

A BOX OF DELICIOUS SHERBET FREE! (SEE PAGE 7.)

No. 961. Vol. XXX.—Week Ending July 17th, 1928.

The GEM 2^d

LIBRARY



GRUNDY'S MESSAGE TO TOM MERRY—CAPTAIN ^{OF THE SHELL!}

(A dramatic incident from the long complete school story "Grundy's Feud!" 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.

THE "SHERBET" MAN!

THE very mention of sherbet makes me feel thirsty, for at the moment of writing the sun is streaming in at my window with unusual generosity. In other words, summer has come. But to return to the "Sherbet Man." Doubtless you are curious, doubtless your mouth is watering even as mine, for sherbet is certainly a cooling and refreshing drink. That being agreed, you fellows will be overjoyed to learn that at all the principal seaside resorts this summer a Special Representative of the GEM will be looking out for my readers. More than that; this Special Representative will be pleased to hand any GEM reader he spots a Delicious Box of Sherbet—Free. How's he going to "spot" a GEM reader, is the question hovering on your lips. That's where you fellows come in. Now, all you've got to do is take your copy of the GEM with you when you go on the beach and show it as prominently as you can. Our "Sherbet Man" will be keeping a sharp look-out for copies of the GEM—that's his special job—and to each boy or girl seen with a copy of this paper he will present Free a BOX OF DELICIOUS SHERBET. Nothing difficult in that, is there? You'll be taking your GEM with you to the seaside, that's a certainty; you'll be reading it on the beach—that's almost as certain. And when our "Sherbet Man" sees you he'll be pleased to hand you a delicious box of sherbet. Got that? Good!—I mean, good health!

THE "MAGNET" AND "POPULAR."

Readers of these two fine companion papers of the GEM have something extra-special to look forward to this week. In the "Magnet" there's a magnificent Free stand-up, cut-out action-photo of W. A. Oldfield, the clever Australian wicket-keeper. In the "Popular" there's a superb cut-out photo of F. Watson, the famous Lancashire bowler. Now these cut-out figures are simply "it." They'll stand up anywhere, and are amazingly lifelike. Here's a unique chance of collecting a set of England's and Australia's leading cricketers, for the "Magnet" and "Popular" are giving these stunning gifts away every week. You'll be sorry if you let this A1 opportunity pass you by. Don't forget, they cost you nothing. Step in with your "Magnet" and "Popular" order to-day, chums.

AN EDITOR'S DIFFICULTIES.

Sorry, and all that, but for the life of me I don't know what to do with the correspondents who send me anonymous letters, asking me why in thunder I have not replied to their previous questions. This is just making things difficult for the Editor. Sometimes a letter gets mislaid, and, of course, I cannot remember all the queries which reach me. It would be little trouble to a reader to repeat his question. Then one could deal with the matter. I only hope this paragraph will meet the anxious eye of a correspondent who weighs in every week or so with a note saying, "Aren't you going to answer me?" I give him my word I am not, unless I know what he asked!

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME!

"THE ST. JIM'S HOTEL KEEPERS!"

By Martin Clifford.

Another extra-long story of Tom Merry & Co., with a particularly novel theme, as is suggested by the title. Mind you read it, boys.

"A PHANTOM THRONE!"

By Sidney Drew.

Also another powerful instalment of this amazing serial of breathless adventure and International intrigue. Look out for it.

"CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE!"

Keep your peepers open, too, for the next ripping poem by the St. Jim's Rhymester. It deals with—"The School Concert." Order your copy of the GEM early, chums. Chin, chin!

YOUR EDITOR.

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TUCK HAMPERS AND MONEY PRIZES AWARDED FOR WIT.

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

WOLVERHAMPTON WINS!

A READY RETORT!

The foreman took a certain workman to task for being late. "How is it," he asked, "that George Brown, who has to walk four miles to his work, can always be here on time, yet you, living next door to the works, always arrive late?" "There's nowt funny in that!" retorted the workman. "If he's a bit late in t' morning he can hurry a bit; but if I'm late, I'm here!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Frederick Smith, 23, Derry Street, Wolverhampton.

THOROUGHLY COMPETENT!

Sergeant: "I want recruits for a railway job." Lazy Private: "All right, Sergeant, put me down as a sleeper!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to James Sutton, 2, Chorley Road, Worthington, nr. Wigan.

EGGS-TRAORDINARY!

The Actor: "Yes, sir, some fool in the audience threw a base, cowardly egg at me." Stage Manager: "What kind of an egg is that?" The Actor: "A base, cowardly egg, sir? Why, one that hits you—and then runs!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss Mary Dunlop, The Surgery, Abercorn, nr. Newport, Mon.

PITY THE POOR ACTOR!

The cinema actor was suspended by a rope over two hundred feet above the ground. "But look here," said the camera man, "suppose the rope breaks?" Producer (ever on the look-out for new stunts): "By Jove, that's a good idea!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Frank Ibbotson, 88, Lodge Street, Manchester.

HIS ONLY CHANCE!

An Alabama farmer, aroused from his sleep by the cackling of his chickens, grabbed a gun from the rack and hastened to the hen-house. He found the door fastened on the inside, and after a few fruitless attempts to open it, he heard what sounded suspiciously like a muffled cough. "Who's in there?" he shouted. There was a pause, and a voice, unmistakably Afro-American, spoke: "Tain't nobody in yere, 'ceptin' jest us chickens!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Field, 58, Augustus Street, Brooks' Bar, Manchester.

MISUNDERSTOOD!

"And did you struggle hard against the consequences of temptation?" asked the prison chaplain. "Yes, sir, I did," replied the convict. "Ah, but if you had only tried a little harder, you would not have been here now." "I did my best, I reckon," was the reply. "It took five policemen to get me to the station!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to William Dawson, 25, Cunningham Road, Old Swan, Liverpool.

(Surely all "Gemites" must hear a good joke some time or another. If it raises a laugh from you it will probably amuse others. Anyway, jot it down on a postcard and send it along to me. If your joke doesn't win a Tuck Hamper it may carry off one of our cash prizes. Bear this in mind also—if at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again!)

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

THE GEM LIBRARY.

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

SOME CAPTAIN! There are few things in this world that George Alfred Grundy can't do better than the next fellow—in Grundy's opinion! His latest ambition is to become junior captain of St. Jim's, for he fondly imagines himself to be a born leader. The result of his feud with Tom Merry, however, seems to indicate that he is a born idiot!



CHAPTER 1. Trimble Tries It On!

"YOU fellows—" Judging by their expressions, the Terrible Three of the Shell Form at St. Jim's were quite unaware that the fat and greasy countenance of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth had appeared in the study doorway, or that he had uplifted a pathetic voice to address them.

"As I was saying—" continued Lowther, with the air of one whose patience has been tried to the utmost limits.

"Kangaroo's bowling is really first-class!" interjected Tom Merry musingly. "He'll have to go down, anyhow. And Koumi Rao of the New House—I can't very well leave him out on present form, can I?"

"What about me?" interrupted Manners pointedly.

The fat figure in the doorway edged a little farther into the study, and Baggy Trimble's beady eyes gleamed at the juniors, oblivious—intentionally or otherwise—to his important presence.

"You fellows—" he began again, raising his voice.

"I only wanted to mention," put in Lowther, with martyr-like mildness, "that I'm in pretty good form myself with the ball this season, Tom!"

Manners grunted disparagingly, and Tom Merry continued to run his pencil up and down a long list of names, without managing to delete any, however. At present there were fifteen names for consideration, and four would have to go. The question before the captain of the Shell was, which?

Tom Merry nodded at last.

"You're jolly good, I know, Monty," he assented. "But you're a better batsman than bowler, any day, and it's the bowling I want to strengthen against Rookwood. You remember that chap Silver? I hear from Wharton of Greyfriars that he's in tremendous form this season—put up a terrific show against the Greyfriars bowling just recently!"

"The Friars are pretty good," said Manners.

"Hear, hear!" agreed Lowther heartily. "But in my opinion we can give Jimmy Silver & Co. all they want in the bowling line—and don't forget Jimmy Silver is the crack bowler of the Rookwood team, too!"

"You fellows—" reiterated Trimble for the third time. He was right inside the study, and now advanced to the table round which the Terrible Three were disposed.

GRUNDY'S FEUD!

A Rattling Fine Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, dealing with George Alfred Grundy's efforts to become junior captain.

BY

Martin Clifford.

"Oh! Trimble!" ejaculated Harry Manners, looking up in surprise. "Run away and play like a good fellow. Can't you see we're busy?"

"I'm not talking to you, Manners!" retorted Baggy loftily, elevating his snub nose an inch or two. "I've come to speak to my old pal Tom Merry. It's important, Tom, old chap!"

He turned a reproachful look on the Shell captain, who was running his pencil up and down the list in quite feverish haste, but still without reaching a decision as to which four names to strike off.

"Hop it, Trimble!" advised Tom Merry briefly. "No time to waste on fat scroungers now!"

Baggy glared, but managed to turn the glare into a beseeching look.

"If that's the way you treat an old pal, Tom Merry—when he's in terrible trouble, too—I'm surprised and shocked, so there! I should have thought you'd have had a bit of sympathy—"

"Kick him out for me, Monty!" growled Tom, jabbing his pencil remorselessly through the name of Clifton Dane of the Shell.

Monty Lowther rose obligingly to his feet, and, gripping Baggy by his fat shoulders, began to propel him more gently than he deserved towards the door.

"Pop off, old fat man!" he urged. "Can't you see we prefer your room to your company? Here's Tom Merry trying to drop his old pal from the junior eleven, and you come barging into the middle of the discussion. You'll be associated in a family tragedy if you're not careful!"

"A family tragedy—that's what I came about!" quavered Baggy, almost tearfully.

"Eh?" ejaculated Lowther, releasing his grip.

"What's that?" inquired Manners.

"What—who—which?" said Tom Merry, turning from his list suddenly and giving the fat junior a peculiar look.

"I thought I could rely on my old pals to stand by me at a time like this!" sighed Trimble, in what he fondly imagined was a voice of pathos. "But I was mistaken, I can see. It's nothing to you fellows if my poor Aunt Agatha dies in horrible agony, crying for her dear little Bagley—not a bit! You fellows don't care! And I haven't a bean to pay my fare to her place!" he wailed, dragging out a fearsome looking rag with which he proceeded to dab his eyes fiercely.

"Rotting, as usual!" grunted Manners.

"I suppose so," admitted Monty Lowther. "Come on, you fat idiot, out with it! What did you come here for?"

"Haven't I just told you?" wailed Trimble, edging a little nearer the table and plumping down in a chair with a deep groan.

The chair groaned, too, and Tom Merry gave a yell.

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**DON'T FORGET
THE GORGEOUS FREE
GIFTS BEING GIVEN
AWAY WITH THIS
WEEK'S "MAGNET"
AND "POPULAR"**

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"Careful, you silly chump! Our chairs aren't made to stand fat elephants bumping on 'em!"

"How you can speak of such a thing when I'm overcome with grief, beats me!" said Baggy, shaking his head in sorrow. "There's my Aunt Agatha, dying in fearful agony and calling for her—"

"Yes, we've had that!" said Tom. "The question is, how much truth is there in it? It looks suspiciously like a yarn to raise the fare, and if we gave it to you I'll bet it wouldn't get any farther than the tuckshop!"

Baggy's only reply to that accusation was a dismal howl.

"For goodness' sake, stop making that row!" growled Manners, stopping his ears.

"And let's see the proof—if you've got any!" said Lowther grimly. "You must have had a letter, or a telegram, or something, if it's genuine. And if it's not I've got a boot here that I'll be only too willing to lend you as you go out into the passage!"

"Big enough!" agreed Manners.

Lowther glared, and Baggy let forth another heart-rending howl.

"I—I can't show you fellows the letter. It's—it's too tragic—and—personal!" spluttered Baggy, wielding his handkerchief furiously. "I—I'm surprised at you chaps wanting to pry into another fellow's private affairs—at such a time of grief, too! Just what I might have expected from unsympathetic Shellfish, though! Even my old pal, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Tom. "If what you say is true, and your aunt is really dying, we'd lend you the fare straight away—only we know you, my fat pippin, of old!"

"It's spoo!" said Lowther coolly. "He won't show us the letter because there isn't one!"

"There is!" wailed Baggy, groping in his jacket. "I'd show it to you, only—it's private, and I can't!"

"Show us the bit where it says, 'Come at once,' or whatever it is!" suggested Manners. "You can fold the page back, so that we sha'n't see anything you don't want us to."

Baggy responded by emitting a further ear-splitting howl, calculated to convince his hearers that his heart was utterly and irreparably broken.

"Oh, dash it all! It sounds genuine enough!" said Tom Merry uneasily. He slid his hand into his pocket. "How much is the fare, Trimble?"

"Fuf-fuf-fifteen-and-six!" spluttered Trimble, a pale gleam of satisfaction lighting his eyes. He stretched out a greedy hand towards the note that Tom extended to him.

"That'll see you through, kid!" said Tom. "And I hope it isn't so bad as you think. You'd better get off at once, hadn't you?"

"And I'll look up a train!" offered Manners, searching for a time-table.

Lowther had been silent, but now he spoke:

"Hold on!"

"What's up?" Tom Merry and Manners replied together.

"If this were genuine Trimble would have gone straight to the Head, and Dr. Holmes would have advanced him the money at once!" said Lowther.

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom.

Manners blinked, and looked at Trimble.

The fat junior's face was showing unmistakable signs of alarm through the mask of sorrow.

"You rotters!" he shouted, glaring venomously at Lowther. "I'm shocked—I'm disgusted! I wouldn't take your rotten money now at—any cost!"

He moved towards the door, and at the same moment Monty Lowther stepped in his path.

"Just a minute, old fat bean!" he grinned. "What's the verdict, you fellows?"

"Spooed!" said Tom Merry. "The rotter looked so utterly miserable, a fellow felt a cad to disbelieve him. I think boiling in oil is too good for the little beast!"

"Bump him!" said Manners vengefully.

Trimble gave a howl in anticipation.

"If—if you touch me—"

The fat junior had no time to say what he would do if the Terrible Three touched him. And they proceeded to touch him—hard! Three pairs of hands gripped various portions of his anatomy, and he was lifted off his feet, to descend with a resounding bump to the study carpet.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yoooooooooop! Yow-wow-wow! Yaroooooh!"

Baggy's yells echoed along the Shell passage, and there was the sound of doors being opened.

Kangaroo looked into the study and grinned.

"Sorry to interrupt," he apologised. "It sounded as if there was a murder on in here. What's Trimble done?"

"That's for telling lies!" growled Manners.

Bump!

"Yaroooooh! Fire! Murder! Rescue! Yow-woop!"

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"That's for being a beastly little cad!" remarked Lowther.

"Leggo! My backbone's broken in two places, and—"

"And that's for luck!" said Tom Merry, as Trimble descended for the last time with a reverberating concussion and sprawled helplessly on the carpet.

"Three seconds!" said Tom grimly. "If you're not gone by then, we'll all take a free kick!"

"Ow! Yow! You rotten cads—"

"All together!" rapped the Shell captain.

Baggy gave a yelp, and made a frantic leap into the passage, cannoning into Kangaroo in full flight. The Shell fellow gave a roar as he went down with Baggy on top of him. Tom Merry & Co. stood in their study door and grinned.

"I'll give you dashing into a fellow like that!" roared Kangaroo, struggling to his feet. "You fat lunatic, I'll—I'll burst you!"

"Yah! Woop!" howled Trimble as a hefty boot clumped on him from the rear.

He broke for the staircase at a record speed, with Kangaroo after him.

"Come back and have some more!" roared the Australian junior, at the head of the stairs.

Baggy paused, after a breathless descent into the hall, and extended his fingers from his fat nose.

"Yah! Shell fathead!" he retorted elegantly.

"Trimble!"

Baggy spun round, hastily altering his expression.

"What ever did you intend to convey by that peculiar attitude, Trimble?"

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, blinked seriously at the fat junior.

"I—I didn't see you, sir," stuttered Baggy in alarm. "I—I was just speaking to—to Noble, sir."

"I should conduct your conversation in a—ahem!—more normal manner in future, Trimble!" said Mr. Lathom, coughing. "Your posture just now was better suited to a boy in a lower Form. A boy in the Fourth has a certain dignity to consider!"

And, suppressing a smile, the Form master swept on down the passage.

Baggy glared after him, conscious of having escaped punishment for an offence to which Mr. Lathom had been an interested spectator, but not at all interested in maintaining the dignity due to a Fourth-Former. Gratefulness was not one of Baggy's redeeming qualities.

"Silly old ass!" he ejaculated, and rolled away, glowering.



"Come back and have some more!" said Kangaroo, from the head of the stairs—

CHAPTER 2.

Touching!

"WELL hit, Rackett!"

There was a roar of applause from the Wayland crowd as a tall figure in white sent the ball bounding away to the ropes.

"Good man!" shouted Wilkins heartily; and Gunn added:

"Hear, hear!"

George Alfred Grundy of the Shell, standing between his chums, nodded disparagingly.

"Not bad," he agreed. "Not what I might have done. Easy bowling, too. But not bad!"

Wilkins closed one eye at Gunn.

When Grundy started to pass opinions on cricket, it was best, for the sake of peace, to humour him. Sometimes, too, a little harmless pleasure could be extracted from the process.

"Not what you would have done, Grundy, certainly," agreed Wilkins. "I should hardly think any of the Loamshire team could play cricket Grundy's style—eh, Gunny?"

Gunn shook his head seriously.

"It wasn't bad, as Grundy says," he admitted. "But it's only Wayland bowling, and Grundy could make an awful mess of that fast bowler, couldn't you, old man?"

It was one of Grundy's little failings that he never could discern when his leg was being pulled. He fairly beamed at his chums, pleased at being pandered to in public, and stuck his chest out importantly.

"Shows you chaps have got a little sense, at least," he said. "Judging by the way these people are clapping, anybody'd think he'd done something wonderful!"

Wilkins and Gunn tactfully turned their faces towards the

cricket, and several of the Wayland crowd regarded Grundy with interest. Grundy's views, on whatever the subject, expressed in Grundy's loud and penetrating voice, always seemed to attract attention wherever he went. Grundy noted the glances with pride, and preened himself accordingly.

It had been Grundy's suggestion that the chums of Study No. 3 should bike over to Wayland on that sunny half-holiday and witness the great encounter between the Loamshire County Club and the local side.

The fixture was played annually, and usually resulted in an easy victory for the county players, though once or twice there had been a draw. But this year the Wayland team were showing up unexpectedly well, and Grundy & Co. arrived to find that Loamshire had been set a good total to win.

Quite why Grundy wanted to watch a game of which he had only the haziest knowledge was a mystery to Wilkins and Gunn, but they were perfectly willing to give him his head, especially as Grundy, in his usual magnificent manner, had paid the admission for all three.

Every time a perspiring Wayland bowler managed to claim a Loamshire wicket, Grundy managed to find some disparaging remark to pass. He was just as impartial with his contempt for the batting.

Now, Cecil Rackett, the star professional of the county team, had come to the wicket, and was giving a display of fireworks which was badly needed. Wilkins and Gunn had their eyes glued on the game, and the ball flew again.

"Well hit, sir!" shouted Wilkins excitedly. "That ball would have caught most batsmen on the hop!"

"Well run!" roared Gunn, waving his cap as Cecil Rackett clumped his bat home just in time to avert the downfall of his wicket.

Grundy was silent this time. The general acclamation of the crowd, for once, impressed him. He watched Rackett carefully as he prepared to take the next ball. The Wayland bowler sent down a lightning delivery, but Rackett got his bat to the ball, and it sped swiftly over the grass for another "boundary."

"What do you think of that, Grundy?" inquired Wilkins breathlessly.

"Quite good," said Grundy unexpectedly. "That fellow can bat, after all! Wonder how long he'll keep it up?"

"What's happened to Grundy?" whispered Gunn in surprise.

Wilkins shook his head blankly, unnoticed by Grundy, who had his eyes fixed intently on the game.

"Well done!" he ejaculated, as the Loamshire batsmen ran again between the wickets, and a single was recorded.

"All over now!" remarked Wilkins prophetically. "There's only one more man to go in!"

Rackett's partner, despite his extreme caution, was caught napping on the next ball, and snapped neatly at the wicket.

"The county will have to look out!" said Wilkins, with a grin. "They always send over a weak team, but it looks as if they've made it a bit too weak this time!"

"Twenty to get!" breathed Gunn, as the last Loamshire batsman left the pavilion. "It's a touch-and-go, you fellows! What a scream if the county were licked by Wayland!"

"It all depends on Rackett!" said Wilkins oracularly.

The bowling went to the last man in, but he kept up his end. Then Rackett had another chance. He was evidently disinclined to play for safety, and the score began to mount up again.

A couple of flashing drives to the off boundary were followed by a third over the bowler's head, and a fourth from a beautiful late cut. Four to win.

The Wayland bowler's delivery never faltered, but Rackett stepped out to it and lifted it coolly out of the ground for a "six."

There was a terrific roar, and the crowd swarmed over the ropes, all eager to shake the batsman by the hand or request his autograph. Gunn, who had brought his camera in the hope of getting a snapshot or two, shook his head.

"No hope of getting close enough," he said. "Look! They're carrying him round the ground!"

"That fellow can play cricket!" observed Grundy thoughtfully, as the St. Jun's juniors recaptured their bikes and wheeled them out into the roadway.

"Grundy's getting observant!" remarked Gunn to the world in general. "Better get a move on, you chaps, or we shall be late for calling-over. Put your beef into it!"

Grundy seemed to have retired into his shell, so to speak, and the ride home was accomplished in an unusual silence, for which Wilkins and Gunn were duly thankful. They had expected to be dragged into a fierce argument concerning the merits and demerits of all the Loamshire players—and Grundy's cricket arguments were enjoyable only to the originator thereof.

Instead, Wilkins and Gunn were able to carry on a quiet and uninterrupted conversation on the same subject, while George Alfred, immersed in thought, rode a yard or two ahead.

Clearly, Grundy had been visited by another of his frequent great ideas, and was engaged in working it out to his satisfaction. Grundy's ideas were of much the same standard of hopelessness, and his chums knew that they would be introduced to the latest brain-wave quite soon enough. There was no sense in precipitating matters.

"Some rot!" opined Gunn.

"Same as usual," agreed Wilkins. "Unless—"

"Unless the world comes to an end?" suggested Gunn.

"Well, you know the ass was actually talking sense at the cricket—perhaps he's going to be a bit saner in future—you never know!"

"I'll believe that when I see it," said Gunn, as they hopped off at the school gates. "Just in time, Taggles, old man! Sorry to rob you of the pleasure of reporting us!"

"Young rips!" grunted Taggles, locking the gates. "If I had my way—"

But the three juniors were gone. Grundy left his chums to put his bike away, and hastened up to the study. He had murmured something about an important idea, but so far had not disclosed its nature.

He kicked open the door of Study No. 3 and entered after the manner of a hurricane—quite a normal mode of entry for Grundy. He swept off his cap and hurled it on to the table. Then he jumped.

There was a junior seated at the table—a podgy junior whom Grundy knew well, and disliked cordially—Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth. Baggy was well known as a raider of other fellows' grub, but he did not look like a study-raider now. He was undoubtedly blubbing. Even when Grundy's cap alighted an inch from his nose, Trimble gave no sign of having noticed it. He sobbed heartrendingly.

Grundy was taken aback for a moment, but he came forward and laid a hand on Trimble's shoulder, feeling quite touched.

"What's up, kid?" he asked gruffly.

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—Baggy Trimble paused after his breathless descent into the hall, and extended his fingers from his fat nose. "Yah! Shell fathead!" he retorted elegantly. "Trimble!" The fat Fourth-Former spun round at that well-known voice. "Whatever did you intend to convey by that peculiar attitude, Trimble?" asked Mr. Lathom. (See Chapter 1.)

Trimble must have felt the touch on his shoulder, but he did not look up. His sobs increased.

"Buck up, Trimble!" urged Grundy kindly. "Try and pull yourself together. Been licked by Knox or somebody?" Baggy paused between his sobs and stuttered.

"N-no, Grundy—it isn't that. It's—it's my aunt!"

Having imparted that information, he drove it home with redoubled sobs.

"Your aunt? What's wrong with your aunt?" asked Grundy, puzzled.

"She's—she's—" Baggy finished with a splutter, and dabbed fervently with a grubby handkerchief at his eyes. His shoulders fairly shook.

"She's—what?" inquired Grundy, in amazement. "Ill, or something?" Perception was not Grundy's strong point.

"She's—dead! I mean—dying!" said Trimble faintly, endeavouring without success to staunch the flow of tears which flooded his fat face. He raised himself on one elbow to assure Grundy that he really was "blubbing."

Grundy, who could not know that Trimble had produced those realistic tears with the aid of a bowl of water, felt his heart melt.

"Poor old chap!" he ejaculated sympathetically. "Were you very fond of her, Trimble?"

"She's—she's dying, I tell you!" muttered Baggy. "She's sent for me—and I haven't a bean to pay the fare. You've no idea what beasts the fellows are till you're in trouble, Grundy!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Grundy. "Any decent fellow would stand by you at a time like this. Have you tried to raise the cash already?"

"Of course," answered Baggy, wiping away the last of his tears with inward satisfaction, for he did not like water. "But they won't lend me a penny—Tom Merry and his pals actually refused to believe me, and kicked me out of their study!"

"The rotters!" said Grundy angrily. All George Alfred's simple emotions were roused now, and he clenched his big fists. "Those rotters think they own the whole of the Lower School!" he growled. "They don't think anybody else matters a fig! I'm really sorry about this, Trimble, old chap. I can let you have the fare, of course. Is there a train soon?"

"Thanks awfully, Grundy! Only a loan, of course," said Trimble, grief-stricken but still retaining his pride, as he tucked away the two pound-notes which the Shell fellow proffered.

"Just as you like," replied Grundy carelessly. "But I'm really glad to be of some use at a time like this, Trimble. Just like those cads in Study No. 10, to chuck you out without listening! How would they like it, I wonder, if a near relation of theirs was pegging out—"

"In fearful agony!" put in Trimble pathetically.

"Well, you'd better hurry," advised Grundy. "Get permission from Railton and slip off down to the station as quickly as you can."

"It's only a matter of a few hours to live, I think," groaned Trimble.

"I'll come with you, if you like," offered Grundy generously. "If you don't feel equal to going down to the station alone—"

"Oh, I can manage—thanks all the same, Grundy!" said Trimble quickly. "I don't want to give you any trouble. I'm deeply grateful for this—this loan, and I hope I shall have some—some better news for you soon—I mean, when I come back."

"Let's hope so, anyway! Keep your pecker up, kid!" said Grundy, as Trimble backed out of the study.

Baggy Trimble retained his lugubrious expression till he had closed the door and scuttled down the passage. He did not make his way to the Housemaster's study. Instead, he paused in an alcove and dried his face finally with the grubby handkerchief, which gradually assumed an even darker shade during the process. Then he burst into a chuckle, fingering Grundy's pound notes lovingly.

"Some fellows are born to have their legs pulled!" he reflected. Then a shade crossed his brow. "I'll have to make out I've been and—and come back," he muttered doubtfully.

Tom Merry came along the Shell passage and stopped at the sight of Baggy Trimble gloating over two currency notes.

"Hallo, you fat fraud! Where did you get those from?" inquired Tom suspiciously.

"Borrowed 'em, if you want to know!" granted Trimble.

"Whose leg have you been pulling now?" demanded the Shell captain.

"Jolly inquisitive all of a sudden, aren't you?" asked Baggy, with a sneer.

"If you've been spinning that rotten yarn—" said Tom.

"If my pal Grundy chooses to make me a little loan, I

don't see what business it is of yours, Tom Merry!" said Baggy loftily, and rolled away hastily before Tom could reply. He left the Shell captain thinking.

CHAPTER 3.

Grundy's Grievance!

"TEA ready, Grundy?"

Wilkins entered Study No. 3 in the Shell passage and addressed that question to a figure sprawled in an armchair by the window.

"Slacker! He hasn't even got the cloth laid!" grunted Gunn, following Wilkins into the study.

"Eh? What's that?" murmured Grundy, coming out of a reverie with a start that set the fireirons clattering in the fender. "Tea ready? Of course it isn't! I was wondering how much longer you chaps would be; you may as well do something useful, as you can't be ornamental!"

"Of all the—" began Gunn, but Grundy went on regardless.

"I've got other things to think about besides filling my stomach; not like you lazy blighters, content to leave the management of the Lower School to the idiot Merry! I tell you, it's time there were some alterations, and a fellow with some sense came to the top!"

Gunn looked at Wilkins, and they groaned in chorus.

"For goodness' sake keep off that subject, Grundy!" growled Gunn. "We've had all that over millions of times before!"

"And if you're specially interested in the welfare of the Lower School, why not begin by helping your own pals get their tea?" suggested Wilkins.

Grundy glared.

"The trouble with you, George Wilkins," he boomed, in a voice clearly audible at the other end of the Shell passage, "is that you haven't got the sense of a bunny-rabbit! I've told you fellows often enough that I'm the only fellow in this study with any brains, yet you drag me into a potty argument on the slightest pretext, when I'm thinking out something of vital importance to the whole school. I'm disgusted with you: you're not worth calling pals! Let me have another word from either of you, and we'll jolly soon see whether—"

"All right, Grundy!" interrupted Gunn pacifically. "Of course, we know you're no end of an important chap and mustn't be worried. Must he, Wilkins?"

Gunn winked, and Wilkins sighed resignedly.

"Of course not," he agreed, with due penitence. "I think Grundy's right all the time—as he usually is!" he added, with a faint attempt at sarcasm. "Let's get tea. He's probably hungry, and here's us standing about jawing!"

Grundy's expression softened, and he permitted a smile to appear on his rugged features. Grundy liked flattery laid on in chunks, though it sometimes called for an effort on the part of his faithful chums to supply it. Still, Grundy was very accommodating, and could be relied upon not to see through the most transparent pretence once his vanity was touched.

He beamed benignantly while Wilkins and Gunn proceeded dutifully to lay the table.

Wilkins, rummaging in the cupboard, gave a grunt.

"Where did you shove the cake, Grundy?"

"Use your eyes!" suggested Grundy pleasantly. "I remember putting it there only this afternoon before we started."

"The mystery of the missing cake!" remarked Gunn, looking over Wilkins' shoulder. "My hat! There were some jam-tarts here, too. Why, and the chocolate meringues, and—and—why, the place has been burgled!"

"What?" roared Grundy, springing out of his chair and peering into the depths of the cupboard.

"There's a loaf!" remarked Wilkins fixedly. "And two tins of fruit—look at 'em!—and you'll see they've both been emptied and stood upside down. And that's the lot!"

"Some awful rotter!" breathed Gunn. "And look, there's a smear of jam on the loaf. Whoever it was, he ought—"

Grundy, who had been regarding the remnants of the feast, emitted a snort.

"Of all the careless fatheads—" he began.

Wilkins and Gunn glared in unison at their leader.

"If you can't lock up a cupboard before you go out, Wilkins and Gunn—"

"Can't you see, you idiot?" hissed Gunn. "The lock's been busted; it was only a flimsy thing at best!"

Grundy dignified to glance at the lock, and even he could not deny that it had been forced open—probably with the aid of a poker—by the unknown mauler who had scoffed their teas.

"I don't think we need search far for the villain!" said Wilkins grimly.

"Trimble!" said Gunn vengefully.

"Trimble? Impossible!" Grundy stared at the jammy loaf and gasped. "Why, if that fat criminal— But he couldn't have done! No, it wasn't Trimble, you fellows!"

"Why not?" asked Gunn bluntly.

"Because he's fairly prostrated with grief," explained Grundy. "I found him in here, when I came up, blubbing—just blubbing like a fag with his head on the table, poor kid! He's just lost his aunt, or something. Fairly knocked him off his feet, and no mistake. I lent him his fare, and he's gone to her bedside by now, I suppose. It couldn't have been Trimble; he wasn't in the mood to scoff other people's grub!"

"The worst of Grundy," said Wilkins, in a voice of wonder, "is that he thinks everybody else is as simple as himself!"

"My hat! Say that again, Wilkins!" roared Grundy.

"Didn't it occur to you that Trimble might have been spoofing?" inquired Gunn patiently. "The fat slug having such an unsullied reputation, I suppose you never thought of suspecting him?"

Grundy paused a few moments before replying to that remark. It always took Grundy some time to digest sarcasm.

"I don't want any cheek from you, either, Gunn!" he blared suddenly. "It's good enough for you that I could see that Trimble was grief-stricken. Anybody could have seen that by the way the poor kid was crying; and you needn't tell all the fellows, either! He's got enough to put up with, without all the fellows laughing at him behind his back!"

"Nobody would want to laugh if his yarn were true," put in Wilkins. "But I'd bet my bottom dollar that he pulled Grundy's leg—as he's done before now!" he added reflectively.

"Anyway, there's no tea!" said Gunn, rather grimly.

"Well, and who wants tea?" retorted Grundy. "I've got a big idea in my head, and I've no time to bother about eating. We'll chuck tea to-day—that settles it! You fellows can clear off!"

And, having delivered that announcement, Grundy threw himself back in the armchair and relapsed once more into deep thought.

"Well, if that doesn't take the cake!" gasped Wilkins.

"No tea, and we can clear off!" echoed Gunn. "Look here, Grundy!" he began excitedly. "If you think we intend to do without tea after hiking to Wayland and back, you're jolly well mistaken! It's too late for tea in Hall—"

"That's enough!" snapped Grundy. "I believe I told you two chaps to get out. Why haven't you gone? I've told you I can't be bothered now; I've got some thinking to do!"

"What with?" asked Wilkins sarcastically.

Grundy ignored the insult, which it is doubtful if he heard, and his chums wavered uncertainly. In those few seconds Grundy came perilously near to being dragged out of his comfortable seat and being subjected to a record bumping, but prudence and the reflection that nothing could be got out of it beyond relief to their feelings, restrained Wilkins and Gunn.

"Come on!" said Wilkins, with a deep breath. "We'll scout along the passage and see if we can plant ourselves on somebody! Buck up, before all the grub's been eaten!"

Gunn nodded, and they left Grundy in solitude, slamming the door with unnecessary violence behind them.

Fortunately, Talbot had received a remittance that morning, and responded to Wilkins' polite inquiry from the doorway with a cheery invitation to join the spread, where, under the influence of Skimpole's unconscious humour and Talbot's congenial talk, Wilkins and Gunn began to take a brighter interest in life.

Meanwhile, Grundy lay back in his chair and devoted his powerful brain to the great idea which had smitten him that

afternoon. When Grundy devoted himself to the processes of thought, he required a lengthy period to bring his efforts to fruition. Thought, with Grundy, was his slowest and least efficient form of activity, and he rarely burdened himself with the care and responsibility which it entailed.

Whatever the problem confronting the great George Alfred was, it was not long before he felt the need of fresh fuel in the shape of fresh air, and accordingly he strode out into the quad. He made for the trees between the two houses, and began to pace up and down. He nearly ran into three juniors who were crossing to the New House to see Figgins & Co.

"Hallo! Keep your eyes peeled, Grundy!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, playfully jerking out Grundy's tie.

"What the thump—why, I'll smash you, you cheeky rotter!" roared Grundy, clenching his huge fists and advancing on the humorist of the Shell.

Monty, with a look of abject terror on his face, cowered behind Tom Merry.

"Oh, p-please, Grundy, sp-spare me!" he quavered. "Sp-spare me for my youth. I'm too young to perish by the sword! Gentle sir, have pity!"

"I suppose you think you're funny?" inquired Grundy, with heavy irony. "Well, I don't! But I've no time to waste on you, anyway, Lowther. It's Tom Merry I want to speak to."

He fixed the Shell captain with a gleam in his eye.

"Go ahead!" invited Tom Merry. "No charge!"

"I've been thinking!" announced Grundy.

Monty Lowther hastily pulled out a notebook and began to jot down something at express speed.

Grundy gave him a look.

"What fool game are you playing now, Lowther?" he asked suspiciously.

"Only making a note of it, in case it never happens again!" responded Monty sweetly.

"A note of what?" asked Grundy, still puzzled.

"That you've been thinking," said Lowther seriously. "Of course, we've only got your word for it, but you ought to know. As you reported it to Tom, I thought it must be genuine."

Manners and Tom Merry grinned, and Grundy glared again. But with great self-restraint he turned again to the captain of the Shell and went on.

"I'm not satisfied with you, Tom Merry!" he announced portentously.

"No?" said Tom politely.

"No. Take this affair of Trimble to-day. I understand the poor kid came to you asking for the fare to see a dying relation. He said you were unfeeling enough to kick him out of the study on his neck!"

"Quite right, too!" asserted Tom Merry coolly. "He asked for it, and he got it!"

"Haven't you got any sympathy for a fellow who's heard bad news?" inquired Grundy, with deep scorn.

"Tons!" answered Tom. "But none for a fat spoofer who's out to squeeze money out of me—that's the kind of chap Trimble is, and you ought to know it by now, I should think!"

"And that's the kind of chap we've got for junior captain!" said Grundy pityingly. "Why, anybody could see it was genuine; the poor little beast was very nearly in hysterics—"

Grundy paused.

"He would put it on a bit more for your benefit, of course!" agreed Tom. "Knowing he was dealing with a born idiot, he could afford to heighten the effects a little. I suppose. You mean to say you let him rook you with that cock-and-bull story, Grundy?"

"No!" growled Grundy fiercely. "I lent him his fare, if that's what you mean! But an unfeeling rotter like you couldn't be expected to have any sympathy!"

Tom Merry's lips set a little.

"That's enough, Grundy!" he said coolly. "This is getting beyond a joke. You were a blithering idiot to swallow Trimble's yarn, but there's no need to jaw me for not being taken in the same way. Keep a civil tongue in your head, you ass!"

"Oh, it's only Grundy's rot!" said Manners, with a grin.

"It isn't rot!" roared Grundy vehemently. "And I'll tell the whole school that Merry's an unfeeling rotter—"

"That's more than enough!" snapped Tom, his eyes gleaming. "Lend a hand, you fellows!"

"All together!" sang out Lowther, as the Terrible Three surrounded Grundy.

"Don't you dare— Oh, crikey!"

Grundy had not time to voice further protests. He found himself grasped firmly in several places and swept off his feet. He bumped on the hard and unsympathetic quadrangle, and roared.

"Ow! Yah! Yooooo! Stoppit, you idiots!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 961.

LOOK OUT FOR THE "SHERBET MAN!"

Would you like a free gift of a box of delicious sherbet? Of course you would! Then look out for the Special Representative of the "Gem" at the seaside this summer! At all the principal seaside resorts, our Representative will be specially looking out for boys and girls who are carrying a copy of the "Gem." To everyone seen displaying this paper, he will present free a box of delicious sherbet. So take your "Gem" with you when you go on the beach, and show it as prominently as you can. Our sherbet man will be on the look out for you!

YOUR EDITOR.

"My hat! I'll smash you when I get up— Yarcough!"
Bump! Bump!

"I think that'll do!" said Tom Merry, quite out of breath. Lowther and Manners, gasping, gladly relieved themselves of the Shell fellow's weight, and let him roll on the ground. The Terrible Three waved him a mocking adieu, and continued their way to the New House, leaving Grundy to sort himself out and decide whether he was really all there—a circumstance which at the moment he felt somewhat inclined to doubt.

"Ow! Yow! I'll get even with the cads!" gasped Grundy, tenderly feeling that portion of his anatomy which had come into violent contact with the quad. "They needn't think they've finished with me yet—not by a long chalk!"

He was just staggering to his feet when Wilkins and Gunn, replete with tea in Talbot's study, came across the quad and spotted their leader.

"My hat! Grundy's been through it!" remarked Wilkins, with a grin.

"Best thing that could happen to him!" said Gunn, with satisfaction.

Really, Grundy's popularity seemed to be at its lowest ebb.

"Come on. He'll expect us to sympathise and dust him down—though all he deserves from us is another bumping!" said Wilkins.

"You rotters!" was Grundy's greeting to his faithful pals, as they dashed up to lend him a much-needed hand.

"Grateful, aren't you?" observed Wilkins, raising clouds of dust from Grundy's jacket.

"Why didn't you come in time to help me lick those idiots—Tom Merry and his pals?" growled Grundy sulkily.

"Between us we could have handled them easily!"

"We—" protested Gunn.

"That's the worst of you fellows!" continued Grundy loudly. "Never on the spot when you're wanted! I wonder I ever manage to stand you like I do—exceptional patience, that's what it is!"

Gunn coughed violently, and Wilkins breathed hard.

"What did you want to fall out with Tom Merry for?" asked Gunn curiously.

"That's none of your business, William Gunn!" retorted Grundy. "Still," he added kindly, "I don't mind telling you. An unsympathetic fellow like Tom Merry is no use as junior captain at St. Jim's! This afternoon Trimble had a letter telling him of a serious family illness—and he hadn't got the fare. What did he do? Applied to the junior captain, of course! And all that dense idiot could do—the leader of the Shell, mark you—was to grin at the poor chap and chuck him out of the study! Call that reasonable? Trimble came to me then—the most sensible fellow he knew—and, naturally, I stood by him. I don't think Merry would show up very well if Railton or the Head got to hear of it, do you?"

"Of course," said Wilkins calmly. "It hadn't occurred to you that if Trimble really had received bad news and wanted his fare, he could have got it quite easily by applying to the Head with the letter?"

"To—the Head?" echoed Grundy, rather blankly.

Wilkins and Gunn grinned. But it took Grundy only a second to recover.

"He could have done!" he admitted. "But, naturally, he thought his own junior captain would stand by him, and he was quite right—Tom Merry should have done! You think you're clever, George Wilkins, but I know what I'm talking about. You can't teach me anything!"

"He's right there! You want brains to learn things!" murmured Gunn.

"What's that?" snapped Grundy.

"Prep, old man!" said Wilkins and Gunn, in affectionate unison.

CHAPTER 4.

Trimble Goes!

"HALLO! Here he is!"

"Who, deah boy? Oh, Twimble!"

The four chums of Study No. 6 in the Fourth were standing at the foot of the School House steps just after tea, when the fat form of Baggy Trimble became visible in the big doorway.

"Here comes the poor bereaved!" grinned Blake. "How's your aunt, Trimble? Or was it a second cousin, or a great-grandmother?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fat spoofer!" grunted Herries.

Several juniors who had gathered by the steps greeted Trimble with humorous inquiries concerning his ailing relation. Baggy's extremely lugubrious expression only seemed to egg them on.

"Buck up, Baggy! While there's life there's hope!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 961.

chortled Blake, slapping him on the back and extracting a loud grunt from the fat junior.

"Look here, Blake, you rotter—"

"Cheer up, old fat man! You didn't do so badly over the yarn. Grundy swallowed it whole, didn't he? And Wilkins was saying that somebody scoffed all the grub out of their cupboard this afternoon—and you never even got kicked for it!"

Groan!

Blake stared, as that doleful sound emanated from Trimble. As he stared it was repeated, with emphasis.

Groan!

"What the giddy thump! Something else the matter with you now?" asked Blake, in wonder. "What on earth are you groaning about?"

Groan!

Judging by the dire misery on Trimble's face, and the heart-rending groans he was emitting, he was in a very bad way indeed.

"Whatevah is the mattah, deah boy?" inquired Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, quite touched. "Perhaps— We can't have been mistaken ovah the beweavement, can we, Blake?"

Blake was eyeing Trimble fixedly, evidently undecided whether Baggy was in need of a kick or sympathy. He decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.

"Ill, old chap?" he asked.

Baggy turned towards the other fellows, possibly so as to let them see how utterly miserable he looked.

"No, you can't do anything, Blake!" he responded heavily. "Only I've got to go to my aunt's by the next train; she's seriously ill, as I told you."

Baggy contrived to utter the last words in a rather pathetic voice, Blake being one of the juniors who had refused to believe him during the afternoon.

"What!" roared Blake indignantly. "Working off that yarn again? Why, Grundy's the only fellow you're ever likely to take in like that, you fat idiot!"

"Yes, draw it mild, Trimble!" said Cardew.

"You fellows will know as soon as I'm gone!" said Trimble gloomily. "It's true enough—the telegram came only this ev—this afternoon, I mean! The Head's sent for the station hack to fetch me!"

"Pity you didn't go this afternoon, then!" said Clive suspiciously. "You've missed a train through hanging about!"

"It's the same yarn re-dished!" opined Cardew, eyeing Trimble curiously, nevertheless. "Be careful, Baggy!" he warned solemnly. "You're losing your originality, you know! Never spin the same tale twice, old bean. It's bad for business!"

"You just wait!" growled Trimble mournfully. "The hack's due at any minute now!"

"Almost looks as if there might be something in it!" said Kangaroo, puzzled.

"Cave! Here's the Head!"

The majestic form of Dr. Holmes appeared at the top of the steps, and he descended in his stately way to where Trimble stood. The mere fact that the Head condescended to approach the junior without ordering him to mount the steps spoke volumes for his sympathy—wrongly or rightly bestowed.

"Well, my boy," said the Head kindly, "you must hope for the best. Quite possibly all will be well by the time you reach your aunt's—indeed, I sincerely hope so. You must not let it worry you, my boy. Has the hack arrived?"

"No, sir!"

The juniors could see that the Head was perturbed, and they marvelled. So it was true! A yarn of Trimble's, scouted as so many of his yarns had been, had turned out to be true! It was almost a proof that the age of miracles was not past.

There was a rumble of ancient wheels, and the old hack rolled in at the gates. It drew up before Dr. Holmes and Trimble, and the kindly old Head helped the junior into it.

"Good-bye, my boy!" he said. "And let us hope the case is not so bad as it appears!"

"Thank you, sir," replied Trimble sombrely. "I'll try to bear up—only—only—I'm very fond of Aunt Carolina, sir!"

"Ahem! Ahem!—of course—quite—quite so!" coughed the Head, fearing a breakdown. He breathed a sigh of relief as the hack rolled away towards the gates, Trimble bidding a pathetic farewell to some of the fellows who ran with the cab. They had nearly reached the gates, when Trimble leaned out.

"I say—Gussy—"

"Yaas, deah boy? Anythin' I can do, old fellow?"

"Lend—lend me a quid—I'm stony excepting for my fare!" gasped Trimble.

The "old fellow" cost D'Arcy quite a lot, but he could feel intensely for Trimble in his present plight.

Gussy swiftly extracted his wallet and passed up a couple of pound notes to the expectant junior.

"That be enough, deah boy?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yes—thanks ever so much, Gussy!" Trimble almost beamed, but remembered to look pathetic in time. "Good-bye, old fellow!"

The juniors came to a halt as the hack swung out of the gates and rolled off towards the station.

"Same old Trimble!" remarked Blake, as they walked back up the drive.

"Yaas!" assented Arthur Augustus slowly. "But fancy Twimble speakin' the twuth all the time, you know! What do you think of that, deah boy?"

"I don't know what to think!" admitted Blake, as they entered the quadrangle. "It looks genuine enough—now! Hallo! Where's all the fellows gone? There was a crowd here a few minutes ago. Talbot!"

Talbot of the Shell paused as he was about to enter the house.

Lowther's voice responded:

"Blow in!"

Talbot glanced into the study.

"You here, Tom?"

"Looks like it!" agreed the Shell captain.

"I've come up to speak to you specially," said Talbot, shutting the door. "There's a lot of rot going on downstairs—I thought you'd like to be told."

"What kind of rot?" asked Tom Merry in surprise, while Manners and Lowther pricked up their ears.

"It's all bosh, of course!" said Talbot. "But you know Grundy lent Trimble his fare this afternoon—to go and see a dying relation—"

"We bumped the fat beast for spinning a rotten yarn!" put in Lowther.

"Well, I suppose you heard what Grundy said—that Tom was an unsympathetic bounder, and a lot more—Grundy was talking out of his hat, naturally. But a good many

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE.

No. 3.—The Picnic Party.



*The hamper's packed, and off we go,
A happy crowd and joyous;
Our faces with excitement glow,
There's nothing to annoy us.
Not even Trimble, giving chase,
Can harass us or vex us;
We've no desire to slap his face,
Or punch his solar plexus!*

*Merry and Manners lead the way,
Each holds a hamper-handle;
And Trimble bellows: "Stop! I
say,
To leave me out's a scandal!
I know you mean to have a feed
Beside the Rippling Rhyl;
And though I don't approve of
greed,
I'll join you with a will!"*

*We stride ahead, nor seem to hear
The portly junior's pleas;
We leave him panting in the rear,
Then halt beneath the trees:
Beside the sparkling River Rhyl,
In cool and leafy shade,
Uncorking there, without a spill,
Bottles of lemonade?*

*The greensward is our tablecloth,
The dock-leaves are our dishes;
Trimble at length arrives, in wrath,
Demanding loaves and fishes!
We let him share our princely fare,
Being in generous mood;
And Baggy sits and gorges there,
Till he's the worse for food!*

*We form a very cheery throng,
Seated around the hamper,
Joining in revel, feast, and song,
While cares and worries scamper.
Though caterpillars from above
May tumble in our tea,
Who cares? For schoolboys simply
love
A picnic and a spree!*

*When dusk descends upon the scene,
And all the world is still,
We quit our pleasant patch of
green
Beside the rippling Rhyl.
Back to St. Jim's we wend our
way.
Its old tower looms before us.
"This is the End of a Perfect
Day."
We sing in cheery chorus!*



"What's the attraction?" asked Blake. "You going in, too, Talbot?"

"Grundy's striking while the iron's hot!" he answered. "He came out as soon as the hack left, and called an indignation meeting in the Common-room—stuck a notice up on the board, and trailed off with half the junior school behind him. I think he has some potty notion of deposing Tom Merry from the captaincy. You fellows going to see what's on?"

"The blithering blatherskite!" growled Blake. "We'll go—and help bump the officious bounder. Come and join in, Talbot!"

"I think Tom Merry ought to know," replied Talbot quietly. "I'll slip up and tell him!"

"Good man! He ought to be on in this scene," agreed Blake. "Come on, you chaps—and get ready to hoot!"

Talbot nodded, and mounted the stairs in a thoughtful mood. Certainly it was up to him to let the junior captain know the turn of affairs, but Talbot had an uneasy feeling that out of Grundy's hot-headed oratory there might come serious trouble. Still, Tom Merry was hardly likely to get his rag out over a trifle. Talbot reached the door of Study No. 10, and knocked.

fellows—even some of those who refused to lend Trimble anything—were saying now that Grundy is in the right."

"But what the thump—" began Tom Merry. "It was all a stunt—one of the fat rotter's everlasting tricks to worm money out of chaps. Surely he's about somewhere now—he can't have actually gone to his aunt, and he can't keep out of the way indefinitely! Perhaps he's afraid of meeting Grundy!"

"That's what I'm coming to," said Talbot quietly. "Since tea, Trimble has gone off in the station hack—the Head saw him off at the gates himself—and everybody's heard that one of Trimble's relations is ill, and sent a telegram for him to go at once."

"That's queer, if you like!" said Tom Merry. "But it was a yarn from start to finish!" broke in Manners hotly. "The fat chump completely gave himself away when he came here—lots of fellows must have bowled him out when he tackled them! But—if he's actually gone—it's certainly a funny thing to happen—"

"He tried to spoof me!" said Talbot. "Of course, I told him there was nothing doing. But he appears to have gone the whole hog in Grundy's study—tears and hysterics,

according to Grundy! It's queer—but it's certain now that he's really gone!"

"But what did you come to tell us specially, Talbot?" asked Tom Merry. "Has Grundy been getting on his hind legs?"

"That's it!" assented Talbot. "I thought you'd better come down to the Common-room and hear what he's got to say."

"Grundy's not the kind of chap to say things behind another fellow's back usually!" said Tom.

Talbot smiled.

"I don't think he cares who hears him this time!" he said. "He's properly lost his wool!"

Tom's usually sunny face took on a slightly grimmer expression.

"He'd pretty well lost it in the quad when we walked over to see Figgins & Co.!" he said. "We gave him a jolly good bumping—but apparently that wasn't enough to cure him. What's he been saying, Talbot?"

"You'll hear for yourself," said Talbot. "Of course, he's such an ass that he probably doesn't mean a word of what he says, but he's been putting it so that you're bound to answer, Tom. I thought I'd warn you."

"I'm glad you did, old man!" replied Tom Merry quietly. "I don't want to lose my temper with the idiot unless I'm forced. Ready, you chaps? Let's go down and hear what his majesty has to say about your humble servant!"

They left the study, Talbot looking rather more serious than usual. Manners and Lowther inclined to treat the matter as a joke—the usual method with one of Grundy's outbreaks—and Tom Merry quiet and self-possessed.

"My hat! What the merry thump is this?" ejaculated Monty Lowther, as they passed the notice board in the hall.

"What on earth—" echoed Manners.

Tom and Talbot halted and stared at the board. The sight that met their eyes brought an involuntary grin to all their faces.

Practically obliterating the other notices was a huge double sheet of foolscap, scrawled on in Grundy's well-known fist. The notice was startling, to say the least. It was framed in arresting phrases, and given extra prominence by Grundy's unique variety of spelling. Before Tom Merry & Co.'s gaze loomed the gigantic word:

"MEATING!"

Under that, the notice was short but explicit:

"ALL JUNIERS

Who Are FED UP with INJUSTISS
should attend a GRAND MEATING in
the JUNIER COMMON-ROOM at 8.0
SHARP! SPEAKER: G. A. GRUNDY."

Tom Merry read it through twice and grinned. Manners chuckled, and Lowther roared.

"Come on!" ejaculated Lowther. "We mustn't miss this! It'll be too funny for words!"

"The cheeky ass!" said Manners grinning. "Grundy's developing into a red revolutionary with a vengeance! We shall have to put a stopper on him—hard!"

"Let's get on to the 'meating'!" urged Lowther. "We're missing the joke of the term standing about here. Hallo! That sounds exciting!"

There was a yell from the Common-room as they approached. Evidently Grundy's indignation "meating" was having a stormy passage.

"Now for it!" said Lowther with satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5.

Champion of the Oppressed!

GRUNDY'S booming voice was struggling to make itself heard amid a babel of cheers and cat-calls. Grundy, conducting a meeting, was calculated to cause a storm anywhere, and everybody in the junior Common-room appeared to be shouting at once.

Grundy was red in the face, and his hair stood on end, but he stuck gamely to his task.

"I tell you Tom Merry's played out—a back number! I've always said so; and now we've got a definite instance."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go and eat coke, Grundy!"

"Three groans for Grundy!"

There was a chorus of acclamation, mingled with a series of groans from Tom Merry's supporters.

Tom Merry and his chums slipped in at the open door quite unnoticed, and mingled with the crowd. The Shell captain was grinning. He could hardly take this seriously. It was no worse than one of Grundy's periodical outbursts against the powers that be—a little more vehement than usual, but not worth the trouble of acknowledgment officially.

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"You fellows get in front of me!" whispered Tom. "I'd like to stay and listen to this for a bit!"

The four juniors edged their way into the crush, and encountered Study No. 6 of the Fourth.

"Hallo! Here's Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Have you come to hear Grundy spoutin' about the juniah captaincy? He's weally wound up this time, I believe!"

"Quiet, Gussy!" whispered Tom. "I want to see how Grundy gets on without the silly clump spotting me!"

The great George Alfred was certainly going strong. He had mounted on the table, and was entirely surrounded by a little coterie of loud-voiced supporters—Racke and Crooke, and several cads of their kidney, all eager to take part in any demonstration calculated to undermine the prestige of the captain of the Shell.

Grundy gasped for breath, and flourished his huge fists like flails in his frantic efforts to drive home his arguments—which, to an impartial listener, would have sounded a bit one-sided.

Grundy's methods of arguing were simple. He got hold of one point which appeared to prove his case, and stated it again and again from all angles until the enemy retired from the contest. Grundy's methods seemed to be exhausting him for once.

If he had set out to attract attention, he had succeeded. Every eye was turned towards him, to the complete satisfaction of Tom Merry, modestly hidden by his pals.

"It's time we had a new skipper!" roared Grundy, brandishing an ebony ruler, and glaring round the room in his fiercest manner.

"Quite right, too!"

"Good old Grundy!"

"What's wrong with Tom Merry?"

"What's wrong with Tom Merry?" bellowed Grundy, taking up the point like a candidate at an election meeting. "What I'd like to know is—what's right? He's finished! He's not the kind of fellow we want for captain of the Shell!"

"Rot! Go back to Colney Hatch, Grundy!"

"Carry on, Grundy! That's the stuff to give 'em!"

George Alfred beamed round on his supporters, and endeavoured to quell the chorus of shouts in disagreement with him.

"If you'll shut up a minute, I want to tell you the reason!" he howled.

"He'll burst a blood-vessel in less than a minute!" murmured Lowther.

"He's in earnest, Tom!" said Talbot.

"I can see that!" agreed the Shell captain. "I hope he doesn't spot me for a few minutes. I want to hear the reason."

"This afternoon," bellowed Grundy, "Trimble got a telegram from home—somebody dying—"

There was a lull in the shouting.

Grundy, feeling he had made his point, went on in a more subdued voice.

"He went to Tom Merry—the junior skipper—to ask him for the fare home. The poor kid was unstrung, and he hadn't a bean. What do you think Tom Merry did?"

Grundy paused for dramatic effect.

"Kicked him out of his study!" said someone.

"Right!" said Grundy triumphantly. "That's just what he did do! And that's my reason for saying that Tom Merry's played out as junior skipper! I put it to you fellows—do we want an unfeeling rotter like that to be captain of the junior school?"

There was a chorus in Grundy's favour from the faithful supporters round the table. Several fellows shouted epithets at the speaker. But it seemed as if he had scored.

Grundy stared round wildly, and hastened to clinch his argument.

"I say Tom Merry is a fool! I've got other reasons as well, but any fellow who says he isn't—is a fool, too!"

There was an angry roar from a crowd of Tom's friends, and it was obvious that matters had reached an ugly pitch.

"Have him off that table!"

"Rag the idiot!"

"Down with Grundy!"

The crowd was surging towards the speaker, when a well-known voice broke in:

"Hold on a minute!"

Tom Merry strolled forward, several fellows making room for him to come to the table.

"Well, Grundy," said Tom, with a faint smile. "I'm here. I've been listening to your remarks for some time. I didn't expect you to lose your wool like this, though."

"I'm glad you heard what I've got to say, Tom Merry!" said Grundy grimly, glaring down at Tom. "Have you got anything to say for yourself? I'm in deadly earnest about this, you may as well know—I'm fed-up with your methods of running the Lower School. You're not a bad

chap in your way—I'll grant that! But in every way that matters, you're a fool!"

Tom's face set. His eyes were gleaming. But he restrained himself.

"Before we go any further, might I ask what I've done to offend you, Grundy?" he asked quietly.

"You're a wash-out!" retorted Grundy grimly. "You're not only incapable, but this afternoon you behaved rottenly to a poor kid who was nearly mad with grief! Besides, I've always said you have no judgment, Merry. Look at the cricket. You always leave me out—in case you should be put in the shade by a better man. Pure jealousy!"

"Rats!"

"Keep to the subject, Grundy!"

"What do you know about cricket?"

Grundy turned a fierce glare on the meeting.

"Shut up, you rotters!" he roared.

Then, folding his arms, he re-addressed himself to the Shell captain.

"As I was saying, Tom Merry, not only have you always made a hopeless muck-up of your job, but now you've shown yourself for the crass ass you are. You stand revealed in your true colours. I think you're an unfeeling rotter—there, is that plain enough for you?"

Tom clenched his fists, and his lips were compressed.

"Yes, quite!" he answered calmly. "I won't take the trouble to argue with you about my merits or demerits as junior skipper. As for Trimble—I think it is fairly obvious that the telegram came after tea, not before. It was a queer coincidence that he should have hit on the same yarn during the afternoon. He tried nearly all the Shell—several fellows can corroborate me there—and had no luck. It took an arrant idiot like yourself, Grundy, to swallow his trumped-up yarn."

"Of course, you haven't the sense to see that Trimble

You fellows would see such a difference that you wouldn't have Tom Merry back at any price, I can tell you!"

"That's enough rot, Grundy!" said Tom patiently. "I'm ready when you are."

Grundy's response was to jump down from the table, whereupon a small band of admirers at once surrounded him. It was noticeable, however, that there was no eagerness on the part of Wilkins or Gunn to get to his side. But Grundy had no use for Racke and Crooke, though he was glad of supporters of almost any kind. He glared round for his chums.

"You'll be my seconds, you two," he announced.

"Oh, all right!" mumbled Wilkins.

"For goodness' sake, stop being an ass——" began Gunn desperately.

A glare from Grundy silenced him. It was of little use to oppose the great George Alfred when once he had the bit fairly between his teeth.

"Hold on! You won't have time before prep," shouted Kangaroo, as Tom Merry and his chums moved towards the door. "Better say immediately after."

"That suit you, Grundy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Pity to delay it—still, we don't want a prefect buzzing around," admitted Grundy. "See you in the gym, then—unless you get cold feet by that time!"

Tom Merry made no reply, but left the Common-room. He made no remark to his chums till they were in Study No. 10. As he drew his books towards him and picked up a pen, he paused.

"What do you think, you fellows?" he asked thoughtfully. "I couldn't do less than offer to scrap him, could I?"

"Hardly," admitted Manners.

"You don't seem so keen on it now, Tom," said Lowther.

"To tell the truth, I'm not," said Tom frankly. "Grundy's such an ass, it's a job to be angry with him for long! Still, it's all fixed up now; I can't back out."

Result of "Scarlet Streak" Competition No. 9.

£10 WON BY "GEM" READERS!

IS YOUR NAME HERE?

In this competition no competitor sent in a correct solution. THE FIRST PRIZE OF £5 has therefore been divided between the following two competitors whose efforts each contained one error:

Miss M. Gunn, 15, Waverley Park, Edinburgh.

P. Lewis, 3, Brynhyfryd Street, Pen-y-darén, Merthyr Tydfil.

THE FIVE PRIZES OF £1 EACH have been divided among the following fourteen competitors whose solutions each contained two errors:

A. Arrowsmith, 21, Plantation Row, Ebbw Vale, Mon.

R. Bowler, 27, Alice Street, Newport, Mon.

Mrs. H. L. Bumpus, 22, Grange Park, Ealing, London, W.5.

Miss N. Bumpus, 22, Grange Park, Ealing, London, W.5.

W. L. Burton, 2, Tanfield Street, Virginia Road, Leeds.

O. M. Diver, 55, Rutland Road, S. Hackney, London, E.9.

E. Dixon, 100, Addison Road, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

J. Dixon, 100, Addison Road, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

D. Creagh, Casual Wards, Eastville Institution, Bristol.

G. Hamer, 146, Embden Street, Hulme, Manchester.

W. H. Kernick, 49, Newton Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham.

A. Shaw, 61, Pontypridd Road, Porth, Rhondda, Glam.

H. Shaw, 61, Pontypridd Road, Porth, Rhondda, Glam.

T. Williams, 43, Glanmor Road, Llanelly.

The correct solution was as follows:

Pirate Cove, a beautiful but deserted spot, is at one end of Catalina Island. Very few persons visit the place in the year owing to its position. On the shore is the wreck of an old sailing vessel from which hangs a large anchor. At noon this anchor casts a shadow on the beach, and it is here that the inventor has hidden his plans.

would have gone to the Head the moment he got the news, not combed the Shell passage for a loan. As a matter of fact, the telegram that did come—after tea—was addressed to the Head—Toby told me so—and he broke the news to Trimble. The whole thing is just a coincidence."

"Oh!"

"That alters the case!"

"You idiot, Grundy!"

Several fellows who had not seen the telegraph-boy arrive, and who had half-believed Grundy's indictment against the Shell captain, looked rather sheepish as they heard that information.

"Still, I'm willing to oblige Grundy," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "If he wants a scrap, I'm ready!"

"Chuck it, Tom!" urged Lowther, catching his chum by the arm. "It isn't worth scrapping over. Grundy's only talking out of his hat, as usual, that's all."

"Leave it to me, Monty," said Tom. "Grundy's been getting on his hind legs a bit too much this time. I don't mind being criticised, but I draw the line at being slandered before a crowd of fellows!"

Manners was silent. He could see that Tom Merry had made up his mind, and that argument was useless. Tom Merry was quite cool, but he was justly angry, and felt there could be only one outcome to Grundy's unpleasant remarks.

"You mean that, Merry?" asked Grundy eagerly.

The Shell captain nodded.

"As soon as you like, then, in the gym!" said Grundy importantly. "But see here, Tom Merry. I'm not up against you as a man, but because I don't think you're fitted for the job in hand. Now I've got a fellow in mind——"

"Yourself, I suppose?" said Blake sarcastically.

"Why not?" ejaculated Grundy ferociously. "I'd like to get control of the junior school for a week or two, anyhow."

In Grundy's study there was an argument in progress—rather a one-sided one, as was usual in Study No. 3.

"So you think I've bitten off more than I can chew, George Wilkins?" Grundy was inquiring, in a voice strongly reminiscent of the Bull of Bashan.

"Well, you see——" began Wilkins feebly.

"You haven't enough sense to see anything a foot before your nose!" roared Grundy. "You can't even see that it's time we had a new skipper, and that I'm the man for the job!"

"Are you?" asked Gunn.

"I am!" said Grundy positively. "The hour and the man, you know. The strong, silent dictator who remoulds the nation—I mean, the Lower School. You fellows are rabbits!" said Grundy scornfully.

"Are we?" murmured Wilkins, his eyes straying to the ink-well.

Gunn had just filled it, and Wilkins was reflecting how pleasant it would be to pour the contents down the back of Grundy's neck. That was a treat that was likely to be denied to Wilkins and Gunn, however. Life would not have been worth living in the study after such an outrage.

"Yes, rabbits! That's you fellows all over!" laughed Grundy derisively. "You haven't even the pluck to back me up. You'd think a dictator had a right to expect support from his inferiors, at least!"

"You're so polite, Grundy!" said Gunn, getting out his prep.

Grundy paused, perhaps to digest that remark. Then he plumped heavily into the armchair.

"Blessed nuisance having to wait till after prep!" he growled. "What's prep, I'd like to know? You fellows had better do mine, or there will be a row in the morning."

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"Nothing new in that!" observed Wilkins caustically.

"In what?" asked Grundy excitedly.

"In us doing your prep!" growled Gunn savagely. "For goodness' sake, give your lower jaw a rest for a bit, Grundy! How's a fellow to do Latin prose with your bull voice booming all the time?"

Grundy glared, but relapsed into silence. That, he reflected, was the kind of support a fellow got from his followers and subordinates on the eve of a decisive encounter. Well, he would show them!

CHAPTER 6.

The Fight!

"HERE he comes!"

"Here comes the conquering hero!"

"Good old Grundy!"

The blare of a dozen mouth-organs, over-weighted but not discouraged by Herries' cornet, greeted Grundy as he entered the gym with his little coterie.

A crowd had gathered already. The morrow would probably reveal a good many cases of scamped prep, with painful consequences to the "scampers," but evidently a number of fellows had decided that it was worth it to get a good view of the contest.

The big vaulting-horse supported half a dozen juniors, none of whom had a very safe perch, while the parallel bars accommodated several others.

Reilly and Hammond were clinging like monkeys to the wall-bars, whence they could see all that went on, and Roy-lance was adventurously swinging in one of the rings, his leg through the ring, his hands gripping the rope.

Grundy smiled appreciatively as the storm of cheers and cat-calls arose, and stalked majestically to the ring. He sat down in his corner, and allowed Wilkins and Gunn to help him off with his jacket.

"Tom Merry's late!" he observed grimly.

"We're quite five minutes early!" said Wilkins. "Don't worry about Tom Merry. He'll turn up all right."

"You're better off while he isn't here, if you only knew it," murmured Gunn, fluttering a towel to cool Grundy's crimson features.

"Eh?" asked Grundy suspiciously.

"I hope you win, old chap!" said Gunn sweetly. "But if you ask me, I don't think you will."

"Fine pals you fellows are—I don't think!" snorted Grundy. "Never mind. You'll rally round fast enough when I'm junior captain, I'll bet!"

"Oh, you idiot!" groaned Wilkins. "The only chap who's ever likely to vote for you as junior skipper is yourself! If you lick Tom Merry, you'll be no nearer the captaincy, you fathead!"

"When I've licked Tom Merry," said Grundy deliberately, "he won't have a leg to stand on. That'll be the first step; after that I shall down him easily enough!"

"Talk of angels—" said Gunn.

There was a roar as Tom Merry and his pals came in and shoved their way to the roped-in space.

"What kind of a wreath would you like, Grundy?" yelled Monty Lowther humorously.

Grundy did not deign to reply.

"Let 'em wait!" he muttered grimly.

The gloves were produced, and Kangaroo appointed referee. Blake kept time, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's expensive "ticker" to check his own by.

Tom Merry threw off his jacket and sat quite calmly in his corner. He hardly seemed to see Grundy, who was sidgiting in his chair, impatient for the fray.

To Grundy, this was the chance of a lifetime—the chance he had longed for—to "down" Tom Merry before a crowd of fellows who would never forget it. Hitherto, Grundy had always rather liked the cheery Shell captain, in spite of the frequent criticism he levelled at him; but over the affair of Trimble, Grundy refused to see that he was in the wrong, and intended to show Tom Merry up in his true light.

"Time, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus, over Blake's shoulder.

"Time!" announced Blake officially.

The combatants advanced and shook hands, and the scrap commenced.

Grundy went away with a rush, as usual. He seemed determined to sweep Tom Merry off his feet by the sheer ferocity of his attack, and in some measure he succeeded.

The Shell captain was hard put to it to ward off Grundy's sledge-hammer blows, and was obliged to retreat for the greater part of the first round. He was breathing hard at the interval, having stopped one or two of Grundy's punches, but the latter was breathing harder, although untouched.

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But as Blake called "Time!" again, Tom Merry stepped up smartly to meet Grundy's lumbering attack. This time Grundy's flail-like fists did not carry all before them. The energy he had put into his initial rush seemed to have evaporated, and Tom was able to get home with a left and right that made Grundy grunt. Tom Merry followed this up with a merry tattoo on his opponent's ribs, and finally sent him to the floor with a right to the jaw. Grundy was just sitting up again at the call of "Time!"

His seconds rescued him, and while Wilkins swabbed a sponge over his face, Gunn did valiant work with the towel. Grundy recovered quickly, and was practically himself again for the next round.

Tom Merry advanced warily this time, expecting Grundy to make a bid for a decision by repeating his "bull-at-a-haystack" tactics, but he was disappointed. The second round seemed to have taught the egregious Shell fellow something, and he contented himself with an occasional swing which invariably missed its mark, taking in exchange a good deal of punishment from Tom Merry.

Lowther grinned as Tom sank back in his chair at the end of the round.

"You've got him easily, Tom," he whispered. "He hasn't a rush left in him; you've only got to wait your chance!"

Tom nodded without speaking.

Grundy, disregarding the advice of his seconds, came into action again with all sails set, so to speak, and renewed his policy of "shock" fighting. Tom Merry stood fast under the attack, and a good many hard knocks were given and taken.

There was a gasp as Grundy, catching Tom Merry napping, connected with a right to the jaw which sent the Shell captain reeling to the ropes. Tom Merry felt his chin dazedly, and held Grundy off for the remainder of the round by sheer instinct.

"My hat!" gasped Gunn, as Tom Merry staggered to his corner. "If the round had lasted another minute you'd have knocked him out, Grundy!"

"Be careful," advised Wilkins. "He's been playing with you so far. Look out for his left!"

In Tom Merry's corner, Manners and Lowther were impressing on their chum that he must go all out to finish off Grundy at the earliest possible moment.

"He nearly had you then, Tom," said Lowther seriously. "You've been taking it too easily. Show him something different this time, old chap!"

Tom rubbed his chin tenderly and nodded.

"Time!"

Grundy came straight up with the intention of "mixing things" at once, but he found Tom prepared for him, and captured a jab in the ribs that made him gasp.

"Go it, Tom!" roared Lowther, flourishing his towel.

"Now's your chance!" said Manners.

The Shell captain needed no encouraging. He was driving Grundy before him now, his opponent's fists feebly attempting to keep out the rain of blows. An easy opening saw Tom Merry's right crash straight between the eyes, and Grundy went down heavily against the ropes.

"One—two—three—" counted Kangaroo.

"Get up, Grundy!" hissed Wilkins.

"Go on, Grundy, old man—get up!" urged Gunn, and then added aside to Wilkins: "He's done!"

As if to prove Gunn wrong, Grundy rolled over and sat up, feeling dimly that his forehead had been driven through to the back of his head.

"Mum-mum-mum-my hat!" he gasped, staring idiotically at Kangaroo. Then suddenly his ears caught the word "Nine!" and he scrambled determinedly to his feet. He swayed uncertainly for a few seconds, while Tom Merry chivalrously stood with his hands down, waiting for Grundy to recommence.

"Time!" called Blake, and there was a sigh of relief from Grundy's seconds. It was noticeable that his small band of supporters was beginning now to fade into the background.

Racke's voice was heard offering two to one on Tom Merry, and there was a chorus:

"Shut up, you shady rotter!"

"I'd take you, Racke," grinned Cardew; "only I think you must know something exclusive about the form of the men!"

Racke grunted. It was pretty obvious now that nothing short of a miracle could give Grundy the victory.

"Sixth round!" murmured Herries. "Grundy's standing up to Tom Merry jolly well. I didn't think he had it in him!"

Grundy was certainly putting all he knew into the sixth round, but he was having a bad time of it. Tom Merry was fighting in real earnest now, and science and superb footwork told heavily against Grundy's blundering methods. He kept his feet through the round, though, and gulped in breath for the next.

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"Chuck it, old man!" advised Gunn. "You've done jolly well! He's the junior champion, you know, and you can't expect to lick him!"

"I'll try!" said Grundy doggedly.

He summoned all his remaining energy for a fierce rush at the beginning of the seventh round, and forced Tom Merry on the defensive. For a moment the Shell captain's guard lifted, and, more by luck than judgment, Grundy's fist crashed through the gap and Tom rolled on the floor.

"Man down!" roared Mellish, who in a misguided moment had taken on Racke's bet. "Good old Grundy!"

There was a silence among Tom Merry's supporters, broken only by Lowther's and Manners' frantic urging.

"Seven—eight—" counted Kangaroo.

Tom Merry blinked, and struggled up with a super-human effort. He realised, rather late, that he had been too careless. His heart was not in the fight, but he had to go on; the alternative steeled his nerves and steadied his feet. He held Grundy off till the end of the round, taking his time to recover.

"And you told me to chuck up!" gasped Grundy, in his corner. "Why, I've got him in the hollow of my hand! I'll have him in the next round, as sure as anything!"

Wilkins and Gunn made no reply. Certainly, Grundy was putting up a far better show than his most hopeful supporter could honestly have expected, and equally certainly Tom Merry had been badly shaken by that last terrific uppercut.

The combatants came up grimly for the next round, both determined that it should be the last.

Grundy led off with rather feeble rush, but Tom Merry coolly knocked his fists up and got to work in real earnest. A flashing left sent Grundy staggering back, and a right drove him into the ropes. He gasped painfully, and made one more desperate rush at his man. Tom staggered under a heavy right, and there was a gasp. Then, as if actuated by a spring, Tom Merry leapt forward and delivered a perfect left on the point of Grundy's jaw.

The Shell fellow went down with a crash, and Kangaroo began to count, but it was not necessary.

Tom Merry, his lip bleeding, stood quietly while the referee counted Grundy out. Monty Lowther helped the Shell captain on with his jacket. Wilkins and Gunn supported Grundy as he sat up, blinking dazedly round him.

"What—who—who—won?" he asked blankly.

"It's all right, old chap!" answered Wilkins kindly. "Lean on my shoulder!"

"But—but Tom Merry must have knocked me out!" ejaculated Grundy, as if he could hardly believe his senses.

Gunn nodded.

"You did splendidly, old man!" he said warmly. "Better than any of us expected. How's your jaw?"

Grundy put a hand to his chin, and gave a gasp.

"Ow! It feels as if it's in pieces!" he growled. "But where's Tom Merry? I want to speak to him!"

"Here I am, Grundy!" said Tom, summoning up a smile.

Grundy eyed him critically—as well as a half-closed eye and a rapidly-swelling nose would allow.

"You've beaten me fair and square, Merry!" he said. "I didn't think you could, but you've done it! I may have said some things I didn't mean about you, but my opinion of you as junior captain is the same! I don't bear malice if you don't, and there's my hand. Is that good enough for you?"

"Quite, old chap!" said Tom, shaking hands warmly. "We can forget this. I wasn't very keen on scrapping, but—well, perhaps it was best, as it happened."

"Good man!" said Grundy approvingly, and suffered Wilkins and Gunn to lead him away to a bath-room, where they endeavoured, somewhat unsuccessfully, to remove traces of the meeting.

"Queer chap, Grundy!" said Lowther thoughtfully, as Tom Merry and his chums followed more slowly. "His brain does work, apparently, but it works thumping slow! If it takes a first-class licking to teach him that Trimble pulled his leg, he looks like getting hurt before he learns much!"

"Grundy's all right!" said Tom cheerily. "He's got a punch on him! Is my chin quite straight, Manners?"

Manners gave his chum a quizzical glance.

"Nearly," he said. "It'll come straight if you give it time. You shouldn't have left so many openings, you ass. You fairly asked to be knocked out!"

"Oh, rot!" said Tom.

In the bath-room Wilkins and Gunn tactfully refrained from inquiring whether this was the finish of Grundy's career in opposition to Tom Merry, but quite unexpectedly Grundy vouchsafed information.

"I'm going on!" he announced darkly. "When I feel better!" he added hastily.

Wilkins and Gunn marvelled at their leader's remarkable tenacity, but took leave to have their doubts privately. Still, as Grundy said, they would see.

CHAPTER 7.

Grundy's Challenge!

"I'M determined—"

Grundy paused.

It was some days after the fight with Tom Merry, and although the loser had recovered, he still bore plentiful traces of the conflict on his face.

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Wilkins looked up with a resigned expression from the congenial task of oiling his cricket-bat. Gunn, who was deep in a book, paid no heed. But Grundy was quite oblivious as to whether he had any listeners or not. Apparently Grundy was thinking, and his thoughts were crystallising into words.

"I'm determined—" he repeated dreamily, without looking at Wilkins.

Wilkins gave his attention to the bat again, and Gunn turned over a page.

"To chuck Tom Merry out of the captaincy yet!" finished Grundy, suddenly coming to earth and glaring round for encouragement from his chums. His glare intensified as he noted that neither was paying the slightest attention to what he was saying.

"Fine pals, you chaps are—I don't think!" he remarked, with patient sarcasm. "I suppose you haven't heard a word!"

Wilkins continued to oil his bat, but replied meekly:

"Oh, we heard you, Grundy. Couldn't help hearing a fellow with a voice like yours!" he added humorously.

"Gunny heard him—didn't you, Gunn?"

"I wish you silly idiots would stop jabbering!" growled Gunn crossly. Gunn, like many other people, cherished the conviction that all other mortals should preserve silence when he was reading.

"Stop jabbering!" repeated Grundy, more in sorrow than in anger. "Stop jabbering! That's what I get from my own study-mates! It's a wonder I ever manage to keep my high ideals in front of me at all, dragged down by a pair of clods like you two!"

"Thanks, Grundy!" murmured Wilkins.

"It's hard luck on a really brainy and energetic fellow," pursued Grundy, evidently in a mood of deep self-pity, "to be shackled throughout his career with unfaithful pals. Just when I need you most, too!" he added reproachfully.

"There's no need to talk out of your hat, Grundy!" said Wilkins. "You know we'll stand by you if there's anything wrong. No bad news from home, or anything?"

"Of course not!" growled Grundy. "I've just said what I meant—if you'd been listening—only, of course, you weren't! I'm going to oust Tom Merry!"

"Oh!" said Wilkins, in a tone of despair.

Gunn closed his book with a resigned sigh.

"I suppose you two owls are going to keep on all the evening!" he said. "It's no use trying to read in this study! What's the trouble?"

Grundy turned a swollen nose and a purple eye on his other henchman. Those facial disfigurements had earned Grundy a little homily from Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, on the lamentable practice of fighting, following which the master had suggested a penance of five hundred lines. Tom Merry, who was not very visibly marked, escaped notice—a fact which added fuel to Grundy's fire.

"I want suggestions," said Grundy impressively. "For the moment I'm short of an idea—an unusual occurrence with me—and I want to know if you chaps can think of anything that might help me to down that rotter from the captaincy!"

"No good asking you what's wrong with Tom Merry, I suppose?" yawned Gunn.

Grundy began to glare afresh.

"You know the answer to that question as well as I do, William Gunn!"

"Oh, of course!" agreed Gunn. "Let's see. What exactly do you want to do to him? Waylay him in a dark lane and strangle him, for instance? Or get him kidnapped and held to ransom? Or," continued Gunn enthusiastically, "bind and gag him and throw him into the Rhyl to drown? How would that do?"

"If you fellows could talk sense," suggested Grundy impatiently, "we might get something done! I've got to beat him fair and square, so that all the school can see it done, too! How? That's the difficulty!"

"It's only half an hour to dorm," said Gunn. "You might challenge him then, and have another scrap. That's the best I can think of!"

"You think I can't lick him, I suppose?" roared Grundy indignantly. "I admit he beat me square enough, but I wasn't in my true form. I was out of training, too!"

"If I were you, old chap, I should chuck up the whole idea!" said Wilkins earnestly. "Tom Merry's the best chap for the job in the lower school, and you ought to be able to see it, even with your intellect! Of course, I know, you're handicapped that way—"

Wilkins broke off suddenly. Grundy had risen to his feet and was pushing back his cuffs in a business-like manner.

"Where will you have it, Wilkins?" he inquired grimly.

"And which would you prefer to go out of—the door or the window?"

"Here, I say—" began Wilkins, in alarm.

"Hold on, Grundy!" interposed Gunn hastily.

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Grundy advanced on Wilkins, and at the same time Gunn came to the rescue.

"Now, you rotter—"

"Look here, Grundy—get hold of him, Gunn!"

Wilkins resisted violently, and Gunn lent a vigorous hand. There was a short, sharp struggle, and then Grundy, much to his surprise, found himself grasped firmly and whirled to the door.

"Now," gasped Wilkins excitedly, "you can go quietly or be chucked out; but, anyway, you're going!"

"I'll—I'll smash you!" roared Grundy. "Lemme gerrat you—that's all! I'll—"

"Out with him!" said Wilkins.

"Oh, let the idiot stop!" said Gunn, relenting. "He's had enough from Tom Merry—we needn't begin on him, too! Let's leave him to it!"

"Oh, all right!" agreed Wilkins, his warlike ardour evaporating.

Grundy, protesting volubly, was whirled, not without difficulty, back into his chair, and dumped therein with a crash.



Grundy took an extra long run, swung his arm with terrific force, and the ball flew. "Hi! Tom Merry!" The school captain gave a convulsive start at the sound of Trimble's voice and swiped at the ball a second too late! A crash from behind told its own tale. (See Chapter 10.)

"There!" panted Gunn. "Let that be a lesson to you, you ass! For two pins we'd have chucked you out on your neck!"

"You rotters! You needn't call yourselves my pals after this!" roared Grundy. "As for chucking me out—we'll see about that! Out you go!"

He leapt up and charged at his chums, ire gleaming in his eye. In a twinkling, Wilkins and Gunn had slipped out of the study, and the door slammed in Grundy's face, missing his bulbous nasal organ by only a fraction of an inch. He dragged the door open, but the passage was empty. Wilkins and Gunn had stood not upon the order of their going, but had gone at once!

"Huh!" grunted Grundy. "Nice pals, I don't think! Now I'll have to think out a wheeze myself. Not that they'd have been any good, if they'd stopped!"

Meanwhile, Wilkins and Gunn went down to the Common-room, where they met Blake & Co., of Study No. 6, just coming up.

"Gwendy given up his remarkable ideah of turnin' Tom Mewwy out of his posish, Wilkins?" asked Gussy.

"Not yet!" grinned Wilkins. "He's like a bear with a sore ear, this evening!"

"Fairly raging!" said Gunn. "Keep clear of our study, unless you want to be bitten!"

The chums of Study No. 6 grinned, and passed on up the stairs.

"Poor old Grundy!" chuckled Blake. "He's taking it hard, and no mistake!"

"Let's look in!" suggested Herries. "We'll chance getting bitten—and we're passing his study. I like to hear Grundy roar when he's cross!"

"Perhaps the poor fellow doesn't feel up to visitahs?" suggested Arthur Augustus mildly.

Blake settled the question by knocking thunderously on the panels of Study No. 3. There was an unintelligible grunt from within.

"He means us to go in!" said Digby.

Blake shoved open the door, and the four juniors looked into the study. They did not see anything like what they

"Gwunday weally does take the cake!" said Arthur Augustus, in wonder.

"You're landed with it, Blake!" grinned Digby.

"Why, I'll ram it down his neck!" gasped Blake, recovering the power of speech, which for a moment had deserted him. "Does he think the Fourth has taken up fagging for the Shell, the cheeky dummy?"

"Cut along, there!" exclaimed Grundy irritably, scribbling away industriously on a fresh sheet. "And shut the door behind you!"

Blake gulped, and grasped the letter. He aimed very carefully at Grundy's bullet head, bent over his work. But before Blake could throw it, the Shell fellow looked up again.

"How about you, Blake?" he asked, quite genially. "Care to play in my team? You're not a bad batsman in your way, you know!" he added encouragingly. "Your bowling's weak, but I've seen your form with the bat, and you're not bad. Not up to my style, naturally. But almost anything is good enough when I'm in the team. Can I count on you?"

"Bats in the belfry!" said Digby, in an awed voice.

"Been coming on for a long time!" said Herries sympathetically.

"Poor old chap!" said Gussy, much concerned. "I've always expected it, but this is wathah sudden, even for Gwunday!"

"And you, D'Arcy!" continued Grundy briskly. "You're a regular tailor's dummy to look at, but you can play cricket, after a style. I'll shove you down, if you like!"

"You're too kind, deah boy!" breathed Gussy faintly.

"I'm afraid I can't find room for Herries or Digby," said Grundy, shaking his head. "Not good enough. I set a standard, though it doesn't matter much when I'm playing! Must have somebody who knows which end of the bat to hold! That'll do, then; I'll count on you, Blake and D'Arcy. Now, you'd better take that challenge along to Tom Merry. Hurry up, or you'll be too late!"

"That—that challenge!" repeated Blake, a light breaking on him. "Is—is this a challenge?"

"Of course," said Grundy, without looking up. "I've thought it out, and it's the only way I can make Tom Merry understand that he's unfitted for the post of junior captain of St. Jim's. When I've given him a good licking on the cricket field—simply held him up to the scorn of all the fellows—he'll feel too small to hang on to the job in the face of opposition. I shall just walk in and take over the reins!" announced Grundy modestly. "The right man in the right place, you know!"

"But—but who on earth is playing in your team?" asked Blake.

"You are, for one—and D'Arcy makes another!" said Grundy, in surprise. "Haven't you just agreed to play? I've put you both down, and I shall expect you to put in some practice!" warned Grundy. "We must be in good form to beat Tom Merry's crowd to a frazzle!"

"Suppose Tom Merry doesn't accept the challenge?" inquired Digby.

"He's bound to!" said Grundy confidently. "Otherwise I shall say to his face that he's afraid."

"Well, my hat!" breathed Blake. "So that's the next move, is it? And you've put Gussy and me down to play in your rotten scratch team—making asses of ourselves with Grundy as leader! Ye gods and little fishes! Count us out, Grundy, for goodness' sake! You'll be the death of me yet!"

"Yaas, wathah!" put in Arthur Augustus warmly. "You can delete my name from your list as soon as you like, Gwunday! But—but this is weally a seweam, bai Jove!"

"Well, I never saw such idiots!" said Grundy frankly.

"Here's me offering you chaps a priceless chance of licking Tom Merry under my leadership, and you refuse it! Well, you'll be sorry some day, you bet! I'm going straight ahead, and I'll find plenty of supporters. If you're not joining up, don't stand there jawing and wasting time—take that challenge along to Tom Merry."

"You cheeky idiot!" roared Blake indignantly. "I'll be blown if I'll run errands for a Shellfish! Take your own rotten notes!"

"Hold on, Blake!" said Digby. "This should be interesting when Tom Merry gets hold of it! Let's stretch a point for once, and oblige Grundy!"

Blake grinned.

"Something in that!" he agreed. "Come on, then, I'll take it, after all, Grundy. Say 'Thank you!' nicely."

Grundy, deep in his writing again, had heard nothing.

"Eh? Not gone yet, you fags?" he ejaculated. "For goodness' sake, get a move on! Never saw such kids for hanging about wasting time!"

Blake breathed hard, but suffered himself to be led off by his pals. They arrived at Study No. 10, and in response

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had expected. Grundy was in the study, but he was not striding up and down the room with foam falling from his lips, as Digby had playfully suggested.

He was doing quite an unusual thing for Grundy—sitting quite studiously at the table, with a sheet of impot-paper before him, writing with a great deal of concentrated effort and a squeaky nib.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Blake disgustedly.

"Who's that?" snapped Grundy, looking up. "Oh, you, Blake! Good! You'll do as well as anybody else. Just run along with this to Tom Merry, will you?"

Without waiting for Blake to reply, Grundy folded the sheet of impot-paper and slipped it into an envelope. He addressed this in his sprawling handwriting to, "Tom Merry, Junier Kaptin, St. Jim's"—and tossed it across to Blake.

"Buck up!" he admonished. "I want him to get it before dorm—and that's only a few minutes!"

to the Shell captain's cheery "Come in!" swarmed into the study.

Lowther indicated two vacant chairs with a flourish.

"Welcome, strangers!" he announced. "Be seated, my children! There's only two chairs, but the window sill and the coal-scuttle are at your service!"

"We've got something to interest you fellows here," said Blake. "It's a challenge from Grundy."

"What's that?" asked Tom Merry.

"Grundy's on the war-path again!" grinned Digby.

"Again?" ejaculated Tom. "Does he want another scrap? He hasn't got over the last one yet!"

"Not this time!" grinned Blake. "We haven't seen what's inside, but Grundy told us it's a cricket challenge. He tried to get us to join his team, the silly ass! I believe he's in earnest, though!"

The captain of the Fourth handed Grundy's missive to Tom Merry, who grinned at the address. He slit it open, and drew out a sheet of impot paper with deep interest. The other fellows crowded round to read it. There was a chorus of chuckles as the document—quite a long and involved one for Grundy's intellect to have conceived—was revealed.

"To Tom Merry, Junior Kaptin of St. Jim's."

"I, the undersigned, do hereby challenge Tom Merry to a cricket match, to prove what an awful ass Tom Merry (aforsed) is on the cricket field."

In the event of Tom Merry's eleven being defeated, I shall be entitled to a place in the junior eleven against Rookwood. In the event of Tom Merry failing to make more runs than me, the sed Tom Merry shall resign from the kaptincy in favour of me.

"This is a challenge!!! If you don't aksept it I shall know what you are made of!!!!"

"(sined)

"G. A. GRUNDY."

"Well, my word!" said Tom Merry, as he finished that remarkable screed.

"He means it all right!" grinned Blake. "But what a nerve! For sheer, undiluted cheek, Grundy prances off with the whole giddy biscuit factory!"

"The blithering idiot!" growled Manners. "Just as if we can take any notice of this! What'd we look like—the junior eleven turning out against a crowd of cripples such as Grundy would get together—if he ever got a full team at all!"

"The awful chump!" said Tom Merry. "I suppose I shall have to reply to this!"

"Chuck it in the wastepaper-basket!" advised Blake.

"I know. I'll stick a reply on the board," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "The whole school ought to know about this—it's too good to keep. I'll decline the challenge officially, and everybody will see it!"

"Good egg!" grinned Lowther.

Kildare looked into the study, and rapped out:

"Bed-time, kids!"

The juniors responded in unison.

"Right-ho, Kildare! Just coming!"

"I'll put up the notice to-morrow!" said Tom Merry. "But we can tell the fellows in the dorm. Don't say a word to Grundy to-night!"

The juniors chuckled.

"Oh, no!"

"Rather not!"

In the dormitory Grundy eyed Tom Merry with grim satisfaction as he undressed.

Tom gave no sign that he was aware of Grundy's scrutiny—but Grundy was quite happy.

"He's got the wind up!" he reflected pleasantly. "He doesn't know what to say to my challenge, and is trying to think of a way out! Let him get on with it!"

And Grundy turned into bed to sleep the sleep of the just.

A few beds away Tom Merry slept soundly till rising-bell, in spite of the shadow of Grundy's challenge.

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy's Brain-Wave!

MR. CECIL RACKETT, the crack batsman of the Loamshire County cricket eleven, was feeling pleased with life in general, and Wayland in particular.

The match with the Wayland team had lasted only one day, leaving the Loamshire cricketers the rest of the week to do as they liked. It made a welcome break in a season which Mr. Rackett found all too long, and here, apart from

a crowd of autograph-hunters and camera-fiends, who cornered him every time he ventured out, there was nothing to worry him.

The county batsman was enjoying an evening pipe on the veranda of the Blue Boar, an old-fashioned hostel in a quiet corner of the town which had taken his eye. Most of the team preferred the big, up-to-date hotel in the High Street.

It was a very warm summer's evening, and to Mr. Rackett, one of the most pleasant he had spent for some time. He puffed contentedly at his pipe, and glanced casually along the dusty road leading to St. Jim's.

Mr. Rackett had heard of St. Jim's, and intended to pay a quiet visit on the morrow to get a glimpse of any cricket that was going on. Mr. Rackett was keenly interested in public school cricket, but he had no love for the limelight.

He watched a figure ride into view on a dusty bicycle, and glanced at the boy who alighted from it with idle curiosity. George Grundy, for he was the cyclist, was staring up at him in a manner that could only be described as rude. The county cricketer smiled slightly. He was used to being stared at.

"That you, Mr. Rackett?"

Grundy's voice sounded important, and Mr. Rackett nodded.

"Good! Wait a tick!"

Grundy disappeared inside the inn, and Mr. Rackett resumed his pipe, somewhat mystified.

"A message, I wonder?" he mused. "Anyway, we shall soon see."

The french windows behind him were opened, and Grundy was ushered on to the veranda.

"Gentleman to see you, sir! Says he has important business, sir."

"Right-ho!" said Mr. Rackett. "Sit down, my lad, whenever you are!"

Grundy sat down on a chair opposite the cricketer, and subjected him to a severe scrutiny.

"So you're the county batsman?" he asked at length.

"I had that impression," observed Mr. Rackett dryly.

Grundy proffered his hand, and the cricketer winced a little at Grundy's grip—he had a small hand, and Grundy's way with small hands was to treat them as if they wanted crushing.

"You've brought a message from someone, I presume?" inquired Mr. Rackett a little grimly.

"Message? Of course not! I've got a proposition to put before you, sir," answered Grundy earnestly.

"Oh!"

Mr. Rackett appeared rather bored at that information, but signed to the junior to continue.

"It's like this, you see," went on Grundy. "I'm a splendid cricketer—a ripping batsman and a deadly bowler—but I can't get my just deserts at school because of the jealousy of the junior captain."

"No," said Mr. Rackett sympathetically.

"You've got some sense! You'll understand, sir," said Grundy, with satisfaction. "You see what I mean. Here's me, as fine a cricketer as ever St. Jim's has produced, kept in the background by nothing but petty jealousy. It makes me tired! But I'm kicking. I've finished knuckling under to Tom Merry. I'm out to lower his colours for good! You get me, sir?"

Mr. Rackett was eyeing his visitor quietly. Grundy interested him.

"You haven't tried just recently, by any chance?" he asked casually.

Grundy flushed, and instinctively caressed his nose.

"Oh, you've spotted that!" he ejaculated. "Well, if you want to know, I have—and he licked me. I was out of training; but that doesn't make any difference. He handled me fair and square in the gym. I'm not jibbing at that; but I'm not beaten yet by a long chalk!"

George Alfred, breathless with his eloquence, paused.

"That's the spirit!" remarked the cricketer. "But, if you'll excuse me, I don't quite see why you've come here, butting in on my privacy. Perhaps you'll explain?"

"That's what I'm coming to," interrupted Grundy hastily. "I've hit on a plan to bring Tom Merry down off his pedestal for good—he'll never be able to hold his head up after this—and I want your help, sir!"

"My help?"

Mr. Rackett raised his eyebrows.

"This is my idea," explained Grundy modestly. "I'm getting up a team—they're a pretty job lot, as a matter of fact, but that won't matter—and we're going to lick Tom Merry's eleven to a frazzle! You get me, of course?"

"I get you," said Mr. Rackett slowly. "But this Tom Merry, I suppose, as he is junior captain, he has a pretty good team to call on—what?"

"Not bad!" assented Grundy grudgingly. "But nothing like the one I'm putting into the field. I'm the star player, sir, and, with my wonderful talent, we're bound to win!"

"You have my best wishes," said Mr. Rackett kindly.

"I want something more than that," pursued Grundy doggedly. "I—I suppose you're not open to take a pupil for a couple of days, are you?"

Mr. Rackett's expression gave no indication of his thoughts, and Grundy plunged on.

"I can offer you a pretty good fee—I happen to be pretty flush just now—name your own figure, in fact! Don't think I want teaching the rudiments of the game!" said Grundy hastily. "But I'm out of practice, and I want a little expert tuition to make doubly sure of being at the top of my form. You understand, Mr. Rackett?"

"Quite," observed the professional.

"So you're willing to give me a few tips—say, to-night and to-morrow—you're going away, after that, of course—and I'll pay anything reasonable," said Grundy eagerly.

"Suppose we say fifty guineas a lesson?" suggested Mr. Rackett solemnly.

Grundy jumped.

"Good heavens! You don't mean that? I couldn't pay anything like so much as that—"

His voice trailed off.

"I might take forty," mused Mr. Rackett, with a very thoughtful expression on his face.

Grundy groaned. His high hopes appeared to be dashed to the ground, if this was the professional's fee for a single lesson!

"Or I might, as a special favour, give you a few tips, as you put it, for nothing," concluded Mr. Rackett.

"What! You—you were joking?"

Grundy's face was wreathed in smiles.

"See here, young man!" said Mr. Rackett sternly. "You've made a big mistake in thinking you could persuade me to give you lessons by offering a high fee. It's a big enough job to play, let alone give lessons on the game. But I don't mind putting you on the right road. I've half an hour to spare, as it happens, and there's a lawn at the back of this place that the landlord will let us play on."

"You're a brick, sir!" said Grundy gratefully.

They repaired at once to the back of the inn, where, as the professional had said, there was a convenient strip of grass, nicely protected by a high fence, where a wicket could be pitched.

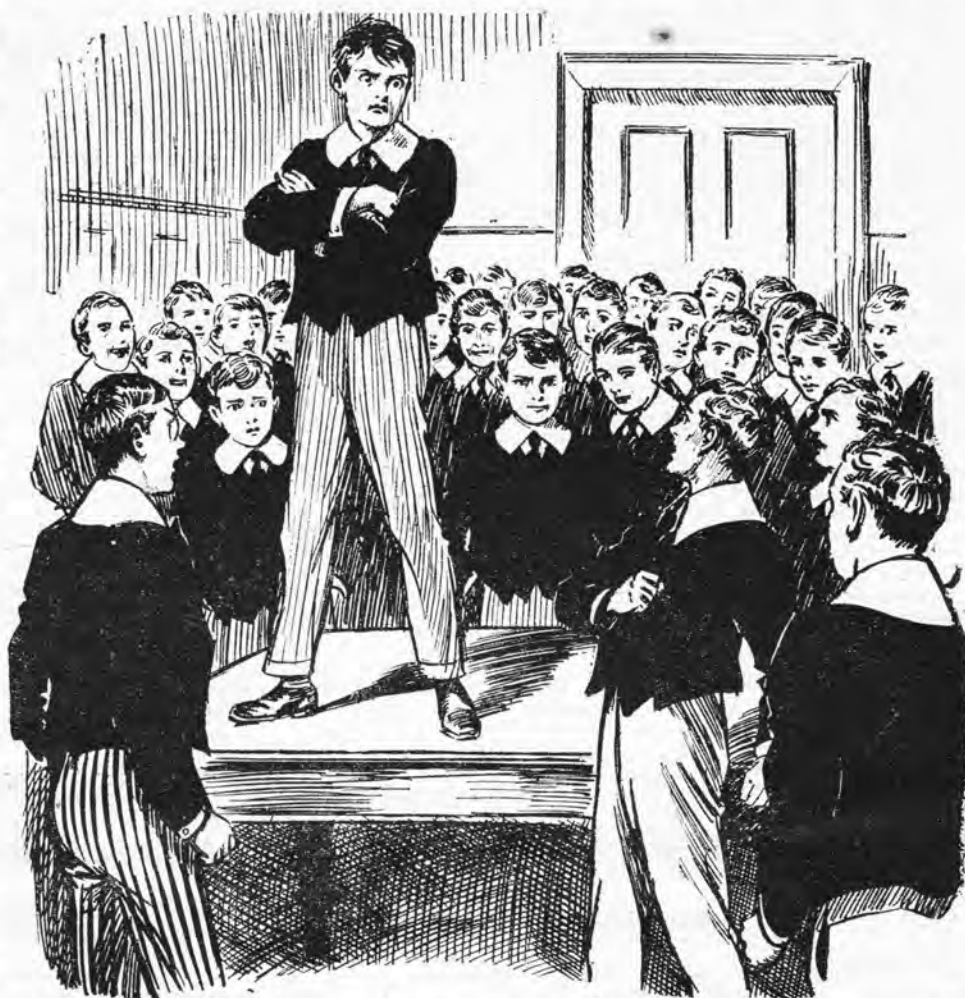
"Got your bat?" asked Mr. Rackett, as Grundy threw off his jacket.

"I've just bought a new one," explained Grundy. "It's on my bike. I got a late pass to go and get it; it was sent down by a London firm. Sha'n't keep you a second."

The Shell fellow returned almost immediately, bearing a brand-new bat, and he presented it proudly to the pro.

"Quite a nice little thing!" said Mr. Rackett. "Let's see if you can use it."

Grundy had thoughtfully brought some stumps and a ball with him, and a wicket was soon prepared.



Folding his arms, George Alfred Grundy faced the Shell captain. "As I was saying, Tom Merry," he said coolly, "not only have you always made a hopeless muck-up of your job, but now you've shown yourself for the crass ass you are. You stand revealed in your true colours. I think you're an unfeeling rotter—there, is that plain enough for you?" Tom Merry advanced towards the table, with clenched fists. (See Chapter 5.)

"Get to the crease," said Mr. Rackett. "I'll just trundle you a few balls to see how you shape."

Grundy strode to the wicket, gripped his new bat, and took his stance.

"Ready!" called Grundy.

"What about centre?" asked Mr. Rackett.

"Centre?" repeated Grundy, rather blankly.

"Bit to the right?" suggested the pro.

Grundy obediently shifted his bat an inch.

"That's better. But what in the name of Jehosaphat are you standing like that for?"

Grundy went a rich shade in crimson. He had adopted his usual stance, but apparently it was not the right one. He submitted for the next few minutes to having his shoulders put into position, his hands adjusted round the handle of the bat, and his legs planted in the correct relations to each other. With a final admonition to "keep the weight balanced equally on both feet," Mr. Rackett departed to his end of the pitch, and proceeded to bowl the first ball.

Grundy resolved to do or die when that ball came down. He had felt like a fag in the second while Mr. Rackett had punched and pommelled him into some semblance of a stance, and now he was determined to take it all out of Mr. Rackett's deliveries.

He eyed the ball with great care as it came towards him, swung his bat fiercely, and gave a wild howl as the ball shot off the bat on to his unguarded shin.

Mr. Rackett heard the crack and held his sides. Grundy, wishing devoutly that he had not omitted to bring some pads, danced on one leg and massaged his shin.

"When you're ready," intimated the county player, "chuck that ball back, and I'll give you another. Try and hit this one!"

Grundy gingerly took up his stance again, and nobly

resolved to do as much damage as possible. He leapt at the next delivery like a tiger, and drove it hard into the long field, as represented by a shrubbery. Mr. Rackett plunged into the bushes and reappeared with the ball.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't have believed you had it in you!"

Grundy, whose grip had changed just before he hit the ball, rendering the hit a sheer fluke, gasped at such praise. He knocked quite a hole in the lawn of the Blue Boar in preparation for Mr. Rackett's third.

This time the county man tried a different ball, and a crash from behind him told Grundy that he was out, even before he had lifted his bat.

"Too fast for you?" asked Mr. Rackett jovially. "I'll send you a slow one."

He did. Grundy had literally to hold himself in while the next ball trickled guilelessly along the turf, and then he smote. Something went "clack," and, with a rather astonished expression, Grundy watched a black sphere mount high in the heavens.

"That should be a catch when it comes down again!" remarked Mr. Rackett, trotting half-way down the pitch.

He watched the ball descend in an almost vertical line, and caught it neatly.

"Out!" he remarked pleasantly.

Grundy grinned sheepishly and continued to bat. He scraped and floundered at the crease until the county player could hardly bowl for laughing. Then Mr. Rackett suggested a change, himself batting and Grundy showing what he could do with the ball.

George Alfred, quite eager to escape from the wicket, took the ball and prepared to retrieve his reputation. He took a long run, and swung his arm in a manner that gave Mr. Rackett considerable apprehensions. Grundy as a fast bowler did not inspire confidence. The Shell fellow's arm came over and the ball flew. It flew straight for Mr. Rackett's eye, and the professional escaped it only by an agile leap to one side. There was a crash as the ball hit the fence and rebounded.

"Sorry!" called Grundy calmly. "It slipped just as I bowed it."

"I can quite believe it!" observed Mr. Rackett. "Kindly see that it doesn't slip again, please!"

"All right. I'm safe enough, sir. You watch!" said Grundy reassuringly.

This time he sent down the widest wide that it had ever been Mr. Rackett's lot to see. Feeling vaguely that he was not making much headway, Grundy took another run and delivered his third. This was perfectly straight, and was driven back, straight as a die, to the bowler. Grundy made a wild grab at the ball, and then let forth a whoop that would have done credit to a Red Indian.

His ample fists had closed—but not on the ball. That whizzing sphere had flashed onwards and ended its orbit on the already swollen proboscis of the bowler. There was a spurt of crimson, and Grundy, holding his damaged nose with one hand, grabbed fiercely in his pocket for a handkerchief.

"What the merry thump did you want to stop it like that for?" enquired Mr. Rackett, dashing up, and endeavouring to stifle his amusement.

Grundy glared, and dabbed furiously with the handkerchief. It was already becoming saturated with blood.

"Do it good!" said Mr. Rackett kindly. "Let out some of the mad blood—I should think there's plenty in!" he murmured under his breath.

"Yow!" gasped Grundy, as the flow eased a little. "I think that's about enough for to-night, anyway, Mr. Rackett!"

"I should advise you to chuck it, certainly!" said the pro. "You're—you're improving, anyhow."

"You—you really think so?" asked Grundy beaming.

"Oh, ahem! I think you're getting better, certainly. And don't forget the stance—stance is everything," said Mr. Rackett. "As soon as you abandon your proper stance, you're an easy prey for any bowler—remember that always. The way you stand naturally is about as promising as the pose of a buffalo!"

"Thanks ever so much for wasting your time on me!" said Grundy gratefully.

"Don't mention it!" said Mr. Rackett. "Let me help you with that bat and the stumps—you want one hand to hold that handkerchief in position."

Between them they tied Grundy's cricket apparatus on his bike, and George Alfred clambered in the saddle.

"See you to-morrow night, then!" he called cheerfully. "Good-night, Mr. Rackett—and many thanks."

The county player waved after him, and did not smile till the junior had pedalled out of sight. He looked forward to the morrow evening in the light of an extra special entertainment.

CHAPTER 9.

Grundy Means Business!

"HERE'S Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ye Gods! Look at his nose! Been having another scrap, Grundy?"

There was a roar as Grundy came into the hall, gently caressing the organ against which Mr. Rackett had driven the cricket ball. George Alfred started at the sound of so many voices, and gave his usual ferocious glare.

"What's the matter with my nose?" he roared indignantly. Then remembering that it showed fresh and undeniable signs of having been in the wars, he calmed down a little.

"You can leave my nose alone, Lowther—unless you want one to match it!"

"Don't trouble, old man!" grinned Lowther. "I shouldn't like to start a rival show! But do let us into the giddy secret—what have you been up to this time?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Grundy, his already ruffled temper gaining the upper hand. "What's all this fuss about, anyway?"

"Hold on a minute, Grundy!" said Monty Lowther, as Grundy endeavoured to shove past. "There's something on the board that will interest you!"

"What's that?" snapped Grundy. His chief desire at that moment was to get his nose into the privacy of his study, away from the grinning crowd of unsympathetic juniors.

"Make way for Grundy!" sang out Lowther. "Let the challenger see the reply of the challenged—and take solace!"

"What the—oh, I see—Tom Merry's taking it on!" ejaculated Grundy, smiling through his injuries. "I'm jolly pleased. I half thought he would funk it!"

"Let Grundy get to the board!" said Kangaroo grinning.

The fellows crowded back to enable George Alfred Grundy to study the notice board at close quarters. His smile of satisfaction faded suddenly as he beheld the new notice, pinned in a prominent position, and inscribed in capitals.

"G. A. Grundy, Esq.,

The St. Jim's Junior Cricket Club does not accept challenges from born idiots—New House excepted!

(Signed) Tom Merry, Junior Capt."

For several moments after reading that blunt declaration Grundy stared unbelievably at it. Then, as the meaning soaked into his rather dense brain, he swung round with a snort of wrath.

"Where's Tom Merry?" he shouted furiously. "Why, I'll smash the cheeky idiot! He can't jolly well sneak out of it like this!"

There was a roar of laughter as Grundy gesticulated wildly, his eyes gleaming ferociously over his inflamed proboscis.

"Take it quietly, Grundy, old man!" laughed Talbot. "You'll burst if you keep on at that rate. You couldn't expect Tom Merry to accept a challenge from you, you know."

"Why couldn't I?" roared Grundy, appearing quite likely to burst at any moment. "Of course, I expected him to accept—it's the only honourable thing to do! I must say I didn't think Tom Merry would back out in this funky way—cold feet, that's what it looks like!"

"Oh, rot!" said Kangaroo. "Can't you see you've made a blithering idiot of yourself as usual, Grundy? If Tom Merry accepted your fatheaded challenge, he'd be the laughing stock of the school. You ought to be able to see that, you ass!"

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"Well, I like that!" hooted Grundy. "The fellow hasn't the pluck to stand up to me—and you rotters back him up—I never saw such a lot of idiots in my life!"

"You're too kind, Grundy," drawled Cardew, from the crowd.

"I say what I think!" roared Grundy truculently. "And if anybody doesn't like it, they can jolly well do the other thing! I think you're a lot of fatheaded chumps to back up Tom Merry when he's obviously afraid to accept my challenge—huh! You make me tired!"

"Cool down, Grundy, old man!" urged Cardew. "Look at it from Tom Merry's point of view. Fancy the lot of a sensible fellow called upon to take a humorist like yourself seriously. It simply can't be done!"

The slacker of the Fourth shook his head sadly. He looked at Grundy with an air of sympathy that made Grundy's blood boil.

"We're all sorry for you, Grundy—aren't we, you fellows?" said Cardew. "But there's nothin' to do but wait till the attack passes off—you'll feel better in the mornin', Grundy, old man! Where's Wilkins and Gunn—they're supposed to be answerable for his safe keepin', aren't they? Neglectin' their duty, I'm afraid!" And Cardew sighed deeply.

Grundy preserved a terrific silence, but his glare spoke volumes. Cardew ought really to have withered up under that gaze, but he didn't. Instead, he turned to Blake.

"It's sad, isn't it, Blake?" said Cardew, with owl-like gravity.

"Very sad!" agreed Blake, nodding at Cardew understandingly. "He can't help it, poor old chap. It's sad, isn't it, Gussy?"

The swell of St. Jim's screwed his monocle in his eye and regarded Grundy with great sympathy.

"Yaas, waiha, deah boy!" he murmured. "The poor old chap can't help it if he isn't in his wight mind, can he? It's vewy sad—don't you think so, Hewwies?"

Herries, smothering a chuckle, took up the cue and shook his head ponderously.

"Very sad!" he agreed gruffly. "Poor old fellow! Sad, isn't it, Dig?"

Digby was interrupted by Grundy, who had found his voice at last.

"You—you idiots!" he ejaculated, in concentrated tones. "Eh?"

"You—you blithering fatheads!" hissed Grundy, his colour that of a particularly healthy beetroot. "I suppose you think you're funny—well, let me tell you it's you feeble chumps who ought to be in an asylum, not me! I'm sick of the whole lot of you!"

And with a scornful glance, somewhat marred by the undue prominence given to his nasal organ by Mr. Rackett's "slog," Grundy strode away to his study, leaving the fellows chuckling.

Wilkins and Gunn were seated at the table when Grundy came in, reading after prep.

"Hallo, Grundy!" said Wilkins wearily, as Grundy slammed the door violently behind him. "How did you get on?"

Grundy's response was to stride across to the armchair and throw himself full length in it.

"Oh, with Mr. Rackett, you mean?" he asked. "Oh, fine! I suppose you fellows haven't seen the notice-board?"

"No," replied Gunn. "Anything fresh?"

"Tom Merry's refused my challenge!" said Grundy grimly.

"Oh," said Gunn, trying to sound surprised. He had expected some such reply earlier in the day, but evidently Tom Merry had been too busy to attend to Grundy before.

"Not really?" said Wilkins, and dropped his eyes to his book again.

"I don't mind admitting that I didn't expect him to refuse," said Grundy frankly. "I gave him credit for a little bit of pluck, though he is a born idiot so far as brains go! But to refuse—I'm disgusted with him!"

"Of course," said Gunn tactfully.

"You haven't been fighting again, I suppose?" inquired Wilkins. The sight of Grundy's face was too much for Wilkins' caution.

"No; that idiot Rackett caught me with the cricket-ball!" growled Grundy.

"Ha, ha—oh, sorry!" spluttered Wilkins, unable to contain himself.

"Well, and what is there to laugh at in that?" inquired Grundy sulphurously.

"Nun-nun-nothing!" stuttered Wilkins, manfully putting on an expression of deep gravity. "Nothing at all, old chap! We're sorry!"

"Shut up," ordered Grundy, "while I do some thinking! I've got to think of a wheeze to dish Tom Merry—even when he hasn't got the pluck to stand up to me on the cricket-field!"

"Challenge him to another scrap!" suggested Gunn, with a grin.

"So I shall—when I've had a bit more practice!" retorted Grundy. "I shall want the gloves on with you fellows during the next few days, so as to get in form!"

"Oh!" said Wilkins and Gunn together. They had vivid recollections of the last time Grundy had the gloves on with them for a few rounds in the study. It had taken both of them a week to recover from the injuries they received in five minutes.

"But about this cricket question, I'm in great form at present with the bat, and I'm going to make Tom Merry play me whether he wants to or not! Can either of you chaps think of anything? Not that your ideas are much good!" added Grundy disparagingly.

Wilkins and Gunn were inured to Grundy's brand of compliments, and had come to disregard them.

"Why not?" Wilkins paused.

"Yes? Go on!" said Grundy eagerly.

"Tell him he's afraid of you to his face," suggested Wilkins brilliantly. "You'd probably have another scrap on your hands at once, though!"

"Hum!" Grundy pondered judicially. Then he slapped his knee ecstatically.

"Got it!" he ejaculated. "Got it—a certain winner! Good! That leaves me to get the team together—that's all! Where's a sheet of paper?"

While Wilkins and Gunn stared rather breathlessly, Grundy gathered up writing materials and began to compile a list of players for his team.

"G. A. Grundy," he wrote slowly.

"You fellows, of course—you'll just have to follow my lead, that's all!"

Before his chums could object, he had scribbled their names down.

"Let's see," said Grundy thoughtfully. "Blake and D'Arcy refused—more silly asses than! Still, I can find plenty of chaps ready to join a team that's going to lick Tom Merry's! I'll run along the passage and scout for players."

And the door slammed on the energetic challenger of the captain of the Shell.

"Well, of all the born idiots!" said Wilkins expressively.

"He's got us down to play!" said Gunn gloomily.

"No need to worry. Tom Merry won't play the team of rabbits Grundy gets together—if he really manages to get a full team at all!"

"Something in that!" agreed Gunn, taking up his book again.

Meanwhile, Grundy was busy. He had only a few minutes before dawn, and he was making the most of them. So far, there were exactly eight places in Grundy's team which remained to be filled, and Grundy optimistically hoped to fill them all that evening. He button-holed Noble as the Australian junior came out of his study.

"Can I count on you, Noble?" he asked importantly.

"What for?" asked Noble, in surprise.

"For my team, of course!" said Grundy impatiently.

"My team that I'm getting up to lick Tom Merry and his crowd. Shall I put you down?"

Kangaroo roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! No, thanks, Grundy. Wouldn't touch your team with a barge-pole, old man!"

And before Grundy could return to the attack, Kangaroo had walked on, still laughing.

"Silly ass!" snorted Grundy, knocking at the door of Study No. 11. "I wouldn't have him now if he asked me on his bended knees!"

Inside the study he found Dane and Glyn.

"I'm putting you fellows down for my team to beat Tom Merry," he announced calmly.

"Don't!" said Dane briefly.

"Eh? Don't you want to play?"

"Wouldn't be seen dead in your team!" said Dane cheerfully. "Shut the door after you, will you?"

Grundy glared, but turned hopefully to Glyn. The schoolboy inventor was busy with a screwdriver and a small dynamo on the table, but he paused as Grundy addressed him.

"What about you, Glyn?" asked Grundy temptingly.

"Well, what about me?" asked Glyn, mystified. When Glyn was busy with one of his inventions he heard nothing of what was said around him.

"I'm putting you in my team—" began Grundy.

"Well, you can cross me out as soon as you jolly well like!" retorted Glyn. "I'm too busy to play in anybody's team just now, let alone with a blithering idiot like you, Grundy! Shut the door with yourself on the other side of it, will you?"

"Of all the—" ejaculated Grundy. He was so staggered by the refusals that—perhaps fortunately for himself—he forgot to commit assault and battery on the

inmates of the study, and instead walked on down the passage. There seemed to be a plentiful lack of enthusiasm for his team—a circumstance which mystified Grundy exceedingly.

"Idiots!" he told himself determinedly. "Fatheads! They don't know what a chance I'm offering them!"

His face brightened suddenly as a junior appeared from his study, and he bore down rapidly on Gore.

"How about you, Gore?" he asked genially. "I'll shove your name down in my team, if you like—"

"To beat Tom Merry?" asked Gore grimly.

"Of course," said Grundy. "That settles it, then, Gore, old man!"

"Just a moment!" put in Gore. "I think you're the biggest ass outside Colney Hatch, that's all!" And with that Gore left Grundy still gasping for breath to reply.

"Did you ever—" breathed George Alfred at last. "They don't deserve a leader like me; but they've got to have one, whether they like it or not! I'll show 'em!"

Nothing daunted, he set off to canvas for recruits in the Fourth Form passage; and there, for a change, he met with a little success. After a number of disheartening and highly uncomplimentary refusals, he secured the services of Lennox and Mellish, neither of whom was the slightest use on a cricket-field; but then, Grundy told himself, he had to make up a team somehow!

Returning to the Shell passage, he persuaded Racke and Crooke to join up, and with them as support, strode majestically along to Study No. 10. The Terrible Three were down in the Common-room, as Grundy was well aware. With a gleam in his eyes, Grundy set to work to put into execution the brilliant idea which had occurred to him in Study No. 3, to the accompaniment of chuckles and encouragement from Racke and Crooke. When Grundy and his new-found supporters left the study, they took with them a tin of whitewash which had figured largely in the proceedings.

That night, Grundy and his embryo team exchanged knowing winks, to all of which Tom Merry remained entirely oblivious. The secret, whatever it was, was reserved for the following morning.

The Shell captain rose early, as usual, and left the dormitory, still unaware that his movements were watched with great enjoyment by Grundy, Racke, and Crooke.

Arriving at Study No. 10 a little ahead of Lowther and Manners, he kicked the door open with a bang and entered, whistling cheerily. Then he stopped suddenly. His eyes were riveted on the looking-glass over the mantelpiece, whereon a huge inscription had been daubed. What he saw caused a flush to appear in either cheek, and his eyes to gleam.

Monty Lowther, peering over his shoulder, read the inscription at the same moment. It was brief and to the point, and obviously emanated from one fellow in the Shell. In whitewash capitals, loomed the one word:

"FUNK!"

CHAPTER 10. The Freak Match!

"THE silly, cheeky idiot!" said Manners wrathfully.

"The fatheaded owl!" observed Monty Lowther, seizing a duster.

"Fetch it off!" said Tom Merry quietly.

A couple of sweeps with the duster saw the epithet changed into a smear, which could be removed later.

"Grundy's going ahead—he means business!" said Manners thoughtfully.

"Something will have to be done about this, certainly," said Tom. "That kind of thing is altogether too thick! From anybody else it would be the limit. But Grundy's such an ass, you can't take him seriously."

"Hardly," admitted Monty Lowther. "Still, it's time he was put back in his place a bit more. I hear he's been canvassing up and down the passages for recruits for his team—he thinks he's going to play the junior eleven, whether you accept the challenge or not."

"Let him think!" said Tom crossly.

"I don't know," said Manners sagely. "He's the kind of idiot that will keep on bothering until he gets what he wants. We might do worse than fix up a game with him."

"What—play that chump, and a crowd of slackers like Mellish and Crooke?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Well, he's challenged the junior cricket club, not you personally, Tom," said Manners. "You refused the challenge as captain—quite naturally. But it seems Grundy isn't contented with that for an answer—he intends to go on making a nuisance of himself until we agree to play him."

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Suppose we call a meeting of the committee and see what they've got to say?"

Tom Merry considered.

"It's a good idea, Tom," said Lowther. "Manners is right—Grundy will keep on till he's dealt with somehow or other. Let's call a meeting, and get the other fellows' opinions."

"Right-ho!" said Tom at last. "We might do that. It would make the club look ridiculous to accept—that's the only thing. Otherwise, I'd be only too pleased to show him up and make him hide his diminished head for a bit. Too much Grundy is a bit wearing to the nerves!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Manners.

"I'll tell the fellows," volunteered Lowther, leaving the study. He was gone a few minutes, and returned with Blake and D'Arcy, Talbot and Kangaroo, and one or two others.

"All present and correct," said Blake. "Excepting Figgy & Co., of the New House. What's the trouble, Tom Merry? Lowther says we're to discuss Grundy and his sins. Is that right?"

"Yes," said Tom, flushing. "I know it's rot to take any notice of a chap like Grundy, but when I came down this morning there was a notice on the looking-glass—"

"He'd daubed 'funk' on it!" interrupted Manners indignantly.

"What fearful cheek!"

"It's the limit!" said Tom Merry. "I don't mind what he says, personally, but it reflects on the cricket club. Manners here suggests that we accept the challenge and give him a good licking for his pains. I want to hear what you fellows think about it."

"No harm in taking him on, that I can see," said Blake thoughtfully.

"We could get the fags to take over the match, only he stipulates that Tom Merry plays," said Kangaroo. "Still, we could skittle his crowd out and finish the game in half an hour. I vote we do it, and take some of the conceit out of the bouncer!"

"Yaaa, wathah!" agreed Gussy. "I think scawlin' on the lookin'-glass is weally too bad, don't you know. I agree with Kangaroo!"

"Same here!" said Talbot.

"Hands up all in favour!" said Lowther laconically.

Every hand in the study was raised.

"That's settled, then!" said Tom Merry, with relief. "Figgy & Co. will agree when they hear you fellows are willing. And I shall be glad to be finished with Grundy for a while—I've had just about enough of him, lately!"

"We haven't got a vacant date, though," said Manners. "And we shall have to play him before the Rookwood match, according to the terms of the challenge."

"That's jolly awkward," assented Tom Merry, rubbing his nose. "Wait a minute, though! How about staging it before the Rookwood fellows get here. We could start early, after dinner, and get it over well before they arrive. They're not due till three, are they?"

"That's right," agreed Manners, the secretary of the junior club.

"I should think that's about the best we can do," said Kangaroo. "It will show the awful ass up in front of a crowd, too—that will do him good!"

It was settled at that, and the meeting broke up in a state of satisfaction—especially Tom Merry. The problem had been solved—and Grundy was to be put in his place.

The Shell captain sat down at once and scribbled a note, and the Terrible Three strolled along the passage and tossed the missive on to Grundy's table.

When Grundy came into his study after breakfast, he received the news with jubilation. He showed the letter eagerly to Wilkins and Gunn, and recommenced his canvassing for recruits with renewed enthusiasm. Surprising as it was to George Alfred, it was only with the aid of bribery and corruption—fortunately Grundy was in funds—that he succeeded in getting a full eleven together.

Each day until the Wednesday of the Rookwood match, Grundy regaled his chums with a glowing account of the triumph which was to be his when he led the junior team off the field after whacking Rookwood to the wide, and he impressed on them continually the need for backing him up wholeheartedly all along the line. Wilkins and Gunn, with visions of "duck's eggs," and the total extinction of Grundy as a cricketer, did not imbibe any of his cheery optimism. They felt that they would come in for some of the reflected ignominy—which was very far indeed from Grundy's happy thoughts.

Wednesday dawned bright and clear—an ideal day for cricket. Morning classes, in the cricketers' opinion, could easily have been dispensed with on that important occasion, but the welcome dismissal came at last, and the juniors had the rest of the day to themselves.

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"Start at two, Grundy!" called Tom Merry, as the Shell crowded out of the Form-room.

"Right you are, Merry!" said Grundy, quite cordially.

Under the influence of his tutor, Mr. Rackett, Grundy's opinion of his cricketing powers had soared even higher than usual, and, regarding himself as a super-batsman, he felt almost sorry for Tom Merry. Still, he reflected, the best men had to come to the top. Tom Merry had had a long innings, and now it was Grundy's turn.

After dinner, Grundy set about the rather annoying task of rounding up the members of his team—a scratch crowd, he was ready to admit, but necessary if only as "make-weights."

Mellish and Scrope were routed out of their studies, and Racke and Crooke, eager to be "in" anything up against Tom Merry, joined up cheerfully. Clampe and Chowle, of the New House, made nine, and Lennox and Buck Finn were rounded up to complete the eleven.

Strutting proudly at the head of his collection, Grundy arrived on Little Side five minutes early, but found Tom Merry waiting. The junior captain was half smiling, half frowning, but he produced a coin at once.

"Ready, Grundy?" he asked. "Got all your men?"

Grundy glanced over the ranks behind him.

"Yes—all here!" he responded grimly. "Had a job to get 'em, though! It'll be different when I'm junior skipper, I can promise you. Heads!"

"Heads it is," said Tom, pocketing the coin. "You're batting, I suppose?"

"No," said Grundy unexpectedly. "We'll put you in first. Nothing like knowing just how many we've got to make!"

"Just as you like!" assented Tom Merry.

It was a single innings match, and he would have preferred to have sent Grundy & Co. in first, so as to save his team the needless task of compiling a total, but it could not be helped.

"Come on, Talbot!" called Tom. "We'll declare at fifty! If Grundy & Co. can get anything like that, they'll be something like a team!"

Talbot grinned, and accompanied the Shell captain to the wicket. Neither batsman anticipated much difficulty in amassing fifty runs against Grundy's eleven. With boundaries in every over, the score would soon mount up.

It was obvious that Grundy was taking the match with deadly seriousness. He solemnly disposed his "field," tell-

ing Clampe to go to mid-off, a position the locality of which was a mystery to both Clampe and his captain alike, and issuing plentiful and totally erroneous instructions to the whole team.

Tom Merry and Talbot manfully repressed their chuckles through this performance.

"Pity the Rogkwood fellows aren't here yet!" murmured Monty Lowther in the pavilion. "They'd like to see Grundy as a cricket captain—he's so original!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

The "field" was set at last, and Grundy prepared to bowl.

"Mind your heads!" sang out Lowther in alarm, and there was a chuckle round the ropes.

Grundy took a terrific run, and his arm flashed over. The ball came down at a good pace, only a few yards wide. Tom Merry grinned, jumped out of his crease, and sent the ball whizzing to the boundary.

"You won't do that again!" observed Grundy calmly. "Look out for your wicket!"

His next ball went high over the batsman's head and right on to the boundary, in spite of the feeble efforts of Crooke, the wicket-keeper, and Chowle, at long-stop.

"Why didn't you stop it, Crooke, you idiot!" growled Grundy, as Wilkins fielded the ball. "Pull up your socks, for goodness' sake!"

Crooke answered with a sullen scowl, and resumed his position behind the wicket—well behind, for Crooke was running as little risk as possible with Grundy's brand of bowling!

Grundy's over continued, and gave seventeen runs—four boundaries and a single. Wilkins took the bowling at the other end, and the batsmen were very careful with his deliveries. Wilkins sometimes played for the School House team, and was doing his best in a forlorn cause.

Then Grundy resumed, and the score leapt. Talbot got amongst the runs, and then it was Tom Merry's turn. He had made ten, so far, and intended to double it off Grundy's last three balls.

George Alfred was growing somewhat disheartened—not at the lack of success attendant on his own bowling, but at the phenomenally poor support accorded him in the field. He determined grimly to take Tom Merry's wicket this over, at least. There were many vagaries at cricket, and if Tom Merry made many more, Grundy might fail

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to beat his total when he came to bat—in which case all hope of the junior captaincy would be gone. He took an extra long run, swung his arm with terrific force, and the ball flew.

"Hi! Tom Merry!"

The Shell captain gave a convulsive start at the sound of the voice—there was no mistaking the fat squeak of Baggy Trimble! He swiped a second too late at the ball, and a crash from behind told its own tale. He eyed the wreckage ruefully, and looked at Grundy.

"Well bowled, Grundy!" he said quietly, and walked off the pitch.

"Hard luck, old man!" murmured Talbot. "I didn't know Trimble was back. Of course, the fat idiot would go and put a fellow off his stroke at the critical moment. Give him a good kick!"

"Tom Merry, the Rookwood chaps are just coming. I saw them from the gates!" shrilled Baggy, as Tom Merry came off the field.

"You fat clam!" roared Lowther angrily. "You got Tom out with your fat clatter. How long have you been back? I haven't seen you before."

"I've just come from the station," said Trimble, with an attempt at dignity. "I should have thought you'd have been glad to hear that it's all right about my aunt—though, of course, I don't expect decency from you, Lowther!"

"Lemme gerrat him!" said Lowther sulphurously.

"Oh, let him alone, Monty!" said Tom Merry, forcing a laugh. "He didn't think it mattered about shouting—and I can't exactly see Grundy getting ten!"

"Not with Fatty bowling!" said Figgins loyally.

Fatty Wynn grinned.

"We'd better go and meet the Rookwood chaps, if they're just coming," said Figgins. "Come on, Merry! Kangaroo's in next, and we sha'n't want anybody else."

The rest of the junior team, with a crowd of other juniors, moved off to the gates, where Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood were just swarming out of a big brake. While the two captains exchanged cheery greetings, Talbot and Kangaroo were making the fur fly merrily on Little Side.

Grundy slaved like a nigger, but he never appeared likely to take either of the Shell fellows' wickets, and in a few minutes Talbot, with a four, sent up the half-century.

"Fifty, Tom!" called Talbot to where Tom Merry was chatting with the Rookwooders.

"Right-ho! Chuck it, then!" called back Tom.

He grinned rather ruefully at Jimmy Silver.

"You'll excuse me a few moments, Silver?" he apologised. "But I've explained how it is—I couldn't very well get out of the challenge—and it won't take many minutes."

"Don't mind us, old bean!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"We'll watch—it looks as if it will be interesting."

"Hear, hear!" concurred Lovell. "Queer fellow, this man Grundy, Jimmy. Seems to think he can do anything, doesn't he?"

"Something like you, old chap," suggested Jimmy Silver, with a grin.

"What?" roared Arthur Edward Lovell excitedly. "Say that again, Jimmy Silver—"

"Steady, old chap!" said Jimmy soothingly. "Remember we're giddy visitors here, and we mustn't rag!"

"You silly ass—" observed Lovell.

"Thanks!" said Jimmy Silver, smiling. "Look! There goes the first wicket!"

Wilkins, in a fit of over-eagerness, had fallen a victim to Fatty Wynn's wiles, and was wending his way back to the pavilion with a big round nought to his credit.

Gunn followed in, and stayed for a few balls. But Grundy's frequent and unnecessary instructions from the other end of the pitch did not conduce to good play, and Gunn was soon caught napping with a ball from Kangaroo. Miraculously enough, Grundy had, so far, managed to stop everything that had come his way, and had even hit a single.

With Lennox as his partner, he now began to make full use of the advice given him by Mr. Rackett, the Loamshire crack. Grundy found that a correct stance hindered his naturally clumsy movements more than a little, his usual style of batting being strongly reminiscent of a windmill—but the stance enabled him to play a straight bat and keep his wicket up. Fortune smiled on Grundy several times during the first few overs, but he survived, and, wonder of wonders, scored a single every now and then.

"Five!" ejaculated Monty Lowther as Clampe went out to join his captain. "Grundy's made five! He'll do it if he keeps on like this!"

"Looks like it!" said Tom Merry, his usually sunny face glum.

Fatty Wynn and Kangaroo were bowling their best, but Fortune and a straight bat performed wonders on Grundy's

behalf. Once he sent a possible catch into the long field, but the sun was in the fieldsman's eyes, and he missed the ball.

Tom Merry groaned.

"It's all up now!" he said dismally. "The silly ass will get more than ten—and you'll have to have him for captain."

"That's not in the conditions," objected Lowther. "You've got to resign in his favour—that's all. But there'd have to be an election—and he'd never get in!"

"More likely me!" suggested Figgins modestly.

"Or Talbot!" suggested Manners.

"Yes, Talbot!" agreed Tom Merry, his face brightening.

"Better have a New House fellow!" said Figg, shaking his head.

"You chaps ready?" inquired Grundy politely.

Clampe had arrived, taken centre, and awaited Kangaroo's delivery.

The field took their places, and Kangaroo bowled. Clampe walked back to the pavilion, and Crooke emerged.

"Two more men!" said Lowther. "Buck up, ye cripples; they won't last long enough for Grundy to make ten at this rate!"

The field crouched expectantly as Crooke took the last ball of the over. But it was a fraction wide, and Crooke, missing it altogether, left Grundy with the bowling.

"Seven for Grundy!" whispered Lowther. "Get his middle stump, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn made no reply, but sent down the best he knew. Grundy, by a sheer fluke, hit it, and ran twice. Fatty's face was the colour of a beetroot as he gripped the ball again.

Tom Merry's face was set.

Grundy fell unnaturally into his stance. Then he shifted his feet. He grinned at the bowler, and opened his shoulders to their full extent. Stance, carefully repeated instructions from Mr. Rackett, all was forgotten but the fact that he was within a run of equalling Tom Merry's score.

He changed his grip to increase its power, and slogged joyously at the ball. His bat described a huge arc, and, meeting no resistance, swept him completely off his feet. The crash of Grundy falling and the spread-eagled wicket were almost simultaneous. Grundy had a glimpse of a flying middle-stump, and then the voice of Lefevre of the Fifth, acting as umpire, remarked calmly:

"Out!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Grundy.

He staggered to his feet, eyeing his wicket mournfully, and shaking his head.

"Luck!" he observed to the world in general and the cricketers in particular. "Just luck—that's all it is!"

Then he turned to Tom Merry, and held out his hand.

"Your win, Merry!" he said calmly, though his face was flushed. "You had bad luck when Trimble called out—and so did I! That was a rotten ball, really. Congrats!"

And, swinging his bat with studied carelessness, Grundy walked back to the pavilion. A minute or two later the final wicket fell, and the teams came off, Tom Merry looking immensely relieved, but more than a little sorry for Grundy.

"My hat, that was a near thing!" he gasped.

"Grundy's a sportsman!" said Lowther. "He took it well!"

"Good old Grundy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "He can't help being an ass, and he's a rattling good sort at heart! Now for Jimmy Silver & Co.!"

And the St. Jim's team hastily prepared to do battle with the cricketers of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 11.

Shoulder High!

"TAILS!" called Jimmy Silver.

And for the second time that afternoon Tom Merry lost the toss.

"We bat!" said Jimmy Silver. "Get your pads on, Doddy! Where's Mornington?"

"Awatin' your esteemed commands, old chap!" grinned Mornington.

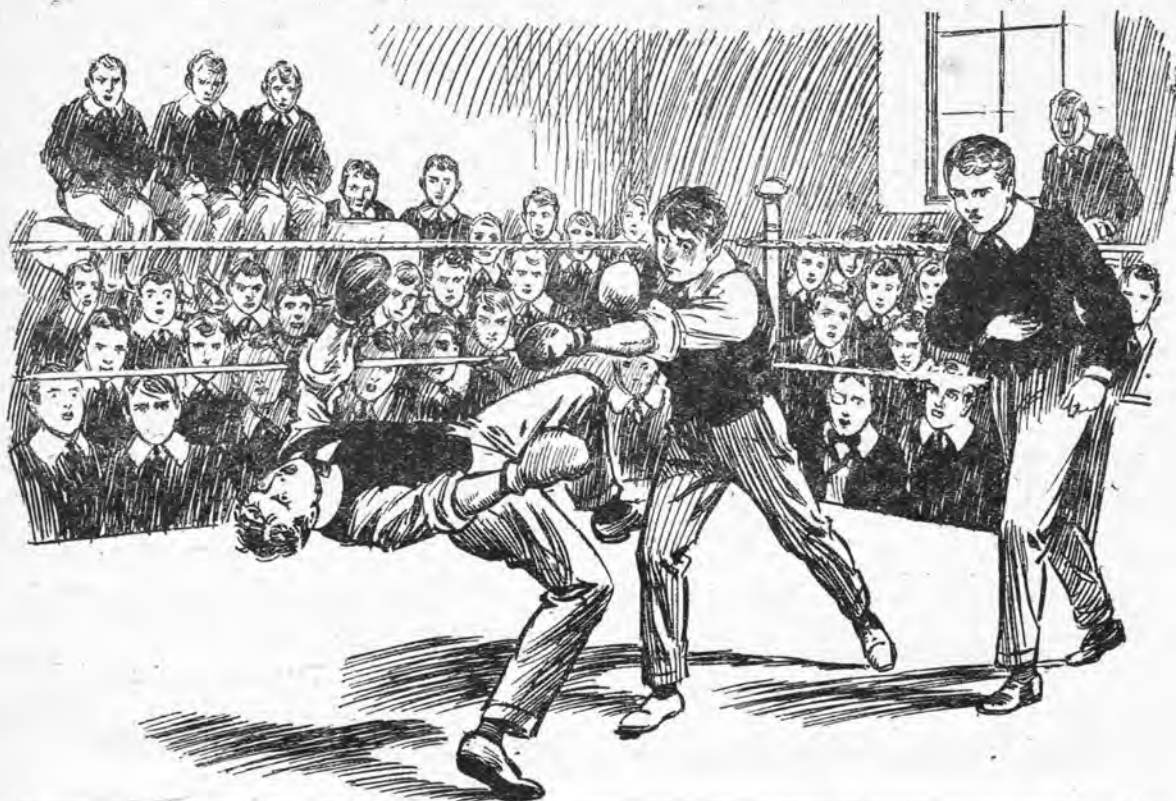
"You go in with Doddy, then, Morny," said Jimmy Silver. "Lovell to follow."

The Rookwood first pair speedily fastened their pads and strode out to the wickets.

"This is where we mop up the field with you chaps!" said Jimmy confidently. "All your team in trim, Tom Merry?"

"All except Kerr; he's in the sunny with a bad cold," answered Tom. "But Koumi Rao's a first class substitute, and I think you'll find the mopping up won't pan out quite as you expect, Silver!"

"Wait and see!" said Jimmy imperturbably.



More by luck than judgment, Grundy's fist crashed through Tom Merry's guard, and Tom rolled on the floor. "Man down!" roared Mellish. "Good old Grundy!" There was a silence among Tom Merry's supporters, broken only by the frantic urgings of Lowther and Manners. (See Chapter 6.)

Tom Merry tossed the ball to Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House, and set his field.

"You take the other end, Kangy!" he remarked, as Fatty prepared to bowl.

Amid keen excitement the match commenced. Dodd coolly blocked the first ball, and treated the second with marked respect. But he knocked the third away, and the batsmen ran two. Fatty finished the over at a cost of two more runs, without discovering any weakness in the batsmen.

Kangaroo took the ball, and though he was at the top of his form he found Dodd and Mornington very difficult to bottle up. The runs mounted steadily, and twenty rattled on the board.

"Do something, Fatty, old man!" urged Tom Merry, as the fat junior returned to the attack for the fourth time.

"I'm going to!" retorted Wynn grimly.

Tommy Dodd, smiling serenely, drove the next ball to the boundary amid a storm of applause from the Rookwooders and their supporters, a crowd of whom had come over in the brake. But there was a sudden crash at the end of the next delivery, and a shout from the field:

"Howzat?"

"Out!" grinned Tommy Dodd ruefully, and retired with ten to his credit.

"Keep it up, Fatty!" said Tom Merry, with satisfaction.

Lovell followed in, and soon revealed himself in the character of a "slogger." He took risks, but he possessed a mighty smite which was particularly disheartening to the bowlers. But Lovell was out at last to a fine catch by Levison.

Next on the list was Jimmy Silver, the Rookwood skipper, and the St. Jim's team pulled up their socks determinedly. Jimmy contented himself with "feeling" the bowling for a few balls, and then he began to hit. Tom Merry changed the bowling, giving Koumi Rao and Levison a turn, but the Rookwood pair batted steadily on. The fifty was soon passed, and the hundred loomed near. With a cheery grin "Uncle James" of Rookwood lofted the ball clean out of the ground to run up the century.

There was a storm of shouting from the Rookwooders around the ropes.

"Good old Jimmy!"

"Go it, Rookwood!"

Mornington left at last, clean bowled by one of Fatty Wynn's best, the Rookwooder having made twenty-six.

Conray joined Jimmy Silver, and the innings continued. Wickets fell quickly after that, but still "Uncle James" remained in action, serenely oblivious to the determined efforts of the St. Jim's bowlers to shift him.

"Last man!" gasped Tom Merry, mopping his brow, as "Putty" Grace emerged from the pavilion. The total stood at 107.

The ball came down, and Putty coolly knocked it away. The batsmen crossed once. Jimmy Silver had the bowling again, and he drove the leather calmly to the boundary, while the score-board rattled appreciation. Putty had the bowling again in a minute or two, but he was not wary enough for Fatty Wynn, and his leg-stump was neatly uprooted.

"Well done, Silver!" panted Tom Merry, as the players strolled back to the pavilion. The Rookwooder had hit 45, and carried his bat.

"Not so bad for the first innings, anyway!" assented Jimmy Silver judiciously. "We'll do our best to see that you chaps don't get anywhere near it."

"Bow-wow!" said Tom Merry, grinning.

Jimmy Silver led his men into the field after a short interval, and Tom Merry and Talbot went out to open the innings for St. Jim's.

"Go it, Jimmy!" said Lovell. "Show 'em what we call bowling at Rookwood!"

"Uncle James," the champion junior bowler at Rookwood, nodded. Tom Merry awaited the ball calmly. To his surprise, it was comparatively easy, and he cut it away for two. The next yielded a single, and Talbot faced the bowler. After blocking two, Talbot drove the leather into the long field, and the batsmen ran three.

Jimmy Silver gripped the ball for the last ball of the over, and smiled to himself. Tom Merry shaped, changed his mind, and gazed mutely at the heap of debris which had been his wicket.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped dismally.

"Hard cheese, old man!" said Talbot sympathetically.

"Well bowled, Silver!" called Tom Merry, manfully, as he left the crease. Certainly it was not the captain of the Shell's lucky day. He passed Blake on his way back to the pavilion.

"Look out for Silver!" he advised grimly. "He's a holy terror!"

The innings continued, but the St. Jim's batsmen did not have a very happy time. When the last man had been bowled the score stood at 80. Talbot carried his bat for 33, having played splendidly right through the innings.

"Good man, Talbot!" said Tom, clapping the Shell fellow vigorously on the back. "If it hadn't been for you—But what a collapse!"

His chums could find no other word to describe it.

"We've simply got to improve on our present display!" said Tom quietly. "There's a fighting chance yet if we stick to it for all we're worth. We must forget what's happened, and make a fresh start!"

"Hear, hear!"

Dodd and Mornington opened again for Rookwood, and for the first few overs it appeared as if they were fixed for the rest of the afternoon. No matter what kind of ball was sent down, it was played safely, although the runs came slowly.

With the score at 15, Tom Merry, who believed in varying the bowling, threw the ball to Koumi Rao, resting Kangaroo. A change was manifest at once. Morny came out rather prematurely to a ball from the Indian junior, and failed to get back before he was stumped.

"A wicket at last!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Well bowled, Koumi!"

The Indian junior's teeth flashed in a smile, and he prepared to deal with his next victim. Lovell was astonished to have his off-stump whipped out of the ground by the very first ball he received, and there was a chuckle from the fieldsmen.

"This is better!" grinned Tom Merry.

Jimmy Silver himself was the next arrival, and for a short period the score mounted without the fall of further wickets. But at 30 showing on the board, a ball from Fatty Wynn found a vulnerable spot in the Rookwood captain's armour and dismissed him for 12.

Conroy came in, and was snapped in the slips by Figgins before he had broken his duck. Erroll fared little better, and the faces of the St. Jim's cricketers lit up as Koumi Rao claimed his middle stump. Fatty Wynn took a turn, and he brilliantly caught and bowled Raby off his first ball.

"Putty" Grace put up a fight for the last wicket, and it was his partner, Tommy Cook, who eventually capitulated to Fatty Wynn. The innings closed amid cheering for 45.

"Seventy-eight to win!" said Tom Merry, as the cricketers crowded off for tea under the trees. "We've a good sporting chance!"

A dainty tea had been laid out in the shade of the trees, but the cricketers partook but sparingly. It was a cheery gathering, and the rivals exchanged much good-natured chaff on the subject of the St. Jim's collapse.

"You wait till the finish!" advised Lowther darkly.

"We will!" agreed Jimmy Silver amicably.

"The only thing to do," said Tom Merry to Talbot, as they went out to open the second innings, "is to lay a solid foundation. No risks, and hit everything that's hitable!"

"That's the caper!" agreed Talbot.

Contrary to the Rookwooders' expectations, a St. Jim's wicket did not fall in the first over. For once, the wiles of "Uncle James" failed to wreak their customary havoc, and as the batsmen settled down to their work they began to score freely.

Tom Merry and Talbot were still together when twenty went up. Jimmy Silver wisely took himself off and put on a pair of change bowlers, but with no better effect. Talbot and the Shell captain battled on as if set for a century apiece, and the scorers were kept busy totting up runs.

"Fifty for no wicket!" grinned Lowther joyfully. "This is what you might call a stand!"

The clapping had barely subsided before Talbot lofted a ball from Mornington and saw it well held by Raby.

"Good man!" grinned Tom Merry, as Talbot retired with a well-earned 18. "Some more of this, and we shall do it easily!"

Blake arrived at the wicket, and added 5. Then Jimmy Silver, who had returned to the attack, claimed a belated victim. D'Arcy played cautiously for a brief period, and then departed with eight to his credit. Disaster followed in the shape of a collapse which threatened to extinguish the hopes of the St. Jim's team. Noble and Redfern were both sent back with "ducks," and Fatty Wynn departed after adding a single.

In desperation, Tom Merry began to take risks, but the Rookwood field stopped every chance of a run. Then the speedy downfall of his partner, Koumi Rao, caused him to revert to careful play again. When Figgins joined his leader, St. Jim's only wanted fourteen to win. But unfortunately for Figgins, he was out to a ripping catch in the slips off his third ball—just missing his pair of "spectacles" by two runs.

Eleven to tie—12 to win!

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Tom Merry, with 30 runs to his credit, waited anxiously for the arrival of Levison. Between them they took the total to 73, Levison doing an unexpected share of the hitting, and receiving a round of applause as he retired from a good-length ball, the last of the over.

"Last man in!"

"Five to win!"

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

Monty Lowther, padded and gloved, walked calmly to the wicket.

"Leave it to you, Tommy," he observed coolly. "Only 5 to win!"

Tom Merry nodded. He had the bowling, and was determined to get them or perish in the attempt.

There was an air of suspense all over the ground as Tom Merry faced Jimmy Silver. It was a difficult ball, but Tom was in no mood to tap it back again.

He opened his shoulders, leapt at the right moment, and drove it hard to the boundary.

"Scores level!"

"Well hit, Tom Merry!"

"Good old Shellfish!"

"Bravo!"

"Only 1 to win!"

The crowd of excited juniors, amongst whom were a few seniors and one or two masters, roared their approbation of Tom Merry's feat. Amid the cheering, Monty Lowther spoke quietly.

"Good man, Tom! Keep it up!"

Tom Merry nodded, realising that his task was not yet over.

His eyes were fixed on the next ball from the time it left Jimmy Silver's hand, and he jumped out to it. It soared away into the blue, to clear the pavilion completely this time, and the match was won!

"Good man, Merry! You deserve it!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Cheering delightedly, the crowd of juniors swarmed over the ropes and lifted Tom Merry above their heads.

"Ow! Chuck it, you asses!" gasped Tom; but he was not heeded.

"Shoulder-high!"

"Three cheers for Tom Merry!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Tom Merry!"

The Shell captain was feeling quite dazed by the time he escaped from his admirers and mounted the steps of the pavilion. Loud among the shouts had been that of George Alfred Grundy of the Shell. Grundy shoved forward now and gripped Tom's hand.

"You're a better man than ever I thought!" he said loudly.

"And you may like to know that I sha'n't be up against you in future—not unless I disapprove of what you do, of course!"

"Thanks, Grundy!" said Tom, grinning in spite of himself.

"Three cheers for Tom Merry!" roared Grundy.

"Hear, hear!"

The cheers were given with a will, the Rookwood fellows joining in lustily.

Then the crowd, the two teams in their midst, swarmed into the House and into the Common-room, where a gigantic spread had been prepared. The hungry juniors proceeded to do full justice to it, Fatty Wynn and Baggy Trimble vying with each other, and even Skimpole, the eccentric genius of the Shell, condescending to look in and masticate a cream-bun.

After the feed the whole team saw the Rookwooders off at the gates, and gave them a rousing cheer as they rolled away in the brake. The Rookwooders cheered back till they were out of sight.

A crowd of juniors were surging in the quadrangle, and there was a shout for Tom Merry.

"Up with him! Here's the giddy centurion!"

Tom Merry gave a gasp of alarm and ran for the House, with Monty Lowther and Manners on his heels. In the hall they passed Grundy, who stared after them.

"Tell 'em I've gone up into the-box-rooms!" gasped Tom Merry breathlessly.

"Eh?" ejaculated Grundy. His intellect was not of the swift order. "Oh, I see!"

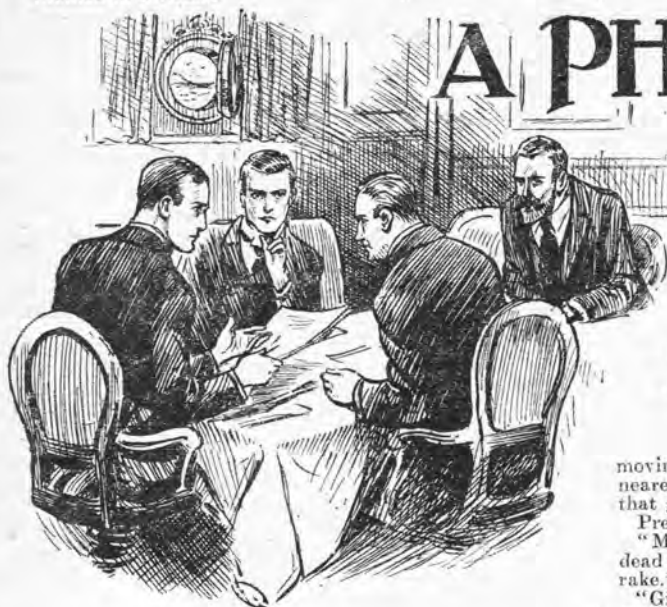
And as the crowd of enthusiastic revellers swarmed into the hall, Grundy, with great solemnity, directed them to the upper box-rooms in search of the missing hero, what time the hero was enjoying a rest from his exertions in the privacy of Study No. 10.

Evidently Grundy's feud, fierce as it had been while it lasted, was at an end!

THE END

(There will be another extra-long story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "ST. JIM'S HOTEL KEEPERS!" By Martin Clifford. Make sure you read it, chums!)

THE MAN IN THE CLOAK! At dead of night, a number of German Royalists foregather to meet their Emperor, choosing as their rendezvous a lonely island in the North Sea. But he comes more like a hunted felon than an Emperor, muffled in a cloak!



A PHANTOM THRONE

By Sidney Drew

An Amazing Story of Breathless Adventure and International Intrigue.

A Bid for Liberty!

LET us talk of something else, baron," said Ching Lung. "European politics don't interest me." "It is a pity they so much interest your friend, Mr. Ferrers Lord, prince," said the baron. "A great man, I admit, a very great man, but so dangerous we must always watch him. Very closely we watch him, and our spies are clever men. But, as you say," he added, shrugging broad shoulders, "let us talk of something else. We who live shall see. Ah, I could be here with you quite content if only you had some good wine or a barrel of beer." "If we'd expected you, and the pleasure of your company, we'd have brought both wine and beer ashore," said Ching Lung.

"How you got ashore is to me a great mystery, though we guessed you would try. Our spy system is expensive, but it is good. When the British Premier and Foreign Secretary came from the Royal yacht and dine on the yacht of Mr. Ferrers Lord, we begin to think, for he is not too partial to these men who are in power to-day and to-morrow out of office. Your good pardon, prince. Of these things it is agreed not to talk."

The prince put his hand to his mouth again, this time not to hide a yawn but a smile, for he felt that if Ferrers Lord had wished to keep the visit of the British Premier and the Foreign Secretary a secret he could very easily have done so. Every London newspaper had mentioned it.

With paste and sand and wisps of sea-grass the bo'sun had concealed the steel door very effectively. Clouds were blowing across the main when the two youngsters crawled through, and at once Val clutched Dave's arm.

"Didn't I tell you, kid?" he said. "There's a boat coming along now!"

"Yes, I see the beggar's sail," said Dave. "She may be going past, though. Very likely they're only putting off to fish."

"Not on your life," said Val, a few seconds later. "She's slewing round to come up the channel."

A cloud drifted over the moon, and the boys heard the rattle of a sail, the creak of oars, and then a soft thud.

When the light came they saw that the nose of the boat was on the sand, and that several men had scrambled ashore. From behind the low dune on which they were lying Dave and Val Hilton watched them.

"It's not the smuggler crowd, for they had a motor-boat," said Val in a whisper. "What are the guys carrying? Can you see?"

"Shovels, I think. If they're after the baron, perhaps they think he's under the ruins, and they're going to try and dig him out."

Dave counted eleven men. Three of them remained with the boat, and the others moved towards the ruins of the mill. The boys could hear their voices and see the gleam of flash-lamps.

"Whoever they are, they'd be more careful if they suspected anybody was on the island," said Val. "They're

moving the stuff about. I'd chance it, and crawl a bit nearer, if it was any good; but they're talking German, and that grunting language always beats me."

Presently five of the men came out, carrying shovels.

"My hat! Scuttle for it," said Dave. "They're making a dead line for us, so beat it, and I'll follow up and use the rake."

"Give me the rake, and you beat it," said Val. "Some sauce you've got to hand out orders to your superior officer!"

Dave sniggered, and waited on the ladder till Val came. Val kept up the door with both hands till he saw the heads and shoulders of a couple of the men appear above the ridge. Then they turned back and disappeared.

"Gosh! They're well after us, kid," said Dave. "If they don't think we're here, why are they digging to find us, for that's what they're doing. Digging like a gang of navvies, the bounders are!"

That is what it sounded like, but the ridge of sand was in the way. Val wriggled forward again, taking advantage of the gloom cast by another cloud. The men were not digging down, but were levelling the uneven sand with their shovel, and flattening out a few ridges. It was quick and easy work, for they had picked out a flat portion. In a little more than twenty minutes they were going back to their boat, leaving behind them four powerful electric torches stuck in the sand with the lights blazing upwards.

"Bow-wow! We're going to have a visit from a night-bird, superior officer," said Dave, who had crawled back to Val. "The absolute nerve of it, scraping out a little aerodrome right under our very noses and marking it out with guide lamps. Shall we go and douse the glims and try and spill the cargo?"

"Are we at war, as Stolzenburg asked when I told him he was a prisoner?" said Val. "We've got no right to break people's necks. Let's have the prince to look at the show, kid. Put your neck down the scuttle-hatch and give him a hail."

Ching Lung arrived, heard the news, glanced at the lights, and shook his head.

"Leave them alone, boys," he said. "There's something very queer, and I can't get to the bottom of it, so lie low and say nothing."

"And get caught like rats in a hole," said Dave.

"If they know there's a hole and rats in it, young 'un. It's a very queer stunt, but let it alone. I'm not keen on giving advice, but as you asked for it, you can have it. I'm not going to meddle with anybody till I'm meddled with."

"I don't know what can have happened to you, Ching," said Val. "You used to be such a jolly helpful sort of chap, but on this journey you're about as useful to me as a glass eye to a deaf-and-dumb man! Whatever I want you just shrug your shoulders and tell me it isn't your job."

"And it isn't, old son; it's yours," said the prince. "You asked me to stay, and I stayed; but I don't look like getting any medals for it. I've told you what I wouldn't do if I were in your place. This island is neither mine nor yours. The baron says it belongs to him, and I believe him. I'd be the first in the world to help you if I knew how, but I don't know how."

"So that's that!" said Val. "If I'm a bit rattled and grumpy, Ching, don't take any notice of me, for I don't mean anything!"

Ching Lung gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder and went below. Barry O'Rooney was frying rashers of bacon for supper, and the smell came strongly up the manhole.

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"If those had been sausages, and they'd been cooking when those pick-and-shovel Huns had been here, they'd have scented us out in no time, for nobody has a better nose for a hot sausage than a German," said Dave. "But what's all this fuss about scraping and levelling the show like a billiards-table and sticking up illuminations? They were over the place in daylight, and must have seen how easy it was to land."

"Easy as eating ice-cream," agreed Val. "You've got the water shining all round, and a fairly decent moon on top, and not a snag to bump against if you keep clear of the mill and the rubbish the explosion scattered about. I'd tackle it myself any old time. If their pilot isn't a novice, he ought to be in a home where they doctor them for nervous complaints."

"Now she's coming," said Val. "I'll shove a blanket over the hole to keep in the light and the sniff of that salted pig. They'll never spot us here if we dig in a bit, and I want to see the show."

It was the big aeroplane that Val had seen earlier in the day. She passed right over the island so far that the boys thought she was not going to land, and then, turning into the teeth of the breeze, she made a beautiful descent.

"That pilot's no novice," whispered Dave. "He can handle that bus, and no error!"

The plane carried no lights. One by one five men climbed out of her. Then something heavy was handed down, and, to the surprise of the boys, the propeller whirled again and the plane winged back to the east.

"What the thump did they fish out of her, Val?" Dave whispered.

"Dunno—but it looks like a table and a chair. Gosh! Is it a council of war, in full war-paint? Four of 'em wearing military cloaks and helmets, and the other's a civvy. What's happening on this rotten old sand-heap? What have we struck? Fetch Ching out to see this bundle of mystery!"

The five men—four army officers and one civilian—formed a strange group as they stood in the moonlight on that forlorn and lonely patch of North Sea sand. They were all tall except the civilian, who was short and fat. They talked together in low voices and pulled at cigars. Now and again as they moved, the moonlight glinted on the scabbard of a sword or the rowel of a spur.

"The beggars are waiting for somebody, or something," said Val. "I wish now I'd stuck to my German at school a bit harder."

"S-sh! Is that plane getting up again? No, that's the wrong place for it. I can hear a plane, or else a motor-boat."

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR!

FERRERS LORD, millionaire and world traveller, entertains the Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary aboard his yacht, the *Lord of the Deep*. In the privacy of Ferrers Lord's cabin these Ministers of H.M. Government discuss informally with the millionaire and Rupert Thurston the activities of the Royalist party in Germany. Lord declares that the plot to restore the Kaiser to the throne is likely to be put into operation at any moment, and adds that should Germany be plunged into civil war, the whole of Europe would be involved in consequences too horrible to contemplate. So strong is the proof the millionaire submits to support his statement that the Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary are convinced that swift action must be taken to avert this calamity. Ferrers Lord then suggests a way out of the trouble, and, although it is fraught with much risk to those who throw in their lot with him, the millionaire answers for the loyalty and patriotism of all aboard the *Lord of the Deep*, and offers to take that risk.

Under the command of Midshipman Val Hilton, Prince Ching Lung, David Ap Rees, Benjamin Maddock, Barry O'Rooney, and a number of ordinary seamen are ordered to proceed to an island named Klarspargen. Here, in accordance with the orders of Ferrers Lord, they meet James Wigland, an interpreter and ex-spy, who leads them to a rectangular underground chamber—a one-time German submarine base—built below an old mill.

Val and his companions have not been on the island any length of time, however, when the mill is blown sky-high by Baron von Stolzenburg, who, it transpires, is the owner of the island. The baron is taken prisoner, and with Prince Ching Lung he calmly discusses the prospects of the German Royalist party, declaring that if war does come he will welcome it.

(Now read on.)

"Another plane," said Val, listening to the faint drone. "She's coming down from the north, and I'll eat my boots if that isn't what they scraped the sand and put the lights on for. By the way the other chap shaped, he didn't want any scraping or illuminations. Look—they're signalling to her!"

One of the men in uniform shot a few flashes from an electric torch, and a beam of light from the sky answered it and then vanished. Swiftly an aeroplane neared the little island of Klarspargen and glided down. She was only a small machine, but she made a good descent. There seemed to be only one passenger, and the pilot scrambled out of his seat to help him down—a man who wore a heavy dark cloak with a cape and an alpine hat.

He took a few steps forward and then stood still, and, as if to welcome him, the moon shone out brightly, and naked swords flashed like silver in its rays. One by one the uniformed figures advanced, clicked their heels together, saluted, and then sank on one knee to kiss the out-stretched hand of the man in the dark cloak.

"My stars, kid!" said Dave, in a hoarse whisper. "Do you know who the guy is? A million pounds to a bag of peanuts it's the Kaiser! Look at him now! He's grown a beard, you know—but it's the ex-Kaiser, for all the money on earth!"

The officers had sheathed their swords, and the civilian, hat in hand, and his bald head gleaming like a huge ostrich-egg in the moonlight, was talking to the last-comer. Taking the risk of being betrayed by a flicker of light on the lenses, Val Hilton put the binoculars to his eyes, and then snuggled into the sand beside his chum.

"You're right, Dave," he said—"the ex-Kaiser has slipped out of Holland and made a moonlight trip to Klarspargen! The fat chap is Rudolf Zeinmeyer, who pretends to be a red-hot Socialist and to be death on emperors and kings. I've seen his photograph so often that there's no mistaking the fat hypocrite! I don't know the others; but they don't seem to belong to the old war gang, for they're youngish chaps—about the baron's age. Gosh, I'm not surprised they raked the sand, put on lights, and brought a table and chair. This is a knock-out!"

They had not only brought a table and chair, but champagne and glasses. The man in the cloak sat down, a cork popped, and glasses were filled. As the astonished boys watched, Ching Lung came up the ladder. Just in time he saw the blanket.

"Switch off the lights, Maddock," he said. "Only for a second or two."

The prince wriggled out and replaced the blanket over the hole, and then crawled to the slope of the dune. He saw the upper part of the plane at once, and went cautiously.

"All serene!" he said, in a whisper. "It's only little me, so don't be nervous. What's the merry game now?"

"The ex-Kaiser with some officers and that rogue Zeinmeyer," said Val, in a choked voice.

"And then you woke up, my lad!" said the prince. "Whe-e-ew! I believe you've got it right! My eyes aren't used to the light yet, but I'll tell you in a minute. If that big chap with the little hat with the spike on top would only shift out of the way I'd— Great Deutschland über Alles! It's the ex-War Lord, as sure as a gun, and Zeinmeyer, as sure as a bayonet!"

It was impossible to hear anything except a faint murmur of voices. The prince understood German perfectly, but the wind was in the wrong direction, and there was no cover to enable him to get on the lee side. The only cover on the lee side was the wrecked mill, and that was out of earshot.

The talk went on, and more champagne was opened. Several times they saw the officer who wore the spiked helmet point to the ruins of the mill.

"He's telling him about the baron and the bits of our plane those chaps found who came in the boat," thought Val. "They must imagine Stolzenburg fired the thing too soon, and got killed and buried in the blow-up."

Ching Lung squeezed Val's arm.

"Which way did the plane come, son?"

"From the north, well out to sea. The big plane just landed the others and then cleared out to make room."

"A queer game!" muttered the prince. "The chief was right again, for he told me long ago he didn't trust Zeinmeyer. There's nothing to do but to lie quiet and twiddle our thumbs, for we're not in this scene at all; we're only spectators, and we're not likely to get another free show like this in a lifetime. It strikes me," he added, as a fierce gust of wind came hooting across the island, "that if the once All-Highest is going back home to-night he's in for a bit of a dusting!"

The man in the cloak took a few steps forward and then stood still. At once naked swords flashed out; then, one by one, the uniformed figures advanced and saluted. (See page 26.)



Val had told Maddock and O'Rooney to remain below unless he called them. Wigland, who was in charge of the prisoner, had placed a chair under the arch, where he could sit and keep the baron in view. Von Stolzenburg was sitting huddled in his chair, his chin sunk on his big chest, and, by the occasional reverberating snore he uttered, apparently asleep. Maddock and O'Rooney, in their own quarters on the other side of the concrete channel, sat in silence—a very rare thing for Barry O'Rooney—and smoked their pipes. Wigland called out to Maddock.

"What time do you make it, bo'sun?" he asked.

"Ten minutes past eleven, Jimmy," answered the bo'sun, after he had consulted his big silver watch. "Time to turn in, if there's nothing better doing, souse me! I think O'Rooney must be suffering from lockjaw, for he hasn't said a word for nearly thirty-five seconds! If it's lockjaw, I hope it's chronic, and will last the noisy rascal for the rest of his days!"

"Pace, you spalpeen—pace!" said Barry O'Rooney. "Oi'm composing a poem. Don't interrupt the flow of poetic janias, idiot!"

Above it was blowing harder. Particles of sand settled on the blanket, and each gust brought more of it. Angry gusts of clouds were scurrying across the sky, and a heavy surf was beginning to pound on the beach. The ex-Kaiser had risen from his chair, and the pilot had climbed into his seat, when the accumulation of sand made the blanket sag in the middle and slip through the hole, and, as if from the very depths of the earth, a beam of light shone upwards into the gloom.

Yells of astonishment and rage told the three watchers that they were betrayed. As they sprang to their feet, swords were out, and the four German officers were racing towards them. Dave reached the manhole first, and heard a smothered yell from Wigland.

"Maddock! O'Rooney! Help—help! The prisoner——"

A heavy splash followed, and seeing Baron von Stolzenburg at the foot of the ladder, Dave jumped full at him.

In the Trap!

WIGLAND'S cry for aid had scattered Barry O'Rooney's poetic dreams and roused the bo'sun to energy. They came rushing out just in time to see Dave make his leap from the iron ladder as the baron was about to climb it and make a bid for liberty.

Von Stolzenburg bellowed like a bull as the youngster came down on him, and staggered back, only avoiding a sidelong plunge in the channel by a quick swerve, and then he shook off Dave, and O'Rooney and Maddock flung themselves at him. They were both powerful men, fit and trained, but the German was enormously strong, and one blow he got home on the bo'sun's ribs made the bo'sun's teeth rattle in his head.

Val practically tumbled down the ladder, leaving Ching Lung to close the trap door, and the prince was only just in time for a sword blade stabbed through the opening and snapped across when the door shut, the broken steel with a clatter falling to the concrete floor.

Aided by Val Hilton, the prince secured the fastening-chain to its hook and then went up again and shot the bolt into its socket.

Between them, Barry O'Rooney and Maddock had brought the panting German to the ground, and O'Rooney was sitting on his chest while the bo'sun was trying to recover some of the breath that had been knocked out of him. Wigland, who had been overlooked in the excitement, had swum down to the half-finished raft and crawled into safety. He climbed out and stood rather shakily with the water streaming from him and forming a pool.

"I am extremely sorry," he said, breaking the silence. "I seem only to have turned my head, sir. The prisoner must have come up behind me as quickly as a cat when I was off my guard. He just picked me up and threw me into the channel."

"Tie him up!" said Val.

Ching Lung was still under the trap-door listening, but all was still. Von Stolzenburg protested against being bound, but not very angrily. He declared it was no treatment for a gentleman to be roped up like a bad-tempered mule.

"And it is not as if I had given my word and broken it. Herr Midshipman," he said. "I gave no promise that I would not to escape attempt, so I have no wrong done! Were you in my place, would you not the same do?"

"Very likely, Herr Baron," said Val, "but my place isn't all lavender just now and you are making it more awkward, so it can't be helped. I don't want to make it too uncomfortable for you, but you will have to submit."

"Souse me, I wish we'd done it sooner," growled the bo'sun. "He's got a fist with a kick in it like a hob-nailed boot and I stopped one from it. You arrived just in time, Master Dave!"

Val picked up the broken sword blade. "Do you think they've found the lid, Ching?" he asked. "If they haven't they soon will, and that thing you have in your hands shows they've found the hole where the lid fits," said Ching Lung. "I was lucky it didn't get my ear." "Plawat a loife!" said Barry O'Roonney, busy with a cord with which he secured the baron.

They lugged the prisoner into the officers' quarters with a couple of blankets to lie on.

"Wouldn't it be safe to drop the watertight half an inch?" said Dave. "If we switched the lights off we might hear something!"

"We'll try it," said Val. "Let her go down a bit, Mr. Maddock!"

The mechanism made very little noise, and presently they felt a ripple of breeze. With the lights switched off it was intensely dark, but an oblong of pale light appeared with one star twinkling in it.

"It's a case of a cat amongst the pigeons," said Val. "They'll get the Kaiser away first thing, I'll wager. Rotten luck that blanket slipping for that's what gave us away!"

"Absolutely, 'kid'! When I was hiking for home with those guys with the big carving knives chasing us, our glims were shining up like a little underground lighthouse. And a rattling good egg I arrived just when I did, for if our big pal the baron had got his head and shoulders through first and blocked the passage, they'd have had us!"

"They're off, boys," said Ching Lung. "That's the plane buzzing. The ex-Kaiser's packing up!"

"I wish we'd captured him," said Dave. "We never thought of that, did we?"

"What the thump could we have done with him if we had collared him, you juggins?" said Val. "There's not a war on, as I keep telling you. I expect he dodged out of Holland, and now he's off back again, but that plane won't carry more than three or four passengers, so some of them are still up there!"

There was a sudden flash of light above the sea-gate.

"Close up, Maddock," said Val quickly. "They're barging round with electric torches looking for another way in."

The sea-gate rose silently, and the bo'sun switched on the electric light.

"Now what's going to happen?" said Val. "It will take more than half a dozen men to dig us out of this, anyhow."

"If they try, will you fight, kid?"

"You bet," answered Val. "We're not going to hold up our hands and squeal 'Kamerad'! If we let 'em get us we might have to spend a year or two in some rotten German fortress. I don't know exactly what the charge would be, but if this is a German island, we're playing a high-handed game in taking the owner prisoner. And it's not likely that they'd make it public, either. If we fall into the hands of that fat traitor Zeimmeyer, we shall just disappear!"

(Val and his companions are in a tight corner, but they are not beaten yet. Look out for next week's instalment of this fine story, boys.)



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