

The

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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



"GRUNDY GOES TO LAW!"

GRUNDY

Goes to



George Alfred Grundy of the Shell has been responsible for many hare-brained escapades during his career at St. Jim's, each one seeming more hare-brained than the last. But for sheer, unadulterated, breath-taking "nerve" Grundy's latest effort takes the biscuit!

CHAPTER 1. Grundy Objects!

"SOMETHING must be done!" Thus George Alfred Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn made no reply. Properly speaking, of course, Grundy's study-mates having finished their prep, should have been devoting every bit of their attention to Grundy.

But they were not. Instead of waiting quietly for pearls of wisdom to drop from their leader's lips, they were deriving quite a lot of amusement from the current number of the "Wayland Times."

The "Wayland Times" was a somewhat pompous county newspaper, and rarely contained anything calculated to amuse St. Jim's juniors.

On this occasion, however, its pompous columns contained the report of an action for slander and assault brought by the father of a local council schoolboy against a school teacher. Wilkins was reading out that report aloud. Gunn was listening. Both found it highly entertaining—so entertaining, that they quite failed to notice the all-important fact that Grundy was addressing them.

Grundy frowned.

"I say that something must be done!" he repeated with emphasis.

Wilkins and Gunn carried on regardless.

"At this juncture," read out Wilkins, "Mr. Grabbe, the solicitor acting for the plaintiff, suggested that a compromise might be effected!"

"Carry on, old bean!" chuckled Gunn.

"Would you mind listening to a chap for a moment, Wilkins?" asked Grundy, in a dangerously calm voice.

"If defendant would consent to render plaintiff a full apology—"

Whiz!

Grundy's patience had given out. A bulky dictionary flew across the study, crashed through the "Wayland Times," and took Wilkins fairly and squarely on the chest.

"Whoooooop!"

"Now perhaps you'll listen!" growled Grundy.

"You silly ass! What did you do that for?" roared Wilkins excitedly.

"To stop your idiotic gas," replied Grundy calmly. "Blow the 'Wayland Times,' and blow the rotten action! And listen to me!"

"You—you—"

"I was talking about Ratcliff being made Form master of the Shell while Linton's away."

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"Oh!"

Wilkins and Gunn displayed a mild interest. The Head's decision to put the unpopular New House master in charge of the Shell during Mr. Linton's absence through illness was a topic of absorbing concern in the Shell just then.

"Well, what about it?" asked Gunn.

"Something's got to be done about it."

Wilkins and Gunn looked at each other rather dubiously. Certainly they were no more pleased than all the rest of the Shell at the prospect of a week or a fortnight under the sour-tempered, dyspeptic Mr. Ratcliff. But the fiat had gone forth, and what exactly could be done about it except grin and bear it, was a mystery to them.

"What do you mean by 'something's got to be done about it'?" asked Wilkins curiously.

"That's what I'm coming to. If you'll just keep that tongue of yours still for a bit, I shall come to it sooner. You talk too much, Wilkins—far too much," said Grundy, with a disapproving glance at his inquiring follower.

"D-do I?"

"Now, Ratcliff is a rank outsider—"

"Admitted!" grinned Gunn. "But—"

"A miserable, sneaking worm—"

"Quite right, old chap. But—"

"It's wrong—wrong in principle that such a rotter should be placed in charge of a first-class Form like the Shell," said Grundy, warming up to his subject. "And I don't mind telling you men that I'm not going to stand it!"

Wilkins and Gunn gasped.

"You—you're not going to stand it?" muttered Gunn.

"Was that really what you said?" asked Wilkins faintly.

"Of course it was, ass! Not getting deaf in your old age, are you?" asked Grundy sarcastically. "I say I'm not going to stand it, and I jolly well mean it! At any rate, I'm not going to have Ratcliff as my Form master without making a thumping good protest to Railton first. So that's that!"

"Great pip!"

Wilkins and Gunn fairly blinked at their leader. Grundy could always be relied on to meet emergencies in a novel fashion, and they had quite anticipated that he would take an original line over the decidedly unpopular appointment of Mr. Ratcliff as temporary master of the Shell. But that Grundy would decline to have Mr. Ratcliff as his Form master had certainly not occurred to them.

"Railton must be made to understand that Ratcliff can't be tolerated in the Shell," went on Grundy, as his study-mates continued to stare at him almost dazedly. "I shall put it to him plainly—politely, of course, but plainly. Railton's a fairly reasonable kind of chap, for a master, and I think he'll see sense."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Grundy, old chap—"

"You mustn't, you know—"

—OF TOM MERRY & CO., & GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY OF ST. JIM'S!

LAW

by
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD**



Wilkins and Gunn were positively beseeching. The idea of Grundy putting it plainly to Mr. Railton almost froze the blood in their veins.

But Grundy had made up his mind. And though Grundy's mind possibly lacked quite a lot, both in quality and quantity, it certainly did not lack determination. Grundy with his mind made up was beyond argument. A mule was a most tractable animal compared with Grundy in such circumstances.

"Where are you going, old chap?" asked Gunn, as Grundy rose to his feet.

"You're not going to Railton, are you?" added Wilkins, in great alarm.

"Not yet. Railton can wait for a few minutes. I'm going to see Merry first!"

"Tom Merry?"

Grundy nodded.

"He's supposed to be captain of the Form—not much of a captain, in my opinion, but still he's captain—and I'm going to ask his support on behalf of the rest of the Form. Savvy?"

"Oh!"

Wilkins and Gunn grinned. They could hardly imagine Tom Merry lending his support to Grundy's wild proposal, though they did not tell Grundy so. It was just as well to let their leader have his head—the result was the same, anyway!

"Coming along?"

"Not just now, thanks; I want to finish reading that newspaper report," answered Wilkins hastily.

"And I want to hear how the case ended," added Gunn promptly.

Grundy snorted and tramped out of the study, slamming the door with a force that seemed to indicate a very poor opinion of his study-mates—an opinion which was fully reciprocated just then.

"Asking for it again!" sighed Wilkins, as he picked up the "Wayland Times."

"If he goes to Railton and tells him he refuses to have Ratty for a Form master, he'll jolly well get it!" said Gunn.

And with that Wilkins and Gunn dismissed the matter from their minds, and reverted to Mr. Grabbe, the solicitor, and his client.

Grundy strode along to Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, which Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther shared. The Terrible Three were just putting away their books. They greeted Grundy boisterously.

"Why this unexpected honour, O Great One?" inquired Monty Lowther, with a courtly bow.

"Wherefore the worried brow?" asked Manners. "Pour out your troubles into the ears of your uncle, old scout!"

"Don't rot!" said Grundy, with a frown. "It's a pretty serious matter I've called about."

The Terrible Three smiled in anticipation. What Grundy considered a serious matter was pretty sure to prove

amusing to them. By a perverse trick of Fate, which Grundy could never understand, people usually saw something to smile at when he was deadly serious.

"It's about Ratty," went on Grundy.

"Oh!"

"What about Ratty? Going to biff him?" asked Lowther innocently.

"Don't be an ass, Lowther! You men have heard, of course, that that New House rotter is taking over the Shell till Linton comes back?"

"That's so," nodded Tom Merry. "The Head's taking the Fifth and Ratty's coming down to the Shell."

"He starts to-morrow morning, so Trimble says. Well, what are you going to do about it? I'm speaking to you, particularly, Merry, as captain of the Form."

Tom Merry stared.

"What do you expect me to do—go into sackcloth and ashes or something?"

"Don't be funny!" snorted Grundy. "I'm asking you a plain, practical question—what are you going to do? Ratty's been made temporary Form master over us—me and you. I suppose you don't propose to take that lying down, do you?"

"Well, I can't say it struck me that there was any other way of taking it," said Tom Merry, in surprise. "We'd rather have someone else, of course. But the Head and Railton have decided on Ratty, and Ratty it must be, I suppose."

Grundy sniffed.

"Fine, go-ahead sort of captain you are—I don't think! It didn't occur to you, then, that you ought to protest to Railton against having that New House outsider foisted on to us?"

"It certainly didn't," agreed Tom Merry, with a laugh. "If it had, I shouldn't have carried out the idea. I'm not in the habit of asking for trouble from Housemasters."

"Not likely!" chuckled Manners.

"In other words, you're funky, I suppose!" sniffed Grundy. "Well, I'm not, and I'm jolly well going to speak

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plainly to Railton about it—give him a piece of my mind, in fact."

"You're going to what?" yelled Tom Merry.

"He's going to give him a piece of his mind—Railton, you know!" almost wept Lowther.

"Oh, ye gods!"

The Terrible Three roared. The idea of Grundy speaking plainly to Mr. Railton about placing Ratty in charge of the Shell struck them as rich.

Grundy reddened.

"What are you chuckling about, you idiots? Dashed if I can see anything funny."

"Take a look in the mirror, old bean. You might see it, then!" gurgled Lowther.

Grundy clenched his big fists, then unclenched them again. With weighty matters occupying his attention, he could not afford the time just then to mop up the study with the hilarious trio.

"Right-ho, then! I'll leave you to have your joke out, and go and see Railton now!" he growled, and turned on his heel to leave the study.

Tom Merry stopped him at the door.

"Half a mo, old bean. You're not seriously going to see Railton?"

"Your mistake; I am. Better get out of my way unless you want a thick ear, Merry!" said Grundy grimly.

"But—but, my dear chap you can't!" said Tom kindly. "None of us like Ratty, of course. But having no choice in the matter, we've got to put up with him. It's not for us to argue about who's to be our Form master."

"Well, I suppose it isn't, if you put it like that," admitted Grundy, frowning. "But Ratty, as master of the Shell, is out of the question. And my idea is that if it's pointed out to Railton in a tactful way he'll see horse-sense, and get the Head to make other arrangements. See?"

"Oh, my hat! No, I don't see," grinned Tom. "If you go to Railton on this stunt I should imagine he'll take it for a jape and give you a licking."

"Rats! Railton's far too sensible to do anything of the kind. I ask you to stand out of my way, Merry."

"Nothing doing, my pippin! We're going to keep you here until you change your ideas. Can't see a chap rush into trouble without trying to save him—even though he does deserve it," added Tom Merry.

Grundy breathed hard.

"For the last time, will you stand aside?"

"Not just now, old top. Later on, perhaps!"

"Right-ho, then! You've asked for it!" snorted Grundy.

As he spoke he flung his arms around Tom Merry's neck and endeavoured to heave him away from the doorway.

Tom grappled, and managed to prevent Grundy making his exit. Grundy struggled furiously, and the two waltzed round the room in affectionate embrace.

"Lemme gerrouit, or I'll pulverise you!"

"Pulverise away, old bean!"

"I tell you I'm going to see Railton!"

"And I tell you you're not going to see Railton!"

There was a sudden commotion at the door. Manners and Lowther jumped to their feet.

"Cave, you asses!" hissed Manners.

"The beaks!" gasped Lowther.

Tom Merry and Grundy parted as if by magic.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, entered the study. Behind him came Mr. Ratcliff, the new master of the Shell!

CHAPTER 2.

Who'll Rag Ratty?

"MERRY—Grundy! You were fighting!" Mr. Railton's tone was severe. He did not like the Housemaster of the New House to be the witness of unseemly behaviour on the part of School House juniors. Mr. Ratcliff's disapproving sniff already indicated what he thought about it.

Tom Merry flushed.

"Hem! Not exactly, sir. It was a sort of friendly argument!"

Tom felt extremely uncomfortable at the masters' sudden appearance. As the object of his struggle with Grundy had been to prevent Grundy's approaching Mr. Railton, the coming of that gentleman made the situation rather tense.

Mr. Railton's glance fell on Grundy, who was standing near the door with a very determined look on his rugged face.

"You were apparently in this study creating a disturbance, Grundy," he said, frowning. "Why are you not in your own study, or in the Common-room? Have you finished your preparation?"

"Yes, sir. Finished long ago. It doesn't take a chap of my ability so long as the average fellow," explained Grundy.

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"Hem!"

"And I didn't come here to create a disturbance," added Grundy resentfully. "I hope you don't think I'm in the habit of behaving like a fag, sir."

"That was precisely what I did think, Grundy," said Mr. Railton, rather tartly. "How else am I to interpret your behaviour in struggling with Merry in his own study?"

"I was just going out of the study—to see you, as a matter of fact, sir. Merry wanted to keep me here, so I was just pushing him out of the way. That's all!"

Mr. Railton looked at Tom Merry.

"Is this true, Merry?"

Tom Merry gave Grundy an expressive glance as he replied.

"Well, I suppose it is, sir. I—I—"

Tom floundered, at a loss for words.

Grundy kindly stepped into the breach.

"I suppose Merry thought he was acting for the best. He thought you hadn't enough common sense to understand what I wanted to speak to you about."

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, while a sarcastic smile appeared round Mr. Ratcliff's lips. The New House master was rather enjoying his School House colleague's discomfiture.

"If you would like me to retire, while you deal with this stupid boy, Mr. Railton—" he murmured.

Grundy glared, and Mr. Railton frowned.

"Not at all, Mr. Ratcliff. Grundy is not intentionally rude, though his phrasing is a little unfortunate. Grundy!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You wished to speak to me, and Merry endeavoured to prevent you, I understand. What matter was it that you wished to discuss?"

Grundy eyed Mr. Ratcliff a little undecidedly. Tactless as he was, Grundy realised that he could hardly discuss Mr. Ratcliff so freely in his presence as without him.

"If you don't mind, sir, I'd rather tell you some other time," he growled.

"I insist on your telling me now! Merry and his friends apparently know already, and there can surely be no objection to your telling me before Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Well, there is, to tell you the truth, sir," replied Grundy bluntly—an answer that caused Mr. Ratcliff to start, and eye Grundy with a very baleful eye.

Mr. Railton's lips tightened.

"You seem to be talking in a very extraordinary manner, Grundy. I insist on your informing me what was the matter you wished to speak about!"

The Terrible Three surreptitiously made expressive signals to the great man of the Shell to refrain. But Grundy did not feel in a refraining mood. He could hardly say all he had intended to say. But he welcomed the opportunity of saying something, even though Mr. Ratcliff was present. And he loftily ignored Tom Merry & Co.'s frantic supplications.

"It's about Mr. Ratcliff's being made Form master of the Shell during Mr. Linton's absence, sir," he explained.

"Indeed!" remarked Mr. Railton coldly, while Mr. Ratcliff eyed the Shell junior with almost a wolfish look on his thin countenance.

"I don't want you to think I'm prejudiced, sir," said Grundy gravely, "but it's as well you should know that from our standpoint, Ratty—I mean, Mr. Ratcliff—is not exactly the man for the job."

"What!" roared Mr. Railton, while Mr. Ratcliff's mottled face turned almost green.

"I think, perhaps, if you and the Head reason it out, sir, you may decide to make different arrangements. From the point of view of the well-being of the Form, I don't think Mr. Ratcliff will get the same results as another master. I'm not saying he isn't a capable master, and all that sort of thing," said Grundy, realising that Mr. Ratcliff was present.

"Grundy!"

"And probably he does well in his own sphere. But in the Shell, sir, we're accustomed to a particular style of working—"

"Grundy!" almost yelled Mr. Railton.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"How dare you!"

"What have I done, sir?" asked Grundy, greatly surprised to see the School House master looking so wrathful.

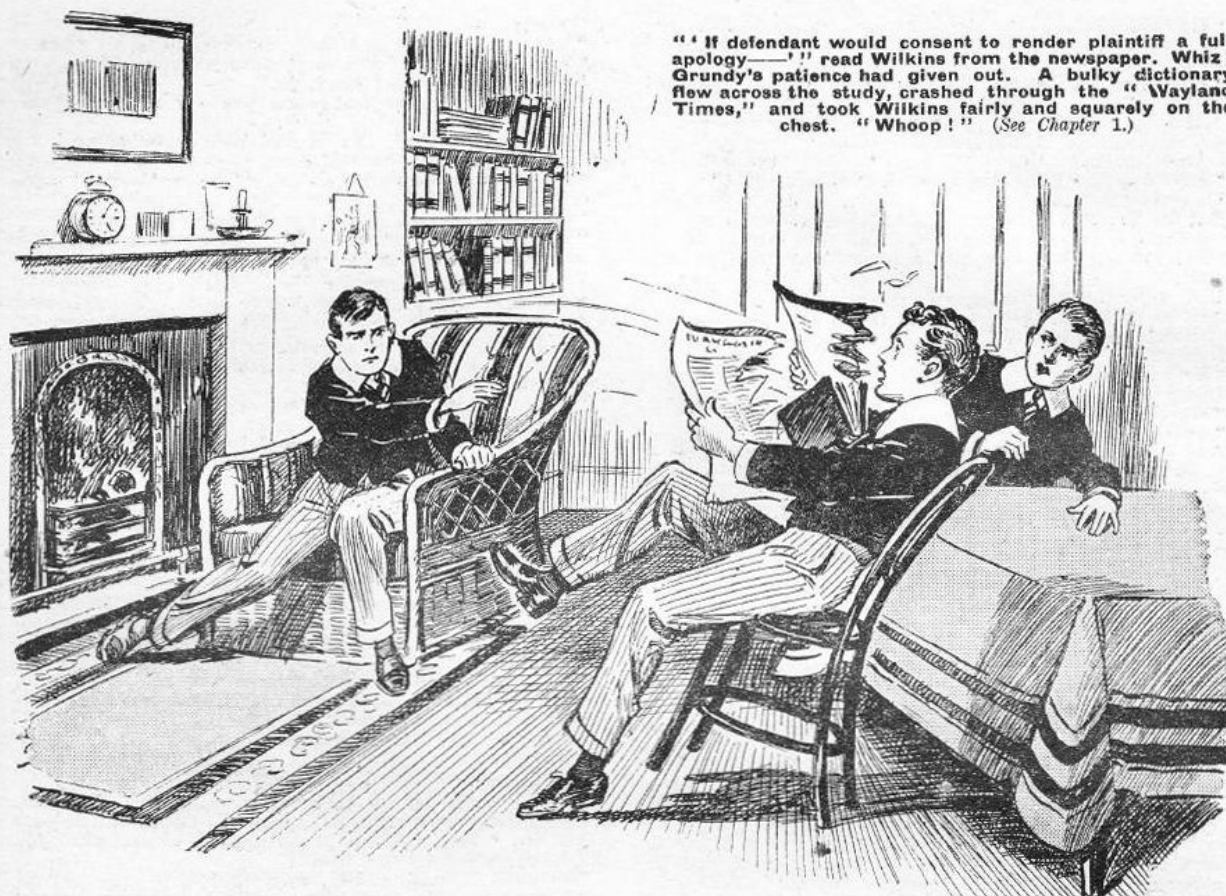
"You utterly stupid boy!" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Oh, sir!"

"Were it not that I realise you are lacking in the mentality usually possessed by a boy of your age, I should report you to the Head for inexcusable insolence!"

"In-inexcusable insolence?" repeated Grundy blankly. "I don't quite catch on, sir. I wasn't being insolent. I was only explaining my ideas, in a respectful way!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" murmured Tom Merry faintly.



"If defendant would consent to render plaintiff a full apology—" read Wilkins from the newspaper. Whiz! Grundy's patience had given out. A bulky dictionary flew across the study, crashed through the "Wayland Times," and took Wilkins fairly and squarely on the chest. "Whoop!" (See Chapter 1.)

"Silence, Merry! I appreciate, however, Grundy, that your singular obtuseness places you in a class apart, and that it would be unfair to treat you in the same way as a boy of normal intelligence would be treated."

"Oh!" gasped Grundy.

"I shall therefore cane you severely, and let the matter rest there."

"Oh crikey!"

"You must learn to bridle your tongue, Grundy, and to use a little common sense occasionally."

"Well, I'm dashed!" exclaimed Grundy, genuinely surprised and indignant.

"Finally, if I find you adopting a rebellious or disrespectful attitude to Mr. Ratcliff while he is your Form master, I shall take the matter up as your Housemaster and deal with you very severely indeed."

"You may leave Grundy to me, in class, Mr. Railton," chimed in Mr. Ratcliff's sour voice. "I have no doubts as to my ability to keep him in check."

Mr. Railton nodded. In point of fact, he had no doubts himself. Mr. Ratcliff had a very effective way of dealing with insubordination—a way which Mr. Railton did not wholly agree with. The Housemaster of the School House could have wished for a better start than this—a start in which there had been no need to mention Mr. Ratcliff's methods of discipline.

Mr. Railton turned to Tom Merry.

"Merry, I came to acquaint you, as Form captain, with the official news of Mr. Ratcliff's taking over the Shell until Mr. Linton's return."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry respectfully.

"I want you to inform the Shell generally that during Mr. Linton's absence, they will be answerable to Mr. Ratcliff for all class work and preparation. Mr. Ratcliff will, of course, continue to reside in the New House, but will also have the use of Mr. Linton's study here."

"I understand, sir."

"Mr. Latham set your preparation for to-morrow, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. You will give Mr. Ratcliff details in class to-morrow. That is all, Merry. You will report to me to-morrow morning after prayers, Grundy!"

And Mr. Railton, with a curt nod, rustled out of the study, obviously the reverse of happy over his visit to No. 10. Mr. Ratcliff paused to bestow a very expressive look on Grundy, then followed.

The door closed behind the "beaks," and the four juniors were left looking at one another. Grundy still seemed a little puzzled, but the determination on his rugged face still survived.

"Blessed if I can understand Railton," he remarked. "He seemed to think I'd been cheeking him."

"Go hon!"

"He didn't seem to cotton on at all. Wouldn't even listen to what I had to say about that rotter Ratty!"

"How extraordinary!"

"Pretty strange behaviour, isn't it?" said Grundy, impervious as ever to sarcasm. "It looks as if Ratty stays, so far as Railton's concerned, anyway. Well, all I can say is, Ratty had better look out—that's all!"

"Don't be too hard on him, Grundy, there's a good chap," begged Monty Lowther. "As you are strong, be merciful!"

"Don't rot, Lowther! I'm not going to hit the rotter, or anything like that!"

"Oh crikey! Aren't you?" gasped Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hitting a Form master isn't done," said Grundy, with a thoughtful frown. "But we're not jolly well going to accept Ratty as our Form master without showing him what we think of him—not while I know it! I suggest we carry out a series of rags, one after the other, until he's only too glad to chuck up the job and buzz off back to the Fifth. What do you think of that?"

"I think you ought to be locked up in a padded cell for your own safety, if you want my frank opinion," answered Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" grinned Manners and Lowther.

Grundy glared.

"Any more cheek from you, Tom Merry, and I'll wallop you! Now, seriously, what about making a start in class to-morrow morning? My idea is to pelt him with bits of chalk, on a given signal? The whole Form—see?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That'll give the rotter a good idea of what we think of him," said Grundy, with relish.

"Great pip! And I rather fancy we'd get a good idea of what Ratty thought of us after that!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Can it, Grundy!"

"Look here, are you fellows backing me up, or not?"

"Not!"

"I'm going all round the Form, you know, and I quite expect that everybody else will follow my lead."

"No harm in expecting!" grinned Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I suppose you don't want to be the only ones left out of the rag, do you?"
 "Don't worry about us. We shan't feel out of it," grinned Tom Merry.

"And don't be disappointed if you find you're the only loony in the Shell," added Lowther gently.

Grundy snorted.

"That's enough from you, Lowther! Put 'em up!"

He rushed into battle.

But the Terrible Three had had enough of Grundy by this time—more than enough, in fact. And they had no intention of turning the study into a boxing-ring for Grundy's benefit.

Before Grundy had time to strew No. 10 with Lowther's bones, so to speak, three pairs of hands had grasped him and whirled him into the air.

Bump!

"Yaroooooh!"

Bump!

"Whoooooop!"

"Another for luck!" panted Tom Merry.

And Grundy collided heavily once more with the floor—just for luck. After which, Grundy was summarily ejected from No. 10, and left to go in search of more willing supporters of his scheme for ragging Mr. Ratcliff.

CHAPTER 3. Grundy Does It!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY was in a sulphurous mood as he made his way to the Form-room on the following morning. His interview with Mr. Railton after prayers had been brief, but decidedly painful, and he was full of resentment towards Mr. Ratcliff, whom he somewhat unreasonably decided was directly responsible for his punishment.

The annoying thing about it was that so far nobody had volunteered to join in his great ragging campaign. His scheme for directing a volley of bits of chalk at Mr. Ratcliff in class—a scheme which Grundy considered really brilliant—had been greeted with derision. Grundy was at a loss to understand why this should be. The only conclusion he could come to was that in some obscure way the juniors were pulling his leg, and that when the time came they would back him up after all. It was with that hope at the back of his mind that Grundy went along to the Shell Form-room early, to make preparations.

The preparations consisted of collecting all the chalk stumps he could find and distributing them evenly round the Form, leaving one or two conveniently placed on each desk, ready for use when the moment for action arrived.

By the time Grundy had finished his self-imposed task, the juniors were streaming in for class.

They stared at the chalk and fairly blinked at Grundy.

"Mean to say you're still carrying on this joke, Grundy?" demanded Kangaroo.

"It's not a joke; it's a rag," corrected Grundy. "I've dished out a supply of chalk, as you see. Now it's up to you men to back me up. When I rap on my desk, I shall expect everybody in the Form to let drive at Ratty. All together, of course. United we stand, divided we fall, and all that kind of thing, you know!"

"Potty!" said Kangaroo, tapping his head significantly.

"Must be!" nodded Clifton Dane.

Grundy frowned.

"No cheek, now! Look here, you men, there must be no mistake about this rag. One good pelting may be enough to make Ratty decide to chuck up the sponge."

"Don't be a hopeless ass, Grundy!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Nobody is likely to do anything so idiotic as to chuck chalk at a Form-master. You've asked for enough trouble as it is; if you take my tip, you'll lie low for a while."

"Rats! If you're funky—"

"It's not a matter of being funky, you chump. It's a matter of refusing to act like a prize idiot."

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Cave!"

There was a general movement to the desks as Mr. Ratcliff entered the Form-room. George Alfred Grundy reluctantly ceased to argue with Tom Merry, and sat down in his place.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced over the Shell with eyes that contained a peculiar glint. The incident in Tom Merry's study overnight had given him an indication of the kind of feeling the Shell entertained for him, and the New House master found considerable satisfaction in the thought that he had this recalcitrant Form in his charge for a week or two. He had arrived with the determination that he would extract the maximum amount of submission from the Shell. Where punishment was necessary, Mr. Ratcliff had quite made up his mind that he would not err on the side of leniency.

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"Merry!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, standing up in his place.

"What subjects had you to prepare last night?"

"Latin and English history, sir."

"Don't shuffle your feet when you are addressing me, boy!"

Tom Merry flushed. As he had been standing perfectly still, that injunction was quite superfluous.

"Is your silence intended for impertinence, Merry?" asked Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

"Certainly not, sir. But I wasn't shuffling my feet—"

"I have no wish to enter into an argument with you. You will take fifty lines for impertinence."

There was a gasp from the Shell. If this was a sample of the treatment they might expect from Mr. Ratcliff, they were in for a hectic time during Mr. Linton's absence.

Mr. Ratcliff turned his attention to Grundy.

"Did you do the history preparation set you for last evening, Grundy?"

"Yes, sir," growled Grundy, eyeing the temporary master of the Shell balefully.

"You are dealing at present, I believe, with the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Give me the date of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Grundy."

"Ten-sixty-six, sir," answered Grundy thoughtlessly.

If he had been thinking more of history and less of his personal dislike of Mr. Ratcliff, even Grundy would have known better than to confuse the date of the Armada with that of the landing of William the Conqueror.

Mr. Ratcliff almost smiled. This was exactly the sort of thing he wanted from Grundy. It gave him an excellent opportunity for exercising his sharp tongue on that refractory junior.

"Indeed, Grundy! The historians who previously gave 1066 as the date of the arrival of William the Conqueror presumably stand corrected, then?"

Grundy's rugged face reddened.

"That was a mistake, sir. I mean fifteen hundred and something—about 1560, I should say."

"Please don't bother to be exact, Grundy!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with heavy sarcasm. "It would not do to tax your brain too severely—I am presuming, of course, that you possess the elements of a brain!"

The Shell grinned, and Grundy snorted.

"I don't see that dates matter a lot, anyway, so long as you've got a general idea," he ventured.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered.

"You are insolent, Grundy—insolent, as well as ignorant."

"I'm not!" retorted Grundy warmly.

"What?"

"I wasn't insolent, and I'm jolly sure I'm not ignorant!" said Grundy firmly.

"Bless my soul! How dare you speak to me in that disrespectful manner! Take a hundred lines, Grundy!"

"But—"

"Another word and I shall cane you!"

Grundy lapsed into silence. But his eyes were gleaming and his lips were set grimly as he sat down again. He felt more determined than ever to let Mr. Ratcliff have that volley of chalk stumps at the first opportunity.

The New House master turned his attention to the rest of the Form, and for the next ten minutes the Shell had a far from enjoyable time. Mr. Ratcliff seemed to take delight in exaggerating trivial mistakes and distorting minor delinquencies. The Shell reacted to this treatment by becoming restive and ill at ease, and the work proceeded in an irregular fashion that made it a strange contrast with the smooth lessons to which the Shell had grown accustomed under Mr. Linton.

Grundy watched for his chance.

Within a quarter of an hour it came. Mr. Ratcliff had turned his back on the class, and was chalking up dates on the blackboard—dates being Mr. Ratcliff's long suit, so to speak, in matters historical.

Grundy looked round eagerly to judge whether the fellows were ready for his signal. Blank faces greeted him everywhere. The Shell found an unprovoked Ratty hard enough to bear; what Ratty provoked by a rain of chalk stumps would be like they hardly dared to think. Nobody felt in the least like following Grundy's rash lead.

Tom Merry shook his head warningly. Grundy merely frowned. Monty Lowther turned down his thumbs in an expressive gesture. Grundy simply shrugged.

Grundy glanced at the blackboard again. Mr. Ratcliff was reaching the end of his writing. Time was short. It was now or never.

George Alfred picked up a piece of chalk in readiness. He paused for an instant to give the others a chance to follow suit. Then he gave a sharp rap on his desk.

Whether Grundy expected the entire Form to rise in its wrath and overwhelm Mr. Ratcliff with a hail of chalk remained afterwards a matter for conjecture. Probably his hopeful nature anticipated a good, if not unanimous,

response. But, whatever hopes he had, Grundy suffered a severe disappointment.

Not a single junior reached out for the chalk stumps which Grundy had so generously provided. Not a single piece was aimed, with the exception of the piece belonging to George Alfred Grundy.

That particular piece, however, undoubtedly was aimed, and aimed accurately. It flew from Grundy's hand like a bullet from a gun, travelling unerringly towards the unsuspecting head of Mr. Ratcliff.

The journey lasted only a fraction of a second, but in that short space of time every eye in the room became glued on Mr. Ratcliff in mesmerised expectancy.

Snick!

With just the slightest sound the chalk stump met Ratty's ear. The horrified Shell saw Mr. Ratcliff jerk forward and smite the blackboard with his somewhat prominent nose. For an instant several constellations of stars seemed to whirl before his eyes; then he sat down violently at the foot of the blackboard.

"Whooooop!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

CHAPTER 4.

Slander and Assault!

MR. RATCLIFF scrambled to his feet rather dizzily. For a moment he hardly seemed to realise what had happened; but that moment passed. Very quickly an extraordinary expression developed on his face, and as he faced the Form he looked, as Lowther afterwards said, like the demon king in a pantomime.

"Silence!" he ground out.

The order was unnecessary. The Shell were silent enough; in fact, from the moment of Grundy's signal a frozen, horrified silence had reigned among them. Grundy was the only exception. He was shifting in his seat rather uneasily now. The demonstration he had hoped for had not materialised; and, though his solo effort had achieved a spectacular success, it wasn't quite what Grundy had intended.

"Some miscreant—some reckless, insubordinate boy, has dared to throw a missile at my head!" said Mr. Ratcliff, in a choking voice.

Silence!

"I demand that the guilty person own up immediately. Any hesitation to do so will result in the severest possible punishment!"

Ratty was simply livid. Most of the juniors had seen the irritable New House master in a "wax" on other occasions. But, compared with this one, most of his previous "waxes" were as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, so to speak.

"I order the culprit to stand up!" rasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Volunteer wanted to face the tiger," said Monty Lowther sotto voce.

There was a chuckle from those who had heard. Mr. Ratcliff silenced it with a fierce gesture.

"How dare you indulge in unseemly mirth at a moment like this! Everybody in this room will take a hundred lines!"

"Whew!"

"Silence!" Mr. Ratcliff glared round like a lion seeking what he might devour. "I am still waiting for a confession from the miscreant who hurled that missile."

George Alfred Grundy stood up.

Mr. Ratcliff started, and his eyes fixed on the duffer of the Shell. For several seconds he just stood and glowered at Grundy. The expression on his face was terrific in its intensity. It might well have petrified Grundy on the spot. Fortunately Grundy was not the kind that petrified easily.

"Grundy!"

"Sir!"

"You have the brazen effrontery to admit that you hurled a missile at my head?"

"I buzzed a bit of chalk at your ear, if that's what you mean," answered Grundy coolly.

The Shell smiled. Grundy's description undoubtedly conveyed a more accurate impression of the facts than Mr. Ratcliff's. As Kangaroo remarked afterwards, one would have judged by Mr. Ratcliff's attitude that he had been struck by a couple of hundredweight of concrete. That, of course, was Mr. Ratcliff's little way.

Mr. Ratcliff was silent for a few seconds, as though he could hardly trust himself to speech. Then he pointed a hand that trembled with rage at the front of the class.

"Stand out before the class!"

Grundy frowned, but ambled out to the front of the class. "I hope you're not thinking of punishing me, sir," he remarked.

"If you are—"

"Silence, Grundy!"

"Yes; but if you are, I must tell you straightaway that I don't recognise you as the proper master of the Shell, and I, therefore, don't admit your right to punish me."

The Shell gasped, while Mr. Ratcliff stared at the junior before him as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

"You—you don't admit my right to punish you? Are you simply out of your senses, or can it be that you are deliberately seeking to be expelled?" he roared.

Grundy's frown deepened. "Look here, sir, I'm not standing that sort of talk from anybody, master or anyone else—"

"N-n-not standing it?" almost shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

"You're not my regular Form master, and you're jolly well not going to slang me!" growled Grundy. "As a matter of fact, sir, you're lucky to have got off as lightly as you did!"

"Lucky?" raved Mr. Ratcliff.

"What I'd planned was a bombardment from the whole Form," explained Grundy, quite calmly. "No disrespect meant, of course, but just as a protest against your being sent to the Shell."

"Stop!"

It was Mr. Ratcliff's voice; and there was something in the tone of it that made even Grundy stop.

Mr. Ratcliff had picked up his cane. He now came up to Grundy and eyed him with a basilisk eye.

"I forbid you to say another word!" he said, in a grinding voice. "It appears, from the remark you have just made, that you endeavoured to get the rest of the Form to emulate your rash example. Fortunately for them, they are not so foolish or perverse as you, Grundy."

"Oh!" gasped Grundy, taken aback.

To be called foolish and perverse by Ratty, for whom he had rather less respect than the common or garden earthworm, was distinctly a comedown.

"From your behaviour last night and this morning, I

Your Editor Says—

In a fortnight's time now, boys, you will have in your hands the first coloured picture card in the novel series of sixteen "Marvels of the Future" about which I have spoken to you during the past few weeks. You have had to wait a little longer than I anticipated, but this is due to the fact that I would not allow the special artists who are painting these wonderful pictures to hurry their job. We want the best for GEM readers; no hurried jobs; no skimmed jobs—the best. And the best you chaps have got. For the benefit of readers who have missed previous announcements, let me hasten to tell them that the sixteen Free Gifts of coloured picture cards will depict the

MARVELS OF THE FUTURE.

which science and invention, working hand in hand, are bound to bring to mankind. Crossing the Atlantic by aeroplane at the moment is a hazardous project. As things stand now such a journey will never appeal to the masses. But in the future we shall see people taking that "flip" to America without the slightest qualm. Risks will be minimised; dotted across the Atlantic will be giant sea-dromes where planes can halt for repairs, if necessary; where passengers can alight for a "stretch"; where fresh fuel will be taken aboard. Can you picture one of these dromes? Well, the first splendidly coloured card, measuring $3\frac{1}{2}$ by $2\frac{1}{4}$ ins., will show one of these floating sea-dromes to such good effect that one dream of the future will have come true. That's only the first of the sixteen subjects dealt with in this unique series. Others deal with the Helicopter, the Desert Liner (a palace on wheels), Television, the aeroplane-car, the rocket that will reach the Moon, the Channel Tunnel through which high-speed trains and 200 miles an hour touring cars will rush their passengers to the Continent. The foregoing does not complete the list, but it does give you an idea of what lies in store. This is the first time such a series of cards has been given away with any paper. You will admit, I feel sure, that the general idea is novel, prophetic. One might almost call it a "Picture Gallery of the Future." Skilled artists and inventors have earnestly collaborated to give "Gemites" a faithful representation of what mechanical science will bring us in the years to come. The result is all that could be wished for. In two weeks' time, then, you chaps will have started to collect a series of coloured picture cards which will be the envy of all your pals. Don't forget—"Marvels of the Future" in the GEM, in a fortnight's time.

YOUR EDITOR.

judge you to be a reckless and irresponsible young hooligan," went on Mr. Ratcliff harshly, fairly rolling the words on his vinegary tongue.

"Eh?" gasped Grundy incredulously.

"Excessive leniency on the part of your Form master—possibly your Housemaster"—Mr. Ratcliff's lip curled—"has resulted in your losing all sense of discipline and respect for your superiors. I shall correct this, Grundy."

Grundy fairly blinked. To do him justice, he really did not realise that his behaviour indicated lack of discipline and respect. How it was possible to fling chalk at a master and still remain disciplined and respectful was a deep mystery. But Grundy's mighty intellect had found a solution somehow; he really believed that his campaign against Mr. Ratcliff was simply a campaign of patriotism to the Shell, and that it only had to be explained in the right way for the Head and Mr. Railton to see it in the same light.

"Look here, sir—" he began.

"Silence, boy!" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff. "As I say, Grundy, I shall punish you; in fact, I intend to punish you severely! It is very evident that you are sadly in need of castigation. You are an overbearing, bullying type of boy—"

"What?" roared Grundy.

"Conceited and intolerably smug—"

"C-c-conceited?" stuttered Grundy, in absolute amazement. "S-smug?"

"Insolent and ruffianly to a degree," continued Mr. Ratcliff, beginning to derive a little consolation from his flow of invective.

"Ruffianly?" almost hooted Grundy.

"And these inherent vices of character, to make matters worse, are combined with a stupidity and ignorance such as I have never before encountered."

It was Grundy's turn to choke now. Words failed him. His ruddy face had turned several shades ruddier during Mr. Ratcliff's dressing-down. His tousled hair was almost standing on end at the finish.

"Why, you—you—" he gasped.

"And now I will cane you," said Mr. Ratcliff, grimly.

"You won't!" said Grundy.

"What?"

"Think I'm going to be caned, on top of hearing you slang me right and left like this?" roared Grundy, in a state of great wrath and excitement.

"Grundy!"

"After you've told me I'm conceited and ruffianly and ignorant? Not likely! I wouldn't let the Head himself cane me after I'd been insulted like that!" said Grundy, genuinely hurt and indignant. "Why, it's criminal; that's what I call it—criminal!"

"Boy!"

"You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, taking away a chap's character! It would teach you a lesson, Mr. Ratcliff, if I took it to law!" Grundy had a vague recollection of the action Wilkins had read about in the "Wayland Times." "In fact, I've a jolly good mind to do so!"

"Grundy!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"You'd look all right if I was awarded heavy damages—"

"Silence, you utterly stupid boy! And hold out your hand at once!"

"Likely, isn't it?" said Grundy scornfully.

"What—what! I order you, Grundy! You hear me? Hold out your hand!"

Mr. Ratcliff was rapidly losing his temper altogether. And as Grundy had already lost his, the situation threatened to become rather alarming. The Shell watched breathlessly. They began to wonder how far the extraordinary scene would go. If Mr. Ratcliff attempted force, it seemed quite on the cards that Grundy would meet force with force.

Perhaps Mr. Ratcliff foresaw that, too, for he suddenly faced the class again.

"Merry—Talbot—Noble! Seize this insolent boy at once! I shall require you to hold him while I punish him! You hear me?"

The three juniors rose very reluctantly.

"If you order us to, sir!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Of course I order you! Come out at once!"

They came out to the front of the class. Grundy squared up in a very determined fashion, as if prepared to mop up the floor with them. But it was not a very easy matter to mop up the floor with the three best fighting-men in the Shell; instead of doing that, Grundy had the mortification of being swept off his feet in the twinkling of an eye. He gave a roar.

"Leggo, you rotters! I'll smash you!"

"Over this desk!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

The struggling Grundy was placed in position.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes were glinting as he raised his cane. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,103.

The Shell could see that he did not intend to deal lightly with Grundy. And certainly they had to admit that Grundy had asked for it—begged and prayed for it, in fact!

The next two minutes proved indeed a painful period in Grundy's career. All his struggles were in vain. The cane rose and fell with deadly precision, and very soon Grundy's yells of rage had changed to yells of pain.

Mr. Ratcliff desisted at last, and a dishevelled and wild-eyed, but distinctly subdued Grundy was yanked back on his feet again, feeling very much the worse for wear.

"There!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "You may return to your desk now, Grundy!"

Grundy paused, and for an instant there seemed to be a possibility that even yet the pugnacious George Alfred had not had enough punishment to satisfy him. But Grundy now was not the Grundy of five minutes before, and after two uncertain seconds, he turned on his heel and limped back to his desk.

For the rest of that morning lessons in the Shell were conducted in an atmosphere of almost painful tranquillity. Mr. Ratcliff had the suspicion of a smirk on his face. He felt that he had faced a crisis and had come through with flying colours. Had he known the thoughts that were going through the mighty brain of George Alfred Grundy, he might have felt a little misgiving. But he didn't. That revelation was to dawn on the astonished consciousness of Mr. Horace Ratcliff at a later date.

CHAPTER 5

Grundy's Amazing Decision!

"FEELING better now, old chap?"

Wilkins asked that question as he and Gunn walked into Study No. 3 after dinner.

Grundy did not reply at once. He was standing near the window immersed in the "Wayland Times"—the same copy which had entertained Wilkins and Gunn the previous night.

"Pain worn off, old man?" ventured Gunn, as Grundy still went on reading.

The leader of No. 3 condescended to notice the existence of his followers.

"I'm all right, of course! Don't ask silly questions!"

"Hem!"

"Nothing very silly in that," remarked Wilkins. "Old Ratty laid it on thick and heavy, from what I saw of it."

"In fact, he went a bit too far, for a Form master," said Gunn, with a nod. "Not that there wasn't some excuse for him. You really did ask for it, Grundy."

"Oh, rather!" grinned Wilkins.

Grundy put down the "Wayland Times," and bestowed a glare on his sympathetic followers.

"Got it the wrong way round, haven't you?" he asked. "What you really mean is that Ratty asked for it, not me."

"Eh?"

"If that's what you meant to say, then I quite agree with you," said Grundy. "Ratty did ask for it. What's more, he's jolly well going to get it!"

And Grundy folded his arms and glared at Wilkins and Gunn as though warning them that any criticism would be made at their peril. Grundy's two study-mates looked rather surprised and uneasy.

"Look here, old chap! Better not carry this ragging bizney too far," advised Wilkins.

"We don't want you to get the sack, Grundy, old man," said Gunn, with genuine feeling. Certainly, Grundy's departure from St. Jim's would have been a calamity to Wilkins and Gunn. Study No. 3 under Grundy's kindly despotism was a land flowing with milk and honey, whereas without him it would have borne a striking resemblance to Mother Hubbard's celebrated cupboard. Wilkins and Gunn were, consequently, most anxious to retain Grundy at St. Jim's.

"Dash it all, old chap, there's a limit!" said Wilkins. "You've ragged Ratty, and Ratty's ragged you, so, in a way, honours are even. My tip is, let well alone. Any more rags like this morning's will land you well on the carpet before the Head, you know."

Grundy smiled patiently.

"Who said anything about more ragging?"

"You did. Didn't you say that Ratty had asked for it, and was going to get it?"

"That's so. I mean it, too," nodded Grundy. "I'm going to see that Ratty gets it in the neck. But not by ragging."

"Oh!"

"I've been thinking this out," explained Grundy. "Ratty called me a number of names in the Form-room this morning."

Wilkins and Gunn suppressed their smiles, and nodded gravely.

"He did pile it on, old chap," agreed Wilkins.

"Thick and heavy!" remarked Gunn, frowning.
"Exactly. He told me I was conceited and smug, to begin with," said Grundy, his rugged face reddening again at the recollection. "Me, you know—conceited and smug!"

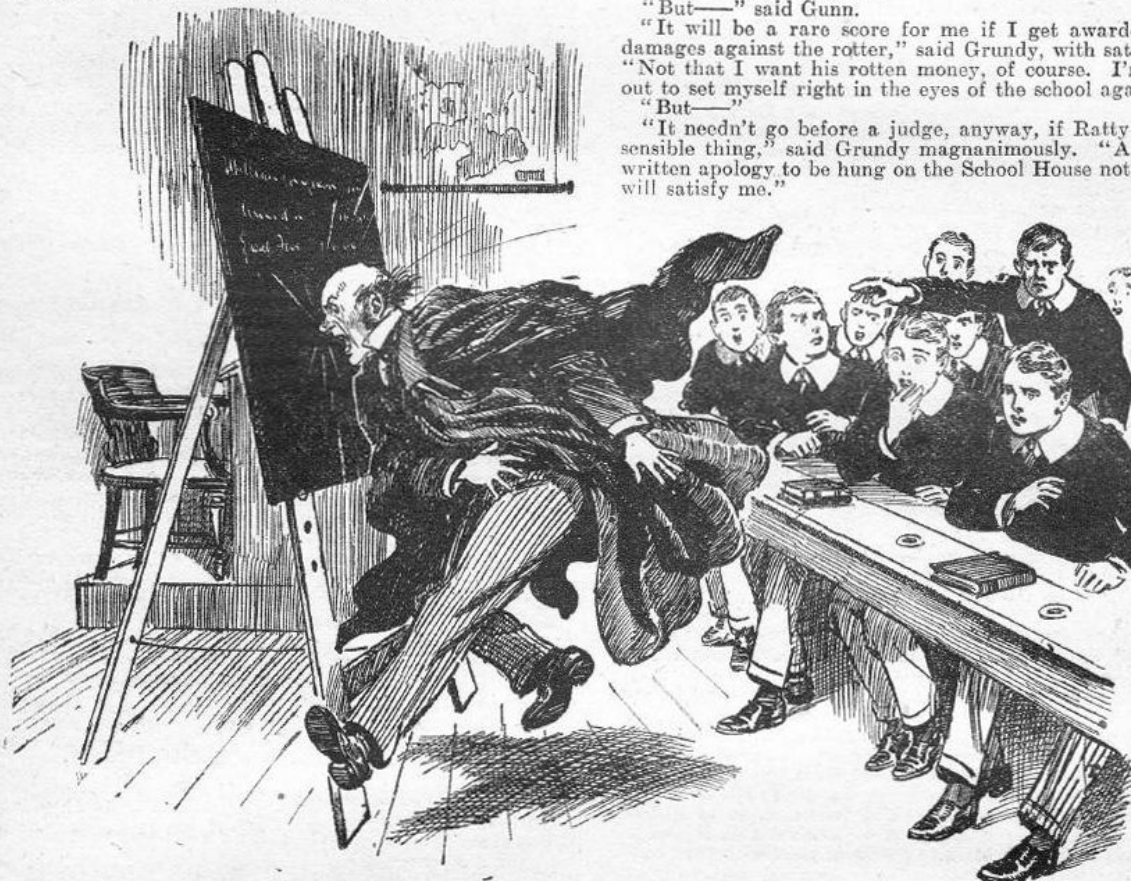
"Rotten!" murmured Gunn sympathetically.

"Quite an exaggeration," said Wilkins, shaking his head. "No one could say you were really smug, of course. A bit self-satisfied, perhaps—"

"What?" roared Grundy.

"I—I mean—"

"Any more funny remarks like that from you, and I'll knock your head against the wall, George Wilkins!" growled Grundy. "Anyway, without repeating all the rotter said, he made me a laughing-stock in front of the whole class. What are you grinning at, Gunn?"



Snick! With just the slightest sound the chalk stump that flew unerringly from George Alfred Grundy's hand met Mr. Ratcliff's ear. The horrified Shell saw their Form master jerk forward and smite the blackboard with his somewhat prominent nose. "Whooop!" (See Chapter 3.)

"W-was I?" said Gunn, becoming very serious again. Gunn, as a matter of fact, had been thinking that Grundy was already a laughing-stock in the Shell without any help from Mr. Ratcliff. But he did not explain that to Grundy.

"Now, when I come to think it over afterwards," continued Grundy, with a suspicious glare at Gunn, "I could see that no amount of ragging would make up for the slanging Ratty gave me. He has held me up to ridicule and contempt in public. That stands, and ragging won't alter it. See?"

Wilkins and Gunn nodded, though they couldn't quite see what Grundy was driving at.

"It was while I was thinking on those lines," went on Grundy, "that I suddenly recollected that case in the 'Wayland Times,' when a kid at a Council school sued a teacher, through his father, for slander and assault. Remember it?"

Wilkins and Gunn nodded, wide-eyed. They were beginning to get an inkling of what was in Grundy's mind now.

"That case gave me an inspiration," said Grundy. "Ratty has slandered me—slandered me up to the hilt, by George! Further than that, he has assaulted me, and done his level best to make me look an idiot in front of the Shell. All the ragging in the world won't alter that. But I've got one remedy, anyway. I can go to law about it!"

"Oh!"

"Great pip!"

It was out now! Grundy was actually contemplating bringing an action against Mr. Ratcliff for slander and assault! Wilkins and Gunn simply gaped.

"From what I can see of it, this Council school kid won his case all along the line, though it kind of fizzled out in the end," said Grundy. "He made the blessed teacher look jolly small, anyway. The chap fairly eats his own words, if you read between the lines."

"Hem!"

Wilkins and Gunn were rather surprised. Their understanding of the case had been that the school teacher was an easy winner. But then, they hadn't read between the lines as Grundy had done.

"Of course, the kid had a good man to represent him," said Grundy. "Grabbe, the chap's name is. Mr. Grabbe, solicitor, of Wayland. I think I shall go and see him myself before I commence proceedings."

"But—" said Wilkins.

"But—" said Gunn.

"It will be a rare score for me if I get awarded heavy damages against the rotter," said Grundy, with satisfaction. "Not that I want his rotten money, of course. I'm simply out to set myself right in the eyes of the school again."

"But—"

"It needn't go before a judge, anyway, if Ratty does the sensible thing," said Grundy magnanimously. "A full and written apology to be hung on the School House notice-board will satisfy me."

"But—"

Grundy suddenly became aware that his faithful retainers were not following his plans with the same enthusiasm as he felt himself.

"Well, what's all the butting about?" he demanded. "Got some fatheaded objections to make?"

"But you're a minor, old chap," said Wilkins, completing his sentence at last. "And consequently you'd have to bring any action through your parent or guardian; in the same way as the Council school kid."

"And if you think your Uncle Grundy will be willing to back you up in it, you'd better have another think, old man," added Gunn.

"Oh, rats! Difficulties like that can soon be overcome," said Grundy confidently. "Of course, my uncle would hardly like to do it, I suppose, being pally with the Head. Anyway, I don't want to drag him into it. But you can bet your life this lawyer johnny will find a way out."

"I'm not so sure."

"Pooh! That's their job! What's the good of having lawyers if they can't get over a simple difficulty like that?" asked Grundy, as if that question admitted of no argument whatever.

"But—"

"But it can't be done, old bean," said Wilkins. "Even if the lawyer could wangle it, you couldn't possibly drag the school into a Court case!"

"Couldn't I? I'd jolly well do it every time, if it was a question of defending my name," said Grundy warmly.

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"But—"

"I've been slandered—"

"Grundy, old chap—"

"I've been assaulted—"

"Yes, but—"

"I've been insulted and ridiculed in front of the Form. Think I'm going to stand that?" demanded Grundy belligerently.

"Hem!"

"If you do, you're jolly well mistaken. I'm not going to, anyway. My plans are made, and there's no turning back. I'm going to bring an action against Ratcliff for slander and assault."

"Oh dear!"

"Fine lot of pals you are to pour water over my ideas at a crisis like this!" said Grundy scornfully. "But I'm accustomed to that. It makes no difference to me. Now to get down to brass tacks—"

"Don't do it, old man!" urged Gunn.

"I shall want witnesses. That's the first step," said Grundy unheeding. "I must get together all the fellows who are willing to support me, and chew it over with them. In fact, I'll get them to come here at tea-time to-day. Nothing like striking while the iron's hot."

"Old man—"

"Tell all the fellows you meet that I want them to come to tea in this study. That'll do it!"

"Won't you listen to reason?" asked Wilkins dismally.

"Not your kind of reason, thanks!" snorted the leader of Study No. 3. "Now just get busy, you chaps, and see if you can collect some good, reliable witnesses for me. I'll buzz off in the meantime, and scout round for myself."

"Grundy, old man—"

But Grundy had already departed. The fiat had gone forth, and the initial steps were already being taken in Grundy's action against the temporary master of the Shell!

CHAPTER 6.

A Rowdy Meeting!

"ROLL up! Roll up!"

"Plenty of room on the window-ledge, you chaps!"

"And in the coal-scuttle!"

"And on the mantelpiece!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Study No. 3 was crowded. Nearly everybody in the Shell had turned up in response to George Alfred Grundy's call for witnesses.

Possibly the prospect of seeing Grundy in another humorous role had had something to do with it. Certainly, the news of Grundy's impending action against Mr. Ratcliff had already caused the wildest hilarity in the Shell. More probably, however, it was the added inducement of a free tea that brought the crowd to Study No. 3. Funds were low in the Shell. There was famine in the land, so to speak. And tea with Grundy was not to be sneezed at. It was a case of corn in Egypt, so far as most of the Shell were concerned.

The Terrible Three were among the surging throng that rolled in, finances being at a low ebb in Study No. 10 as well as in the rest of the Shell passage. They squeezed in behind the door with considerable difficulty. Study No. 3 was a solid wedge of humanity by the time they had taken their places.

There was a cheer as Grundy appeared at the door.

"Here he comes!"

"Good old Grundy!"

"Make way for the host, you men!"

"The plaintiff, you mean, don't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy somehow edged his way to the middle of the room and surveyed his array of witnesses with a good deal of satisfaction.

"Glad you've all turned up," he remarked. "Close the door, somebody. Won't do to be overheard, you know."

"No fear!"

The door was closed after a struggle, and Grundy mounted a chair.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Grundy!"

"On the bawl!"

"As most of you know by this time, I've decided to take the only dignified course open to me in regard to Ratcliff. I've decided to bring an action against him for slander and assault—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy frowned. That roar of laughter seemed quite out of place to George Alfred Grundy. For a moment, it put him off his stroke.

"Look here—" he began warmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Grundy!"

"Carry on, old sport!"

Grundy resumed. He couldn't quite understand the general hilarity. But there were a good many things about the behaviour of other fellows that Grundy couldn't quite understand, so one more added to the list didn't make a lot of difference.

"Well, the first point about bringing an action is that a chap has to get some reliable witnesses," said Grundy, raising his voice above the din. "Of course, it's a lot of rot. My word ought to be good enough."

"It ought to be!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But the law requires them, so I've got to round them up," explained Grundy. "Now to get to business. I've got a note here of all the things Ratty said to me this morning."

"Good egg!"

"Read it out, old bean!"

"I've only written it up from memory, so there may be some alterations and additions to make. That's where you fellows can help me, to begin with," said Grundy, gravely unfolding a sheet of paper. "Listen carefully, you men!"

"We will!"

"Rather!"

"The pleasure is ours!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"First of all, he said I was foolish and perverse; that right?"

"Yes, rather!"

"After that, he called me conceited and smug; and then, insolent and ruffianly; all correct so far?"

"What-ho!"

"Then I believe in the finish he said something about my being 'stupid and ignorant. Can you chaps support that?"

"All serene, old scout!"

"Good!" Grundy folded up the piece of paper again, and replaced it in his pocket. "Now I want you to realise what you've got to be prepared to do. If the case goes before the Court, you'll have to come along and swear—"

"Oh, Grundy!" butted in Monty Lowther, in shocked tones. "How can you ask us to do such a thing?"

"Can't be did, old sport!" said Kangaroo, shaking his head. "Don't mind using a bit of slang, but I object to bad language!"

"Same here!" grinned half a dozen others.

Grundy snorted.

"You silly asses, I'm not asking you to use bad language! I tell you I shall want you to come along and swear—"

"Impossible!"

"Nothing doing!"

"Surprised at you, Grundy!"

"I simply want you to swear—" howled Grundy.

"Shame!"

"No wonder you're blushing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You thick-headed idiots! I don't want you to swear. I want you to swear—"

"Not 'swear'; but 'swear'! Bit too subtle for me!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"When is a swear not a swear?" asked Clive humorously.

"Not swear in the sense of bad language, but swear in the legal sense, you grinning asses!" hooted Grundy.

"Oh!"

"You mean make statements on oath?" asked Manners gravely.

"Of course!"

"That's better! Now we understand!" said Lowther.

"Why didn't you say what you meant at first, Grundy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy gulped. He felt almost like wading in and making mince-meat of his humorous witnesses for a moment. But he manfully resisted the temptation and went on:

"Well, you understand what's expected of you now. On the assumption that everyone in this room is willing to be a witness, then I'll tell you just what I'm thinking of doing. In the first place—"

"Just a tick, Grundy," interrupted Monty Lowther in great excitement, as if a brilliant brain-wave had just dawned upon him. "Do you want a ripping idea for putting Ratty in the cart—a real top-notch?"

"If this is some more of your rot—" began Grundy wrathfully.

Monty Lowther looked pained.

"I thought you knew me better than that, old chap," he said. "My idea is this: To-morrow morning, bright and early, you go out and get hold of the first bobby you can find."

"Eh?"

"You bring him into the Form-room—"

"What?"

"And then, when Ratty comes in, you say: 'I charge

that man with slander and assault! Arrest him, officer! See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared at the thought of that interesting tableau taking place in the Shell Form-room.

Needless to say, George Alfred Grundy did not join in the general merriment. His action at law was a matter of great seriousness to him, if to nobody else. For the second time the temptation to commit assault and battery was strong upon him, but again he overcame it.

"If Lowther's finished being funny," he snorted, with a glare at the humorist of the Shell, "I'll get on. As I was saying, what I intend doing is—"

But before Grundy could proceed to explain what his intentions were there was another interruption.

"Hold on, Grundy!" put in Crooke. "What about tea?"

"Hear, hear!"

There was a decidedly cordial chorus of support from Grundy's witnesses.

Grundy started, and for a moment even he seemed to forget the all-important matter of the action against Ratty.

"Great pip!" he exclaimed.

"What's up, Grundy?"

"That reminds me," said Grundy.

"Reminds you of what?"

"I've forgotten to get in the grub!"

"Wha-a-a?"

Quite a yell went up in Study No. 3. The juniors' grins faded away suddenly. Rather grim looks were turned on Grundy.

"Look here—"

"If you think we're going to stay here without tea—"

"You're jolly well mistaken!"

"Play the game, Grundy!"

"You asked us to tea, you know—all prospective witnesses, so Wilkins and Gunn said."

"Quite right, I did," acknowledged Grundy. "Sorry I forgot, you chaps! If some of you will run down to the tuckshop—"

"Good egg!"

"Got the wherewithal?"

There were plenty of volunteers for an expedition to the tuckshop. Grundy plunged his hand into his pocket. Then for the second time he started.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Anything wrong?" asked Kangaroo.

"Well, yes! I'd completely forgotten! I've run out of money!" said Grundy.

"What?"

"I've been settling some tradesmen's bills, you see, and I've run myself right out. Haven't a bean, in fact!" confessed Grundy.

"Eh?"

"I'm afraid the tea's off. Never mind. Can't be helped. Tea doesn't matter much."

"D-doesn't matter?"

Judging by the expressions on the faces of Grundy's guests, tea mattered quite a lot. They were regarding Grundy with frozen faces.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Clive. "If you don't take the giddy biscuit, Grundy! You invite us all to tea—"

"And then calmly tell us there's nothing doing!" said Gore disgustedly.

"I've said I'm sorry, and that's an end of it," said Grundy firmly. "The chief reason I invited you here, anyway, was not to see you gorge yourselves, but to discuss my action against Ratty. Blow tea! We'll get on with the discussion!"

"Will we?" growled Gore. "I don't know what the rest think, but for my part you've made a mistake. We jolly well won't get on with the discussion!"

"No fear!"

"Not likely!"

"Fetching us here and keeping us from the tea in Hall—"

"On blessed false pretences!"

"Rag him!"

"Scrag the bilker!"

There was a roar of excited voices in Study No. 3. The juniors had come in the expectation of partaking of a first-class tea. Now that that tea had vanished like a beautiful dream they were, not unnaturally, feeling rather wroth.

To Grundy the tea was but a minor and very unimportant detail of the meeting. To Grundy's guests the tea was the one important thing about it. Having made the discovery that he was unable to "stand" tea, Grundy was quite unperturbed, and ready to carry on with the meeting all the same. Grundy's guests, however, were very much perturbed indeed, and had no intention whatever of going any further with the meeting.

There was a surging movement round the chair on which Grundy was perched. The chair began to rock perilously, and the great man of the Shell gave a yell of alarm.

"Mind where you're going, you idiots! Don't barge so much!"

"Scrag him!" was the unsatisfactory reply from a dozen excited juniors.

"If you lay hands on me—"

What was going to happen if they laid hands on Grundy was never related. At that moment Grundy's chair was kicked from under him, and his remark ended in a wild roar.

"Yarooogh! Whooop!"

An instant later Grundy was seized at all points of the compass and whirled aloft.

"Clear a ring!" yelled Gore. "No space to bump him here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The study door was opened, and some of the juniors had to crowd out into the passage before there was sufficient space for the performance of bumping Grundy.

Grundy, from a dizzy angle, fairly bellowed with rage.

"Lemme get down! I'll smash you! I'll pulverise you!"

"Now for it!" said Gore, unheeding. "Give him six of the best, you men! That'll teach him to invite us to imaginary teas!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"Lemme alone, I tell you!" roared Grundy. "If you bump me—whooop!"

The bumping had already begun. And, despite Grundy's loud protests and lamentations, he received, in Gore's words, "six of the best." After which Grundy's extremely disloyal army of witnesses tramped out of Study No. 3, leaving him to reflect bitterly on the mercenary character of man.

Grundy picked himself up and glared round the suddenly silent study, almost as though hoping to find a stray enemy left there whom he could kick. But not one had stayed; even Wilkins and Gunn had departed in quest of tea. Grundy's fascinating company being, from their point of view, no substitute for a meal.

Then the study door slowly opened, and a fat face peeped round. It was Baggy Trimble, the fattest member of the Fourth. The news that Grundy was providing tea to prospective witnesses had just reached his podgy ears, and he had hastened to Study No. 3, with the intention of making hay while the sun shone.

Trimble insinuated himself into the study and bestowed a podgy and ingratiating smile on the raging Grundy.

"Hallo, Grundy, old chap! Is it right that you're standing tea to chaps who'll stand by you as witnesses?"

Grundy took a deep breath and got ready to raise his foot. "Because if so, you can rely on me, old pal!" said Trimble fatuously. "I'll stand by you through thick and thin, you know. I'll swear anything. I'll— Whooop! Wharrer you doing, you silly ass!"

"Kicking you out of the study!" replied Grundy grimly, though by that time the explanation was unnecessary. Even Baggy's limited intellect had found out what Grundy was doing!

With a bump and a loud yell, Baggy Trimble landed on the unsympathetic linoleum in the Shell passage.

And Grundy, feeling just a little relieved, returned to his study to devote his attention once again to his great legal action—this time without the assistance of witnesses!

CHAPTER 7.

Lowther Helps!

"ABOUT Grundy—"

"Blow Grundy!" said Tom Merry.

"And all his works!" grinned Manners.

Monty Lowther smiled, unperturbed.

"You're not doing him justice. Grundy is a very great man."

"In his own estimation, perhaps," remarked Manners.

"And in mine," said Lowther. "I repeat—Grundy is a very great man."

Tom Merry and Manners looked at their chum with inquiring smiles. When Lowther started speaking in riddles it was time to ask the humorist of the Shell what kind of a joke he was planning.

"Let's hear it, Monty," said Tom Merry.

"Cut the cackle and get to the 'osses!" grinned Manners.

"What's the wheeze this time, old bean?"

Lowther assumed quite a pained look.

"Wheeze? There's no wheeze. I was simply thinking of helping old Grundy go to law with Ratty. That's all."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Take my tip and forget it, Monty. Grundy's playing the giddy ox quite enough without any help from you."

"Playing the giddy ox? Why, I consider Grundy a public benefactor," said Lowther warmly. "His action against Ratty comes along just at the dullest part of the term, when we're all hard up and fed up. My idea is that we ought to be grateful to the chap."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Something in that, I suppose," acknowledged Tom Merry. "Still, Grundy is treading on dangerous ground at present. If he's not careful he'll get the Ancient Order of the Boot; and the best help you can give him, as far as I can see, is to knock his wooden head against the wall until he chucks up all idea of going to law."

"Can't do that, Tommy. It would be a crying shame to ruin the best joke of the term before it has a chance to blossom out a bit more," said Lowther, with a shake of his head. "My idea is, we ought to help Grundy. I'll tell you how I thought of doing it."

"Go ahead, then!" said Tom Merry resignedly.

"As things stand, dear old Grundy will bring disaster on the whole thing from the beginning," explained Lowther. "To-morrow afternoon, you see, he intends to go to Wayland to see a solicitor—Grubbe, or Grabbe—or some such name, I believe."

"Grabbe!" nodded Tom Merry. "I've heard of the chap before. Gets mixed up in some shady cases, from what I've read about him in the local paper."

"Bound to be a quack, if Grundy chooses him," said Lowther sagely. "Anyway, quack or not, my point is this—if Grundy goes to him just as he is, the chap will simply turn him down and tell him he must bring the action through his parent or guardian."

"That's a cert!" agreed Manners. "Grundy can't do it on his own, of course, being a minor."

"Exactly! Consequently, unless he starts off in a different way, the whole thing will come to an end there and then."

"Which will be a jolly good thing for Grundy!" said Tom Merry.

"Possibly. But I can't help thinking it will be an awful pity if the joke fizzles out so tamely as that," said Lowther. "Hence my concentration on the problem. I think I've now discovered a way by which the thing can be carried a bit further."

"See if you can't forget it again, then!"

"Rats! It's a jolly good wheeze, and if I have my way Grundy's going to carry it out. The stunt will be for Grundy to pretend he's a grown-up, and conceal the fact that he's only a schoolboy and Ratty a master. Savvy?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But in that case he won't be able to tell the solicitor what happened," remarked Manners in surprise.

"Why not? He can tell old Grabbe just what Ratty said about him, and he can also say he was assaulted. No need to disclose the fact that Ratty's his Form master. Twig?"

"Great pip!"

"If he starts off like that Grabbe will take up the case like a shot," explained Lowther. "Probably he'll begin the battle by sending Ratty a threatening letter. We can nab that before Ratty gets it. After that we can think out more stunts. See?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"But—but how the dickens can Grundy pretend to be a grown-up when the solicitor can see for himself that he's only a schoolboy?" demanded Tom Merry.

Lowther chuckled.

"That's easy. Grundy's big and tall for his age, and his voice is deep enough. And we've plenty of props belonging to the Dramatic Society that will come in useful. In a word, Grundy will have to be disguised."

"Oh!"

"Don't you think it's a stunning idea?" asked Lowther enthusiastically. "Don't you think we can get the laugh of a lifetime out of it?"

"H'm! It's brainy enough, certainly," admitted Tom Merry dubiously. "But you'll have to be jolly careful, Monty. If anything comes unstuck—"

"If Ratty gets hold of the solicitor's letter, for instance—"

grinned Manners.

"We can fix that all right," said Lowther confidently. "I'm as keen as mustard on it, anyway. In fact, I thought of going along to see Grundy now."

"Go ahead, then!" said Tom, with a grimace. "I suppose it's no good trying to talk sense to you when there's a jape in the offing?"

"Not a bit," answered Monty Lowther cheerily. "Stay here, then, for a few minutes, you men. I'll buzz along and talk like a Dutch uncle to the great George Alfred."

And Lowther rose and quitted the study.

Grundy was alone in Study No. 3 when Lowther looked in. He greeted the humorist of the Shell with a far from amiable look. Most of the Shell were in bad odour with Grundy that evening.

"Well?"

"Busy on the Ratty ritzney?" asked Lowther agreeably. Grundy eyed him rather suspiciously.

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"I am, as a matter of fact. Got anything funny to say about it? Because if you have—"

"Not a bit of it! I called to help you, old bean," replied Lowther smoothly.

Grundy looked rather surprised.

"Change for you to help a chap! Still, if that's what you've come for it's good of you!"

"It's a pleasure. Only too pleased to see you having a cut at that old blighter," smiled Lowther.

Which was no exaggeration. Mr. Ratcliff was no more popular with Monty Lowther than with any other junior at St. Jim's.

Grundy turned a frowning face to the sheets of foolscap paper that were littered before him.

"Dunno that you can help me much, Lowther, anyway," he grunted. "I was just making out a sort of rough case for myself here."

"Still, I might be useful," murmured Monty. "Of course, I don't pretend to have the same ability as you—"

"I should jolly well think not!" said Grundy in cordial agreement.

"Naturally, I haven't so much intelligence and insight into things as you—"

"Naturally you haven't," nodded Grundy.

"Still, I might make one or two suggestions that would help you. It's just possible, anyway," said Lowther, with a humility that would have aroused suspicion in anyone but George Alfred Grundy.

Grundy felt quite pleased at the self-effacing manner of his unexpected helper.

"Well, two heads are better than one, I grant you," he admitted. "Even when one is a little bit on the wooden side."

"Just so!" grinned Lowther. And he nobly forbore from raising any question as to which was the wooden-headed one.

"Now, what's your opinion of my prospects in this action?" asked Grundy.

Lowther sat down at the table with great gravity. Grundy had asked the very question that Lowther had wanted him to ask. The opportunity of diplomatically introducing his scheme was presented to Lowther without any of the difficulty he had imagined he would encounter.

Lowther sat down and made the most of it.

George Alfred Grundy, by no means quick-witted and always rather dense, was as clay in the hands of the wily Lowther. He saw the force of Lowther's arguments without much difficulty. Truth to tell, Grundy, despite his air of confidence before Wilkins and Gunn, had been inwardly a little troubled by the thought that as a minor he might find himself at a disadvantage. Lowther's scheme was all the more welcome, because it seemed to smooth over those possible difficulties.

"But—but if it goes to the Court, it'll have to come out that I'm under age, then," he objected, after Lowther had spent quite a long time explaining his proposals.

"It will never go to Court," said Lowther, with a conviction that was quite genuine. "Ratty will give in long before that and you'll be able to do as you like with him. If it does go before a judge—well, your uncle will have to back you up then, that's all."

"Doubt if he'd do it," said Grundy. "Still, there's a lot in what you say, young Lowther. Ratty will probably throw up the sponge before it develops too far. I think it's worth carrying out."

"You'll do it, then?" asked Lowther, hardly able to suppress his delight. "You'll let me disguise you to-morrow afternoon, and go through with it just as I have suggested?"

Grundy nodded.

Monty Lowther walked back to Study No. 10 almost on air. Grundy had fallen for it. And Lowther had visions of the coming of a jape that contained immense possibilities that might, in fact, turn out to be almost unique in the history of japes!

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy Grows Up!

THE following day was Wednesday—a half-holiday at St. Jim's. Most of the fellows made for Little Side after dinner, Tom Merry having arranged a junior practice-match for the afternoon. Grundy and Lowther, however, were absentees. Matters of far greater moment than Soccer claimed their attention.

When the footballers had all departed and the coast seemed clear, the two plotters adjourned to a box-room where nobody was likely to disturb them.

Grundy was looking rather thoughtful, now that the time had arrived for actually disguising himself as a grown man.

"It'll be a ticklish business, remembering I'm supposed

to be a grown man while I'm talking with the solicitor," he remarked.

"It would be for some people," nodded Lowther. "But not, of course, for you, old bean."

"Oh—ah—no!"

"To a born actor like you, Grundy, it will be as easy as rolling off a log," said Lowther flatteringly. "An ordinary chap like myself, of course, would make an awful hash of it—"

"Yes, I suppose you would," agreed Grundy.

"But a fellow of your stamp can carry it off, you see. You're tall and manly-looking, and you've got plenty of brains. A little touching-up and a change of clobber will make you into a man of thirty."

George Alfred Grundy almost purred. The idea that he could so easily be transferred into a grown man was distinctly pleasing to him. He felt his qualms about the difficulties of carrying out the scheme disappear almost immediately under the influence of Lowther's judicious flattery.

"Right-ho, Lowther!" he said graciously. "As you say, it will be easier for me than for an ordinary fellow. I'll manage all right, don't you worry."

Lowther grinned, and refrained from pointing out the worry had all been on Grundy's side.

"And now to get busy. What do you think of this for a suit? Rather nobby—what?" he said, selecting a rather loud-looking suit of clothes from the pile on the floor.

"H'm! Don't care for the pattern much. Still, it'll do all right," said Grundy carelessly. "Hand it over, young Lowther. And lock the door while I'm changing, in case some nousey parker comes along."

Lowther turned the key in the door, and Grundy got into the suit of "reach-me-downs." The fit, while not exactly in accordance with the best traditions of Savile Row, was fairly good. Lowther nodded his satisfaction.

"Fits you like a glove," he pronounced. "Get this collar round your neck now. Can't walk about in a lounge suit and Eton collar, you know."

Grundy discarded his regulation collar and fitted on one more in keeping with his new habiliments. Already he looked considerably older than he did in Etons.

"Now for a bit of face-fungus," grinned Lowther. "Something neat, but not gaudy, perhaps. How about this?" Grundy looked a little dubious.

(Continued on next page.)



The Editor appreciates the fact that the wise cracks of our whiskery wiseacre published in the "Gem" are being copied by certain scientific and educational journals in various parts of the world; but requests his brother-editors of Europe, Asia, America, Iceland, Australia and elsewhere, to acknowledge "The Gem" as the source of their inspiration

Q. Who was Rembrandt?

A. One of the Dutch "Old Masters" G. G. H. He was the son of a prosperous miller and was born at Leyden in Holland on July 15th, 1607. Early in life he showed an aptitude for art, and was apprenticed first to Jacob van Swanenburch and afterwards to Pieter Lastman, of Amsterdam, a painter of portraits. Some of his work was shown in the Dutch exhibition in London this year, together with that of Frans Hals, Vermeer, and many other "Old Masters." Although Rembrandt died a bankrupt, these paintings of his shown at Burlington House were worth round about £3,000,000!

Q. Which is the coldest month ever known in England?

A. Phew! Some of you lads are slamming in the questions red-hot this week! The complete records of centuries doesn't exist, but the February of this year was the coldest month we have experienced since 1895.



A Japanese pagoda towering above the roofs of a picturesque village nestling in its shadow.

Q. What is the difference between a pagoda and a pergola?

A. Quite a lot, Charlie Talboys, of Peckham—almost as much as there is between a "boater" and a bloater. A pagoda is a sacred building such as may be found in China, India, and elsewhere, and usually strangely ornamented. A pergola, however, is a sort of rustic arbour with trellis-work erected for the training of climbing roses and other similar plants. So if mother asks you to erect a pergola, Charlie, don't make a mistake and put any Oriental touch to your Peckham garden!

Q. Is Ashby-de-la-Zouche a hard name to pronounce?

A. Don't make me smile, Percy! If you've got sound health and a strong jaw, try saying over to yourself a few times the name of this town in Anglesey—Llanfairpwllgwyngillgogerechwyrndrobullllandysiliogogogoch.

Q. What is a shrew?

A. One meaning of this word is a scolding woman. Shrew also is the name of a small species of rodent of which the most remarkable is the long-nosed jumping shrew which is found on the East Coast of Africa. The shrew lives in holes in the ground and comes forth at night in search of insects which form its chief food. In looks it is not unlike our office boy, but as you have not the misfortune of knowing him, I print here a picture to give you a better idea of this curious species.

Q. What is a hidalgo?

A. A Spanish gentleman.

Q. What is cork?

A. I must confess, friend "Cecil," that for a time your question "had me up a gum-tree," as the saying is. For the last several years—ever since my ninety-fifth birthday, in fact—I have seen very few corks, as my sole liquid nourishment has consisted of Grade A milk delivered

in cardboard-sealed bottles. But the Editor has come to my rescue, and informs me that the corks which pop so cheerily in the tuck-shop and elsewhere, are made from the bark of a species of oak-tree grown in Spain and other parts of Southern Europe.

Q. How many owners of wireless sets are there in Great Britain?

A. This is something of a puzzler, Jimmy Tate. There may be quite a number of people who own sets who have omitted the formality of getting a licence. I may tell you, however, that over 2,400,000 wireless receiving licences are now held in the country.

Q. Who was Bill Harris in the Great War?

A. A young reader, "Gussy," of Wandsworth, has sent in this question, obviously with the idea that Bill Harris, of whom he has heard, was a sort of counterpart of Bill Adams at Waterloo. As a matter of fact, "Gussy," Bill Harris was the popular name for "bilharzia," a dangerous parasite that frequents much of the water of Egypt, Palestine, and Arabia. Many thousands of luckless soldiers on the Eastern fronts had to spend various periods in hospital on account of taking "Bill Harris" into their systems.

Q. In what prominent sport are there two players known respectively as the "pitcher" and "catcher"?

A. In the great national sport of America—baseball. Roughly speaking, the pitcher does the job of a bowler at cricket, and the catcher, with mask and well-protected body, is the "wicket-keeper."



A long-nosed, jumping shrew of the East Coast of Africa

"I don't want to look like a blessed film comedian, Lowther. Still, perhaps it will serve the purpose. Gimme that gum!"

He fixed on the small moustache Lowther had handed him, and looked at his assistant for a decision.

"Just the thing!" said Lowther, who was thoroughly enjoying himself. "Now shove this bowler hat on your napper! It's your size. Then you're finished."

Grundy obeyed, and the disguise was complete. Certainly nobody coming into the box-room at that moment would have guessed that he was looking at George Alfred Grundy.

"All right now?" asked the great man of the Shell.

"Fine!" chuckled Lowther. "I'll come down to the gates with you just to see you off. I can shove your togs back in the dorm later on."

Grundy nodded, and unlocked the door, and the two walked down the stairs together.

There was nobody about in the Form passages at that hour of the day, but one or two fellows were still in the Hall as they passed through, and several curious glances were thrown at Lowther's rather unusual-looking companion.

On the School House steps they ran into a small crowd of juniors sunning themselves in the bright spring sunshine. In the light of day the transformed Grundy probably looked a little more strange than he did indoors, for the juniors all stared. Baggy Trimble detached himself from the group and rolled down the steps after them.

"I say, Lowther, who's your pal?" he asked, in an inquisitive stage-whisper.

"S-sh! Relation of Grundy's," answered Lowther.

"He, he, he! He looks almost as big a freak as Grundy himself!" sniggered the fat Fourth-Former. "Here, what the thump—Oooooop!"

Much to Baggy's surprise, Grundy's relative had turned round and given his snub nose quite a savage tweak. Baggy was left roaring with pain and indignation, and feeling quite homicidal towards the latest representative of the Grundy family.

Near the porter's lodge, Scrope of the Shell crossed over to them, grinning broadly.

"Know anything good for the three o'clock race, Lowther?" he asked.

Lowther stared.

"Your pal ought to be able to tell us. Bookmaker's tout, by the look of him, isn't he? Yaroooooogh!"

Scrope's humorous effort ended in a fiendish howl as the stranger's big boot landed violently on his person. And Grundy's grown-up relative and his escort finished the remainder of their journey to the gates unmolested.

"All right now, old bean?" asked Lowther, as they parted.

"Oh, rather! Meeting Trimble and Scrope has made me feel easier," answered Grundy, with a grin.

"Remember all I've told you. Dear old Grabbe mustn't get the faintest suspicion that you're a schoolboy and Ratty's a master. Savvy?"

Grundy nodded.

"Leave it to me, Lowther. I'll be as right as rain."

"Good egg! Give your home address, you know. Wouldn't do for you to have the same address as the defendant."

"All serene!"

Lowther, grinning cheerfully, watched the new Grundy out of sight down the lane. And Grundy, feeling full of confidence and enthusiasm, tramped off to the station on his mission to Mr. Grabbe.

CHAPTER 9.

A Client for Mr. Grabbe!

"MR. GRABBE in?" George Alfred Grundy, looking very different from the Grundy known to the Shell at St. Jim's, asked that question of an inky-looking office-boy, in a dingy outer office in Wayland, later on in the afternoon.

The office-boy extended a grubby hand.

"If you'll gimme your card, sir—"

"Name will do," said Grundy. "Tell him Mr. Grundy, of St. Jim's—I mean, Mr. Grundy, of Bramleigh, Hampshire," he corrected hastily.

"Bramleigh, Hampshire? All right. I'll tell 'im."

The office-boy ambled across to a door marked "Private" and disappeared for a few seconds. Ambling out again, he nodded reassuringly.

"E's in, sir. This way."

Grundy walked round the counter and entered the legal sanctum of Mr. Grabbe. That gentleman—a rather shifty-eyed, sharp-featured individual, was engaged at the telephone. He motioned Grundy to a seat while he finished his conversation.

"Hallo! Still there? I'll give you twenty thousand for THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,103.

the property as it stands, then. Bring round the deeds and I'll look into them. Good-bye!"

Grundy felt impressed as Mr. Grabbe replaced the receiver. Here was evidently a man of substance and importance—a solicitor who was very decidedly a cut above the average solicitor in a small town like Wayland. Grundy failed to observe that Mr. Grabbe had had his hand on the receiving hook while he spoke, thus effectively cutting off his words from any listener at the other end. Had he noticed that peculiar circumstance, even Grundy might have suspected that Mr. Grabbe's twenty thousand deal existed largely in the solicitor's imagination, and had been invented for the sole purpose of impressing a new client.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Grabbe, in a businesslike tone. "Mr. Grundy I understand?"

Grundy nodded.

"Mr. Grundy, of Red Gables, Bramleigh, Hampshire. I'm afraid the matter I've called about will seem rather small to you."

Mr. Grabbe smiled.

"Tut-tut! Small or large, all cases receive the same attention and care at my hands, Mr. Grundy. Now, what is it? Blackmail—bankruptcy?"



"You talk to me of legal rights—" roared Mr. Ratcliff, "you, Grundy, suddenly whipping a notebook out of his pocket. "Would

"Oh, great pip! Nothing like that," grinned Grundy.

Mr. Grabbe looked at Grundy rather queerly for a moment. Perhaps the somewhat flippant exclamation was unusual among the solicitor's regular clients.

"Tell me your trouble, Mr. Grundy."

Grundy did so.

"I've been slandered—slandered and assaulted," he explained. "A measly, rotten worm not fit to be called a man has slandered and assaulted me."

"Hem! Precisely!" gasped Mr. Grabbe, wondering for a moment whether the slander had been entirely one-sided. "This unfortunate affair took place, of course, before witnesses?"

"Plenty of 'em. That's the annoying part of it. He called me all the names he could think of before a whole crowd!" growled the disguised Grundy.

"Before a whole crowd? This sounds very serious, Mr. Grundy," remarked Mr. Grabbe, frowning portentously.

"It jolly well is serious!" snorted Grundy.

"Can you recollect the exact terms of this serious slander?"

"Yes; I've got it all down here on paper," answered Grundy, selecting a sheet of paper from a sheaf he drew out of his pocket.

"Excellent! This will be of material assistance to us."
 "Here you are. You'll see he called me overbearing, and bullying, and conceited, and smug. Ridiculous, of course!"
 "Preposterous!" agreed Mr. Grabbe, looking profoundly shocked. "And then—what's this? 'Insolent' and 'ruffianly'? Dear, dear me! Why, this is positively outrageous! And you say he assaulted you as well?"
 "Lashed me with a cane," nodded Grundy. "Of course, that didn't matter much."
 "Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Grabbe, rather taken aback.



norant, doltish, almost imbecilic—"Here, half-a-minute," said Grundy, repeating what you said?" "What—what—" (See Chapter 11.)

"I wouldn't have bothered much about the assault part of it. It's the slander that gets my goat."

"Naturally, naturally!" murmured Mr. Grabbe, wondering what queer kind of fish he had landed in his office, and more important, how much he could afford to pay out in the way of solicitor's charges.

"Now all I want is satisfaction," went on Grundy. "There's nothing vindictive about me, I hope. I don't want damages."

Mr. Grabbe jumped.

"You—you don't want damages? Did I hear you say you don't want damages, Mr. Grundy?"

"Certainly not! I wouldn't touch his rotten money with a barge-pole!"
 "Oh!"

Mr. Grabbe rubbed his hands and became suddenly very respectful indeed. A client who didn't trouble about damages was evidently not particularly in need of money.

"What, may I ask, do you want, then, sir?" he asked.

"Just a complete, written apology to be shown on the notice-board."

"The—the notice-board?"

"I should say, to be shown in public," corrected Grundy,

spotting his lapse. "If I get that, I'll be quite satisfied. If I don't, then I want you to take it to Court. See?"

"Undoubtedly. Undoubtedly it shall go to Court if an adequate apology is not forthcoming," said Mr. Grabbe. "If the facts are as you have given them, sir—and I accept your statement in toto—then we shall have no difficulty whatever in obtaining complete satisfaction. Now, let me take some notes on the matter."

He drew a bulky register towards him, and picked up a pen. And for the next ten minutes or so he questioned Grundy regarding the circumstances of the alleged slander and assault.

Grundy, on his mettle at this most important juncture, was sufficiently ingenious in answering to give Mr. Grabbe all the information he required without once letting drop a hint of the real relationship existing between himself and Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Grabbe seemed to find his client's answers satisfactory enough, so far as they went. Once or twice he glanced rather keenly at him as though he divined an undercurrent somewhere. Possibly he suspected that, though Grundy was telling him the truth, he was not telling him the whole truth. Mr. Grabbe, anyway, didn't concern himself much with that. To reveal the dreadful truth, he was more concerned over the possibility of "tapping" this new and mysterious client for something on account of his fee.

The interrogation finished at last, somewhat to Grundy's relief, and Mr. Grabbe put down his pen and rubbed his hands again.

"Very well, sir. You may, for the moment, leave the case in my hands," he said. "Rest assured that it will receive my personal and most earnest attention."

"What's the first move, then?" asked Grundy.

"By to-night's post I shall send this Mr. Ratcliff, of St. James' College, a preliminary letter, advising him of my instructions and requesting the name of his legal representative."

"Oh, good! That'll give the blighter something to think about," grinned Grundy.

"And I venture to prophesy that he will have occasion to think still more before very long, Mr. Grundy," remarked Mr. Grabbe, unbending to the faintest suspicion of humour. "That, then, terminates our interview."

"Good! Then I'll buzz off," said Grundy, rising to go.

"Hem! Before you depart, sir—"

"Anything else?" asked Grundy

"You are a new client, and your financial standing is at present unknown to me," said Mr. Grabbe smoothly. "I was about to suggest that our business relations would be the more firmly established if you deposited a small sum of money against my fee."

"Oh!"

Grundy looked a little surprised. It had not occurred to him that he would be expected to pay a deposit at his first interview, and the impression of great wealth created by Mr. Grabbe's telephone conversation had given him the idea that money was a minor consideration in this solicitor's office. However, having fortunately received a timely "tenner" from Uncle Grundy that morning, he happened to be in a position to rise to the occasion. He dived his hand in his pocket and drew out a wad of notes.

"How much do you suggest, then?"

"Hem! Perhaps five pounds would meet the case," murmured Mr. Grabbe, winking at his desk.

"Oh, crumbs!"

Grundy looked a little dismayed for a moment. But on reflection he decided that he could hardly expect to achieve Ratty's discomfiture without paying well for it. He handed over five pound notes, and was rewarded with a most respectful bow from Mr. Grabbe.

"Thank you, sir. The receipt shall be sent to you at Bramleigh, sir."

"Don't bother to send one," said Grundy. "You'll post off that letter to-night for certain?"

"It shall be my first consideration," beamed Mr. Grabbe. "Good-afternoon, sir!"

The door closed behind Grundy. Perhaps it was just as well that it did, or Grundy might, to his astonishment, have heard Mr. Grabbe's summing-up of the interview, spoken aloud to the four walls of his office.

"One born every minute!" said Mr. Grabbe.

CHAPTER 10. Plain Speaking!

"HERE he comes!" said Monty Lowther.

"Can't be! Looks too respectable for him!"

"Mean to say that's Grundy?" asked Tom Merry, with a stare.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nearly all the Shell, and a good many of the Fourth had gathered in the gateway of St. Jim's after the practice

match. The news that Grundy had gone to Wayland, disguised as a grown man, for the purpose of enlisting the aid of the legal profession in his great campaign against Mr. Ratcliff, had been greeted everywhere with roars of laughter, and not many of the juniors felt like missing the return of the great man of the Shell.

Lowther's intimation that the loudly-dressed individual who was tramping up the lane towards the school was Grundy himself was greeted with a buzz of interest, and there was a loud cheer as the newcomer reached the gates.

"Good old Grundy!"

"Have you taken out a warrant yet?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The disguised Grundy frowned.

"What's all the excitement about?" he asked.

"You, of course, old bean! Tell us what happened."

"What did the lawyer Johnny think of that moustache, Grundy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy snorted.

"You fellows can cackle! I rather think it will be my turn soon!"

"Everything go off all right, then?" asked Lowther.

"Of course!"

"The Grabbe bird didn't rumble that disguise?"

Grundy chuckled.

"Not likely! He was a sharp sort of chap. But he happened to be dealing with someone who was a bit sharper."

"Oh, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's he going to do for you, then?" asked Manners.

"Send Ratty a solicitor's letter, in the first place. After that, the next move will rest with Ratty. If he cares to apologise—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Fully and unreservedly," said Grundy firmly. "Then I'll be willing to waive the question of further proceedings. Otherwise, all I can say is, Ratty had better look out for himself!"

"Great pip!"

"Needless to say, it will have to be a written apology," Grundy added, by way of explanation. "I shall insist, of course, on exhibiting it for a week in the Hall."

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"After that, I shall probably frame it, and hang it in the study as a sort of trophy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors simply yelled. The idea of Ratty writing Grundy a full apology to be exhibited in the Hall, and afterwards framed and hung in Grundy's study, was really rich.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Well, if you don't take the whole biscuit factory, Grundy!"

"A written apology, you know!" gurgled Kangaroo. "To be framed as a kind of trophy!"

"From Ratty—Ratty, of all people!"

"Oh dear!"

It was a long time since the Shell had had such a really good laugh. Grundy's visit to the solicitor promised to be the joke of St. Jim's during the next day or so.

"Well, I'll be getting along now," said Grundy. "Blessed if I can see what you grinning idiots find to cackle at!"

"Wait till Ratty gets that letter; you'll probably see it then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!"

Grundy left the hilarious crowd, and tramped off towards the School House.

Wilkins and Gunn detached themselves from the rest and followed him. Grundy's two study-mates felt a little alarmed at this sudden development, and they meant to find out exactly how far Grundy had gone, and get an indication of the kind of trouble he was likely to land himself in.

They caught him up on the School House steps, and took up positions on either side of him to escort him safely up to the Shell dormitory. Fortunately there were no masters or prefects about to ask awkward questions as to the identity of the stranger, and they reached the dorm without once being challenged.

"And now," said Gunn firmly, "we want to know exactly how this bizney is going to end."

"There's only one end to it," said Wilkins, with conviction. "The silly ass will get bunked."

Grundy paused in the act of detaching his false moustache to bestow a glare on the pessimistic Wilkins.

"If you're referring to me as a silly ass, George Wilkins, I'll—"

"I am!" snapped Wilkins. "If your behaviour this afternoon isn't the behaviour of a silly ass, I'd like to know what is."

"Why, you cheeky rotter—" roared Grundy, almost

deprived of the power of action by this unexpected revolt on the part of the usually docile Wilkins.

"I'm with Wilky, too!" put in Gunn. "'Silly ass' isn't strong enough, in my opinion, in fact."

"You—you—why, I'll smash you!" hooted Grundy. "Call yourselves pals of mine, and you round on me just because I'm sticking up for my rights!"

"Oh, can it!"

"What?"

"Can it!" repeated Wilkins more loudly. "If you had the sense of a billygoat, you'd see that the very reason we're rounding on you is that we're your pals, and we don't want to see you leave St. Jim's in a hurry on your neck."

"Just so!" nodded Gunn.

Grundy snorted.

"Bosh! If you're worrying over the possibility of my getting the sack, of course, I can understand your getting a bit upset. What you'd do without me to look after you, goodness only knows. But you needn't worry. They can't sack a man for standing up for his legal rights. As Lowther pointed out—"

"Lowther! Why trouble to tell us what Lowther said?" demanded Gunn impatiently. "Don't you realise yet, you chump, that Lowther has been pulling your leg—that his rigging you up and sending you to the solicitor this afternoon was just one of his fatheaded hoaxes?"

Grundy frowned.

"Are you insinuating, Gunn, that I've had my leg pulled?"

"Not insinuating it; stating it!" corrected Gunn.

"Why, you silly ass! Think I'd allow any man at St. Jim's to pull my leg?" roared Grundy furiously.

"Dear man, it's done every day."

"And every minute of the day!" added Wilkins.

Grundy fairly gasped. Home-truths from Wilkins and Gunn fell very unpleasantly on Grundy's unaccustomed ears. Not that he recognised them as truths; but he perceived, at all events, that they were the reverse of complimentary.

"Look here, if you idiots keep up this rot much longer, I shall wade in and knock your silly heads together," he warned. "You can take it from me that Lowther hasn't been pulling my leg at all. I know he's a japing kind of ass—"

"Oh, you do know that, do you?" asked Wilkins sarcastically.

"But this time he's cut out all that nonsense and helped me like a good sport."

"Helped you like a first-class japer, you mean," snorted Gunn. "For goodness' sake, listen to reason, old chap! Lowther's been having you on toast. That much is obvious to everyone else in the Shell but you—"

"The opinion of the Shell doesn't interest me in the slightest," said Grundy disdainfully. "Pass my collar, Gunn, and don't gas so much!"

"You've fallen for Lowther's jape like a lamb," pursued Gunn. "As a result, it looks as if the fat's in the fire. If Ratty gets that letter—"

"He jolly well will get it; by the first post to-morrow morning," said Grundy, with satisfaction.

"Then there'll be trouble—trouble with a capital T!" said Gunn gloomily.

"Trouble for Ratty!" chuckled Grundy.

"No; for you, you born idiot! He'll take that letter straight to the Head—"

"Exactly what I want him to do!" grinned Grundy.

"And that will put paid to your career at St. Jim's. It'll be you for the long jump then, old man. There's only one chance. If we can intercept the letter before it reaches Ratty—"

"You'd better not do anything of the kind!" said Grundy, with a glare.

"We can burn the rotten thing—"

"Look here, you prize idiot, if you try any monkey tricks like that you're in for something extra special in the way of thick ears!" roared Grundy. "My solicitor—"

"Blow your solicitor!"

"He has had his instructions. Those instructions are going to be carried out. Anybody who attempts to interfere—"

"Oh, dry up, you silly cuckoo!" granted Wilkins, beginning to lose all patience.

"What?"

"Dry up!" hooted Wilkins. "We're used to your behaving like a blessed mule, but when you start behaving like a lunatic—"

Grundy almost choked.

"Why, you—you—"

Words failed him, as they frequently did. He threw aside the hair brushes he had been using and made a rush.

Wilkins and Gunn were ready for that rush. They almost welcomed it. Physical violence, after all their fruitless eloquence, seemed a great relief.

Grundy apparently expected to overwhelm his painfully-candid chums immediately and strew them in the farthest corner of the dormitory.

But something went wrong with Grundy's programme.

It was Grundy himself who was overwhelmed, and a very much astonished Grundy who came into violent collision with the floor of the dormitory—once, twice, and thrice.

After which extraordinary and unprecedented occurrence, Wilkins and Gunn shook the dust of the dormitory from their feet, leaving Grundy to sort himself out.

CHAPTER 11.

A Letter for Mr. Ratcliff!

MONTY LOWTHER made a bee-line for the letter-rack in the Hall as soon as he came downstairs on the following morning. It was very important indeed from Lowther's point of view—and, incidentally, of course, from Grundy's also, though Grundy did not know it—that that letter from Mr. Grabbe should be got out of the way before Mr. Ratcliff had a chance to see it.

The morning's delivery of letters had only just been sorted into alphabetical order and placed in the rack, when Lowther came up. The humorist of the Shell grinned as he spotted a typewritten envelope bearing Mr. Ratcliff's name.

He looked round cautiously to see that he was not observed, and was reassured to find that nobody was in sight. It was the work of a moment to annex the letter and to glance at the embossed name of the Wayland solicitor on the flap. His task accomplished, Lowther turned away to go up to the Shell passage.

It was at that moment that he became aware of the podgy presence of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth. The fat Fourth-Former had rolled into the Hall via the side entrance near the letter-rack, and was eyeing Lowther's rather stealthy movements with interest.

"I say, Lowther, what's on?" he inquired.

Lowther frowned.

"Where did you spring from, Baggy?"

"He, he, he! Didn't see me, did you? I say, Lowther, been committing a crime, or something? You do look guilty, you know!"

"Don't talk piffle, barrel, unless you want to feel my boot!"

"Oh, rats! Look here, Lowther, if you've been pinching someone's letter, I won't say anything about it. You can rely on me, old scout!"

"You silly ass!" roared Lowther, reddening.

"He, he, he! I'll tell you what—if there's a remittance in it—"

"In what, you fat idiot?"

"In the letter you've pinched, of course! Here, keep off, you ass! I mean the letter you didn't pinch—that's what I really mean!"

"That's what you'd better mean, too!"

"Well, anyway, if there's a remittance in it—" said Trimble, keeping a safe distance from Lowther's boot.

"In the letter I didn't pinch!"

"He, he, he! Exactly! In the letter you didn't pinch, old chap! If there's a remittance in it, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll keep mum about it. See? Then we can go halves in the remittance."

Monty Lowther stared.

"Why, you—you fat criminal! You're actually suggesting collaring someone else's money?"

Baggy frowned.

"Hem! That's rather a coarse way of putting it, Lowther. If that's how you look at it, I shall decline to have anything to do with the matter."

"But I rather fancy I'm going to have something to say in the matter," said Lowther grimly. "Something that can be said with the toe of my boot, as a matter of fact, you fat burglar. Here it is!"

And Lowther proceeded to say something with the toe of his boot.

Trimble of the Fourth made a wild leap out of the way. The fat Fourth-Former was not usually a very active person; but this must have been the exception that proved the rule, for he sprang a good couple of yards in the direction of the door. Such surprising agility on the part of Baggy Trimble was unexpected, so far as Lowther was concerned. The humorist of the Shell found that Trimble's fat person was not where he had anticipated it would be, with the result that he overbalanced completely.

Crash!

Feeling far from humorous, for once in a way, Lowther crashed to the floor.

Trimble gave a roar from the doorway.

"Yah! Serves you right for bullying! Yarooogh!"

He fled, like a champion on the cinder track, as the en-

raged and injured Lowther scrambled to his feet and came in hot pursuit. Pursuer and pursued disappeared from the Hall.

And on the floor of the Hall, dropped in the fall, and unheeded in the excitement, was left Mr. Ratcliff's letter!

Long before Lowther's thoughts returned to that all-important missive it had been picked up by a passer-by and replaced in the rack. And just before breakfast-time, while the aggrieved Lowther was still hunting for Trimble, like a lion hunting for its prey, Mr. Ratcliff, going through the Hall on an early visit to Mr. Railton, took it from the rack, transferred it to his pocket, and went his way.

It was at breakfast-time that Lowther, with a start, remembered the letter again.

"Oh, great pip!" he ejaculated suddenly.

"What's up, Monty?" asked Manners, who was sitting next to him at the Shell table.

"That letter—" said Lowther faintly.

"What letter, ass?"

"Why, Ratty's letter, you know; from the solicitor—"

Manners stared.

"You don't mean to say that, after going down specially to the letter-rack, you've missed it?"

"But I have!" groaned Lowther. "It was all through that fat brigand Trimble! I'll slaughter him when I get hold of him!"

"Fat lot of good that will do!" grunted Manners. "Ten to one Ratty's got hold of the thing and read it by now."

"Bound to have done!" groaned Lowther.

"Fine mess you've landed Grundy in now!" said Manners. "We told you from the start that it was a risky sort of jape!"

"Oh dear!"

"Unless a miracle happens, poor old Grundy will be for the long jump right enough!"

"Perhaps Ratty hasn't got it yet," said Lowther hopefully. "I must cut off soon after brekker and scout round for it."

But the faint hope that Mr. Ratcliff had not yet received the letter vanished a few minutes later, when Toby, the page, entered the dining-hall with a message for Grundy.

That message was ominous. Grundy was wanted by Mr. Ratcliff in Mr. Linton's study immediately after breakfast.

"And 'e don't 'alf look in a rare old wax, Master Grundy!" added Toby, as a piece of additional information.

Grundy grinned cheerfully. The news that Mr. Ratcliff was in a rare old wax pleased the litigant of the Shell, rather than otherwise, Grundy being, fortunately, free from nervous characteristics of any kind.

The effect of Toby's concluding remark on Lowther, however, was quite the reverse. The humorist of the Shell began to wish very heartily that he had never conceived the brilliant notion of sending Grundy to the solicitor.

When the Shell rose from breakfast, Lowther fairly swooped down on the cheerful Grundy.

"Grundy, old man—"

"Can't stop. Got to see Ratty at once."

"For goodness' sake, Grundy, listen! Ratty's got hold of that letter—"

"Naturally. That's why he wants me," grinned Grundy.

"Whatever you do, don't do anything to upset him now. Look here, Grundy—"

But Grundy had already gone, and Lowther was left to pour his tale of woe into the interested ears of a crowd of Shell fellows, and to appeal for suggestions as to what was the best thing to do—an appeal that resulted in nothing whatever being done.

Meanwhile, Grundy, in a mood of glowing optimism, reached the study of the absent Mr. Linton, where he found Mr. Ratcliff pacing the carpet like a raging tiger.

(Continued on next page.)



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He gave Mr. Ratcliff a cheerful nod. He felt that he could afford to be polite, now that he occupied the unusual position of plaintiff in an action-at-law.

"Good-morning, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff's only reply to that polite salutation was something that sounded very much like a snarl.

"I have received a letter—"

"Quite right, sir!" nodded Grundy.

"A letter from a person who styles himself a solicitor—"

roared Mr. Ratcliff.

"Mr. Grabbe, of Wayland. He is a solicitor," said Grundy.

"Informing me that you have instructed him to begin proceedings against me!" booted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Perfectly correct!"

Mr. Ratcliff choked.

"This self-styled solicitor has the ridiculous presumption and impudence to request the name of my legal representative. My first and natural impression was that the thing was a hoax perpetrated by some undisciplined juniors. Am I to believe—can it be possible that you are aware of the circumstance?"

Grundy looked a little surprised.

"I can't think what could have given you the idea that there was any hoax about it, sir. Of course I'm aware of it!"

"You acknowledge it, then? You admit to going to a solicitor and threatening me with legal proceedings?" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

Grundy nodded calmly.

"Of course I admit it! I had to do something to protect my good name. Some fellows would have acted differently. They might have hit you, for instance—"

"H-h-hit me!" stuttered the irate New House master.

"But I'm not like that. I like to act in a constitutional way, if I can," said Grundy. "Not that I like going to law, in the usual way. All lawyers are a lot of swindling sharks, in my opinion. But when the need arises, I've got my legal rights as well as anybody else."

Mr. Ratcliff almost exploded.

"Legal rights! You talk to me of legal rights—you, an ignorant, doltish, almost imbecilic—"

"Here, half a minute!" said Grundy, suddenly whipping a notebook out of his pocket.

"What—what—"

"Would you mind repeating what you said?" asked Grundy.

"R-r-repeating—"

"From now on I'm keeping an exact record of everything you call me," explained Grundy. "It may not be necessary to bring it all up in the evidence—"

"Ev-evidence?" raved Mr. Ratcliff.

"But, on the other hand, it may prove useful. Now let's see. 'Ignorant' and 'doltish,' I believe you said. And after that—"

"Grundy!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Just a moment, sir!"

"Grundy!"

"'Imbecilic' was the last word, wasn't it?"

Mr. Ratcliff snatched the notebook from Grundy's hand and sent it flying into a corner of the room.

"Upon my word! I begin to believe that I am dealing with a madman!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Are you ill, boy? Do you feel that you are still in possession of such rudimentary mental faculties as you have hitherto possessed?"

Grundy turned the colour of a beetroot.

"Look here, Mr. Ratcliff, you're really going a bit too far," he growled. "Calling me a madman, indeed! I shall jolly well let my solicitor know about this, I can tell you! Take my tip, and cool down a bit. I warn you—"

"You—you warn me?" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff, beginning to wonder whether this extraordinary interview was a fantastic dream.

"I warn you that all you're saying now is only going to make things worse for you if the case goes to Court," said Grundy dully. "Take my tip, sir—"

Mr. Ratcliff didn't take Grundy's tip. Instead, he took up his cane, and waded into action without even waiting to hear what the tip was.

Grundy's warning remarks ended in a wild yell as the cane descended on his broad shoulders.

"Yoooooop! Look here— Yaroooooh! Whooooop!"

Mr. Ratcliff's precipitate action had given Grundy an excuse, if he needed one, for abandoning constitutional methods and "bashing" his legal adversary.

But even Grundy had his limits. Some remote notion of the fitness of things, even at this critical moment, held him back from taking that extreme step. He contented himself with leaping out of the range of Mr. Ratcliff's deadly cane as often as he could. Notwithstanding which, the master of the Shell succeeded in doing great execution.

"There!" he gasped at last. "Perhaps that will teach

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you that I am to be treated with elementary respect. But the matter will not rest there—"

"Groooh! I'll jolly well see that it doesn't!" groaned Grundy.

"I am going straight to the Head to acquaint him with the whole facts of this amazing business, Grundy," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a grinding voice.

"I don't mind that—not at all!"

"For the present you will proceed to the Form-room. Inform Merry that I shall expect him to preserve order until I arrive. You may go!"

Grundy went. And Mr. Ratcliff, after an interval during which he composed himself a little, proceeded to the Head's study.

CHAPTER 12.

Dr. Holmes is Alarmed!

"WELL, Mr. Ratcliff?"

Dr. Holmes, the venerable headmaster of St. Jim's, looked up inquiringly as Mr. Ratcliff, a little more calm and collected now, entered his study. The New House master's arrival at that moment was not altogether welcomed. The Head was just ready to go to the Fifth Form room to take them in Roman history. But the Fifth and Roman history had to give place to Mr. Ratcliff.

"Pardon the intrusion, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff. "If you can spare me a few minutes—"

"I am due in the Fifth Form room, Mr. Ratcliff—" began the Head mildly.

"The matter is of some importance, sir," murmured Mr. Ratcliff.

"Very well, Mr. Ratcliff. Pray proceed."

"I regret that I should have to lay a complaint against a Shell boy so soon after taking over that Form, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff.

The Head frowned.

"It is certainly regrettable that you should have encountered any difficulty at this early date. What is the nature of your complaint, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"From the moment of my taking over the Shell, Grundy, a member of the Form, has set himself out to defy me," answered Mr. Ratcliff, two bright pink spots appearing on his cheeks at the recollection of his insubordinate charge. "On several occasions already I have had to punish him for calculated impertinence and insubordination—"

"Dear me!"

"In addition to which I have had frequent occasion to rebuke and reprimand him for other faults!"

"This is very disturbing, my dear sir!" exclaimed the Head, frowning portentously.

"Very disturbing indeed, sir," agreed Mr. Ratcliff. "What I have told you, however, is of trivial importance in comparison with the extraordinary action which Grundy has now taken."

"You have something even more serious to report, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Unfortunately I have, sir. By this morning's post I received a letter—a letter which I was at first inclined to treat as a hoax. On interrogating Grundy, however, I find that the letter is perfectly genuine. With your permission, sir, I will read it out to you. It purports to come from a Wayland solicitor—a person named Grabbe."

"Pray read the letter, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, in a state of considerable surprise and perturbation.

Mr. Ratcliff cleared his throat, and did so.

"Dear Sir,—I am instructed by my client, Mr. G. A. Grundy, of Red Gables, Bramleigh, Hants, that on a recent occasion, in the presence of a number of my client's friends, you uttered statements concerning him which my client alleges to be slanderous. Further, that on the same occasion you assaulted him with a cane. It will facilitate the proceedings that are contemplated if you advise me the name and address of your legal representative with the minimum of delay.—I am, dear sir,

"Yours faithfully,"

"JASPER GRABBE."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated the Head, quite shocked.

"That, sir, is the letter," said Mr. Ratcliff, his voice trembling with anger. "You will now understand my anxiety to lay the whole matter before you at the earliest possible moment."

"Bless my soul! Grundy, then, has instructed a solicitor!"

"Precisely, sir!"

"And you say he does not deny it?"

"Far from denying it, sir, he seemed to glory in it," answered Mr. Ratcliff.

"But—but this is preposterous!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, staring at the letter, which Mr. Ratcliff had now handed

"What do you think you're doing, caning a friend of mine?" demanded George Alfred Grundy, planting himself in front of Mr. Ratcliff. "I—I—if it is your wish that Wilkins should be treated leniently—" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff. "Well, it is!" "Then I will remit his punishment." There was an almost incredulous gasp from the Shell. (See Chapter 14.)



him, almost as though he could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes. "By the reading of this extraordinary letter, I judge that an action at law is contemplated—an action for slander and assault?"

"That is my interpretation of it, sir."

"An action by this foolish boy Grundy against yourself," said the Head, quite faintly.

"Precisely!"

"Goodness gracious me!"

Dr. Holmes was staggered. Rare indeed were the occasions when the Head was shaken out of his characteristic academic calm. But Mr. Grabbe's letter had certainly had that effect.

"This, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff, "is the crowning effort in this reckless and recalcitrant boy's orgy of defiance and insolence. The matter has now become too serious for me to adjudicate upon. I must leave it to you to mete out such punishment to Grundy as you feel to be appropriate to his extraordinary misdemeanours."

Judging by Mr. Ratcliff's tone, there could be only one punishment to fit Grundy's present crime—expulsion.

But the Head, for the moment, was not giving a thought to the question of suitable punishment for Grundy. His eyes were still on the solicitor's letter, reading its contents over and over again, as though even now he could not be sure that he had read aright.

At last he looked up.

"Mr. Ratcliff—"

"Sir!"

"This letter emanates from a solicitor well known, I believe, in Wayland."

"I was not aware of that, sir."

"Nevertheless, that is a fact, Mr. Ratcliff. The inference to be drawn from that circumstance is that this threatened legal action is not a thing to be treated too lightly."

Mr. Ratcliff's jaw dropped a little. Angry as he had been at receiving Mr. Grabbe's letter, his anger was brought about by Grundy's lack of respect rather than by the prospect of his actually having to deal with legal proceedings. So obsessed had he been with Grundy's stupidity and defiance that the possibility of his ever having to appear in Court had hardly occurred to him.

"But—but surely Grundy is a minor and is therefore unable to take legal action on his own initiative?" stammered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Undoubtedly. That, Mr. Ratcliff, is what makes the

receipt of this letter a most serious matter. An established solicitor would naturally decline to deal with a minor in an affair of this kind. It follows that the proposed legal action has the support of Grundy's relative, whose address is given in this letter."

"G-good heavens!"

Mr. Ratcliff was shocked. Had he thought clearly about the matter that point would certainly have occurred to him before. Mr. Ratcliff's notoriously bad temper, however, was not an aid to clear thinking, and the Head's suggestion that Grundy's uncle was at the back of it all came as a bomb-shell to him.

"That, at all events, seems the only possible explanation to me," went on the Head. "I am surprised that Mr. Grundy did not first consult me before taking such precipitate action; but it is very evident that he is the person whose instructions Mr. Grabbe has accepted."

"I admit that that aspect had not occurred to me, sir. But I can see the force of your argument!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, whose convulsively-working face betrayed the variety of emotions he was now feeling.

"Mr. Grundy is undoubtedly an active supporter of his nephew's extraordinary stand—that much seems certain," said the Head decisively.

"P-precisely!"

"It is a most regrettable and alarming position," said the Head, rubbing his chin reflectively. "Obviously, I cannot allow the name of the school to be dragged through a Court of Law in a matter of this nature."

"Obviously not!" echoed Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

"The threatened action must be stopped at all costs. An arrangement must be made whereby the possibility of legal proceedings is obviated."

"An—an arrangement?" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff, turning almost green.

The Head nodded.

"Possibly a compromise may be effected direct. With that idea in mind, Mr. Ratcliff, I advise you to refrain from communicating with this solicitor."

"Ah! Exactly!" muttered Mr. Ratcliff, his expression almost fiendish by this time.

"In the meantime, of course, you must treat Grundy very carefully—very carefully indeed!" repeated the Head, with emphasis.

Mr. Ratcliff said something unintelligible.

"Whatever happens, nothing must be done that can aggravate the present serious position in the slightest degree. I am sure that I can rely on your co-operation, Mr. Ratcliff," said Dr. Holmes.

"Er—er—ye-es, sus-sus-certainly, sir!"

"It is, of course, preposterous that such a situation should have arisen; but for the present, Grundy must be treated leniently—even indulgently. You quite see the point, my dear sir?"

"Oh—ah—quite!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"To punish Grundy at the present juncture might jeopardise the prospect of a peaceful solution of this extremely delicate problem. I rely on you, Mr. Ratcliff, to treat this disrespectful and foolish boy with such consideration and leniency as will ensure the success of our efforts to avoid litigation."

Mr. Ratcliff choked. He could not trust himself to words.

"For the time being, then, we will refrain from action," said the Head. "Possibly on reflection, Mr. Grundy will withdraw from the extreme position he has taken up. In the meantime, everything that can be done to ameliorate the situation must be done. Please see that Grundy is given no excuse for persisting in this hasty action."

"I understand, sir," Mr. Ratcliff managed to mutter.

"We will meet and discuss the matter after classes, then," said the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff nodded, and, with feelings almost too deep for expression, turned on his heel and fled!

CHAPTER 13. A Surprise for the Shell!

"CAVE!"

The warning cry from Kangaroo, who was stationed on the door as a look-out, brought to an end the excited buzz of talk that had filled the Shell Form room during Mr. Ratcliff's absence.

Grundy's legal proceedings had been the sole topic of conversation during that period. Fierce arguments had developed over the problem of what Lowther could do to save Grundy from the "sack." Meanwhile, the central figure of the drama—Grundy himself—had passed the time in asking various juniors' opinions of the form of apology he had drawn up for Ratty's signature, receiving in reply opinions which were more forcible than polite.

As Mr. Ratcliff's footsteps became audible down the passage, a tense silence came over the Form. Everybody felt that the crisis had been reached. Several commiserating glances were thrown at the great man of the Shell. Needless to say, Grundy was blissfully unconscious of them. The door opened, and Mr. Ratcliff entered.

As the juniors had anticipated, he was not looking in the best of moods. On the contrary, quite a startling look of rage was on the countenance of Mr. Ratcliff. Contrary to expectations, however, he did not immediately order Grundy to the Head's study. Instead, he went to his desk, and sat down.

Every eye in the Shell was upon Mr. Ratcliff; every junior wondered what he was going to do.

Mr. Ratcliff did nothing.

Then Grundy stood up.

Frantic hands from neighbouring desks tried to drag him down again; frantic whispers begged him not to act the giddy goat. Grundy ignored them.

"If you please, sir—" he began.

Mr. Ratcliff looked up; and for an instant such baffled malevolence seemed to possess him that some of the Shell began quite seriously to wonder whether he was going to burst in front of their eyes.

Then something seemed to happen to Mr. Ratcliff's face. The terrific expression slowly faded away, the scowling brows appeared to wrench themselves apart, and the thin lips creased up into a ghastly effort at a smile.

"Yes, Grundy?"

The Shell jumped. That thin, mild voice. Was it—could it be—the voice of Mr. Ratcliff? Even Grundy started violently as he heard it, and felt so surprised that for a moment he was unable to go on.

"If you please, sir," said Grundy, when he had recovered sufficiently to speak, "I wanted to ask whether you had been to the Head?"

Gasp from the Shell.

Mr. Ratcliff seemed to swallow something. But when he spoke his voice was still but a thin, mild shadow of the harsh voice that was usually Mr. Ratcliff's.

"Yes, Grundy. I have been to the Head."

"Hem! Of course, I'm rather anxious to know what he said," remarked Grundy, with rather a puzzled look at this extraordinarily changed Ratty. "If you've got any news for me, sir—"

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A strange, choking sound seemed to come from Mr. Ratcliff's throat.

"I—I have no news for you, Grundy. I—I am not at present at liberty to—make a statement."

The Shell fairly blinked. If Mr. Ratcliff had returned triumphantly to lead a disillusioned Grundy back to the Head for a flogging and summary expulsion, nobody would have been a bit surprised—quite the reverse, in fact. But this—

Grundy himself hardly knew what to make of it yet. But he was rapidly becoming conscious of one fact—that Mr. Ratcliff now was a very different man from the Mr. Ratcliff he had interviewed only half an hour before. And though Grundy's intellectual powers were not of the highest he had sufficient understanding to realise that something must have happened in the Head's study—something unfavourable to Mr. Ratcliff and very favourable to himself.

Grundy began to grin.

That grin was almost his undoing. For an instant Mr. Ratcliff seemed torn between conflicting emotions. But the Head's warning prevailed, and, with a mighty effort, he overcame the impulse to pick up his cane and make a rush at Grundy. And the ghastly smile on Mr. Ratcliff's face remained there after all.

"You may sit down, Grundy!" he gasped.

"Thank you, sir!" grinned Grundy.

He sat down.

The lesson commenced.

Virgil was the subject of the first lesson that morning. The "Æneid" was a favourite with Mr. Ratcliff. It was not a favourite with the Shell. Not unnaturally the Shell had supposed that this difference of opinion concerning Virgil's celebrated work would lead to trouble. But the trouble didn't materialise.

One by one the juniors got up to construe. As a rule, "con" with Ratty meant a gruelling and painful time for his pupils. But this time he passed over the most glaring errors of translation. Obviously, his mind was for once not on the lesson. And, judging by the frequent number of times his eyes turned in the direction of Grundy, the Shell had a shrewd idea what had taken his attention away from the classic beauties of Virgil.

At last it came to Grundy's turn.

"Grundy, pray resume from the point where Talbot stopped!" croaked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir. Would you mind telling me where that was?" asked Grundy coolly.

The Shell gasped again. Surely that nonchalant retort would "fetch" Ratty, if nothing else would!

But this was a morning of surprises for the Shell. Instead of rising in his wrath and devouring the junior who had the "nerve" to admit that he didn't know where they were in the lesson, Mr. Ratcliff remained quietly at his desk and told him.

"Start translating from the sentence beginning 'Non ignara mali,' Grundy."

Grundy glanced carelessly at his book, then put it down on his desk again.

"Sorry, sir. Can't be done!" he said briefly.

"C-c-can't be done?" breathed Mr. Ratcliff.

"You see, sir, I didn't have time to do any prep last night," explained Grundy.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry involuntarily.

"To tell you the truth, sir, the legal proceedings I'm taking leave me with very little time in the evenings," rattled on Grundy, with the utmost cheerfulness. "Matter of fact, I'm thinking of chucking prep until it's all over."

"G-G-Grundy!" almost wept Mr. Ratcliff.

"So if you don't mind leaving me out of construe this morning I'd be much obliged," finished up Grundy calmly. "It would be a waste of time for me to try to translate stuff I hadn't prepared, wouldn't it?"

Again Mr. Ratcliff seemed to swallow something.

"Very well, Grundy," he said. "You may resume your seat."

The Shell stared at this strange, new Mr. Ratcliff almost incredulously.

"Great pip! Am I dreaming or do I see things?" gasped Monty Lowther.

"What idiot said that the age of miracles was past?" grinned Kangaroo.

Similar remarks were buzzing all round the Form. Something akin to a miracle was undoubtedly happening before their very eyes. The Shell were simply flabbergasted.

As for Grundy, his rugged face was beaming like a full moon. There could be no mistake about the startling change that had taken place in Mr. Ratcliff now, and to George Alfred Grundy it meant only one thing—that the defendant in Grundy's legal action had thrown up the sponge. For the remainder of that lesson Grundy was content to sit at his desk fairly revelling in his own great triumph!



"Come off it, young feller! Yooooop!" As the "chucker-out" grasped him with his horny hands, George Alfred Grundy hit out. But Grundy regretted having done so immediately afterwards, for he was given a decidedly rough passage out of the solicitor's office. (See Chapter 16.)

CHAPTER 14. Grundy's Triumph!

GRUNDY was the cynosure of all eyes during morning break. The news of the amazing events that had taken place in the Shell-room spread through the other Forms like wildfire, and caused general astonishment. Grundy's unheard-of behaviour in instructing a solicitor to proceed against a master was in itself sensational enough. Ratty's apparent surrender was more sensational still.

The Shell juniors, who had seen for themselves Ratty's changed attitude towards his legal opponent, began to wonder whether Grundy's recourse to the law might, after all, turn out to be something more than a good joke. Respect for Grundy grew rapidly, as the impression that it might succeed began to gain ground.

The juniors quite looked forward to the second session in the Form-room, wondering whether Mr. Ratcliff could possibly continue in the way he had begun. They were not disappointed. Mr. Ratcliff returned from break with precisely the same new mode of conduct as he had adopted for the first half of the morning. Grundy was treated with respect—almost with deference. And the Shell marvelled.

Half-way through the lesson Grundy stood up.

"Well, Grundy?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, in the mild tone that still sounded so strangely in the ears of the Shell.

"Sorry to interrupt the lesson, sir," said Grundy. "If you don't mind I want to cut off for ten minutes or so."

"You—you want to absent yourself from the Form-room, Grundy?"

Grundy nodded.

"It's in connection with the action I'm bringing against you, sir. I've just thought of something. I want to tell my solicitor."

A sickly pallor spread over Mr. Ratcliff's dyspeptic countenance.

"G-Grundy!" he gasped.

"If you'll allow me to use the telephone in Mr. Linton's room I can get on to Mr. Grabbe right away. May I do so, sir?" asked Grundy calmly.

Mr. Ratcliff seemed to sink in his high chair.

"Grundy, my dear boy—"

The Shell almost jumped out of their seats. Never before in all history had Mr. Ratcliff been known to address any junior by a term of endearment. That seemed to be the last straw.

"Is—is it necessary—is it imperative that you should communicate with—with your solicitor?" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Well, it's rather important," said Grundy, frowning.

"If you've any objection—"

"Nunno! Not at all!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "But I am wondering, Grundy, whether it is essential that you should continue to pursue the course of action you have taken up—"

Grundy's expression became rather grim.

"You understand, of course, that my solicitor has his instructions?"

"Ye-es! Exactly, Grundy!"

"Well, I'm not withdrawing those instructions until my demands are met in full," said Grundy grimly. "Mr. Grabbe will inform your solicitor of the details, when he hears from him."

"But—but, my dear Grundy, I beg of you—"

"What!" yelled Grundy. Even he had hardly expected Mr. Ratcliff to start begging of him.

"I implore you not to act too precipitately!" quavered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh crikey!"

"Think of the disastrous consequences that may follow decisions made in haste," implored Mr. Ratcliff.

Grundy recovered himself, and bestowed a very lofty look on the wretched Mr. Ratcliff.

"That's all very well now. But you must admit you've brought all this trouble on yourself," he said severely.

Mr. Ratcliff gulped.

"Possibly I have been a little hasty, my boy—"

"Hasty! I like that!" snorted Grundy.

"Possibly, in the heat of the moment, I have used expressions which I would not ordinarily have used," mumbled Mr. Ratcliff.

"That's a bit better!" nodded Grundy.

"Must you then continue to communicate with this—this solicitor of yours?" asked Mr. Ratcliff almost beseechingly.

"I'm afraid I must," answered Grundy. "Not that I'm hard—far from it! But you went a bit too far to be allowed to crawl out of it so easily as this."

"G-Grundy!"

"It's no good talking, sir," said Grundy, shaking his head. "When you fulfil my terms, then I shall be willing to call off the proceedings. But it will have to be done in a proper business way—that means through our solicitors."

Mr. Ratcliff gasped and nodded.

"So, with your permission, I'll go and use Mr. Linton's phone now," concluded Grundy. And, without waiting for the required permission, he strolled serenely out of the Form-room, leaving the Shell staring after him as though hypnotised, and Mr. Ratcliff making strange noises with his throat.

Grundy was absent nearly twenty minutes, and the lesson was drawing to a close when his hefty frame appeared in the doorway again.

During his absence, Mr. Ratcliff had recovered some of his old spirits, and had begun to wake up the Shell with a few "impots" and detentions. As Grundy came back into the Form-room, he was just about to cane Wilkins for some petty misdemeanour.

George Alfred Grundy frowned.

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

Mr. Ratcliff started, and turned round.

"You—you have returned Grundy?"

Grundy nodded.

"I have. And not too soon by the look of things! Why are you caning Wilkins?"

Mr. Ratcliff's face went through several rapid and startling changes of colour.

"Er—really, Grundy—"

"I should have thought your experience with me would have taught you a lesson. Apparently it hasn't!" snorted Grundy. "What do you think you're doing, caning a friend of mine?"

"M-m-my dear Grundy—"

"And I don't want any soft sawder, either!" growled Grundy. "If he deserves it, all well and good. But from what I know of you—"

"Grundy!" groaned Mr. Ratcliff.

"You're probably doing this out of spite," finished Grundy.

"I—I—if it is your wish that your friend should be treated leniently on this occasion—" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Well, it is!"

"In that case, Grundy, I will remit Wilkins' punishment," muttered Mr. Ratcliff.

Grundy nodded graciously.

"Good enough! Hook it, Wilky!"

Wilkins tottered back to his desk, and Grundy, after bestowing a warning look on the half-paralysed Mr. Ratcliff, followed him.

The humiliated Mr. Ratcliff, in a state of mind bordering on frenzy, simply fled from the room at the sound of the bell for dismissal. As he did so the Shell rose to a man and almost overwhelmed Grundy.

"Good old Grundy!"

"Was there ever anyone like him?"

"Never!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but what does it all mean?" gasped Tom Merry. "He's eating out of your hand, old bean!"

"Have you doped him?" demanded Clive.

"Or hypnotised him?" suggested Manners.

"Perhaps Ratty's simply gone mad!" said Kangaroo brightly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy looked round triumphantly.

"Well, perhaps some of you sceptical fatheads will admit now that I was right and you were wrong," he said. "Purely as a result of my action at law—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ratty has become as meek as a giddy lamb. The reason is obvious: he's frightened; he realises only too well now that I've got him in the hollow of my hand!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But the best is still to come," said Grundy, with a grin of anticipation. "Wait till you see his written apology hanging up in the Hall, you men. You'll have something to chortle over then!"

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"Oh, my hat! Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, however it all ends, we can't deny that Grundy has given us the laugh of the term," remarked Tom Merry, wiping the tears of merriment from his eyes. "I call for three cheers for Grundy! Hip, hip, hip—"

And the cheers were given with a right good will. And Grundy left the Form-room looking loftier than ever, and feeling that he deserved well of his country.

CHAPTER 15.

On the Telephone!

MR. RATCLIFF paced the floor of Mr. Linton's room at dinner-time that day like a caged tiger.

The expression on his face was also reminiscent of that ferocious animal. Now that he was on his own there was no need for Mr. Ratcliff to disguise his feelings. And had Grundy been able to take a peep into the room he might have been rather disconcerted to see how far from the truth Mr. Ratcliff's Form-room mildness had been.

The temporary master of the Shell was in a difficult position.

Every instinct, every impulse within him, urged him to take Grundy by the scruff of the neck and flog him till he howled for mercy.

But with an action at law hanging like the Sword of Damocles over his head, Mr. Ratcliff found that course impractical. The Head's counsel, in fact, had made it impossible. And now that he found himself alone for the first time since his interview with Dr. Holmes, and had time to ponder over the situation, he could see for himself that further violence against Grundy was for the time being out of the question.

The Head had said that the name of the school must be kept out of the Courts, even though it meant compromising with Grundy. Mr. Ratcliff almost tore his hair at the thought of his impotence. But he could see that the Head was right.

He wondered what could be the nature of a compromise between himself and the Shell junior. The bare thought of it was maddening. But the problem had to be faced.

After some deliberation, Mr. Ratcliff read through Mr. Grabbe's letter again, then picked up the telephone receiver.

"Wayland, one-double-two," he said harshly.

There was an interval—a rather considerable interval—then came a voice from the other end:

"Mr. Grabbe speaking."

Mr. Ratcliff scowled into the receiver.

"I am Mr. Ratcliff—Mr. Ratcliff, of St. James' College."

Mr. Grabbe, in his dingy office at Wayland, sat up and took notice.

"Mr. Ratcliff—ah, of course! You are ringing me with reference to the little matter I am handling for Mr. Grundy?"

"Exactly!" agreed Mr. Ratcliff. "I received your letter this morning, sir—"

"And you are now prepared to inform me the name of the gentleman who will be acting on your behalf, I presume," said Mr. Grabbe smoothly.

Mr. Ratcliff snorted.

"Nothing of the kind, sir! I am not at present proposing to appoint a solicitor at all!"

"Dear me! That is a somewhat unusual course to pursue," remarked Mr. Grabbe, apparently rather surprised. "The matter is of some importance to my client, Mr. Ratcliff."

Mr. Ratcliff, with an effort, checked the biting retort that rose to his lips.

"I—I appreciate that," he managed to say. "Nevertheless, I feel that it may be settled without my seeking legal aid."

"That remains to be seen!" was the unpromising response from the other end. "What is the purpose of your call, may I ask?"

"Your—your client Grundy—"

"Mr. Grundy!" corrected the solicitor.

"Your client, Mr. Grundy," snorted Mr. Ratcliff, "has hinted at the possibility of his withdrawing from further action on certain conditions."

"That is so," assented Mr. Grabbe, winking into the receiver at his end of the wires. "My client takes a very generous attitude over this unfortunate affair—"

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"What!"

"Utter nonsense! Please do not delay this conversation by unnecessary and ridiculous statements about Grundy. To proceed—I wish to ask you on what conditions Grundy is prepared to drop further proceedings."

Mr. Grabbe coughed.

"Mr. Grundy's instructions are that all proceedings will be

terminated on your signing a full and complete apology that he can exhibit to his friends."

Mr. Ratcliff jumped.

"My own view was that the apology should have been inserted in the leading newspapers at your expense," said Mr. Grabbe seriously. "My client, however, in his generosity—"

"Utter nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Ratcliff savagely. "You seriously expect me to sign an apology for Grundy to exhibit to his friends? The idea is ridiculous!"

"The consequences for you may be serious—"

"Preposterous!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "I may say, sir, that had the matter rested entirely with me I should have answered your letter by giving Grundy a sound flogging!"

"My dear sir—" exclaimed Mr. Grabbe, in a shocked voice.

Naturally, Mr. Ratcliff's words sounded considerably more ferocious to the solicitor than they would have sounded if he had known all Mr. Ratcliff knew. Mr. Grabbe, however, had as yet no reason whatever for suspecting that his client was only a schoolboy.

His ignorance on that point was not destined to last much longer. With Mr. Ratcliff's next remark, in fact, Mr. Grabbe's illusions concerning George Alfred Grundy received a severe set-back.

"What state of affairs are we coming to—what is to be the end, I say," thundered Mr. Ratcliff into the telephone receiver, "when an undisciplined schoolboy like Grundy can invoke the aid of the law against his own Form master?"

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Grabbe.

"What satisfaction can you, a member of an honoured profession, obtain out of helping a stupid and refractory junior to undermine authority at a great school like this? Answer me, sir!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

No answer came from the other end. Mr. Grabbe was sitting up in his chair as though electrified. Mr. Ratcliff's unwitting revelation had temporarily taken the wind out of Mr. Grabbe's sails.

"I am waiting!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff, so loudly that Mr. Grabbe hastily shifted the earpiece a few inches from his ear to avoid the risk of being deafened.

"I—I—" Mr. Grabbe pulled himself together.

This new situation had to be faced, somehow. For the sake of such little bit of reputation as he possessed he couldn't admit that he had been hoaxed.

"Pardon, my dear sir," he said. "I am not prepared to discuss generalities. If I might suggest it—"

"Pah!"

"The matter might be ended satisfactorily without our continuing this conversation," said Mr. Grabbe, only too anxious to put up the receiver, now that the startling truth had been revealed to him. "I wish you a very good day, sir!"

"But I haven't finished!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "Hallo! Are you there?"

Mr. Grabbe was not there. At that moment Mr. Grabbe was walking up and down the room, mentally making quite a lot of unkind remarks about the client who had placed him in such a decidedly unprofessional position.

And Mr. Ratcliff, blissfully unaware of the effect of his remarks, was left to slam down the receiver and worry afresh over his unsolved legal difficulties!

CHAPTER 16.

Back to Earth!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY, once more disguised—this time, however, without Monty Lowther's assistance—walked blithely into the office of Mr. Grabbe after school hours that day.

The inky office-boy evidently remembered the loud suit and the slight moustache—indeed, they were not easily forgotten. He jerked his thumb significantly in the direction of Mr. Grabbe's private office.

"E's expecting you!" he announced.

Grundy nodded, and passed through.

Mr. Grabbe met him with a smile that a more observant person than Grundy would have thought had something rather sinister about it. Grundy didn't notice that sinister quality.

"Lovely day!" remarked Grundy genially.

"Glorious!" assented Mr. Grabbe. "Take a seat—er—Mr. Grundy."

"Mr." Grundy sat down.

"You have called, of course, about your—er—proceedings against Mr. Ratcliff," said Mr. Grabbe.

Grundy nodded and grinned.

"I thought I'd let you know how things are going. Everything's O.K.! That letter of yours has made him fairly grovel!"

"Indeed!"

"He's simply eating out of my hand now!" said Grundy, with a relish.

"You have been in communication with Mr. Ratcliff, then?"

Grundy started. For the moment he had forgotten that his solicitor was supposed to know nothing about his residing on the same premises as Mr. Ratcliff.

"Hem! I—I happened to run into him, you see!" he replied awkwardly.

"Quite by accident, of course?" said the solicitor, with an irony that was wasted on Grundy just then.

"Well, not exactly," said Grundy truthfully. "Anyway, apart from that, Mr. Grabbe, we've got to have a chew about that apology. From what I can see of it, Ratty—I mean, Mr. Ratcliff—will sign an apology like a lamb, to stop further proceedings."

"You think so?" said Mr. Grabbe, with another sinister smile.

"I'm jolly sure of it! Now look here; I've knocked up the sort of thing I want from him. It's only rough, of course, and I want you to run your eye over it and tell me what you think of it."

"That will be a pleasure!" smiled Mr. Grabbe.

"Here it is, then!"

Grundy proudly produced a sheet of paper, covered with his large scrawl, to say nothing of a large number of blots, and handed it over to his legal representative.

Greatly to his surprise, that legal representative did not peruse it with growing admiration and conclude by warmly congratulating his client on a masterly document.

As a matter of fact, he did not trouble to read it at all.

To Grundy's utter consternation and dismay, he calmly tore the carefully prepared apology into little pieces. After that he deposited the fragments in the wastepaper-basket at the side of his desk.

"That, Mr. Grundy, is what I think of it," he said coldly. Grundy fairly blinked.

"You—you—why, you've torn it up!" he gasped.

"Precisely!"

"I—I— What the dickens do you mean by doing that?" roared Grundy indignantly.

"You asked me for my opinion of the document you have drawn up. I have given it," replied Mr. Grabbe calmly. "If you want my opinion of you yourself—"

"Me?"

"I should say that you are sadly in need of a good thrashing," said Mr. Grabbe.

"What?"

"Furthermore, I feel sorely tempted to give you what you need," added Mr. Grabbe.

"Mad!" said Grundy.

"Eh?"

"Mad as a hatter! Of course you're mad!"

"What?"

"Can't make out why I didn't spot it before," said Grundy. "But then you seemed sane enough when I called here the other day. I suppose you get periodical attacks!"

"You—you—why, you insolent young rascal!" gasped Mr. Grabbe, starting to his feet.

Grundy backed away in alarm.

"Don't you lay hands on me, you blessed lunatic! If you try to, I warn you that I will call the police and have you put under observation!"

"You insulting young sweep!" roared Mr. Grabbe. "Are you insinuating that I am out of my mind?"

"No other explanation, that I can see," said Grundy. "If you're not potty, why did you tear up that paper I gave you?"

"Because, my dear Grundy, I have decided to wash my hands of you!" answered Mr. Grabbe. "I am not in the habit of dealing with clients who come to me disguised in theatrical suits and a false moustache—"

"Oh crikey!" exclaimed Grundy.

"And, in any case, I should be unable, even if I felt like it, to conduct a case on behalf of a minor."

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

All Grundy's indignation oozed away as the full meaning of Mr. Grabbe's words penetrated his intellect. He stared at his quondam legal adviser in blank astonishment and dismay.

"How the merry thump—" he gasped.

"How did I learn the truth? That, Master Grundy, has no particular bearing on the matter. I have done so, providentially, before I have placed myself in the very unpleasant position I should have otherwise arrived at."

"Well, if this isn't the limit!" said Grundy, in dismay. "Mean to say, then, that you're not going on with the case now?"

"I am not. But if I can assist Mr. Ratcliff in any way—by helping him to thrash you, for instance—I shall be very happy to do so," said Mr. Grabbe. "By the way, Master Grundy, your moustache seems to have become loose!"

Grundy tore off the false moustache, with an angry snort, and threw it into the wastepaper-basket on top of his demolished apology.

"Then it's no good arguing about it?"

"No good whatever," said Mr. Grabbe. "So far as I am concerned the case is wiped out. There is only one matter—"

"Well, what's that?" growled Grundy.

"The balance of my fee has yet to be paid," answered Mr. Grabbe, rather grimly.

"Your what?" yelled Grundy.

"My fee, Master Grundy. This case has wasted a considerable amount of my very valuable time."

"But I've already paid you a fiver!"

"That, my dear Grundy, was merely a deposit on account," explained the solicitor firmly. "My fee amounts in all to seven guineas—"

"The balance outstanding is therefore two pounds seven shillings. I shall expect you to settle that balance before you leave my office."

Grundy's rugged face went pink and then red.

"Two pounds seven—on top of the fiver I've given you already! Why, you rotten swindler!"

"What—what—"

"Think I'm going to give you a penny, after the rotten way you've treated me? Not likely!" roared Grundy. "Of all the rotten sharks—"

"Sharks!" said Mr. Grabbe, with a very unpleasant look. "Do I understand that you are calling me a shark?"

"So you jolly well are a shark. Look here—"

But Mr. Grabbe had finished talking to Grundy. That opprobrious epithet had apparently been too much for the solicitor. He bent over his desk and pressed a bell-push.

"Send Higgins!" he snapped, as the inky office-boy pushed his head round the door.

"Yessir!"

And a minute later Higgins arrived—Higgins being apparently a janitor, or doorkeeper, attached to the building.

Mr. Grabbe indicated Grundy with a nod.

"Conduct this young gentleman off the premises, Higgins!" he said.

Higgins spat on his hands and reached out. A moment later Grundy felt himself jerked off his feet.

Grundy gave a roar.

"Keep your maulers off me! If you touch me—"

"Come along, young feller!" said Higgins.

"I warn you I'll bash you!"

"Come off it, young feller! Yoooooop!"

Grundy had fulfilled his threat. But Grundy rather regretted having done so immediately afterwards, for Higgins' horny hands gave the hero of the Shell a decidedly rough passage out of the office of Mr. Grabbe, after that. Grundy struggled furiously. But his captor, who was evidently experienced in this kind of work, transported him without difficulty through Mr. Grabbe's outer office. After that he carted him down the stairs like a sack of coals and hurled him bodily out into the street.

Bump!

Grundy's anatomy and the Wayland High Street came into violent collision. The Wayland High Street apparently won, for Grundy did not risk repeating the collision. And it was an aching and thoroughly disillusioned litigant that crawled into Wayland Station five minutes later, on his way back to St. Jim's.

George Alfred Grundy had come back to earth, in more senses than one!

CHAPTER 17.

The Head Intervenes!

WHILE Grundy's disconcerting interview with Mr. Grabbe was taking place at Wayland, a discussion in which Grundy figured prominently was taking place at St. Jim's.

Mr. Ratcliff had called on the Head some little time after the finish of afternoon classes to acquaint him with the circumstances of his telephone talk with Mr. Grabbe, and to see whether the Head proposed to take any further action.

Dr. Holmes listened gravely to what Mr. Ratcliff had to say.

"The solicitor seemed disinclined to discuss the question of a compromise, then?" he murmured, when Mr. Ratcliff had finished.

"He seemed disinclined to discuss anything, sir. The man was most abrupt; in fact he rang off in the middle of our conversation, before I had a chance to go into the matter in any detail."

"Unfortunate—very unfortunate!" commented the Head. "Nevertheless, I am determined that a way out shall be found. You have been careful in your treatment of Grundy in class, in accordance with my wishes?"

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"I have been very careful indeed," answered Mr. Ratcliff, rather bitterly. "Grundy, I might mention, has taken full advantage of my leniency. His behaviour throughout the day has been execrable!"

Dr. Holmes compressed his lips.

"He is a very difficult boy, Mr. Ratcliff. The type that will never be driven, but can be very easily led."

Mr. Ratcliff sniffed. If it had been left to him to describe Grundy's character, he could have said a lot more than that about it.

"I have found him most intractable, sir," he ventured.

"Very possibly," sighed the Head, rather wearily. "Your experience has been unfortunate, Mr. Ratcliff."

Mr. Ratcliff thought it advisable to turn the discussion into another channel.

"What, if anything, do you propose to do in the matter now, sir?" he asked.

"Well, I think the matter should be placed on a more definite basis," said Dr. Holmes thoughtfully. "Perhaps the best course will be to get in touch with Grundy's uncle on the telephone, and see whether we cannot come to an amicable arrangement."

"I should certainly feel more relieved in mind, sir, if you were able to do that."

"I will telephone Mr. Grundy at once."

The Head picked up the telephone receiver on his desk.

It was a trunk call, and there was a ten minutes' interval before the Head was in touch with Red Gables, Bramleigh. That interval passed slowly and uncomfortably for the two gentlemen who were waiting. The Head was displeased over the unfortunate affair, and he did not hold Mr. Ratcliff altogether blameless. As a consequence, he was not in the mood for conversation, and Mr. Ratcliff, sensing his attitude, felt it best to remain silent also.

The ten minutes passed with scarcely a word between them.

Then, to their relief, the telephone bell buzzed, and Dr. Holmes, picking up the receiver again, found that he was in touch with Bramleigh.

"Is that Mr. Grundy's house? May I speak to Mr. Grundy, then?"

Another interval while Mr. Grundy was called to the phone.

"Is that Mr. Grundy? Dr. Holmes speaking."

Grundy's uncle, at the other end, was surprised.

"Dr. Holmes? From the school? This is unexpected, sir. Has that rascal of a nephew of mine been up to his tricks again?"

The Head coughed. Considering the circumstances, he could not help thinking that Mr. Grundy's tone sounded rather flippant.

"I wish to speak to you, sir, about the legal proceedings which I understand are pending," he said coldly.

"Legal proceedings?" echoed Mr. Grundy blankly.

"It was not originally my intention to communicate with you regarding the matter. I had already decided in my own mind that on your reflection you would abandon them, and I was not desirous of embarrassing you in any way."

"What—what—" came Mr. Grundy's voice blankly, from his Bramleigh home.

"Circumstances have arisen, however, which render imperative an immediate understanding between us, my dear sir," went on the Head, in the same cold tone. "I must confess, Mr. Grundy, that it was an unpleasant surprise to me to discover that you had countenanced the precipitate action that has been taken—"

"Sir!" gasped the wondering Mr. Grundy.

"I should have anticipated that you would in the first place have approached me before taking the rash step you deemed it necessary to take—"

"Dr. Holmes!"

"But all that is by the way. I have to face the unpleasant fact, sir, that you threaten to drag the name of this school into a Court of Law—"

"Bless my soul! Are you suffering from delusions, Dr. Holmes?" exclaimed Grundy's uncle.

Dr. Holmes' eloquence came to a sudden stop.

"Delusions, Mr. Grundy? Did I hear you say delusions?" he gasped.

"I haven't the foggiest notion what you're talking about, my dear sir!" roared Mr. Grundy's hearty voice. "Your mention of legal proceedings is all Greek to me, sir!"

The Head jumped.

"Surely, Mr. Grundy, you are aware of the action with which Mr. Ratcliff, a Housemaster here, has been threatened with?"

"I know nothing about it! Are you dreaming, Dr. Holmes?"

The Head's expression was extraordinary. His assumption that Mr. Grundy must be standing by his nephew had seemed so logical that it had not occurred to him that there could be any doubt about it. But doubt entered his mind

now—doubt that very soon became a conviction that for once his judgment had been at fault.

"M—Mr. Grundy!" he gasped.

"Dr. Holmes!"

"Surely there can be no possibility of a misunderstanding? Mr. Ratcliff has received a letter—a solicitor's letter from—"

"I know nothing whatever about it, sir!"

"A letter threatening an action for slander and assault on the part of your nephew against Mr. Ratcliff—"

There was an exclamation from the other end of the wires.

"Great gad! That young jackanapes—"

"I had naturally assumed that the contemplated action had your support. Your nephew, being a minor, obviously has no standing at Law—"

Dr. Holmes' explanation was interrupted by a loud roar of laughter from Mr. Grundy.

"A practical joke, Dr. Holmes! And something unusual in the way of jokes, by the sound of it! By George! The young rascal—"

Dr. Holmes turned quite pink.

"Then this matter is entirely unknown to you, sir?"

"This is the first I've heard of it, sir. I assure you!"

"Then I apologise, most profoundly, Mr. Grundy. I regret having troubled you unnecessarily."

"Not at all, sir, not at all! I'm sorry to have spoilt the fun, in a way, sir. Don't be too hard on the young rascal, Dr. Holmes!"

"Justice shall be meted out!" snapped the Head, who was in no mood to see the funny side of it. "I bid you good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, Dr. Holmes!" chuckled Mr. Grundy. "That young jackanapes—"

Mr. Grundy's voice ceased abruptly as the Head replaced the receiver.

Dr. Holmes turned to Mr. Ratcliff, who had been listening to the Head in growing amazement, not, however unmixed with relief at the thought that matters seemed to be considerably less serious than he had supposed all that day.

"You got the purport of Mr. Grundy's news?" said the Head grimly.

Mr. Ratcliff nodded.

"The thing is a hoax. In some way, Grundy has inveigled this solicitor into writing the letter, knowing full well that he had no standing at Law."

"Exactly." The Head's frown was portentous. "We need not prolong this discussion on our own. Mr. Ratcliff. Perhaps you would like to see Grundy yourself first, and bring him here later."

"I thank you, sir. I will see Grundy and bring him to you at the earliest possible moment."

And Mr. Ratcliff, looking much brighter than he had looked all day, withdrew.

Grundy's house of cards was rapidly collapsing to the ground!

Chapter 18. No Luck for Grundy.

"GRUNDY!"
"Oh crikey!"

George Alfred Grundy let out a groan of dismay as Mr. Ratcliff's sour voice fell on his ears. Entering the School House, attired still in his "property" suit of clothes, Grundy's one aim had been to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. Certainly, the last person he had wanted to see was Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

But Mr. Ratcliff had been waiting for him in the doorway of the School House. And he fairly chirruped as he saw how Grundy was dressed.

"Grundy! What ever are you wearing? Is it possible, boy?"—Mr. Ratcliff examined Grundy with minute care—"is it possible that you are attired in these extraordinary clothes for felonious purposes?"

Grundy glared. He could tell immediately that Mr. Ratcliff had suffered another change, and his slow intellect was not so slow that he found any difficulty in guessing that something had gone wrong with the works, so to speak, during his absence.

"I—I—" he stuttered.

"You are disguised, boy!" snorted Mr. Ratcliff.

Grundy couldn't very well deny that he was intended to be disguised, though without the moustache the disguise was rather transparent.

"You will accompany me to the Head!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, as Grundy hesitated.

"Oh crumbs! Can't I change first?" asked Grundy, in alarm.

"You may not change, Grundy! Follow me!"

For a moment Grundy looked like rebelling. But after his visit to Mr. Grabbe, he felt, distasteful as the admission was, that the game was up. He followed Mr. Ratcliff.

Monty Lowther detached himself from the group of juniors who had been standing in the doorway.

"Excuse me, sir—"

"I am busy, Lowther!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, but perhaps I may be able to help in this matter. You see, it was owing to me—"

"You share the guilt? Very well! Follow me also!" said Mr. Ratcliff readily. All was grist that came to the New House master's mill just then.

Disillusioned litigant and unhappy japer walked side by side to the Head's study. And never had that apartment seemed so dreadful as it did on this occasion. Even Grundy, in his present mood, felt far from happy at the prospect that lay before him.

Dr. Holmes was looking his sternest as the party entered. He started at the sight of Grundy, and glanced in some surprise at Lowther.

"Lowther? If you wish to see me, my boy, you must return at another time."

Monty Lowther would have been only too glad to avail himself of the offer. But it was up to him to stand by Grundy now that the hour of retribution had come, and Monty Lowther was not one to shirk his responsibilities.

"Lowther admits that he has a share in the guilt, sir," explained Mr. Ratcliff solemnly.

"Oh!"

"You see, sir, it was all my fault, really," said Lowther. "I egged Grundy on to disguise himself, so as to make the solicitor believe he was over twenty-one."

"You jolly well didn't! I thought it all out myself!" exclaimed Grundy warmly. "I admit you made one or two suggestions—"

"Grundy!" boomed the Head.

"Oh! Yes, sir?"

"Pray be silent!"

Grundy lapsed into an indignant silence; and the Head turned to Lowther and proceeded to interrogate him, probably with the idea that his version would be briefer and a good deal more to the point than that of the principal offender.

Within five minutes Dr. Holmes knew all there was to know about Grundy's great action against Mr. Ratcliff, without having to go to Grundy himself for information. Lowther had thought it advisable to make a clean breast of it—and, indeed, it was difficult to see what else there was to do now that they were on the carpet in the Head's study.

The Head was sterner than ever at the end of Lowther's recital. Possibly the time would come when, in the privacy of his own drawing-room, Dr. Holmes would see it in a humorous light. But for the moment he was a wholly awe-inspiring figure.

"You have behaved disgracefully, both of you!" he said sternly.

"If I might explain, sir—" began Grundy.

"I would advise you, Grundy, not to add to your offence by disputing the facts."

"Oh!" said Grundy. And, for once in his life, Grundy decided that discretion was the better part of valour. Grundy did not explain, after all. Instead, he listened with respectful attention to the very severe "wiggling" which the Head then proceeded to give them.

That wiggling was painful enough. But the caning that each of them received afterwards was decidedly more painful than the wiggling.

"You may go!" said the Head after that.

They went. And very little was heard from Grundy and Lowther for the rest of that evening, apart from such unintelligible remarks as "Ow!" and "Yow!"

That was the end of Grundy's great legal battle with Mr. Horace Ratcliff, M.A. Or, at least, it was nearly the end. There was an echo of it on the following morning, when Grundy received a bill for two pounds seven shillings from Mr. Grabbe—a bill which Grundy stoutly declared he would never pay, but which the Head—who took the liberty of opening the letter for Grundy—ordered to be paid immediately. Needless to say, the Head's word "went" in that little matter.

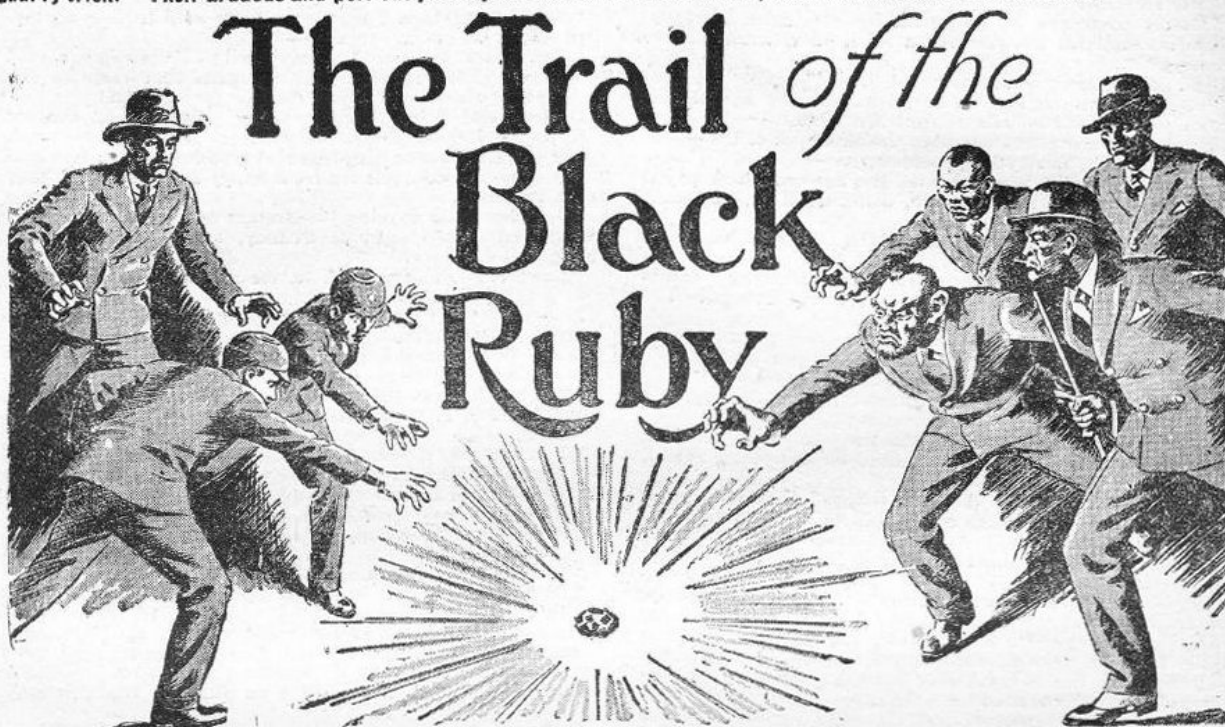
And the second and more important sequel was that Mr. Ratcliff came into his own again. With all fear of legal proceedings banished from his heart, Ratty had a thoroughly enjoyable time with Grundy during the remainder of his tenure of the office of Shell Form master. And by the time Mr. Linton came back the New House master had made Grundy more than sorry that the notion of going to Law with Mr. Ratcliff ever entered his head!

THE END.

(If you want a real good laugh, chums, make sure you read "GEORGE'S AUNT!" next week's screamingly funny story of Tom Merry & Co. As this is one of the finest yarns Martin Clifford has written, all "Gemites" should make a point of ordering their copy WELL IN ADVANCE.)

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INTRODUCTION.

Trailed across two continents by a gang of cunning crooks, Steve Barrett, in possession of a Black Ruby, eventually reaches England. With the aid of this Black Ruby, Steve has hopes of making his fortune, for the ruby is the key to a claim of land in Stony Gorge, Queensland, rich in precious stones. The crooks, however, succeed in gaining possession of the Black Ruby and make good their escape. Steve enlists the services of Bob Crompton and Syd Dyson, two plucky, athletic fellows, with whom he sets off in a wild dash south on the trail of the Black Ruby. After a series of exciting adventures, the chums retrieve the precious stone and board the Maharajah, bound for Australia. Sweetman and his gang also get aboard, but their efforts to regain the coveted jewel prove of little avail, for the chums jump ship when nearing Perth and reach shore under cover of darkness. Later, they are waylaid by a gang of toughs in the pay of Sweetman. Although Steve is wounded in the fierce fight which ensues, the chums succeed in foiling the enemy. After weeks of trekking across the terrible expanse of arid desert, the trio meet Gentleman Jack, a strange man of the bush, who leads them to Stony Gorge where early the next morning they again encounter Sweetman's toughs. Under the leadership of Gentleman Jack, Syd and Bob hold the crooks at bay, while Steve gallops away in the direction of Stonyville to register his claim.

(Now read on.)

A Gamble!

It was eerie in the darkness, firing at nothing in particular, and hearing the wicked whine of bullets in the blackness, humming overhead, or suddenly coming out of the night to splatter on the rocks near by. But gradually the first faint streaks of dawn tinged the sky in the east. For a time the shadows grew darker behind the light, but as the sun rose so the shadows were dispersed.

The change was so gradual that some of Karl Sweetman's crooks who surrounded the camp on the mountain-side were careless. Bob got a glimpse of one man who thought a rock concealed him, but his shoulder and left arm were plainly visible.

Crack! Bob's rifle spoke, and the man yelped and disappeared.

"Good for you, chum!" grinned Gentleman Jack. "That's one less!"

"And if that chap shows himself again there'll be two less," growled Syd. "I saw half his body just—"

Crack!

"Got him!" grunted Syd.

Gentleman Jack let fly, and a third crook yelped.

"Bloodthirsty wretches, aren't we?" grinned Gentleman Jack.

"Don't agree," said Bob. "If we don't shoot them they'll shoot us. Otherwise I wouldn't do it. But I wish Steve would come back. Can't hold 'em off all day."

"Three hours' ride each way to Stonyville," said Gentleman Jack, frowning. "Got to keep 'em at bay for some time yet."

"But ammo is running short," said Syd curtly.

"Then make every bullet count!" rasped Gentleman Jack.

That was good advice, and they acted on it. The crooks showered lead on the little camp, but the chums reserved their fire, only shooting when a crook was incautious enough to make a billet for a bullet.

But the sun began to climb the sky, and the higher it rose the hotter was the gorge. The burning rays of the sun seemed to be trapped in that natural basin. The chums panted and thirsted. The hot air was heavy with gunpowder fumes. The bullets of the crooks spat dust in their faces.

And the irregular fire of the chums put heart into the crooks. They began to creep forward from rock to rock, advancing all the time, and getting within easier and closer range. Their bullets came nearer. Bob lost his hat. Gentleman Jack was nicked on the arm—a slight flesh wound. A bullet ricocheted from a rock beside Syd, and a splinter of stone cut his cheek.

Grimly Gentleman Jack drew his great clasp-knife and laid the gleaming blade close to his hand, ready for emergencies.

"Steve ought to be here soon!" he growled. "But if he doesn't come we go down fighting, chums."

Syd and Bob nodded. There was no need to say anything.

Bob got a glimpse of Ah Wong and let fly. The Chink squealed, and Bob grinned. Syd got Bully Mahon in the shoulder. But the crooks and their reinforcements were, slowly and surely, coming nearer—nearer—

There was system and method in the advance of the crooks and their army of toughs. From rock to rock they advanced, taking advantage of the fact that the pals were running short of ammunition and their fire had ceased at intervals.

Gentleman Jack gazed all round the valley. He saw slouch hats everywhere. He could have drilled many of them quite easily, but he dared not waste the lead, and if he drilled half a dozen—and he had only half a dozen bullets left—he would still be at the mercy of the survivors.

But what he noticed most of all was the way those slouch hats were forming a ring round the tiny camp. From rock to rock crawled the crooks, keeping up a rapid fire on the barricaded camp. Gentleman Jack fingered the haft of his clasp-knife, then, for apparently no reason at all, he sheathed the weapon.

"Won't you be wanting that in a minute?" queried Syd curiously.

"Well, no," grinned Gentleman Jack.

"But they'll rush us in a minute."

"Sure they will, chum. And we're going to surrender."

"I'll see you somewhere first!" snapped Bob. "I'll go down fighting, I will. I haven't hoodwinked Karl Sweetman and his mob all this time to give in meekly at the end of the trail."

Gentleman Jack grinned broader than ever.

"Chums," he said, "I sure like your spirit, and I'm no weakling that way myself. But consider, Steve ought to be back here at any moment. Maybe he'll come in five minutes, with a posse of Rangers behind him. And it won't be much consolation to you if he arrives two minutes after you're dead, will it?"

Syd grinned. Bob looked sheepish. They understood what Gentleman Jack was driving at.

"You intend to gain time?"

"To waste time," said Gentleman Jack. "That's the idea. Call it a gamble, if you like. We'll be rushed

in half a jiffy from the rear. There's an ugly fellow behind that rock there. I could have sent him to glory easily half an hour ago, but I didn't want to. When they come, sling your arms in the air and keep 'em talking as long as you can. Get me?"

The pals nodded and waited. At intervals they let fly at some of the slouch hats, just to keep the crooks on the qui vive, and to hide the fact that they were acting a part. Yet all the time they were fully aware that a party of toughs had crawled round behind the camp and were dangerously close. If that party should choose to shoot to kill, then the trail would end abruptly for the pals. Syd ventured to suggest that would happen, but Gentleman Jack ridiculed the idea.

"Guess again, chum," he said. "I've been watching those guys, and they're sorter puzzled. They've sent messages back to the main party more'n once. They can see plumb in here, and they can't see Steve. If they bump us off they won't know where Steve, and— Here they come!"

A burly man suddenly leapt up on to a rock. He leapt again, across the intervening open space, up on to the rocky parapet that had been hastily formed round the camp. He stood there, a revolver in each hand.

Gentleman Jack and his pals spun round, making out they were terribly amazed.

"Drop yore guns! That's it! All right, mates, they can't sting you! I've got 'em coralled! Walk up!"

The tough's jeering cry brought all his pards—a good hundred of them, at least. Syd reckoned, the sweepings of some mining town. They came from behind rocks and boulders, until the gorge seemed alive. They crowded into the tiny camp and promptly looted all there was to loot; but Ah Wong, a dirty bandage round his forehead, and Bully Mahon, with his arm in a sling, took first look at the pals' baggage, probing everything, searching—always searching—for the Black Ruby, and not finding it.

The toughs stripped Gentleman Jack and the pals of their knives and tied their wrists behind their backs.

(For the concluding chapters of this great adventure serial see next week's GEM.)

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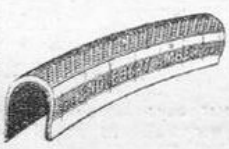
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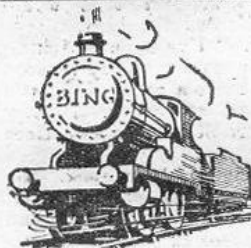
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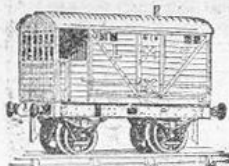
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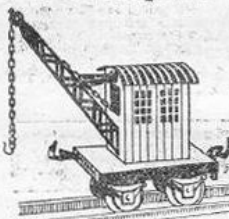
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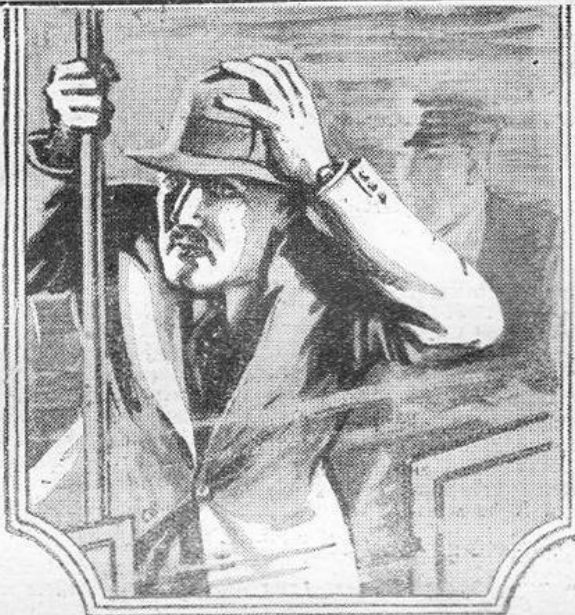
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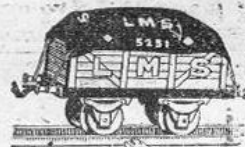
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