."

"Oh! Not for the pleasure of seein' the dear Pon?"

"I'd see Pon hanged first, Caterpillar! He's a blessed sight too tricky for my liking."

"You're nothing to me, Caterpillar, your eyes shinned, dear boy! Pon won't take you in an' do for you quite as easily as he might some of your fellows, I fancy, by gad!"

"That made me feel a little better to see this foolery," Franky Courtenay inquired.

"You don't like it, then, Courtenay? Well, if it's any comfort to you to know it, Wharton don't like it much, either."

"Pity he should ever have agreed to it, then. It only means more bad blood between the schools, and, goodness knows, there's been enough of that."

"You're right, much choice. And it isn't going to cause any ill-feeling between us and you fellows, anyway."

"I hope not. Well, pon in and have some tea with us before you get back, old chaps. I might as well prefer to take tea with Ponsooby, of course."

"Your fellow hermit, Field," said De Courcy lazily, "has grown impatient. He has been taken by the nose by Gadsby at the amiable Vavasour to the august presence of Pon."

"Hazel's got nothing to do with this bizzies. He came over on his own, and squiffed. I'll trot along, see you two later."

Gadsby, Vavasour, and Hazeldene stood together in the passage when Squiff came up to them.

"You'll find all the giddy warriors in there," said Gadsby, indicating Pon's study, with a leer that made Squiff long to kick him.

"Oh! Aren't you one of the chosen champions?" asked Squiff.

"No, I'm not."

"Beastly disappointing for you, I should say. I do hope you won't let account of the little affair with Derwent? You carry some of his marks still, I see."

"Sneerin', swankin' cad," snarled Gadsby, as he passed into Ponsooby's study.

"Oh, I don't know! There are worse chaps than Squiff," Hazel replied.

"He's another of these Colonial rotters! I hate 'em—don't you, Ya?"

"Absolutely," said the dandy of the Fourth.

"I suppose it's no good thinking of seeing Pon till he's got through with Squiff?" said Hazel.

"Not a scrap. Got any tin on you?"

Hazel flushed. Gadsby's meaning was brutally plain. He wanted a game, but not on terms of IOU.

"Oh, yes," answered the Greyfriars junior, weak as ever in the face of temptation. "But where shall we go? You chaps seem to be turned out of your quarters."

"Come along to No. 6," said Gadsby. "Nobody there—only that dashed bird of Derwent's. An' those three will be ratty if we make the place full of us."

"Derwent came along. Hell make old Pon pi before he's finished, shouldn't wonder!"

"So the three made for No. 6," said Gadsby, as they went to study with Wharton and Merton.

"Nice boys—oh, nice boys!" chuckled Cocky, as they entered.

"I'll take care, or I'll bring your dashed neck," said Gadsby viciously.

Fixing It Up.

"HOW de do, Field?" said Pon-sooby, in his lordliest manner. "Pleased to see you."

"Thanks," replied Squiff dryly.

"He knew how much Pon's affability was worth. But he shook hands."

"I saw you at the gates, an' Monson

fetched these other fellows along." Pon continued. "We are the five, you know; an' I suppose you may as well fix up things with us, so that we can use bringin' anyone else into it, by gad!"

Merton and Tunstall and Monson shook hands, though Monson looked a trifle suspicious about it. He was a quiet, unassuming fellow, but no great faith in the new fellow's ability to tip down the scale on their side.

"You know Derwent, I think?" said Ponsooby.

"Well, we've met—and exchanged compliments," said Squiff. "I can't say we have been properly introduced."

"I wasn't over and above civil," admitted Flip, grinning. "But I don't think you could that against me, Field."

"Oh, not likely," Squiff said. And they gripped hands. There was nothing of the usual flabbing about Derwent's grip, Squiff noticed.

"You chaps come from thereabouts the same place—Timbuctoo, Mandalay, or somewhere—don't you, by gad?" drawled Pon.

"We come from places hundreds of miles apart; but we're both Australians, and I recommend you to study geography a little, please."

"Well, Squiff, I don't think you did out then that neither Timbuctoo nor Mandalay is in Australia."

"My dear man, I ain't interested in geographical details, but I call it so," said Pon yawning. "As for studyin'—what do you think we keep a tame Mobby for? He knows his place too dashed well to think of explainin' to us."

"He's a bit of a colonial, I'm pleased to say, though I shouldn't care for it myself, by gad!"

"His tone was almost insufferable. If the crew had been the usual nutty one, Squiff would have felt inclined to chuck his mission then and there. But Gadsby and Vavasour were absent, and no Greyfriars fellow could be so sure of himself as they did to those two. Moreover, the frank, healthy face of Flip Derwent made Sampson Quincy illy Field feel more at home."

"I'll wash with the washing," he said, and he sat down.

"I take it you have authority from Wharton to settle things," said Pon.

"You may certainly take it that way. That's what I've come here for," replied Squiff.

"Do you make any proposals as to time, place, an' so on?"

"I'll handle the rest say that, on the whole, they'd as soon leave that to you."

"Doosid kind of them! Gloves, I take it?"

"Yes, I should say so."

Squiff agreed that it was far better for the Highcliffe champions that gloves should be used. But he thought it.

"Let's see—your five are Wharton, Cherry, Nuncut, Ball, and that nigger chub."

"And Harree Janset Ram Singh, who is no more a nigger than you are," said Squiff corrected him.

"Oh, don't get on your ears! I'm not good at pedigrees, by gad, outside racein'."

"Well, here are our five. Now we don't see pairin' off."

"You don't see what?" asked Squiff.

"We'd prefer to fight five against five—not in pairs."

"Oh!"

"So one at Greyfriars had thought of that, and for a moment the ambassador felt doubtful."

But it was only for a moment. For quite certainly no one at Greyfriars had any doubt of the prowess of the Panchoy to pick the best five of the nuts, with gloves or without, in pairs or in general combat.

"You don't agree—what?"

"Oh, yes, serene! Our chaps won't mind. There must be some understanding as to what makes a finish, though. Suppose four of one side are downed out, and only one of the other, are the nuts to be round away at the one till he sings out that he's had enough?"

"Oh, yes, by gad! It's all very well to say down an' out, but because you love to get to prove that there's no more fight left in him. He may scramble up again."

"But you'll admit you're licked—I mean, either side must own up to being licked if it's five against five, Ponsooby."

"Certainly, as long as there's more than one of the other lot on his dashed feet an' ready to go on."

"But why more than one? Ain't one good

enough? Though I must say I don't think the fight ought to come to anything so jolly thick that eight or nine fellows out of you are laid out."

Squiff could not quite see what the leader of the nuts was driving at, and he felt a bit suspicious. But Pon had no very definite end in view; he was only making the terms as favourable to his own side as he could manage in the uncertainty of what might happen in the fray.

"Five down one side, only three on the other—a win. Five down on one, an' four on the other—two minutes by the watch to give one or more of the five a chance to stagger up again. Is that fair, Field?"

"I think that's fair," Squiff said gravely.

The terms sounded as if the nuts were going into this affair in the most determined do-or-die spirit. But that was not like the nuts, and there was excuse for Squiff's puzzlement.

"As for the venue, don't you think the sands, down beyond Peag, would be a dashed good place?" inquired Pon.

"That will do—as long as it's far enough beyond," the Greyfriars junior answered.

"We don't want a crowd of outsiders gaping at the show, either."

"Time to-morrow afternoon, shall we say?"

"I say, though, Pon, that isn't the best time for me. Flip isn't in—Courtenay asked me to play for Form Eleven to-morrow."

"You didn't promise him, did you?" snapped Pon.

"I didn't, as it happened—because of this. I wasn't in when you fixed it for. But he knows that there's no first term game, of course; and there was a kind of understanding that I'd turn out for the Form when you could get me to do a bit of fighting bizzies."

"That won't do, Flippy," said Merton quickly. "You can't expect to be fightin' fit after a hard game like this."

"As you didn't promise Courtenay, I don't see that there's anythin' in it," Cecil Ponsooby said. "Haug Courtenay, anyway! An' as you're lookin' for the first term game, I might as well let you go."

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Hazel in the Toils!

HAZELDEXE was certainly not playing the game. But he was just the Banker is not a game on the Puritan list.

"He ought not to have played at all, and he knew it. He had only a few shillings to play with, and he was in Pon's notice; and he needed what he had for other purposes. But Hazel was one of those whose only way of resisting temptation is to keep at a distance from it. When it came close he was sure to fall."

Cocky was in one of his most conversational moods. He did not talk to these three as he did to Flip, or to Merton and Tunstall, who had become his very good friends. His remarks were rather a sarcastic kind, quite as though he perceived the folly of what they were at.

"Nice boys!" Oh, very nice boys—I don't think," he said, and then he gave a shrill, prolonged whistle.

"That's a knowing old bird," said Hazel, grinning as he swept up his winnings on the first hand.

"But the brute!" said Gadsby savagely.

"One of these days I shall do for him!"

"Well, don't ask me to help you, you know," answered Hazel lightly. "I've nothing against him—except the chap he belongs to."

"Tricky—oh, devilish tricky!" said Cocky.

"Shut up!" roared Gadsby.

"Not if I—jolly well—know it—by—Jup!"

"But the crooked bird slowly, with a pause after each word.

"Hanged if I ever saw another like him!" remarked Hazel.

"He talks straight back."

"That's that!" Gadsby said. "It's just one of those Derwent's fond of savin', just in that way, too. An' the 'by Jupiter' he picked up from that silly ass Cocky."

"He's all right—all right-o!" put in Merton.

"I shouldn't care to talk secrets before him," said Hazel.

"I'll trouble you for five bob, old sport," Vavasour said.

"Why didn't the dashed girl twin take him, by gad?" growled Gadsby, who was losing and did not like it.

"She wanted to, didn't she?" asked Hazel.

"I heard something about it. They're both no end fond of old-top-knot here."

"He kept him all serene at Cliff House, too. They'd bar a dog there; but old maids like parrots and all that sort of thing."

"Why shouldn't she have him?" inquired Vavasour, grinning slyly.

"What do you mean, ass?"

"Oh, by gad, I'm not such an ass, Gaddy! It wouldn't be half a bad move to put the giddy bird, as you call 'em, over the garden wall at Cliff House, would it?"

Cocky began to sing "Over the Garden Wall." Cocky's singing voice was not as true as it might have been, but his temper grew rapidly worse as he continued to lose.

"Con-found the rotten bird," he snarled.

"What good would that do, Vav. anyhow?"

"Well, you know, no one could blame us much. We heard that Miss Derwent was plain for the creature, y'know, an' we were too gallant to let her pine any longer."

"We took him along widgeon, too. An' if by accident the catch of the cage came open as we were lovin' it, an' Cocky flew away, an' the cruel rooks an' magpies an' things pecked him to death, y'know—well, that wouldn't be our affair, would it?"

"My hat! You must have been doin' some thinkin', Vav!" gasped Gadsby.

"It was rather surprising to find Vavasour, the emptiest-headed of all the nuts, coming out with a scheme all on his own, though the scheme itself seemed to Hazel rather a bit queer."

He was sure, too, that the bird was a bit of a two-did, how much the bird from his far-away home counted for with Flip Derwent.

If Cocky were missing nothing but physical strength and plenty of that, he would be a bird from going in search of him. Classy, or call-over, footer or even a fight, it would be all one.

Each or any of them would have to wait till Cocky had been found, and then he should, y'know. Vav had better drop his brains if he can't use them to any better purpose than that," said Hazeldene.

"Leave the cockatoo alone, and let's get on with our game."

Hazel was winning this far. He had a ten-shilling note and quite a little pile of silver before him. He had put down his cigarette, the burning end of which was smoldering in the tablecloth. His hands were shaking with excitement, and his eyes gleamed.

He was not built for gambling. He could not keep cool.

Gadsby tapped Vavasour's shins under the table.

The scheme Vavasour had outlined appealed to Gadsby. But he had no wish to do anything that might bring a bad name to be quite a good notion if Peter Hazeldene could be got to take the risk.

Vavasour's brains were not likely to run to the same as deep as this. But Gadsby was crafty enough.

Across the table the dandy winked at his pal. He saw that Gadsby was meditating a move.

Just lost on the next round, but was a

winner again on that which followed. He was feverishly excited now. If only he could keep on for half an hour or so in this vein he could face Pon without a tremor—pay the debt—off—aid, of course, never get into his debt again—till next time!

"You're in luck to-day, old sport, by gad!" said Gadsby cheerily.

That should have been enough to make Hazel suspicious, for Gadsby was known to be a bad loser.

But it had not that effect. The Greyfriars junior was too full of pleasure at his own success to wonder why Gadsby should be so unusually affable.

Had he but known it, there was no present reason for his dreading Pon. That magnificent youth had not summoned him to Highcliffe to duan him, but only to be kind—to refrain in the most marked manner from the harsh criticism which was all part of Pon's plan to establish friendly relations with Cliff House; but even if Hazel had suspected that, it is doubtful whether he would have worried about it.

But Pon was at the back of Gadsby's mind all the time. Hazel had the weak, foolish idea that gambling debts are in a very special way debts of honour. All debts are more or less so—gambling ones rather less than most.

Perhaps, Hazel, who would have borrowed from anyone who would have lent to pay Pon, would not have worried a tenth part as much about repaying the loan.

Are You Reading

the Magnificent Stories

Dealing with the

Schooldays of

FRANK

RICHARDS,

the famous author,

now appearing in

"THE BOYS'

FRIEND"?

Now he thought he saw a chance to pay Pon without borrowing from anyone.

For a time he went on winning. Then the tide turned, and he saw his winnings slipping away from him.

He would have stopped; but the fascination of the game was strong upon him, and moreover, he knew that Gadsby and Vavasour would resent his proposing a stoppage.

So he went on, growing more morose with each lessening of his pile, but as feverishly excited as ever.

And now he began to feel something for Gadsby's virulent hatred towards Cocky.

"Mind whose toes you tread on!" he snapped, as he passed more money across the table.

"Chuck him out of the window!" said Gadsby, with an evil grin.

"Mind whose toes you tread on!" chuckled Cocky.

"He means Derwent will attend to you if you meddle with him, by gad!" said Vavasour.

It would have needed a pretty strong inducement to get Vavasour to meddle with Cocky. He had begun at first that Gadsby could not see his credit was safe.

Now he was hoping that Hazeldene would. That would suit him just as well. Derwent would suffer, and he could not be brought to book.

He was not afraid of Derwent! snapped Hazel.

"Big talk! Big talk!" remarked Cocky.

"Oh, ain't he got a lovely, lovely face!"

As he got up and approached the bird, was far from lovely. The drawn,

wan look of the luckless gambler was upon it, and an angry gasp of passion disfigured it.

Further as he arose from his seat, seized the cage, and shook it furiously.

Cocky gave an angry scream.

"Oh, stop that, you cross idiot! You'll have Derwent here!" protested Vavasour, shaking in his elegant shoes.

"He's afraid of Derwent, by gad!" said Gadsby. "Hazel can lick him all serene."

"Hats! I'm not going to fight the fellow."

"But that beastly bird does get on a chap's nerves."

He sat down again.

"Oh, my hat!" he said. "Look at this blasted fellow! One of those nasty cigarettes has burnt a hole right through it."

"Yours—not ours," said Gadsby pointedly.

"We've been smokin' ours. But it's no odds."

The dashed tablecloth isn't Derwent's; it belongs to Tun, an' you ain't afraid of Tun, I know, for all he's developed into a fightin' man nowadays."

"If we pull it over a bit this way it won't be too far from what I've gone," replied Hazel.

"Those chaps won't be best pleased about us smokin' in here, I guess, as you say Merton and Tunstall have chuckled it."

He looked the tablecloth farther over the edge on his side, and Gadsby and Vavasour exchanged winks.

"That cleans me out!" said the Greyfriars junior with a grin.

"Oh, well, take your paper, y'know!" said Gadsby, to Vavasour's surprise.

Pon might have taken Hazel's I.O.U.'s, for Pon had said that the one who would win would pay up. But Gadsby, himself a roguish, had less faith in human nature than Pon, because he had less knowledge of it.

"I don't know," said Hazel, doubtfully.

"I don't think I will," thanks, Gaddy. I'm up to my giddy ears in debt now, you know."

"Pon's one of your creditors—what?" said Gadsby.

"Yes—the biggest one. And I guess he expects me to shell out something on account to-day. But I can't. I haven't anything but a copper or two left."

Gadsby made no offer which caused Vavasour to open his eyes very widely.

"Look here, old scout, we're pals, you know. Shall I lend you a couple of quid or so to sweeten Pon—eh? You don't want Pon kicking up a shime because you can't pay what?"

Gadsby offering to lend money—and to an outsider?

For the nuts looked upon Hazel as an outsider. They were ready enough to gamble with him; but there was no friendship in that.

At a moment Vavasour utterly failed to comprehend it.

"He knew that Gadsby was aware that Pon did not expect anything on account from Hazel, and only wanted to hold the debt over the Greyfriars junior's head in order to further his own schemes."

Then Vavasour's eyes fell upon Cocky, and he understood.

It was double-dealing on Gadsby's part. He would be working against Pon's plans if Hazel accepted.

But Vavasour had no objection to treachery, even when it was done by a pal. His feelings were as friendly as to anyone to whom he looked up as a leader. And Vavasour was a good deal in love with his own plan to annoy Flip Derwent, for a man who trades his self on his Norman blood an' all that, there's a trifle too much of the Isidore about 'em—Pon, by gad!"

"Mind!" said Vavasour. He felt a little bit nervous in talking treason thus. But he wanted to back up Gadsby.

The two pound-notes had just changed hands when the study's rightful occupant came in.

(To be continued next week.)

20-10-17