

A LONG AND EXCITING SCHOOL YARN BY MARTIN CLIFFORD INSIDE!

# The GEM 2<sup>d</sup>

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



**GRUNDY HOT ON THE TRAIL OF THE MYSTERIOUS FOOTPRINTS!**

Grundy, the Great Detective, spots a clue! (An amusing and amazing incident from the grand school story of Tom Merry & Co. inside.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

**M**Y DEAR CHUMS,—Cross Words break no bones, so they say. But lots of things people say, though well enough meant, are not really based on fact. The great craze for tying words into knots so that folks shall get a little brisk exercise for their powerful brains, has spread everywhere. Of course, St. Jim's was included in the wordy visitation. I am coming to that part in a moment. Before I go on, just let me put in something concerning the wonderful programme the GEM is now giving. Better than ever is the right description. There never was a time when the splendid yarns of St. Jim's were more keenly appreciated. Some of the characters have had rapid rises in popular estimation. They signally deserve the rise. In all its many attractive features, the GEM is right to the front. There it will remain. Now for a few pleasing details about next week's brilliant bill.

#### "THE CROSS WORD CRAZE AT ST. JIM'S!"

By Martin Clifford.

Everybody knew well enough it would come. The cross-word craze is like the insistent sea, edging its way through the weak points of the stoutest dyke, and then swamping all the country. There was no escape. Not that we wanted to elude the fashion of the day. What is good for the rest of the world is good likewise for St. Jim's. Mr. Martin Clifford has taken time by his trusty forelock. Nothing like being up to date, and ready, ay, ready, for any emergency. They have very lively times at the school in connection with the popular hobby of the moment. The introduction to the Cross Word business is made by the Head, the Reverend Dr. Holmes in person. It thus has the official seal of august authority. The Head hands out a record puzzle for solution. He means well, undoubtedly, but the consequences become mighty serious. So great is the enthusiasm for the new competition that even football has to take a back seat. Things get to sixes and sevens. Prominent goal-getters slacken off and fail to turn up. Tom Merry is at his wits' end for the honour of his team. For there is a Cup match on, and Fatty Wynn is so immersed in the craze that he forgets a palpable save. That is only part of the trouble. To be absent-minded on the football field is to invite disaster. You will read with relish the happenings next week.

#### "THE NIGHT HAWK!"

By Lester Bidston.

"Gemies" are always glad to extend the hand of welcome to those bright young aerial detectives, "Live Wire" Lindsay and Jerry O'Gorman. In next week's fine yarn of adventure the capable twain go to join up in an aero club. They immediately find themselves caught up in the meshes of an insidious plot quite equal to any experience they encountered when they were engaged in tracking down the re-

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doubtable Ultima. The tale is as ingenious in its working as it is possible to imagine. We get an insight into the most up-to-date methods of certain individuals who let the principles of meum and tuum go by the board. Modern thieves have the benefit of the latest inventions, and small wonder if the hard-working police are baffled when a burglar can skirmish round on a swiftly-moving plane. The incidents narrated are amazing, and the excitement is at boiling-pitch to the drop of the curtain.

#### THE TUCK HAMPER!

Everybody has some good story to tell nowadays, and that's the reason why I am asking my chums to send in their very brightest specimens. The Tuck Hamper is still to be won, and it is worth a little trouble. Send your entries to the Editor, the GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, London, and remember that postcards will admirably serve your purpose.

#### "ERRORS!"

At a very early date I will publish the names of the winners in our wonderful "Errors" Competition. The judges have had some very heavy work in making the awards, for competitors were legion. But the results will not be long delayed.

#### "FOOTBALL CHUMS!"

By Arthur S. Hardy.

Another rattling instalment of the adventures of Hal Chester, next week. There are numerous startling developments in this finely-written tale of the football field. It is the work of a prince among writers, who is also a sportsman through and through.

#### For the Best Books Buy—

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### "MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

#### OUR TUCK HAMPERS ARE PRIME!

Remember, boys and girls, we award a delicious Tuck Hamper for the best storyette sent us each week—also half-a-crown is paid for each other contribution accepted. Cut out the coupon on this page, and send it, together with your joke, to me.

#### GOOD OLD LANCs!

##### BEATEN!

Young Murphy, eager to join the Police Force, came to London to pass the necessary medical examinations. This he easily did, and next day he was interviewed by a high official. "Well, my man," said the latter, "you look a promising sort of fellow; where were you educated?" "Oh," said Murphy, "shure, I was educated in Dublin." "Ah, and you have a good knowledge, I hope?" "Shure, I have, sor!" "I wonder if you can tell me, for example, how many miles it is from London to Manchester?" At this the recruit became nervously agitated, but at length blurted out: "Look here, bejabbers, if you're going to put me on that beat, I'm done wi' the Force!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to J. Shutter, 23, Victoria Road, Padiham, Lancs.

#### WHY HE WAS WANTED!

The old coloured woman came before a governor of Tennessee, and said: "Massa governor, I want my Sam pardoned." "Where is he?" asked the governor. "In prison," was the reply. "What for?" "Stealing a ham." "Did he steal it?" "Yes, sah, he suah did." "Is he a good nigger, auntie?" "Lawdy, no, sah; he's a frightful worthless nigger." "Then, why do you want him pardoned?" "'Cause, yo' honah, we's plumb out o' ham again!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Lane, 46, Slipper Place, Rotherhithe, S.E. 16.

#### TRUE TO HIS WORD!

Reproachfully, her eyes rested on her youthful husband. "No, Yvonne," he was saying, "I did not care for any of those breakfast rolls you made." She gasped. "Basil," she faltered, "did you not say before we w-w-were m-married that you would gladly die f-for me?" "Did I say that?" he demanded eagerly. "You did, Basil!" "Yvonne," he said, in a hollow voice, "I am a man of my word. Can I trouble you to pass those rolls? Thank you!" And, without another word, he fearfully took his life in his hands.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Harvey, 30, Derby Road, Montague Road, Edmonton, N. 18.

#### TUCK HAMPER COUPON. THE GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

Grundy's imagination knows no bounds. The big fellow appears in a new role—a detective! And finds a clue, too—thanks to Monty Lowther!



## CHAPTER 1.

Queer!

"It serves you wight, Blake!"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

"And I told you so, you know."

"Shut up, blow you!"

"Weally, Blake, I was meahly pointin' out—"

"Will you dry up, you blithering dummy?" snorted Jack Blake, the leader of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. "Isn't it had enough to miss the jolly old paper without you butting in with your dashed moralising? Give your rattling chin a rest, for goodness' sake!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye and regarded his chum with some dignity.

"Weally, Blake," he said, with great severity, "there is no weason whatever to get watty, you know. I was meahly pointin' out that it serves you wight, and that I told you this would happen."

"Will you dry up?" hooted Blake.

"When I have finished my wemarks, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "As I have already wemarked, it serves you wight, Jack Blake. You were not ignowant of the fact that the 'Boys' Fwiend' is published on Mondays, and I weminded you on Monday evenin' that you had neglected to call for your copy. It is now Wednesday aftahnoon, and natuwallly all the newsagents are sold out. I feel bound to point out, Blake, that it is weally your own fault, bai Jove!"

"You—you—you—"

Blake stuttered and stopped, controlling his wrath with an effort. Certainly, Arthur Augustus had reminded him, and, in a way, it certainly was his own fault. Like a wise fellow, Blake had a standing order for his favourite papers with the Rylcombe newsagent, but for once he had got "left." He had neglected to call for his "Boys' Friend" on the Monday, and a new assistant who did not know Blake had sold his copy in the interval. And now, after making the rounds of the newsagents in Wayland, to no avail, the chums of St. Jim's had made a raid on the bookstall at Wayland Junction, only to be met with the usual, dismal greeting, "Sold out."

It really was exasperating. And D'Arcy's insistence upon remarking that it served him right, and that he had told him so, did not serve to decrease Blake's exasperation.

Indeed, it took all Blake's self-control to prevent him from committing assault and battery on the moralising Arthur Augustus. But he manfully refrained. The London train

# GRUNDY ON THE TRAIL!

A Thrilling and Exciting School  
Story of Tom Merry & Co., at  
St. Jim's.

By Famous  
Martin Clifford.

was just in, and the crowded platform was scarcely the place for a rough-and-tumble. Instead, he contented himself with a ferocious glare and a grim warning.

"You—you blithering gasbag!" he went on, in concentrated tones. "If you open your dashed mouth on the subject again, Gussy, I'll—I'll biff you on the boko and bash your topper in!"

Arthur Augustus eyed his wrathful chum in lofty disdain.

"Pway westwain yourself, Blake," he said icily. "I twust that you would nevah dweam of such wuffianly conduct in a public place of this description. Howevah, as I pwefer not to wisk twouble heah, I will not wefer to the mattah again."

With that Arthur Augustus turned away from the bookstall and his chums and marched towards the station exit. Blake and the others followed—Blake still grumpy, Herries and Digby chuckling.

"I'll slaughter that fathead one of these days!" vowed Blake darkly. "Why does the dummy want to be always rubbing it in? If he mentions it again—"

"Oh, let him rip!" grinned Herries pacifically. "After all, Gussy can't help himself, and, in any case, it's nothing to row about. You can easily order another copy of the paper or borrow another fellow's."

"B-r-r-r-r!"

Still growling, the disgusted Blake led the way through the booking-office hall into the station-yard, where they had left their bikes. D'Arcy was just taking his machine off the pavement, and his chums were about to do likewise, when a man whom they had passed in the doorway approached them.

He was a genial-looking individual, clean-shaven, and wearing large, round spectacles, which gave him rather an owl-like appearance.

"Excuse me, boys," he exclaimed, glancing at the juniors' caps, "but I see you are from St. James' School! I am expected there by Dr. Holmes this afternoon, and I'm wondering if you would be kind enough to direct me?"

"Oh, yaas, sir!" said Arthur Augustus politely. "It is wathah a long walk, though."

"There's a train to Rylcombe in about three-quarters of an hour," chimed in Herries.

"Yes, I know," said the stranger, smiling. "If it is not too far, however, I would much prefer walking to waiting, boys. If you will—"

He was interrupted. At that moment a man, who had just jumped from the driving seat of a somewhat dilapidated taxicab, which was drawn up a yard or two away, stepped up to the group, touching his cap as he did so.

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"Excuse me, sir," he said respectfully, "but do you happen to be Mr. Mellin?"

The stranger nodded.

"That is my name—Mr. Joshua Mellin," he said.

"That's right, then, sir," said the driver, with rather a curiously sharp glance at the juniors. "I've been instructed to meet you here, sir, and run you over to the college. I was just comin' in to look for you, knowing you'd be waiting for the Rylcombe train. If you'll step in, sir—"

He indicated the open door of the taxi.

"Oh, yes; certainly!" said Mr. Mellin.

He seemed both surprised and pleased, and, with a smiling nod to the juniors, he stepped into the taxi. It was apparent that he had scarcely expected a car to be sent to meet him, whatever his business at St. Jim's happened to be.

The taxi-driver closed the door, jumped into his seat, and a moment later the ancient vehicle was rattling and banging down the High Street.

"Bai Jove!"

In no little astonishment the St. Jim's juniors watched the taxicab vanish in the direction of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus, who seemed to have forgotten the little difference with Blake. "That was wathah queer, you fellows. The Head usually sends his own car to meet visitors, you know."

"Nothing queer in that, though," said Blake, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "But I thought it a bit queer for a dashed old bus like that to be sent."

"Yaas, wathah! It's wathah infra dig, you know. I'm surprised at Dr. Holmes awwagin' for a disreputable—"

"Ass! I suppose the Head merely phoned for a cab, and they sent that along," grunted Blake. "What I mean is, that it's not a local taxi—at least, I've never seen it knocking around, nor have I seen the driver before."

"He wasn't in uniform, either," said Digby. "It's a bit queer."

"Rot!" sniffed George Herries. "I suppose the garage people had all their usual cars engaged, and so they sent that bus along. Nothing queer about it. Let's get back."

"Yes, I suppose that's it," agreed Blake. "It isn't our jolly bisney, anyhow. Come on!"

The juniors mounted their machines, and rode out of the little market town, dismissing the incident from their minds. They were very soon to be reminded about the ramshackle taxicab, however.

Just outside Rylcombe they overtook three juniors, two of whom were riding slowly alongside the third who was pushing his bike before him.

The three were Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, and as they recognised the famous trio Blake & Co. slowed down and dismounted.

"Hallo, you giddy Shell-fish!" exclaimed Blake cheerily. "What's the trouble—a puncture?"

Tom Merry & Co. glanced round. It was Tom Merry pushing the bike, and his face was wrathful.

"Hallo, it's you, Blake!" he grunted. "No, it isn't a dashed puncture. It's a twisted pedal, and it might have been a thundering twisted neck if I hadn't been slippy."

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, regarding Tom Merry's muddy and dishevelled attire in alarm. "Have you had an accident, deah boy?"

"Oh, not at all!" said Tom Merry, with withering sarcasm. "I've been rolling in the mud just for a joke. I twisted that pedal with my teeth, of course, just for a lark."

"What happened?" grinned Jack Blake.

"A blessed taxi!" growled Tom. "It came up behind us some minutes ago, and if I hadn't been jolly slippy it would have run me down. As it was, I swerved in the nick of time and came a cropper."

"Oh!" ejaculated Blake. "Was it a ramshackle affair, driven by a chap in mufti?"

"That's it. The mad rotter was driving like a lunatic. Anyway, I'd like to have five minutes with the idiot!" ended Tom, looking grim.

Blake chuckled.

"Then you'll get a chance if you want one," he said. "I fancy he'll be back again this way soon. He's taking a visitor to St. Jim's, Tommy."

"St. Jim's!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes; we saw him start at the station."

"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom. "If he's bound for St. Jim's, then he's gone a rummy way to get there."

"How's that?"

"Because the blessed taxi turned down Cooper's Lane ahead there. That leads to the meadows and the river. If he's making for St. Jim's, then he'll have to cross a couple of meadows, the Rhyl, and several ploughed fields," grinned Tom.

"Bai Jove!"

"Great pip!"

It was the turn of Blake & Co. to be surprised.

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"You—you mean that?" demanded Blake, astonished. "That old taxi went down Cooper's Lane?"

Tom nodded, as did Lowther and Manners.

"We thought it rummy, as the lane really leads nowhere," said Manners. "Why? Think anything's wrong?"

Blake nodded, his brow wrinkled. The next moment he was telling what they knew of the taxi and those aboard it.

"Phew!" was Tom Merry's grim remark. "It certainly sounds queer. I vote we slip down the lane and investigate. The taxi can't get far that way. What about it?"

"I'm game!" said Blake promptly. "It's fishy, and it won't take long."

"Blow the taxi!" growled Herries. "Let's get home to tea. What's the good—"

"Rats! Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Herries did not seem very keen, but he was overruled. In a couple of minutes the party reached Cooper's Lane, and turned down it, Tom running alongside his chums, having left his damaged machine in the roadway.

The lane was little more than a cart-track on the fringe of the woods, and it ended at a gate opening on to the meadows—a gate that was open now.

Tom Merry reached the gate first, and as he glanced over the wide meadows and the silvery river beyond he gave a sudden yell.

"There it is! Great Scott! Quick, you fellows!"

"Bai Jove!"

As they rushed through the gateway the juniors saw what their leader had seen. It was the taxi right enough. It stood motionless on the fringe of the trees some fifty yards away.

But that was not all. Close by it was the bespectacled Mr. Mellin, and he was struggling desperately with the taxi-driver and a second man.

"My hat!" breathed Blake. "Come on!"

Tom Merry was already dashing across the meadow, and after him went Blake and the rest at top speed.

"Help! Help!"

A faint cry reached the juniors' ears, and they put on speed; but they were too late to be of use.

The figure of Mr. Mellin was seen to crumple up suddenly, and in a moment he was bundled into the taxi, one of the men jumping in after him. Then the driver leaped into the driving seat, and the vehicle went careering on across the hollows and hummocks of the meadow.

"Keep it up, chaps!" panted Tom. "We'll do the rascals yet, whoever they are!"

But Tom was wrong there. The juniors ran their hardest, but the car rapidly drew away from them, and vanished from sight at last beyond a corner of the woods.

The juniors did not stop, however, and as they rounded the jutting corner of trees and thickets they saw the ramshackle taxi at rest on the grass a hundred yards away.

"Looks as if they've left it," grunted Tom. "Keep it up, though!"

The juniors thudded on, and surrounded the vehicle with a rush. As they had expected, it proved to be deserted. There was no sign of the mysterious Mr. Mellin or his more mysterious attackers.

"Gone into the woods, of course," panted Tom. "Quiet a minute!"

The breathless juniors stood motionless, listening. Not a sound came from the woods, however.

"Better search, I think," said Jack Blake.

Tom Merry nodded.

"It's a queer affair, and no mistake," he breathed. "We'd better search round for a bit. Keep your wits about you, though."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The mystified juniors plunged into the wood, and started the search, puzzled by the silence. For ten minutes or more they tramped about, and at length Tom Merry gave the word to stop.

"No good, it seems," he said quietly, as they gathered together again by the taxicab. "They must have been pretty slippy to get away, anyway. Let's get back to the bikes now."

"It fairly beats the band!" exclaimed Herries. "What in thunder does it mean?"

"Blessed if I know!" admitted Tom, staring with a frown at the deserted taxi-cab. "It wants some guessing. It's foul play, though—that's pretty certain."

"Ought we to go to the police?" asked Manners.

Tom shook his head.

"The police should be told, of course," he said. "But we'll leave that to Ralton or the Head to do."

"You're going to report it to them, then?"

"Of course," said Tom Merry. "And the sooner the better. Come on! It would take all night for us to search Rylcombe Woods alone. Wonder who that chap Mellin can be?"

Nobody could answer that. And in a very mystified and bewildered state the youngsters recovered their bikes, and



"There it is!" cried Tom Merry suddenly. "Quick, you fellows!" The juniors followed their leader's gaze and saw the taxi, standing motionless on the fringe of the trees some fifty yards away. Close by it was the bespectacled Mr. Mellin, and he was struggling desperately with the taxi-driver and a second man. "My hat!" breathed Blake. "Come on!" (See page 4.)

started for home, their tongues and minds busy with all sorts of theories and speculations. It certainly was a mystery, and even Blake's disappointment at missing his copy of the "Boys' Friend" was forgotten now.

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Rhabdomantist!

**I**MEDIATELY on arrival at St. Jim's Tom Merry and Jack Blake went along to Mr. Railton's study, leaving their chums to arrange about tea. Besides being puzzled at the strange adventure, they were seriously alarmed on behalf of the gentleman who called himself Mr. Mellin, and they realised that the sooner the matter was reported the better.

They found the Housemaster in his study; and he was not alone. With him was a gentleman at sight of whom Tom Merry and Blake almost collapsed, so surprised were they.

He was a gentleman wearing a somewhat dingy great-coat, a rather dusty bowler-hat, and large, round spectacles. It was either Mr. Joshua Mellin or his ghost!

"Mum-my hat!" gasped Blake.

Mr. Railton eyed the juniors questioningly.

"Well, boys, what is it?" he asked, rather testily. "I am busy at the moment. If it is anything important—"

"Oh—oh, no, sir—not at all, sir!" mumbled Tom Merry. "We—that is, I suppose Mr. Mellin will have told you already. We only came—"

"I fail to understand you, Merry," said the Housemaster, staring. "Have you met this gentleman before?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Tom. "We were the fellows who tried to rescue him this afternoon—"

"Rescue him?" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir! We're here to report the matter now, for we didn't know Mr. Mellin had escaped from those rascals, of course."

Mr. Railton stared blankly at the juniors. Mr. Mellin also stared at them fixedly, with eyes that glinted curiously behind his spectacles. Tom Merry was quite startled at the mingled fear and consternation on his features.

"Merry," said Mr. Railton in astonishment, "what ever are you talking about?"

The two juniors stared from the master to his visitor in amazement. They had naturally expected Mr. Mellin to have related his adventures to the Housemaster. They had been surprised enough at finding him safe and sound at St. Jim's. But that he had arrived without, apparently, reporting the curious affair, was surprising, to say the least.

They almost wondered if it could be the same man, after all. Indeed, Jack Blake found himself doubting, despite the fact that Mr. Railton had as good as admitted that his visitor's name was Mellin. The clothes were undoubtedly the same, as were the spectacles and somewhat flabby cheeks. Yet, the expression was not the same. At the station Mellin had struck the juniors as being a genial and harmless individual. But the Mr. Mellin they saw now had glittering, penetrating eyes, and hard features that were neither genial nor prepossessing.

Though Jack Blake had only seen him face to face for a few brief moments, he was startled at the change.

It was Mr. Mellin who broke the silence. His hard face suddenly twisted into a smile, and he stepped forward with a laugh.

"I think, Mr.—er—Railton," he exclaimed blandly, "that I had better explain. The fact is, I had rather an alarming adventure on my way here. I should have told you, but I did not wish to alarm you—especially as no serious harm came of it. In the first place, I should be very interested to know, Mr. Railton, if Dr. Holmes arranged for a taxi to meet me at Wayland Station this afternoon?"

Mr. Railton looked bewildered.

"He did not mention having done so to me," said the Housemaster. "He merely informed me that you were expected, and requested me to see you on your arrival, Mr. Mellin."

"Then it is undoubtedly as I suspected," was the grim retort. "The whole thing is a rascally plot. Mr. Railton, you will doubtless be surprised to learn that a taxi met me at Wayland, the driver stating that he had been ordered to meet me there by Dr. Holmes."

"Bless my soul!"

"Naturally, I suspected nothing wrong, and stepped into the cab. It was then driven at a dangerously rapid pace out of the town. At some distance out the car left the high road and took to a rough cart-track on the outskirts of a wood. Even then I suspected nothing, until suddenly I became aware that the car had passed through a field-gate, and was bounding and lurching over the grass of a meadow."

"Bless my soul!" repeated Mr. Railton again.

"I realised then," proceeded Mr. Mellin, "that something was wrong, and I shouted to the driver to stop. He ignored me. He drew up suddenly, however, at the edge of the wood. I sprang out, somewhat surprised, and as I did so the driver leaped from his seat, and, to my alarm, flung himself upon me. At the same moment, to my still greater alarm, a second scoundrel—obviously an accomplice—leaped out of the wood and also attacked me."

"Good gracious!" gasped the Housemaster. "Really, Mr. Mellin—"

"It was then," went on the bespectacled visitor, with a smiling nod at the two juniors, "that I heard a shout and saw several boys rushing across the field to my aid. Unfortunately, I was overpowered and hustled into the cab before they could reach the spot. Happily, however, their success was shortlived. The second rascal accompanied me into the cab, and I flatter myself that I proved more than a match for him. After a brief struggle I succeeded in breaking free, and I leaped from the moving taxi."

Mr. Mellin paused and laughed at the expression on Mr. Railton's face.

"Luckily again," he said, "I was unhurt, save for a scratch or two, and I dived into the wood, and—well, to cut my story short, I got clear away, though the rascals chased me hotfoot. I suppose," he added, smiling at Tom Merry and Blake, "that you two were among the boys who tried to aid me?"

"Yes, sir!" mumbled Tom, his eyes fixed on the stranger's face. "We—we found the car deserted, and we couldn't understand it. So we rushed here to report the matter to Mr. Railton."

"This is amazing, Mr. Mellin!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, in alarm. "I presume the motive was robbery—"

"Undoubtedly. Though I am inclined to think," said Mr. Mellin smoothly, "that the rascals took me for someone else—some local man of wealth. It is the only way I can account for such an extraordinary adventure."

"H'm! That is possible, of course!" said Mr. Railton, frowning. "It is most alarming, however. You have acquainted the police, of course, with the happening?"

Mr. Mellin shook his head.

"That was my first thought, of course," he said. "But, on reflection, I decided not to mention the matter at all."

"But really, Mr. Mellin—"

"I realised that the name of St. Jim's would have to be brought into the matter," explained the man calmly. "I know that headmasters hate publicity, and I knew that Dr. Holmes would not care to have the school mentioned in connection with a police matter. For that reason, Mr. Railton, I decided to say nothing; after all, there has been no real harm done."

Mr. Railton gave him a rather sharp look.

"That was exceedingly kind and thoughtful of you, Mr. Mellin," he said politely. "Dr. Holmes would certainly have disliked such publicity. But—but—however, I am still at a loss to know how these juniors came to know of your danger."

The Housemaster looked at the juniors, and Blake answered. He told of the brief meeting with Mr. Mellin at the station, and how they had suspected something was wrong afterwards. And as he finished, the curious glint that had come into Mr. Mellin's eyes at Mr. Railton's question, faded away.

"It was plucky of you, boys," he said cordially, "though you were unable to help me. I trust I shall see more of you during my stay here."

"I have no doubt of that," laughed Mr. Railton. "All the boys will be keenly interested in your work, Mr. Mellin. You are aware, Merry, why this gentleman is here, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Tom wonderingly.

"Mr. Mellin is a rhabdomantist," explained the Housemaster. "He—"

"A—a whatter?" exclaimed Blake involuntarily.

"A rhabdomantist," explained Mr. Railton, laughing in some amusement, "is a person who is supposed to—ahem!—I should say, who has the power of discovering things hidden away in the bowels of the earth—especially such things as metals, ores, and water. You have heard of diviners, surely, Merry?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Very well. Mr. Mellin practises the science of rhabdomancy; otherwise, he is a diviner, which is but the popular name."

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term for a rhabdomantist. There are water diviners and metal diviners. In this case Mr. Mellin is here to search for gold. He has been given permission by the governing body of this school to search the vaults and monastic ruins, both at St. Jim's and on Abbey Island, for certain gold chalices which are still believed to have been hidden centuries ago by the monks, in order to save them from sacrilege."

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. "I—I see, sir. I—I hope Mr. Mellin will be successful, sir."

Mr. Railton coughed.

"I certainly hope so, too, Merry," he said—though from his tone it was obvious he had little hope—"for doubtless if anything is found, the school museum will benefit thereby. However, that is why Mr. Mellin is here, boys, and I am sure you will all be keenly interested in any progress he makes."

With a nod the Housemaster dismissed them smilingly, and they backed rather confusedly out of the study.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry, grinning at Blake in the passage. "So—so that's it! That queer merchant is a rhab—rhab—rhab—"

"Oh, cut it out!" chuckled Blake. "Call the potty merchant a diviner. I've heard about them. They're supposed to have second sight, or something. Go about twiddling a blessed twig, or something—"

"A divining-rod!" grinned Tom Merry. "I believe in some parts they call it a 'dowsing-rod.' It's really a hazel twig, and the chap, by holding it over a spot, is supposed to be able to tell if there's water there, or metal, or whatever he's hunting for."

"Sounds all rot!" said Blake.

"I fancy Railton thinks so, anyway," grinned Tom. "I bet the Head does, too. Looks as if some cranky ass on the board of governors has sent this chap down. Anyway, can't say I like the look of this chap Mellin, Blake."

"Blessed if I do, either," said Blake thoughtfully. "At the station he struck me as being a jolly, harmless sort of old buffer, though."

"Well, he doesn't strike me as being that sort, anyway," said Tom Merry. "His blessed eyes seem to bore through a chap. That's not all. I fancied that yarn of his about getting away from those men was a bit weak."

"My hat! That's just what I thought, too, Tommy!" said Blake quickly. "He was either telling whoppers, or else he was keeping something back. I fancied Railton was not quite convinced either."

"Must be all right, though!"

"I suppose so."

The juniors went on along the passage. At the corner a group of juniors were standing in a grinning circle round Baggy Trimble, the Paul Pry of St. Jim's. The fat junior was looking wildly excited, and as Tom and Blake came up they heard his voice raised protestingly.

"I tell you it's true enough, you asses!" he snorted. "I heard it!"

"Rats!"

"Bosh! You fat idiot—"

"But I tell you I heard it!" roared Trimble. "I happened to hear Railton and Linton talking about it?"

"Prying again?" sniffed George Alfred Grundy of the Shell. "You need those fat ears of yours glued up, Trimble!"

## CHAPTER 3.

### Grundy Does Not Approve!

"I COULDN'T help hearing!" snorted Trimble. "It's a fact, though. I heard it. There's something coming to St. Jim's—an animal. Sounded like a—a rhinoceros, or—or a hippopotamus—"

"Sure it wasn't a brontosaurus?" inquired Cardew gravely. There was a chorus of chuckles. Tom Merry and Jack Blake exchanged grins and stopped.

"Hallo, what's that fat ass gassing about?" asked the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"Blessed if I know!" grinned Levison. "He's been listening at keyholes again, and got hold of some yarn or other—rot, as usual!"

"I tell you it isn't rot!" sniffed Trimble. "I heard it. I heard Railton say that a—a rhinoceros, or an animal of some sort—blessed if I could quite catch what it was!—was coming to St. Jim's. He said it was coming to search for carcasses, or something."

"Carcasses?" ejaculated Tom.

"That's it! I say, Merry, think the—the rhinoceros will be alive?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Blake roared—they could not help it. They saw Baggy's little mistake. Evidently he had overheard Mr. Railton and Mr. Linton discussing the arrival of Mr. Mellin. He had got a little mixed, and had taken the word rhabdomantist for rhinoceros, and the word chalices for carcasses.

"You fat ass!" laughed Tom Merry. "Wasn't it a rhabdomantist you heard Railton speak about?"



With a grunt of defiance Grundy leaped forward and flung himself at the moving form. "Got you, my pippin!" he gasped. But Grundy was wrong there. As his fingers clutched the man the junior felt himself clutched—in a grip of iron. Realising his helplessness he wisely gave vent to a bellow which rang clear in the silent school. "Help! Rescue! Rescue!" (See page 10.)

"My hat! That was it!" gasped Baggy eagerly. "I say, do you really think it's coming here, Merry?"

"It's already come," remarked Blake, with a chuckle. "Wha-at?"

"It's in Railton's study now, Baggy. We've just seen it. You'd better look out, Baggy! If it catches sight of a fat lump of blubber like you— Oh, great Scott! Here it is, now!"

At that moment the door of Mr. Railton's study opened, and Baggy jumped.

"Look out!" gasped Blake, grabbing the bewildered Trimble by the shoulder. "Look out! Run, you fat ass!"

With an iron grip on the fat junior Blake fairly rushed him along the passage. Hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, Baggy yelled in alarm as the humorous Blake rushed him on to the head of the stairs. There he bumped him down, and rolled the fat junior over the edge.

"Yaroooooh!" howled Baggy. "Oh, help!"

He frantically strove to save himself, but was too late.

Amid a series of yells and a series of bumps, he went rolling down the stairs, to reach the bottom with a final resounding bump and an earsplitting yell.

Blake returned, grinning, to the rest of the juniors. Fortunately, Mr. Railton, escorting Mr. Mellin, had turned and gone along the opposite passage, and if the Housemaster had heard Baggy's yells, he did not heed them—happily, for Blake.

"You silly ass!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Lucky Railton didn't come this way!"

"What's it all about?" chuckled Clifton Dane. "Who was that merchant with Railton?"

"That was the animal Baggy spoke about," grinned Blake. "He's a rhabdomantist."

"A whatter?" came in a chorus from the other juniors.

"A rhabdomantist," repeated Blake. "Otherwise a diviner. You chaps have heard of water-diviners?"

"Oh, yes!" said Levison, staring. "But—"

"Well, that's what that chap is. His name's Mellin, and he's come here to search—not for water, though, but for gold!"

And, with the help of Tom Merry, Blake explained to the bewildered juniors what Mr. Railton had explained to them.

The recital amazed the juniors.

"My hat!" said Bernard Glyn. "What a lark! I'm going to pal on with that chap! Think Railton will let us help the chap in his search?"

"I hardly think so," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "But it's jolly interesting, anyway!"

All the juniors were certainly interested and excited. Many were frankly sceptical—especially Grundy, who was both sceptical and wrathful.

"Well, my hat!" he breathed, in disgust. "What blithering rot! Fancy a blessed outsider coming here with that spoofing bosh! I've a jolly good mind to tell the Head what I think about it!"

"Do!" said Tom solemnly. "He'll listen to you, Grundy! Do it now, old chap; he's in his study."

"I've a jolly good mind to!" snorted Grundy. "It's all tosh, of course! Diviner—eh? Rot! I think it's a disgrace for the school to be taken in with that silly tosh! I don't approve of it!"

"Don't you?"

"No, I thundering well don't! Mind you, I don't say there aren't any gold chalices and things hidden about the school; in fact, I believe there are. But this diviner bosh—

bah! I don't stand for it. In any case, why should they have to bring a dashed 'outsider in to search for 'em?' demanded Grundy warmly.

"Ask me another?"

George Alfred breathed hard.

"It's just like the blessed school authorities," he said bitterly. "Plenty of keen chaps with brains about—at least, there's one I know of—"

"Yourself, of course?"

"Yes, you're right, Blake. I'm glad you'll admit that," said Grundy calmly. "Anyway, if they want the blessed chalcies finding, why don't they get the chaps in the school who've got brains to search for 'em? Answer me that, Merry."

Neither Tom Merry nor Blake attempted to answer that. They passed on to Study No. 6, grinning all over their faces. Grundy at all times was entertaining, but when he had a bee in his bonnet—as he obviously had now—he was doubly entertaining.

But Tom Merry and Blake wanted their tea, and they did not stay to answer George Alfred.

It had been arranged that the Terrible Three should be the guests of Blake & Co. that afternoon, and so they walked on to Study No. 6. There they found tea already in full swing, and to the astonished juniors Tom Merry and Blake told the surprising news they had learned in Mr. Railton's study.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That is wathah intewestin', deah, boys! I'm afwaid I do not quite undahstand this divinin' bizney; but I should vewy much like to help Mr. Mellin, you know. As a fellow of gweat judgment and deductive ability, I wathah fancy I should be wathah useful to him. Do you think that if I approached the Head he would allow me to dwop lessons for a few days in ordah to help Mr. Mellin, deah boys?"

There was a chuckle.

"I don't doubt it for a moment, Gussy," said Lowther gravely. "Why not go and ask him now—before someone else does, you know?"

"Do you weally think it will be all wight, Lowthah?" asked Gussy innocently.

"Certainly, old top!"

Arthur Augustus frowned reflectively, and then he shook his head slowly.

"Upon wefection, deah boys, I don't think I'd bettah—not yet, at all events!" he exclaimed doubtfully. "I will think it ovah, bai Jove!"

And having come to that wise decision Arthur Augustus proceeded with his tea—apparently oblivious of the soft chuckles and sly winks of his chums.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Grundy's Determination.

**B**Y next morning all St. Jim's had heard the news of Mr. Mellin's arrival and his object in visiting the school, and widespread interest was aroused. On numerous occasions in the annals of St. Jim's searchers had hunted for the ancient treasures of the old monastery, and they had searched in vain. Yet it was still believed that the treasures existed, hidden possibly in some underground vault or secret hiding-place. But, though keenly interested in the matter, there were few at St. Jim's who believed in Mr. Mellin or his powers. They scarcely took the affair seriously.

It was generally believed also that Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton had little faith in rhabdomaney, whatever their personal views of Mr. Mellin himself might have been. Indeed, Mr. Railton had been heard to say—according to Baggy Trimble—that it was "all humbug!" Be that as it may, however, neither Dr. Holmes nor Mr. Railton showed any indications of their feelings in the matter. They had evidently been instructed to lend every aid to Mr. Mellin—which they did. He was shown over every inch of St. Jim's personally by Mr. Railton, and was handed the keys of the vaults. All the known secret hiding-places were pointed out to him, and he was generally given the free run of the school.

The Lower School, as a whole, looked upon the matter as a huge joke, and there were general grins whenever the owl-like features of Mr. Mellin appeared in sight. Only George Alfred Grundy seemed to take the matter seriously. And he took it very seriously.

When Blake & Co. happened to return to their study just before prep that evening they were astonished to find Grundy in the study alone. He was kneeling before the panelling of the wall busy wielding a screwdriver.

The owners of Study No. 6 fairly blinked at him. "Here!" shouted Jack Blake warmly. "What's this dashed game, Grundy? Well, my hat! The howling nerve!"

Grundy looked up, showing a flushed and heated face.

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"You kids can get out!" he said coolly. "Can't you see I'm busy, blow you? Get out!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Busy!" stuttered Blake. "Am I dreaming? He's busy, you fellows—busy in our study! He's ordering us to get out! Well, my hat! The cheek!"

It was "cheek" undoubtedly.

Grundy did not seem to view it as "cheek," however. He waved his hand for the juniors to go away, and then he resumed operations with his screwdriver. The juniors had realised what he was doing. He was withdrawing a number of screws from one of the panels. That panel, they knew well enough, was a sliding panel, a secret entrance that led down to the vaults beneath St. Jim's. It had been discovered some considerable time ago, and it had been screwed up by order of the Head, to prevent adventurous juniors from exploring the noisome depths.

Not only that, but the Head had also given strict orders that the secret panel and passage was not to be used by the juniors under any circumstances whatever. It was strictly "out of bounds," so that Blake & Co. were doubly amazed at the sight of Grundy calmly withdrawing the screws.

"You—you burbling manise!" snorted Jack Blake. "What on earth are you up to, Grundy? Are you potty—that is, pottier than usual?"

"Oh, shut up!" sniffed Grundy, without looking round. "Can't you see what I'm up to, ass? You know what I've said, don't you? You've heard me say what I mean to do, haven't you?"

"I heard you gassing rot all day——"

"I want no cheek!" warned Grundy darkly. "I've told you more than once to-day what my programme is. You know my views about that dashed Mellin chap. Well, as I've said, I'm not standing it—I'm not allowing that chap with his dashed rot to get a chance to reap the glory of finding those chalcies. I'm going to find 'em myself—see!"

"Ass!"

"I haven't bothered myself about it before simply because I haven't thought about it," explained Grundy. "If the blessed governors had asked me instead of that chump with his blessed twigs and things, they'd have shown a bit of sense. But they didn't——"

"What an oversight!" murmured Digby.

"Shut up, Digby! Well, as I was saying, they didn't ask me, so I'm taking the job on—for the glory of St. Jim's, you know! I don't see why that chap should reap the glory; in fact, he won't stand a chance now, of course. Diviner, eh? Bosh! Humbug! Divining rod—fiddlesticks! Bah! I'll show him!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors blinked at the great George Alfred. The latter junior turned to his work again.

Jack Blake drew a deep breath.

"So—so that's the programme, is it?" he asked.

"That's just it. I'm making a start here. I'm going to explore this passage first, and then the vaults. I've realised it's no good asking the Head for the keys. He wouldn't understand if I did. There's no need, though. This passage behind this panel leads to the vaults—you chaps know that. I've got a torch in my pocket, and I'm going to explore it now for a start."

"Are you?" gasped Blake. "I rather fancy you're not, you cheeky rotter! You are going to explore a passage, though—the Fourth passage outside; and you're going to explore it on your giddy neck. Collar him, you chaps!"

"What-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here—What—Yaroooh! Leggo, you—Groooh!"

Grundy howled with wrathful surprise as Blake yanked him over backwards, and he yelled still more as several pairs of hands lifted him and rushed him through the open doorway.

"Now let him start his exploring," said Blake grimly.

"Out he goes!"

"Yoooop!"

Crash!

Grundy whirled through the air and dropped sprawling in the passage. Blake pitched his screwdriver after him. It caught Grundy a fearful crack on the head—fortunately not with the sharp end—and Grundy howled fiendishly.

Blake glared out after him, and then he closed the door, and the key clicked home in the lock. Study No. 6 evidently didn't want to be bothered with Grundy again.

"Well, my hat! The—cheeky cads!"

Grundy staggered to his feet, his clothes rumpled and dusty, his rugged features showing his towering wrath and outraged surprise.

He stood for a moment, breathing through his nose, and then he dashed at the door, and grasped the handle. Finding it locked, he snorted, and after hurling a torrent of threats through the keyhole, he staggered away, taking his screwdriver with him.

"The—the cheeky cads!" he repeated, again, setting his jaw hard. "Chucked me out—me! My hat! I'll show 'em what's what for this!"

Seething with wrath, he went along to the Shell passage, and entered his own study. Wilkins and Gunn, his study-mates, were busy with their prep. They glanced up carelessly.

"Hallo! What's happened, Grundy?" asked Wilkins, exchanging a wink with Gunn. "Have you explored that passage?"

Grundy scowled.

"No; Blake and the other idiots turned rusty," he explained moodily. "The cads kicked me out. A bit thick—what?"

"Not really?"

Grundy nodded.

"They were too many for me, of course. Anyway, it scarcely matters. It means I'll have to do what I want to after lights out. In fact, I really intended to do that all along."

Both Wilkins and Gunn stared at that.

"Grundy, you ass!" exclaimed Wilkins, in great alarm. "You're not thinking of leaving the dorm after lights out?"

"Of course! Haven't I said so, ass?"

"To explore that passage?" gasped Gunn.

"Of course."

"You—you idiot!" snapped Wilkins. "It's bad enough if you unscrew that secret panel; that means a flogging if you're caught. But if you break bounds at night as well, it's going to be the high jump for you. Chuck the silly game up, you idiot!"

"Rot! Utter rot! Silly game, eh?" snorted Grundy. "If you talk to me like that, Wilky, I'll dot you on the boko—jolly sharp, too!"

"But look here, Grundy—be reasonable, old chap."

"Reasonable!" snorted Grundy. "Aren't I reasonable? Don't talk rot! I tell you I'm going; and what's more, you chaps are going with me, you rotten funks!"

"Are we?" gasped Gunn. "Not likely!"

"No thundering fear!" snapped Wilkins emphatically. "You can go hunting blessed mare's nests on your own, Grundy. Think we're going to leave warm beds to go crawling about beastly cobwebby passages? Not much!"

Grundy stepped towards Wilkins, who happened to be nearest, and shoved a knuckly fist under his nose.

"Oh, aren't you?" he snarled. "We'll see about that! See that fist, Wilky? If you don't agree here and now to come to-night, you'll get that—both of you! I'll wipe up the study with you! Got that?"

Grundy's long-suffering pals exchanged glances.

"Look here, Grundy, you know," said Gunn warmly, "I—"

"Yes or no?" roared Grundy. "Out with it!"

Wilkins looked at Gunn again.

"Oh, well, I suppose you must have your own way, Grundy," he said pacifically. "If Gunny will agree, I will."

"And I'll agree if Wilky will," added Gunn, winking at Wilkins. "So that's settled, Grundy. Now let's get on with our prep, there's a good chap!"

Grundy grinned. Grundy's wits were never very quick, and he quite failed to notice that neither of his chums had actually agreed.

"That's good enough, then," he said, with sudden geniality. "I thought you chaps weren't really funks, you know. To-night, then, after lights-out, remember. I'll stay awake. Leave everything to me."

And smiling his satisfaction Grundy allowed the subject to drop for the time being. Getting out his books he started his prep.



CLARENCE YORK TOMPKINS.

A member of Study No. 4 in the School House Fourth, his co-occupier being Michael Mulvaney. A simple but innocent junior is Tompkins. Has no interest whatsoever in sports, his mind being filled with thoughts botanical. Until fairly recently Tompkins had to knuckle under to Mulvaney, but thanks to the training of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the noble art of self-defence, he is now able to hold his own. Clarence York is a nice fellow, and has quite a number of friends in the school.

## CHAPTER 2.

### At Dead of Night!

THERE was a great deal of amusement in the School House at St. Jim's that evening in regard to George Alfred Grundy's declaration that he was going to search on his own for the long-lost chalices of the ancient monks. Grundy was always "going in" for some new "stunt" or other; and it was just like him to noise his project abroad. And undoubtedly there wasn't a fellow in all St. Jim's whose brains and abilities better fitted him to undertake such a task as G. A. Grundy—in G. A. Grundy's opinion.

But though Grundy made no bones about noising his general programme abroad, he was very careful not to let his intention to start the search after "lights out" that night become known. Which explained the fact that while the rest of the juniors were up to bed chucking over Grundy's latest, his own study-mates, Wilkins and Gunn, took the matter far more seriously.

In fact, Wilkins and Gunn were very worried about it. They knew Grundy had taken it for granted that they intended to accompany him on his nocturnal adventure. And as they had not the slightest intention of doing so, they naturally expected trouble when the time came.

To their great relief, however, Grundy did not mention the matter going upstairs, nor did he mention it while undressing. And both Wilkins and Gunn went to sleep blissfully thinking their stars that their leader had either forgotten the whole thing, or had discreetly changed his mind.

This was quite a mistake, however, as Wilkins discovered when he was awakened abruptly and unpleasantly some time later by the application of ice-cold water on his face.

It was a startling shock to Wilkins, and he sat up in bed abruptly, gasping. As he did so his head struck something violently, and there followed a smothered yelp in the darkness.

"What—what—" Wilkins blinked dazedly through the gloom, and became aware of a dim figure at his bedside. "Oh, you—you ass! It's you, Grundy, is it?" he went on. "What's the game, you burbling chump?"

"Game, you—you—" Grundy—for it was indeed he—spluttered and choked. "You careless dummy! You've nearly busted my face! What did you want to jump up like that for? Out you get!"

"But look here—"

"Have you forgotten?" hissed Grundy sulphurously. "You know what's on to-night. Out you get!"

"Go and eat coke, you raving idiot!"

Wilkins lay down again, breathing hard. Grundy also breathed hard for a moment, and then he grasped the bed-clothes and whirled them off his chum.

"Now, my pippin, out you get!" he hissed. "I've already squeezed a spongyful of water over you. If you're not out of bed in two ticks, you'll get the dashed water-jug. Got that?"

The hapless Wilkins had. He knew the overbearing George Alfred would keep his word, so he groaned, and slipped out of bed, shivering.

"Oh, all right, then!" he grunted. "Gunny not up—here, I'll wake him!"

He slipped across to Gunn's bed and shook him gently into wakefulness. Grundy started to dress, feeling apparently that the victory was won. After Wilkins had whispered into

Gunn's ear for a moment, Gunn also got up, and the two started to dress—or they appeared to be dressing.

"That's right, chaps!" whispered Grundy. "Buck up—just shove coat and trousers over your jammies. Here, what—"

To Grundy's surprise the dim forms of his chums slipped past him, making silently for the door of the dormitory.

"Wait a bit, you asses!" hissed Grundy frantically.

But Grundy's chums did not wait—they vanished through the doorway. Grundy grunted, hurriedly finishing his dressing, and slipped to the door.

He naturally expected his chums to be waiting in the passage outside, but to his astonishment there was no sign or sound of them.

"The chumps!" breathed Grundy.

He stood in the silent corridor, staring hard into the gloom, more than a trifle suspicious. He was just thinking of returning to see if his faithless chums had slipped unseen back into the dormitory, when he fancied he heard a faint sound from somewhere in the stillness below stairs.

That settled the matter for Grundy.

"Well, the dummies!" he breathed wrathfully. "Why the thump couldn't the asses wait for me?"

With that Grundy felt his way along the dark corridor to the head of the stairs and began to descend silently in his rubber-soled shoes.

As he vanished, two dim, pyjama-clad forms emerged from the shelter of an alcove along the passage, and two separate and quiet chuckles sounded.

"That's done the burbling ass!" whispered Gunn.

"Serve him right, the born idiot!" whispered Wilkins, though his tone sounded uneasy. "If he wants to explore, let him. I'm going back to bed. Come on!"

"Yes, rather!"

And Grundy's faithless henchmen disappeared into the Shell dormitory.

Blissfully unconscious of the little trick his chums had played upon him, Grundy descended the stairs in a state of seething wrath. He naturally supposed his chums had gone downstairs on their own, and he was angry and mystified about it.

He had heard no further sound since that faint noise from below, and Grundy's heart thumped a trifle as he fumbled his way to the bottom of the stairs and started along the lower passages. He had his torch with him, but he dare not use that yet. He knew it must be close on midnight, but he was taking no risks—at least, no unnecessary risks. It was bright moonlight in the quad outside, and through the tall windows at the end of the passage a bright shaft of white light gleamed across the passage floor and wall.

But the rest of the passage was dark and shadowy, and Grundy had to feel his way along.

He stopped suddenly, and his heart began to thump madly, almost choking him.

What was that? Across the patch of moonlit passage beneath the tall windows a figure had moved swiftly. It was not Wilkins or Gunn; it was not a boy's figure at all. It was a man's; and it was not a master's figure, either. It was a stranger's figure; Grundy was certain about that.

Who was it? Who could be prowling about St. Jim's in the still hours? Grundy crouched back against the wall, his heart beating fast. He knew that the form—unseen now—was approaching him; he caught the soft pad of feet, and his tongue clung to the roof of his mouth; he felt a curious tingling sensation in his scalp.

Burglars!

The sudden thought occurred to Grundy, and quite abruptly his fears left him. For all his faults, Grundy was stout-hearted and plucky. Moreover, he had unbounded faith in his own physical powers, and he suddenly got a grip of himself again.

"Who—who is that?" he called out huskily. "Stop!"

The quiet pad of footsteps stopped. Grundy heard the sharp hiss of indrawn breath. He stared hard through the blackness, his teeth clenched, his fists ready. Suddenly the junior saw the vague form—it had moved, as if about to turn and bolt.

That was enough for George Alfred Grundy. With a grunt of defiance he leaped forward and flung himself at the figure.

"Got you, my pippin!" he gasped.

But Grundy was wrong there. It proved to be the other way round. As Grundy's fingers clutched the man the junior felt himself clutched—in a grip of iron. A pair of powerful hands gripped Grundy's arms, and as the plucky Shell fellow realised his helplessness he wisely gave vent to a bellow which rang out clear in the silent school.

"Help! Help! Rescue! Help!"

There was a muttered exclamation in the darkness, and suddenly Grundy felt one arm released. He immediately shot out his fist, and even as he did so something—something like iron—struck him with stunning force, and he sank to the passage floor with scarcely a groan.

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He lay there limply. His brutal attacker stooped over him a moment, and then he stood upright again, listening intently. Then, as if he had heard something, he muttered an oath and sped away.

His figure showed a brief instant across the shaft of moonlight below the tall windows, and then it melted away into the gloom beyond.

On the passage floor the form of Grundy lay still and silent in the shadows.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Who Did It?

"N OW for bed again! That silly ass——"

"That burbling chump——"

"Gets more of a born idiot every day of his life," finished Wilkins, as he felt for his bed in the gloom. "It serves him right to let him have his head, but—but I don't like it."

"Nor do I," whispered back Gunn.

"You know—what he is," went on Wilkins, in an uneasy mutter. "He'll be getting into all sorts of mischief on his own. If he doesn't break his neck he'll get into a mess of some sort. We ought to stop him, Gunny."

"It's too late now, Wilky. In any case, the chump's too big a handful for us to tackle."

"I know that; but I was thinking——"

Wilkins, who had placed one leg in bed, withdrew it again.

"Half a mo', Gunny!" he whispered grimly. "It's no good—we can't let that ass play the fool like this. I'm going to wake Tom Merry. Three of us ought to tackle the fathead easily enough."

"But it's too late——"

"Rot! He'll have to go to the study for his dashed screw-driver, and it'll take him some time to get the screws out, won't it? Anyway——"

"Hallo! What's up? What are you chaps doing out of bed? That you, Wilky?"

Another voice interrupted Wilkins—the drowsy voice of Tom Merry. The junior captain of St. Jim's was sitting up in bed, blinking hard through the gloom. The soft mutter of voices had aroused him.

"Oh, good!" muttered Wilkins.

He stepped across to Tom's bed, and in a few quick sentences explained the situation.

"Well, my hat!" was Tom Merry's comment. "The—silly idiot! That chap Grundy's the giddy outside edge! How long has he been gone?"

"Couple of minutes or more."

"Right! We'll soon have the potty chump back again. He must be mad. Just a sec, chaps!"

His drowsiness gone now, Tom Merry leaped from bed and started to shove some clothes on. Then he got a pocket-torch from his locker, and by that time Wilkins and Gunn had donned jacket and trousers again.

They left the dormitory stealthily, and it was as they reached the passage outside that Grundy's bellowing voice rang out below, shouting for help.

"Help! Help! Rescue! Help!"

Shattering the dead silence abruptly, the sounds made the three startled juniors stop dead, their hearts in their mouths.

"What the thump——"

Tom broke off to listen intently. But no other cry came from below. But from the dormitory they had just left, and from various other rooms, came sounds of movement and alarmed voices.

"Great pip!" gasped Tom Merry. "That was Grundy's voice. What on earth can the ass be up to? Come on!"

The juniors knew that the House was alarmed and awake now, but there was a note of urgency and appeal in Grundy's voice that they could not miss.

Something was wrong downstairs—seriously wrong.

Followed by Wilkins and Gunn, Tom Merry led the way with a rush, his torch sending a dancing beam of light before him as he ran.

Down the stairs he went at full tilt, and it was well he had a light, or he would have gone sprawling headlong over Grundy's prostrate form in the passage beyond.

As it was, the dancing light fell upon it, and Tom Merry gave a cry.

He reached the spot in a moment, and as the light fell on Grundy's white, upturned face, Tom Merry gasped his alarm, and, kneeling by the junior's side, he lifted the head anxiously.

Grundy's eyes were closed, and on his forehead showed a dark bruise.

"Stunned!" breathed Wilkins, in a whisper. "My hat!"

Scarcely had he spoken when Grundy's eyes opened, and he raised his hand to his head dazedly.

"What—what— Oh, it's you, Merry!" he gasped weakly.

"Jove, my dashed head! What— Here, that brute—has he got away?"



Grundy saw the pair of muddy, hob-nailed boots on the shelf and made a grab at them. As he dragged them off, the string tightened, and the saucepans and other household utensils which were tied to the string came off the shelves on top of the devoted head of the amateur detective. (See page 13.)

He raised himself and glanced quickly about him dazedly and in some bewilderment.

"What d'you mean, Grundy?" exclaimed Tom. "You're all right now, old chap. What's happened? We found—Here's Railton!"

"Now for it!" groaned Gunn.

Lights danced on the staircase, and Mr. Railton, clad in his dressing-gown, and with a flickering candle in his hand, came hurrying downstairs.

Mr. Railton reached the bottom of the staircase, and the next moment the passage was flooded with electric light.

"What is the matter here?" asked the Housemaster anxiously. "What are you boys doing out of bed at this hour of— Good heavens, Grundy!"

Mr. Railton suddenly caught sight of Grundy lying back with his head against Tom Merry's knee, and in a flash he was also on his knees at the injured junior's side.

"Grundy! What ever is the matter—"

"I—I'm all right now, sir!" gasped the burly Shell fellow.

He strove to get up. Tom Merry and Mr. Railton helped him to his feet, where he swayed drunkenly.

"The boy is injured!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, catching sight of the bruise on Grundy's brow. "Kildare, you had better rouse the sanatorium staff without delay. He must be carried—"

"Rot! Utter rot!"

"Grundy—"

"I—I mean, I'm all right now, sir!" gasped Grundy, realising suddenly whom he was talking to. "A—a bit of a dashed headache, that's all. No need to make a fuss, sir. I—I say, sir, is it long since I yelled out?"

"A couple of minutes, Grundy; no more, my boy. But, really, Grundy—"

"My hat! You'll get him, then, if you're slippy," said Grundy, a little excited. "I struggled with the brute. He hit me with something; fairly knocked me silly."

"Grundy."

"Be quick!" cried Grundy urgently. "He'll get clear."

"Who will get clear? What—"

"The burglar, of course!" gasped Grundy frantically. "I met the brute in the passage here. We struggled and he knocked me out. If you don't be—"

Grundy's voice became faint, and he would have fallen but for Mr. Railton, who was holding him.

"Bless my soul! This is amazing!" exclaimed the Housemaster, glancing at him hastily. "Mr. Linton, perhaps you will kindly escort Grundy to the sanatorium, and see that his injury is attended to. He has undoubtedly received a severe blow. Kildare, Darrell, Rushden, Baker, you had better accompany me in a round of the House. The rest of you boys will return to bed at once!"

The juniors' excited faces immediately became glum.

"We—we could help to search, sir," suggested Tom Merry.

"If there was a burglar—"

"Nonsense! You will return to bed without delay. Ah, Mr. Lathom—"

Suddenly noticing that the Fourth Form master was present, Mr. Railton nodded meaningly to him, and the next moment the juniors and seniors, with the exception of the prefects, were being escorted back to their dormitories by Mr. Lathom. Grundy was also escorted away by Mr. Linton, leaving Mr. Railton and the prefects to begin their search of the House.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry when Mr. Lathom had seen them safely into their dormitory. "Poor old Grundy's fairly been in the wars. Think it was a burglar?"

"Looks like it!" grunted Wilkins. "Anyhow, trust old Grundy to find trouble if there's any knocking round. Phew! Wonder how he'll explain about being out of bed?"

All the juniors wondered that. They climbed back into bed, but not to sleep yet. They were too anxious to know what was happening, and what actually had happened.

For ten minutes or so they sat up discussing the strange

affair in low tones, and then the door opened and Grundy entered, a bandage round his head. Behind him was Mr. Linton.

After telling the Shell fellow to get into bed at once, the master wished the dormitory "Good-night!" and withdrew, closing the door after him.

There was a buzz of questions at once.

"Well," was the eager chorus, "what's happened, Grundy?"

"Blest if I know!" snorted Grundy. "I suppose that dashed burglar's got away. Blow him! Anyway, the fatheads wanted me to stay in the sanny. I wasn't having any, though. Not likely. As if a blessed knock like that would bowl me over. Rot! Now, Wilky, and you, Gunn, I want to know—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Railton. The Housemaster was looking puzzled.

"Ah, you are back, then, Grundy?" he exclaimed, eyeing the junior with some concern. "How do you feel now, my boy?"

"Not so bad, sir," said Grundy, a trifle loftily. "My skull's pretty thick, you know, sir."

"So I should imagine," said Mr. Railton dryly, pretending not to hear the chorus of chuckles that went up at Grundy's innocent admission. "However, if you are feeling better, perhaps you will explain this strange affair?"

"I suppose the burglar's got away, then, sir?" said Grundy, with scarcely veiled disgust.

"I am afraid I cannot believe that a burglar has been in the House at all, Grundy," retorted the Housemaster, eyeing Grundy sharply. "Nothing appears to have been taken or disturbed. There are no signs of an intruder, nor are any windows open. A window has certainly been found unlatched—the window of the museum on the ground floor. That, however, was most likely left unfastened by a careless servant. Are you sure that you did not come by your accident by means of a fall, Grundy?"

Grundy was staggered.

"Of course not, sir!" he almost snorted. "I met the chap and went for him. He was a tall chap and a hefty brute. I saw his figure clearly, though I didn't spot his face."

There was no doubting Grundy's earnestness, and Mr. Railton nodded and frowned.

"It is very strange, Grundy," he said quietly. "Kildare and the others are still searching, however, and possibly we may discover something further before morning. I have not asked you yet, Grundy, how you came to be up and about at the time."

Though Grundy's head was throbbing he still had his wits about him. He had expected that question sooner or later.

"I heard a noise and went downstairs, sir," he answered promptly, and quite truthfully.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Very well, Grundy, for the present we will leave the matter," he said. "We will go into the matter again in the morning. You had better get some sleep now, my boy. If you feel at all unwell in the night, however, you must not hesitate to come for me, or send for me. Now let us have that light out, please."

With that Mr. Railton wished the dormitory "Good-night!" and left, closing the door after him.



Here You Are, Lads!

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"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "You—you nerry boulder, Grundy! Did you hear a noise downstairs?"

Grundy grinned.

"Of course I did," he said. "When I went out into the passage I heard a noise downstairs. I thought it must be Wilky and Gunny—"

"By Jove!" interrupted Wilkins. "I remember now. I heard something, too—when we were outside in the passage. I thought it must be the wind at the time."

"Oh, did you?" snorted Grundy.

"So—so that's how you managed

it? You were sneaking in the passage, you cad? So that's how you thundering well tricked me, was it?"

"But look here, Grundy, old man—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Grundy bitterly. "I'm going to lick you both until you can't stand for this. You wait! I don't feel up to it now, though. But just you wait until morning, that's all!"

And with that dark threat, Grundy climbed into bed, and refused to discuss the matter further either with his faithless chums or with anyone else. Grundy was "fed-up."

## CHAPTER 7.

### Grundy—Detective!

THE next morning the School House fellows came down eager and excited, and burning with curiosity to learn if anything else had come to light concerning the startling events of the night. Before morning school both School House and New House was buzzing with the news.

Nothing fresh had come to light, however. Nothing whatever had been taken or disturbed, and the only single thing that lent colour to the burglary theory was the unfastened window of the museum on the ground floor. And it was generally supposed that even that was simply an oversight for which a servant was responsible.

Yet someone undoubtedly had attacked the luckless Grundy. There was the visible evidence of Grundy's nasty bruise, and Grundy's wild bellow for help was further proof. Then there was Grundy's word. Whatever his faults, which were many, Grundy was not given to telling "whoppers."

In the Shell, at least, it was known why Grundy had left the dormitory in the first place, and there was much speculation as to how he would explain matters when questioned by the Head. But they need not have worried. Mr. Railton had already accepted Grundy's explanation, and the Head did not even ask him for further details.

For all that, Grundy was looking none too cheery when he left the Head's study after the interview. Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. were chatting in the passage, and they tackled him at once.

"Well?" demanded Tom Merry. "How did you get on, Grundy?"

Grundy snorted.

"The Head's an ass—so is Railton!" he snapped.

"He asked you what you went down for, then?" asked Blake.

"No; never even mentioned it!" said Grundy. "What the thump does that matter, though?"

"Then what are you looking ratty about?" grinned Tom Merry. "You ought to be jolly glad—"

"Glad!" snorted Grundy, pointing to the bruise on his head. "Would you be glad if you'd got a crack on the napper like I got, and would you be glad if the rotter who did it was to get off scot-free—eh? Rot! It's the limit—the outside edge! Railton let the brute get away, and now the Head says nothing can be done. Bah!"

"Is he going to do nothing, then—not even report it to the police?" gasped Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Is he thump—though blessed if I know what the dashed police could do!" snorted Grundy, becoming excited. "I tell you I'm not going to let the dashed business drop if the Head is! Not likely!"

"Doesn't he think it was a burglar?" exclaimed Manners.

"No, he doesn't—nor does Railton!" said Grundy, with a sniff. "I'm blessed if I do, either, now!"

"You don't?"

"No, I thundering well don't! I've been thinking things over, you chaps. A dashed burglar wouldn't have known his way about like this chap did. He must have been a chap who knows St. Jim's to walk about the passage in the dark like he did."

"Phew! But, you ass, who could it be, then?"

Grundy clenched his fists.

"That's what I'm going to discover!" snapped Grundy.

"Local police? Bah! What good are they, in any case? There's only one chap any good on this job!"

"And who's that?" asked Blake, with interest.

"Me!" snapped Grundy. "Little me! I don't say I'm as good a detective as Sexton Blake, mind you. But I'll lick the head off any dashed local bobby. I told the Head he could safely leave the matter to me—"

"My hat! You did?"

"I did—plainly, too! He told me not to talk nonsense! Bah! The Head's an ass! I'll show him! I'm going to take the case up; I'm going to track the dashed brute down, and if he's a local chap I'll show him up!"

"Good man!" said Lowther gravely. "Are you going to do this little job before you find the gold chalices, or after?"

But sarcasm was wasted on George Alfred.

"Oh, that!" he exclaimed, sniffing. "That can wait a bit, Lowther, of course! I'm not afraid of that chap Mellin beating me—not much! He's a mug, and looks it. Blow

the chalices now! I haven't forgotten it, though. I'll see to that after this little job's finished."

And Grundy marched away, looking grim and determined. He left seven chuckling juniors behind him. Grundy in the role of treasure-hunter had amused them, but Grundy in the role of detective amused them much more.

"Well, of all the born idiots," grinned Tom Merry, "that chap takes the bun! Fancy telling the Head to leave it to him!"

"Grundy as a detective will be funny," remarked Lowther thoughtfully. "I expect he'll prove it was the Head who did it—or Railton. We must help him, you know. We'll see if we can't find him some clues."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

The bell for morning lessons rang just then, and the grinning juniors went in to their respective Form-rooms. Grundy came in for a good deal of attention during classes that morning—from the juniors and from Mr. Linton. He was exceptionally inattentive; but, for once the Shell master was lenient with him. The juniors, however, were well aware of the reason for Grundy's inattention. Grundy's latest intention to play detective, and his air of reflective abstraction entertained them.

But Grundy was in deadly earnest this time, as Tom Merry & Co. learned when classes ended. The juniors were chatting together in the Shell passage when Baggy Trimble came along chuckling.

"I say, you fellows!" he grinned. "If you want to see some fun, come and see Grundy detecting!"

"Eh? What d'you mean, Trimble?"

"Grundy!" cackled Trimble. "That awful ass! He's crawling about the floor of the giddy museum hunting for clues with a magnifying glass. He, he, he! Come and have a squint!"

"Oh, blow Grundy!" said Jack Blake. "Let the ass get on with it!"

Monty Lowther was more interested in the activities of Grundy, however.

"He's there now, you say, Trimble?" he inquired.

"Yes. I say, just you come and see the chump. There's a whole crowd of chaps watching him already."

"Right! I'll come along now, Baggy."

Baggy Trimble trotted away, still cackling like a fat hen. Lowther turned to his chums.

"You fellows coming along?" he asked.

"Oh, rats!"

"You'll miss some fun if you don't," warned Lowther. "I fancy I see a way of helping dear old Grundy. Even Dr. Watson was of use at times to Sherlock Holmes, you know. Anyway, I'm off!"

Lowther hurried away, chuckling, and it was not until some ten minutes later that his chums saw him again. It was some time before afternoon classes, and the juniors were out of doors for a stroll. It was while approaching the gates that they saw Lowther, and it was obvious at the first glance that the practical joker of the Shell was "up to" something.

He was walking along on the flower-beds on the inner side of the hedge that bordered the Head's garden, and he was walking in a curiously awkward and stealthy manner.

"Hallo!" gasped Tom Merry. "What game is the ass up to now?"

When the juniors came up to Lowther they stared.

On Lowther's feet was a pair of big boots—obviously fitted on over his own. They were not only big boots, but they were hobnailed, and they were muddy.

"Well, my hat!" said Blake, blinking at the boots. "What on earth are you up to, Lowther, you ass?"

Lowther stopped and grinned.

"These boots belong to old Taggles," he explained. "Nice old barges, aren't they? Taggles was out, so I sneaked into the lodge-kitchen and borrowed 'em."

"But what—"

"You'll see presently," said Lowther. "I'm arranging clues for Grundy to pick up. All he's picked up so far is a bit of an old matchbox, and dust on his trousers off the museum floor. I'm making a trail for him to follow from the window of the museum to Taggles' lodge."

"Bai Jove!"

"It's a pity for Grundy to have all his trouble for nothing, you know," said Lowther. "I'm arranging these clues so that he won't be disappointed. Of course, if it leads him to suppose Taggles did the deed, that's his own look out, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha! I suppose so!"

"I carried these boots to the flower-beds below the museum window, and put 'em on there, you see," went on the humorous Monty. "They make a beautiful trail, and Grundy's bound to be pleased when he spots it. Anyway, I must get on. Grundy's too busy dusting the museum floor to think of looking out of the window for footprints. I'll have to get back and suggest it to him."

Monty Lowther tramped on towards the lodge, watched by his grinning chums. He vanished inside, and did not

reappear for two or three minutes. But when he did come out he started off at a run for the School House.

"Bai Jove!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Lowther is weally the limit, you know. We weally must see this, deah boys."

"Yes, rather!"

The chums of the School House waited expectantly, their eyes fixed on the window of the museum.

It opened at last, and they saw Monty Lowther leaning over the sill. He vanished abruptly, and his place was immediately taken by the burly figure of George Alfred Grundy.

After staring down at the flower-bed for a moment the very amateur detective gave a yell and leaped through the window.

"He's spotted it!" laughed Tom Merry. "Now for it! Come on!"

The juniors ran across to Grundy, keeping their faces as straight as possible. At the same moment Lowther dropped out of the window, whilst a dozen or more juniors from the Shell and Fourth appeared suddenly on the School House steps and ran round to the spot. Evidently Lowther had told them what to expect, for all were grinning expectantly.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's on here, Grundy?"

Grundy, who was stooping over the ground, waved them back excitedly.

"Keep back, you idiots!" he snapped. "Lowther, just keep these asses back, will you—they'll spoil the sign!"

"Get back, you fellows!" called Lowther severely. "Can't you see Grundy's found a sign?"

There was a chuckle, but Grundy was too engrossed in his task to hear it. With his eyes glued to the "sign" made by Taggles' great, hob-nailed boots, he closely examined the footprints for a moment or two, and then he started to follow up the trail, his eyes blazing with excitement.

It was not a difficult trail to follow; indeed, the footprints made by those boots were clearly visible yards away. Why Grundy found it necessary to closely examine each footprint was a mystery to all but Grundy.

"Buck up, Grundy, old chap!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, who seemed rather impatient. "I'm fairly trembling with excitement."

"Shut up!" hissed Grundy.

Watched by the grinning juniors the amateur detective continued to scrutinise each footprint. He was fairly shaking with excitement by the time they led him to the back door of the porter's lodge.

"Well, my hat!" he breathed, turning round and regarding the crowd with blazing eyes. "What do you fellows make of that? These footprints lead to Taggles' lodge. Didn't I tell you chaps I believed it was a local chap who'd done it?"

"You did, right enough; I'll admit that," said Lowther gravely. "My hat! This beats the band! Go on, Sherlock—I mean, Grundy."

Grundy "went on": it was not a difficult matter at all. The muddy footprints led over the doorstep of the lodge into the spotlessly clean kitchen beyond.

Crowding expectantly round the doorway, the rest of the juniors watched Grundy as he followed the "sign." It led him straight up to a series of high shelves across the kitchen.

"Look!" cried Grundy.

His voice was shaking with triumph.

The juniors looked, and saw a pair of muddy, hobnailed boots on the lowest shelf.

Grundy lifted his hand and took the boots off the shelf. Unfortunately he did not notice that the boots were attached by the laces and by various pieces of string to the array of saucepans and empty bins on the shelves above, and for that omission Grundy suffered.

As he dragged at the boots the strings tightened, and then the saucepans and other household utensils came off the shelves.

Clatter, clatter, crash! Clatter, crash!

"Yaroooh! Yooop! Ow! Yaroooh!"

Clatter, clatter! Crash!

On top of the devoted head of the amateur detective rained the shower of pots and pans.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Above the general din and clatter sounded a howl of laughter from the crowd in the doorway. They had been led to expect something from Monty Lowther, and they had not been disappointed.

The noise of the falling utensils and Grundy's howls had scarcely ceased when the burly form of old Taggles, the school porter, appeared in the doorway.

"Ere, 'ere, what's all this?" he snorted, pushing his way through the crowd into the kitchen. "You young rips! What I wants to know—My heye!"

Taggles' eyes fell suddenly upon Grundy, sitting on the

floor surrounded with pots and pans, and with an aluminium saucepan jammed on his head.

"Master Grundy—well, you young rip!" gasped the porter. "My heye! You—you—jest you come outer that! Well, I'm blowed! You—you—"

The irate and astounded porter grasped Grundy by the collar with a horny hand and hauled him to his feet.

"Leggo!" roared Grundy, wriggling frantically. "Leggo, you old idiot! Here, you—"

Taggles wrenched Grundy's helmet off and flung the saucepan away. Then he fairly lifted the struggling Grundy through the doorway.

"Houtside!" snorted Taggles wrathfully. "You—you young rip! I'll report you for this, Master Grundy—you see if I don't. My heye! Clear hoff!"

Hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, the detective staggered to his feet and glared round him.

He had already got a glimmering of the truth in his mind, and his glance rested at last on Monty Lowther.

"Lowther!" he stuttered. "You—you rotter! I believe you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's vague suspicion became a certainty as he glared at the laughing faces about him.

"What are you scowling about, Grundy?" demanded Lowther, shaking his head. "You've tracked your man down; what more do you want? Why don't you show him up?"

"You—you howling rotter!"

"There's gratitude for you!" remarked Lowther. "After all the trouble I took to bag Taggles' old boots and to lay that beautiful trail; not to mention the trouble I took to arrange the little surprise at the end of it. Grundy, old chap—Here, keep him off, you chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows roared as Grundy made a wild rush at the practical joker. Lowther dodged the rush and streaked away with Grundy in hot pursuit after him. Pursued and pursuer vanished from sight round the cloisters.

Laughing joyously, the rest of the juniors moved off towards the School House.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus, wiping his eyes with a delicate handkerchief. "That was weally funny, y'know. It was too bad on poor old Gwunday, deah boys."

"Serves the silly ass right!" grunted Manners. "Let's wait for Monty. I expect he'll be needing medical attention if Grundy's managed to get hold of him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors halted on the steps to wait for Monty Lowther. They were still standing there when two figures came through the gateway. One was Mr. Lathom, and the other was Mr. Mellin, the diviner.

They reached the old archway leading into the quad, and they parted there; Mr. Lathom approaching the steps on which the juniors were standing.

At the same moment Mr. Linton, the Shell master, came past the juniors down the steps. The two masters met and stopped.

"Ah! Have you been out for a stroll, Lathom?" asked Mr. Linton genially.

"To the pillar-box to post a letter, that is all," said Mr. Lathom, smiling. "By the way, Linton, I have just been chatting with that diviner fellow—Mellin. Have you spoken to the man yet?"

"No, I have not," said Mr. Linton dryly. "In my view, the science of rhabdomancy, if it can be called a science, is all humbug."

Mr. Lathom nodded.

"I confess I was rather interested in the matter," he said, "but after my chat with this fellow a moment ago I am rather inclined to agree with you, Linton. The man appears to be either extremely churlish or strangely ignorant of his—profession. He seemed quite unable to explain the use of the divining rod even, and he appeared to have no knowledge of the magnetic or sidereal pendulum, or of the bipolar cylinder. Indeed, he seems to be an extraordinary man."

The two masters passed the juniors, and they heard no more.

The juniors could not help overhearing what they did, however.

"Evidently the beaks don't think much of that chap Mellin, then," grinned Blake. "It's just what I said. It's all spoof!"

"The chap hasn't discovered anything yet, that's clear," grinned Tom Merry. "Give him a chance, though. He's only been here—Hallo, here's old Monty!"

The arrival of Monty Lowther just then changed the conversation. Lowther was panting heavily, but he was grinning, and obviously still sound in limb if not in wind.

"Well, did he catch you, Monty?" inquired Tom.

"No. He chased me round the cloisters, but I hid behind

a buttress, and—well, he's hunting about the ruins for me now, I expect," grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laughing over the misfortunes of George Alfred Grundy, the chums of the School House went indoors, little dreaming where they were to see George Alfred next.

## CHAPTER 8.

### On the Trail Again!

"CHEEKY little cad! My hat! I'll—I'll smash the rotter when I get hold of him!"

Grundy muttered the words through his teeth, and he muttered them to himself. He was breathless and panting and wrathful. He had chased Monty Lowther round and round the cloisters, and now he had lost sight of his quarry altogether.

Besides being in a towering rage, Grundy was a trifle mystified. He could have sworn he had seen Lowther's form vanish towards the ruins. Yet he knew the ruins were strictly out of bounds, and he hesitated about following.

As a matter of fact, at that moment Monty Lowther was going indoors with his chums. But Grundy did not know that.

He meant to find Lowther, however, if he spent all day looking for him. He was still sore in mind and body. That avalanche of pots and pans had hurt him considerably. But the hurt to his anatomy was as nothing to the hurt to his dignity.

So Grundy had no intention of giving up the chase yet. He hesitated a brief instant longer, and then he entered the quiet ruins.

All was still and silent, save for the wind rustling in the ivy of the old ruined tower, but Grundy knew that Lowther, or a good many other juniors, might hide safely among the broken masses of moss-grown masonry lying about.

But Grundy did not get far. He had scarcely reached the shadow of the dismantled tower when he heard a footstep behind him, and he wheeled abruptly.

It was not Lowther, however. It was Mr. Mellin, the diviner. Grundy grunted with disappointment as he recognised the owl-like features, familiar enough to the St. Jim's juniors now.

The eyes of the diviner seemed to glitter as they rested on the junior.

"Well, boy," he demanded harshly, "what are you doing here? I understood that these ruins were out of bounds."

Grundy blinked at him. That a stranger should talk to him like that rather took Grundy's breath away. As he had explained more than once to all and sundry, Grundy had a very poor opinion of Mr. Mellin, and his object in visiting St. Jim's.

"Eh? Say that again!" he exclaimed warmly. "I'm blest if I can see what it's got to do with you what I'm doing here!"

It was more than a trifle rude, but Grundy was in no mood to mince his words.

Mr. Mellin's face set harder.

"You had better leave these ruins at once, my boy," he said quietly. "Otherwise I shall report you to your headmaster."

"Report and be blowed!" snorted Grundy, just a trifle uneasily, however. "Who are you to come—"

Grundy paused.

Though Grundy had seen Mr. Mellin several times, both at St. Jim's and in the village, where the diviner was staying, he had not yet seen him face to face.

But he saw him face to face now, and Grundy quailed a trifle beneath the penetrating stare of those black, glittering eyes.

What strange, menacing eyes they were! Grundy stopped speaking suddenly, struck by a startling memory that he had seen those eyes before somewhere.

But where?

In a blinding flash Grundy remembered, and a shiver ran down his spine at the remembrance.

He had gazed into them the previous night, in the dark, shadowy corridor, when he had struggled alone with the unknown marauder at the dead of night.

Was it possible? The unknown had been tall, and this man was tall. Yet the unknown of the night had not worn glasses, though, after all, that meant little. It was quite likely—

Quite suddenly Grundy saw something else, something that made him jump.

On Mr. Mellin's upper lip was a scar, a recent cut without a doubt. Grundy remembered, with keen satisfaction, how his fist had connected with the marauder's mouth during that brief struggle.

"Mum-my hat!" breathed Grundy.

He stared at Mr. Mellin, and that hard-faced gentleman stared at him with a keen look of inquiry.

"Why do you look at me like that, boy?" Mr. Mellin demanded, a slight uneasiness in his tone. "You were saying—"



For dear life Tom Merry & Co. raced on, stumbling and lurching, their breath coming in great, choking gasps, their eyes staring into the blackness ahead. The churning, hissing waters surged around them, threatening to sweep them off their feet, when Tom Merry's staring eyes glimpsed some steps. "Stick it, chaps!" he yelled. "We'll do it yet!" (See page 19.)

Grundy strove to steady his voice. "I was saying that it's no business of yours!" growled George Alfred sullenly. "But if you want me to go—"

The diviner laughed and extracted a cigarette from his case carelessly.

"It is of no consequence to me whether you go or stay, my boy," he laughed, striking a match. "But I understood that these ruins are out of bounds, and I also understood that they are dangerous to venturesome boys. It was merely for your own sake that I told you to clear."

With that the diviner turned and struck another match, his first one having gone out. It was the last match in the box. So, after lighting his cigarette, he threw the dead match and the box away. Then he nodded to Grundy and walked on.

Grundy stared after him as he vanished into the shattered walls of the ruined chapel.

"My hat!" breathed the amateur detective. "So it was you, was it? M-my hat! Right, my pippin! I'm blest if I know what your little game is, but—"

Grundy stooped suddenly and picked up the empty matchbox. It was a peculiarly coloured box, with foreign printing on the outside. Grundy did not remember ever having seen the brand of matches before, certainly not in the district.

As he looked at it Grundy gave a start, and took from his waistcoat a scrap of something—something that was obviously a scrap off a matchbox.

From the matchbox he had just picked up a small piece was missing, had been torn off. With fingers that trembled Grundy fitted the piece from his pocket to the broken box.

It fitted exactly. And he had picked up that scrap of matchbox from the floor of the museum beneath the window. "Well, that settles it!" muttered Grundy, almost shaking with excited triumph. "Laugh at me, would they? I'll show 'em what's what! Jove! There's a thundering queer mystery about this, and I'm the man that's going to solve it."

For a brief instant Grundy stood, his brow wrinkled in deep thought. Then he carefully placed the "clues" in his inside pocket, and started to move cautiously towards the ruined chapel.

He had no clear idea what he meant to do, excepting a determination to "shadow" the queer Mr. Mellin. He was elated at what he believed was his success, and he was bewildered at the amazing discovery. What it all meant he did not stop to think out, nor did he stay to bother over the fact that it was already past time for afternoon classes. Indeed, Grundy scarcely gave classes a thought. What did lessons matter, anyhow? His detective instincts were aroused, and he meant to give them full play.

He reached the silent chapel, and, stepping through a broken archway, he glanced cautiously about him. All was silent as the grave, and he saw no sign of his quarry.

"Oh, blow it!" breathed Grundy. "He's given me the slip. No, he hasn't, by gad!"

It dawned upon Grundy quite abruptly that Mr. Mellin would undoubtedly be in the vaults below. And as the thought occurred to him, Grundy ran softly across the grumbling flagstones.

In the centre of the floor was the movable slab of stone  
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that gave admittance to the vaults. It was closed now. Evidently Mr. Mellin had closed it after him. But Grundy did not hesitate.

He grasped the large ring in the slab, and hauled with all his strength. It came up at last, and dropped back with a hollow, echoing thud, revealing some steps leading to a dark cellar below.

"Oh, good!" gasped Grundy.

The junior waited a moment to get his breath again, and then he dropped down on to the steps that led into the blackness beneath.

As the cold, earthy atmosphere of the vaults struck him, Grundy could not repress a shiver. But he set his teeth and trod cautiously down the steps. The next moment he was standing in the vaults, blinking about him into the darkness.

All around him loomed the great stone arches and massive pillars, silent and ghostly. But there was not a flicker of light anywhere.

"Rummy!" breathed Grundy. "He must have come down here, I suppose."

He hesitated a moment, and then he trod deeper into the gloom of the vaults. It occurred to him that the light might be hidden by the rows of arches if Mellin had gone far into the vaults, which were extensive, running beneath the whole of the old part of the school.

He had scarcely gone a dozen yards over the flagstones, when there came a sound from behind him—a sound, dull and ominous, that made him wheel round with a start.

It was the dull thud of the movable stone falling into place, and as it closed the aperture, darkness, deep and impenetrable fell upon Grundy.

"Mum-my hat!" panted Grundy.

He blinked about him in great alarm, and a sudden thrill of fear took possession of him. He was still standing motionless when he heard a slight sound from the stone steps, and the next instant a dazzling beam of white light shot out.

It roved about a moment, and then it came to rest on the form of the amateur detective.

Grundy understood then; he had been trapped!

Behind the light was a tall, dimly-seen form; but Grundy did not need to be told who it was. The form approached, and Grundy found himself staring once again into the cold, penetrating eyes of the diviner.

"What—what does this mean?" panted Grundy, unable to restrain his uneasiness.

"That is what I wish to know!" said Mr. Mellin, in a meaning tone. "Why were you following me, boy?"

Grundy scowled, and said nothing.

"I do not like people to spy upon me," said Mr. Mellin, his voice hardening. "There is another question I will ask you. When I met you outside a few moments ago you stared at me very curiously—as if you had met me before, and as if you were startled. Where have you met me before, boy?"

Had he been wiser, Grundy would have refrained from answering that question. But he was still feeling a bit triumphant, and at the question his jaw set doggedly, and his eyes gleamed.

"I'll jolly soon tell you that, you rotter!" he snapped impulsively. "I met you close on midnight last night in one of the passages at St. Jim's—where you'd no thundering right to be at that hour! I jolly soon spotted you, my pippin! It was I who split that dashed lip of yours, and it was you, you rotter, who biffed me on the napper. I've bowled you out, and I'm going to thundering well show you up! I'm blessed if I know what your little game is, but—"

The diviner, who had not moved, interrupted him.

"That is rather an extraordinary statement to make, boy," he said coldly. "Are you quite certain of what you claim?"

"Yes, I jolly well am! You can't spoof me, if you can the blessed governors! Diviner—rot! Bosh! You've got some game on here!"

"You seem to be a youth of unusual powers of deduction," said the man blandly. "Have you told anyone of your—er—suspicious?"

"No, I haven't!" snapped Grundy, not a little astonished at the way Mr. Mellin was taking things. "But I'm jolly well going to do!"

"I do not think you are," retorted Mr. Mellin quite pleasantly.

As he spoke, the diviner placed the electric torch he carried carefully on the stone floor. Then, with the leap of a tiger, he flung himself at the unsuspecting George Alfred.

Taken utterly by surprise, Grundy went to the floor with a crash, and a yell that echoed and re-echoed throughout the vaulted chambers.

Before he could even think of resisting he felt himself twisted over swiftly, and a pair of hands like steel, gripped his wrists, twisting them behind him.

Grundy realised the man's intention then; but the realisation came too late. And, in any case, the Shell junior was like a child in the diviner's powerful grasp.

Grinding the junior's face on the stone, and with a knee pinning Grundy's arms down, the man swiftly ran a cord round the junior's wrists, and secured them, despite the junior's desperate struggles.

Then Mr. Mellin got to his feet, breathing heavily.

"Now get up!" he snapped.

Grundy staggered to his feet, panting and raging, and still struggling with the cord round his wrists.

"You—you howling rotter!" he hissed. "You dare—"

"You are a young fool!" said the man. "But you are dangerous to me for all that! I am now going to put you in a safe place where you can do no harm!"

He picked up the torch, and took a grip of Grundy's arm.

"Get on!" he said. "I'll show you the way!"

"I jolly well won't go!" yelled Grundy furiously. "Let go, you brute! Help, help!"

Grundy's yells rang through the vaults. And as he yelled, Grundy kicked and struggled to free himself.

"You will have it, then!" snapped Mr. Mellin.

He struck the junior a blow on the temple with his fist, and Grundy reeled and fell. Mr. Mellin picked him up and flung him across his shoulder like a sack. Then he picked up the torch with his free hand, and tramped away through the gloomy vaults, the torch casting dancing lights and shadows on the ancient stonework.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Where is Grundy?

WHEN Grundy failed to turn up for afternoon classes, there was considerable surprise and not a little disappointment in the Shell Form. The absurd affair of Taggles' boots was generally known by this, and all the juniors were looking forward to seeing Grundy's face when he appeared in class.

But Grundy did not appear, and though not, like his pupils, disappointed, Mr. Linton was surprised. He naturally jumped to the conclusion that Grundy's injury was responsible for his absence, after a moment's reflection, however. Grundy was the last fellow to make a song about an injury; and Mr. Linton had been not a little afraid that the junior was making too little of it. Had it been anyone else but Grundy who had received that blow, he would undoubtedly have been a suitable case for the sanatorium. Grundy certainly was, as he had admitted, very thick skulled.

Mr. Linton did not miss the junior for some minutes after lessons had commenced, and then he turned to Tom Merry.

"Merry," he exclaimed, "do you happen to know why Grundy is absent from class?"

Tom Merry informed the master that he did not, as did the rest of the Form on being questioned.

"Very well," said Mr. Linton. "Will you kindly go to Mr. Railton, Merry. Ask him if he has given Grundy leave of absence from class this afternoon."

"Certainly, sir."

Tom Merry left the room. He was absent only a few minutes, and when he returned he shook his head.

"No, sir," he said. "Mr. Railton says that Grundy should be in the Form-room."

"Oh, indeed!" remarked Mr. Linton grimly. "It is very strange—and annoying. Doubtless he will put in an appearance shortly, however."

He nodded to Tom Merry, and that junior returned to his place, and the lesson proceeded. But Mr. Linton was an optimist. Grundy did not put in an appearance shortly, nor had he appeared when lessons were ended. And by that time Mr. Linton was looking grimmer still.

"Well, that chap takes the cake!" remarked Tom Merry, as they left the Form-room. "He just does what the dickens he likes!"

"He'll get it hot for this!" said Manners.

Tom nodded.

"You saw him last, Monty," he said, wrinkling his brows thoughtfully. "You say he went towards the ruins?"

"Yes. Why, d'you think he'll be searching for me there yet?" grinned Lowther.

"No, I don't," answered Tom Merry. "But—but it's queer! Even an ass like Grundy wouldn't miss afternoon class without a jolly good reason. It's just struck me, you fellows. I hope the silly chump hasn't gone searching the ruins—for the Abbey treasure, I mean, not for Lowther."

"My hat!"

"It's quite likely that he has," said the junior skipper. "You remember he was dead nuts on beating that diviner chap and finding the treasures. He's a silly ass if he did."

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But finding himself in the ruins he might be tempted to have a go, you know."

"That's jolly likely!" agreed Manners nodding. "Hadh't we better go and squint round there, Tommy?"

"I was wondering that," said Tom Merry. "But we'll give the ass a bit longer. If he doesn't turn up at call-over we'll try the ruins, anyway."

Grundy was marked absent at call-over, and, true to his word, Tom Merry called his chums together. The more Tom had thought about it the more certain did he believe his theory was the correct one.

"We'll get Blake and his lot to help us," said Tom Merry, as they got pocket-torches and their caps ready. "Better slip out quietly one by one, though."

The Terrible Three went along to Study No. 6 to ask the chums of the Fourth to accompany them on their rather risky expedition. They found Blake & Co. standing by the panelled wall of their study, and all of them were looking a little startled.

"Hallo! Oh, good!" exclaimed Blake, as he recognised the chums of the Shell. "Come in and shut the door, you chaps! We've got something to show you!"

The Terrible Three came into the study.

"What's the matter?" demanded the leader of the Shell.

For answer, Jack Blake pressed a projecting knob in the carved, age-old panelling of the wall. The panel facing Blake moved with a slight creaking noise. It moved a few inches, and then stuck.

Tom Merry whistled.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he said grinning. "Who on earth's taken the screws out, Blake. That panel was screwed up by order of the Head."

Blake nodded.

"That's so, Tommy. But, look! The screws are gone! They were in when we kicked Grundy out yesterday. You remember he sneaked in here and tried to open the panel."

"Phew!"

"It was Gussy here who discovered it," said Blake. "He found a screw on the floor, and guessed where it came from. He examined the panel and spotted it."

"It was weally sheah luck, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus modestly.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"So that's it!" he said excitedly. "We were just going to ask you fellows to come with us to the ruins to search for that idiot Grundy. There's no need to risk being spotted there now, though. That's where Grundy's gone."

"Bai Jove!"

"We guessed Grundy had opened the panel, of course," breathed Blake. "But we never connected it with his absence. Well, the awful ass!"

"You think he's gone exploring down in the vaults?" gasped Herries.

Tom Merry nodded gravely.

"Yes, I do," he said; "and it looks as if he's come to grief, too, you fellows. It's a risky game, and he may have fallen and hurt himself, or something. You chaps came to help search for the ass?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You bet!" snapped Blake. "I don't like the look of things!"

The rest of the juniors did not, either, and they were soon bustling about making preparations for the expedition. Torches and lamps were rooted out, and most of the juniors donned their coats, knowing it would be chilly in the vaults.

They were ready at last. They had made their preparations behind locked doors; but now Tom went to the door.

"Now you chaps get through the panel," he directed. "I'll turn the light out and unlock the door. If anyone comes to the study they'll only think you're in the Common-room or in another study. They won't dream of the truth."

"Wathah not!"

The juniors stepped through the aperture in the wall. Tom unlocked the door, and then he turned out the light and joined the others in the passage, which was but a hole in the massive wall where a huge block of masonry was missing.

He stepped in, and slid the panel to after him. Blake turned on his electric torch, and a broad beam of light stabbed the blackness, revealing a flight of stone steps, leading downwards between the thick old walls.

In single file the juniors followed Tom Merry down the steps, their feet echoing strangely amid the silence. The walls and the floor were thick with dust and festooned with cobwebs.

Tom found his progress barred abruptly by a huge block of stone; they had reached the bottom of the stairs. But it was not the first time Tom Merry & Co. had explored the strange passage, and Tom knew what to do.

Carefully he ran his hands over the cold stonework. His chums waited silently. The gloom and stillness was already having its effect upon them. They could not help the feeling of eerie awe steal over them as their minds went back

to the days when this passage had been used by the monks of long ago when St. Jim's was a monastery.

The place smelled horribly musty and damp, and the juniors shivered as a chilly draught struck them from somewhere.

"Got it! Oh, good!"

Tom Merry's roving hand had stopped at a deep depression in the stonework, and as he spoke he pressed it with all his force.

With a slight rumbling noise the great slab of stone facing them swung inwards, apparently upon a pivot.

Tom Merry stepped through, the rest of the juniors following hard on his heels. They found themselves in the vaults; and dark and forbidding enough the places looked to the juniors.

Their suspicions were about to be put to the test now. They believed that somewhere in the gloomy recesses before them they would find the hapless Grundy—possibly with a broken leg, or some other serious injury. It was the only way they could account for the junior's strange absence, and for the significant fact that the secret panel had been opened.

"Come on!" muttered Tom Merry, in a strangely subdued voice. "We'd better see if the movable stone leading down into the vaults from the ruins is open first."

"Yaas, wathah! Lead on, deah boy!"

Tom Merry led the way amid a blaze of light from the torches the juniors carried. It was only a short distance to the steps leading up to the ruins, and on reaching it they saw at once that the stone trapdoor was closed.

"That's good enough!" said Tom. "Come on! We'd better spread out and start the search now. Half a mo! I'll give a yell!"

He was just about to do so when he stiffened suddenly, for from above their heads had sounded footfalls.

"My hat!" breathed Tom Merry, in astonishment. "Who on earth is up in the ruins at this time of night? Jove, I've got it!"

"Well, what—"

"It's the beaks or prefects searching for Grundy, I bet!" snapped Tom. "Railton knows Grundy was last seen round the ruins, and I bet he knows Grundy was keen on searching for the treasure."

"Phew! That's it!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors stared at each other, and at that moment there came a sound from above their heads.

"Quick!" hissed Tom Merry. "Out with the lights! Hide, you asses!"

The lights snapped out, and the juniors took shelter behind arches close by. They knew what to expect if caught in the vaults at that hour of the night, whatever their object might be.

They had scarcely done so when a stone above their heads fell back abruptly, letting in a gleam of starlight, which was blotted out the next moment as a dark form dropped on to the steps. Then the stone thudded into place again, and blackness fell.

But not for long. A dazzling beam of light cut the darkness, and footsteps sounded on the stone steps. They stopped at the bottom, and the watching juniors saw the torch placed on the floor, and then they got a good look at the man who had entered the vaults.

It was not Mr. Railton, nor Kildare, nor anyone from St. Jim's. It was Mr. Mellin, the diviner!

"Hallo!" breathed Tom Merry in Blake's ear. "What's that Johnny doing down here at this time of night? It must be close on eight, at least."

"Working overtime?" murmured Lowther, beneath his breath.

Tom Merry frowned. It was possible, of course, that Lowther's semi-humorous suggestion was true, but it was certainly highly improbable. And Tom Merry felt a return of that strange distrust he had felt of the man at first sight.

To add to Tom's distrust the fellow's first act on putting down the torch was to take his round spectacles off and place them in his pocket with a muttered sigh of relief.

Then he picked up the torch again and strode away through the vaulted chambers.

"Come on! After the beggar!" whispered Tom Merry. "I'm just a bit curious about this chap!"

The other juniors were also, and they trod softly in the wake of their leader, as he flitted from pillar to pillar on the track of Mr. Mellin.

All the juniors wore rubber-soled shoes, and they made no sound as they crept on the trail, always keeping well behind the radius of the lighted torch.

They knew they could not be far off the end of the vaults by this time, and suddenly the light ahead vanished abruptly.

"Gone into the cell!" muttered Tom. "Carefully now, for goodness' sake!"

The juniors tiptoed the rest of the way. They knew where the man had vanished. At the end of the vaults was a queer,

cell-like chamber. They wondered what Mellin was doing there.

They soon knew, for Tom Merry reached the arched doorway and peered cautiously round. Then he started, and switched his torch on.

The small, cell-like chamber was empty.

Blake was the next to reach the doorway, and he immediately saw something that Tom Merry had failed to see. It was a black, yawning gap in the stone flooring of the cell. Close by the gap was a massive flagstone.

"So that's it!" breathed Tom, his eyes gleaming. "I tell you, there's something jolly queer about that chap. I heard Railton say only at tea-time that he had reported having discovered nothing as yet."

"He's found another secret exit from the vaults, anyway," muttered Blake. "And there it is!"

"That's just it," whispered Tom. "It's fishy!"

He stepped cautiously towards the gap, carefully keeping the light from the hole in the floor. He reached it, and glanced down. He saw no light and heard no sound.

"We'll risk it, chaps!" said Tom, flooding the hole with light.

It revealed a flight of stone steps, damp and clammy and moss-grown. It also revealed something lying on one of the steps—a St. Jim's school cap!

"My hat!" panted Tom.

He stepped down on to the steps, and picked up the cap. He looked inside the lining, and his eyes goggled as he read the name—G. A. Grundy!

## CHAPTER 10.

### The End of the Trail!

"GRUNDY'S cap!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors stared at the cap. It was Grundy's without a doubt, and the sight of it sent a sudden chill to their hearts.

Where was Grundy, then?

"We—were right, then," said Tom Merry, in a low tone. "Grundy did come here to the vaults. And—and he went down there, too."

"Looks like it!"

"I can't quite make it out!" muttered Tom. "But—but, come on! We've got something to go on now. We'll kill two birds with one stone by following this up—looking for Grundy, and finding out what that diviner merchant is up to."

"Lead on, dear boy!"

All the juniors were tingling with excitement and eager to know where the mysterious steps led to.

Tom crammed the cap into his pocket, and, turning the light of his torch on the old, mildewed stone steps, he started down them, with his chums stepping cautiously after him.

Mr. Mellin was evidently some distance ahead, for no sound reached them, nor could they see a glimmer of light in the blackness below.

Down, down the steps led them, seemingly endless. The air grew more dank and chilly, and the walls of glistening stone slimy to the touch. The wavering torch in Tom's hand cast grotesque shadows on the glistening walls.

"Look out!"

Tom shouted the warning as the steps ended suddenly on a rocky floor that appeared to slope downwards before them into the black mouth of a tunnel. The walls of crumbling stone gave place to uneven walls of rock.

"Hallo!" murmured Monty Lowther. "This looks like the Twopenny Tube!"

In the light of Tom's torch the tunnel seemed to stretch endlessly before them. The juniors started down it, their heads just clearing the rocky, slimy roof.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in some horror. "This is weally awful! My clobber will be uttably wuined!"

"It isn't very pleasant," said Tom, glancing up at the roof of the tunnel uneasily. "It doesn't look any too safe, either. Wouldn't take much to bring the whole blessed show down."

None of the juniors were quite enjoying the journey. The blackness, the damp chill of the air, and the tomb-like stillness of the underground tunnel was getting on their nerves.

Only Lowther seemed to have much to say, and he spoke more to keep his own courage up than anything else.

"It's a tidy step, wherever it leads to, you chaps," he said presently. "I'd have brought my bike if I'd known, Jove, look at the water! I feel as if I'm walking under a blessed shower-bath!"

As Lowther spoke Tom Merry stopped suddenly, his eyes fixed on the roof of the tunnel, from which water dropped at every step, whilst the walls were streaming with it.

"My hat!" he breathed. "I've got it, you fellows! Do you realise where we are?"

"We ought to be near a dashed station by this!" murmured the irrepressible Lowther.

"We're under the river, I do believe!" snapped Tom

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Merry. "We've tramped the distance easily by this. What do you chaps think?"

"I think so, too, by Jove!" exclaimed Blake, his eyes gleaming. "Then, if we are, I fancy I can guess where this beastly tunnel leads to."

"So can I," said Tom. "Unless I'm much mistaken, it leads to Abbey Island—right under the Rhyl!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's got an outlet somewhere," grunted Manners. "The air isn't really bad, you know."

Manners was right there; though damp and mouldy-smelling, the air seemed fairly good—certainly not poisonous. And, even as Manners spoke, the rocky walls gave place to stone walls, smooth to the touch, while the ground became firmer and sloped upwards steeply.

"Steps," said Tom Merry suddenly. "Carefully, now. We mustn't forget that Mellin chap."

"Wathah not, bai Jove!"

The juniors started up the steps, ears and eyes on the alert for sound or sign.

But no sound reached them, and they saw nothing until suddenly the beam from the torches showed up a stone slab—obviously another trapdoor—above their heads.

Tom Merry stopped and stared up at it. What lay beyond it they could only guess.

"Shall we risk it?" asked Tom Merry. "That diviner chap may be on the other side; but, after all, he may be up to nothing wrong. And there's Grundy."

"Risk it," said Blake, nodding.

"Yes, rather!"

Tom nodded, and placed his bent shoulder beneath the slab of stone. Blake and Lowther came to his aid, and together they heaved with all their strength.

It moved at last, and went over slowly. Blake and Tom Merry kept their grasp on the stone to prevent it thudding over, fearful of making too much noise.

The stone came to rest on its edge, and stayed thus. And as it did so there sounded a cry—a startled cry—from above them in a well-known voice.

"What—what's that? Who is there?"

It was the voice of Grundy of the Shell, and as they heard it Tom Merry & Co. hesitated no longer. They swarmed up one after the other into the blackness above them. Tom Merry immediately flashed his light about him.

The juniors found themselves in a cell-like apartment similar to the one they had left beneath St. Jim's. It was bare, save for a couple of heaps of straw, and on the heaps lay two forms, bound and helpless.

One was Grundy, and the other was a middle-aged man with a rather podgy, homely face—a face that was white and drawn, but strangely familiar to some of the juniors.

The two captives blinked at Tom Merry & Co., amazed and half-blinded by the dazzling light of the torch.

"Grundy!" cried Tom Merry. "So—so we've found you!"

"Bai Jove!"

Grundy's eyes blazed with joy; but he gave a warning hiss.

"Quiet!" he breathed. "They're just above us—in the crypt. Cut us loose—quickly!"

In a flash Tom had his knife out and was slashing at the bonds of the stranger and Grundy.

"Who is above, Grundy?" demanded Blake grimly. "Do you mean that rotter Mellin?"

"Mellin!" sniffed Grundy, rubbing his wrists to restore the circulation. "That chap's a fraud. This is Mr. Mellin!"

"Wha-at?"

The juniors stared dumbfounded at the middle-aged stranger who smiled and nodded a trifle shakily, as he rubbed away at wrists and legs.

"Yes," he said grimly. "I am the real Mr. Mellin. I fancy I remember meeting some of you boys at the station at Wayland," he added, looking closely at Blake & Co. "The scoundrel who has taken my name and place is one of the two scoundrels who tricked me into entering that taxi and who afterwards kidnapped me on the edge of the woods."

"Bai Jove!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors understood a lot now. Blake & Co., as they stared into the genial features of Mr. Mellin, wondered how on earth they could have missed seeing the difference. It was the queer, owlish spectacles that made the deception so easy, as they realised now.

"But—but—" stammered Tom Merry. "What on earth does it mean? Who are the men, and—?"

"I do not know," was the quick response. "They are undoubtedly criminals, however, and are after the golden chalices. They have vowed to torture me unless I place my skill and science at their disposal to aid them in their search for the treasure. They also, I suspect, are intending to rob the school when the most suitable time presents itself."

"Phew!"

"But you, Grundy!" gasped Tom Merry. "How on

earth did you manage to get captured? It was you, of course, who opened the secret panel—"

"Was it thump!" sniffed Grundy. "It was that beastly impostor who did that, and it was he who knocked me senseless last night. He was prowling round the school, seeing how the land lay, I suppose. Anyway, there's no time for gassing now. Let's get out of this!"

"But if there are only two of them—" began Tom.

"There are only two, certainly," agreed Mr. Mellin quietly. "But both are armed, and numbers would be of little use against them. Our young friend is right. We must get out of this without delay and leave further explanations—"

He broke off, listening. From above sounded faint foot-steps and a scraping sound. The next moment the stone trapdoor topping a flight of stone steps the juniors had noticed led up from the cell, was lifted.

It fell over with a dull thud, and a light flashed downwards.

"Run for it!" yelled Grundy. "Down the steps—quick!"

## CHAPTER 11.

### A Race Against Death!

FROM above them sounded a shout of alarmed fury, and the juniors and the real Mr. Mellin waited no longer.

One after the other they dropped through the gap in the floor, and Tom Merry, who came last, strove to drag the heavy flagstone over.

With Blake's aid he managed it at last, just as the rascal who had posed as Mr. Mellin, followed by another man, came flying down the steps leading from the abbey crypt above.

In the lights cast by the dancing torches the juniors carried, they raced down the steps and entered the noisome tunnel.

Outnumbering the rascals as they did, they knew that to face armed and determined scoundrels was madness.

"Go it!" panted Tom Merry. "We'll beat them yet! They can't escape off the island any other way, either. The river's flooded. I suppose it is Abbey Island—"

"Yes!" panted Grundy. "They've got a boat, though."

"That's right!" gasped Mr. Mellin. "They brought me to the island in a boat, after carrying me through the woods. We've not escaped ourselves, yet, though," he added grimly, as an echoing thud sounded behind them.

It was the opening of the trapdoor, and the next moment they heard the thudding feet of their pursuers on the steps.

Slipping and sliding on the slimy rock of the tunnel floor, the juniors and Mr. Mellin raced on.

"Put it on!" gasped Tom Merry, glancing round suddenly. "My hat! The brutes are gaining!"

It was true enough. In their desperate fear of their captives escaping, the men were running all out. A fierce shout reached the ears of the fleeing juniors and their companion.

"Stop! If you don't stop, hang you, I shall shoot! Stop!"

"They won't dare to shoot!" cried Tom Merry. "Don't stop—go it!"

But Tom Merry proved to be wrong. There sounded a sharp report behind them—a report that echoed and re-echoed thunderously in the confined limits of the tunnel.

Whether the shot was fired to hurt them or only to frighten them, they never knew.

The sharp report was still ringing in the air when another sound came—the deep, ominous rumbling of falling masonry and rocks, echoing away into the darkness.

"Good heavens!" yelled Tom Merry. "It's the roof—the roof of the tunnel's given way. Run—run for your lives!"

But the rest of the party had no need to be told to do that. With blanched faces they raced on, and in their ears was another sound now—the splash and hiss of water.

The splash of water grew suddenly into a torrential roar as another fearful crash sounded, and something licked round their feet and raced ahead of them.

Water!—All of them realised the worst now. The roof of the tunnel had given way, and the water from the river above them was pouring into the tunnel in a racing torrent.

What had happened to their pursuers they did not know. The tunnel had given way between them somewhere. The race for liberty was now a race for life.

Every moment the shattered hole in the tunnel roof was widening, and the churning, hissing waters surged in, filling the tunnel with a deafening, terrifying roar of sound.

It was rising every second, now almost waist-high, and threatening to sweep them off their feet. Their run had dropped to little more than wading, but the tunnel was steadily rising also now in a steep incline—had it been otherwise they would never have won through.

Then Tom Merry's staring eyes glimpsed the steps at last, and he gave a choking, almost hysterical yell of joy.

"Stick it, chaps!" he croaked. "We'll do it yet!"

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy had reached the steps now, though the water was round their waists. Half-swimming, half-wading, they charged for the steps with the water sweeping round them like an incoming tide.

A few yards behind them the rest were swimming now, tossed about helplessly by the rising, resistless tide of water that swept them hither and thither, but always nearer to the steps.

Blake climbed out and raced up the steps. Then he turned and swept his torch downwards. It was well he did so, for Mr. Mellin and the rest behind, were fighting for their lives in that tunnel of horror and blackness below, with scarcely a foot between them and the roof above them.

But the sheer force of the water, happily, swept them out into the open by the steps at last, and helping each other, they scrambled high up the steps into safety.

"Safe enough now!" panted Tom Merry, staring down thankfully at the maelstrom of water that seethed round the steps below. "We're well above the river level here, and the river can't rise above its own level. Sure we're all here?"

"All safe—yes!" panted Blake, scanning his companions. "Another few seconds would have done us, though!"

"Thank Heaven!" gasped Mr. Mellin. "It was almost a miraculous escape!"

"What about those other chaps?" gasped Grundy suddenly. "Think they'd get clear?"

Tom's face became graver.

"I don't know—the tunnel caved in between us," he said. "But I think they had a smaller distance to cover than we had. Let's hope they did, anyway!"

Dripping and shivering, the half-drowned party climbed the rest of the steps, and through the trapdoor into the cell in the vaults. They were almost too exhausted to drag themselves along, but they kept going to keep off the deadly chill of their wet clothes.

"You'd better come into the school with us, of course, Mr. Mellin," said Tom Merry through his chattering teeth. "We'll get back through the secret panel in Study No. 6, you fellows. By Jove! Won't the chaps get a surprise when we march out of Study No. 6 into the Fourth Form passage like this?"

Tom Merry was right there. The juniors, with Mr. Mellin behind them, climbed through the sliding panel into Study No. 6, and then they broke up—Tom Merry and Mr. Mellin hurrying to Mr. Railton's study, whilst the rest bolted for the bathrooms and dormitories. But dozens of juniors and seniors met them en route, and they almost had fits at sight of the dripping and bedraggled crew. Tom Merry & Co. did not stop to explain, however. They rushed for the bathrooms, followed by an excited, curious crowd.

But the curious ones heard it all later, and that evening all St. Jim's buzzed from end to end with the astounding story.

The Head and Mr. Railton heard the story in utter amazement, and at once Mr. Railton got on the telephone to the police at Wayland, and later that evening a force of police visited Abbey Island. But they found nobody there—the ruins and the crypt were deserted and silent. It was concluded then that the men had met their fate in the tunnel. But still later that evening a report came through that two men answering to their description had boarded a London train at Abbotsford—and that proved to be the last ever heard of them. It was a relief to all to know that they had not lost their lives, rascals as they were, however.

The real truth concerning their intentions was never fully known. But much could be guessed. They had evidently heard of the diviner's proposed visit to St. Jim's, and his object in going there, and they had planned the whole thing, obviously hoping to discover the treasure for themselves, and also with the additional intention of robbing the school. On that first night, the man Grundy had met in the passage had obviously been finding out the lie of the land, and it was equally obvious that he had opened the secret panel in Study No. 6 in order to give himself easy egress and ingress to the school at night. His meeting with Grundy in the passage had interrupted his activities, however. It was a daring and clever scheme, and it would have undoubtedly succeeded, but for Tom Merry & Co.

Those juniors came in for a great deal of glory, naturally. And Grundy—to his disgust and wrath—came in for a great deal of chipping. But as he was dealt with leniently by the Head for his escapade, even Grundy had to admit that he had something to be thankful for over the affair.

Mr. Mellin stayed for some weeks at St. Jim's, but—alas!—his task proved to be an unsuccessful one. Though he made several interesting discoveries of a minor nature, he did not find the golden chalices. Nor did Grundy! But then, Grundy did not attempt to find them. He had had more than enough of exploring the ancient mysteries of St. Jim's while On The Trail!

THE END.

(There will be another rollicking story of Tom Merry & Co., next week, chums: "THE CROSS-WORD CRAZE AT ST. JIM'S!" By Martin Clifford. Don't miss this wonderful treat.)

The first of a new series of thrilling sporting and adventure yarns!

# TROJAN TIM

By John W. Wheway

A Great Story of Football  
Conspiracy.



## CHAPTER 1.

### A Rogues' Compact!

**C**OULSON FERRIERS frowned severely at the carpet, puckered a pair of fleshy lips into a momentary sneer, and then raised his eyes to the level of the youngster who was seated opposite him. "And that's final?" he said.

Tim Webster smiled.

"Quite final," he agreed, with a nod. "But why?" Ferriers gazed at the lad with a plainly baffled stare. "Why?" he repeated. "Terms not good enough?"

"Terms are excellent—for a youngster of my age!" Tim laughed. "Why, I don't get five pounds a week, or anything like it, for the job I'm doing now!"

There was a moment's silence, then Tim lifted himself from his chair on one elbow and gazed across at the man keenly.

"I'll be quite frank with you," he added. "You've made me an offer. You want me to sign professional forms for Midborough Athletic, of which you are manager. That means I must leave the Trojans, the amateur club to which I now belong, and which, we know, is paired against yours in the Third Round of the Cup. Very good. If I wanted to become a professional I'd accept that offer—and think myself lucky to get it! But I don't, Mr. Ferriers."

Again Coulson Ferriers stared.

"But why?" he protested; and even as the answer trembled on the other's lips—"Webster, most youngsters of your age would give their heads to get such an opportunity. Mind you," he added hopefully, "five quid a week's only the wage. There's other money you can make by turning pro—bonus and such like."

"I know. You've mentioned that before. But the fact remains, Mr. Ferriers, that I don't want to turn a pro. There's another consideration, too. The Trojans, who are the only amateur team now left in the Cup, are looking

to me to help them through—and I've promised. If I broke that promise—"

"Well, if you broke the promise?" demanded the Midborough manager impatiently, as the other paused. His tone plainly implied that he considered promises things made to be broken.

"I should be a cad," Tim replied quietly. "And that's all, Mr. Ferriers."

He rose. The hint was too plain to be ignored. Coulson Ferriers, muttering beneath his breath, took up his hat.

"Very well," he growled, and moved towards the door.

Tim, a smile on his lips, very pointedly held it open for him.

"Good-night, Mr. Ferriers!"

Ferriers growled back gruffly as he stuck his hat on the back of his head and grabbed at the rail of the banister which led down from Tim's little flat into the hall below. Still muttering, he blundered down the stairs.

Ferriers was not pleased. He confessed to himself that he had expected no other reply to his offer than refusal, but the fact that his expectations had been so fully realised made the bitterness of his pill no less palatable. For Tim's loyalty to the Trojans was as well-known as his goal-scoring feats in the First and Second Rounds of the Cup were known.

Tim was the mainstay of the amateurs. With him in his usual place at centre-forward the Trojans' chances of beating Midborough, their local rivals, was distinctly rosy; without Tim the boot was on the other foot. For it was a curious fact that on such occasions as young Webster had been absent the Trojan forward line had proved themselves inept and feeble. Though they had tried hard, the inspiration which the youngster lent to the side had been absent, and they could do nothing. Ferriers knew that, just the same as every other football observer in England knew it.

And because he knew it, Ferriers wanted Tim out of the side that was to meet his own club a fortnight hence. Midborough's recent failures in the Second Division of the League had caused attendances at the Spion Lane ground to slump heavily. Crowds

hadn't patience with a team that couldn't score goals, and as a consequence had gone over to the Trojans, the big amateurs, who, if they did not compete in the League, at least served up good football.

A success in the Third Round at the expense of the Trojans, therefore, was just the filip that the Midborough club needed to put them back upon the pedestal of popularity—and defeat meant the end of all their hopes. And Ferriers, remembering that he held two hundred pounds' worth of shares in the League club, was desperately anxious for his side to win.

That's why he had attempted to induce Tim Webster to take the plunge into professionalism, and so alienate himself from the amateurs. He couldn't have played him against his old club in the Cup, of course, for the rules of the competition forbade that. But he could play him in League matches—and, what was more to the point, would not have had him to fear when his team met the amateurs. Now—

"Hang him!" he muttered savagely. He wrenched savagely at the knob of the front door, flung it back upon its hinges, and passed out into the street, almost cannoning into the form of an excessively long and lean gentleman who was about to enter at the same moment.

The nearness of his escape made Coulson look up. He found himself gazing into a face that possessed an atrocious squint, and whose general air of terrific melancholy was enhanced by the drooping, snuff-coloured moustache that hung limply down either side of his chin. The other returned his gaze with interest.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Hi!" Ferriers grunted by way of reply.

Having summed the long gentleman up, he made as though to pass on his way, and with that intention brushed him roughly aside and emerged on to the pavement. But not thus easily was the long gentleman to be disposed of.

"Hallo!" he said again. And then, lifting his voice plaintively: "I say, stop a minute, Mr. Ferriers!"

Ferriers obeyed in the sheer surprise of hearing his name.

"I know you, you see!" the other leered, coming forward. "Never spoke to you before, of course, but I've noticed your portrait so often in the local papers that I couldn't help but recognise you. Football's your bisney, eh, same as my young nephew up there. That's where you've just come from, eh?"

"Well?" The mention of "nephew" had vested the long gentleman with a new interest to Ferriers. He craned his neck upward inquiringly. "Who the dickens are you?" he demanded.

"Me? No offence, Mr. Ferriers, no offence, I assure you!" the other returned hastily. "My name's Webster. I'm Tim's uncle—Uncle Nick!"

"Uncle Nick?" Ferriers dwelt upon the first word with sarcastic emphasis. It was in his mind to add, "Not Old Nick?"—but a sudden idea, flashing into his brain, warned him to be cautious. "You live with him?"

"Not with him. I live near here, though," Uncle Nick conceded. "Occasionally, when I'm broke, I go up and see him. I'm broke now," he added, eyeing the manager speculatively.

Ferriers grinned. Being something of a judge of human nature, he had already formed an impression of this man's character, and that impression was not flattering to Nick. The idea which had first taken hold upon him, that this man might be useful, began to grow. He nodded sympathetically.

"Too bad!" he agreed. "Still"—he paused and hesitated as he glanced towards the distant lights of a public-house—"like a drink?"

Nick brightened. A pink tongue appeared from the depths of his snuff-coloured moustache and caressed his lips thirstily. He made a clucking noise in his throat.

"Now, you're a gentleman, you are!" he affirmed with enthusiasm. "Would I like—Where shall we go, sir—Pig and Whistle?"

"As you like!" Ferriers began to walk in the direction of the inviting lights, Nick falling into step beside him. In another two minutes they had gained the public-house. In ten Nick, waxing loquacious over his third drink, was busy imparting to his new acquaintance some aspects of the Webster family history.

"His father—Tim's father—died five years ago," Nick confided, leaning elegantly upon the counter. "Being a football man yourself you'll have heard of him—he was a famous Corinthian, and, therefore, an amateur. A regular red-hot amateur, too. He hated professionals!"

He took a sip from his glass. "Law, when old Tim Webster got worked up on the subject of professionalism there was no holding him. Had just as much use for the crowd as a mouse for a kitten. Professional mad, they called him."

"He made young Tim promise that under no circumstances would he ever turn pro—he did more than that. He drafted his will out so that if Tim did turn pro before he was twenty-one all his money—"

"Money?" Ferriers looked up sharply and interrogatively. "I didn't know Webster had any money," he said.

"He hasn't—not at present, anyway; but he will have when he's twenty-one!" Nick replied disdainfully. "But, between you and me, he's got no more right to that money than the blessed barman here. I'm the one who should have it."

"You?"

"Yes. Before Tim was born me and Tim's father—he was my brother, you know—made it in business together. When he married Tim's mother he gave me half—my share—and took the rest and retired on it. I lost mine—never mind how," he added hastily as he caught the look of inquiry in the other's eyes. "But I helped him to make his, and therefore I maintains that he ought to have left it to me; but he didn't."

"Of course," Ferriers said sympathetically. "Ungrateful beast."

"He was that—and his blessed son's like him," Nick said viciously. "When I think about it sometimes I—I feel as I could murder him! To think of that kid handling five thousand quid when he's twenty-one, whilst I—"

"Five thousand!" Ferriers's lips pursed into a whistle, and a new gleam came into his eyes. "That's a big amount, Nick. Have another."

Nick implied that he would have another. He had another after that and still another. And by the time the last was swallowed Coulson was in possession of all the facts relating to the will, and had had his first impression of this man justified by his own words. For at heart Nick was a villain. He hated Tim because he considered that Tim had done him out of what was rightly his.

"But if anything should happen to him—if, for instance, he did turn pro," Ferriers cunningly suggested at the end of the evening. "Have you thought, Nick, that, as next-of-kin to his father, you would inherit the money?"

"Ay, many times!" Nick growled. "But there's no fear, Mr. Ferriers. He won't turn pro. The only other thing I can hope for is that he'll—he'll— But there's not even a reasonable chance of that. It's a rotten world," he added morosely.

They went out into the street, Nick silent, Ferriers turning over the information in his mind and wondering

whether a certain course of action he had planned therein would be wise. At the end of the street he turned.

"Nick," he said, "supposing—supposing I told you that it's possible for him to turn pro—supposing I turned him into a pro myself? What'd it be worth to you?"

Nick's small eyes glinted. He drew in a deep breath as he stared at the other.

"Worth to me," he repeated. "Well, I guess any man who did that could name his own figure, provided he was willing to wait till I got the money. What'd you suggest?"

"A thousand?"

"Two—if you can do it," Nick cried eagerly; and Ferriers's eyes gleamed more avariciously than ever. "It's worth that to me, every penny. But how? What's the scheme?"

"Come along to my digs," Ferriers countered.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Enter Raggy!

SO to the manager's digs this oddly-assorted pair repaired, and there Ferriers explained his priceless plan, while Nick Webster listened with bated breath and shining eyes as he took in the simple details of it. And when the manager had finished Nick was the most excited man in the world. "Why, it's wonderful!" he said. "Wonderful—if you can bring it off!" he added doubtfully.

"There's no 'if.' I can," Ferriers returned confidently. "I had this idea in mind before I met you, as a matter of fact, but the details didn't occur until just now. By the way, Nick, there's no harm in placing this thing on a business footing, and if you're agreeable I'll draft out a little agreement."

"Look here!" He went to a bureau and took out a sheet of notepaper, and



Ferriers pointed a dramatic finger at Tim. "I protest against that man playing!" he said. "You ought to know, Ref., before the game goes any further. He's got no right to be here. He's playing against his own side!"

Nick, who seemed to be curiously helpless in the power of this villain, watched him wonderingly as he began to write. "How's this?"

He handed the finished paper to Nick, who took it and read it through, rubbing the bristling point of his unshaven chin during the process.

Briefly, it stated that in the event of Jim Webster turning professional and signing for Midborough Athletic, Nick Webster undertook to pay the sum of £2,000 to Coulson Ferriers within three days of inheriting the money that would come to him as a result of the youngster's lapse.

Nick signed it. There was no way out of it; and, to do Nick justice, he had no intention of breaking his promise. And Ferriers, after blotting the signature, folded the paper up and placed it in an inside pocket of his coat with a smug smile.

The next morning he was down at the Spion Lane ground early—so early indeed that he surprised Raggy Jones, the club's fourteen-year-old programme-seller, in the act of cleaning up his office. Raggy, as was his wont, was whistling an ear-shattering tune as he enveloped himself in the fog of dust that rose from under his energetically-applied broom.

He looked round, with a start, as the door opened, and Ferriers, looking very satisfied with himself, halted on the threshold. For a moment the manager stood there, sniffing delicately at the very decided odour of stale fish that assailed his nostrils. That odour was part and parcel of Raggy, whose father was the local fried fish and chip merchant.

Ferriers smiled as the lad made as though to put away his broom.

"It's all right," he said. "You needn't go, Raggy. I want to talk to you. First of all, though, we'll have this door shut."

Ferriers closed the door carefully behind him before coming further into the room. Raggy grinned a little. He fancied he knew what Manager Ferriers wanted to speak to him about, for this was not the first time that he had been asked to do things for the manager which were not strictly above board. Raggy didn't mind. Raggy's one obsession and ambition was to become a footballer, and Ferriers had promised, one day, that he should get his chance with the Midborough team. In view of that prospect Raggy would have done anything for Ferriers.

Mind you, you mustn't blame Raggy. He was only young. His social environment in an ever-present atmosphere of stale fish, and the influence of a father who too frequently indulged, had somewhat blunted his moral outlook. He knew right from wrong, of course, but he never stopped to think about it, and long association with men of Ferriers' type had given him a code of honour peculiarly his own.

Ferriers had found Raggy's ready compliance in most matters extremely useful. There was nobody else save Raggy whom he would have entrusted with the betting slips he sent to Bill Tucker, the local bookie; there was nobody else save Raggy whom he would have dared to put the suggestion he now contemplated. But he knew Raggy, did Coulson Ferriers, just as Raggy knew him. And he had no qualms.

"Raggy," he said, "would you like to earn five quid?"

Raggy's eyes opened wide.

"Five what?" he gasped incredulously.

"Five quid," Ferriers nodded. "It's easy money, and it's precious little

you've got to do to earn it. You know the Trojans' ground?"

"You want me to burn it down or something?"

Ferriers smiled.

"Hardly," he said. "All that I want you to do is to take a slip of paper there on Saturday after the match, and induce a certain gentleman to sign it. If you succeed there's five pounds for you. If you don't—well, I don't believe in paying out money for nothing. Raggy, I'm going to let you in on this. But first of all I want you to promise that everything I say now will never be repeated."

Raggy grinned.

"You promise?"

"I promise," the youngster said solemnly, and Ferriers nodded his satisfaction.

A promise from Raggy was as solemn a bond as the word of a judge.

"Very well, then!" Ferriers took from his pocket a paper, one side of which was covered with small print.

"You know what this is, Raggy?"

"It's a professional registration form," Raggy said wonderingly.

Again Ferriers nodded, and busied himself with folding the paper up so that at last only the dotted lines allowed for the signature remained visible.

"You see this?" he said, holding it out to the youngster.

Raggy, staring, nodded again.

"And you know what happens to an amateur who signs his name on that line?"

"He becomes a pro!" Raggy said.

"Right enough. Now, look here, Raggy, somebody has got to sign his name on that line without knowing what he's letting himself in for. It's a Trojan man—Webster, to be precise—and you'll get the signature at the Trojan ground. When the players come out after the match on Saturday you'll wait at the players' entrance, and when you spot Webster you'll make a dive for him with a pen and this paper, and ask him to sign his name for your autograph album. It'll be dark, so he won't notice what he's signing, and as he'll be pestered by other autograph-hunters he won't worry, either. You understand."

Raggy grinned.

"Easy," he said.

"And you'll do it?"

"Like a shot! Gimme the pen and the paper, and leave the rest to me! When do I get the five quid?"

"As soon as ever you come back with that paper signed!"

Tim, upon reflection, decided not to report to the Trojan secretary the offer that had been made to him by Ferriers, though, in truth, it was his duty to do so. Tim's was a generous nature, and Midborough, he reflected, were in enough trouble already without having to undergo the unpleasant inquiry by the F.A. which would result from the report. Therefore, wisely or unwisely, he decided to keep his mouth shut.

He did, and, keeping his own counsel, went about his business until Saturday came, and with it the Trojans' annual friendly fixture with the famous Corinthians, whom they met on their own ground at Midborough Road. Once again Tim led the line, and once again proved himself a brilliant success. The Corinthians went away goalless; the Trojans added two to their rapidly growing average, and, as usual, Tim was the scorer.

"By Jove, you're a marvel!" Bob Braithwaite, the captain and centre-half, commented as he and Tim walked towards the players' exit after the match. "How do you do it, Tim?"

Tim laughed.

"Just luck," he said modestly.

Bob grunted.

"Play doesn't enter into it, eh?" he said. "It's funny, Tim, that the 'luck,' as you call it, seems to desert the side when you're not present. If it's luck that leaves most goalies that come to this ground absolutely helpless when you're in front of them, let's hope we'll have plenty more of it! I suppose you know they're already talking about you as an England centre?"

Again Tim laughed, but the laugh had a note of self-consciousness in it this time.

"Talk's cheap, Bob!"

"Cheap or not, you'll get a chance, you see! England's hard up for a centre, and this is your chance. And there's the Scotland match coming off—Hullo!"

Bob Braithwaite halted on the steps which led down into the street and grinned down at the excited crowd of youthful faces which, by the light of an adjacent street-lamp, he saw upturned expectantly towards him. At the same moment a cry went up.

"Here they are!"

"That's Webster!"

And then, as though by magic, a forest of hands, holding stumps of pencils, fountain-pens, bits of paper, autograph books, and even cigarette-cards, was thrust upwards. And as one man the crowd below thundered:

"Sign, please!"

"We're for it!" laughed Bob, descending, while Tim, reflecting upon what the captain had said, more thoughtfully followed.

This was nothing new after a Trojan home match—nor is it new to any big football ground. Fame has its penalties, and its idols must pay the price. To sign one's name fifty times in the space of a quarter of an hour is one of the most minor of them.

And there were fully fifty excited youngsters below, all pressing eagerly forward as the two players ventured the steps. Foremost among them was Raggy Jones, who, having forced his way to the front by sheer physical force, was the first to accost Tim.

"Mr. Webster," he said, handing the footballer his fountain-pen, "will you sign?"

Tim took the pen—more mechanically than otherwise, and glanced curiously at the scrap of paper which was handed to him. The shadow of the high wall fell across it and obscured it, and all that Tim could see was a dim blur of white. He sighed resignedly as he scrawled a signature in the dark.

"There you are!" he said. "And don't come worrying again. Good pen you've got there. Where did you get it?"

"Won it in a raffle!" Raggy promptly replied.

"Next time win an autograph album. A pen like this and a scrap of paper like that are incongruous somehow. Here you are! Here's the pen! Now, what's your trouble?" He turned to the next insistent clamourer, and Raggy, hugging the form tightly in his hand, forced his way through the crowd.

Ten minutes later, his face flushed, he burst into the private office of Coulson Ferriers.

"Got it!" he gasped, planking the form down on the table with one hand and extending the palm of the other. "Crumbs, just as easy as falling off a house! Five quid, please!"

Ferriers did not heed. With one swift grab he seized upon the paper, opened it out, and keenly examined the signature below the printed words.

A little exclamation of satisfaction escaped his lips.

"Good boy!" he said appreciatively. "Good work, Raggy! Didn't spot anything, did he? But, of course, he couldn't!" He beamed on the youngster benignantly. "The labourer's worthy of his hire, Raggy, and you shall have your reward! What did I promise you?"

"Five quid," Raggy said, still holding his palm out.

"Five what?"

"Quid!" Raggy said laconically. "I'll have it now, if yer don't mind—silver, notes, or gold'll do!" he added inconsequently.

Ferriers grinned.

Carefully he folded the paper and placed it in an inside pocket.

"You've gone wrong somewhere, Raggy," he said. "I

never promised you five pounds! If I did, I'm sorry; it was a mistake. Five bob was the amount I mentioned."

"Eh?" Raggy started back a pace, his eyes fixed on the manager's face. And something he saw there caused a gleam of suspicion to come into his mind. His eyes narrowed. "You did promise me five quid, Mr. Ferriers," he said quietly.

"Did I? Well, I'm sorry then. I meant five bob. You surely don't think I should give five pounds for a simple bit of work like this—especially when the club's so hard up?" He plunged his hands into his pockets and tossed two half-crowns upon the table. "There you are, my boy!" he said patronisingly.

"But—"

"No buts!" Ferriers looked up sharply. "Take it," he said testily, "and beat it! I'm busy."

For a moment Raggy's face crimsoned. Hot, bitter words rose to his lips. He took up the money, struggled with an impulse to throw it back across the desk, and then very quietly slipped it into his pocket. Then, without another word, he walked towards the door. Ferriers, chuckling to himself, watched him go.

"And that's bluffed you, Raggy boy!" he muttered as the door closed. "You'll not be sure now whether it was bobs or quids I offered, and by and by you'll give me the benefit of the doubt. Five bob—with a possibility of two thousand at the end of it!" He rubbed his hands in delight. "I'll keep this form and produce it in the Cup-tie," he told himself delightedly. "That'll cause a stir; it'll also be an advert for the club. There'll be trouble with the F.A., of course, but a fifty quid fine will settle that. Ferriers, my lad, you're in luck!"

He might have changed his mind if he could have read the deep and desperate thoughts that were chasing one another through Raggy's mind at the same moment. For once Raggy was disillusioned and embittered, and his faith in humanity had gone. And when a lad—especially a lad of Raggy's moral code and gutter-sharpened wits—has that mood upon him he can be a very dangerous enemy indeed.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### A Cup-Tie Sensation!

**R**AGGY'S role of programme-seller and general drudge at the Midborough Athletic Football Club gave him many advantages. It gave him, for instance, the privilege of

being able to enter the manager's office whenever the manager was not there.

And during the week that ensued Raggy went into the manager's office many times when the manager was not there. And an investigation of certain papers he discovered in the manager's carelessly-left clothing gave to him first the glimmerings of an idea which, when he heard later the colossal scheme afoot, crystallised into a concerted plan.

A conversation between Ferriers and Nick Webster afforded the key to the plot.

"It's a great scheme," Ferriers said. "If I wait until half-time and then walk on the field with the paper and denounce Tim Webster as a pro, it'll create a sensation such as has never happened in Midborough football. Incidentally, it'll be a leg-up for us. It'll just about kybosh Webster. It'll cause the finger of suspicion to be pointed at the Trojans as a club. The more I think about it the better pleased I am."

And then Raggy's mind was made up. Shortly before the Midborough team was due to depart the following Saturday he walked into the manager's empty office, took down the coat and overcoat which hung on the peg—for at the ground Ferriers invariably discarded his ordinary coat in favour of an old sports jacket—and juggled deftly with certain papers and a pocket-book. Then, a pleasant sense of having seen justice done possessing him, he left hot foot to see the match.

He reached the Trojans' ground to find it crowded, for this match between local rivals had proved the attraction of the draw. The gates were closed and hundreds of disappointed spectators were left in the street. That didn't disturb Raggy, however. An athletic scramble up the high wall when the policeman on duty wasn't looking carried him into the ground. Ten minutes after that he was balanced precariously on the roof of the stand, rudely spreadeagling fingers and thumbs at the groundsmen below, who sulphurously bade him "come down!"

Raggy didn't come down. And as the groundsmen was no athlete, and, therefore, couldn't shin up the stand sup-

ports as Raggy had done, he had, perforce, to be content to remain on watch. And Raggy, uncomfortably conscious that a little moment of forgetfulness might precipitate him forcefully on to the pitch below, scraped a perilous passage to the top of the roof, and there, one arm embracing the flagstaff for support, prepared to enjoy the match with a reasonable amount of security.

And hardly had he made himself comfortable when the Trojans, with big Bob Braithwaite at their head and Tim following, emerged on to the green turf which sparkled under the benign rays of the February sun. A thunderous shout announced their arrival.

"Good old Trojans!"

"Bravo, Webster!"

"Trounce 'em, Trojans!"

Then another shout as the professional team came out, accompanied by some hissing, for the Athletic were not popular in these days of its decline, and certain of its players had the unenviable reputation of being "dirty." And after that the appearance of a heartily-cheered referee, the tossing of the coin, and the game had commenced.

Both sides opened a little shakily; the Trojans perhaps too keenly conscious of what hung upon the result, the Athletic plainly afraid of the Amateurs' reputation. Tim, as the centre-forward of the side which had lost the toss, opened out with his usual oblique pass to Raikes, his left-winger; but Raikes failed to intercept, with the result that the ball bounced into touch. From the throw-in an Athletic man secured, dribbled cleverly up the field, and looked like breaking through, until Braithwaite, coolly taking the leather off his toe, passed back to Tim.

"Watch it, Tim!" he shouted.

Tim was watching. There was little during a game that escaped his keen eyes. He ran forward, gathered up the ball between his toes and, faster almost than the eye could follow, pivoted round and set off up-field. A roar went up. It grew, was silenced a moment as the Athletic left-back sailed put to tackle, and then was renewed when the

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More by instinct than judgment Tim flung himself at the falling youngster and wrapped his arms round him a second before he touched the ground.

Athletic man was seen to crumple up and hit the turf, sent there by a charge from Tim's hefty shoulder. The roar was still growing when Tim shot.

Such a shot! There seemed to be no effort behind it, yet it was one of the most deadly volleys ever seen on that ground. The spectators never saw the ball until it was in the net; the goalie never saw it, though he felt it whistle past his head. But of a sudden a great bulge in the rigging appeared, and the next that everyone knew was that the ball was trickling back over the goal-line.

Then the cheering started in real earnest.

Even Raggy cheered, though he had been taught to despise the Trojans. But Raggy was a footballer first and foremost, and a piece of good play such as he had just witnessed compelled his admiration. He cheered loud and long, and with such whole-hearted enthusiasm that he completely swallowed the gum he had been chewing, and as a result of the sudden choking fit which followed the disaster almost lost his balance.

After that both sides settled down to it in grim earnest. It was a real Cup-tie struggle that the crowd watched henceforward. Tim, well watched by the Midborough halves, was held in check, and for a time found his utmost efforts frustrated. Then—

In midfield the Trojan centre-forward snapped up a pass from Raikes, and for once in a while found himself unmarked. Like a shot, Tim wheeled; then, quicker than lightning, he flew off up the field. The crowd drew in its breath, with a hiss of wonderment, as Brigand, the Athletic left-back, rushed out to challenge. Tim, seeing him out of the corner of his eye, deliberately stopped.

Brigand came up. He hunched his shoulders. The charge he hurled at the youngster might have sent Tim spinning over the touchline had it landed, but it did not. Like a snake Tim wriggled, and, like a thunderbolt crashing to earth, Brigand hit the turf with a mighty thud. The next second Tim had sprinted on with the ball, rushed full tilt at a completely flummoxed goal-keeper and literally whizzed the ball into the net.

Once again the crowd cheered. Two up! The Athletic looked a beaten side already. The referee's whistle shrilled, and the players walked back to the centre line.

Then it was that a diversion occurred. From near the players' entrance rushed a hatless, dishevelled figure, its face red, its coat-tails flying, waving one arm frantically as it ran. The crowd murmured:

"What's that silly ass doing?"

"He's stopping the game!"

"Why, look! It's Ferriers!"

Ferriers it was, foregoing his decision to interfere at half-time after having seen those two goals scored against his side, anxious now only to stop the match at any price. The referee halted, amazed, as he saw the flying figure, and when Ferriers came up, recognising him, frowned.

Ferriers halted and pointed a dramatic finger at Tim.

"I protest against that man playing," he said. "You ought to know, Mr. Referee, before the game goes any further. He's got no right to be here. He's playing against his own side—"

Tim's eyes opened. The referee frowned, not understanding. And then from the top of the stand came a shrill yell.

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"Don't believe 'im! 'E's a liar!"

It was the voice of Raggy, but in the general consternation nobody heeded it; it is doubtful, indeed, if anyone heard him. And while the players, referee, and Tim were endeavouring to assimilate the information they had heard, Ferriers went on:

"I signed him as a pro last Wednesday week in his own flat. But, by an oversight I forgot to send the form up for registration." He fumbled feverishly in the pocket-case in which he had kept the faked form, and, opening it, fished out a paper and handed it to the referee. "There you are!" he said triumphantly. "There's the form itself! Read it!"

Tim's face went deathly white. He saw the whole plot now.

"You liar, Ferriers!" he said.

"Liar! I like that!" Ferriers' voice was full of shrill indignation. "Why, you said yourself that you was fed-up with being an amateur, and wanted to make money. Those were your own words—What's the matter, Mr. Referee?"

The referee's hand holding the paper had fallen to his side. He was regarding the manager curiously.

"There's some mistake," he said dryly. "Some big mistake! This paper is not a registration form at all. It appears to be an agreement between you and a man named Nicholas Webster to share certain monies on the day that Tim Webster here becomes a professional. Webster, this concerns you. You might examine this document."

He handed the paper to Tim.

Ferriers' face suddenly paled. He reeled back for a moment, aware of a ghastly sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. His knees trembled beneath him. What hideous mistake had he made? He could have sworn that the registration form had been in his notebook, for he distinctly remembered examining it only that morning, and to avoid confusion had placed the document he saw now in the inside pocket of his overcoat.

The field swam before his eyes. In that moment he only saw Tim Webster—saw the paper he was so interestedly perusing. And with a shriek which was half-maniacal he launched himself forward.

Tim staggered back under the shock of the other's body. He went down to the grass, still clutching the paper, while Ferriers tore and scratched and screamed in his mad efforts to get hold of it. The crowd began to yell. Someone piled on top of Ferriers, and others on top of him. Ferriers struggled like a lunatic.

In a minute the ground was in an uproar. The game was forgotten in the new excitement. In the stand and on the touchline the crowd, angry at this stoppage of the game, yelled vociferously. In the middle of a knot of a dozen players Ferriers wrestled and screeched and tore. The police hurried up. One got the manager by the scruff of the neck and began to pull him towards the touchline.

"My paper! I want my paper!"

Ferriers babbled.

"Chuck 'im off!" shouted the crowd.

"It 'im!"

"Get on with the game!"

But Ferriers refused to be chucked off. He fought and cursed every inch of the way, and the police, though there were a good dozen of them, had all their work cut out to hold him. But hold him they did, and in spite of his resistance dragged him slowly towards the barrier, the players trooping after him. They had barely reached it when another thunderbolt descended.

It was Raggy. The excitement had been too much for the Midborough programme seller. The flagstaff, old and rotten, had snapped in his hands, and before the youngster knew where he was he found himself clawing and kicking desperately upon the sloping roof of the stand. At the edge of the roof he made one supreme effort, clutched at the gutter, and missed! The next moment, with a scream, he sailed earthwards.

Only Tim saw him, and, seeing him, turned white. He rushed forward as the youngster flew through space, stretching out his arms with some half-formed idea of stopping him. Raggy, descending feet foremost at a terrific speed, would have broken both legs if Tim had not done what he did then. More by instinct than judgment the footballer flung himself at the falling youngster and wrapped his arms round him a second before he touched the ground.

The impetus sent him backwards with a force that knocked all the breath out of his body, and Raggy sprawled on top of him. By that time Ferriers, beyond the barrier, and still protesting, was being escorted towards the dressing-room.

Breathlessly the youngster rose.

"And that's done for you, Mr. Ferriers!" he muttered, glancing in the direction of the uproar. "Five quid you promised me—and gave me five bob. Well, I've not said anything, as I promised I wouldn't, but you're in a bigger mess now than if I had. Mr. Webster—"

He turned to Tim, who, wonderingly regarding the youngster, was scrambling to his feet.

"Thank yer, sir!" he said. "You're a gentleman, you are, and if ever I can do you a good turn, rely on me. In the meantime, 'ere's a little present that I fancy you'll be interested to see, and which might put yer on yer guard against Ferriers and the cove who calls himself your uncle. I took it out of Mr. Ferriers' pocket-book this morning, and put that there agreement thing in its place."

And, so saying, he handed Tim a paper.

Tim glanced at it. It was a professional registration form with his own name signed at the bottom. He looked up, puzzlement in his eyes, to question its donor.

But Raggy had vanished.

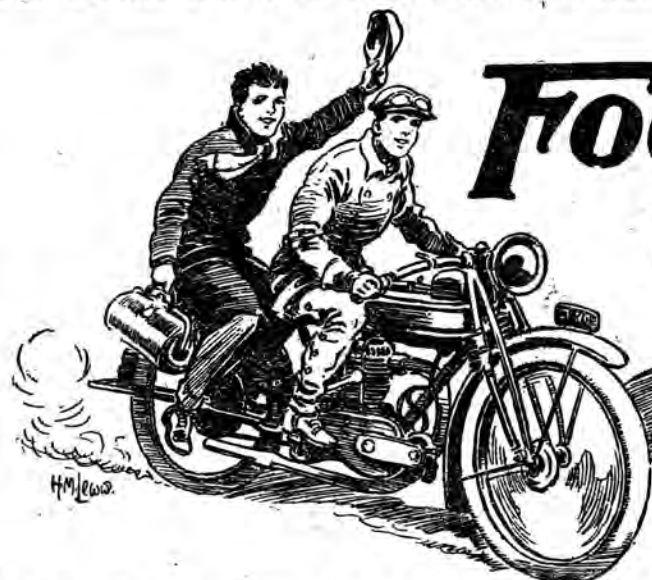
And not until some time later, in circumstances which you shall hear about later, did Tim Webster and Raggy Jones join company again. But before that happened the Trojans, thanks to their centre-forward, had won the right to compete in the Fourth Round of the Cup, and Ferriers had been hauled up before the F.A. and suspended from football for life.

But Ferriers, if out of football, had by no means abandoned his intention of earning his two thousand pounds, and a fresh agreement between him and Nick bound him to earn it within a space of six months. Whether he could stick to his agreement or whether Tim, now on his guard, was able to frustrate his schemes, is a matter that future stories must tell.

THE END.

(There will be another splendid yarn of Trojan Tim soon, chums. Meanwhile, make sure you read the thrilling yarn of "Live-Wire" Lindsay and Jerry O'Gorman: "THE NIGHT HAWK!" by Lester Bidston, which will appear in next week's GEM.)

Hal Chester soon finds that professional football is not all honey!



# FOOTBALL CHUMS!

By  
**ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

(The Most Popular Football Writer of the Day.)

A thrilling yarn, telling of the trials and tribulations of young Hal Chester, in his bid for fame on the footer field.

## WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

**HAROLD CHESTER**, a well-knit youngster in his teens, and a member of the Kingsdown Football Club. His love for football earns for him the disapproval of

**JAMES HENSON**, his stepfather, a Nottingham grocer, in whose employ Hal Chester is. Like the rest of the employees at Henson's, Harold finds his stepfather a very hard taskmaster. First of all, his stepfather dislikes him; secondly, James Henson hates football; and, thirdly, he believes that he—Harold—is an idler.

An important match is down for decision on Saturday for which Hal had already been granted permission to assist his team. But when the great day comes Mr. Henson cancels his promise. Hal has pledged himself to play for his team. He was considered one of the best players in the club, and could not very well let his side down.

Suffering from a sense of injustice, Hal is determined to turn out for his team, come what may.

But luck is against the lad, for in the match he is badly hurt by one of the opposing backs. It is late when he returns home, weary and in great pain, and he finds the door locked against him. He meets an old friend, however, in Tommy Bell, who is well in

with the management of the Nottingham Town Football Club. Hal is given a trial with the professionals, but the older players, envious of his play, starve the lad, and he is turned down.

Still convinced of his chum's prowess, Tommy Bell interviews the manager of Nottingham United, and Hal is given a chance with them.

It was an "on" day for Hal, for his side proves victorious by three clear goals, all of which are scored by Hal himself. And, to crown it all, the United's opponents had been Nottingham Town, the team that had turned Hal down as being no good. There is an immediate cry for the youngster's signature, and Hal, anxious to be with his chums, signs on for the Town. He makes a depressing start, however, for in his first real game he has to face Stevens, the burly back who had injured him the day he met Tommy Bell. Hal evades the player, and Stevens vents his spite on Bell, in consequence of which he receives "marching orders." The two chums are leaving the ground when they see Stevens, an angry look on his face, waiting outside the official's room.

"I say, Tommy," says Hal, "Stevens is going to assault the referee!"

(Now read on.)

## The Boxing Referee!

"LOOKS like it," murmured Tommy Bell. "He's brute enough for anything. But if I am not mistaken, Mr. Hargreaves is no fool. He's afraid of nobody. I dare say he can look after himself."

"Perhaps he can, Tommy; but don't you think we ought to stand by?"

Tommy frowned.

"We'd run the risk of trouble with the Bangley players. Remember, they're sore at being beaten."

Dicky Double swung up then. The fat boy's face was spread in its usual smile. A giant he looked as he glanced down at his old school chums.

"We'll just watch from here and see how things develop," he said. "We need only interfere if necessary."

Players and officials turned to watch developments of an extremely ugly yet interesting situation.

Bill Stevens was hammering upon the referee's door with clenched fist.

"If you're a man open this door and come out!" he shouted. "If you don't I'll burst it in!"

No answer came.

Stevens, with muttered threats, banged furiously upon the wood, then applied his great shoulders to it, straining so that the fastenings creaked. The door held.

Stevens, drawing back, prepared for a rush from some twelve yards away from the door.

"I'll teach you to send me off!" he howled.

But before he could charge the door the unexpected happened. A key grated in the lock, the door was pulled wide, and the referee, fully dressed, came out.

He was a much smaller man than the full-back. He was a much older man also, his hair being white at the temples

and liberally streaked with grey. The player stopped his run at sight of him and grinned, but his smile faded before the gleam in the referee's steady brown eyes.

"Now," said Mr. Hargreaves, "Perhaps you'll repeat your threats, Stevens. There are plenty of witnesses. As far as memory serves me, you have been suspended five times in League football and twice in Nottingham Junior League football. Not an enviable record, Stevens. I shall report you, and you will be suspended again—for conduct that reflects little credit upon the Bangley Football Club."

"If you add to your offence by assaulting me, I shall try and get you suspended for life."

Every word told, the referee's steel-like voice echoing clearly in the hall below the stand.

Stevens' face went livid. The other players exchanged glances, suddenly realising that this referee baiting was a two-edged tool. It would be better to go no farther lest they cut themselves.

"Bill," said one of them, taking Stevens by the arm, "I reckon we'd better quit. No good can come of hurting the referee."

Stevens savagely shook away the restraining arm.

"I'll kill him!" he shouted.

"Killing is murder. A murderer is hanged," jeered the referee. "Stevens, it is men like you that bring professional football into bad odour. Take my advice and go home."

But it was worse than useless to offer advice to a man like that. Stevens tore off his coat and aimed a savage blow at the referee's head.

The result was, to say the least, astonishing in its unexpectedness.

The referee ducked, moved aside, raised his arms, and

parried the swinging punch with the left arm that Stevens hurled at his jaw.

They moved back, stepped in, pivoted round, and the footballer rocked on his heels from the left and right crisp, straight hits that were driven through his guard.

Back moved the referee, and in came the bigger man, swinging wildly, and leading with the right.

Hal, who had learnt how to box at school, ran forward, his mouth agape with delight at the briskness and cleverness of the older man.

To a good boxer there is nothing nicer than for an opponent to lead with the right.

Mr. Hargreaves' face wore a contented smile.

Bang!

His left, shooting out with stunning force, connected with Stevens' chin before the full-back's swinging punch could land, and again Stevens rocked backwards.

Referee Hargreaves moved in simultaneously, landing twice in swift succession with the left, then driving the right up to the chin.

Stevens gasped. His eyes were glazed. His knees trembled and bent. A crisp, hard blow, that moved perhaps a foot or less, then did the trick.

Down dropped the bully to the concrete floor.

Mr. Hargreaves glanced at him with an amused smile.

"You asked for what you got, Stevens," he declared. "It was your intention to injure me. I wonder how you like that?"

He smiled at the Bangley players.

"You will bear witness that I did not start this," he said.

Then he turned and moved towards the group of startled Nettingham men, and beamed at George Bliss and the officials.

"I believe," he said, "you have your omnibus waiting outside. If you'll be so good as to give me a lift as far as the station I shall be greatly obliged."

"We'll give you a lift as far as you want to go, sir," answered the Nettingham manager.

"Thanks, awfully! I'll just fetch my bag."

Mr. Hargreaves walked back past the prostrate bully, who was now sitting up and staring about him in a dazed way, his hand clutching his damaged jaw.

The referee whistled as he went, then came back, bag in hand, humming a tune.

The Nettingham players and officials then departed, Mr. Hargreaves accompanying them.

Even as the echoing sounds of their motor died away, some of the Bangley officials came into view and glowered at the discomfited Stevens.

From safe hiding-places they had witnessed the scrap.

"You're a nice chap, you are!" said one of them. "We've only just signed you on, and now you're going to get us into a pack of trouble! It's no light suspension you'll get this time!"

Stevens did not answer. His cup of bitterness was full.

First he had been outwitted by a couple of boys on the football field, now he had been made a laughing-stock of by the referee he had intended to thrash. And the club's officials had gone back on him.

He slunk away without a word.

As for Mr. Hargreaves, he smiled as he wished the Nettingham players good-bye.

"I have always found my knowledge of boxing come in useful," he explained, "but never more than to-day. Now I am going to put that player where he ought to be. Good-night!"

### Hal Goes Home!

IT was a pleasant journey home to Nettingham despite the storm of wind and rain, which continued unabated at something like full gale force.

Hal Chester, pleasantly tired after the game, and elated at his success, which had surpassed all his expectations, smiled unceasingly.

He knew he had done well, but he did not hanker after any further praise than that which Tommy Bell and Dicky Double whispered in his ears repeatedly.

He could tell by the smiling faces of manager and officials that he had made a hit with them. More than everything else, he was delighted to find that he was able to trick and beat an opponent on the mud in an important League game as easily as he used to beat the boys at school.

Hal had never at any time shot at goal to better purpose. He had doubted before that match with Bangley began whether he would be able to reproduce the form he had

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shown when playing for Nettingham United against Nettingham Town, yet he had surpassed himself, and had, after Gerald Marsh had retired to the wing, done as well in the centre as he had previously done at inside-left.

Marsh was glum and dispirited now. Bill Stevens had hurt him, and, besides, he felt that envy of a cleverer player that must come to even the most generous of footballers at some time or other.

Marsh could not blind his eyes to the fact that a new Nettingham Town star had come to light. Tommy Bell and Dicky Double had made no mistake when they had spoken of Hal Chester as one of the cleverest players they had ever known.

White-faced, silent, and depressed, Marsh sat apart, scarcely speaking a word during the whole of the journey. For a long while Hal Chester left him to himself, but at last he went over to him.

"Gerald, don't be sore with me," he said kindly. "We play football not only for the money we make out of it, but because it is a game we love. We are all going to do our best for Nettingham Town. I don't want you ever to feel jealous of me. I want to be friends."

Marsh frowned a moment, remembered the jealous things Atkins had said about Chester, felt a momentary resentment of Hal's advance, and then, with a laugh, cast his depression aside.

"That's nice of you, Hal," he returned. "I'll own I have had my knife into you. I hated that such a fuss should be made of a newcomer, especially a boy without a reputation. But all I can say now, after seeing you play for the United and the Town, is that you jolly well deserve all they say about you, and— Let's shake hands!"

It was the crowning incident in the day's joys. Hal's spirits soared.

"That's fine, Gerald!" he exclaimed. "And I wouldn't worry about your knee if I were you. You're as strong as a bull, and you'll be fit to play again before Saturday. And remember, Bill Stevens won't get very lightly out of his bit of trouble. What fools the Bangley directors were to sign on a man like him! They must have known they were courting trouble."

"They've found a peck of it, at any rate," Gerald admitted. "And wasn't Referee Hargreaves wonderful? Fancy his being able to tame Bill Stevens like that! He won't mince matters in his report, either. What do you think will happen to Stevens now?"

"With that unenviable reputation of his behind him?" said Hal. "Oh, he'll be suspended for three months, I suppose!"

He left Marsh, happy at the result of the advances he had made, and rejoined his chums. Then, before they knew where they were they had arrived home. A brisk walk to their lodgings, a meal washed down by some hot tea, a talk, and a read of the football papers, and then they went to bed to sleep without stirring until the early morning, when they arose as fresh as spring daisies, to find the sun shining gloriously and a keen bite in the air.

After breakfast Hal and Tommy Bell went for a long walk, then came back to late lunch, and in the afternoon went out for another ramble in company with Dicky Double, Low, the full-back, and Warren, the right-half. The rest of the day passed in quiet and peace. Towards evening Hal became sad and a trifle restless. Something was troubling him, Tommy saw.

"What's the matter, old man?" asked the centre-half.

"I've been thinking about my mother," Hal answered. "It seems an age since she came to see me. It's odd that she hasn't come. She hasn't written, either, and I'm worried about it."

"You can't run round home and see her, I suppose?" suggested Bell.

Hal's face hardened.

"No. I'm not going home again. I'll never forgive my stepfather for the way he treated me. He's as hard as nails, Tommy. He loathes football and everything to do with it. He would have all the League clubs suppressed if he could have his way. He actually believes that the game will be the ruin of the nation. What would he say to me now if he knew that I had joined the ranks of the paid players?"

"I don't suppose you care very much what he'd say, do you, Hal?"

"Candidly I don't. He's so blind and bigoted that his opinion is not worth having, yet I would like to be able to see my mother, Tommy."

Tommy Bell, sitting cross-legged, recalled many an instance of stubbornness on Hal Chester's part that had left a mark upon their schooldays. Hal was not mulish, but he was mighty difficult to coax once he had taken offence. Bell guessed that Hal would never enter James Henson's house or stores again unless Mr. Henson sent for him. Therefore

he dropped the subject and began a discussion of football from various points of view, the "shop" talk lasting until it was time to go to bed.

Hal would never enter his stepfather's house until James Henson sent for him, Tommy had thought overnight, and that is just exactly what happened on the Monday morning. For they had scarcely finished their breakfast when a messenger arrived with a letter for Hal, which the boy opened feverishly.

"Jackson, one of the packers at the stores, brought it!" cried Hal excitedly, for he had recognised the shop-assistant from the window. "It's from my stepfather. I know his writing."

Swiftly he read the letter through, and as he read his face lengthened.

"Tommy," he said, "mother's ill. That's why she has not been to see me or written. My stepfather asks me to call and see her, and says he wants to see me, too."

"I'm sorry to hear your mother is ill, Hal. Does Mr. Henson say what the trouble is?"

"No. Merely that mother has been in bed since Friday."

"You'll go, of course?"

Hal's face hardened. Into his eyes crept a light that Tommy Bell knew only too well. The corners of Hal's mouth went down.

"I am going to see mother," he answered. "But I shall not see my stepfather."

Tommy nodded.

"I can't say that I blame you, either, old chap," he remarked. "If you're going that way now I'll walk as far as the stores with you."

The two chums walked briskly through the streets. It was another glorious day. Near the stores a familiar voice hailed them, and, with a merry pup, pup, pup, pup! Bert Roberts, Hal's old chum of the Kingsdown Athletic, ran his Norton up beside them.

"Why, Hal, it's great seeing you!" he beamed. "It seems an age since we played together for Kingsdown. I regret your going, I can tell you. The team's not the same without you. There's not the old vim or dash, and I'm hanged if I can get the boys to feed me the way you used to!"

"It's nice to know one is missed," answered Hal, with a faint smile.

"Ay, you're missed right enough. And I see you have been doing great things, Hal, lad. You always wanted to play for Nettingham Town. My hat, you must have put it across Bangley! And Bill Stevens got it in the neck, too—eh? The foul brute!"

Laughing, Hal referred to the game, then introduced his chum Bell to Bert.

Roberts, with a nod, a bright smile, and a firm grasp of the hand, welcomed the meeting.

"I know all about you, Tommy!" he cried. "And sometimes I've watched you play. You're great. Hal's often told me about the times you and he and Dicky Double had when you were at school. It must be fine for you to be together again. I wish I had the chance of joining the Town, too, although, mind you, I have a great fondness for the Athletic."

Tommy Bell regarded Roberts with more than ordinary interest.

He knew from what Hal had told him that Roberts was a rattling good footballer; and realised how hard good centre-forwards are to get these days.

Since Roberts was willing to play for the Town, and the City Road club had not got a really good centre-forward—with all due respect to Gerald Marsh—the club might do worse than get hold of a young and enthusiastic player like Bert Roberts.

A finely built lad he was, tall, broad-shouldered, as fit as a fiddle, and easy and confident in manner.

The three stayed talking for a while, then Hal explained the reason for his hurry, and wished Bert good-bye.

"Give my kindest regards to Long John Reed and all the boys," said Hal as Roberts moved away on his motor-bicycle. "I'll do that, Hal. They're always talking about you. So long, old man, and I do hope you'll find your mother better."

A minute later Hal had reached the stores in which he had worked so hard for such a poor reward. He did not as much as glance in at the window of the shop, but went straight to the private door and rang the bell.

Hal studied the shop which he used to regard as a sort of goal.

It looked somehow shabby and mean. The front needed washing down and brightening, and the goods on view were poorly displayed. The place conveyed a sense of being neglected.

Yet there was not a harder working man than James Henson, or one more conscientious.

The shop looked smaller, too. Hal had once regarded it as a big and important place.

It was a difference arising from his living nearer the centre

of the town, and passing every day bigger shops that were run on more up-to-date and enterprising lines, he supposed.

He was in the midst of his reflections when the door opened and a pale-faced girl with a smudged face appeared.

"Have called to see mother, Milly," Hal explained. "Can I go up?"

"Oh, yes please, sir!" answered the girl, her eyes brightening at sight of him.

"So long, Hal! See you at lunch!" cried Tommy, as he turned and hurried away.

Hal vanished beyond the door.

Hal found his mother lying propped up in bed, in a warm and well-ventilated room. There were dainties by her bedside, and a book lay upon the coverlet. She looked very white and tired, but her wan face lit up at sight of her son.

"Mother," said Hal, choking as he bent over her, "I hope you are not very bad."

"It is nothing serious," answered Mrs. Henson, with a smile. "The doctor says it is a nervous breakdown. I must lie in bed and rest for quite a while, and when I get up I must not do anything for a while. It's all come of worrying about you, I suppose—and the housework, and all the rest of it. My head feels very tired, but I sha'n't worry so much now that you've come to see me," she said, brightening up. "Hal, you look wonderfully well, and I pictured you starving."

Hal laughed brightly at that.

"No fear of my starving, mother," he answered. "I'm paid regular wages every week. I've already got quite a nice bit of money in the bank, and I've made a heap of friends. I am playing as a professional for Nettingham Town now."

Hal told her all the news.

The invalid listened with surprise. Gradually the lines in her tired face were smoothed away.

The miracle had happened—the miracle that James Henson had always regarded as impossible—her boy, dubbed by her husband as a failure, had found his feet and was earning a goodly living unaided. Yes, and she knew that she could trust him to make the most of the chance, not to fritter away the opportunity selfishly.

Hal would make good, and she felt proud of him.

(Continued overleaf.)



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*(It seemed hard for Hal to speak thus, but then, wasn't his step-father solely to blame? Don't miss next week's grand instalment of this powerful serial.)*

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