

"Happy New Year 'to You All, Chums!"

The GEM 2^d

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EVERY
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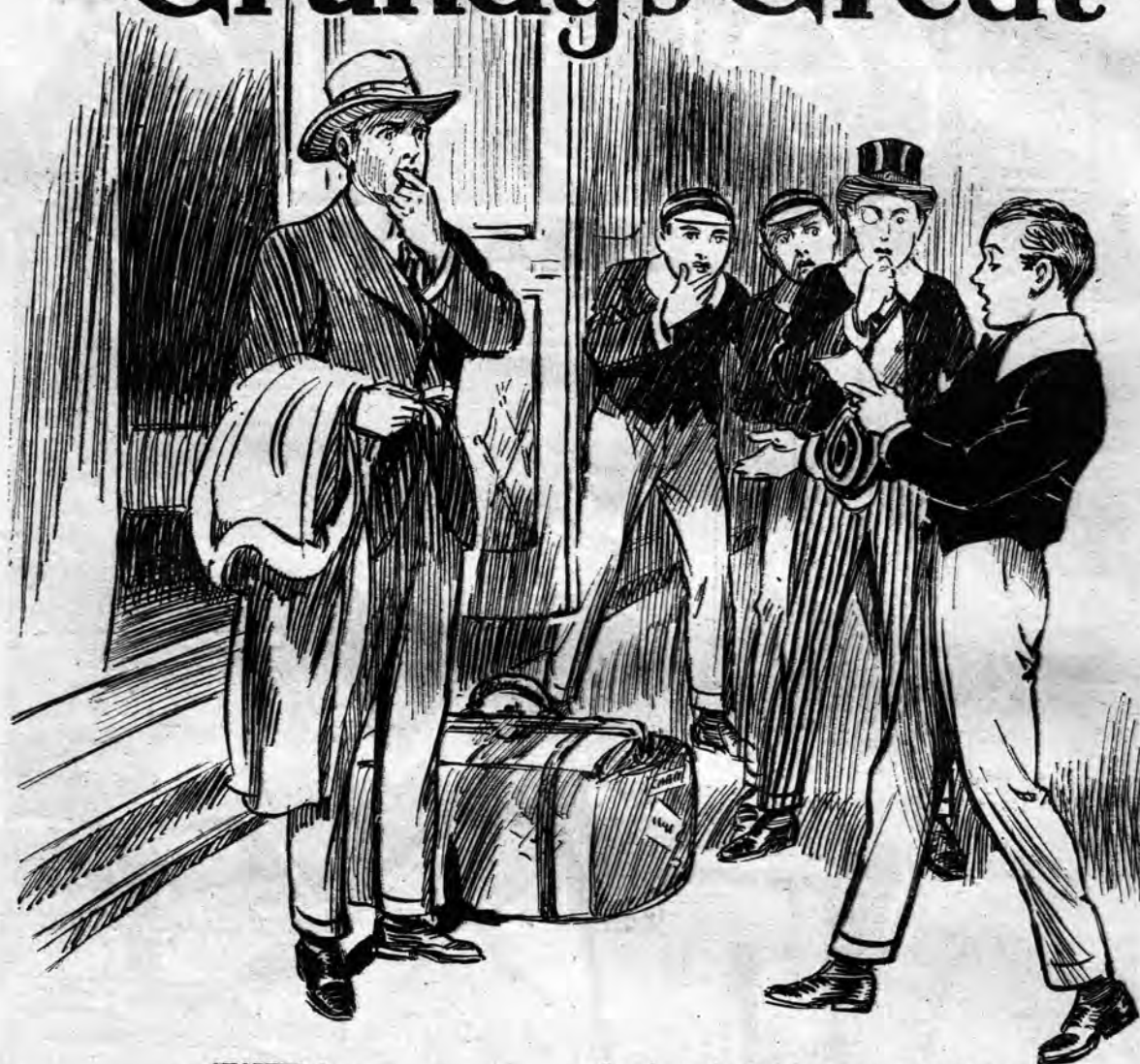


SURPRISING THE CRACKSMEN!

(A dramatic incident from the grand
school tale of St. Jim's inside.)

A SPLENDID LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY FEATURING—

Grundy's Great



CHAPTER 1. The Colonial Visitor.

"Gussy!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Where is he?"

"Where the dickens has the dummy got to?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was apparently in great demand.

"The frabjous idiot!" said Jack Blake.

"The footling chump!" snorted Herries.

"He knew dashed well the game was due to begin at half-past seven!" remarked Digby. "Just like the howling ass to go and disappear like this!"

There was quite a crowd in the Junior Common-room. And they were getting a little impatient. An event of some importance had been due to begin at seven-thirty—nothing less than the deciding game for the Junior Chess Championship of the School House—and Arthur Augustus was one of the contestants. Hence the general anxiety for his appearance.

Tom Merry, the cheerful leader of the Shell, who was to engage the swell of the Fourth in the final game, had turned up prompt to time. But ten minutes had passed since the striking of the half-hour, and so far nothing had been seen of Gussy.

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Search parties had been sent up and down the House, without result. And the Fourth, who had assembled in full force in the hope of seeing the noble representative of their Form vanquish the redoubtable Tom Merry, were feeling decidedly exasperated.

"He was with us only a quarter of an hour ago," said Jack Blake, knitting his brows. "What the thump can he be playing at?"

"Perhaps he's gone out!" suggested Levison.

"Rot!"

"Possibly the earth has opened and swallowed him up," remarked Manners thoughtfully.

"Ass!"

"Do you think he's funking it?" asked Monty Lowther brightly.

The Fourth glared.

"Asking for a thick ear?" said Blake pleasantly.

"Or a punch on the nose?" growled Herries.

"Not really," grinned Lowther. "I thought this was a chess championship, not a nose-punching tournament!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No need to worry about the time, anyway," said Talbot. "It won't take Tommy long to polish off Gussy, I'm thinking."

"Five minutes will do it," remarked Lowther sagely, and the Fourth glared at him with renewed glares.

"Bai Jove!"

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— TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S.

Adventure! *by* Martin Clifford



Once George Alfred Grundy gets an idea into his head, wild horses won't drag it from him. His latest idea, coupled with an overdose of obstinacy, lands him into an extraordinary adventure, from which he is exceedingly fortunate to emerge with so much credit.

"What the dickens has Mr. Railton's nephew to do with it?" asked Tom, staring.

"Evvowytin', deah boy! I have just been talkin' to Mr. Wailton—"

"So that's where you've been!" said Jack Blake in deep disgust. "Talking to a blessed Housemaster, when you're booked to play Tom Merry at chess! You dummy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Cheese it, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Stick to the giddy point, you know. What's this about Railton's nephew?"

"Mr. Wailton's nephew fwom South Afwica is expected to awwive heah to-morrow, deah boy. I happened to take Wailton an impot, just befoah it was time for our game, and he confided the news to me, while I was in his woom."

"Oh!"

"Appawvently young Wailton, who is a fellow of twenty-thwee or foah, is to stay at St. Jim's for a few days befoah he pwocceeds to London on business," explained Arthur Augustus. "I assuahed Mr. Wailton that so far as I was concerned, I would tweat any visitah fwom such a distant part of the Bwitish Empiah as an honoured guest!"

"Did you, though?" grinned Lowther. "I suppose Railton looked awfully bucked at that?"

"Yaas, wathah!" replied Gussy innocently, and there was a chuckle from the juniors.

"But how does that prevent you playing chess this evening?" asked Tom Merry.

"It doesn't, deah boy!"

"But you just said it was impossible to start the championship game, you ass!" said Jack Blake.

"So it is, deah boy!"

"Then if you can play, why the thump can't the game begin?" hooted Blake.

"Because Tom Mewwy can't play!"

"What!"

"Mr. Wailton asked me to wequest Tom Mewwy to wun along and see him, in his studay, about the awwival of his nephew, I believe. Therefoah, the game cannot take place, at the moment!"

"Oh!"

Jack Blake grunted, and the rest grinned. Gussy often took a long time to reach the point, but there usually was a point to his conversation. The point had evidently been reached now.

"Oh, I see! I'm wanted in Railton's study—is that it?" grinned Tom Merry.

"That's it, deah boy! Twot along, and see what Wailton wants, and you may be out soon enough for us to finish a game. I considah I ought to lick you without a gweat deal of twouble, Tom Mewwy!"

"Rats!" said the leader of the Shell cheerfully. "Anyway, I'll buzz off. Stay here, chaps, and I'll be as quick as I can!"

"Right-ho, Tommy!"

Tom Merry quitted the Common-room, and the crowd broke up into groups and scattered over the room.

Tom Merry was not absent for long. Within ten minutes he entered the door of the Common-room again, and there was a general movement back to the chess table.

"Back already?" said Arthur Augustus, taking his seat at the table. "Then I am quite pwepared to begin the game now, if you wish, deah boy!"

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The juniors swung round as the voice of the swell of the Fourth sounded behind them.

"Here he is!"

"Where have you been, you image?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his celebrated monocle and surveyed the crowd with a rather dismayed expression.

"Bai Jove! Am I late, deah boys?"

"Late!" snorted Jack Blake. "Ye gods! You're nearly in time for next year's championship! Where the thump have you been, you silly cuckoo?"

"Weally, Blake, I must ask you to westwain your language," said Gussy, fixing a very severe look on the leader of Study No. 6. "I wefuse to be called a sillay cuckoo, and—"

"But where have you been, you footling ass!" howled Herries.

"I wgard that expwession as widiculous, Hewwies!" said Arthur Augustus, with icy dignity. "Kindlay—"

"Oh, suffocate him, somebody!" growled Blake. "What about the chess championship? Mean to say you forgot it?"

"Yaas, I'm wathah afwaid I did—"

"What!"

"Temporawly, you know, deah boy!" finished Gussy. "I must offer you my sinceah apologies, Tom Mewwy, for keepin' you waitin'—"

"All serene, old son!" said the skipper of the Shell cheerfully. "Sit down and we'll get busy!"

"I'm afwaid that's impos at the moment, deah boy!"

"Eh?"

"I'm afwaid it's impos! You see, Mr. Wailton's nephew—"

"In half-a-tick, Gussy. News, first," said Tom Merry. "Gather round, my infants, and I will a tale unfold." The juniors gathered round curiously. "What's on, Tommy?" "Let's hear all about it!" "On the ball!" "Don't get excited—it's nothing much really," said Tom; "all that's happened is that Mr. Railton has asked me to go down to Rylcombe Station to-morrow afternoon and escort his nephew up to the school."

"Oh!" "Lucky we're not playing an important match, then," remarked Talbot.

"Just what I thought. Anyway, I'm glad enough to oblige a decent sort like old Railton. And from what he tells me, his nephew will prove interesting enough—he's a regular corker, in fact!"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, he's a champion boxer, sprinter, swimmer, and all sorts of other things, according to Railton. Regular adventurer, too—knocked about all over the world, although he's only a young chap."

The juniors were quite impressed. A young man of twenty-three or four, who was athletic and had seen adventures all over the world was certainly worth knowing from their point of view.

"Want somebody to come along with you?" asked Jack Blake. "Just as well to have someone to represent the Fourth, you know."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here, Tom Merry," said George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell. "If this chap's an athlete, he'll appreciate it if he's met at the station by the best athlete in the Lower School; you'd better let me take your place!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't be did, Grundy!" said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "If Railton's nephew were an imbecile, or something, we might consider the proposition!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any of your cheek!" growled Grundy, frowning darkly. "I'm serious. This nephew of Railton's is coming all the way from South Africa—a blessed outpost of Empire, by George!—and it's up to us to give him a suitable welcome. I consider I'm the most suitable chap here to meet him!"

"Great pip!"

"Nothing like modesty!"

"I mean it!" said Grundy emphatically. "A chap like Railton's nephew won't think much of St. Jim's if a soft-looking dud like Tom Merry goes along to meet him. He'll expect to see a hefty-looking chap like me, you know. Coming all the way from Africa, he's probably a big weather-beaten trapper—"

"Trapper!" howled Jack Blake. "From Africa! Ye gods! Aren't you thinking of Canada, Grundy?"

"No, I'm not!" roared Grundy. "I suppose there are trappers in Africa, as well as Canada, ain't there? Anyway, he'll expect a—he-man to meet him, and I reckon I'm the man for the job!"

"Rot!"

"Dry up, Grundy!"

"Yaas, wathah! Dwoop it, deah boy!"

"I tell you—" roared Grundy.

"Rats!"

"You cheeky cads! I'll mop up the floor with the whole lot of you!" hooted Grundy furiously. "Cheek me, would you? Why, I'll—Yaroooop!"

The juniors had become tired of listening to Grundy's bellowing voice, and had suddenly taken steps to put an end to the nuisance. The steps consisted of yanking Grundy off his feet, and depositing him, with great vigour, on the floor.

"Now bump the idiot till he promises to be quiet," suggested Jack Blake.

"Good egg!"

Many willing hands seized the great man of the Shell and lifted him up.

"You howling idiots! I'll smash you!" roared Grundy.

"I'll—"

Bump!

"Yaroooop!"

"I'll fight you half a dozen at a time, you cads!" bellowed Grundy, struggling furiously. "Only let me—"

Bump!

"Yaroooop!"

"Going to dry up, Grundy?" demanded Blake.

"No, you rotter! Yaroooop!"

"Give him another!" said Herries cheerily. "We can keep this up all night, Grundy!"

Bump!

"Grooooooh! You rotters!" gasped Grundy. "All right, you idiots, I won't say any more!"

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"Good! Drop him, you chaps!"

The chaps dropped Grundy like a hot brick, and that celebrated member of the Shell yelped as he met the floor with a loud concussion.

"Bai Jove! I wathah think it's time we started our game now, Tom Mewwy!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I'm ready!" assented Tom Merry. "We'll forget Railton's nephew and Grundy for a bit and get to the business of the evening."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And at that the fellows gathered round to watch the game, while George Alfred Grundy, with many a groan, limped out of the room, feeling exceedingly sorry that he had made any suggestions concerning the reception of Mr. Railton's nephew.

CHAPTER 2.

Grundy's Bright Idea!

"ROTTERS!" said Grundy.

"Yes, old chap!" said Gunn sympathetically.

"Cads!" said Grundy.

"Oh, rather!" murmured Wilkins.

"Footling idiots!" said Grundy bitterly.

Wilkins and Gunn, Grundy's study-mates in Study No. 3, looked at each other significantly. Something had evidently happened to upset the composure of their celebrated leader.

"If you chaps had been there to back me up, instead of rooting here in the blessed study, it might have been a different story!" growled Grundy.

"Oh!"

"Not that you're much good in a scrap, if it comes to that!" said Grundy moodily. "Still, you'd have helped me to put up a show!"

"If it's not asking too much, what the thump are you talking about?" asked Cuthbert Gunn, with heavy sarcasm.

"I'm talking about what's just happened in the Common-room," grunted George Alfred. "About twenty of the cheeky rotters down there had the infernal impudence to set about me—me, you know!"

"Awful!" said Gunn gravely.

"Shocking!" said Wilkins, stifling a yawn.

"It's outrageous!" declared Grundy, with emphasis. "Of course, I suppose it was simply jealousy, as usual, but that doesn't excuse it!"

"Certainly not!" agreed Wilkins. "By the way, how's the game between Tom Merry and Gussy going?"

The leader of Study No. 3 glared.

"Game? I'm talking about what happened to me, not about a rotten game of chess, you idiot!"

"Oh, sorry!"

"They bumped me, the cads!" said Grundy sulphureously. "And all because I said it was up to me to meet Railton's nephew, instead of a soft-looking dud like Tom Merry!"

"Ha, ha! I mean, you don't say so, old chap!"

"If you're trying to be funny, Wilkins—" began Grundy, rolling back his cuffs in a businesslike manner.

"Nunno! Go ahead, old man!" said Wilkins hurriedly.

"Who's Railton's nephew, anyway?"

"Railton's nephew is a blessed Colonial—a South African, or something—who is coming to the school to-morrow," explained Grundy. "Railton has asked Tom Merry to meet him at the station and bring him up here, in the one-and-only hack, I suppose."

"Oh!"

"Railton's nephew, it seems, is a bit of an athlete—a boxer, and all that kind of thing—and as soon as I heard what was on, I pointed out to the fellows that he'd probably appreciate it if a chap of his own kidney met him."

"I see!"

"He's coming a long way—thousands of miles, in fact," said Grundy impressively. "And coming from a man's country, it stands to reason he'd like a good specimen of British stock to welcome him to St. Jim's—me, for instance!"

"Great pip!"

"Well, why not?" asked Grundy argumentatively. "Ain't I the best athlete in the Lower School here?"

"H'm!"

"No cheek or I'll bash you!" roared Grundy. "Am I, or am I not, the best athlete in the Lower School?"

"Why, of course you are, old man!"

"Oh, rather!"

"Very well, then. That being so, I'm the man who ought to meet Railton's nephew. And I'm jolly well going to do it!"

"But my dear old chap, hasn't Tom Merry already been selected for the job?" objected Gunn.

"Blow Tom Merry!"

"Oh!"

"Tom Merry's got no idea of running a thing like this," said Grundy. "He simply intends to meet the chap and

trot him up to the school—that's about as far as his imagination goes."

"But isn't that all that's needed?" asked Wilkins, staring blankly.

"No, it jolly well isn't!" grunted the great man of the Shell. "Of course, I don't expect you chaps to use your brains. Can't use what you haven't got, I suppose, can you? Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy roared at that humorous sally, while Wilkins and Gunn turned pink. They forbore from taking summary vengeance for the uncomplimentary remark, however—probably because they realised that the process might have proved a somewhat painful one!

"As I was saying," continued Grundy, in high good humour after his little witticism, "Tom Merry's got no idea. It isn't as though the visitor was an ordinary chap—he's not!"

"What I propose to do with Railton's nephew," said Grundy, "is what the big bugs do with important visitors."

"And what the thump do the big bugs do with important visitors?"

"Read 'em an Address of Welcome," answered Grundy unhesitatingly.

"What?"

"An address! Oh, my hat!"

"And your bright idea is to read an address of welcome to Railton's nephew—is that it?" murmured Wilkins.

"That's the idea!"

"Great pip!"

"My sainted aunt!"

Wilkins and Gunn looked at each other, and burst into a roar of laughter. The idea of Grundy preparing and delivering an address of welcome to a visitor from a distant land struck them as rather funny. They roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy glared.

"Well, you cackling idiots, what's the giddy joke?" he hooted. "Blessed if I can see anything funny in an address of welcome! I think it's a top-hole idea—a regular brain-wave, in fact!"

Just as they reached the horse-trough, Grundy, with a terrific wrench, tore himself away from Blake and Herries, and sent his fist crashing into D'Arcy's noble jaw. "Don't let the rotter escape!" panted Blake. (See Chapter 4.)



"What is he, then—a freak?" asked Wilkins curiously. "Idiot! The visitor, I tell you, is a Colonial—a pioneer from one of our far-flung outposts of Empire!" said Grundy impressively.

"Oh crumbs! Haven't I heard that remark before somewhere?" gasped Wilkins.

"I saw it in the 'Daily Mail' this morning!" grinned Gunn. "Is that where you read it, Grundy?"

"Ass! Think I have to go to the blessed 'Daily Mail' for my phrases?" hooted Grundy. "When I used that phrase, I was being quite original. I may have read it in the 'Daily Mail' this morning, but I'd forgotten it, and I'll punch your head if you suggest I've cribbed it!"

"Go ahead, then!" said Gunn, with a wink at Wilkins. "This chap is a representative of one of our great Colonies," said Grundy. "It's up to us at St. Jim's to give him the jolly old glad hand and make him feel that he's at home."

"And how do you propose to do that?"

Grundy smiled.

"That's where brains come in! Naturally, you fellows can't see how to do it—you wouldn't! But I've been thinking about it on my way up from the Common-room, and I've got a bright idea."

Wilkins and Gunn did not look enthusiastic. They had heard of Grundy's bright ideas before.

"Oh, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy rose from the study table, and glared at his grinning satellites with a glare such as the fabled basilisk might have envied.

"You silly cackling hyenas!" he exclaimed fiercely. "For two pins I'd mop up the floor with you! What the thump is there to snigger at in what I've said?"

"Oh, n-nothing much!" said Wilkins, subduing his mirth with an effort.

"Quite a good wheeze, in fact, old chap!" gurgled Gunn.

"Well, then, stop giggling like a couple of schoolgirls!" roared Grundy. "And listen to what I'm going to say!"

"Oh! Right-ho, old man!"

"That's my idea, anyway," said Grundy. "Read the honoured guest an address of welcome, and make him feel that we, as British citizens, are proud of him. Hands across the sea, and all that kind of business—see?"

"H'm—yes!"

"There's only one drawback," continued Grundy, frowning. "Tom Merry, as usual, is bound to interfere, and shove me in the background, if he can. Now, that's where you come in!"

"Oh crumbs! Is it?"

Grundy nodded.

"What I want you to do, is simply to stand by me. When the train comes in, and I step forward with my address of welcome, it's ten to one that Tom Merry's pals will try to yank me back. That will be your opportunity!"

"W-will it?"

"Certainly! it will!" said Grundy, quite enthusiastically. "What you've got to do then is to protect me. I shall be too busy to do any scrapping, of course!"

"Oh, of course!"

"All you've got to do when Merry's pals set about me is to stand up to 'em, and hit out right and left! Savvy?"

Wilkins and Gunn looked at each other. They did not seem at all enthusiastic at the idea of standing up to Tom Merry's pals, and hitting out right and left.

"Well, you're agreeable, I suppose?" growled Grundy.

"H'm!"

Grundy's eyes fairly bulged at the realisation of the reluctance that his followers were displaying. His big fists clenched, and he glared at them with a truly ferocious glare.

"You—you howling funks!" he roared at last. "Mean to say you're actually backing out—that you're going to leave me in the lurch?"

"N-nothing of the kind!" gasped Wilkins. "We wouldn't leave you in the lurch for worlds, old chap! But don't you think it would be carrying the joke a bit too far to kick up a shindy in front of the giddy visitor?"

"Rot! He's a Colonial—a he-man, not a softy!" said Grundy, banging the table to emphasise his words. "Probably the chap would appreciate seeing a good scrap on his arrival! And while you were keeping the other rotters at bay, I could be getting through the address. Now, what is it—yes, or no?"

"Oh crumbs! We're not backing out, of course, Grundy, but—"

"You see, old chap—"

"That's enough!" roared Grundy, rolling back his cuffs and advancing on his reluctant followers with gleaming eyes. "You're funky! You're white-livered! By George! And to think that I own you as pals! Take that!"

There was a howl from Wilkins as his leader's heavy fist smote him on the nose, and a roar from Gunn as the other fist landed forcefully on his jaw.

"I'll show you!" hooted Grundy. "Stand up and take your gruel, you funky cads!"

"Whoop!"

"Yaroooooh!"

Wilkins and Gunn wisely did not wait to take any more gruel. They made a simultaneous leap for the study door and fairly flew through the doorway, assisted in their flight by a hefty kick from their furious leader.

Grundy slammed the door after them, with a slam that made the study shake. He was red with rage and disappointed at this unexpected set-back. But set-backs, as a rule, made Grundy more determined than ever, and this one was no exception. Left on his own, deserted by his pals, he sat down to prepare an address of welcome for Mr. Railton's nephew. And he was still preparing it when bed-time came.

CHAPTER 3. Grundy Insists!

THE following day was Wednesday—a half-holiday at St. Jim's—and quite a crowd of School House juniors took advantage of the opportunity to accompany Tom Merry to Rylcombe Station to meet Mr. Railton's nephew.

Manners and Lowther, who, with Tom Merry, comprised the famous Terrible Three of the Shell, went along with their leader as a matter of course. Blake & Co. turned up in full force to represent the Fourth, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his celebrated monocle glimmering in his eye, and in all the glory of a brand-new "topper," beautifully creased trousers, and the nattiest of patent shoes, was evidently determined to impress the visitor.

In addition to these leading lights in the Lower School at St. Jim's, others, such as Kerruish, Julian, and Hammond of the Fourth, and Talbot and Frere of the Shell joined the Terrible Three as they tramped down to the gates. Baggy Trimble, perhaps with some idea in his podgy brain of a possible feed at someone else's expense, came puffing and blowing after them; and even Skimpole, carrying a bulky volume under his arm, swelled the ranks.

Last, but not least, George Alfred Grundy, with a very determined look

on his face, brought up the rear, with the faithful Wilkins and Gunn in attendance.

Wilkins and Gunn, with voices lowered so that the rest would not hear, were doing their best to convince their leader that an address of welcome to the newcomer was quite unnecessary. But Grundy took a lot of convincing.

"It's like this, Grundy—"

"Can't you see, old chap, that—"

"Rot! You can't talk me over! You two fellows are like Tom Merry—you simply haven't got the brains to understand what's wanted on an occasion like this! It's not your fault—it's your misfortune!"

"But—"

"You see—"

"Rot, I tell you! Leave it to me! I'll do all the thinking; you just stick to the donkey-work, and you'll be helping me. Just stay near me all the time, and if the emergency comes, just hit out for all you're worth and keep the rotters away from me. I'll do the rest!"

"It's no good talking to him, Wilky!" grunted Gunn.

"Waste of breath!" said Grundy cheerfully. "You'd better drop it, and simply act on my instructions, both of you!"

Wilkins and Gunn dropped it. But they made a mental vow that they were not going to imperil themselves that afternoon for Grundy's address of welcome, or anything else appertaining to Grundy, for that matter!

It was a cheerful crowd that tramped down Rylcombe Lane, past the Grammar School, and on to the station. There was much good-natured chipping of Grundy for his turning out with Tom Merry, after declaring so emphatically in the Common-room that the job should have been his. But Grundy, with his painfully prepared address of welcome tucked away securely in his jacket-pocket, took it calmly. He felt that he could afford to do so.

The station was reached in good time, and the juniors ranged themselves along the platform, ready to cheer when the Wayland train came in. The bronzed Colonial, who at that moment was changing over from the main-line train from Southampton to the local train, would probably have been considerably surprised had he been able to see the elaborate arrangements that were being made for his reception.

"Tommy keeps in front, of course!" said Manners. "He's the official host, you know!"

"Yaas, wathah! And pewwaps I had bettah stand close by, deah boy, in case—"

"Rats!" chimed in Jack Blake. "Who's skipper of the Fourth—you or I?"

"You, of course, deah boy; but—"

"Well then, who ought to back up Tom Merry?" demanded Blake.

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

"Well don't!" growled Blake. "Any support that Tom Merry requires is going to come from the skipper of the Fourth, my son!"

The swell of the Fourth jammed his monocle in his eye and bestowed a look on Jack Blake that should have withered that junior up on the spot. Strangely enough, Blake, who had started speaking to Tom Merry, did not show any signs of being affected by that withering look; in fact, he did not seem to be conscious even that he was being looked at. And Gussy, with but two pink spots on his cheeks to indicate the indignation that burned within his noble breast, gave it up.

Very shortly afterwards the train from Wayland was signalled. The juniors got ready to cheer, while Grundy fumbled in his pocket for his address of welcome, and Wilkins and Gunn got ready to edge away from their leader as soon as danger threatened.

"Here she comes!"

"Keep an eye out for him, you fellows!"

"What-ho!"

The local train steamed in, and slowly drew to a stop, and the fellows scanned the alighting passengers eagerly for their expected visitor.

There were not many to choose from, and most of them were immediately recognised as local tradespeople, or residents.

"There's our man!" exclaimed Herries suddenly, pointing to a passenger who was just stepping out of a first-class carriage.

The juniors looked, and saw a tall, bronzed young man, of cheerful countenance and athletic figure.

"That's Railton's nephew, right enough!" said Jack Blake confidently. "Give him a cheer, you chaps! Hip, hip—"

"Hurrah!"

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

1. Walter Adolphus D'Arcy.
2. Eric Kildare.
3. "Curly" Gibson.
4. Clifton Dane.
5. Marie Rivers.
6. Ephraim Taggles.
7. Harry Manners.
8. Reginald Talbot.
9. Toby Marsh.

Rylcombe Station fairly echoed with the cheer that rang out.

Tom Merry stepped forward, and "capped" the stranger.

"Mr. Stanley Railton, I believe?"

"That's my name, certainly!" admitted the new arrival, with a smile. "How did you guess? And what's your name, young 'un?"

"I'm Tom Merry, of St. Jim's. Your uncle, Mr. Railton, our Housemaster, sent me along to conduct you to the school, sir."

"And you've brought all your pals along—eh?" said Mr. Stanley Railton, with an amused smile. "What the dickens are they cheering about?"

"Oh, that's for you, sir!" explained Tom. "You see—Oh crumbs! Grundy, you ass—"

George Alfred Grundy had just come to the conclusion that it was high time he took a hand in the proceedings. He did so, and his first act was to barge the captain of the Shell out of the way, and extend a hefty palm to be shaken.

"Welcome to a pioneer from one of the outposts of our far-flung Empire!" said Grundy, in a loud and solemn voice. "What!" said the pioneer, staring blankly at the great man of the Shell.

"Welcome!" repeated Grundy, producing his address, with a flourish.

"Grundy—"

"You fearful idiot—"

"For goodness' sake—"

The horrified juniors, suppressing, for the sake of the visitor, their inclination to smite Grundy hip and thigh, tugged at him from behind, and made imploring gestures. But Grundy was adamant. Clearing his throat, and glancing at the sheet of paper in his hand, he began:

St. Jim's v. Grammarians!

Next week's rousing story of Tom Merry & Co. deals with the friendly feud between St. Jim's and Gordon Gay & Co., of the Grammar School.

Fun and adventure are blended with a harmony that is at once appealing and absorbing. Every Gemite will find

"AT WAR WITH THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL!"

By Martin Clifford,

a story that abounds in laughs and thrills.

Don't miss this treat, chums—order your GEM in good time!

"Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Squash him, somebody!"

"I feel it recumbent on me—"

"Recumbent 'I! Oh, my hat!"

"As the leader of the School House at St. Jim's," continued Grundy, rolling the words on his lips with much satisfaction, "to welcome one of the pioneers from a distant part of our glorious Empire!"

"Oh, help!"

The juniors glared at Grundy almost speechlessly.

Had they suspected previously that Grundy's intentions had lain in the direction of reading Mr. Stanley Railton an address of welcome, they would unhesitatingly have put Grundy under lock and key until the visitor was out of the way.

But it was too late to think of that now. And for the moment they were nonplussed. Of course, it would have been a fairly easy matter for half a dozen of them to seize Grundy and sit on him, while Tom Merry conducted the stranger out of the station. But they did not want the reception turned into a brawl in front of the Housemaster's nephew, and Grundy, unfortunately, was strong and pugnacious enough to create that unwanted state of affairs.

"Something's got to be done!" muttered Blake, glaring at Grundy almost wolfishly. "Another minute of this, and, visitor or no visitor, I'll slaughter him!"

Fortunately, that drastic step proved unnecessary. And it was the visitor himself who solved the problem.

"Pioneers of Empire are always welcome to our ancient edifice, sir!" stated Grundy, still reading from his paper. "But to you, the honoured son of an honoured father, our respected Housemaster—"

"Oh, crikey! Railton's his uncle, not his father, you born idiot!"

"I mean the honoured nephew of an honoured uncle, sir," corrected Grundy, "we extend special greeting, and—"

"For pity's sake, dry up, Grundy!"

"Can it, you fearful chump!"

Mr. Stanley Railton looked long and hard at George Alfred Grundy. He had listened at first in blank astonishment to the oration of the great man of the Shell. Then his lips began to twitch, and a faint smile appeared on his face. Inwardly, he was wondering whether Grundy was in earnest, or whether the ceremony was a schoolboy "jape."

He came to the conclusion that no boy could be so foolish as to read an address of welcome—and such an address of welcome!—in earnest, and that therefore Grundy was attempting to pull his Colonial leg.

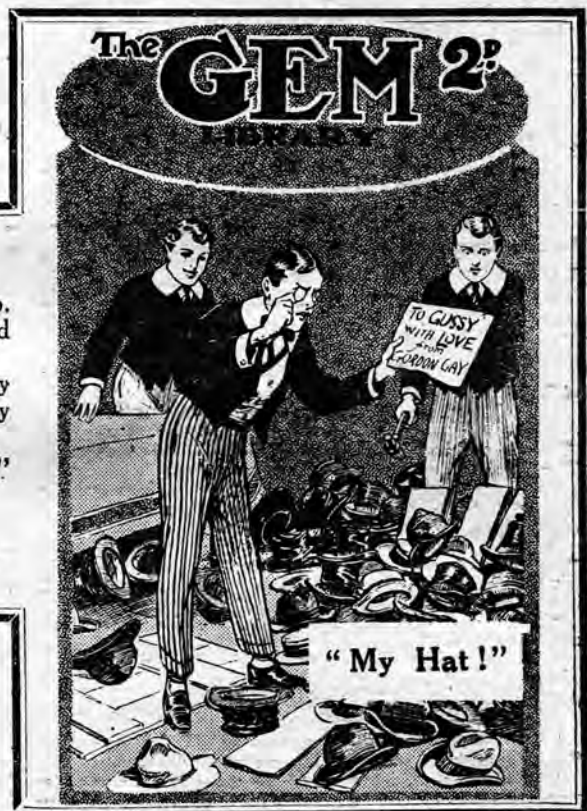
His eyes gleamed a little at the thought.

For several minutes he listened gravely and attentively to Grundy's stream of eloquence. Then, at a favourable moment, when Grundy was pausing for breath, he laid a restraining hand on the cheerful orator of the Shell, and gently brought him back to earth, so to speak.

"Please spare my feelings any further, Master—"

"Grundy—George Alfred Grundy," finished the owner of that name.

"Master George Alfred Grundy!" said the Colonial, with



a nod. "I really cannot allow you to continue an oration specially dedicated to one so unworthy as myself."

"Rot!" said Grundy cheerfully. "I spent a lot of time preparing this address, sir, and—"

"Nevertheless, I cannot allow you to finish!" said Mr. Stanley Railton firmly. "I will take it as read, Master Grundy, and make my formal reply at once."

"Well, if you think that's best—" said Grundy dubiously.

"I certainly do!"

The man from South Africa, with a somewhat peculiar smile on his sunburnt face, turned round to the juniors. The latter hardly knew how he was taking Grundy's address of welcome, and they waited expectantly for his "formal reply."

"Gentlemen of St. Jim's," he said, "in reply to Master Grundy's address of welcome, I can only say that I am overwhelmed. I gather from the attitude of some of you towards our friend, that you don't approve of his action."

"No fear, sir!" chorused a good many of the fellows.

"Wathah not!"

Mr. Stanley Railton's nephew smiled.

"Why not?" he asked gently. "After all, it's quite a harmless form of insanity!"

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For a moment the juniors stared at him. They had hardly expected him, a complete newcomer, to "jump to it," and respond to Grundy's greetings by pulling Grundy's leg. Then they roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well spoken, sir!"

Grundy, whose chest had swelled with pride as the visitor began to reply to the address which he—George Alfred Grundy—had delivered, almost fell down when he heard what the visitor had to say. His jaw dropped; he could hardly believe his own ears.

"What did you say?" he stammered, staring incredulously at Mr. Stanley Railton.

"Some poor fellows," said Mr. Railton, "spend their days in a padded cell with straw in their hair; other demented creatures believe they are Napoleon, or the Kaiser. Surely the fellow whose mania takes the form of reading an address of welcome is much to be preferred!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors were delighted at the turn which events had taken. They simply beamed on the cheery Colonial.

"In conclusion," said the young Mr. Railton, "I thank Master Grundy for his address, and I would pay him the compliment of observing that he is a splendid humorist. If his ambitions lie in that direction I am perfectly sure that, after leaving school, he will make a first-class clown!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared applause.

"Now I'm ready, youngster!" said the visitor, turning to Tom Merry.

"Are you going to take the back, sir?" asked Tom.

"I prefer to walk, I think. I need a stretch."

"Right-ho! This way out."

A general move was made for the exit, and Grundy was left standing on the platform, his rugged face wearing an expression of dazed incredulity.

CHAPTER 4.

Grundy is Suspicious!

"M-MY hat!" said Grundy.

Tom Merry and his supporters, with Mr. Stanley Railton in their midst, were passing through the barrier that led off the platform. They seemed to be in a very exuberant mood.

George Alfred Grundy, left with only Wilkins and Gunn, who took no pains to disguise their mirth, continued to stare after the crowd like one in a dream.

"M-m-my hat!" he repeated, still in utter bewilderment.

"Did you hear what that chap said, Gunny?"

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Gunn. "Didn't you catch it, old chap? I'll tell you if you like!"

"A clown!" choked Grundy. "He called me a clown—me, you know!"

"Shame!"

"He said I was suffering from insanity! Insanity—me, suffering from insanity! Think of it!"

"I can't bear to!" chortled Wilkins.

"Why, the chap must be mad himself!" declared Grundy.

"That's the only solution—he's an escaped lunatic!"

"He doesn't look much like an escaped lunatic to me," remarked Gunn, with a glance at the fine, alert figure of the man who was just passing through the barrier. "Looks a very sane sort of chap, if you ask my opinion."

"But how else can you explain his behaviour?" demanded Grundy. "Here I go and prepare a tip-top address of welcome for him, and he turns round and insinuates that I'm a blessed loony! If that's not madness, what is?"

"Give it up," yawned Wilkins.

"Either that," said Grundy darkly, "or—"

"Or what?"

The great man of the Shell knitted his brows thoughtfully. "I hardly know what yet. But doesn't it strike you there's something fishy about him?"

"Blessed if it does!"

"I thought he seemed a very decent sort," remarked Wilkins. "First chop, in fact! What are you getting at?"

Grundy shook his head.

"I feel there's something rummy about him," he said, a look of deep suspicion coming into his eyes. "Something shady, in fact. Didn't you notice it?"

"No, I didn't!" retorted Gunn candidly. "He certainly ticked you off rather smartly, but there's nothing rummy in that that I see."

"Rather natural, perhaps!" suggested Wilkins, sotto voce.

"What did you say?"

"Oh, n-nothing, old chap!"

"Well, stop mumbling, then!" snapped Grundy, with a

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glare. "Anyway, whatever you fellows think, I consider that his behaviour to me shows that there's something peculiar about him."

"Oh crumbs! Does it?"

"That chap is not all he pretends to be!" said Grundy solemnly.

"But he hasn't pretended to be anything so far!" grinned Wilkins. "It was you who made him out to be a pioneer of empire and all that kind of thing."

Grundy shook his head again.

"I'm not satisfied. There's something suspicious about the chap. If there's not, why should he talk to me in the way he did?"

"Because he thought you were pulling his leg, I should think, old chap," said Gunn. "He couldn't accept you at your face value—that's all!"

Grundy snorted.

"Rot! Of course, it's useless talking to you chaps; you never can see anything! But it's my opinion that he's deep; he's shady!"

"Oh, don't talk piffle!" said Wilkins, with an uneasy glance at the retreating crowd. "And don't speak so loudly, old man; they might hear you."

"Who cares?" growled Grundy. "I don't mind who knows my opinion of Railton's nephew—in fact, he can hear it himself if he likes!"

"For goodness' sake, Grundy—" began Wilkins.

"Hold on, old chap!" gasped Gunn, in alarm.

"Rot!" said Grundy, shaking off his anxious chums. "I'm a plain chap; no beating about the bush with me! I'm going to tell him to his face that I suspect him!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hold him back, Wilky!" cried Gunn desperately. "Stop the ass!"

Grundy swung round and glared ferociously at his scared followers.

"Lay hands on me, would you?" he roared. "Mutiny, by gum! I'll show you!"

He made a rush at them.

Wilkins and Gunn stood bravely up to this rush—for about a space of one second. After that their sudden bravery deserted them, and they fled precipitously out of reach of their leader's hefty fists.

With a grunt, the great man abandoned the chase, and, turning round again, tramped through the barrier and out of the station.

Outside, in the village street, the cheery crowd who had come out with Mr. Stanley Railton were just starting off on their walk back to St. Jim's.

There was an ironical cheer as Grundy appeared.

"Good old Grundy!"

"Going off to buy that strait-jacket?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"S-sh! Visitor present!" murmured Jack Blake.

"Ragging's taboo!"

"Yaas, wathah! Kindlay westwain your exubewance, deah boys!"

"Looks as if Grundy's coming after us," remarked Blake, with rather a worried look back. "Wonder what his game is?"

"Pewwaps Gwundy is goin' to apologise for unintentionally woundin' young Mr. Wailton's feelin's," suggested D'Arcy.

"I don't think it's that!" grinned Herries. "Grundy looks like a giddy lion seeking whom he may devour, as some Johnny said. Look at him!"

"Bai Jove!"

George Alfred Grundy was advancing on the juniors with an air of grim determination about him. Judging by the gleam in his eyes, he had not come, as D'Arcy had suggested, to apologise.

"He's looking for trouble," said Digby. "Shall we drop behind a little bit and keep him off, while Tom Merry and the rest keep ahead with the visitor?"

"What-ho!"

"Good idea!"

Jack Blake & Co. slackened speed, and unostentatiously dropped a little in the rear of the others. If Grundy was looking for trouble, the stalwarts of the Fourth were quite willing to oblige him; but they wanted the visitor to be well out of range of the hostilities before the trouble commenced.

Mr. Stanley Railton was pretty well out of earshot by the time Grundy came tramping up to the Co.

"Get out of my way, you kids!" was Grundy's greeting, as he found himself confronted by four smiling Fourth-Formers.

"Nice day, isn't it?" remarked Jack Blake cheerfully.

"Let me pass, you young idiots!" roared Grundy.

"Not just now," said Herries gently. "Some other time, perhaps!"

Grundy hesitated. His natural inclination was to make

a rush at the grinning Fourth-Formers, and "mop up the floor" with them, as he would have expressed it himself. He realised, however, that mopping up the floor with Jack Blake & Co. was not a very easy task, even to a fellow of his prowess. Anyway, his aim was to have a few words with the School House master's nephew, not to mop up the floor with the chums of Study No. 6.

"You lemme pass!" he growled, dropping his clenched fists again. "I'm going to speak to that cheeky rotter down the road there!"

"Which cheeky rotter?"

"Railton's nephew, of course! I—"

"Weally, Gwunday, that is hardly the pwopah mannah in which you should refer to our Housemaster's nephew," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly. "For two pins, I would give you a feahful thwashin'—"

"Are you cheeky young cubs going to allow me to pass, or shall I have to lick you first?" hooted Grundy.

"Is that a conundrum?" asked Jack Blake sweetly.

"You—you—"

Grundy did not waste any more time in words. He flung himself furiously at the cheeky Fourth-Formers, hitting out right and left.

But Jack Blake & Co. were ready for the onslaught, and Grundy's wild rush did not take them unawares.

Ducking to avoid the truculent Shell fellow's hefty blows, the four closed round on him and seized him before he had time to do any damage.

"Hold him tight!" gasped Blake, using all his strength to pinion Grundy's arms to his sides. "Grab his legs, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Leggo, you interfering rotters!" howled Grundy, struggling spasmodically. "I'll smash you! I'll—groogh! Oh crumbs! Where are you taking me?"

Jack Blake & Co., each holding one of Grundy's limbs, had whirled him off his feet and were marching back towards Rylcombe Station, with Grundy between them.

"We're taking you to the horse-trough, my son!" answered Blake grimly. "You're a bit too hot and feverish this afternoon, Grundy. We're going to cool you down a bit, that's all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai jove! That's wathah funnay, you know!"

"Here, hold on!" yelled Grundy, in alarm. "You dare to chuck me in the horse-trough, and I'll—"

"You can do what you like afterwards," chuckled Blake.

"That's where you're going, anyway!"

"Oh crikey! Look here, I was only joking!" said Grundy desperately. "I won't interfere with the Railton johnny, if you'll lemme go!"

"Too late, now!" said the unrelenting Blake. "Now, here we are, chaps! Get ready there—Groooogh!"

"Yarooooop!" yelled Herries.

"Oh, bai jove! The wotah's escapin'—yawwoh!"

The sight of the horse-trough outside the station must have inspired Grundy to extraordinary strength. For just as they reached it, Grundy, with a terrific wrench of his whole body, pulled Blake to the ground and sent Herries staggering. Righting himself in a trice, he sent his fist crashing into D'Arcy's noble jaw, and finally tore himself away from Digby and ran for his life.

"After him! Don't let the rotter escape!" yelled Jack Blake excitedly.

The Co., thirsting for gore, sped across the road after the flying figure of Grundy.

Had the hero of the Shell continued to rely on his legs, he might have been recaptured and taken back to the horse-trough again.

But he realised his danger. And as a motor-car came down the road, at a moderate speed, he seized the opportunity to make good his escape.

Heedless of the wrathful cries of the occupants of the car, he leaped on to the footboard.

"Let her rip, sir!" he called out to the astonished driver. "I want to get clear of those rotters down the road!"

The man at the wheel did not look at all pleased. Nevertheless, he accelerated, and the car, with Grundy clinging on to it, sped through the village, in the opposite direction to St. Jim's.

The last Jack Blake & Co. saw of Grundy was when the car turned a corner at the far end of the village. By that time Grundy had climbed into the seat at the rear, and was apparently in conversation with the two men who were in the car.

"Well, that disposes of Grundy," said Jack Blake—"for a time, anyway!"

But it was only for a time, as later events were to show!

CHAPTER 5.

Suspicious Confirmed!

"WELL?"

The monosyllable came from the gentleman sitting next the driver in the car whose appearance Grundy had found so timely.

Grundy was still standing on the footboard, looking back at his pursuers, who were fast disappearing from view. He turned round at the interrogation, and coolly climbed into the rear of the car.

"Sorry to trouble you, gentlemen!" he said. "You see, those idiots were going to chuck me into the horse-trough, so I had to do something!"

"Well, you're a cool card!" remarked the man, with a laugh. "Lucky we weren't in an argumentative mood, or we might have run you down!"

"I've known times when we would have!" said the driver, with a peculiar inflection in his voice, which was lost on the somewhat wooden-headed Grundy. "Anyway, now you're here, what do you want us to do with you?"

"Oh, just drive out of the village!" said Grundy. "I'll foot it back, and the coast will be clear by the time I'm there again."

As they drove out of the village, Grundy had time to study his rescuers. He was not particularly impressed with them at a first glance.

They were both young men, and although they were well dressed, there was something rather "flashy" about them which Grundy did not altogether like.

The great man of the Shell was not wanting in gratitude, however, and the realisation that they had saved him from a watery fate made him look at them with a more kindly eye than he might have bestowed on them in ordinary circumstances.

"You're from the Rylcombe Grammar School, eh?" asked the driver, as they left the last house of the village behind and came out into the open country.

"Rylcombe Grammar School? Wouldn't be found dead in it!" said Grundy disdainfully. "I'm from St. Jim's."

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"Oh!"

Grundy's two hosts looked at each other. The mention of St. Jim's seemed to attract their interest.

"St. Jim's, eh?" repeated the other man. "Slow down, Harry! Let's talk to our friend before he leaves us."

"But—" began the gentleman addressed as Harry.

His friend closed one eye—the one which was outside Grundy's line of vision—and "Harry" did not proceed with his remark. Instead, he applied the brakes, and pulled the car to a stop at the side of the country road.

"Yes, I'm a St. Jim's man," went on Grundy proudly. "Junior leader of the School House, you know—under Mr. Railton."

"Railton?" said Harry, his greenish eyes glittering. "Oh, indeed! I know that name!"

"Dare say you do," said Grundy carelessly. "He's all right in his way, I suppose, is old Railton. A bit one-sided, perhaps. Treats me pretty shabbily at times. His blessed nephew seems to take after him, in that respect!"

The two men exchanged a quick look. There was a strange air of suppressed excitement about them which might have impressed an observant individual. But Grundy was not observant, and he did not notice it.

"That was Railton's nephew, walking along with a crowd of fellows up the road," said Grundy. "Probably you noticed them before you reached me?"

"Oh, that was Mr. Railton's nephew, was it? And you don't like him, you say?"

Grundy knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"Blessed if I know what to make of him!" he replied. "He's a cheeky beast, anyway—and I must say, I thought his behaviour was fishy. Anyway, I don't suppose you're interested. I'll buzz off now. Thanks for the lift!"

"Hold on a minute!" said the passenger of the car, laying a detaining hand on Grundy's arm. "As a matter of fact, we are interested—"

"Careful!" broke in the driver in a quiet, warning voice.

"It's all right, Harry. Our friend here looks as if he's got his head screwed on the right way. He can be trusted with a secret all right."

"But—" gasped the driver.

"Leave it to me," said the other smoothly. "Now look here, my young friend—"

Grundy turned back.

"What's on?" he asked curiously.

Grundy was not displeased at the flattering opinion which the stranger seemed to have developed of him. Grundy's greatest and bitterest complaint was that people didn't realise what a brainy, clear-thinking fellow he was. It was a pleasant experience to hear from one who had known him only a few minutes that he "had his head screwed on the right way." Grundy felt quite willing to spend a little more time in such congenial company.

"I don't understand exactly what you're getting at, but if I can do anything for you—" he began quite cordially.

"Possibly you can help us," said his flatterer, eyeing him keenly through his narrowed eyes. "We'll see. First of all, can I rely on your discretion in a very confidential matter?"

"I should jolly well think you can!" replied Grundy, without any hesitation. "Why, up at St. Jim's, I'm—"

"That's all right, then," interrupted the man smoothly. "I'll accept your assurance and take you into our confidence. We are plain-clothes officers of the Customs!"

"Great pip! Is that a fact?" asked Grundy, very much surprised at that unexpected information.

"It's the truth," corroborated the driver, although, strangely enough, he had betrayed in his face almost as much surprise as Grundy at his companion's words.

"You are probably already aware of the nature of our duties?" continued the smooth-voiced gentleman.

"Can't say I am," confessed Grundy. "Of course, I know that Customs' Officers prevent dutiable goods being smuggled into the country, and so on, but I always thought they wore uniforms."

"So they do. But we are on confidential work, and we naturally don't want to advertise ourselves. Now, to get to business. You yourself admit that there is something fishy about your Housemaster's nephew. There is!"

Grundy stared.

"How the dickens do you know that, then?" he asked.

"You don't even know the chap, do you?"

"Not personally. But we have our instructions, and, from what we are told, it certainly seems that Railton's a wrong 'un!"

"Oh!"

"Now you understand that what I am telling you is confidential, and must not be repeated?"

"Certainly," said Grundy, very much impressed. "I won't say a word to a soul."

"Then I will tell you what Railton is. Railton is a diamond-smuggler!"

"A diamond-smuggler? Oh crumbs!"

Grundy stared at the two officers of the Customs with eyes that bulged with excitement.

"A smuggler!" he gasped. "And our Housemaster's nephew! Great pip! Are you sure?"

"Absolutely!" answered Grundy's informant gravely.

"He has just returned from South Africa—"

"That's true," nodded Grundy.

"And our information is that he smuggled a considerable quantity of uncut diamonds into the country—diamonds which would be liable to a heavy duty."

"My only hat!" gasped Grundy. "Then he's as good as a criminal?"

"Precisely. But we want proof before we act. And he carries the proof with him."

"What, the diamonds?"

"Oh, no! He would undoubtedly pass them on to a confederate at Southampton as soon as he landed."

"Quick work, then," said Grundy, knitting his brows. "He has only just arrived here from Southampton."

"Exactly," said the man smoothly. "Our people at Southampton have been on the telephone to us this afternoon and given us the full facts. We are here to find out what they failed to find out. We are convinced that a consignment of diamonds has been smuggled through by Railton, and we are going to find out how and bring him to book. Is that clear?"

"Absolutely," said Grundy. "But what a giddy scandal, though, if you succeed. I wonder what the fellows would say if they knew?"

"They must not know—yet. Now, my young friend, Railton is going to St. Jim's, doubtless to wait till he thinks everything is O.K. And you are living at St. Jim's. The conjunction of those two facts seems to indicate that you are in a position to help us."

The two men regarded Grundy with eager eyes.

"I see," said Grundy slowly. "You want me to do a bit of detective work? Well, I rather pride myself on my ability in that line. I was saying to Wilkins and Gunn only yesterday—"

"Never mind that. Let me explain the position more clearly. Railton is going to St. Jim's as the guest of his uncle, and will probably hobnob with your headmaster and the principal officials of the school. That being so, we cannot very well approach them for assistance."

"No, I suppose that wouldn't do," admitted Grundy thoughtfully. "Then you mean—"

"I mean that we have to go to work in another way. We have got to see Railton's private papers."

"H'm! Can't say I like the idea of prying into a chap's affairs like that," said Grundy dubiously.

"Nevertheless, that is our business. Naturally our methods cannot always be conducted with strict regard to schoolboy codes of honour."

"Well, if you want me to pry into the chap's private papers, I won't do it, and that's flat!" said Grundy. "Of course, I suppose you have to do these things?"

"Precisely. And we don't want you to usurp our functions," interrupted the man suavely. "Now, I'll come right to the point. Will you let us into your school to-night and show us Mr. Railton's room?"

Grundy hesitated, and regarded the two men with rather troubled eyes. Grundy was as straight as a gun-barrel, and it went against the grain for him to do anything that savoured of underhandedness. But against that was the fact that he was as simple and unsuspecting as a child, and he implicitly believed the story that had been related to him. Certainly the story was feasible, and the man's knowledge of the young Mr. Railton's movements seemed to stamp it with the hall-mark of truth. A good many fellows with less simple minds than Grundy's would have accepted it.

"Blessed if I know what to think," said Grundy, scratching his chin in perplexity. "Of course, I'm all out for justice and that kind of thing, but it seems a rotten way of doing things, somehow. Can't you go to the Head?"

"Impossible! He would never consent to our searching a guest of the school. And even if he did, Railton would probably have time to dispose of any evidence before we got to him."

"Something in that. Blessed if I know what to say," said Grundy, quite gloomily. "Suppose I help you, as you suggest, I suppose it will be made quite clear afterwards that my action was justified?"

"Most decidedly. And I may say, you will earn the gratitude of my department and consequently of the Government of the country."

Grundy nodded, and his chest swelled with sudden pride at the thought of assisting his country to lay by the heels an unprincipled fellow who was defrauding the revenue. All at once he saw a vision of himself as a successful smuggler-sleuth, the hero of the school, and possibly of the

entire country. And that vision quickly decided George Alfred Grundy.

"Right-ho!" he said. "I'll let you into the school to-night and show you where young Railton sleeps."

The eyes of the two men gleamed with sudden triumph.

"Good man!" said the smooth-voiced one, with deep satisfaction. "You have made the decision of a patriot."

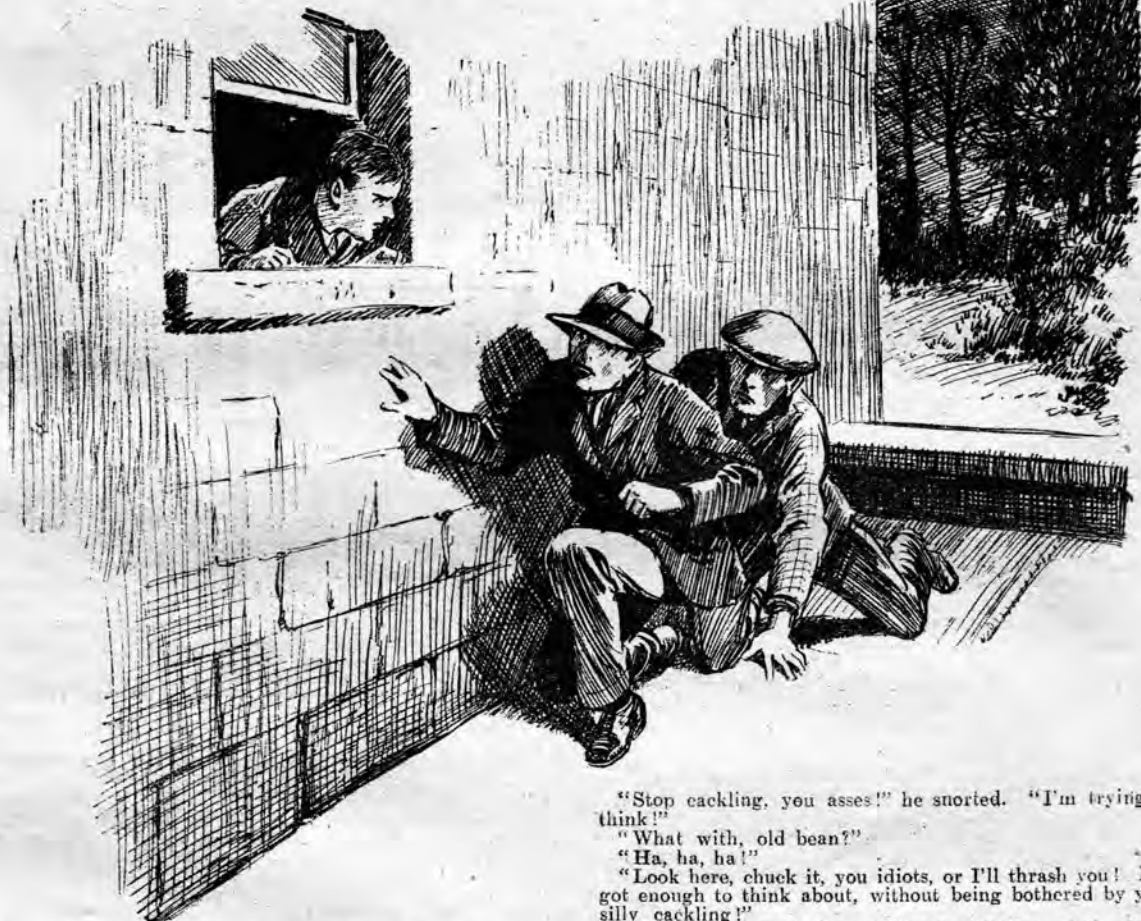
For the next five minutes plans were discussed. Grundy gave the two men instructions how to reach the point where he would be waiting for them, and they in return plied him with questions relating to the school.

After that Grundy parted with them, and started back

Grundy frowned.

He was looking unusually grave and thoughtful. The alleged diamond-smuggling proclivities of Mr. Railton's nephew had occupied his mind ever since he had left his new-found friends on the other side of Rylcombe. The prominent part which he was to take in the exposure of the criminal who was sheltering at St. Jim's gave him a feeling of self-importance which was grateful and comforting. And the ribald greetings of the School House fellows on the steps did not fit in with that grateful and comforting feeling. Grundy frowned.

Grundy peered out of the window near the waiting men. "You chaps there?" he called out. "Come in through this window." "Quiet, fool!" hissed one of the men. "No need to shout, is there?" (See Chapter 7).



towards Rylcombe, his head in quite a whirl concerning the strange affair in which he had suddenly become involved.

As the driver of the car started up the engine again Grundy heard the smooth-voiced gentleman say:

"Where are we going now?"

"Back to 'The Cedars,' at Wayland, I guess," was his companion's reply.

At that moment, Grundy did not take much notice of that scrap of conversation.

The time was coming, however, when it was to return to his mind with very great force.

CHAPTER 6.

Grundy Helps His Country!

"HERE he comes!"

"Good old Grundy!"

"Welcome to a pioneer from an outpost of Rylcombe!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In this cheery fashion, quite a crowd of juniors greeted Grundy, as he mounted the steps of the School House, on his return to St. Jim's.

"Stop cackling, you asses!" he snorted. "I'm trying to think!"

"What with, old bean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, chuck it, you idiots, or I'll thrash you! I've got enough to think about, without being bothered by your silly cackling!"

"What's happened, Grundy?" asked Talbot of the Shell, discerning something unusual about the great man.

"Nothing—just yet, anyway!" was Grundy's cryptic reply. "You'll see what will happen later on, though!"

"Going to prepare another 'address of welcome' to Railton's nephew?" suggested Hammond.

"Rats! I'm not likely to do that again. That was a mistake," said Grundy calmly.

"Great pip! The first one you've ever admitted making, then!" chuckled Wilkins.

"I admit it," said Grundy. "I was mistaken. Everyone's liable to make a mistake—even me!"

"Go hon!"

"If I'd known earlier all that I know now about Railton's nephew, I wouldn't have prepared an address of welcome for him, I can tell you," said Grundy. "I'm not at liberty to say what I know, but you chaps can take it from me, the chap's a wrong 'un! And before very long, I'm going to prove it to you!"

With that, Grundy marched into the House leaving the juniors staring after him in great surprise.

"What the dickens is the matter with him?" asked Hammond, in astonishment. "Not like old Grundy to take things so badly!"

"What did the chump mean about Railton's nephew?" asked Julian wonderingly.

"Blessed if I know! Must have gone potty, all of a sudden!"

"Well, he never was far off anyway—Wilky and I can tell you that, from experience!" said Gunn feelingly.

And with that, the matter was dismissed. But the fellows went in to tea feeling considerably surprised by Grundy's mysterious hints.

Later on, in the Common-room, Mr. Railton's nephew, and Grundy's address of welcome were the general topics of conversation. The fellows who had witnessed the proceedings at Rylcombe Station in the afternoon described them with great gusto to those who had not been there, and there was great hilarity over Grundy's latest adventure.

"What's this I hear about Grundy running down our giddy visitor?" asked Jack Blake, as he and his followers joined Tom Merry & Co., in a corner of the Common-room.

"First I've heard of it," replied Tom. "The idiot isn't taking things seriously, is he?"

"I'm told he is. Who knows something about it?"

Talbot sauntered over to the group and joined in the discussion.

"I can't throw any light on it, you chaps, but I can tell you that for some reason, Grundy has got his back up about Railton's nephew," he said, and then he recounted the incident of Grundy's return to the School House just before tea-time.

"Well, that's a new line for Grundy!" remarked Tom Merry, wrinkling up his brow thoughtfully. "We all know that Grundy is several sorts of an ass, he's not the kind of ass to get nasty over having his leg pulled—or at least, I don't think he is."

"It's my opinion that something else has happened," said Talbot quietly. "It struck me at the time that Grundy had practically forgotten about Railton's nephew pulling his leg at the station—he seemed to have something more serious in his silly old head."

"But what could it be?" asked Jack Blake. "That's all that's happened between them, isn't it?"

"Bai Jove! I wondah—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy polished his monocle thoughtfully with a silk handkerchief.

"I wondah whethah there is some mystewious connection between Gwunday's stwange behaviour and his wunnin' away with those people in the cah?" he said. "You wemembah—"

"Ass!" grunted Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"How the thump could Grundy's getting into that blessed car affect his attitude towards Railton's nephew?"

"Well, pewwaps that is a little difficult to undahstand, at the moment," admitted Gussy. "But you wemembah that Gwunday seemed to get into conversation with the two men in the cah wathah quickly. I wondah—I wondah whethah—"

"Good old Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

But the dear boys refused to treat D'Arcy's evident suspicions seriously. And Gussy lapsed into an indignant silence.

Talbot strolled away again. He was looking very thoughtful, and strange to relate, he had not joined in the laughter at D'Arcy's expense. Talbot had seen more of the seamy side of life than any of the others, and he instinctively sensed something peculiar in the development of the Grundy-Railton affair. A shrewd judge of character, he knew and understood Grundy's simple nature like a book, and he had a feeling of certainty that Grundy's strange hints about the visitor from South Africa had not been engendered by the incidents at the station. Talbot was still looking very thoughtful when the time came to go to bed that night.

Grundy reappeared at bedtime. He had spent most of the evening in the study with Wilkins and Gunn, and arrived at the Common-room only a minute or so before Kildare looked in to shepherd the juniors to their dormitories.

In the study, Grundy had been more or less normal, but a little incident that happened during his journey to the Common-room turned his thoughts back to Mr. Railton's nephew and filled him with suppressed excitement.

Just as he was turning a corner near Masters' Passage, he ran into the Housemaster and his nephew coming down the stairs. They brushed by without noticing him, being evidently engaged in earnest conversation together, and Grundy had time to take good stock of the recipient of his address of welcome earlier in the day.

He was a little disappointed to discover that his second impression of Mr. Railton was more favourable than the

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first had been. Grundy was not a fellow to bear malice, and he had almost forgotten the indignities to which the ungrateful Colonial had subjected him at Rylcombe.

Being, therefore, in a much cooler frame of mind, he was able to look at the visitor with more normal eyes, and he was a little disconcerted to find that the "fishiness" and "rumminess" which he had previously detected, did not now manifest themselves in the visitor's face.

On the contrary, Mr. Stanley Railton looked a very decent, straightforward, young fellow, and for a moment Grundy began to have doubts about his being a diamond-smuggler after all.

Then something happened to bring back his suspicions more strongly even than before. Just as they passed him, Grundy caught a snatch of their talk. It was the South African who was speaking, and he said:

"Of course, I know that diamonds are rather dangerous things to handle, but—"

"Great pip!" muttered Grundy.

He did not hear any more. But what he had heard was enough. Then it was true! Stanley Railton was connected in some way with diamonds—Grundy's friends, the Customs Officers had been right! Grundy fairly thrilled at the thought. He even wondered for a moment if the Housemaster himself might be implicated, but after a little consideration, he dismissed the thought. The idea of the eminently respectable master of the School House being connected with a diamond-smuggling enterprise was too

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steep even for Grundy. Possibly the visitor had been attempting to explain away some suspicious circumstance which had arisen to connect him with diamond smuggling in his uncle's mind.

Grundy did not give much thought to that part of the subject, anyway. The main thing was that he had heard Stanley Railton mention diamonds. Following upon the allegations of the men in the car, it seemed a little too thick to imagine that that could be mere coincidence. It must be true. Stanley Railton was a diamond smuggler!

With such thoughts running through his brain, it was not to be wondered at that when he came up to the Shell dormitory Grundy looked unusually excited.

Talbot watched him quietly, and wondered still more. But he said nothing, and Grundy went to bed in blissful ignorance of the fact that there was one member of the Shell at least who was taking a very keen interest in him that night.

After Kildare had turned the lights out, the fellows, one by one, began to sink into the arms of Morpheus.

Grundy, however, did not sleep. Something more important than sleep was claiming Grundy's attention. The nefarious schemes of a smuggler had to be brought to light, and the great man of the Shell was going to have a hand in the business. Grundy was going to help his country!

Difficult as it was, therefore, for Grundy to overcome his natural inclination to fall asleep, he remained awake.

The arrangement was that he should wait for the officers of the Customs in one of the lower box-rooms, which they could easily reach by scaling one of the ivied walls at the back of the School House, and proceeding along a flat roof. The appointment was for midnight, and Grundy, therefore, had a long vigil,

Ten o'clock boomed out from the old Clock Tower of St. Jim's—then eleven. After what seemed to Grundy an interminable period, the first stroke of twelve sounded on the still night air.

Grundy sat up in bed.

"You fellows awake?" he called out cautiously.

The only answer was another stroke from the school clock.

Grundy got out of bed, put on a dressing-gown and slippers, and noiselessly quitted the dormitory.

CHAPTER 7.

Nipped in the Bud!

BOOM!

The last stroke of midnight rang out from the Clock Tower of St. Jim's.

On the flat roof at the rear of the School House two men, huddled close to the wall, near a window, heard it, and waited, silent and expectant.

Grundy's smuggler-hunting friends had kept their appointment.

The silence of the night followed the striking of the hour; for some minutes there was no sign of their confederate within the House. But the men exchanged no word or gesture to show that they were in any way anxious. Doubtless the exigencies of their profession had taught them the virtue of patience.

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A sound came at last—the sound of a window being cautiously opened from the inside. The two men still remained motionless, though their eyes were gleaming in the shadow.

A head peeped out from the window near them, and then only did the men reveal their presence. The head was that of George Alfred Grundy of the Shell.

"You chaps there?" called out Grundy softly. "Oh, there you are! Come in through this window."

"Quiet, fool!" hissed the man who had been driving the car in the afternoon. "No need to shout, is there?"

Grundy glared, through the darkness. In the usual way, anybody who had applied the epithet "Fool!" to George Alfred Grundy would very quickly have come into painful contact with that junior's knuckles. Grundy had sufficient common sense, however, to realise that the circumstances were rather exceptional, and the need for caution very great, and for once, therefore, he refrained from avenging an insult.

The men clambered noiselessly through the open window, and entered the room where Grundy was waiting—the lower box-room which had been referred to in their arrangement.

"Everything all right?" whispered the one who had been primarily responsible for the meeting. "You are by yourself?"

"You bet!" growled Grundy. "Catch me trusting any of the fellows in my Form on a job requiring brains, like this! I'm alone, all right!"

"Excellent! You know the position of our suspect's bed-room?"

Grundy nodded.

"It's a room on the floor below this—not far from our Housemaster's bed-room, as a matter of fact. Old Railton, your man's uncle, you know."

"I see. Is it easy to reach?"

"Rather! We just slip along to the end of the passage outside this room, hop down the stairs, and his room is the first one we come to on the lower floor. I'll lead the way."

"Very well. We are ready."

Grundy crossed over to the door and opened it, and his two nocturnal visitors followed him swiftly and silently along the passage outside, and down the stairs which led to the passage where Mr. Stanley Railton's bed-room was situated.

At this hour the house, to all appearances, was buried in slumber, and although Grundy's friends were alert enough, they did not seem to indicate by their manner that they expected to be interrupted.

Unknown to them, however, a pair of keen eyes was watching them as they tiptoed down the stairs after Grundy.

Those same keen eyes had watched Grundy get out of bed and depart from the Shell dormitory, and had followed his progress afterwards along the passages leading to the lower box-room.

Reginald Talbot had been the only fellow in the Shell dormitory to see Grundy's cautious exit at the midnight hour. When Grundy's quietened voice had called out, "You fellows awake?" Talbot had heard. But he had not replied. Instead, he had followed Grundy on his mysterious excursion.

Outside the box-room he had halted. And his quick ears had caught the sounds of the whispered conversation from the other side of the door. Concealed in the deep shadow at the end of the passage, he had witnessed, with amazement, the reappearance of Grundy, with two complete strangers. And now, creeping down in their wake with the softness of a cat, he was watching them pause, and whisper together at the foot of the stairs.

Straining his ears, he just caught Grundy's whisper: "This is where he sleeps? What are you going to do now?"

Followed a whispered remark from one of the men which he was unable to understand.

For several seconds nothing was done. Talbot could only judge from the gestures of the men that they were trying to induce Grundy to leave them. Grundy, however, seemed disposed to argue the matter, and there was some little delay before the argument was settled. If the argument was as Talbot conjectured, the men evidently succeeded in convincing Grundy; for in the end the great man of the Shell nodded his head slowly, and, after shaking hands with his two mysterious visitors, tiptoed away in the direction of the Shell dormitory.

Immediately he had departed the two men acted. Crossing over to the door which Grundy had indicated, one of them cautiously put his hand on the door-knob, and slowly turned it. Then he gently pressed his body against the door to see whether it would open. Talbot, watching with bated breath, saw him turn round and nod to his companion. Apparently he was satisfied; the door was not locked on the inside.

After that the action was swift. In a trice the door was opened, and the men had entered the room. Whatever mission they were engaged upon it was near accomplishment now.

But Talbot also acted. Dumbfounded as he was by the things he had witnessed—by Grundy's appointment in the lower box-room, and the mysterious invasion of the School House premises by his two friends—Talbot fortunately was not deprived of his well-known ability to think and act quickly.

Taking the remaining stairs at a leap, he made a dive for Mr. Stanley Railton's room, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Rescue, Shell! Help, you fellows! Thieves! Help!"

He fairly tore into the room, switched on the light, and flung himself full-tilt at the astonished raiders.

In a moment a fierce conflict was in progress.

The sudden light revealed Grundy's two strange friends bending over the bed where the Housemaster's nephew lay sleeping. But if they had intended harming him, Talbot was in time to prevent it, for the flood of light and the shouting woke up the St. Jim's visitor, and in an instant, without inquiring into matters, he was hitting out at them.

In the space of a few seconds the outlook for the startled raiders had undergone a tremendous change. A yelling schoolboy had appeared out of nowhere, fighting them like a demon, the light had gone on, and the gentleman whom they were honouring with their attentions had come to life and was hitting out right and left.

Furthermore, Talbot's yells had roused the entire House, and already they could hear startled voices, and the

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shuffling of hurried feet from distant passages and dormitories.

Things were becoming distinctly uncomfortable for the self-styled officers of the Customs, and they didn't stop to argue the matter any further. Dodging Talbot's fierce blows, one of them jerked out his foot and tripped up the Shell junior, sending him crashing to the floor. Meanwhile, the other picked up a chair and flung it full in the face of the man from South Africa, sending him staggering back for an instant.

Immediately, the midnight raiders seized the momentary respite that was offered them. In a bound they were out of the room, and racing up the stairs leading to the lower box-room.

They were only just in time. Two seconds after their departure, the first arrivals from other parts of the House came on the scene—a few juniors, with a senior or two, among them. Startled faces looked into the room, as Mr. Stanley Railton and Talbot struggled to their feet again.

"After them!" said Talbot, between his teeth. "Up the stairs to the lower box-room, you chaps! Don't let them get away!"

There was a rush of fellows up the stairs. None of them had any idea of what was "on," but it was easy to see from the appearance of the visitor's bed-room that a struggle had taken place, and beyond that they did not, for the present, seek to inquire.

Quite a crowd of fellows swarmed excitedly up the stairs in pursuit of the midnight callers. Meanwhile, the Housemaster and Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, arrived.

"Good heavens! Whatever has happened?" asked Mr. Railton, surveying his nephew's disordered bed-room in amazement.

"Burglars, I think, uncle," replied the man from South Africa. "No time to tell you now, though. I'm after them!"

Joined by Talbot, he raced up the stairs after the crowd, while the Housemaster and Mr. Linton followed, in a state of considerable perturbation.

But precious moments had been wasted, and when Talbot and Mr. Railton junior arrived at the lower box-room, it was only to find that the birds had flown. The window was wide open, showing clearly how the raiders had made their exit; but of the raiders themselves, there was no longer a trace.

"Too late!" said Talbot bitterly.

"The school premises must be searched immediately, of course," said Mr. Railton senior, coming up. "Kildare, will you get the seniors to make a thorough search, please? And, Darrell, you might go down to Taggles' lodge, and request him to go round the school grounds with his dog."

"I expect they will have left the school well behind them by now, sir," said Talbot ruefully.

"I'm afraid so, too," remarked Kildare. "No harm in having a search, though. I'll go and get dressed."

He and Darrell hurried off.

"Where's Grundy?" asked Talbot, speaking above the buzz of excited voices that filled the room and the passage outside.

"Well, who wants me?" growled Grundy, pushing his way through the crowd.

"I do," said Talbot, with a very searching look at Grundy's rather troubled face. "What's your little game, Grundy?"

"What do you mean?" asked Grundy, flushing.

The Housemaster and his nephew, who had been talking together, looked over at that moment, and Talbot did not proceed with his questioning just then.

"We'll thrash this matter out later," he said, sotto voce.

"Back to your dormitories now, you juniors," called out Mr. Railton. "There is no cause for further alarm."

"Mayn't we help the seniors in their search, sir?" asked Tom Merry eagerly.

"I do not think the seniors require any assistance," replied Mr. Railton dryly. "Talbot, I want a word with you; the rest must go. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The juniors reluctantly streamed back in the direction of their dormitories, leaving Talbot and Mr. Railton and his nephew to adjourn to the latter's bed-room for a discussion on the events of the night.

CHAPTER 8. Mysterious!

"H E, he, he!"

It was just before first lesson on the following morning, and a crowd of fellows were sunning themselves on the School House steps, and discussing the exciting affair of the previous night, when that unmusical cackling sounded behind them.

Baggy Trimble was responsible for it. He had just rolled

up with a grin on his podgy face, and a very excited look in his little eyes.

"He, he, he!"

"Roll off, Trimble!" said Tom Merry, frowning.

"Yaas, wathah! Wun away, deah boy! We're busy!"

"He, he, he! Talking about the giddy burglars, what?" said Baggy, cheerfully ignoring the polite hints. "You chaps don't know what I know about it!"

"Been putting your ear to someone's keyhole again, eh?" said Tom Merry grimly. "Well, we don't want to hear it!"

"Rats! I only happened to stop outside Railton's room for a minute to tie up my shoelace, and what I heard was quite by chance, you know."



Dodging Talbot's fierce blows, junior, sending him crashing to the floor, a chair, and flung it full in the face of the man from South Africa.

"Eavesdropping young cad!" remarked Jack Blake contemptuously.

"Yaas, wathah! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, Twimble!"

"Oh, can it, Gussy!" said Baggy Trimble. "But I say, you chaps, you'd never dream who's bowled out this time! Who do you think let the burglars in last night?"

"Nobody. Shut up!"

"But it was Grundy!" said Trimble, fairly bursting to create a sensation. "Fact! And Talbot followed him up and stopped it! Grundy, you know! In league with a gang of crooks! Would you believe it?"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors stared blankly at the fat Fourth-Former. Baggy Trimble had a reputation for telling tall stories, but he had never before told a story that sounded quite so tall as this.

"You utter idiot!" hooted Jack Blake. "Mean to say you expect us to believe that Grundy let the burglars into the House last night?"

Trimble nodded eagerly.

"It's quite true! I heard Railton talking to his nephew about it. If you don't believe me, ask Talbot. Anyway, Railton popped out, just as I finished tying up my shoelace, and asked me to find Grundy and tell him to report to his study. So there!"

The juniors looked at one another.
 "It's rot, of course!" said Tom Merry.
 "Yaas, wathah! Uttah nonsense!"
 "You've got the wrong end of the stick, Trimble," said Manners. "Now, if it had been you—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "All right, then; don't believe me!" sniffed Trimble.
 "You'll find out it's true, soon enough, anyway. I'm off to find Grundy!"
 He rolled back into the House again, leaving the juniors in a state of considerable surprise. The yarn was so utterly incredible that they all wondered at Baggy relating it to them, even.
 "The fat fibber must be potty!" remarked Digby.
 "Hear, hear! I can't imagine why he should spring such a yarn on us," said Tom Merry.
 "Nor can I. It's about the most impossible thing you could believe of old Grundy."
 The bell for first lesson stopped any further discussion then, and the juniors trooped in to their respective classrooms.

blows, one of the raiders tripped up the
 ng to the floor. His companion picked up
 l in the face of the man from South
 ica. (See Chapter 7.)



Tom Merry & Co. were a little surprised, however, to find that neither Talbot nor Grundy turned up in the Form-room. Evidently something was "on" in which those two were involved. And as the minutes went by without either of the missing juniors putting in an appearance, the Shell began to whisper while Mr. Linton's back was turned. The rumour about Grundy having assisted the mysterious midnight visitors began to spread round the Form like wildfire. Meanwhile, a most unsatisfactory interview was taking place in the Housemaster's study—an interview that was equally unsatisfactory to all the parties present. The interview was between Mr. Railton and Grundy. Mr. Railton's nephew and Talbot were also there, but they had little occasion to speak.

Grundy had looked uncomfortable as he entered the study. He guessed the reason for the summons. But his rugged face was set obstinately. He believed most firmly and sincerely now, that the visitor from South Africa was a diamond-smuggler; he also believed that he had acted justly and patriotically in assisting the forces of the Crown against the smuggler, even though he did not altogether approve of their methods. And Grundy, having given his word to keep silent, was determined not to say a word that would be likely to help the alleged smuggler.

"Ah, Grundy!" said Mr. Railton, with a keen glance at the great man of the Shell. "I have sent for you on a

most serious matter. Last night two men gained access to the House and broke into the bed-room of my nephew, Mr. Railton. Owing to the timely intervention of Talbot, here, they were unable to succeed in their designs, and had to escape."

Grundy nodded grimly.

"I have obtained, I may say after considerable trouble, some surprising information regarding the raid from Talbot. Talbot was very reluctant to drag in the name of a school-fellow, and it was only after I had assured him that I would consider the culprit's misdemeanour in the most lenient manner that he agreed to mention a name. The name he mentioned was yours."

"I see, sir!" growled Grundy.

"If Talbot's statement is correct, you left your dormitory at midnight last night, went to the lower box-room where the burglars entered—"

"How do you know they were burglars, sir?" interrupted Grundy.

"I have very good reason to believe that that is an accurate description of them, Grundy!" answered Mr. Railton sharply. "To continue, I am told that you went to this box-room, talked with the men concerned, and deliberately conducted them to my nephew's bed-room. Now, Grundy, is that true or untrue?"

Grundy hesitated, then replied:

"I have nothing to say, sir."

Mr. Railton's lips tightened, and his nephew, who was sitting beside him, frowned, while Talbot, more puzzled than ever, could only stare.

"If that is your attitude, Grundy," said Mr. Railton sternly, "I can only conclude that the story is true. Do you wish me to believe that?"

Grundy was obstinately silent.

"Come, come, Grundy!" said Mr. Railton, rather nettled, and not a little astonished at Grundy's behaviour. "You may rest assured that you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by telling me the whole truth. I may tell you that, although your class-work is not satisfactory, I have always held you personally in the highest esteem, and even in the face of such evidence as is brought against you now, I am prepared to believe that your moral character is of the best, and that you were simply misguided in some way. I ask you to tell me the truth."

Grundy's face softened for a moment, but only for a moment. Then he shook his head.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't explain."

"You seem to be a very bad sportsman, Grundy," put in Mr. Railton's nephew at this juncture. "Whether these men were burglars, or simply roughs engaged to give me a thrashing, it seems that you showed them to my bed-room. That being so, I can only think that you were actuated by animosity against me on account of that little joke down at Rylcombe yesterday."

Grundy flushed crimson, and for a moment his fists clenched. The thought that anybody could think him—George Alfred Grundy—capable of hiring bullies to avenge him made him feel temporarily almost homicidal. But he soon unclenched his fists again. Tactless as Grundy was, he was not quite tactless enough to start fighting the Housemaster's nephew in the Housemaster's study. Even with Grundy there was a limit!

"You refuse to say anything, then?" said the Housemaster sharply.

Grundy nodded.

"I'm sorry, sir. I don't want to be disrespectful to you, but I can't very well answer your questions," he said very firmly.

Mr. Railton gazed at him in perplexity.

"But my dear Grundy, this is monstrous!" he exclaimed. "Do you realise that you are putting yourself in a most extraordinary position? If I send for the police and explain how matters stand, I feel quite sure that they will want to arrest you on suspicion of complicity with thieves."

"Oh, erikey!" ejaculated Grundy, startled out of his composed defiance for the moment at the suggestion.

"In any case, your attitude is most impertinent," continued Mr. Railton angrily. "In the ordinary way, I would flog you severely for that alone. I have given my word to Talbot, however, to act with the utmost leniency, and I am going to give you every possible chance before I act. Are you still maintaining your extraordinary attitude?"

Grundy nodded doggedly.

"Very well, Grundy," said Mr. Railton, his eyes gleaming. "For the present you may go, but I have not finished with you. Return to your Form-room now."

Grundy departed, and Talbot, at a signal from the Housemaster, followed him.

"It is altogether incomprehensible!" said Mr. Railton, turning to his nephew when the door had closed after the two Shell fellows.

"It is certainly mysterious!" assented the younger man. "Mysterious is hardly a strong enough word. It is extraordinary!" declared the Housemaster. "I assure you that I have found Grundy always to be the soul of honour. If he is helping some rogues who are after the diamonds you so foolishly carry about with you, then their intentions must be unknown to him, or I am sure he would never lend them a hand."

"Well, if the boy can help people to get into my bed-room, and remain under the impression that they are not burglars, he must be a fool!" commented the Housemaster's nephew.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Undoubtedly Grundy is very simple. Nevertheless, the episode remains extraordinary and inexplicable. I presume, Stanley, that after the events of last night you will take the diamonds to the bank in Wayland and deposit them there until you leave."

Mr. Stanley Railton laughed.

"Still worrying, uncle! Didn't I tell you last night that I am quite capable of looking after myself? I carry them in a body-belt which I wear in bed, and believe me, no robber is likely to deprive me of them while I sleep!"

The Housemaster shook his head doubtfully.

"I think you are very unwise, Stanley," he said. "It is evident that some desperate rogues are intent on gaining possession of the jewels, and—"

"Nonsense!" said his nephew, smiling. "I am only staying one more night with you, and I'm sure I'm not going to Wayland specially to deposit them for such a short period. Please don't worry! They're safe enough. Those fellows will be too scared to return to-night."

The man from South Africa spoke confidently, but had he known what turn events were to take in the near future it is probable that he would not have felt so confident.

CHAPTER 9.

The Night Hawks!

THAT night a solitary motor-car sped along the dark country lanes leading from Wayland to St. Jim's.

Reaching the school, the motor-car slowed down at the side of the road, and turned off into a cart-track till it was hidden by a hedge from the gaze of any late motorist or pedestrian. At this point the driver shut off the engine and switched off the lights.

The driver and his one companion then got out of the car.

If George Alfred Grundy of the Shell had been there he would have recognised the car in which he had made his escape from Jack Blake & Co. at Rylcombe two days before. He would also have recognised his friends, the plain-clothes officers of the Customs.

George Alfred Grundy, however, was at that moment snoring away in the Shell dormitory, forgetful of Customs Officers, diamond smugglers, and all the other disturbers of the serenity of his wakeful existence. Grundy therefore did not have the opportunity of recognising them.

"We can leave it here all right, I think," said the driver, referring to the car.

"Safe as houses!" growled the other. "Hardly anyone comes along this road at night, anyway."

"Just as well to hide it, though. After last night's affair there may be a few narks about."

"Who cares? I'm out for those diamonds to-night, and I'll risk swinging to get them!"

"Well, we've got twelve cartridges between us, all ready for use," chuckled the first speaker. "I guess that's enough to wing all the narks there are likely to be around here!"

They crossed the road, and, after a cautious look round, clambered up the school wall, and were over the other side in a few seconds.

"Quiet!" hissed one. "Can't I hear a dog?"

The other listened, and heard the soft pattering of a dog coming towards them on the grass. A moment later, with a fierce growl, Taggles' dog bounded into view and flew at the intruders.

But watchdogs evidently held no terrors for these unusual Customs Officers. They did not fly for their lives in the face of the rather formidable canine opposition. Instead, they dodged and kicked—and with good effect, for Taggles' dog, with a yelp, collapsed for a moment. Instantly one of them planted his foot cruelly into the creature's neck, stifling its attempt to howl; and the other, bending over, cautiously forced its jaws together, then applied to its nostrils a pad of something that had a peculiar odour.

In a very short time the dog's struggles ceased, and it became limp and helpless. Then the pad was removed, and the men stood up again.

"So much for him!" remarked the one with the strangely odorous pad. "He won't wake for a good many hours!"

"Think his yelping roused anyone?"

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"I doubt it. We're going through with this now, anyway, sink or swim! Let's take bearings. Railton's room will be at the back of the school. We must move round."

Like two shadows they flitted across the silent quad, and, hugging the school buildings, moved rapidly round to the rear of the School House.

There, in the shadow of one of the outbuildings, they paused and keenly studied the main building.

"It will be just about there," said one of the mysterious pair, pointing to a window near the corner of the House.

"It's on the second floor, and it was the first room in the passage we came to after leaving the stairs last night. Come to think of it, that must be the very room."

"How do we get there?" asked his companion, looking rather dubiously at the intervening stretch of wall. "The ivy isn't so thick as it is round the corner."

"It's the only way," retorted the first speaker, with a shrug. "It would be asking for trouble to go the same way as last night—and, anyway, he's bound to have his bed-room door well secured, whereas the window is wide open. We must chance it."

"Very well. Can't expect to make a get-away with fifty thousand in stones without taking a risk, I suppose!"

No time was wasted. Having decided what to do, they proceeded to do it. And certainly no gymnast at St. Jim's could have negotiated that perilous climb better. With an adroitness and a silence which indicated that they were no strangers to such work, they clambered swiftly and lightly towards the window on the second floor. Both had anxious moments, but they were cool and possessed all the time.

Triumphant at last, they reached their objective and hung, resting for an instant, one each side of the window. Then the shorter man of the two—the one who had driven the car—swung himself on to the window-ledge, and softly raised the bottom sash.

There was a movement from within the bed-room. The first slight sound had disturbed the sleeping occupant. Immediately after, the intruder had slipped into the room and sped across to the bed, and his companion was sitting after him.

The judgment of the visitors had been sound. It was Stanley Railton who stirred in his sleep and sat up in bed.

He peered into the darkness and instinctively dived a hand under the pillow for the revolver which he had placed there on going to bed.

Too late! Just as he did so a pair of sinewy hands shot out from the side of the bed and closed on his throat in a merciless stranglehold. A moment later the other man was on the spot, pressing over his mouth and nostrils the pad which had that peculiar, sickly odour.

The struggle was soon over. In a few seconds the chloroform had done its deadly work, and Stanley Railton was lying inert and unconscious on the bed.

The marauders knew where to put their hands on what they wanted. As soon as their victim was helpless Stanley Railton's body-belt was whipped off, and, breathing hard with excitement, the two night-hawks examined it in the faint starlight by the window.

"All right?" whispered the shorter man.

The other nodded.

"I can feel them sewn in the leather attachment here."

"Leave them there, then; examine them later. You're sure?"

"Dead sure! Feel for yourself."

Two minutes later they descended by the same perilous route which they had taken to get into the House. They skirted the main school building and retraced their steps across the sleeping quad, back past the spot where Taggles' watchdog lay inert and helpless as they had left him. A swift negotiation of the high wall that bounded the school premises, a few steps across the road, and they were back on the cart-track where their car still stood.

The engine started up, the car reversed and swung back on to the main road again. Within a few seconds it was speeding away from St. Jim's, and was very quickly swallowed up in the gloom of the night.

And St. Jim's, all unconscious of the visit of night-hawks, slept on.

CHAPTER 10.

Under a Cloud!

ST. JIM'S woke up on the following morning to a first-class sensation.

The news that the nephew of the School House master had been drugged during the night and robbed of an immensely valuable consignment of diamonds went through the school like wildfire and caused a tremendous hubbub.

The school had not yet recovered from the excitement of the previous night's alarm. This, coming so soon after the other, fairly staggered everybody.

Naturally, many different versions of the facts were flying about. Tom Merry, who happened to get first-hand news from Kildare, had a fairly accurate version to relate; but other imaginative minds added a good many picturesque details to the original story. Baggy Trimble asserted everywhere, with great seriousness, that Taggles and Mr. Railton's nephew had been murdered, and a million pounds' worth of diamonds had been taken. Credulous as many of the juniors were, however, they didn't believe that.

Grundy heard the first rumours, going down the stairs from the Shell dormitory.

At first he was sceptical and incredulous. He had a suspicion in his slow-working mind that this might be some organised jape on him, and when he was told tall-sounding stories of burglars, chloroform, and missing diamonds, he smiled—for a time.

Then he grew rather irritated and disturbed. It began to strike him as rather strange that everybody should know that the Housemaster's nephew was associated with diamonds. How could they know that?—he wondered. If this was an organised rag, and the yarn an invention, the fact that diamonds should be mentioned was certainly a strange coincidence, to say the least of it.

Grundy began to feel vaguely alarmed. Up to this point he, with his customary self-satisfaction, had felt perfectly sure of the correctness of his behaviour in regard to Stanley Railton. He had swallowed the story of diamond smuggling whole, and he had been thoroughly convinced that the Housemaster's nephew was a "wrong 'un."

The ignominious flight of the men who had described themselves as Customs Officers on the night when Talbot had wrecked their plans had not changed Grundy's opinion. Since their work was so confidential as to necessitate mysterious visits to people's bed-rooms at night, it seemed logical enough to Grundy that they should flee from the light of publicity. He felt quite proud, in fact, to think that he was "knowing" enough to understand their actions. For a time Grundy really believed that he was getting an insight into the methods of the country's Secret Service.

But now, for the first time, a doubt assailed him.

Supposing, after all, that everything was not exactly as he imagined it to be! Supposing that something was wrong somewhere—that his mysterious friends were not Customs Officers, after all! Supposing—

Grundy shuddered. He could hardly permit himself to think that there was any truth in the yarns that were going round. Nevertheless, alarm and doubt began to fill his mind. He was not long kept in ignorance of the truth.

No sooner had he reached the quad for his usual morning stretch than Darrell of the Sixth called him back from the School House steps.

"Hi, Grundy! Wanted!"

Grundy started and flushed guiltily as he began to retrace his steps.

"Who wants me?" he growled, as he mounted the steps again.

"The Head—in Mr. Railton's room," answered Darrell, with a queer look at the uncomfortable Shell junior. "Sharp's the word! It's very important!"

With a sinking feeling in his heart, Grundy went back into the House and made his way to Mr. Railton's room.

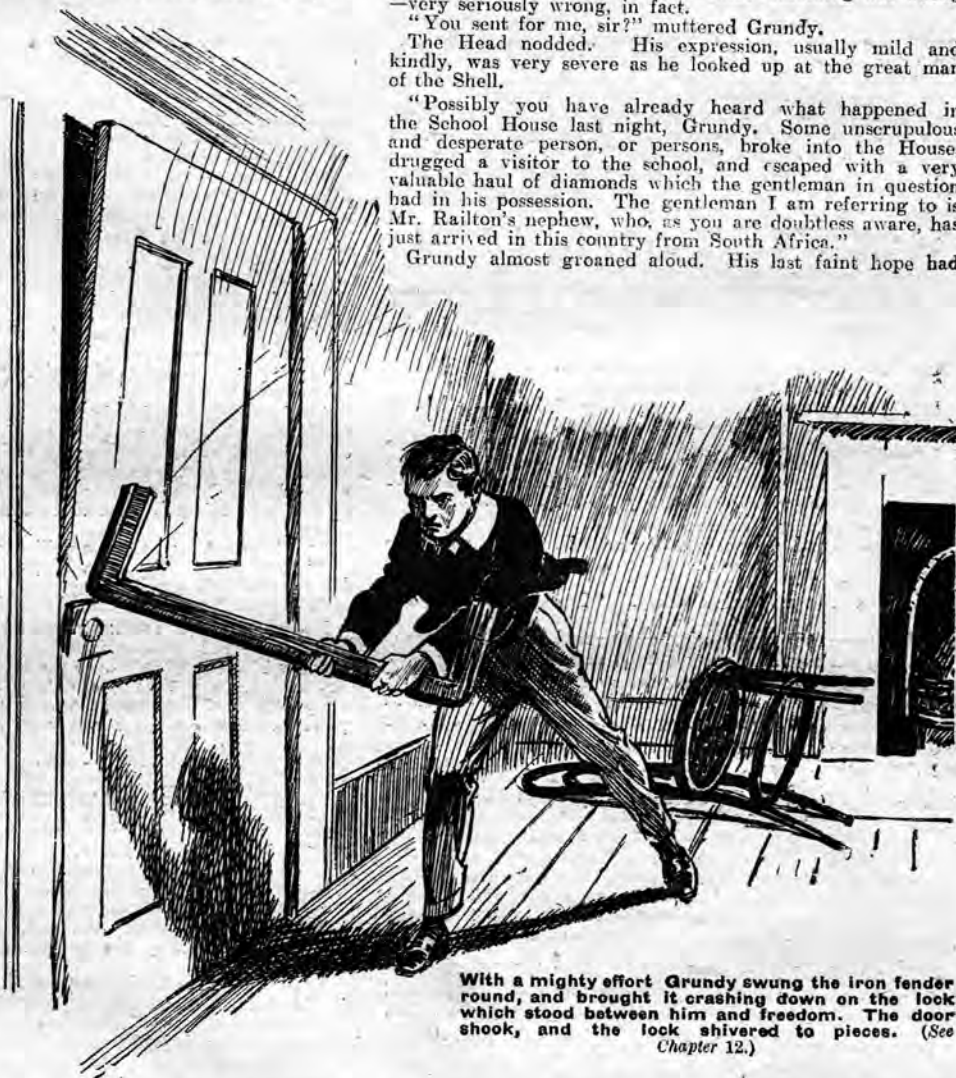
Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of St. Jim's, and Mr. Railton were both there when Grundy entered. Their faces were grave and troubled; and Grundy's last hopes that things were still all right began to fade away. One look at the Head was sufficient to assure him that something was wrong—very seriously wrong, in fact.

"You sent for me, sir?" muttered Grundy.

The Head nodded. His expression, usually mild and kindly, was very severe as he looked up at the great man of the Shell.

"Possibly you have already heard what happened in the School House last night, Grundy. Some unscrupulous and desperate person, or persons, broke into the House, drugged a visitor to the school, and escaped with a very valuable haul of diamonds which the gentleman in question had in his possession. The gentleman I am referring to is Mr. Railton's nephew, who, as you are doubtless aware, has just arrived in this country from South Africa."

Grundy almost groaned aloud. His last faint hope had



With a mighty effort Grundy swung the iron fender round, and brought it crashing down on the lock which stood between him and freedom. The door shook, and the lock shattered in pieces. (See Chapter 12.)

gone now. The yarns which he had scouted only a few minutes before were true—only too true!

"It was only last night," continued Dr. Holmes, "that I heard for the first time from Mr. Railton the very extraordinary story of your apparent connection with the burglars—for, presumably, they were burglars—who entered the House on the previous night. Now that this second disastrous visitation has come upon us, I have sent for you at once, to give you an opportunity to explain your position before the police arrive. I await your explanation."

Headmaster and Housemaster regarded Grundy with expectant and unsympathetic eyes.

Grundy gulped.

"I—I—" he began, then he lapsed into silence.

The occasions when Grundy was at a loss for words were few and far between. But undoubtedly he did not know how to begin on this occasion.

The veil was torn from his eyes now with a vengeance. Only too well did he realise that his two acquaintances in the motor-car were not Customs Officers, nor anything of the kind; nor was Mr. Railton's nephew a smuggler; the whole thing was a cock-and-bull story, ingeniously invented on the spur of the moment to gain Grundy's assistance. The men

were cracksmen; that was the truth. And it was they, and none other, who had drugged the man from South Africa and vanished with the diamonds. With bitterness in his heart Grundy realised now what a simpleton he had been. He—George Alfred Grundy, the keenest and brainiest fellow in the Shell—had been taken in completely. And, in the fond belief that he had been doing a patriotic duty, he had helped a couple of scoundrels to rob a visitor to St. Jim's.

True, he had been fast asleep on their second visit; but Grundy did not spare himself on account of that. But for the help he had given them on the night before that visit they could never have found out Stanley Railton's whereabouts in the school. It was he—Grundy—and he alone was responsible. It was terrible—ghastly! Grundy felt more crestfallen, more wretched than he had ever felt in his life.

"I am waiting, Grundy," said the Head.

His voice was like the rumble of distant thunder.

Grundy made an effort.

"I suppose it will sound silly to you, after what's happened, sir," he said thickly. "Anyway, goodness knows I acted with the best of intentions!"

Then, in halting and stumbling sentences, Grundy told the story of his encounter with the two men in Rylcombe and what followed.

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton listened in grim silence.

"So, now I've told you all I know, sir," finished Grundy at last. "Of course, I don't know for certain that those two fellows were the ones who came last night, but it looks like it, right enough."

He mopped his brow, which had become quite heated with the effort of his recital, and waited.

His two hearers looked at one another.

"Extraordinary!" said Dr. Holmes.

Mr. Railton nodded. He looked as if he could hardly trust himself to speech, for the time being.

"The most extraordinary story I have ever been asked to believe, Grundy!" said Dr. Holmes emphatically, turning to Grundy again. "If this is true, then undoubtedly you are the most simple and credulous boy I have ever met!"

"Oh, sir!" muttered Grundy.

"Do you seriously expect me to credit that it did not occur to you that these men might be rogues, even after the events of the night before last?"

"Yes, sir!" groaned Grundy. "I didn't think, sir."

"Monstrous! Preposterous!" murmured the Head.

Mr. Railton rose and drew a deep breath.

"Well, sir, nothing can be done now until the arrival of the police," he said. "I suggest that Grundy be locked in the punishment-room until they arrive and require him for interrogation."

The Head nodded.

"I suppose that is the only thing we can do," he said, in very troubled tones. "It is a very terrible thing to think that a junior belonging to the school should be involved in such an affair! You don't think, Mr. Railton, that—"

"That they will want to arrest Grundy on suspicion of complicity?" finished Mr. Railton, divining the Head's thoughts. "I doubt it. Incredible as the story sounds, they will probably be prepared to accept it. In any case, Grundy must be locked up in the punishment-room for the time being."

"Very well. Please conduct him there, Mr. Railton."

Mr. Railton signalled Grundy to follow him, and quitted the room, and Grundy, looking wretched and humiliated, went out after him.

They climbed the stairs leading up to the punishment-room. There were quite a number of the fellows about, and they looked on curiously. The rumour about Grundy's connection with the previous raid had returned to many minds as the news of the burglary spread, and the sight of Grundy

following Railton up the stairs made the juniors wonder what exactly there could be in it.

Into the punishment-room, the closing of the heavy oak door, and the click of the lock, as Mr. Railton turned it, from the outside, and Grundy was left alone to his reflections.

They were not pleasant. Grundy, as a rule, was the sort of fellow to take troubles lightly—to face with a cheerful grin the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. But the predicament in which he found himself now was too serious for that.

For himself Grundy did not care. He had heard the Head's remarks about the possibility of his arrest by the police, but that did not worry him at all. What worried Grundy was the thought of the grievous trouble he had brought to Mr. Railton's nephew. With scarcely a shred of evidence he had believed that the man from South Africa was a "wrong 'un." And now, because of his wooden-headed credulity, Stanley Railton was lying still unconscious from the effects of the drug, while the diamonds which he had carried were in the hands of the villains whom Grundy himself had helped. The thought almost maddened Grundy. He paced up and down the little room feverishly, his rugged face the picture of despair.

If only he could have had the time over again, how differently he would have acted! Oh, what a fool he had been—what a simple, credulous fool!

Suddenly Grundy halted.

"By gum!" he muttered.

A ray of hope—the faintest possible ray, but, still, a ray of hope—had come to him.

"By gum!" he muttered again. "The Cedars, Wayland! I wonder—"

A picture had suddenly come to his mind. It was a picture of himself, walking away from the car, in the country lane on the far side of Rylcombe.

That scrap of conversation between the two men in the car! At the time, Grundy had not taken much notice of it, but now it came back to him with vivid and startling force.

"Where are we going now?" one of the men had asked.

"Back to the Cedars, at Wayland, I guess!" had been his companion's reply.

"By gum!" repeated Grundy. "If only—"

The chance that anything could be done on that insignificant clue was slender indeed; but there was a chance. Grundy had no notion where the Cedars, at Wayland, might be, and, even if he found out, it seemed almost hopeless to expect that the crooks would be there. But it was possible. And a fresh gleam came into Grundy's eyes.

CHAPTER 11.

Loyal Chums!

"GRUNDY, you know!"

"Grundy, a blessed cracksmen!"

"A second Bill Sikes! Would you believe it?"

Aubrey Racke and Gerald Crooke were discussing Grundy in rather loud voices. Evidently they were not anxious to keep the subject of their conversation a secret.

It was just after breakfast-time, and most of the Shell were in the Form passage, holding a kind of impromptu meeting about the rumours, which by this time were settling down into something approximating to the truth. Crooke and Racke sauntered up to the crowd, wearing very cheerful grins. The startling news that Grundy was, somehow or other, involved in the cracksmen's enterprise did not seem to overwhelm them with sorrow—quite the reverse, in fact.

"That's the chap that pretended to be so good and strict—regular Honest John, in fact!" said Racke, with a chuckle. "And he turns out to be a blessed burglar—a youthful king of the underworld, by gad! What a come-down! What a show-up—eh?"

"And what a hypocrite!" added Crooke, grinning. "Wonder if some of the other Good Little Erics here are anythin' like him? I shouldn't be surprised!"

Tom Merry looked grimly at the newcomers.

"Cut that out!" he said tersely. "Nobody asked you for your caddish opinions!"

There was a murmured "Hear, hear!" from a number of the fellows; but some of them grinned, for Crooke's remark had been an obvious "dig" at Tom Merry himself, and Tom's sharp reply seemed to indicate that he had understood it as such.

"Blessed if I see that our opinions are more caddish than those of anyone else," said Racke coolly. "We all know that Grundy let the burglars into the House the other night, and that they were after young Railton's diamonds. And we all know that people don't let burglars into a house unless they're in league with 'em!"

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"Perhaps we're expected to believe that Grundy did it for a lark," suggested Crooke sarcastically, and there was a faint chuckle from the group of Shell juniors.

It was at that moment that Wilkins and Gunn, Grundy's study-mates in Study No. 3, came out of that celebrated apartment. They were looking anxious and puzzled. They, like the rest, had heard the rumours, and were aware that Grundy had been locked up in the punishment-room.

"Did I hear you mention Grundy's name just now, Racke?" asked Wilkins, halting in front of the leader of the rotters' brigade in the Lower School at St. Jim's.

Racke nodded.

"What about it? Are you in the swim, too?" he asked insolently.

Wilkins' fists clenched for a moment, but he resisted the

frequent troubles between he and Gunn on the one side, and Grundy on the other, Wilkins had quite an affection for his wooden-headed leader, and he knew him for an honest and thoroughly decent, if somewhat muleish, fellow. He was furious at the suggestion that Grundy was dishonest, and above all, that he was a hypocrite.

Aubrey Racke, as a rule, would have run a mile from a fight. But he could put up a show in a case of necessity, and he held Wilkins, the unheroic-looking fellow of Grundy, in small regard, and really thought he could "lick" him. Consequently he accepted the challenge quite cheerfully.

Within a very few minutes his cheerfulness had completely vanished. True, Wilkins did not display the skill and subtlety that the great fighting-men of the Form—like Tom Merry and Talbot—would have shown. Fortunately for him, that was not needed against Racke. But he did fight with a vigour and determination that drew cries of encouragement from the audience, and very soon his hefty blows began to take toll of his opponent, already weakened by cigarette-smoking and nocturnal card-parties down at the Green Man.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

He was all over Racke now, driving him down the passage yard by yard. Racke, furious with pain and humiliation, made a last wild rally, rushing at Wilkins with his arms



The beam of light from the inspector's torch revealed the figure of a schoolboy, bound to an upright beam, by the fireplace. "Thank goodness somebody's come at last!" growled Grundy. (See Chapter 16.)

temptation to hit out at Racke's mocking face. Instead he asked:

"Would you mind repeating what you said about Grundy?"

"Too much fag to remember exactly," yawned Racke. "I don't mind telling you what we all think about Grundy, though. We think that he's an associate of thieves, and an underhanded, hypocritical—Yaroooooop!"

Racke's vivid description of George Alfred Grundy's character came to a sudden end as Wilkins' fist flew out. The cad of the Shell gave a howl.

"Grooooooh! Why, you cheeky beast, I'll smash you!" he hooted furiously.

"You're welcome to try!" retorted Wilkins, facing him with gleaming eyes. "Grundy's the straightest, cleanest fellow in the Form, and I'm not going to hear him libelled by a dingy, smoky rotter like you! Come on, you cad!"

Without any more preliminaries the fight began.

The fellows crowded round the two combatants and watched the progress of the fight with great interest. It was unusual to see either Wilkins or Racke in a pugnacious mood, and only exceptional circumstances like the present could have brought it about.

Wilkins was not a fighting fellow, but on this occasion he squared up in a very businesslike manner. In spite of the

whirling like the sails of a windmill. But Wilkins was ready for him.

Crash!

Wilkins' left shot out, landing just at the right spot on the other's jaw. That finished it. With a yelp of pain, mingled with rage, Racke reeled over and fell to the floor. He did not get up in a hurry. Aubrey Racke had had enough—more than enough, in fact.

"So much for that cad!" remarked Wilkins, dropping his fists and glaring round at the crowd. "Anybody else got anything to say about old Grundy?"

"No takers!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No need to get on the warpath, Wilky," said Gunn. "I don't think many of these chaps side with Racke."

"I don't, for one," said Tom Merry promptly. "It's a funny bizney, of course, and we haven't even got authentic news yet, but whatever's happened, I've always believed that Grundy was true-blue, and I haven't changed my opinion yet."

There was a murmur of approval from some of the Shell. Others, however, did not seem to endorse their skipper's opinion with any great enthusiasm. Grundy's overbearing manner and heavy hand had not made him particularly

popular in the Shell, and though few really believed that Grundy was anything like Racke's picture of him, the majority were not sorry to know that, for once in his career, Grundy was being, as Frere expressed it, "taken down a peg or two."

"Well, it's good to know some of you chaps look at it like that," said Wilkins. "I can tell all of you this: Though we don't know exactly what sort of a scrape Grundy's got himself into, Gunny and I are backing up Grundy. Aren't we, Gunny?"

Gunn nodded.

"Yes, rather! We know he's a silly ass—"

"We all know that!" said Tom Merry, with a faint smile. "But we know he's not the kind of silly ass to do a shady trick, under any circumstances," finished Gunn. "So we're standing by him."

"And the first thing we're going to do is to get at the truth of the affair," said Wilkins. "We know Grundy's been taken up to the punishment-room, and we're going up there to hear what he's got to say."

"Wish you luck," said Tom Merry cordially. "Don't let the beaks see you, or you might be in the soup, too."

"Got to risk that," said Wilkins, with a shrug. "We're off now, anyway. See you later."

Grundy's two chums went off together, and the juniors dispersed to their studies to get their books ready for first lesson.

When Wilkins and Gunn reached the stairs leading up to the punishment-room they looked round cautiously before ascending. They knew enough to realise that their leader was in serious trouble, and Mr. Railton would be likely to regard their offence in communicating with the detained junior as serious in proportion.

The coast seemed clear, however, and they hurriedly scampered up, and ran along the passage to the apartment to which Grundy had been taken.

They naturally expected that the door would be closed, and they had anticipated having to conduct their conversation with Grundy through the thickness of the oak door.

To their astonishment, however, they saw immediately that the door was wide open, and, peeping in, they could see that there was nobody within the room.

"Rummy!" said Gunn, looking at Wilkins with knitted brows. "Surely they haven't taken him away already?"

Wilkins went up to the door and inspected it. Then he chuckled softly.

"My hat! Look at this lock! They haven't taken him away, Gunny. He's let himself out!"

Gunn joined his chum, and he fairly gasped as his glance fell on the lock.

"Phew! What a wreck! He must have smashed it with a poker or something. Same old Grundy!"

"Anyway, it's a pretty sure thing the beaks haven't found it out yet," said Wilkins. "I vote we get downstairs again while we're safe."

"What-ho!"

And hurriedly departing from the scene of Grundy's escape, Wilkins and Gunn went downstairs again and made their way towards the Shell Form-room.

CHAPTER 12.

Grundy on the Track!

WHEN Wilkins and Gunn had gone up to the punishment-room on their unsuccessful quest for Grundy, that unfortunate junior was, as a matter of fact, still within the walls of the School House. He remained in the School House for some hours after, while Wilkins and Gunn were wrestling with irregular verbs and other mysteries of the French language in the Shell Form-room.

After his first recollection of the mention of the Wayland address by his friends of the car Grundy was quick to act. The great man of the Shell was essentially a man of action; thinking came afterwards with him—quite a long way afterwards.

George Alfred Grundy knew an address where he might possibly find the scoundrels who had robbed Stanley Railton. And knowing that address, his sole idea was to get to it as quickly as possible, recover the diamonds, and, if possible, hand the crooks over to the police.

Of course, he might have waited until Mr. Railton came up again and have passed the information on to him. But that was not Grundy's way. The great man's blood was simply boiling at the thought of the way in which he had been hoodwinked, and he longed, with all his heart and soul, to get even with his deceivers. Apart from that, he felt that he was responsible for the loss of the diamonds, he ought to make himself responsible for their recovery. Anyway, he didn't think much about it. He knew that he wanted to be up and doing something—

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the lack of action about his present condition exasperated him. Grundy accordingly looked round for means of escape.

The window was hopeless—he realised that at once. To begin with, it was barred; and even if he could have got through the bars, the climb down to the ground was so perilous that he would probably have broken his neck in attempting it. Finally—and this settled it—in the light of day, the feat would have attracted so much attention that by the time he had reached the ground a crowd would have been waiting to welcome him. Escape by the window, therefore, was out of the question.

There remained the door. It was a stout oaken door, and the lock seemed substantial; but Grundy thought he could force that with, perhaps, a certain amount of difficulty. The greatest drawback about escaping by that means was that it meant sneaking out of the House unobserved—a somewhat formidable proposition. But it seemed a more reasonable method than the other, and Grundy decided to attempt it.

Having come to a decision in the matter, Grundy got to work on the lock. In the fireplace was an old-fashioned heavy iron fender. Looking round for an instrument, Grundy spotted this, and without hesitation crossed the room and lifted it above his head, his brawny arms having to exert all their power to keep it in that position.

Then, with a mighty effort, he swung it round and brought it crashing down on the lock which stood between him and freedom.

The fender won! With a terrific crash it met the door, then descended to the floor, leaving of the lock only mangled remains.

The din of the impact was dreadful. If it had occurred in any other part of the building, undoubtedly it would have attracted a curious crowd in no time. Luckily for Grundy, the punishment-room was quite a distance from any spot where people were likely to be at that hour in the morning.

With a grunt of satisfaction, Grundy saw that his object had been accomplished. The door still remained closed, but the lock was a ruin, and it would be child's play to get out of the room now.

He wrenched at the battered-looking handle. One wrench was sufficient—the door swung open.

"Now for it!" murmured Grundy.

He stepped cautiously out into the passage, and, holding himself ready to dart into hiding at the approach of any stray master or prefect, descended the stairs leading to the lower floors of the House.

It was breakfast-time, and scarcely a soul was about. Grundy hoped to be able to get right out of the House without being detected.

Luck favoured him at first. He reached the Shell passage without encountering anybody, and was able to look in at Study No. 3 and get his hat and coat.

After donning these, he issued forth again, and boldly went downstairs and along a passage that led to one of the side entrances to the House.

From that point, Grundy's luck appeared to change for the worse. First, he had to take refuge in the nearest room as the sound of Mr. Railton's voice reached his ears. It turned out to be Mr. Linton's room, and Mr. Linton coming in soon after, Grundy had to retreat behind a handy screen.

Mr. Linton did not seem in a hurry to leave, and Grundy began to wonder what was the matter, for it was now the hour for first lesson, and Mr. Linton was, as a rule, very punctual. Then Grundy remembered, with a smothered groan, that the Shell took French for first lesson that morning, and Mr. Linton was therefore free for an hour and a half.

For the whole of that period Grundy had to fume and wait for the master of the Shell to leave. He departed at last, and Grundy, with a sigh of relief, was able to abandon his uncomfortable position and proceed with his escape.

He had not, however, reached the end of his troubles. The House seemed alive with masters and prefects by this time, and Grundy had to hide his bulky person in all sorts of nooks and crannies before he was safely out in the open.

Altogether, the process of getting out of the School House took Grundy the best part of three hours, and the school clock pointed to half-past eleven as he climbed over the wall and at last dropped safely into the road. Grundy was exasperated by the delay, but it could not be helped. And now that he was clear of the school premises, he made up for the lost time by sprinting down the road towards Rylcombe at a pace that astonished the one or two pedestrians whom he passed.

At Rylcombe he was again delayed, having to wait three-quarters of an hour before the first train left for

Wayland. Grundy was by that time irritated almost to a degree of madness. The thought that all these precious hours were being wasted while the crooks were possibly making a leisurely exit from the district was constantly running through his fevered brain. He could scarcely endure the wait.

At last, however, the train came in, and within a few minutes Grundy was seated in a third-class carriage, bound for Wayland.

The hour of one struck from the town hall clock as Grundy at last stepped out of the station into the busy street. A whole morning had been wasted.

Now that he had arrived at Wayland, Grundy was a little nonplussed for a minute or two. How was he to find the Cedars? That was his next problem. He tackled a passer-by.

"Could you direct me to the Cedars, please?"

"The Cedars?" repeated the man blankly. "Never heard tell of it. Anyway, I'm a stranger here, my lad."

Grundy walked on, disconsolate, until he happened to run into an errand-boy. He put the same question to the boy as he had put to the man, and this time with more success.

"The Cedars?" said the boy, scratching his chin. "Only one I know of is just outside the town on the Wayland road, just before you get to the level-crossing."

"Know who lives there?" asked Grundy eagerly.

"Well, I haven't been delivering that way lately myself, sir," answered the boy. "The place was empty for years—rummy old show, it is—then two gents took it. Whether they live there now or not, I don't know."

Grundy's eyes gleamed.

"That's the place I want, right enough!" he said. "Many thanks!"

He slipped a half-crown into the palm of the surprised errand-boy, and hurriedly made off down the High Street towards the Wayland road. His long legs soon took him through the town, and in a very short space of time he was striding through the outskirts of Wayland and getting towards open country.

In a lonely part of the road, about a hundred yards distant from the level-crossing to which the errand-boy had referred, Grundy suddenly came across the Cedars. It was an old-fashioned, dilapidated-looking house, standing rather a long way back from the road and screened by tall hedges.

Grundy's heart beat more quickly as he read the name, painted in faded letters, on the front gate. Could this be the headquarters of his acquaintances? And, if so, were they in?

If Grundy had been gifted with a little more common sense, he might, at this stage, have turned back and gone to the nearest police station.

But common sense was not one of Grundy's strong points. The great George Alfred was very anxious to bring off a coup single-handed. And even if a policeman had come along at that moment, it was doubtful whether he would have called on him for help.

Moving with the stealth of a Red Indian on the track of an enemy, Grundy crawled through the hedge and peeped cautiously from behind a rhododendron-bush at the old house.

He gave a violent start as he looked. For there, standing on the unkempt lawn at the side of the house, was the very car in which he had made his escape from Jack Blake & Co. two days before!

CHAPTER 13.

Unlucky!

GRUNDY could have shouted for joy at the sight of that motor-car. He had taken a great deal of trouble to reach the residence of the self-styled Customs Officers. But he had fully realised during the progress of that search that the finding of the house would not necessarily mean the finding of its occupants. It was quite possible—even probable—that, having obtained one rich haul in the neighbourhood, they would abandon the house which had served as their headquarters and disappear.

If Grundy had possessed sufficient intelligence to fathom other people's motives, he might have seen that there were substantial reasons for returning from a midnight raid on St. Jim's to such a house as this. For one thing, it was a clear run through a lonely countryside from St. Jim's to the Cedars. At night, it would be possible to drive all the way without meeting a soul, and the odds against being seen by a policeman were incalculably great. A night ride to London, on the other hand, would be fraught with danger all the way.

Such thoughts did not occur to Grundy. But he wasn't bothering about motives. The sight of that familiar car

drove everything from his mind but the desire to get into the house and investigate further.

Keeping well in the cover of the bushes, he advanced upon his objective. As he drew nearer the house he was able to observe that a number of tools were scattered near the car, from which fact he judged that repairs were in progress. There seemed, however, to be nobody about. Grundy conjectured that if his two acquaintances were engaged in putting the car to rights, they had probably gone into the house for a late lunch, or a snack.

Grundy arrived at last at a point where he was within a couple of yards of the path that skirted the building. By this time a rough plan had formed in his head. At the side of the house was a flight of stairs leading down to a basement. He would make for them, and try to gain an entrance to the house that way.

Success attended his efforts. Descending the steps, he put his hand on the handle of the door at the bottom, and gently turned it. The door yielded to his pressure. He entered.

He found himself in a dark, dirty room, containing practically nothing in the way of furniture. Apparently it had at one time been used as a kitchen, for there was a big range on one side of the room. Judging by the thick coating of dust that covered it, however, the cooking, if any, had been performed in some other part of the house for a period of months, at least.

Grundy tiptoed across the room and opened a door leading to a passage. Feeling quite an exhilarating sense of adventure, he moved noiselessly down the passage, then ascended some stairs leading to the upper regions of the house. There was a musty atmosphere of decay and desolation about the whole place; it seemed to Grundy, on that account alone, just the sinister kind of building two burglars would choose for their headquarters.

Grundy was alert for the faintest sound now, and he felt ready for anything. Just exactly how he, an unarmed schoolboy, was to overcome two presumably desperate, well-armed crooks, Grundy had not quite decided. But he had unlimited confidence in his capabilities, particularly in the fighting line, and he advanced in search of the enemy in a state of perfect cheerfulness.

Reaching the entrance-hall upstairs, he heard, for the first time, sounds of life. From one of the rooms leading off the hall, voices were coming, accompanied by the clatter of knives and forks against chinaware. Grundy's surmise was evidently correct. The occupants of the house were having a meal.

Grundy listened outside the door. So confident was he by this time that he was on the right track that he did not even feel any particular elation at noticing that the voices were indeed those of his two friends of the Rylcombe episode.

It seemed that the men were just finishing their meal, for Grundy had not been long outside the door before he heard the noise of their chairs being pushed back from the table. At that warning sound, Grundy hastily dodged across the hall, and slipped into the room opposite.

Taking quick stock of his new surroundings, he realised immediately that he had stumbled across one of the rooms which they frequently used. There was a slight haze of tobacco-smoke still in the air, and two camp-beds occupied different corners of the room.

Grundy scarcely had time to look round before he realised that his hosts were about to enter the room. Almost instinctively, he dived under one of the beds. There was not a lot of room for Grundy's bulky body, but he just squeezed in a moment before the door swung open to admit his friends, the enemy.

From his uncomfortable position on the floor Grundy listened intently. As they entered, one of them was saying:

"I vote we make for London as soon as we've got the car right, anyway."

"All right, then. When can we realise cash on the stones?"

"As soon as Levy takes them over. They'll be the finest collection of diamonds he's had for many a year, you bet!"

The other man chuckled.

"And we got them with less trouble than we've had over any job I can remember, thanks to the kind help of our friend, the schoolboy."

Grundy squirmed as he listened to that last remark. He felt sorely tempted, for a moment, to jump up and "wade in" without further delay. But, even with Grundy, discretion was occasionally the better part of valour, and he decided to postpone the "wading in" until a more opportune moment.

Meanwhile, he was becoming very cramped and sore under the low camp-bed, and he very heartily longed for the two rogues to quit the room.

It seemed, however, that they had business to transact, for Grundy could see by the position of their feet that they

had sat down facing each other, at a table in the middle of the room. The St. Jim's junior felt a thrill run through him as he heard one of the men say:

"Just look at 'em! Ever see such beauties?"

"They're the goods!" growled the other.

Evidently they had the diamonds on the table in front of them. Grundy's heart beat more quickly at the thought. If only he had a revolver on him! He'd show them! If only—

Grundy's mental longings came to an abrupt end. His position, in addition to being cramped and uncomfortable, was also draughty and dusty. And the combination of the last two conditions suddenly brought about a result which was as unlooked for as it was disconcerting. Grundy felt, all at once, a tickling sensation in his nose, and he realised, with a feeling of alarm, that he was in imminent danger of sneezing.

He made frantic efforts to repress the incipient explosion, and for two or three seconds he succeeded. But then—

"Achoooooo!"

Grundy's terrific sneeze echoed across the room, and the other two occupants of the room leaped to their feet as if electrified, as they heard it.

"What the thunder—"

"A mark!" snarled the shorter man. "Under the bed! Get him! Oh, great powers! Look who it is!"

"The schoolboy!" stuttered the other. "How in the name of all that's wonderful— Here, keep away, you young fool! Put your hands up, or I'll shoot you like a dog!"

Grundy's impetuous rush stopped, as he found himself confronted by the menacing barrel of an ugly-looking revolver. With a growl like the growl of an angry terrier, he reluctantly extended his hands above his head.

The two men gazed at him almost in stupefaction, for some little time, then they looked at each other and grinned.

"So you trailed us here, my young friend!" commented the man with the revolver. "Goodness knows how you did it, but you've done well, anyway. What was your idea?"

"My idea was to bring a couple of thieves, lying scoundrels to justice, if you want to know!" growled Grundy, glaring savagely from one to the other.

"Ha, ha! Excellent! But I'm afraid you'll have to give it up now, Master—let's see, Grundy, I think, isn't it?"

"Plenty of cord downstairs," remarked the other man cheerfully. "Come along with us, young feller-me-fad, and we'll make you safe for a day or two, to give us time to make a good get-away."

"And no larks, remember, or you'll get a hole drilled right into you!" warned the man with the revolver. "Out you get!"

Grundy had no option but to obey.

They led him down to the kitchen from which he had so recently ascended. Here, while one of them continued to hold him covered, the other deftly bound him with cord. Within a couple of minutes the unfortunate Grundy was completely helpless. To finish off their handiwork, they secured him with rope to the wall at the side of the kitchen range, and gagged him.

"So much for you, Master Grundy!" observed the armed member of the partnership, transferring his revolver to his pocket. "We're sorry to have to treat you like this after the generous assistance you've given us, but we can't afford to take any risks."

"And now for the car! We've got to put that in order before dusk, if possible," said the other man briskly, and at that the precious pair quitted the room.

Grundy was not pessimistic by nature—quite the reverse, in fact. But, left to himself, the realisation of his utter helplessness came home to him, and, for once in his life, Grundy felt that he could now abandon all hope.

CHAPTER 14.

St. Jim's Wonders!

MEANWHILE, at St. Jim's, the general excitement was increasing. In the break between the second and third lessons, Wilkins and Gunn had confided to several juniors the result of their trip to the punishment-room, and the news of Grundy's escape quickly spread through the ranks of the Shell and the Fourth.

When Mr. Linton came to take the Shell in Latin after the break, he found that he had a very inattentive Form to deal with. The climax was reached when he called upon Wilkins to give him the English translation of the phrase "quod erat faciendum." Wilkins certainly was not considered a great classical scholar, but even he, at a more normal time, would have known better than to reply: "It was easy to get into prison!"

The Shell chuckled at that extraordinary answer. They could judge from it that Wilkins' thoughts were taken up

more with George Alfred Grundy than with the ancient gentleman whose works they were supposed to be studying. Wilkins, however, was not alone in this respect. A good many Shell fellows were thinking more of Grundy than of the lesson that morning.

Just before the Form was dismissed, Mr. Railton, looking by no means as serene and cheerful as he usually looked, rustled into the room.

Mr. Linton paused in the lesson, and there was a movement of interest in the Form.

"Pray excuse me, Mr. Linton. I'm afraid I must interrupt you for a few minutes," said Mr. Railton apologetically.

"By all means, Mr. Railton," replied the master of the Shell, stepping back to his desk.

The Housemaster faced the Form, and regarded them with troubled eyes.

"I dare say all of you have heard the rumours which I understand are current, regarding the burglary which took place last night, and also regarding your Form-fellow, Grundy," he began. "I have come to acquaint you boys with the circumstances, first, because I think it preferable that you should know the truth, rather than believe exaggerated rumours; and second, because I wish to make an inquiry here respecting Grundy."

The Shell waited, expectantly.

"Most of you know that a relative of mine from South Africa has been staying at the school for a couple of days. In South Africa, he is engaged in the diamond-mining industry, and he took advantage of his trip to England to bring over a valuable consignment of diamonds with him. News of that consignment must have leaked out, for, as you know, two rascals broke into the House the night before last and entered his bed-room, their evil designs being frustrated by the prompt and brave action of a junior in this Form."

There was a subdued murmur of applause from the Shell, and Talbot flushed uncomfortably at the complimentary reference to himself.

"Last night," continued Mr. Railton, "burglars again broke into the House. This time, I am sorry to say, they were more successful. They drugged my nephew, and absconded with the precious stones which he unfortunately still retained in his possession. He is now recovering from the effects of the drug, and I can judge already that he is going to be very badly shaken by the affair. The occurrence is bound to react unfavourably on him in his business career for many years, apart from the tremendous blow involved in the immediate loss, and altogether it is a very, very regrettable business."

Mr. Railton paused, and the Shell waited for what more was to come.

"Now, as to Grundy, I am aware that some most absurd rumours have been going round the school this morning. I shall be glad if you boys will endeavour to put a stop to them. Nobody suggests for a single moment that Grundy had a hand in last night's burglary. What has happened is this: Grundy is alleged to have known something about the raid of the previous night. In view of later developments, I considered it advisable to detain him until the arrival of the police. I now find that Grundy has escaped from the punishment-room, and that is all I know. I trust that this statement of mine will have the effect of putting a stop to the sensational stories I understand are being told. I may tell you that I, personally, feel sure there is some explanation which will prove to clear Grundy from any suspicion whatever."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Wilkins and Gunn, and one or two others.

"Coming to my inquiry: Is there anybody in the Form who knows anything about Grundy's escape, or who can throw any light on the nature of his connection with the rascals who entered the House the other night?"

Silence followed the question. Wilkins and Gunn felt that they were hardly called upon to relate the story of their ascent to the punishment-room earlier in the morning, and nobody else knew anything about the matter.

After an interval, Mr. Railton nodded, satisfied, and withdrew, leaving Mr. Linton to resume the interrupted lesson. But what little interest the Shell had previously had in Latin had been completely dissipated by Mr. Railton's visit and the remainder of Mr. Linton's lecture was hardly listened to. Fortunately the bell for dismissal rang shortly afterwards, and the Shell might have carried away with them a good many souvenirs of the morning in the form of impositions.

At dinner-time, the whole school seemed to be agog with excitement. Burglaries were not everyday occurrences, and the mysterious connection of Grundy of the Shell with the particular burglary under discussion made it an affair of quite unusual character.

Despite the loyal efforts of some of the Shell to make little of Grundy's disappearance, it was inevitable that

dark suspicions should be abroad. Most of the Lower School were not slow to condemn the absent Shell fellow. What else but a guilty conscience could cause him to run away?—was the universal question that was asked. And even Wilkins and Gunn found it difficult to think of a satisfactory answer.

The Housemaster's nephew, looking white and drawn, was out and about in the afternoon. Some of the fellows saw him coming out of his uncle's room with a police-sergeant from Wayland, just before tea-time, and the exact significance of the fact was discussed at many a study tea afterwards.

Dusk settled over the old school. The time for prep came, and went. No further news seemed to be forthcoming. And the one question that was uppermost in everybody's mind now, was: Where was Grundy?

CHAPTER 15.

Turning the Tables!

AFTER Grundy's captors had left him trussed up like a very hefty chicken in the musty old kitchen of The Cedars, the St. Jim's junior saw nothing more of them for several hours. Grundy could hear them talking, as they worked on the motor-car at the side of the house, and he gathered from such remarks as he caught, that they were experiencing more difficulty with the repairs than they had anticipated.

For a considerable time, Grundy's spirits were at the lowest ebb; it seemed impossible that he could escape from his unenviable position. His thoughts were gloomy and bitter.

Then his natural optimism began to penetrate the gloom. However dreadful his plight had been—and certainly it was serious enough—Grundy could not have remained interminably in the abyssal depth of despair to which he had sunk immediately after his capture. And instead of spending the time in fruitless self-reproach, he began to look around for a possible means of escape.

His eyes roved round every corner of the room; but no inspiration came to him. The only article near him was an old long-handled broom. That seemed completely useless. There was no article within reach which would help him to loosen his bonds; and that, of course, was the first essential.

He made spasmodic attempts to work the cord away from his wrists. But the only result was that he rubbed the skin until it was sore. So painful did his hands become, that he was soon forced to stop moving them; obviously, there was no hope just there.

He tried sudden jerks, with his whole body. For some time, he struggled, and wriggled, and jumped, until the perspiration was streaming down his forehead. Memories of newspaper-articles he had read about a man named Houdini returned to him, and encouraged him in his valiant efforts. But the efforts were in vain. Evidently he did not possess the peculiar gifts of the celebrated Handcuff King.

After struggling vainly for half an hour, Grundy had perforce to stop; he was too exhausted to go on. And being inactive, he began to think again.

It seemed that all the struggles and jerks in the world could not release his hands or his body. There remained his feet. Grundy could not see that his position would be very much improved, even if he could free his feet. But anything was better than just doing nothing, so Grundy set himself out to get the cord away from his ankles.

He found that task almost as formidable as the others—almost, but not quite. Grundy was secured to the solid

oak beam that supported the mantelpiece above the kitchen range. His tightly-bound feet rested at the foot of this beam, where it was covered with a sheet of metal. It was to the corner of the metal sheet, where it might be expected to form a blade, of sorts, that Grundy applied the cord that secured his ankles.

In his present position he was unable to move his feet up and down to a greater extent than a couple of inches. He hoped, however, that even this little movement would be sufficient to wear through the cord in time, and with a patience that would have astonished the St. Jim's fellows, who regarded Grundy as the reverse of patient, he stuck to it.

An hour—two hours went by. Now and again Grundy had to rest, and in those intervals it was only natural that he should begin to feel despondency creeping over him again. But he gamely returned to his task, and the time came when he could feel that the strands were beginning to weaken.

Quite suddenly, with a snap, one piece of cord parted. Ten minutes later a second followed suit. With a muffled grunt of triumph, Grundy felt that his feet were no longer bound together.

Having achieved that trifling measure of freedom, Grundy began to wonder whether it had been worth the trouble he had taken. Certainly, he could now slip his feet out from the rope that kept him secured to the wall. But the rest of his body was still hemmed in as tightly as before, so it was difficult to see what advantage he had gained.

Then an idea came to Grundy.

Grundy frequently had ideas. Usually they contained about as much originality as his tousled head contained brains; that is to say, a very small quantity indeed. On this occasion it may have been a case of necessity being the mother of invention. Whatever the explanation, Grundy's idea this time certainly was original. "Original" hardly did justice to it—it was fantastic.

Grundy's chief concern in wanting to get free was to get back the stolen diamonds, and capture his present captors. His own personal discomfort didn't worry Grundy a bit, so long as he did that. Up to the time when his great idea occurred to him, Grundy had not seen how it was possible to capture the rogues who were working on the motor-car outside, while remaining in his present position. But now he suddenly saw how it could be done.

The long-handled broom, which had previously been outside his range, he could now reach with his feet. That was Fact No. 1. There was a trapdoor in the middle of the kitchen, leading evidently to an underground cellar. That was Fact No. 2. The other facts were that the trapdoor lifted by means of an iron ring, which Grundy could "wangle" with the broom-handle, and that it could be locked from the outside with a flat, sliding bolt which Grundy optimistically thought he could shut with the same implement. The only problem was to get the crooks down into the cellar.

To any normal individual, the idea would certainly have seemed grotesque. But to Grundy, in his present desperate plight, it seemed the most wonderfully inspired "whizzer" he had ever thought out. Once he had his hosts imprisoned in the cellar, there would be no further hurry. If it took him all night to get free from his troublesome bonds they would still be there.

Without bothering his head for the moment about the somewhat formidable problem of how they were to be induced to make the descent, Grundy applied himself to the technical problem of manœuvring the cellar-flap.

Grasping the broom between his feet, he moved the

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handle towards the ring, and pressed it into the required position. Then using the brush end as a lever, he gently endeavoured to raise the flap. There was an immediate response to his pressure, and the flap rose several inches. Grundy's heart gave quite a leap. It could be done!

Satisfied on that point, he dropped the flap again, and tried the broom-handle against the sliding bolt. Without actually performing the operation, he could see that it was quite practicable.

After that, Grundy racked his brains to think of a means by which he could somehow or other attract the two crooks down into the cellar. In his present condition, bound and gagged as he was, it seemed pretty hopeless to imagine that he could even attract them into the kitchen, let alone into the nether regions where he wanted to get them.

Grundy realised that as a preliminary to attracting them anywhere he would have to get rid of his gag. Accordingly, he next devoted himself to this task—and a considerable task he found it. Grundy's face had never been considered very beautiful, but it is safe to say that the contortions through which that face went during the following half-hour rendered it more hideous than his bitterest enemies had ever imagined it could be.

In the end, however, his efforts reaped their reward, and at long, long last, with much spluttering and gurgling, Grundy had the pleasure of moving the handkerchief that bound his capacious mouth, and ejecting the second handkerchief which his cautious captors had stuffed within it.

Grundy drew a deep breath of relief and satisfaction. He seemed to be getting on now.

Time was getting on, too. The deepening gloom that was settling over the room indicated that the sun had set, and the sound of a motor-engine from outside the house running smoothly at last warned Grundy that by now the repairs were in all probability complete. Very soon, unless something happened to stop them, the diamond thieves would be speeding along the country roads to London, there to be swallowed up in the maze of the metropolis.

But not if Grundy could help it! That redoubtable junior, in spite of his acute discomfort and apparent helplessness, was brimming over with optimism now. For the coming of darkness had shown him that the problem of imprisoning his captors might not be so baffling, after all. Already it was impossible to see across the room. If he could only get them to walk across the kitchen now, might they not tumble down into the cellar, without the option, so to speak? It was certainly possible—even probable—for, as Grundy had already noted, there was no bulb fitted to the electric light pendant which hung from the ceiling.

Anyway, the time had come to act—that was certain. And Grundy acted. Again grasping the broom between his feet, he inserted the end in the ring, the position of which he knew to a nicety now. Raising the flap inch by inch, he strained every muscle in his legs until it swung right over. Keeping it suspended there, in an almost vertical position, he drew a deep breath, and fairly bellowed:

"Help, help! Thieves! Murder! Help!"

Almost immediately there was a scurry of footsteps along the gravel path outside. Grundy's hosts of "The Cedars" had heard, and were hurrying to investigate. Grundy's powerful voice carried beyond the confines of the house, and they were far from anxious to attract inquiries from the road outside.

Pausing for a moment, Grundy heard them running down the steps leading to the kitchen.

"Curse the young fool! I'll flay him for this!" the furious voice of one of them grumbled out.

A moment later they had burst into the room.

"You big-mouthed whelp! I'll—"

What would happen? For an instant Grundy's heart was in his mouth. Then—

Crash! Bang!

"Great heavens! What—"

Crash! Thud!

The yells of terror rang out across the room, followed by the heavy thud of two bodies hurtling down into the cellar below.

With a howl of triumph which he could not repress, Grundy sent the cellar flap crashing down into its place again, then hurriedly sought out the sliding-bolt with the end of his broom-handle, and slipped it home into its socket.

"Now get out if you can, you rotters!" yelled Grundy exultantly. "My win, I think! Hurrah!"

There was no answer from the cellar. The shock and the fall had silenced the unfortunate crooks of "The Cedars." Both were lying bruised and unconscious on the stone floor to which they had dropped.

CHAPTER 16.

Good Old Grundy!

"WELL, sir, what do you make of the St. Jim's affair?"

The police-sergeant seated at the wheel of Inspector Skeat's motor-car put this question to his superior officer as they bowled along the Wayland Road in the direction of the town.

The police search that had swiftly followed Grundy's disappearance had so far been without result. The junior had been traced as far as Wayland, but there the trail had suddenly stopped short. The Wayland inspector had taken charge of the search in the vicinity of the town, but without a trace of the missing junior being discovered. It was as though Grundy had vanished into thin air.

The inspector shrugged.

"A strange business!" he replied. "Of course, the burglary itself is easy to understand. A big school containing a visitor with fifty thousand in diamonds is fair game for any burglar. It's the disappearance of the schoolboy Grundy that puzzles me."

"Do you think he is one of the gang, sir?"

"Not for one moment. I understand that he comes of a good family, and has never known what it is to be short of money. Further than that, he has been at the school for years, and has an unblemished record. Maybe he was a dupe, and has run away in fright now that he knows what has happened."

The sergeant pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"From what I have heard of Master Grundy at the school, I should imagine that fright is the last thing he'd suffer from," he remarked. "Still, there must be some explanation like that, I suppose. Hallo! What's that?"

At the same moment as he made his concluding remark the inspector had started up from his seat.

"Stop the car!" he commanded. "Did you hear it, too, then?"

"I certainly heard something," replied the sergeant, applying the brakes. "Sounded like somebody crying for help."

"Precisely what I thought. Stay here a moment. I'll see if there's anything wrong."

The inspector jumped out of the car and walked across the road. It was almost dark now, and it was difficult to distinguish anything but the dim outlines of trees and hedges. Faintly silhouetted against the sky, beyond the hedge to which he walked, however, was the gloomy shadow of a house. The inspector recognised it as a house which had been untenanted for years. He recollected having observed, when motoring by on previous occasions, the name "The Cedars" in faded painted letters on the gate.

"Help! Help! Help!"

The faint shouts echoed across the road. There could be no mistaking the direction from which they came this time.

The inspector did not waste any time. With hurried steps he made for the front gate, and advanced up the short drive leading to the house. As he approached the house he was able to judge that the shouts came from the side of the building. Accordingly, he passed the front entrance and went round to the side.

He noticed a car standing empty and silent on the grass. Without giving it more than a fleeting glance, however, he descended the stone steps leading to the part from which the cries for help were still coming.

At the foot of the steps he paused for an instant, to produce an electric-torch from his pocket, then wrenched open the door and strode into the kitchen of "The Cedars," switching on his torch as he did so.

"Now, then, what's the matter—" he began, then he stopped and gasped. For the beam of light that came from his torch revealed a sight such as even he, with all his long experience of crime and criminals, had seldom seen. It was the sight of nothing less than a schoolboy in Etons, securely bound with cord and roped to an upright beam by the fireplace.

"Thank goodness somebody's come at last!" growled George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell at St. Jim's. "Another ten minutes or so, and my voice would have given out, I think. I've been yelling for help for half an hour at least."

"What does this mean? Who are you?" demanded the inspector, quickly recovering from his astonishment and crossing over to the spot where Grundy was tied.

"I'm Grundy—George Alfred Grundy—"

"What, Grundy of St. Jim's?" interrupted the inspector, with keen interest, as he produced a knife and began cutting at the cord.

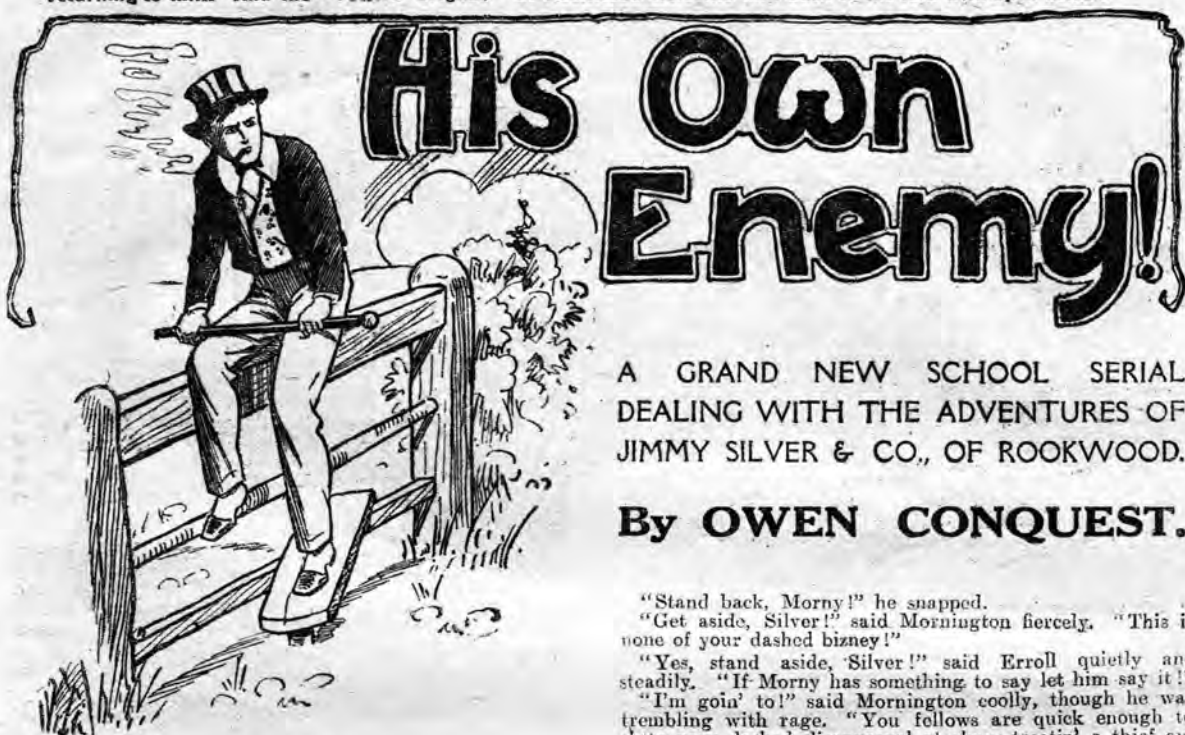
"That's right! How did you know? And who are you?"

"I'm Inspector Skeat, from Wayland."

"The police-inspector!" cried Grundy, in great delight. "Oh, my hat! This is lucky, and no mistake! I've got a couple of fellows locked up in the cellar below this room

(Continued on page 28.)

THE DOWNWARD PATH! Once set on the downward path, Valentine Mornington finds all his old shady habits returning to him. And the "rotters' Brigade" at Rookwood welcome him back to the fold with open arms!



A GRAND NEW SCHOOL SERIAL
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By OWEN CONQUEST.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

KIT ERROLL befriends an old acquaintance in Albert Biggs, a one-time waif of the slums, who comes to Rookwood and takes up a post as gardener's boy. Valentine Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, appeals to Erroll to "drop" his ragged friend, but Kit refuses. In consequence of this Mornington plots with Peele & Co., three shady rotters, to effect Biggs forcibly from the school. The four are about to carry out their rascally project that night, when they are overheard by Tupper, another servant who is sleeping in the next room to Biggs. Tupper raises the cry of "Burglars!" Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, is awakened by the noise, and quickly scenting the cause of the trouble, severely reprimands Mornington and threatens to report the matter to Dr. Chisholm, the Head.

Jimmy Silver & Co., returning to their dormitory after the "scare," are absolutely disgusted with Mornington, but the dandy of the Fourth is unmoved.

(Now read on.)

Forced to Fight!

HOWLING rotters, the lot of them!" snorted Arthur Edward Lovell. "If they weren't already booked for trouble I'd lick the lot of them myself for disgracing the Form like this!"

"They'll get enough in the morning," said Raby, "and serve them jolly well right!"

"Stop that chatter, and get that light out—sharp!" came Bulkeley's voice from the door.

"Right, Bulkeley!"

The juniors scrambled quickly into bed, and the light was extinguished. But as the door closed there came a movement from Mornington's bed. The next moment a light glimmered.

"That you, Morny?" snapped Jimmy Silver, sitting up in bed. "What's the game now, you rotter?"

"You'll know in a minute!" said Mornington coolly.

The next moment the gas flared up as Mornington lit it. The fellows sat up in bed and stared at him. Mornington's eyes were glittering.

He crossed over to Kit Erroll's bed and glowered at him. "Now, you rotter!" he said, through his teeth. "Out you get! I've got a settlement with you, an' it can't wait! Out you get!"

"Morny"—Erroll looked pained and alarmed as he sat up in bed—"Morny, what's the matter—what—"

"Out you get, or I'll yank you out, you cad!" hissed Mornington.

And, grabbing Erroll's bedclothes, he dragged them viciously off his chum. Erroll stared at him, white-faced, and then he got slowly out of bed.

At the same moment Jimmy Silver sprang out of bed and jumped between the two. He saw at once Mornington's intention.

"Stand back, Morny!" he snapped.

"Get aside, Silver!" said Mornington fiercely. "This is none of your dashed bizney!"

"Yes, stand aside, Silver!" said Erroll quietly and steadily. "If Morny has something to say let him say it!"

"I'm goin' to!" said Mornington coolly, though he was trembling with rage. "You fellows are quick enough to show your dashed disapproval at chaps treatin' a thief an' guttersnipe as he should be treated. But I want to know what you think of a fellow who sneaks in a cowardly, crawling way on a pal—or a chap who was his pal!"

"Morny—"

"You've sold me out, you cad!" gritted Mornington. "You've sold the chap who's been your pal, who's stood by you through thick an' thin! Gad! I never dreamed—"

"Morny, what on earth do you mean?" interrupted Erroll in great distress. "I haven't sold you—I've never sneaked about anyone, much less you!"

"Liar!"

"What?" Erroll's face flushed crimson; but he set his teeth and did not move.

Every fellow was out of bed now and crowding round.

"Mornington—stop that, you rotter!" said Lovell angrily. "Haven't you caused enough trouble to-night!"

"Shut up!" snapped Mornington, his lip curling. "Ask Erroll who's caused the trouble. You rotten worm, Erroll! Ask Peele, an' Gower, an' Lattrey—they've good reason to know, as I have! It was Erroll's rotten, caddish sneakin' that got us nabbed to-night!"

"Mine?" exclaimed Erroll.

"Yes. You've no need to look innocent!" sneered Mornington. "You saw us leave our beds—you even spoke to me. You guessed what our game was an' you followed."

"I did!" admitted Erroll very quietly. "I suspected you were going to rag Biggs, and I followed, hoping to be in time to stop you. But—"

"Then perhaps you'll admit the rest, then?" sneered the dandy of the Fourth. "You followed us, an' saw us hide in that dashed box-room. Then you went upstairs and warned Biggs. You put him up to doin' what he and Tupper did. You told them to shout 'Burglars!' and to lock us in that room."

"I—I didn't!" panted Erroll, aghast. "I never dreamed—"

"Liar!" repeated Mornington calmly. "Peele will bear me out an' so will the rest."

"That's right!" put in Peele savagely. "The cad must have done it. Those two low hounds saw us below—they must have seen us, and knew perfectly well we weren't burglars. It was a dashed put-up job—a dirty trick to get us nabbed without openly sneaking about us."

"That's it!" said the white-faced Gower. "Erroll can't deny it, the howling sweep!"

"Go for him, Morny!" hissed Lattrey.

"Hold on!" snapped Jimmy Silver, again coming between the two. "This isn't the time for rowing, Mornington. Don't be a fool! If you want to have it out with Erroll you can do that to-morrow."

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"Put up your hands, you cad!" said Mornington. And he sprang at his former chum. Erroll jumped back with his hands up, and the next moment they were fighting furiously in the dimly-lit dormitory. (See this page.)

"I'm not waitin' until to-morrow!" hissed Mornington. "Stand aside, Silver, you interferin' fool! Let Erroll face me."

"I'm not afraid of facing you, Morny!" said Kit Erroll, striving hard to restrain his own temper. "You're making a mistake—a big mistake! I did not even speak with Biggs to-night!"

"What rot!" jeered Peele. "What a rotten lie. I—Ow!" Cyril Peele yelled and went spinning across the room as Erroll turned on him and landed out with his fist.

"If I allow Mornington to call me liar," he said through his teeth, "nobody else here is going to! Morny—"

"That's enough!" shouted Mornington, shoving Jimmy Silver aside swiftly. "Leave Peele alone; you'll have enough dealin' with me, Erroll. I—"

"I tell you I swear, Morny—"

"I'm listenin' to no denials!" hissed Mornington, his eyes blazing. "You sneakin' toad, Erroll! This evenin' I struck you! You refused to fight—you took the coward's blow! We'll see if you'll take it now!"

Snack!

Erroll reeled backwards, his hand to his burning face.

"You rotter, Mornington!" said Jimmy Silver.

For a moment Erroll stood motionless—undecided and dazed. But Mornington gave him no chance this time to refuse to fight.

"Now put your hands up, you cad!" he snapped.

With that grim warning Mornington sprang at his former chum, and Erroll jumped back with his hands up. He saw at once that nothing could avoid a conflict. Indeed, forgiving and patient as he was, Erroll found that last blow too much for him. His eyes suddenly blazed, and after that first jump back he gave no more ground.

The next instant they were fighting furiously in the dimly-lit dormitory.

How the Fight Ended!

"STOP them!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "They'll have the beaks here in a tick, the idiots!"

But there was no stopping the two juniors.

The sheer fury of Mornington's mad attack got through Erroll's defence again and again, but Erroll stood his ground and gave blow for blow, and very soon he had himself well in hand.

"Go it, Morny, old man!" called Peele excitedly. "You've got him!"

Mornington heard the call, and his face crimsoned. He could scarcely believe it was true—that within twenty-four hours he should have quarrelled with his best chum, should be cheered on by a shady rascal like Cyril Peele while fighting his chum.

And it was his own doing—his own headstrong temper and

unreasonable jealousy had caused it—despite all, Morny, at the bottom of his mind, could not help knowing the truth.

But he gritted his teeth as he remembered what had happened, and what was to happen in the morning. To do Morny justice, he really believed that Biggs had purposely roused the school in order to get them caught, and that the idea had been prompted by Erroll.

Crash!

Mornington was down. He was, perhaps, the better man of the two, but his temper was his undoing. Erroll seemed to grow cooler as the fight went on, whilst Mornington grew more and more reckless and savage.

"That's enough!" snapped Jimmy Silver, jumping between the two once again. "This has gone far enough—it's a marvel nobody's heard the rumpus already. You asses can finish this to-morrow—if you're born idiots enough!"

"Stand aside, Silver!" Mornington was on his feet again, red trickling from a cut lip. He did not wait for Jimmy to stand aside, but rushed round him and at Erroll. "Come on, Erroll, you cad!"

They were at it again the next moment. Jimmy Silver and several other fellows who might have interfered looked on helplessly. The sunny-tempered junior skipper was looking grim and deeply disturbed. He did not like seeing old friends fall out in this manner, though he could not help feeling that Erroll was not losing much by losing Mornington's friendship. He had liked Mornington well enough since his reform—they had been friends enough, but "Uncle Jimmy," good-natured and good-tempered himself, could not understand Mornington allowing his temper to get the better of him.

It was not good enough; Morny's savage temper found no sympathy in Jimmy Silver.

The fight went on with no thoughts of time-keeping or rounds. Morny was cooler now—that crashing fall had brought him to his senses, and he gave no more openings for a knock-down blow. Backwards and forwards, now thudding into a bed, now into a washstand, they lurched and struggled.

But a minute after Morny's fall he was caught napping, and Mornington's right drove into his face, and he crashed down in his turn.

"Good man, Morny!" called Lattrey. "Go it!"

Suddenly the door opened and Bulkeley walked in, a cane in his hand. He looked round, and his face set grimly as he saw what was happening.

There was a sudden silence—caution had been forgotten in the excitement of the last few minutes.

"Well, you—you young sweeps!" said Bulkeley. "So you're not satisfied with having caused enough trouble to-night, Mornington? Are you begging for the sack, you young fool? What's this mean, anyway?"

"It means," said Mornington deliberately, "that I'm givin' a sneakin' cad the hidin' of his life! Erroll was my friend, but he's no friend of mine now."

"It looks like it, I must say!" said Bulkeley dryly. "You young idiots! I won't go into the trouble now, and as you're already booked for trouble enough, Mornington, I won't report this. But if you're not all in bed in one minute I'll start on you with this ashplant. Sharp now!"

Bulkeley swished his cane, and there was a hurried scramble for the beds. Erroll climbed into his, and after hesitating a moment, his face black with fury, Mornington followed his example—even Morny knew better than to defy the Rookwood skipper.

"That's all right!" said Bulkeley pleasantly. "And I might warn you that if I hear another sound from this room to-night I'll give you a licking all round. Mind that!"

And, turning the light out, Bulkeley went out, closing the door behind him.

"Good for you, Bulkeley!" remarked Jimmy Silver. "Even a giddy prefect's useful sometimes! Well, that's that, and if you two idiots will take my tip you'll chuck—Hallo! You getting up again, Morny, you fool?"

"Yes," answered Mornington's voice coolly in the darkness.

There followed the scraping of a match and once again the gas-jet flared feebly. Every fellow sat up in bed and blinked in amazement at the headstrong, self-willed Morny.

"Now, Erroll," said Mornington calmly, "we can carry on again. Out you get! I mean to settle this to-night, and neither Bulkeley nor anyone else will stop me! Out you get or I'll drag you out!"

Erroll did not move or answer. Jimmy Silver slipped from his bed, his face set and grim.

"So you mean to start the trouble again, after Bulkeley's warning?"

"Yes; and you won't stop me, either!" hissed Mornington.

"Right!" said Jimmy Silver quietly, turning and facing the rest of the fellows. "You hear that, you chaps? Mornington's a rotten, unreasonable cad to go on as he is doing! I know the reason as well as Erroll does. That chap Biggs is a decent kid—a poor ragamuffin who did Erroll a service years ago—saved him from starvation, I believe. Erroll naturally is anxious to repay the debt, and he got Dicky Dalton to get the kid a job here, as he was tramping the country looking for work."

"Good for you, Erroll!" said Putty Grace. "Go it, Jimmy!"

"I'm going it!" said Uncle James. "Well, for no reason at all, just out of sheer jealousy and snobbishness, Mornington chooses to get up against the kid—to do his best to get him kicked out. He's even gone to the length of quarrelling with Erroll over it—though we know Erroll isn't the fellow to quarrel for nothing. And now—well, you know what happened to-night. With his new pals, Peele, Gower, and Lattrey, the cad went to rag Biggs in his room."

"Erroll swears he didn't get Biggs and Tupper to rouse the school like they did, and I believe Erroll," said Jimmy bluntly. "It isn't in him to do that! Mornington's a rotter to believe it, knowing him as he must do."

"I didn't do it!" said Erroll quietly. "I found Biggs asleep, and knowing he had been tramping the roads all day I did not wake him, but crept back and got into bed. I'm sorry for what happened afterwards, but it was no doing of mine—I swear that!"

"Liar!" said Mornington doggedly; but there was an uneasy doubt creeping into his mind now.

"That's enough!" said Jimmy Silver. "The fellows know what to think now. You were a howling cad to dream of playing caddish tricks on a servant—a fellow who daren't hit back, Mornington! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, and you've disgraced the Form! Now are you going to let this drop for to-night or not?"

"I'm going to drag that cad from his bed and lick him, and you won't stop me!" hissed Mornington.

"That's good enough, then!" said Jimmy Silver. "Out of bed, you fellows! We'll put him into bed ourselves, and if he refuses to go, he's booked for a Form licking—a licking he jolly well deserves! Come on—collar him!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was a chorus of grim responses; practically every fellow excepting Peele & Co. jumped out of bed, and advanced on Mornington.

Mornington drew a deep breath. But he made no attempt to get into bed. His eyes glittered, and he placed his back to the wall.

Only twenty-four hours before he had been popular—regarded with respect and some admiration by the best fellows in the Form. And now—His glance met the scornful, angry looks of his disgusted Form-fellows, and he went crimson. But it was only a momentary flush of shame, and next moment his voice was heard hoarsely.

"Come on, the dashed lot of you!" he hissed.

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"GRUNDY'S GREAT ADVENTURE!"

(Continued from page 24.)

whom you'll be glad to lay hands on. Oh, crumbs! I can't stand now that you've cut that rope! I've been here for hours—cramp, I suppose."

"Lie down on the floor for a bit," advised the inspector. "Now, what on earth are you talking about, my young friend?"

Grundy sank down to the floor, and, resting his back against the wall, told the whole story from beginning to end. The inspector, needless to add, listened in utter amazement.

"And you mean to tell me that, bound as you were, you bolted the flap down on top of them," he gasped, as Grundy concluded his recital.

Grundy nodded.

"It was a bit of a job, but I did it," he said simply. "I haven't heard a sound since. The fall stunned them, I suppose. Hope they're badly hurt, rotters as they are."

"We'll soon find out," said the inspector.

He quitted the room, leaving Grundy alone again. After an interval of a few minutes he returned, accompanied by the sergeant. Grundy by that time had recovered the use of his limbs a little, and he stood up and watched the proceedings with interest.

The officers approached the task of investigating the cellar with all the caution that the peculiar situation seemed to demand. But as it happened, there was no need for much caution. The diamond thieves were lying on the floor of the cellar, completely incapacitated. Neither of them was more than semi-conscious, and both were bruised and cut about rather badly. The officer hauled them up to the kitchen floor and handcuffed them, then examined their pockets. And great was Grundy's joy to see the precious body-belt, with its valuable contents glittering in the rays of the electric torch, brought to light.

"Good business!" remarked the inspector as they proceeded up the stone steps to the garden, carrying the helpless crooks along with them. "Good business, indeed! You must come back to Wayland with us now, Master Grundy, and we'll ring up Mr. Railton and fetch him over. I fancy he'll be pleased."

"He won't be more pleased than I am!" said Grundy.

Wayland Police Station was very soon reached, and the inspector was quickly in touch with St. Jim's on the telephone. In the interval, while they were waiting for Mr. Stanley Railton to put in an appearance, Grundy had a much-needed wash-and-brush-up, and a very hearty meal—his first meal that day. After that he felt very much refreshed and quite his old self again.

The South African, accompanied by his uncle, did not take long to get to Wayland, for they came over in the Head's car. And a very excited pair they looked as they arrived.

To say that they were surprised and pleased by the turn events had taken would be putting it very mildly. They simply overwhelmed Grundy.

"My dear boy!" murmured the School Housemaster, with

quite a catch in his voice. "You took the gravest risks imaginable, but you have done well—wonderfully well!"

"Grundy, old chap, you're a corker!" was the younger man's comment as he wrung the great man's hand. "I shall never be able to repay you for this day's work!"

"I'm jolly glad I brought it off!" said Grundy happily. "It was all my fault, anyway, that the blessed diamonds were pinched in the first place, and if I hadn't got 'em back for you I'd never have held my head up again."

"Incidentally," said the Housemaster's nephew, with a smile, "I'm sorry I upset you at the station on my arrival. I was only doing what I thought you were doing—leg-pulling, you know."

"Oh, that's all right," replied Grundy cheerfully. "I suppose I was a bit of a silly ass."

Which was a surprising admission to come from the lips of George Alfred Grundy.

When, on the following day, St. Jim's heard the amazing truth about Grundy and the burglars, the dark suspicions which had accumulated round the name of the great man of the Shell disappeared like snow before the summer sun.

Grundy found, not without a glow of pleasure, that he had suddenly become the hero of the school. All sorts of fellows who had not previously spoken to him came up for a chat. Even Fifth and Sixth-Formers condescended to stop and have a word with him. And Grundy felt immensely gratified.

Unfortunately his unusual popularity did not tend to diminish the somewhat exaggerated notions he had of his own importance—quite the reverse, in fact. The result was that Grundy's popularity was not of long duration.

It was not more than a week after the affair of the stolen diamonds, at a meeting of the Junior Football Club, that this melancholy truth was brought home to Grundy.

At the first favourable opportunity in the course of that meeting, Grundy rose and suggested that the time had come when Tom Merry should resign from his position of Junior captain.

"Perhaps," said Grundy, "after recent events, you will recognise that there is one fellow here who has more brains and ability than the rest of you put together. I suggest you kick out Tom Merry and elect me instead!"

And, sad to relate, the fellows responded unanimously with that ancient and classic monosyllable:

"Rats!"

THE END.

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