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THE GEM 2^d



A LONG, LONG TRAIL!

ROARS OF LAUGHTER! YELLS OF MIRTH!—IN THIS FINE TALE—

Grundy, the

*Damsels in distress please note: Protection provided in best Knight-Er-ant style—
by George Alfred Grundy of St. Jim's!*



CHAPTER 1. Generosity!

"GINGER-BEER and a cream-bun for me!"

"Same for me, Mrs. Murphy!"

"Lemonade and a twopenny jam-tart for me!"

"I say, you chaps—"

"Hallo, Trimble!"

The Terrible Three turned round, and smiled as they sighted Baggy Trimble. The fat youth was seated on a tall stool before the counter of Mrs. Murphy's tuckshop in Rylcombe. His fat face was shiny, jammy, and covered with pastry crumbs. Before him was a plate of tarts and a glass of ginger-beer.

"I say, you chaps—"

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"Nothing doing, Baggy!" grinned Tom Merry. "You've already gorged enough by the look of you!"

"I say—"

"Not a twopenny tart!" said Lowther firmly.

"Nor a ginger-pop!" added Manners.

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"We're not feeding porpoises to-day, old chap!" said Tom Merry.

"But, you silly owls—"

"We're standing for nothing, old fat man!"

"But I don't want you to stand me anything!" howled Baggy indignantly.

"You don't?"

"Of course not! I was going to ask you fellows to have a ginger-pop with me!" said Trimble warmly.

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

Protector!

By
Martin
Clifford



"What?"

"Great pip!"

The Terrible Three stared at Trimble. It was something distinctly unusual, not to say uncommon, for Baggy Trimble to offer to stand anyone anything. He was the most impetuous fellow and the most persistent raiser of loans in the Lower School at St. Jim's.

"You—you want to stand us a ginger-pop?" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes."

"And you've got the cash to do it?"

"Of course!" snorted Trimble, diving a fat hand into a pocket, and exhibiting several silver coins. "What about that?"

"Is it yours?"

"Eh? Oh, yes; of course, you silly owl!" said Trimble crossly. "Look here—"

"Have you been robbing a bank?" exclaimed Tom Merry accusingly.

"Or raiding a post office?" added Manners.

"You silly owls—"

"My hat! I have it, you fellows!" said Lowther, pointing a finger at the indignant Baggy. "He's the Wayland bandit! Baggy's the giddy bag-snatcher! That's how he's got this money!"

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"That's it!" said Tom Merry, as if a great light had broken in upon him. "The very thing! Baggy, you awful scoundrel, are you the wicked bag-snatcher that's been terrorising the neighbourhood lately?"

"Own up, Baggy!"

"Confess here and now—"

"You silly asses!" howled Baggy. "Of course, I'm not! It's my own money—sent by my Uncle George only this morning!"

"If you can prove that—"

"Why should I jolly well have to prove it?" hooted Trimble indignantly. "You know the pater always sends a remittance on a Tuesday—"

"It was from your Uncle George a minute ago!" pointed out Tom.

"I meant to say the pater—I mean, they both sent me some—a quid each!" said Trimble. "Look here, if this is how you thank a chap for standing you grub—"

"All serene, Baggy!" said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "Here's your good health, old fat man! May you never grow fatter; if you do you'll not be able to enter a tuckshop doorway, and that would be a tragedy—for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear, hear!"

The Terrible Three drank Trimble's health with gusto!

"That will be eight-and-sixpence, Master Trimble!" said Mother Murphy grimly.

"Oh crumbs!"

Baggy's beaming face suddenly clouded a trifle. He laid several coins on the counter, and blinked at Mother Murphy.

"That's rather awkward, Mrs. Murphy!" he said. "You see, I've only got six bob. Still, you can put the odd half-crown down to my account!"

Mrs. Murphy's face became frosty.

"I'm sorry, but you know I never allow you credit, Master Trimble! I must have the full money now!" she declared coldly.

"I say, you chaps," said Trimble, with a sniff, "just lend me half-a-crown to pay the old beast—I mean, old lady!"

"Not much!" said Tom Merry. "You fat rotter! You mean to say you haven't enough to pay up?"

"Yes, old chap! Rather awkward, ain't it? Look here, I'll tell you what!" said Trimble, picking up the six shillings before Mrs. Murphy could grab them. "We'll call it a loan. I'll owe you the eight-and-six, and you can settle with Mother Murphy, Tom, old chap!"

"Why, you—you—"

"You needn't pay up now; Mrs. Murphy will allow you credit!" said Baggy cheerily. "That's all right! The fact is I wanted to get a—postal order with this six bob—a very urgent one. I simply must get it! I'll pay you out of my weekly cheque from the pater in the morning!"

And, pocketing the six shillings, Baggy rolled towards the door, munching a last jam-tart as he went.

Tom Merry hooked a firm hand in his collar, and yanked him back like a sack of coke.

"Yarroop! Leggo, you beast!"

"Not much, you fat spoofer! Out with that six bob, Baggy! I'll pay the rest! Goodness knows who that six bob really belongs to!"

"Haven't I told you my Uncle John sent it?" yelled Baggy. "Leggo! I want that six bob, or Knox will—"

"Knox? Why—"

"Nothing! I mean to say I've got an urgent appointment! Leggo!"

"Up-end him, chaps!" snapped Tom.

"Look here—" shrieked Baggy. "I tell you— Oh, all right, I'll settle up, you beasts! Here it is!"

Baggy flung the six shillings on the table, and the chums released him.

"There you are, you awful beasts!" he spluttered. "I'll jolly well never stand you anything else, I can tell you! Of all the rotten ingratitude and ill-mannered— Yow-m-m-mum-mum!"

Trimble's flow of indignation ceased as Lowther jammed a tart over his nose, while Tom Merry rammed a cream-bun down the back of his fat neck. Then Baggy was rushed to the door and scooted out into the street.

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"Baggy's the frozen limit!" growled Tom Merry. "Now I wonder where the fat ass got that six bob from?"

"He said something about Knox!" grinned Lowther.

"So he did. Well it's none of our bizney, anyway!" grunted Tom, frowning. "Let's get off home now, chaps!"

And, having paid Mother Murphy, the Terrible Three finished their refreshments and started back for St. Jim's. Just outside the village they caught up with Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth. The four chums were laughing.

"Hallo, you fellows, what's the joke?" demanded Lowther.

"Trimble!" said Blake, with a chuckle. "He's been trying to get a loan from us—wanted six bob for some reason or other!"

"Matter of life and death, from all accounts!" said Digby.

"You didn't lend him anything?" asked Tom.

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, you born idiots! The fat rotter's just gorged about seven bobs' worth of grub!"

"My dear man, don't jump to conclusions!" smiled Blake. "We didn't lend him any cash—only our boots! To escape further loans, Baggy started for St. Jim's at about fifty miles an hour. He should be half-way there by now!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's where you're wrong," smiled Tom Merry, "for there he is now—in front! I say, what is the fat ass up to? Keep out of sight, chaps!"

The juniors obeyed and dodged back into the green foliage. At the moment they were taking the short cut through the woods and on the path ahead of them was Baggy Trimble.

Obviously he was up to something.

After glancing about him cautiously, the fat junior suddenly dived into the trees by the side of the woodland path.

"Come on!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We'll see what the game is!"

And they crept forward to see what the wangler of St. Jim's was up to now!

CHAPTER 2.

Spoof—And the Reality!

KNOWING Baggy Trimble as they did, Tom Merry & Co. were ready for almost anything. But they were not quite prepared for what they saw.

The wangler of the Fourth had halted in a leafy glade. They peered through the intervening foliage just in time to see him get a handful of mud and rub it over his face.

"What the thump—" breathed Blake.

They stared as if transfixed.

Having rubbed mud liberally over his fat, jammy face, Baggy took his cap off and ruffled his hair until it stood almost on end.

This done, he rolled in the grass, obviously to rumple his clothes. Then he tore his soft collar and his tie free from their moorings and turned all his pockets inside out, leaving them thus.

After that, he unbuttoned his lounge jacket and waistcoat, chuckled loudly, and left the clearing.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Tom Merry. "What on earth is the fat chump up to this time?"

"Vewy vemarkable, deab boys!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wondah—Bai Jove! I weally do twust the fellow has not gone off his wockah, you know!"

"No fear! He could scarcely be a bigger ass than he is already!" said Blake reassuringly. "Don't worry about dear old Baggy—he's all there still! But it beats the band!"

"Let's catch him up and see what the game is!" suggested Monty Lowther curiously.

"Good egg!"

They trod cautiously back to the woodland path. Ahead of them they sighted Baggy Trimble. He was limping along in a curiously drunken manner.

"Don't let him know we spotted him!" warned Tom.

They soon caught up the fat junior.

He turned and eyed them woefully as they came up to him.

"Ow, ow, ow! Grocogh!" he groaned. "Ow, ow, ow! Grocogh!"

He swayed very artistically, and leaned against a tree-trunk and closed his eyes.

"What's the matter, Baggy?" exclaimed Tom, winking at his chums. "Poor old chap! What's happened to you now? You look half-dead!"

"More than half-dead!" assented Lowther sympathetically. "Been run over by a motor-bus?"

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"Has a tree fallen on you, old fellow?"

"Ow, ow, ow!" groaned Trimble faintly. "Has—has he gone?"

"Eh? Who gone?"

"The bandit!" mumbled Baggy, holding his head. "Ow, ow! It was awful! I—I did my best, but they were too many for me!"

"Who were?"

"The bandits! The bag-snatchers!" groaned Baggy. "Three of them—huge, hulking brutes wearing black masks! Ow, ow, ow!"

"Bai Jove!"

Baggy's acting was superb. Had Tom Merry & Co. not witnessed that strange scene in the glade, they would certainly have been greatly disturbed and sympathetic with the fat youth.

As it was, they winked at each other, wondering not a little what was coming next.

"They soon knew, however."

"Ow, ow, ow!" groaned Trimble. "I—I shall be all right soon, you fellows! One of them caught me a fearful blow on the head—with his clubbed automatic, you know! I should have captured all three but for that, armed with knives as they were."

"Bai Jove! Twimble—"

"I did my best, of course—I didn't forget that I was a St. Jim's chap!" murmured Baggy feebly. "I fought like a tiger—knocked two of them down when the third brute crept up behind and sent me down with a terrible foul blow! Grocogh! I did my best to save Knox's postal order—you fellows are witnesses to that, remember!"

"Eh? What's that?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Knox will be fearfully angry, I expect!" gasped Trimble faintly. "But it can't be helped! I did my best, and no fellow can do more. Mind, you fellows are witnesses! Look at me now! You can see how I must have fought to save Knox's six bob—I mean his postal order for six bob!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry.

He was beginning to understand now.

"Did Knox send you to the village for a six-shilling postal order, then?" he said grimly.

"Ow! Yes! Gave me six-and-six and told me to keep the change out of the odd sixpence, the mean beast! Ow, ow! Well, it serves him right, doesn't it? Now that awful bandit—I mean those fearful bandits—four of them there were, you know—have got his six bob!"

"Bai Jove! You—your feahful fibbah, Twimble!"

"Oh, really, D'Arcy!" said Trimble, blinking reproachfully at the shocked Arthur Augustus. "That's rather thick—after a fellow's escaped with his life! If you doubt my word—"

"Doubt his word!" spluttered Monty Lowther. "Oh, ye gods! Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums roared—they could not help it. They understood what the "game" was now. Trimble, instead of buying the postal order, had spent the six shillings in Mother Murphy's. No wonder he was anxious to borrow six bob from someone. Knox was not a fellow to swallow Trimble's yarns.

Now, fearful of trouble with Knox of the Sixth, Baggy was trying on this wangle—pretending he had been robbed by bandits.

"Well, you awful fibber!" gasped Tom. "You think Knox will swallow that yarn?"

"Eh? Of course he will!" said Trimble warmly. "I shall call you fellows as witnesses! Mind you explain how I looked—nearly fainting and exhausted after the gruelling fight I had! Don't forget to rub it in what a terrific fight I made against the bandits!"

"Bai Jove! You feahful wottah, Twimble!"

"Oh, really, you are a heartless beast, Gussy!" said Trimble reproachfully. "How would you like to be attacked by ferocious bandits—one fellow against five? I bet you wouldn't have put up such a scrap as I did!"

"You—you—"

"I hope you fellows will tell the truth!" said Trimble. "You know what a beast Knox is—always doubting a fellow's word! He's awfully suspicious—you know that! He might—might think I'd made it all up—that I'd spent his six bob on tuck!"

"Well, my hat!"

"If you fellows tell the truth and back me up, the beast is bound to accept my word! He knows—everybody knows—about the bandit that's terrorising the district!" said Trimble earnestly. "Everybody's talking about it, in fact! Only yesterday another Spalding Hall girl was attacked, and her bag stolen! I think something ought to be done about it—especially now the bandits have started attacking St. Jim's fellows!"

"Trimble—"

"I think I shall ask Railton to let me go into the sunny!"

said Trimble, beginning to groan again. "Ow, ow, ow! I feel awfully ill—simply exhausted after my fearful struggle. Can I lean on your—ow!—arm, Gussy, old fellow?"

"No, you cannot, Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus sternly. "You are a fabwicatin', spoonin' young wascal!"

"Really, Gussy—"

"We shall tell the twuth certainly!" resumed Arthur Augustus. "We shall tell that we saw you wubbin' mud on your face and gettin' weady to play this wotten twick, Twimble!"

"Oh crikey!"

Trimble jumped.

"Yes, we saw you, you fat wangler!" grinned Lowther. "We also know you've spent Knox's six bob on grub, old fat bean!"

"Oh crumbs! I say, you chaps, don't tell Knox—I mean it's all a mistake. You fellows couldn't have seen me because nobody was watching—I know that. Having been robbed by those brutal handits—"

figures struggling just off the path. One was the figure of a schoolgirl; the other was the burly figure of a man or youth in rough clothes, and wearing a black mask.

"Help!" shrieked Trimble.

Trimble's alarm was genuine enough.

The girl was struggling pluckily as the ruffian strove to tear her handbag from her grasp.

"On the ball, you chaps!" yelled Tom Merry. "It's the bag-snatcher!"

CHAPTER 3.

Grundy Helps!

IT was the bag-snatcher right enough—the rascal who had been terrorising the Wayland district of late.

The juniors had heard all about him; the whole neighbourhood was talking of nothing else, in fact. Now they were face to face with the unknown masked bandit, with a good chance of catching him!

The girl was struggling pluckily with the masked ruffian who was trying to snatch her bag. "On the ball, chaps!" yelled Tom Merry. "It's the bag-snatcher!"



"Oh, cheese it, you fat ass!" snorted Tom Merry, frowning. "We shan't give you away to Knox—we're not sneaks!"

"Oh, good! You fellows back me up—"

"But we'll boot you back to St. Jim's for trying to drag us into your rotten tricks! Collar him, chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here—" roared Trimble. "I tell you—Yaroop!" Trimble bolted, just missing Tom Merry's boot as he went.

He fairly flew along the woodland path.

"The—the fat spoofer!" gasped Blake. "He pinched Knox's money, and now wants us to help him wangle out of it!"

"Of course!" said Tom. "We found him in Mother Murphy's feeding his fat face! I guessed then that—Hallo! What's that?"

There was a wild yell from somewhere ahead—a yell in Baggy's well-known tones.

"Help! Help! Bandits! Police! Help!"

"Bai Jove! What—"

"More spoofing!" grinned Lowther.

"I tancy not," said Tom, quite startled. "I heard someone else cry out—sounded like a girl! Quick!"

And he pelted off along the path as hard as he could go. His chums followed him instantly, quite alarmed now. They plunged on, and were scarcely a yard behind him when a turn in the path brought gasps of alarm from them.

The fat figure of Trimble, his face full of alarm, was racing towards them. Beyond him they glimpsed two

Hearing Tom Merry's shout the man gave vent to an oath, and turned to bolt. But Tom was at him like a terrier and, springing on his back, brought the ruffian crashing down amid the ferns.

The next moment Blake and the rest were on the spot, and a furious struggle ensued.

Over and over in the grass and ferns the rascal pulled and fought, kicking and punching viciously. The juniors swarmed over him, determined to capture the cowardly brute.

"Stick to him!" panted Tom, whose nose was streaming red. "Don't let the brute get away!"

"We've got him!" gasped Blake.

But he spoke too soon. For just at that moment Grundy arrived.

Grundy was a fellow with heaps of pluck, and he was a mighty fighting man. Unfortunately he was a terrible fellow for doing the wrong thing at the right time, or for doing the right thing at the wrong time. Though he always meant well, he invariably was a little too zealous and enthusiastic.

He was so now.

He came along the woodland path with his chums, Wilkins and Gunn, and he took in matters at a glance.

"Why it's the rotten bandit!" he yelled. "My hat! Leave the brute to me, you fellows!"

And Grundy rushed in like a bull at a gate.

Tom Merry, Blake, Manners and Lowther had the rascal

pinned to earth; Arthur Augustus, Herries, and Digby hovered round, ready to lend a hand if necessary.

Grundy's rush sent the three latter spinning to right and left, and the Fourth-Former rolling over amidst a chorus of yells.

The masked bandit leaped up, sent Grundy spinning away with a hefty slam under his square chin, and then bolted into the thickets.

"After him!" shrieked Tom Merry, scrambling up in a fury.

"Leave him to me!" roared Grundy. "You clumsy owls! Now he'll get away!"

The chums did not stay to argue with Grundy. They tore after the fleeing ruffian, Grundy, Wilkins and Gunn at their heels.

But it was a hopeless chase. The man had a good start, and he obviously knew the woods well. They glimpsed his form now and again through the trees, but his crashing footsteps died away at last, and he vanished.

They gave it up at last, and returned to where they had left Trimble and the girl.

They had already recognised the girl as Lady Peggy Brooke, their girl chum from Spalding Hall School.

"Yah! You let him get away!" jeered Trimble.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Blake.

"But for Grundy—"

"That born idiot—"

"That blundering goat—"

"Yaas, wathah!" panted Gussy.

"Hallo! Here he is!"

Grundy came charging back, his rugged features wearing an expression of disgust.

"Well, you hopeless duffers!" he exploded.

"What? Why—"

"You blundering duds!" bawled Grundy. "If you'd left him to me as I told you I should have landed him; now he's got away."

"Well, my hat!" spluttered Tom Merry. "Of all the cheek! We'd already nabbed him, Grundy! If you hadn't chipped in—"

"Rot! I like that!" said Grundy warmly. "You let him get away—made no effort to stop the brute! If you'd left him to me—"

"Why, you—you—"

Tom held himself with an effort, though both he and his chums would dearly have liked to fall on Grundy and smite him hip and thigh. But Lady Peggy was present still, and they choked down their wrath.

"He got away, then?" said the girl breathlessly.

"Yes."

"Hard lines!" said Lady Peggy, grinning cheerfully at the juniors now. "I gave him one on the nose myself!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I wasn't going to let him yank off my bag without a fight!" said the girl sturdily. "No fear! He was hiding in the bushes there, and jumped out at me! You'd have collared him, but for Grundy!"

Grundy blinked at her.

"Why—what—well, I like that, Miss Peggy!" he gasped. "Look here—"

"Too painful!" said Lady Peggy sweetly. "Wear a mask like the bandit, and then I will! I say, don't you fellows let this get out for goodness' sake! If Miss Finch hears about it she'll insist on us girls having a giddy escort, or else she'll keep us indoors altogether! She's already talking of doing that! Awful rot! As if we can't look after ourselves!"

"Well, you can't!" snorted Grundy. "You ought to have an escort, Miss Peggy. Look here, Tom Merry, I vote we form a vigilance committee, and place our services at the disposal of these girls!"

Grundy spoke as if the Spalding Hall girls were mere infants, at least. Lady Peggy went red with wrath.

"Eh, what's that?" she gasped.

"It's my idea!" said Grundy modestly. "I thought of it this morning when I heard Miss Doris and one of our mistresses had been robbed by that brute! We'll form a vigilance corps—under my control, of course—and act as escorts for you kids, see? When you want to go anywhere, say the village, just send for one of us chaps to escort you! That's the idea!"

And Grundy smiled at Lady Peggy, evidently expecting praise and approval of his great idea.

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Lady Peggy blinked at him.

"You—you cheeky owl!" she gasped. "Such impudence!"

"Wha—at?"

"As if we were infants, and couldn't take care of ourselves!" spluttered her ladyship wrathfully. "Why, you—you—"

"Look here," said Grundy frowning. "You don't understand! We shan't expect payment or anything like that for our services; they're free. We shall be—well, knight-errants, you know! Just you run along home and tell the girls of my idea. You know me—G. A. Grundy!"

"Yes, we jolly well do know you!" articulated Lady Peggy warmly. "You're the biggest ass—"

She paused, and a sudden mischievous twinkle came to her blue eyes.

"Still, it's not a bad idea, after all!" she resumed thoughtfully. "And you'd be willing to escort any of us?"

"Of course! Just let us know, and we'll be on the job!" said Grundy eagerly. "With that brute knocking around, you girls should be escorted! We'll be your knight-errants, you know!"

"Ripping!" murmured Lady Peggy. "I see the idea, Grundy! I'll tell all the girls, of course!"

"Good!" Grundy nodded, with lofty approval. "Right! And if any of these fellows funk the job, you can always rely on me, Lady Peggy!"

"We'll not forget you, Grundy—don't fear!" said Lady Peggy cheerfully. "We're so—so bucked at your splendid offer! Well, cheerio!"

And Lady Peggy departed on her way with rather a curious glimmer in her eyes. Tom Merry almost fancied she winked at him as she went!

"You silly owl!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Those girls aren't the sort to want anyone to escort them, Grundy! They'll just think it cheek, and be frightfully waxy!"

"But it isn't safe for them!"

"I suppose it isn't!" admitted Tom. "But they won't think so, and I'm jolly sure they'll be waxy at the very idea. You're a cheeky idiot, Grundy!"

"If you call me a cheeky idiot—"

"We jolly well do!" snorted Blake. "And a blundering idiot, too! But for you, we'd have been yanking that bandit merchant off to the lock-up now!"

Grundy spluttered.

"Why, I'll—I'll—"

"Well, get on with it!"

"I jolly well will!" roared Grundy, and he rushed in with whirling fists.

It was just what Tom Merry & Co. wanted. They were hungering to smite Grundy hip and thigh. Now Grundy himself was asking for it.

In a moment Grundy was collared on all sides, and before he even guessed what was happening to him, he found himself upside-down in the midst of a thick, prickly bramble bush.

It was a decidedly painful position, and Grundy roared and roared with wrath and anguish. The more he struggled, however, the more painful he found it.

"Yaroooooo! Rescue! Wilkins, Gunn! Rescue! Help! Why, I'll—"

But Wilkins and Gunn were already out of sight, having anticipated the fact that Grundy might need help, while Tom Merry & Co. walked away, laughing.

CHAPTER 4.

Nothing Doing!

"I SAY, you chaps—"

"Hallo, here's Trimble again!"

"I say—"

"Buzz off, old fat man! We've had enough of you for one evening!"

"But I say—"

"Buzz off!" roared Blake.

Trimble did not obey—though he kept a wary eye on Blake.

The chums found Trimble waiting for them as they came in at the gates, and there was an apprehensive and uneasy expression on his dirty features.

(Continued on page 8.)

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West Hampstead, N.W.6; Fred Humphrey, 38, Brook Street, Colchester, Essex; A. Jessop, 696, Barking Road, Plaistow, E.13; Horace Jones, 41, Tower Street, Hackney, E.8; H. Langford, 3a, Prospect Street, Huddersfield; N. Leach, 147, Carville Road, Byker, Newcastle-on-Tyne; H. Letchford, 15, Chatham Road, Wandsworth Common, S.W.11; E. Little, 167, Wykeham Road, Reading; P. W. Macdonald, 20, Coval Avenue, Chelmsford, Essex; A. McLeod, 37, Wilberforce Road, Walton, Liverpool; T. W. Moss, 70, Wennington Road, Rainham, Essex; J. O'Shaughnessy, 26, Roseland Avenue, Dudley, Worcs.; J. W. Pettinger, 38, Chinley Street, Darnall, Sheffield; Harold Roberts, 9, Grove Place, Ravenhead, St. Helens; S. Semple, Flushing, near Falmouth, Cornwall; Stanley Sheath, 5, Alexandra Street, Ladywood, Birmingham; Robert Short, 17, Stourbridge Grove, Clapton Park, E.5; J. T. Smith, 11, Lawrence Street, Canning Town, E.16; Joseph Stokes, 84, Lennox Street, Lozells, Birmingham; A. Thomas, Maple Grove, Llanbadarn Road, Aberystwyth; D. Turberville, 133, Valden Road, Harnage, Birmingham; Cecil Warwick, Furnace Cottages, Hunsbury Hill, Northampton; A. J. White, 30, Cromwell Avenue, Highgate, N.6; Byron White, 163, Farebrother Street, Grimsby, Lincs.; George Williams, 40, Mozart Street, Lodge Lane, Liverpool.

All Claims must be submitted before Thursday, April 24th, after which date the Gifts claimed will be forwarded and no further claims can be recognised.

"GEM" FREE GIFT REGISTRATION Form.

PLEASE REGISTER MY NAME and address in your Free Gift Scheme.

NAME

ADDRESS

Age

Grundy, The Protector!

Continued from page 7.

If anything Trimble looked more of a wreck than he had done before, and it was clear he had been trying to improve his "evidence." Obviously, the wangler of the fourth intended to see his wangle through somehow.

"I say, you chaps, it's nothing to laugh at!" gasped Trimble. "You know what Knox is! He's such an awful beast! He's an awful liar himself, and so he thinks everybody else—"

"Oh, am I, Trimble?"

"Yarroop!"

Trimble almost leaped out of his skin as a strong hand hooked him by the collar. He fairly yelled as he twisted round and recognised Knox of the Sixth, who happened to be standing in the School House doorway as they mounted the steps.

"So I'm a liar, am I?" remarked Knox pleasantly. "Nice way for a fat little worm to speak of a protect, what?"

"I—I say, Knox, I didn't see you there!"

"You fat little rotter!" said Knox, shaking the fat junior. "Come to my study at six, and I'll give you a little lesson regarding the respect due to protects. And now, what about that postal order?"

"It's—it's gone, Knox!" stuttered Trimble.

"What?"

"Those—those awful bandits have got it!" gasped Trimble, quaking. "Six of them! I stood absolutely no chance, though I fought like a tiger! Ask those chaps! Oh dear! I say, do tell him all about it, Tom Merry—"

"You mean to say you haven't got my postal order, you fat little thief?" bellowed Knox.

"Nunno! You see, those awful bandits—"

"Nor my six bob?"

"Nunno! The bandits— Yarrooooooh!"

Trimble roared with anguish as Knox banged his head against the doorpost.

"So you've spent my six bob on grub and come back with that lying yarn?" gasped Knox furiously. "Take that—and—"

"Hold on, Knox! That's enough!"

It was Kildare, captain of St. Jim's. He came up just in time to prevent Knox banging Trimble's head again.

"What's the matter, Knox?" he asked.

There was no love lost between Knox and Kildare. But Kildare was skipper, and Knox knew better than to defy him.

"I sent this fat little beast to the post office for a six-shilling postal order!" he answered. "He's come back without it—spent the cash on grub, I expect!"

"Trimble!" said Kildare sternly.

"Ow! I say, it was the bandits!" wailed Trimble. "Ask these fellows! I call them as witnesses! Tell him about it, Tom Merry—how I was robbed on the way back by the bandits! Left lying unconscious on the ground! Look at the state I am in! Isn't that proof enough?"

By this time Trimble almost believed his own "whoppers!"

Kildare stared at him, and then stared at Tom Merry & Co., all of whom bore glaring signs of a mighty scrap.

"If Trimble was robbed by footpads, then you can scarcely blame him, Knox!" he remarked hesitantly. "He looks as if he's been through the mill, anyway—so do these fellows! What happened, Merry? Have you had a rumup with the Wayland bandit?"

Tom hesitated. It was not his business to help in Trimble's trickery. On the other hand, he was not likely to sneak on Baggy, and certainly he had no desire to "back up" the hated Knox. Still, he could answer Kildare's question truthfully.

"Yes, we have!" he grinned, nodding. "A big brute wearing a mask! We came to the rescue, and we would have collared the chap if Grundy hadn't chipped in and upset things."

"And he robbed you of Knox's postal order?" demanded Kildare, turning to Baggy.

"Ow! Yes. I fought hard, but it was no good. The brute was too much for me!" gasped Baggy. "How could I help it? These fellows will tell you it wasn't my fault."

Tom Merry & Co. had no intention of telling anything of the sort. They remained silent.

"I don't believe the yarn!" snapped Knox angrily. "These little sweeps are backing Trimble up. They've been retapping among themselves, I suppose!"

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"I believe the yarn, then!" said Kildare calmly. "Everybody knows there's a bag-snatching brute roaming about, and Trimble's just the sort of prey for the brute I can believe Tom Merry, anyway."

"But what about my six bob?" hooted Knox.

"That can't be helped," said Kildare, smiling grimly. "After all, it's not a very great loss, Knox. If you want it back, why not go hunting the bandit?" added the skipper sarcastically.

Knox bit his lip savagely.

"You're bound to stick up for the little beast against me, Kildare!" he growled. "I'll be hanged if I'll—"

"I'm doing nothing of the kind, Knox. If I thought Trimble was lying I'd tan his fat hide, and see that he made the six shillings good," said Kildare.

"I'm going to tan his fat hide, anyway!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Knox! I'm sorry about your money, but it can't be helped. In any case, if you trust your cash to a kid like Trimble, you must take the consequences. Cut off and get yourself cleaned up, Trimble."

Trimble cut off with remarkable celerity. Tom Merry & Co. smiled and walked on. Kildare nodded to Knox and walked away. They left Knox fuming. But it was all he could do; he dare not defy Kildare.

"One in the eye for Knoxy-woxy!" chuckled Lowther.

"A bit thick, all the same," said Tom Merry. "That fat little worm wants a lasting lesson! Still, we couldn't give a Lower School chap away to Knox."

"Wathah not! But—"

There was a "but." Tom Merry & Co. felt they had been tricked by Trimble into supporting his shady trickery. Certainly Trimble was exceedingly obtuse, and knew no better. None the less, they felt he ought to be taught better.

They found him waiting at the top of the stairs. He looked quite cheery.

"He, he, he!" he sniggered. "What price Knoxy, you fellows! Neat, wasn't it? I knew you chaps would have to back me up, you know!"

"And now we're going to do a bit more backing up of a different nature," said Tom grimly. "We couldn't give you away, Baggy, but we can teach you not to drag us into your wangles! Collar him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Bump!

"Yarrooooooop!"

For the next few moments Baggy felt as if he was in the midst of a ferocious earthquake and a savage cyclone. He roared and yelled with anguish, and bitterly did he regret having succumbed to the temptation to spend Knox's six bob. By the time Tom Merry & Co. had done with him he almost wished he had allowed Knox to deal with him instead.

CHAPTER 5.

Awkward Indeed!

"TOM MERRY!"

"Hallo!"

"I want you!"

"Go on wanting, then, old bean!"

And Tom Merry resumed chatting with Lowther and Manners.

It was after dinner the next day—a half-holiday. The Terrible Three were chatting in the Fourth passage, waiting for Blake & Co. There was no match on that afternoon, and they intended to go for a stroll up the river.

It was George Alfred Grundy who had called to Tom, and in Grundy's opinion Tom should have answered smartly, and without delay, and with the meekness and respect due to so great a man as G. A. Grundy.

But Tom merely resumed his chat, not by any means sharing Grundy's opinion of his great importance.

Grundy breathed hard.

"I'm talking to you, Tom Merry!" he snorted. "Can't you answer a fellow?"

"You said you wanted me, old chap—well, you can't have me!"

"You silly owl!" roared Grundy, exasperated. "Look here, I want to know if you've thought it over—that suggestion I made last evening."

"What suggestion?"

"About the Spalding Hall girls, of course," said Grundy warmly. "I've been thinking it over. I think it's a ripping idea. I don't see why there shouldn't be knight-errants in these days as well as in the old days. Chivalry isn't dead—"

"Nor is common-sense, old chap—excepting so far as you are concerned," smiled Tom. "You leave the Spalding Hall girls alone, Grundy. They don't want giddy knight-errants, old bean!"

"What rot! You heard what Lady Peggy said? She said it was a ripping idea, and that she'd tell the girls—"

"Pulling your leg, Grundy!" grinned Tom. "I know Lady Peggy. She's a sport, but she's a bit of a joker as well. You keep off the grass—that's my advice!"

"When I want your advice I'll ask for it," said Grundy disdainfully. "Think I don't know best? Rot! Those girls are bound to be terrified of going out of doors after what's happened. It's up to us men to help them at a time like this."

"They don't need any help from us, you footling ass!"

"If you call me a footling ass—" bawled Grundy.

"Oh, run away and play marbles!"

Tom resumed his chat with the grinning Lowther and Manners. Grundy looked as if about to resume the argument with his big fists, when Toby, the School House page, came along. He had a bundle of letters in his hand.

"For you, Master Grundy!" he said.

"Eh? For me—all that lot!" whistled Grundy. "My hat!"

Looking astonished, but rather excited, Grundy took the letters, and tipped Toby, who walked off, grinning. Grundy sniffed at the bundle of letters. A delicate scent came from them. Moreover, they were all in small, neat envelopes, obviously not business communications.

"Well, my only hat!" observed Lowther, also sniffing.

"Are all that pile for you, Grundy?"

"Yes. Rather queer—what? But—"

It was a chorus.

Grundy frowned, and ~~was~~ open another delicately-scented letter. Then he jumped again. This time it was from Doris Levison, asking him to escort her to Merton village that afternoon starting from the stile in Rylcombe Lane at two-fifteen!

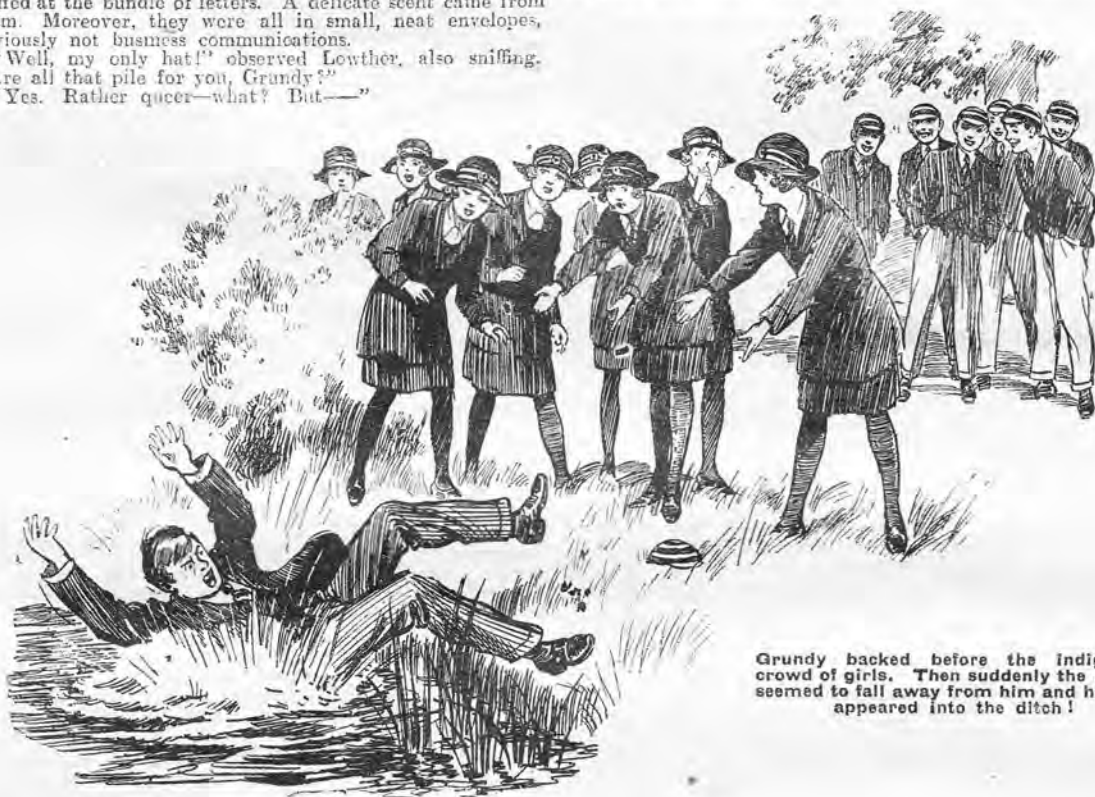
"How thumping awkward!" he remarked, in dismay. "Here's another from Miss Levison, asking me to take her to Melford, also at the same time and place. What the thump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to cackle about!" snorted Grundy. "Look here, some of you fellows will have to lend a hand. I can't let those girls down—you know that! Tom Merry—"

"Absent, sir!" said Tom. "Nothing doing!"

"No fear!" said Lowther. "You'll have to be in three places at once, Grundy; after all, nothing's impossible to a great man like you!"



Grundy backed before the indignant crowd of girls. Then suddenly the earth seemed to fall away from him and he disappeared into the ditch!

"Scented!" breathed Lowther. "How many thumping girls have you, Grundy? This wants looking into!"

"You shut up, Lowther!" snapped Grundy, going red. "You jolly well know I'm not the fellow to hanker after girls! Rot! But—"

He blinked at the letters almost dazedly. They were all addressed to "G. A. Grundy, Esquire, St. Jim's," right enough! Then he tore the first open, and a satisfied smile came over his face.

"It's all right, you fellows," he remarked loftily. "Just what I expected! It's a request from Miss Cleveland for my company—"

"Your company!" yelled Lowther.

"Yes—to escort her to Rylcombe! Miss Peggy's evidently told her of my offer. Good! Now are you fellows satisfied? I knew I'd hit on a ripping idea! Those girls will be jolly glad of an escort like me—what?"

"Well, my hat!"

Grundy tore the second letter open, looking rather curious. Then he jumped.

"That's rather awkward!" he said, frowning.

"What is?" grinned Tom.

"Here's another note, from Lady Peggy herself, asking me to escort her to Wayland this afternoon! Unfortunately, it's at exactly the same time that Miss Cleveland wants me to meet her—two-fifteen. Hm! Rather awkward! I suppose one of you fellows wouldn't mind taking on Miss Cleveland for me—what?"

"No thanks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackling idiots!" said Grundy.

Tucking the opened letters under his arm, he started opening the rest one after another, his rugged features registering greater and greater alarm as he went on. Altogether there were twenty letters, and all of them made an appointment with him for two-fifteen at the stile, and all wanted him to take them to different places!

"There's a mistake somewhere!" said Grundy. "I suppose they've all written without telling each other!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

To Tom Merry & Co., there was no mistake at all. They knew the girls were out to pull Grundy's leg—an easy process at any time. But Grundy never saw that. He frowned and frowned as he reflected on the deep problem of how to be in twenty places at once. The task presented difficulties—even Grundy saw that!

"Frightfully awkward!" he commented, looking up at last. "Look here, you fellows, you'll have to take one each for me!"

"No fear!"

"But I can't take the lot myself!" howled Grundy.

"You'd better meet 'em all and explain the posish, then!" said Tom, wiping his eyes. "After all, you can yank them round dropping each one off, as it were, where they want to be dropped off. Then you can call round and collect 'em again! It may take a long time—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'd better meet them at the stile and explain the difficulty!" snorted Grundy, glaring at the laughing juniors. "Of all the mean, unsportsmanlike, unchivalrous rotters, you chaps take the bun! Perhaps Wilkins and Gunn will lend a hand, though!"

And Grundy hurried away in the hope of getting a few knight-errants together to help him out of the difficulty.

Tom Merry & Co. roared.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Blake, as the Terrible Three explained the joke to him a moment later. "I say we'll turn up at the stile, what? I'll bet it'll be interesting!"

"I think so, too!" assented Tom. "Those girls mean to pay Grundy out for his impudence, I bet!"

"Yaas, watah! Bai Jove! It is aftah two o'clock now! We'd better watch for deah old Gwunday and follow him out!"

"Good egg!"

And that was decided upon. As the chums expected, Grundy got no recruits for his Vigilance Brigade, and when he left St. Jim's to keep his appointment, he left it on his lonely own. Apparently Grundy was the only knight-errant at St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 6.

Too Many for Grundy!

"O H crumbs!" murmured Grundy.

He had just come in sight of the stile in Rylcombe Lane.

Half a dozen girls were standing there together—obviously waiting for their knight-errant!

As he sighted them several more came down the lane from the direction of Spalding Hall, and halted at the stile.

Grundy paused.

It was, as he had stated, frightfully awkward. He had made the offer, and the girls had accepted it. Certainly he had not expected them to accept it on a wholesale scale. He would have to explain matters to them.

Though he paused, George Alfred was not the fellow to back out now; he had no intention of letting the defenceless females down like that!

Still, he paused. A ripple of musical laughter came to him from the stile. Apparently the girls had discovered the awkwardness of the situation, and were amused thereby.

Grundy gritted his teeth as he reflected on the meanness and lack of chivalry shown by his schoolfellows.

There were footsteps behind him, and Tom Merry & Co., with a score of other Lower School men, came along, all of them smiling.

"Go it, Grundy!" called Tom Merry. "Don't keep the girls waiting!"

"Rats!" snorted Grundy. "Look here, if you fellows aren't going to lend a hand——"

"Not to-day, old man!"

"Watah not, Gwunday!"

"Then sheer off, you cackling dummies!" hissed Grundy. Feeling very self-conscious, Grundy approached the stile and raised his cap. He was sighted at once, and there was a chorus of cheery voices.

"Here he is!"

"Here's our knight-errant! Good!"

Grundy wiped the perspiration from his forehead and adjusted his tie. Before he could speak he was surrounded by smiling faces and bright mischievous eyes.

"Take me, Grundy!"

"I was here first, Grundy! Take me to Wayland!"

"No; me, Peggy! I want him to take me to Rylcombe!"

"No; me, Maud——"

"No; me——"

"Oh crumbs!"

Hot and bothered, Grundy backed and backed, but the girls pressed closer until he was surrounded on all sides by an excited, clamouring throng, all pressing their claims in eager voices. Other girls came along and joined the crowd until Grundy scarcely knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

In some mysterious manner his cap vanished from his head, and then also in some mysterious manner he found himself seated in the dusty roadway.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

Grundy scrambled up, his rugged features crimson with dismay.

"Hold on!" he gasped, trying to make himself heard above the babel of musical voices. "Look here—it's all a mistake! I can't take the lot of you!"

"But you can take me——"

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"No; me, Doris——"

"No; me, Grundy! I was here——"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Grundy. He raised his voice desperately. "Look here, one at a time—let a fellow explain!" he shrieked. "How can I take the lot of you? It's all a mistake—I can't take you——"

"What? He says he can't take us, after all!" said Lady Peggy, facing Grundy with sudden indignation. "So you mean to leave us to the mercy of that bandit——"

"Oh dear! Do listen——"

"It's all a swizz, girls!" called Lady Peggy, with apparent warmth. "Grundy's brought us here all for nothing! Well, of all the mean bounders!"

"You mean thing, Grundy!"

"Well, the rotter!"

"Look here—do listen——" shrieked Grundy.

He backed and backed before the indignant swarm of girls. Then suddenly the earth seemed to fall away from him and he disappeared from the sight of the hilarious Tom Merry & Co.

Grundy had backed a little too far—into the ditch!

Splash!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fortunately there was only a foot of water in the ditch, but Grundy found it very wet and cold, and he howled.

He scrambled out, and by the time he had done so the girls were vanishing up the lane. But their seeming indignation had gone now. Their almost hysterical laughter reached Grundy's bewildered ears.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crumbs!" panted Grundy. "Ow, ow, ow! I do believe the blessed girls were pulling my leg all the time!"

"What a low, suspicious mind Grundy has!" choked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling rotters!" gasped Grundy.

He looked down at himself in dismay. His clothes were wet and caked with mud. He found his cap at last and jammed it on his ruffled head, and then he glared round at the laughing St. Jim's juniors.

"Serves you jolly well right, Grundy!" laughed Tom Merry. "You might have known those girls would object to being treated as infants."

"Why, you—you——" Grundy choked. Then he made a blind rush at the laughing juniors.

They scattered, but Monty Lowther was not quite smart enough. Grundy overtook him in a couple of strides, and the next moment they were waltzing about in the roadway, locked together in a deadly embrace.

"Help!" roared Lowther, as Grundy punched away at him, getting his head in chancery at once. "Help! Lend a hand, you idiots! Yoooop! Stoppit!"

Lowther's shrieks of laughter had changed to shrieks of anguish as Grundy's fist connected again and again with his features.

He broke free at last. But the raging Grundy collared him again instantly, and after waltzing about for another few seconds they both vanished into the ditch—the second time for Grundy!

Splash!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry and the rest.

Somehow Lowther managed to scramble out first, and his chums surrounded him, presenting a united front to Grundy as that enraged junior scrambled from the ditch.

Grundy rushed at them undaunted, but he was sent rolling back again immediately. He gave it up then.

"You—you rotters!" he panted. "You wait! I'll—I'll teach you to laugh at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently Tom Merry & Co. did not need any teaching in that respect. Lowther was the only one who did not laugh. He hugged himself and groaned.

"Look at me!" he gasped dimly. "Oh, the raving madman! I'm wet through and smothered in mud! I shall have to go back and change my clothes now!"

"Never mind!" laughed Tom Merry. "I knew those girls had some game on, and Grundy asked for it, if you didn't, old chap! Let's hope it'll be a lesson to him."

"It's nothing to laugh at!" shrieked Lowther. "I'm drenched and shall have to go back and change!"

"Well, it's in a good cause, Monty! We'll wait for you in the bunshop—Mother Murphy's, old chap! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry, Manners and Blake & Co. strolled on towards the village, still laughing, while Lowther followed Grundy dimly to St. Jim's for much-needed repairs. Like Grundy, Monty Lowther could see no humour in the situation at all.

CHAPTER 7.

A Job for Grundy!

"CHEEKY cads!"

George Alfred Grundy came through the gates and paused, a dark frown on his rugged brow.

He had changed his clothes, and was, more or less, in his right mind now. But he was still in a state of towering wrath—wrath that was directed against the cheeky rotters who had dared to laugh at him.

Grundy breathed hard as he glanced down the lane. What should he do now? He might find his chums at Mother Murphy's in the village, and he decided to stroll there rather than waste a precious afternoon doing nothing. He started off down the lane.

Coming towards him was an elderly, prim, and rather severe-looking lady. It was Miss Finch, the headmistress of the Spalding Hall school for girls.

Miss Finch was rather an absent-minded lady, and she halted now, just as if she had suddenly recollected something.

"Good gracious!" she murmured. "How extremely annoying!"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am!" said Grundy, halting and raising his cap.

"I'm afraid I was speaking aloud to myself!" said Miss Finch smiling. "Dear me! One moment, my boy. Do you happen to be going past my school?"

"Yes, ma'am—I'm going to the village!"

"Then I wonder if you will take a message for me!" said Miss Finch, and blinked at him through her spectacles.

"Cheek!" murmured Grundy to himself. Aloud he said: "Yes, Miss Finch!"

"Thank you, my boy! You need not visit the school, perhaps you may meet one of my girls, or a mistress. Would you be good enough to say you have seen me, and that I wish someone to meet the new girl at Rylcombe Station—to meet the four-twenty London express?"

"Certainly, Miss Finch!"

"I quite forgot to leave instructions for her to be met!" said Miss Finch, frowning. "And with this terrible foot-pad roaming about it is more than ever necessary that new girls in particular should be met and escorted to the school."

"Absolutely, ma'am!" agreed Grundy. "It isn't safe for any girls to be out unescorted, in fact; that's my opinion!"

"I am afraid I must agree with you, my boy! However, I am taking tea with Mrs. Holmes this afternoon, and do not wish to have to return home to see to the matter. If you will be good enough—"

"Leave it to me, ma'am!" said Grundy cheerfully. "In fact," he added, as the bright idea came to him. "I can meet the girl myself for that matter, and take her along to Spalding Hall. I'd be sorry for the bandit who attacked anyone I was escorting!"

And Grundy puffed out his chest. Grundy had a very good opinion of himself.

Miss Finch smiled.

"I am quite sure she could not have a more efficient and trustworthy escort!" she exclaimed. "Let me see, your name is Grundy, I think?"

"Yes, ma'am! Grundy of the Shell!"

"Very well, Grundy—you may certainly meet the girl, and it is very considerate of you to make the offer!" said Miss Finch smiling. "Her name is Pamela Trent, and she is about your own age, I should think. But I do not think you can make a mistake—she will be wearing the Spalding Hall colours, of course!"

"Leave it to me, ma'am—"

"Thank you very much, my dear boy! I will mention your kindness to Mrs. Holmes. Remember that the train is the four-twenty London express, and be very careful that you do not miss her!"

And with a nod and a smile, the headmistress of the girls' school trotted on towards the Head's private entrance.

Grundy smiled his satisfaction. It was just the sort of job he had wanted—a chance to show that there was at least one fellow of St. Jim's who was chivalrous. With that unknown bandit haunting the district, it was certainly not safe for a strange new girl to be left to find her own way to Spalding Hall.

"Oh, good!" said Grundy. "Just the chance I wanted!" And he walked on towards the village, full of the burning zeal of a knight-errant.

As he went, a grinning face appeared round the post of the school gates. It was Lowther's face, and Lowther had happened to emerge from the gates scarcely a dozen yards behind Grundy. Not wanting another scrap with that youth, Lowther had dodged back again round the gate-post, deciding to wait until Grundy had vanished. And thus he had overheard Grundy's conversation with Miss Finch.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Lowther, a glimmer appearing in his eyes. "So dear old Grundy's going to escort a giddy new girl, what? I wonder—My hat!"

A great wheeze came to Lowther in a flash. Lowther was a great practical joker, and a great burning desire for vengeance on Grundy was an added motive now.

"Four-twenty, eh?" he murmured, with a deep chuckle. "Good! Heaps of time to get ready, then! I'll give him punching my chivvy as if it was a punchball! I'll give him knight-errant."

And Lowther turned on his heel and dashed back across the quad.

When he returned about fifteen minutes later he was carrying a big, rusty-looking black leather bag in one hand and a suitcase in the other. The black bag was very big and deep and looked as if it had been in use for many more years than Lowther. Lowther had rooted it out of the box-room, and was very pleased with his find. It had been empty when Lowther found it, but it was not empty now.

Hurrying along Rylcombe Lane, Lowther suddenly dived into the woods lining the lane, and in a little sheltered clearing he opened the black bag and disclosed to view various articles of feminine attire; also a wig and a make-up box.

Hanging a small pocket mirror to the trunk of a near-by tree, Monty got busy without delay.

He was an expert at making-up. Numerous were the difficult impersonations Monty Lowther had carried through successfully, and the impersonation of an unknown girl was a very simple matter indeed to the practical joker of the Shell.

Swiftly and deftly he worked away; he changed into feminine attire, and then he produced the make-up materials, and soon a remarkable transformation had come about.

From a short-haired schoolboy with cheerful face and mischievous eyes, Monty Lowther became a bobbed school-girl, with an equally cheerful face and equally mischievous eyes.

He was satisfied at last.

With a last satisfied look at himself in the glass, Monty packed the make-up box, and hid it in the bushes.

(Continued on next page.)

HIT first and ASK afterward

That's the only way to deal with trouble-hunting redskins, in the opinion of the Rio Kid, Boy Outlaw. He's got himself mixed up in another 100 per cent thrilling adventure this week. Adventure in the heart of a desolate plain, with fiery redskins all round him. Every week in the POPULAR there's a powerful long complete Western Yarn dealing with the adventures of this ex-cowpuncher dare-devil. And if you like stories THAT LIVE, that thrill, then these are the tales you want.



THE
POPULAR
THE FAMOUS SCHOOL STORY PAPER

Every Tuesday. Don't miss this week's issue!

together with his own clothes. Then he grabbed the bags and made tracks for the village.

He knew his chums would be at Mother Murphy's. But there was the chance of running into Grundy, and he did not want that.

He had to get to the station somehow, without Grundy, of all people, seeing him. Yet he wished he could let his chums into the jape.

Luck favoured him in that respect. Scarcely had he reached the village when he sighted Tom Merry, Manners, and Blake & Co. strolling towards him.

"Coming to meet me, I bet!" murmured Lowther, with a chuckle. "Good lads!"

He planted himself in front of his chums. If they failed to see through his disguise then Grundy certainly would.

Tom Merry & Co. halted and stared at him almost rudely. They only saw a pretty, curly-haired schoolgirl, and they only wondered why she had stopped them—though Tom Merry's face looked puzzled.

"Dear old Gussy!" said Lowther, in his ordinary voice. "Great pip!" gasped Tom Merry, glaring into Monty's grinning face. "I do believe—yes, it's—"

"Lowther!" yelled Blake.

"Not at the moment!" chuckled Lowther. "I'm Pamela Trent, a new girl expected at Spalding Hall, and I'm going to be escorted there by a fellow named Grundy! See the wheeze?"

"Bai Jove!" Lowthah, you feabful wuffian—"

"Now don't spoil things, Gussy!" gasped Lowther, in sudden alarm. "Here, keep him off, chaps! I apologise, Gussy, fearfully, old chap. I say, you fellows, such a lark!" he added hurriedly. "Do listen while I explain!"

Even Gussy listened while Lowther explained—for certainly his extraordinary get-up required some explaining. But when he had explained, even Arthur Augustus forgave him and chuckled. And then they escorted him to the station, Tom Merry & Co. remaining outside while "Pamela Trent" went inside to await the arrival of her knight-errant.

CHAPTER 8.

Too Bad!

"HERE he is, Monty!"

"Good! Buzz off, then!" Having warned the daring Lowther, Tom Merry cut off out of the station again and joined his chums outside. Monty Lowther ceased pacing the little station platform and picked up the bags with a bit of a struggle.

The black bag was very heavy now—very heavy indeed; having been filled, ten minutes before, with bricks found in the station goods-yard. The suitcase was filled with bits of coal.

Lowther had all his work cut out to carry them out through the booking office. In the doorway, just as he was emerging into the street outside, he almost barged into Grundy.

"Oh! So sorry!" gasped Lowther, in his feminine voice.

And "Pamela Trent" dropped the heavy black bag, and Grundy howled fiendishly as it lighted on his foot.

"Yarrooop!"

"Sorry!" murmured Lowther again. "Awfully sorry! I wonder if you could direct me to Spalding Hall school, please?" he added, smiling pleasantly in Grundy's red and agonised face. "You see, I'm a new girl and do not know the way!"

"Ow! Oh!" gasped Grundy.

He ceased hugging his toes and smothered the remarks he was about to make. He crimsoned, and his features twisted into something resembling a smile.

"It's—it's all right!" he gasped. "You—you're Miss Pamela Trent, of course?"

"You know my name?" exclaimed Lowther, staring as if surprised. "Yes, that is my name, but—"

"I thought I was early—my watch must be wrong!" mumbled Grundy.

"But who are you? Oh, I see!" said Lowther brightly. "You're the page boy at Spalding Hall!"

"Eh! Me? Nunno! Why—"

"The bootboy, then! Well, it doesn't matter! Please take my luggage. It's rather heavy, I'm afraid, but you look a big, strong boy, and I'll tip you sixpence—"

"Here, I say," objected Grundy, frowning. "I'm not a dash—I mean I'm not a bootboy; I'm Grundy—"

"Son of Mother Grundy, what?"

Grundy gasped, and glared at Tom Merry & Co., who appeared on the scene at that moment, chuckling.

"Here, you kid—sheer off!" he ordered gruffly. "Look here, miss, you're making a mistake. I'm Grundy—"

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"You said that before! Any relation to—"

"I'm Grundy—a fellow from St. Jim's!" gasped Grundy, red in the face now. "St. Jim's is a school near Spalding Hall—a public school. I'm a public school man. Miss Finch asked me—I mean, I asked her—if I could escort you to the school!"

"To St. Jim's? But—"

"Nunno! To Spalding Hall, of course!" gasped Grundy. "Oh crumbs! Shall—shall we get on?"

He grabbed at the bags, and a dismayed expression spread over his face as he felt the weight. But he said nothing, lifted the black bag on to his right shoulder with an effort, and then grasped the suitcase in his left hand.

Together they left the station, Grundy staggering behind his charge under the weight of the bags. Tom Merry & Co. followed on, explosive chuckles escaping them. Grundy looked round.

"Sheer off you rotters!" he hissed, in a stage whisper. "I'll smash you all for this, you see if I don't! Have you no manners, you ill bred cads!"

"No, don't send them away!" objected Lowther sweetly, who had just caught the aside. "Let them come with us by all means. They look such nice boys! I say, I'm awfully hungry! Is it far to the school, Master Sunday?"

"My name's Grundy!" articulated Grundy. "It's about a mile—"

"Then why not call in here for a ginger-beer and some cakes?" suggested Lowther cheerfully. "I'm awfully peckish, you know! Travelling so far—"

"Oh, all right Miss Pamela!" gasped Grundy.

He felt thankful he had plenty of money in his pocket—Grundy, in fact, was always more or less flush with cash. But he scowled as Tom Merry & Co. followed them in and seated themselves. He stared thunderstruck at the new "girl," however, when she calmly ordered Mother Murphy to serve ginger-beer and tarts to the lot of them.

Did she expect him to pay for it all, he wondered? What a nerve the dashed girl had! As for these cads—Grundy glared ferociously at Tom Merry & Co.

They smiled back at him and piled into tarts and ginger-beer.

Grundy sipped his ginger-beer, but ate nothing. "Miss Pamela" chatted brightly to Tom Merry & Co. as she waded through tarts and drank ginger-beer. She ignored Grundy, and that youth seethed inwardly with indignation.

Miss Pamela rose to her feet at last. She had consumed four jam-tarts, two cream-buns, and two ginger-beers.

"That's better!" she announced. "Now where's my—Dear me! I'm afraid I've no money on me, and I haven't the key to my bag. How very unfortunate!"

Tom Merry & Co. smiled, but, ungraciously, they remained silent. There was nothing else for it. Grundy was a very generous youth, and in the ordinary way he would have "stood" the feed and thought nothing of it. But after the way Tom Merry & Co. had treated him—

He glared at those cheery youths, called for the bill, and paid it. Then, heaving up the big bag, he followed Miss Trent from the little shop into the street.

Tom Merry & Co. followed him. They were quite enjoying themselves.

The two bags seemed to get heavier and heavier, especially the one on his shoulder, and Grundy was bent nearly double under their weight as he staggered along.

Miss Pamela walked briskly along in front, while Grundy, his feelings too deep for words, strove desperately to keep up with her.

By the time they were out of the village, Grundy was on the verge of collapse from exhaustion. His face was crimson, and perspiration streamed down his rugged features. Then a belated idea occurred to him.

"I—I say, Miss Trent!" he called desperately. "Hold on! Look here! Lemme get a taxi! I'll run you to the school in a few minutes then!"

Miss Pamela looked round and smiled winningly.

"Of course not," she said in surprise. "I should much prefer to walk, but not through the wood, Sunday. I've been hearing things about this terrible bandit, so I think we will go round by the road."

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Grundy. He knew well enough it was much farther to Spalding Hall by road.

There was nothing for it; he had started this knight-errant job, and he would have to go through with it. His heart sank as he saw the long road winding up hill in front of them.

Grundy had a grievance. Girls should not go about with such heavy luggage; it was absurd. He would not have minded so much if Tom Merry & Co. had not been watching from behind. He could not see them, but he could hear them.

A donkey, grazing peacefully beside the road looked up as Grundy and Miss Pamela approached, and Grundy felt sure that the brute was laughing at him.

And well it might have been. Had Grundy looked behind him just then he would have seen Tom Merry & Co. helpless with laughter in the middle of the road. For the aged black bag was bursting open, and out of the back a large red brick was poking!

A few minutes later Tom and his chums caught up with Miss Pamela and her escort, and a general conversation ensued; Grundy, however, having no breath to spare, did not join in, but lagged a yard or two in the rear.

"It's ripping country round here, you know, Miss Trent," Tom Merry informed her.

"Good! What about a little walk round, then, before we go to the school, boys?" she suggested cheerfully. "I'm not a bit tired!"

"Good idea, Miss Trent!" said Tom Merry. "We'll

For in his sudden confusion Lowther had spoken in his own voice. Moreover, it was clear the girl was surprised at being addressed as "Miss" by a fellow schoolgirl!

"You—you are a Spalding Hall girl, I suppose?" she said, with a faint gasp. "I—I'm a new girl. My name is Pamela Trent. I—"

"Pamela Trent!" almost yelled Grundy.

His eye suddenly fell on the initials on the bag, and he jumped.

"Yes. Why—"

"But you can't be, miss!" articulated Grundy. "This is Miss Pamela Trent, and I was sent to meet her by Miss Finch. I—I—I—"

"Oh, indeed!" said the real Miss Pamela, with a sudden giggle. "I had no idea I had a double at Spalding Hall—especially one who wears a wig, her skirt back to front, a boy's size in boots, and speaks in a boy's voice! How frightfully interesting!"

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT!

By The EDITOR.



THE FLOATING GHOST!

Ever seen a phantom motor-boat? Don't suppose you have. But if you want to read about one, don't miss "The Phantom Motor-Boat!" by Martin Clifford, next week's dramatic, full-of-pep and mystery story of Tom Merry & Co.

This story is guaranteed to raise every hair on your head (unless you're bald) and give you the jim-jams every time the light goes out. Adventure—why there's that in every line, and talk about thrills—ooooh!

Chick Chance & Co., the heroes of our grand serial, are on their way to the greatest experiences of their lives, and in next week's instalment we find them up to the neck in perils. "Chick Chance—Adventurer!" by Robert Murray, is the story of the year!

One last word before I leave you—turn to page 7 once more and get wise to the Great Free Gift Scheme right now.

Cheerio,

THE EDITOR.

take you round by the river and back by Merton; that's only three or four miles. Why, what's the matter, Grundy?"

For Grundy had dropped the bag again with a thump. His patience was exhausted at thoughts of a three-mile walk with that bag.

"I—I've got an awful pain in my hand!" he panted. "Cramp, I think. Will you take the bag for a bit, Tom Merry?"

And Grundy glared almost viciously at the leader of the Shell.

"Sorry!" murmured Tom. "I don't claim to be a knight-errant, old chap! Wouldn't rob you of the honour for worlds, Grundy!"

"Wathah not, Gwunday!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Cawwy on, deah boy!"

"Grundy's such a strong, hefty chap—" Blake was beginning, when he paused as a girl caught them up and halted.

She was rather a hefty girl, and she was a stranger to the juniors. She was not at all pretty, but her face was homely and pleasant, and there was something very attractive about her.

She carried a travelling-rug, and a handbag bearing the printed initials, "P. T."

"Would you mind directing me to Spalding Hall School?" she exclaimed pleasantly, with a glance at Lowther's hat. "I see you are a Spalding Hall girl—"

"Bai Jove!"

Lowther started violently, and flushed crimson under his make-up. He did not need to be told who the pleasant-faced girl was, and he felt her clear eyes boring through him.

"Oh crumbs! Y-ye-es!" he stammered. "Straight along the lane, and take the—the first turning to the left, miss!"

The girl stared harder still at him—as well she might.

"Wha-what?" stuttered Grundy.

He was not a particularly bright youth, but a glimmer of what she meant came to him as he blinked at the suddenly alarmed Lowther.

Tom Merry & Co. looked very unhappy indeed as they met the calm, cold glance of this exceedingly cool young lady. Somehow the jape did not appear so funny to them now. Obviously, Monty Lowther was bowled out. Grundy was staring at him dazedly.

"Then—then who are you?" he gasped.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Lowther.

Tom Merry & Co. wished themselves far away.

"This is very serious, though!" resumed Miss Pamela, becoming very grave. "I fear you are an impostor, and I must call a policeman at once!"

And she looked about her in a very determined manner indeed.

"Im-impostor!" choked Grundy, glaring at Lowther.

"But what—why— Oh!"

Something very familiar in Lowther's dismayed features struck Grundy then—he had already been startled by Monty's voice.

He gave a strangled sort of yell, and grabbed at Lowther's wig.

It came off in his grasp, and he gave a roar as his sudden, overwhelming suspicion was verified at sight of the close-cropped hair.

"Lowther!" he shrieked. "It's that rotter Lowther! I—I might have known it! Oh, you—you rotter!"

Lowther turned to bolt—just too late!

Miss Pamela's determined grasp closed upon him.

"Lowther!" yelled Grundy. "It's all spoo! then! And—and—"

Suddenly sighting the bag, which he had dropped, THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,157.

Grundy fumbled at the fastenings and tore them open. His face went red with rage as he sighted the chunks of coal and the pieces of brick.

"And I've been yanking those about!" he roared furiously. "Oh, you—you—"

Without warning, he smote Lowther full on the nose. He followed this up with a punch that sent the dismayed Lowther to earth with a thump.

The next moment both of them, heedless of Miss Pamela's presence, were rolling over and over, fighting furiously in the dust of the lane.

Miss Pamela looked on, not one whit alarmed. She seemed a very self-possessed young lady indeed.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on, not knowing what else to do.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Lowthah—Gwunday—"

They ignored Arthur Augustus, and went on scrapping for all they were worth. Lowther's skirt hampered him considerably, and he had not Grundy's deep wrath and indignation to aid him.

He howled and yelled to Grundy for mercy; but Grundy was not in the mood to spare him.

Nor did he!

In a matter of moments Lowther was a wreck. But he managed to break free at last, and with one eye bunged up, and his nose streaming red, he tore himself away and fled for his life.

Grundy followed him for fifty yards, and then he came back, breathing hard, but by no means satisfied.

Without hesitation, he went for Tom Merry & Co. with a rush, and those dismayed youths scattered and fled, Tom stopping only long enough to pick up Lowther's suitcase.

They vanished down the lane, and Grundy mopped a heated brow and faced Miss Pamela Trent, who eyed him approvingly.

"Good man!" she commented coolly, with a laugh. "You're a useful boy with your fists, I must say. The impudence of that boy impersonating me like that! But tell me all about it!"

Grundy heaved the bag of bricks into the nearest ditch and told her. She nodded, smiling.

"I understand!" she said sympathetically. "It was jolly decent of you to come to meet me like that. I knew it must be a joke the moment I saw that boy wore a wig and had his skirt on back to front, and—well, I was naturally annoyed at being impersonated like that!"

"It was a rotten trick!" mumbled Grundy, flushing.

"Rotten!" agreed Miss Pamela. "Never mind. You licked him, and I'm glad you did. Do you know, I rather like you, Grundy!"

"D-do you?" gasped Grundy, flushing with pleasure.

"Well, and I like you, Miss Pamela—no end! I think you're a stunner!"

"Not quite so bad as all that!" laughed Miss Trent.

"But I'm glad I've got you to escort me, anyway—especially with footpads about. I shan't be afraid of meeting any after seeing you handle that boy as you did. How nice it is round here!"

"Ripping country!" said Grundy eagerly. "I—I say, if you're not in a hurry to get to school, I—I'll show you round a bit, if you like."

"Rather! I'm not a bit in a hurry, Grundy!" laughed Miss Trent. "Good idea!"

"Ripping!" said Grundy.

And he straightened himself up, grabbed Miss Trent's handbag, and they started off for a walk, Grundy in the seventh heaven of delight.

It was not often that girls enjoyed Grundy's company, good-natured and easy-going as Grundy was. But he found a girl who appreciated his company now, and he was happy. Lowther's great jape had fallen very flat indeed, so far as Grundy himself was concerned.

CHAPTER 9.

Good Old Grundy!

"H E, he, he!" Baggy Trimble came along the Fourth Form passage, almost exploding with merriment.

The Terrible Three were chatting over cricket matters with Blake & Co. and several other fellows, and they stared at Baggy.

"Hallo! What's the joke, Trimble?" demanded Blake.

"Somebody broken his neck?"

"Or going to be flogged?" asked Manners.

Other people's troubles were often subjects of merriment to Trimble of the Fourth!

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"Nunno! He, he, he!" giggled Trimble. "It's old Grundy! He's in love, you know—head over heels! He, he, he!"

"Well, I believe that's true!" chuckled Glyn. "He shoved a spoonful of marmalade in his tea at breakfast, and he told Linton that Pamela Trent won the battle of Bannockburn!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. laughed. They had observed the signs only too well. They had met Grundy and the new girl, Pamela Trent, along the river an hour after Lowther's tragic licking, and they had wondered why he had not scowled at them instead of beaming at them as he had done.

But they soon knew why!

Grundy came striding along the passage, and the juniors fairly blinked at him. Grundy was notoriously careless and slovenly in his dress; but even Arthur Augustus could not have found fault with him now.



In the middle of the narrow lane a burly youth was thrashing a small terrier with a hefty stick. Grundy reached the spot in two strides.

He wore nicely creased and spotless flannel bags, and his boating blazer was new, likewise spotless, and bore a flower in the button-hole. Grundy's hair was plastered down and neatly parted and his white canvas shoes fairly glimmered. In his hand he carried his best straw hat.

"Oh, ye gods!" murmured Lowther. "What a vision! Going courting, Grundy, old chap?"

And Lowther got ready to bolt, fully expecting a rush from George Alfred.

But it did not materialise. Grundy smiled and nodded.

"Don't talk rot, Lowther!" he said, quite affably. "I say, I'm sorry I licked you yesterday, kid!"

"Sus-sus-sorry!" repeated Lowther.

"Yes. I lost my temper, I'm afraid!" said Grundy, nodding. "I didn't think then that your kid's game would prove a jolly good thing!"

"Oh crumbs! Has it proved a good thing?" gasped Lowther. "I didn't think so myself, Grundy," he added, stroking a still-swollen nose. "I can feel that last punch even now, old bean!"

"Well, if it was a lesson to you, I'm glad, too!" assented Grundy, rather loftily. "You kids need keeping in order. Anyway, it was a good thing for me. I shouldn't have got

so chummy with—with a friend, but for you. You did me a good turn, Lowther!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Miss Trent admired the way I handled you kids!" explained Grundy, smiling. "She took a fancy to me at once—looks on me as a sort of knight-errant, you know! Did you notice what a stunner she is?"

"I noticed what a stunner you were!" groaned Lowther. "You jolly nearly stunned me, anyway. Still—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle about!" said Grundy, frowning. "Anyway, mind you fellows keep off the grass where Miss Trent's concerned—see? She's the rippingest



girl I ever met—absolutely a stunner! Just the girl-pal for a chap like me—what?"

And with that enthusiastic eulogy George Alfred walked on cheerily. The yell of laughter that followed him did not trouble Grundy at all. In a state almost of ecstasy the Shell fellow walked to the village and purchased a large box of chocolates. Then he started out for the little foot-bridge in the woods where he had promised to meet Miss Pamela Trent.

"I'm not quite such a ragamuffin as I was yesterday!" he murmured. "I fancy I look rather smart in these togs! Jove, I'll take her up-river, I think; plenty of time before lock-up. I'd like her to see how I handle a boat."

But Grundy's hopes of a pull up-river in Miss Pamela's charming company were doomed—for that evening, at least.

At the moment George Alfred happened to be passing the backs of a row of untidy hovels on the outskirts of Rylcombe. He halted suddenly as a shrill, anguished yelp struck his ears, mingled with the angry voice of a youth.

Grundy moved on quickly, rounded a corner, and came right upon a scene that made his rugged face go hard.

In the middle of the narrow lane a burly youth was standing. In his hand was a hefty stick, with which he was thrashing a small, dingy terrier, which struggled and yelped at the end of a lead held by the youth's free hand.

Grundy gasped and reached the spot in a couple of strides. Then his right shot out, and the youth reeled backwards with an oath, his teeth rattled by that drive under his bristly chin.

"Take that, you rotten brute!" gasped Grundy.

He snatched the lead from the fellow's hand, and the terrier gave a final yelp and vanished round the corner.

It would have been wiser had Grundy likewise vanished, for the fellow was a head taller than he, and an ugly customer into the bargain.

But that was not Grundy's way.

He stood on the defensive, and he had not long to wait. With a furious bellow the youth rushed at him, and next moment they were at it hammer and tongs.

The fellow was in a towering rage. But Grundy was also in a rage. With all his faults George Alfred was a generous, tender-hearted youth, with a love for animals that was only equalled by a hatred of brutality of any kind. The way the youth had been thrashing the little terrier had made his blood boil.

Backwards and forwards the pair trampled and fought, and Grundy very soon realised that he had taken on more than he had bargained for.

Again and again Grundy went crashing down; but he was up again the next moment, game as ever. His legs were getting groggy, and his head sang, and he could scarcely see out of his eyes. But he stuck it grimly, giving almost, if not quite, as good as he received.

In his view he was giving the fellow a well-merited thrashing, and he meant to finish the job. Unfortunately, to the crowd that began to gather, it was only too clear that the gallant Grundy was booked for the thrashing!

Fortunately, Grundy was saved from the worst, however.

There was a sudden yell from a slouching, grubby supporter of Grundy's opponent:

"Look out, Seth—cops!"

The crowd melted away, and almost before Grundy was aware of it he found himself seated on the ground once again, and this time he was alone. Seth—if that was the youth's name—was gone.

Blinking dazedly about him, Grundy sighted a blue uniform approaching leisurely.

It was Police-constable Crump, the Rylcombe policeman, and that worthy fairly stared at George Alfred.

"'Ere, 'ere! What's this mean?" he demanded. "My heye! It's one of the young gents from St. Jim's! You bin fighting with that rascal, Seth Booker, Master Grundy?"

Grundy nodded—it was all he could do at the moment.

"My heye!" said the constable. "Then it's a wonder you ain't a 'ospital case, my lad!"

He helped the hapless Grundy to stagger to his feet, where he stood, swaying drunkenly. He looked a shocking sight—his clothes were torn and dishevelled, his flannel shirt was torn and soiled, likewise his flannel bags, while his face was sadly the worse for wear. Grundy felt good enough—or bad enough—for a hospital case already! He was a wreck.

"I'd have thrashed the brute, though!" he told the policeman huskily. "Ow, ow! He's a good man with his fists, I must say! I feel as if I'd been through a blessed mangle! Ow, ow!"

"I don't know about thrashin' 'im!" commented Crump dryly. "Seth Booker's a tough 'un, and a bad 'un, too! I've 'ad my eye on him for a long time. What's he bin up to now?"

Grundy told him as he dismally adjusted his attire and mopped his nose.

"Humph!" grunted P.-c. Crump disappointedly. "Well, I don't see as 'ow I can get him for that, Master Grundy! Anyway, you steer clear of Seth Booker arter this, my lad! He's a wrong 'un. Never done an honest day's work in 'is life. 'as that rascal—though, if I'm not mistook, he's done many a dishonest night's work. Ho, yes! You get off back to school, and don't come round here no more—that's my tip!"

Grundy nodded, though he was not the fellow to take good advice from anyone. He rammed his hat on, and picked up the box of chocolates, sadly battered and damaged now, having been trampled on more than once during the fight.

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Certainly they were not a suitable present for Miss Pamela now, and, handing the box to an urchin, Grundy staggered on his way dismally.

He was still feeling dizzy, and he was a mass of aches and pains, but he had no intention of neglecting his appointment—far from it. He would be late, of course; but that could not be helped. Miss Trent was a topping girl, and she would understand.

He turned from the lane on to the field-path—and came face to face with Mr. Linton, his Form master.

"Grundy!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, eyeing him in scandalised anger. "What—what—how dare you walk out in such a disreputable state! Good gracious! You have been fighting, sir!"

Grundy could not deny it.

"Never have I known a boy so quarrelsome and so prone to fight on the least provocation!" said Mr. Linton severely. "I am ashamed of you, Grundy—ashamed that you are a member of my Form. I presume you have been quarrelling with a Grammar school boy?"

"I haven't—"

"Not a word!" said Mr. Linton, pointing with his stick. "Return to school without delay—at once, sir!"

Grundy groaned and went—there was nothing else for it. He trailed along behind Mr. Linton. They reached the cross-roads, and Mr. Linton sighted the Terrible Three and Talbot coming from the direction of the village.

He waved his stick to them.

The Four Shell juniors stared blankly at Grundy. When last they had seen him he had been the picture of elegance. Now he was a wreck, battered and bedraggled.

"Yes, sir?" inquired Tom, as they touched their caps.

"You are returning to school, my boys?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very good! You will take charge of this—this rebellious boy, Merry! You will not, on any account, allow him to escape you! He is to return to school at once."

Grundy grunted and scowled.

"You will return with Merry, who will be held responsible for you, Grundy!" snapped the master. "And you are detained for the rest of the evening! You will report to me at six o'clock!"

Mr. Linton gave Grundy a grim look, and walked away towards the village.

"Come on, Grundy!" said Tom, smiling. "What on earth have you been up to?"

"Had a lover's tiff?" inquired Lowther innocently.

"Eh? Don't talk rot!" gasped Grundy, glaring. "Look here! I'm jolly well not coming, and Linton and the lot of you can go to pot!"

"Aven't you?" said Tom. "I think you are, old bean! Mr. Linton holds me responsible for you, and you're coming home, Grundy. But what's happened?"

Grundy told them, fairly seething with rage and dismay. They smiled, but they could not help feeling sympathetic.

"Hard lines!" murmured Tom Merry. "But the course of true love never did run smoothly, old chap! I'm afraid Miss Trent will be no end waxy—Oh, my hat! Here she is, Grundy!"

A girlish figure dropped into the lane from a near-by stile. Grundy groaned as he noted the expression on Miss Trent's face as she sighted him.

She seemed to hesitate. Then she looked him up and down icily, and turned away, with a toss of her head.

"Hold on!" gasped Grundy. "I—I say, Miss Pamela, I—"

Miss Pamela quickened her pace and walked on, vanishing round the corner.

"The marble eye!" grinned Lowther. "You've done it now, Grundy! Alas! Another romance ended!"

CHAPTER 10.

Miss Trent's Ultimatum!

GRUNDY choked.

He could not blame Miss Pamela—far from it. She must have been waiting fully twenty minutes.

Now she found him walking along the lane with his schoolfellows, a dishevelled, disgraceful sight.

But he was not standing it, for all that.

He gave a growl, and jumped to follow her. But Tom and his chums were too quick. They collared him in a flash.

"No, you don't!" grinned Tom. "I'm sorry, old bean; but—"

"Lemme go!" panted Grundy, struggling furiously. "I'm going after her to explain! Oh, you rotters! Lemme go!"

"Not much, old chap! In any case, you're not in a fit

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state to meet a lady, old chap! You'll do more harm than good, Grundy!" said Tom calmly. "Linton's given me my orders, and I'm carrying 'em out! He's made me responsible for you, and I'm not getting it in the neck for you, Grundy!"

"Leggo!" roared Grundy.

He renewed his struggles, and a wild and whirling conflict followed. But they were too many for him, and he found himself on his back at last with the four sitting on him.

"Make it pax, and you can get up!" said Tom.

"I jolly well won't—"

"Be sensible, old chap. You can do what you like when you get to school; but I'm responsible for you now, and you're coming!"

"I'm jolly well not!" roared Grundy. "Leggo!"

"Look here, you'll only make matters worse by seeing her in this awful state!" urged Tom soothingly. "I tell you what—I'll trot on after her now and explain for you. And I'll ask her to meet you again—"

"I tell you—"

Grundy paused. After all, Tom Merry was right; Miss Trent would not be favourably impressed with him in his present state; moreover, she was not in the mood, obviously, at present, to listen to reason and excuses. Even Grundy saw that.

"Right!" he panted. "You—you'll do that, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, if you'll trot off home quietly now. No good getting Linton's wax out more, you know! Only gate you for a month, p'raps, and then you'll never get the chance to see your giddy lady-love!"

"All right!" growled Grundy thickly. "It's a go! You'll explain why I was late—"

"Yes, old chap!"

"And why I'm in this beastly state!"

"Yes, old fruit!" grinned Tom. "Trust me to bring her round!"

And Tom dashed off at top speed after Miss Pamela.

Grundy breathed hard, and accompanied Manners, Lowther, and Talbot back to St. Jim's. There he lost no time in changing his clothes and making himself more presentable—though nothing could disguise a rapidly blackening eye and a swollen nose.

"Still, I gave that brute nearly as good as he gave me!" said Grundy, showing a set of bruised knuckles to Lowther and Manners as he waited for Tom Merry's return. "I knocked one of the brute's teeth out, and altered the shape of his rotten nose, anyway! I should have licked him—Hallo, here's Merry now! Good!"

He looked eagerly at Tom.

"All serene!" said Tom, smiling. "She was in a terrific waxy, and I had all my work cut out to make her listen! She thought you'd forgotten her and come for a giddy walk with us, and been larking. But—"

"And you made it right—"

"I fancy so! She agreed to meet you in the same spot at six to hear your own giddy explanation!"

"Oh, good egg! Then I'm off there right away!"

"What about Linton, though?" asked Tom, frowning.

"Blow Linton! Who's Linton? Hang Linton! Let Linton go to pot!"

And Grundy rushed out, got his cap and tore from the House, for it was already well after five thirty. But it was not Grundy's lucky day. In the gateway he ran into Mr. Linton.

"Grundy!" gasped Mr. Linton. "You—you were going out?"

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Grundy.

He had wild thoughts of dashing past the master; but before he could carry them out Mr. Linton's grasp closed on his arm.

"Come with me!" he gasped. "I gave you strict orders that you were not to leave the school again this evening. I also ordered you to report to me at six, Grundy!"

"I—I—I—" babbled Grundy.

"Come!" thundered the master.

Grundy went, dismal and inwardly seething. Mr. Linton escorted him to his own study, pushed Grundy inside, and locked him in.

"Oh!" gasped Grundy, finding himself alone. "Oh, the— the awful beast! Why, I—I—"

Just then Grundy sighted the open window. Without a second's hesitation he swarmed over the sill and dropped down on to a flower-bed beneath the window.

"I'll show him!" he panted defiantly. "I'll— Oh, my hat!"

He almost yelled as a heavy hand closed on his arm. It was Kildare, skipper of St. Jim's, and with him was Darrell.

"Hallo! What's this game, Grundy?" asked Kildare

pleasantly. "That's rather a new way of leaving a master's study, isn't it?"

"Leggo, Kildare! Look here—"

"Not much, my pippin! You'll come with me!" said Kildare grimly. "What have you been up to in Linton's study?"

"Nothing! Look here—"

"This way!" said Kildare.

Grundy went that way. With Kildare's strong grasp on his arm, and with Darrell walking on the other side, resistance was useless and dangerous.

It was really appalling luck, but there was no help for it. Grundy groaned in despair as he thought of Miss Pamela waiting once again at the footbridge for him. She would never accept a second excuse—even if she did accept the first. Grundy felt that his young life was blighted for ever.

Kildare marched him up to Mr. Linton's study, and frowned on finding the door locked and the key gone.

"So that was the game, Grundy!" he snapped. "Mr. Linton locked you in, and you bolted. That's serious!"

"Look here," said Grundy desperately. "I—I've got an important appointment—awfully important! I've simply got to be there—"

"Yes—an appointment with Mr. Linton, I fancy!" smiled Kildare. "You're going to keep it, Grundy! Here he is now!"

"Bless my soul! Grundy!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, blinking at that youth in amazement. "How—what—how did you get out of my room, boy?"

"Caught him dropping out of the window, sir!" said Kildare.

Having done his duty, Kildare walked away with Darrell. Mr. Linton unlocked his door, and hauled the hapless Grundy inside. Then he took a cane from his table drawer.

When he put the cane away again two minutes later, Grundy's face registered anguish, and his palms were tucked convulsively under his armpits.

"That will teach you the folly of defying your Form master. I trust!" gasped Mr. Linton. "Never have I

known such inexcusable impudence and lawless defiance. You will write me two hundred lines, and if you dare to leave the House this evening I shall report you to the Housemaster. Go! I shall instruct Taggles not to allow you through the gates!"

Grundy went, hugging his tingling palms.

But he was by no means subdued. The thought of Miss Pamela watching and waiting in growing impatience and wrath at the footbridge, made him feel like tearing his hair. He simply had to get out somehow—even if it meant the sack!

But how? Mr. Linton would probably be speaking to Taggles on the phone even now, warning him not to allow Grundy out of gates. And he knew how keen on such duties was Ephraim Taggles! Moreover, getting out of the House unseen was a stiff problem in itself.

Unconsciously Grundy turned his steps towards his study, and had just reached the landing at the top of the stairs when he paused. Through the window he could see into the yard at the back on the domestic quarters. The sight of a horse and van standing there gave him a brain-wave.

Setting his jaw he made for the back staircase and descended into the kitchen regions. Then he made with due caution for the yard. His luck was in, for a change, and he reached the yard unobserved.

He saw then that the van was the Rylcombe corn-chandler's van. Some flower had just been delivered, and old Peddle, the driver, was now just fitting a nosebag to his horse.

Grundy gave a quick glance about him, and, risking being seen from the kitchen window, he made a dive for the back of the van on tiptoe.

He reached it, and slipped into the van, clambering over the lowered tail.

That the floor of the van was thick with flour-dust and corn did not trouble Grundy. He only felt thankful old Peddle had not seen his lightning vault into the van.

He crouched down, pulling a couple of empty sacks well over him being shielded from view at the front by a couple of sacks of corn.

Scarcely daring to breathe, Grundy lay there while Peddle

(Continued on next page.)



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finished feeding his horse, flung the empty nosebag into the van, and climbed into the driving-seat.

Grundy drew in a relieved breath. He had feared the cart might come round to the back to fix up the tail, which was hooked and chained into position. But he had not done so, and Grundy felt he was safe enough.

The next moment the van was moving out of the yard, and out through the tradesmen's entrance of the school. To Grundy's relief it turned into Rylcombe Lane.

"Oh, good!" breathed Grundy.

The dust and flour got up his nose, and it was all he could do to restrain a frantic desire to sneeze. But he did restrain it, and lay still until he judged the van was near the stile that gave on to the woodland path leading to the bridge.

Then he crawled backwards carefully from under the empty sacks until he reached the tail. He knew old Peddle was as deaf as a post, so he did not fear his hearing anything—nor did he care now whether he did or not.

The van was jogging along quite leisurely, and Grundy almost grinned as he sithered backwards over the tail, and let go.

His grin faded abruptly as his feet went from under him, and his nose struck the road with a thump that made him see more stars than he had imagined it possible to see.

Grundy had been quite confident that he knew exactly how to drop, but his confidence was shattered now. He lay in the road too stunned even to howl.

But he clambered up at last, dizzy, and with the crimson streaming once more from his ill-used nasal organ. It dripped on his shirt and tie, mingling with the flour and dust that was already there.

Grundy had never been a handsome youth, but he looked a sight now. Even Grundy's rugged features could not escape damage from such a terrific collision with the hard road. To make matters worse, his clothes were now covered with flour, dust, and chaff.

"Ow, ow, ow!" groaned the Shell fellow. "Ow, ow, ow! Oh by dose!"

Still, his masterly strategy had been successful, though a glance at his watch showed that it was already six o'clock.

Without troubling to attempt to dust his clothes, Grundy limped to the stile and crossed on to the path, mopping his damaged nose as he went. Then off he went at a limping run towards the footbridge.

He came in sight of it at last, and then he stopped dead at what he saw there.

On the footbridge, beneath the dusty trees that overhung the little stream, two figures were struggling. One was the figure of a burly man, wearing a mask, and the other was that of a girl. Even as he glimpsed the alarming scene he heard a cry.

"Help!"

"G-good gad!" panted Grundy.

Next instant he saw the man snatch something from the girl's desperate grasp, and saw her reel back against the rail of the bridge. Another instant and Grundy, heedless of his aches and bruises, was tearing towards the spot, racing as he had never raced before.

But the bag-snatcher was already running, and he vanished amid the thick trees as Grundy reached the spot.

"After him!" gasped the girl. "Quick—never mind me! He's got my bag! Quick!"

Grundy had halted, fearing the girl was hurt, but he rushed on again now, his eyes blazing. His momentary hesitation was fatal, however. The rascal was well ahead now; and, after dashing for fifty yards into the wood, his footsteps died away, and Grundy gave it up, realising further pursuit was hopeless.

He returned to Miss Pamela, who was leaning against the rail, still gasping and panting.

"You—you've let him get away, then?" she gasped faintly. "If—if you'd only been quicker—"

She paused, and gave a little shriek as she sighted Grundy's damaged features.

"Your—your face, Grundy!" she gasped. What—"

"I—I had an accident!" mumbled Grundy, going crimson under her far from friendly gaze. "I say, did the brute take anything?"

"My bag!" said Miss Trent, in angry dismay. "It had a gold locket—my mother's. There was a little money, too; but that doesn't matter. If—if only— But what's the good of talking now? You've let me down again!"

"Oh, but listen to me—"

"I don't want to hear any excuses!" said Miss Trent, stamping her foot in great wrath. "You made a fool of me this afternoon!"

"Oh, but it wasn't my fault! Do listen!" gasped Grundy. "And it wasn't your fault now, I suppose!" said Miss Trent warmly. "Nice knight-errant you are, I must say! If you'd been here in time this wouldn't have happened."

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I shouldn't have had this fright, and I shouldn't have lost my bag. I wouldn't have lost that locket for anything. Now—"

"But do listen; it wasn't my fault," pleaded Grundy, eyeing the irate young lady in dismay. "Look here!"

"You're ten minutes late again—isn't that enough, without this happening?" cried Miss Pamela indignantly. "If you'd been here it would never have happened. Now my bag's gone, and—"

"But let me explain," gasped Grundy.

"I don't want to hear any explanations!" snapped Miss Trent. "Why didn't you follow that footpad up?"

"I—I—he'd got too far ahead. I knew it was useless," stammered Grundy. "But I'll go after him again—"

"What's the good of that now?"

"I'll catch him somehow!" vowed Grundy, setting his jaw. "What was the brute like? Did you see his face?"

"How could I, when he wore a mask?"

"Yes; but—"

"He wasn't old, but he was terribly strong—that's all I noticed about him, except that he had a swollen nose like you, and had lost a tooth!" snapped Miss Trent. "Not that it's any use telling you anything about it."

"Isn't it?" said Grundy doggedly, his eyes gleaming. "You'll jolly well see if it isn't, Miss Trent! I'm going to catch him somehow, and I'm going to get your bag and locket back. You'll see!"

"Well, you can speak to me again when you do, but not before!" said Miss Pamela, with a toss of her head. "If you prefer to walk about and fight with your friends to keeping appointments—"

"But do listen. I can explain all that," said Grundy earnestly.

"You can explain when you get back my bag, Master Grundy!" retorted the young lady, somewhat unreasonably. "I'll hear your excuses then. In the meantime, please don't speak to me again!"

And with that the new girl at Spalding Hall School turned her back, and walked away with her head in the air.

Grundy stared after her, crimson and utterly dismayed.

Then he followed her, slowly and miserably. Certainly Miss Trent was a somewhat short-tempered and unreasonably young lady. But Grundy would not admit that for one moment. It was all his fault, he told himself. And now he had lost his girl chum, unless—

Grundy set his jaw and clenched his fists.

Somehow, that bag had to be regained—somehow! The local police were baffled by the identity of the unknown bandit. They were helpless to catch or trace him. But there and then George Alfred Grundy resolved that where the police had failed he would succeed. He rather prided himself on his detective abilities, and, unlike the police, so far as he knew, he had the advantage of possessing two clues, at least.

The bandit had a swollen nose and a tooth missing!

Well, he would work on those clues, and he would track down the Wayland bandit, recover the loot, and thus heal the breach between Miss Pamela Trent and himself.

Grundy was resolved upon that!

CHAPTER 11.

On the Trail!

THERE was a pressing invitation awaiting Grundy when he arrived back at St. Jim's. It was from Mr. Railton; and when Grundy left the Housemaster's study at last he had still more aches and pains, and he was feeling that life was scarcely worth living.

Moreover, he was the richer by five hundred more lines. Still, it might have been worse, considering his defiance of Mr. Linton and of law and order.

That evening Grundy was like a bear with a sore head, and Wilkins and Gunn had a very bad time of it. Since Grundy had been "in love" life had been well worth living for them in the study. Grundy had been extremely affable, and in high good humour, and even when they checked him he took it smiling.

But now Grundy was a disappointed man. He could scarcely bear to be spoken to, and there were ructions in the study until Wilkins and Gunn ended the trouble by taking their prep along to Study No. 10. Naturally, they took the story with them, and it was soon all over the House, and caused great amusement.

Grundy did not care, however! He was used to being misunderstood. In any case, what did anything matter now? He had nothing now to live for, unless—

Miss Trent had given him the chance to make amends, and Grundy still had that gleam of hope. He did no prep that evening, and concentrated on the problem of bowling out the Wayland bandit.

It was not going to be an easy job, even for a fellow with Grundy's brains and abilities. Grundy realised that.

All that evening, and all the next day, Grundy pondered over the problem, but it was not until tea that light broke in upon him.

It came upon him suddenly, and he leaped up from the tea-table, causing Wilkins to pour tea over his trousers instead of into his cup.

"You silly owl!" shrieked Wilkins, jumping up.

"I've got it!" yelled Grundy. "My hat! Why didn't I think of it before?"

"So have I got it—all over my trousers!" hooted Wilkins, dropping the tea-pot and rubbing frantically at his soaked clothing with his handkerchief. "You—you clumsy idiot!"

"Never mind that!" said Grundy excitedly. "I tell you I've got it—"

"Got what?" demanded Gunn, staring.

"The Wayland bandit!"

"You've got that all right," admitted Gunn, chuckling. "Fairly on the brain, old chap!"

"I mean, I know who it is!" gasped Grundy, gleaming. "I say, Wilky, just listen—never mind your silly trousers! Blessed if you don't make a fuss about nothing! Now, listen—"

"You clumsy, howling idiot! Blow you and blow your rotten bandit rot!"

"If you want a thick ear—" bawled Grundy, exasperated.

Wilkins did not want a thick ear, so he subsided, breathing hard, and still mopping his drenched trousers.

Grundy's eyes were dancing with excitement.

"It just came to me in a flash—inspiration, you know!" he explained. "It beats me why I didn't think of it before! I think I told you fellows how I licked that brute, Seth Booker, didn't I?"

"You told us how you came to be looking like a squashed tomato," said Gunn dryly. "If you licked him, then he must have been a hospital case, at least!"

"I licked him all right—or would have done if the bobby hadn't interfered!" snorted Grundy, glaring. "Well—"

"What's that merchant got to do with it?" inquired Gunn.

"He's the Wayland bandit, of course!"

"Wha-at? How the thump do you know that, Grundy?"

"Because I do know!" said Grundy grinning. "Deduction, you know! See my knuckles?" He showed a pair of bruised knuckles. "I got a beauty full on that brute's nose. And I know I knocked one of his teeth out—saw him spit it out. Well—"

"But what's that got to do with the thumping bandit?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Grundy, with biting sarcasm.

"Nothing at all, Gunny. It was merely a silly coincidence that the bandit who attacked Miss Trent had a swollen boko and a missing tooth!"

"Oh! Phew! Had he?"

"Of course! I had those clues to go on! But it was only a minute ago that I remembered my scrap with Booker! Booker's the man!"

And Grundy jumped up again and reached for his cap.

"You're going out?"

"Naturally! No time to be lost if I'm to get on Booker's trail!"

"But what about tea—"

"Bother tea! Fancy thinking about tea with that rotter at large!" snorted Grundy. "I shall disguise myself as a low-down tramp, or something like—"

"No need to adopt any disguise to do that, is there?" asked Wilkins innocently.

"Of course there is!" said Grundy, not grasping the point

—fortunately for Wilkins, perhaps. "It's absolutely necessary to disguise myself. If he spots me he'll want to scrap or something. In any case, I've got to shadow him, and I want to catch him in the act if I can."

"Supposing he catches you in the act of catching him in the act!" said Gunn. "A chap who alters features like he's altered yours already—"

"Oh, shut up! What's the good of talking serious matters to a silly pair of brainless fools!" said Grundy.

And he went out, banging the door after him with unnecessary violence. It was always Grundy's grievance that his chums never would take him seriously. In any case, Grundy wanted to get busy on the trail of the bandit. He had always fancied himself in the role of a detective, and now it was desperately necessary to exercise his abilities in

The constable rushed up and hurled Grundy to the ground. Grundy crashed on his back, and before he knew what was happening, he was handcuffed!



that direction. Miss Trent had, as it were, thrown down the gauntlet, and he had taken it up. He felt himself to be like one of the knights of old about to fight for the favour of a damsel in distress.

He lost no time. Five minutes later, like Monty Lowther, he had raided the cupboard where the Lower School Stage Club kept their props, and had left the school carrying a bag. In the bag was a shabby, tattered suit of rough cloth, a scarf, and a cloth cap that had seen a good many better days. What Lowther had done, he could do!

In the woods, like Lowther, he changed his clothes, and hid his own suit. But he did not bother to make-up his face. Grundy was relying on his genius for altering his features—a genius only Grundy himself acknowledged existed.

But he made quite sure of looking the part of a tramp by rubbing soil over his face, and over his shoes.

He certainly looked far more like a tramp than a Public schoolboy when he had finished. It was extremely unlikely that Mr. Linton, much less Seth Booker, would recognise him as George Alfred Grundy now.

He was in disguise—deep disguise. There was no doubt about that. Grundy looked himself up and down, and grinned with satisfaction.

Hiding the bag of clothes, Grundy started off for the row of hovels where he had met Seth Booker, giving a final pull

at his grubby scarf, and pulling his cap well down over his eyes as he went.

He slouched along with his hands driven deep in his pockets.

Despite his confidence, Grundy could not help having doubts.

It was possible that Seth Booker did not live at the cottages at all, though as Police-constable Crump knew him, it was more than likely that he lived at Rylcombe. None the less, Grundy knew that the outrages had started in the Wayland district, and only recently had the epidemic of robberies started at Rylcombe.

Still, Grundy was sticking to his theory.

Reaching the backs of the cottages, Grundy seated himself on a fence to watch and wait.

It proved to be a long wait, and Grundy's hopes sank lower and lower. It was scarcely the sort of detective work Grundy liked. He wanted something exciting to happen. Several people came out of the cottages, and a number of people passed him. They scarcely gave him a glance.

But his long wait was rewarded at last.

Just when Grundy was getting tired of the game, he sighted a burly figure approaching up the lane. It was Seth Booker, and Grundy's eyes gleamed.

Would he enter one of the cottages, though? Grundy trembled.

But Seth Booker did not—possibly he did not live at the hovels at all. He came slouching past where Grundy sat, and did not even give the amateur detective a second glance.

Grundy waited until he had got well ahead, and then he dropped down from the fence and followed, keeping a respectable distance behind his quarry.

Seth Booker did not look round once. He crossed from the lane into the fields, and followed the field path until he reached the woods. The moment he had vanished into them Grundy quickened his step.

He was out of sight when Grundy entered the wood. But the unior could hear him ahead, and he easily kept on the trail. Now and again he caught a glimpse of his quarry through the green foliage, and then quite suddenly the sounds ahead ceased, and the man vanished.

"Queer!" murmured Grundy, frowning.

There was silence in the dusky wood, and Grundy waited for several seconds, listening intently, and peering ahead.

Then he decided to risk it, and pushed on cautiously.

That Seth Booker was somewhere near, he felt certain, for he trod softly, and he suddenly came out into a clearing—a sort of hollow, sloping on each side and with a steep bank of soil, tree-roots, and brambles facing him across the grassy declivity.

But the hollow was empty. Grundy had supposed that the fellow had stopped to lounge and smoke on the grass. But he had vanished, and Grundy was about to cross the grass when his breath caught, and he swiftly withdrew himself behind a screen of foliage.

A startling thing had happened.

Without warning, the brambles on the miniature cliff opposite had been thrust aside, and Seth Booker had scrambled out into the sunlit hollow, brambles tearing at his clothes as he emerged.

But the fellow was wearing a different jacket now, and a shabby, dirty soft felt hat in place of a cap. And he carried a strip of black cloth in his hand.

He gave a swift glance about him, and then, cramming the strip of cloth into his pocket, he hurried away, taking the direction of the field path and the footbridge.

Grundy drew in a deep, deep breath.

So he was right, then! What else could it mean—why, else had Seth Booker changed his clothes, and what else was that strip of cloth but a mask to cover the upper part of his face?

Moreover, the fellow's whole attitude was one of stealth and great caution now.

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Grundy hesitated. He felt an almost irresistible desire to explore the curious cave—if cave it was that the brambles hid! Yet he was also anxious to get on Booker's trail. Very obviously the fellow meant business, and was off on his cowardly bag-snatching expeditions.

By the time Grundy had made up his mind, the sounds of his quarry's departure had died away, and the woods were silent again.

"Blow!" muttered Grundy. "Why the thump didn't I go after him? Why, he might attack anyone—"

Realising he was wasting time, Grundy hurried after Seth Booker. From the deliberate manner in which the fellow had tramped away, it seemed possible that he had some definite task on hand, for he was hurrying fast through the trees.

Scarcely caring about caution now, Grundy hurried after him. Whatever secret the cave in the woods might hide, it was obviously more necessary for him to keep on Booker's trail, and prevent the rascal committing yet more brutal robberies.

But though he hurried, Grundy was too late.

He knew he must be quite close to the woodland path, when quite abruptly the silence of the woods was shattered by a scream and a cry for help.

"Help!"

"Got 'im!" grinned Grundy.

He dashed forward with a yell, tripped over a hidden root, and went crashing down with another yell—of pain this time.

It was Grundy's luck again!

Always an impatient fellow, George Alfred paid for his impatience now—though in the circumstances it was justifiable. He scrambled up, breathless, and leaped out on to the path—just in time to glimpse the fleeing figure of the masked bandit.

Next second he glimpsed the girl; he was leaning against a nearby tree; and as he looked she slumped back, and would have fallen had not Grundy made a wild leap and caught her.

Much as he wanted to catch the bandit, Grundy did not heed him then; he was not the fellow to leave the girl who obviously had fainted with fright.

He caught her and lowered her gently against the tree-trunk.

As he did so he heard heavy footsteps pounding towards him along the path; then a burly figure in blue appeared, a drawn truncheon in his hand, his features red with running.

It was a police-constable, and he had evidently heard the girl's cry for aid. Grundy did not know him, but he remembered that extra police had been sent to patrol the woods since the bandit had started his attacks.

"Good!" breathed Grundy.

He did not know what to do for the girl, and he was relieved to see the policeman approaching. His relief was short-lived.

The constable came rushing up. Allowing his truncheon to hang from his wrist, he caught Grundy by the collar and shoulder and whirled him over.

Crash!

Grundy went down on his back, and before he knew what was happening his wrists were pinned together and there was an ominous click.

Grundy was handcuffed!

He blinked down at the handcuffs with eyes that nearly started from his head.

"What—what—Here," he bawled, "what's this mean?"

"It means I've got you—got you at last, my lad!" rasped the constable, his eyes gleaming with satisfied triumph. "Got you at last! I knowed we should get you sooner or later! And we've got you! You stand there, and don't you try to look it, or I'll dot you one with this soon as look at you, my lad!"

Grundy gasped.

He had quite forgotten that he was disguised as a tramp, that his face was dirty, and that he looked altogether a most unsavoury individual. But he realised the constable meant what he said. The constable's face was grim, and

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it was clear the man would have no mercy on whom he believed to be the cowardly blackguard who had terrorised the district.

"Oh—oh crikey!" gasped Grundy.

The girl had opened her eyes again now, and the constable was helping her to her feet, keeping a wary eye on Grundy as he did so. But Grundy was far too startled, too hopelessly flabbergasted, to think of bolting. In any case, he knew he could never get far with the handcuffs on his wrists.

"You're all right now, miss," said the constable kindly. "I got the fellow! He won't frighten no more girls, nor anyone else, he won't—leastways, not for a tidy time, I know!"

"But it wasn't me!" shrieked Grundy. "I only rushed up to the girl's help! You born idiot—"

"That's enough lip, my lad!" said the constable ominously. "You shut up! This were the fellow, miss—"

"That—that's him!" panted the girl, to Grundy's horror. "He had a mask on, though!" she added.

"Must have chucked it away," said the constable, looking about for it. "Never mind that, though, now. I've got 'im—and that's all as matters jest now, I reckon. You all right now, miss?"

"Ye-es."

"He took nothing, did he?"

"He tried to snatch my bag," explained the girl breathlessly. "I stuck to it, though; and then—then I must have fainted, I suppose. But he didn't get it!"

She held up her bag.

Grundy fairly blinked at her. He fancied he had seen the girl in one of the village shops, and possibly she might have recognised him had he been dressed as Grundy. But Grundy was now a tramp—looked one to the life. It was no wonder the girl imagined he was the footpad.

"Well, you'd better hurry off home, miss," said the constable, after taking the girl's name and address. Then he turned to Grundy. "You come along with me, my lad!"

"I jolly well won't!" yelled Grundy, in great alarm. "Look here, you're making a rotten mistake, I tell you! Look here—Stop, miss!"

But the girl hurried away; she evidently had seen as much as she wanted of Grundy. The constable hooked a hand in Grundy's coat-collar and yanked him back as he made a step after the girl.

"That's enough!" he snapped. "Unless you want a tap with this toothpick of mine you'd best come along quietly!"

"But I tell you 'im not the dashed bandit!" yelled Grundy, almost foaming at the mouth. "My name's Grundy—"

"You'll soon have a number instead of a name!" grinned the constable, who was naturally pleased with his capture. "Now, march!"

"I jolly well won't! Listen to me, you born idiot—Yarroooooop!"

Grundy yelled as the truncheon tapped his head. The constable was a good-natured fellow, but he was not likely to have any good-nature to spare for a blackguard who preyed on women and girls—especially one who called him a born idiot, too!

But the tap was enough for Grundy.

He went for the constable with a rush.

What followed was painful for Grundy. With his hands secured he could neither let loose one of his famous rights nor one of his equally famous lefts.

The constable merely whirled him round and grabbed him by one arm and the back of his collar.

Grundy, though he choked and struggled, could only succeed in hurting himself; for the constable was powerful, and his grip was like iron.

"Are you going quietly, or am I to use my truncheon?" he grunted, sending the hapless junior sprawling ahead. "Now, march! Look lively!"

And Grundy marched.

It was just then that two juniors came along the path. Grundy's heart leaped as he recognised Trimble and Mellish of the Fourth.

"Rescue, St. Jim's!" he bawled desperately. "Help! Mellish—Trimble, rescue!"

Trimble and Mellish stopped dead, more stupefied even than scared.

"G-good lor!" gurgled Trimble, blinking in amazement. "It—it's the bandit! That bobby's got him at last!"

"But—but he knows us!" gasped Mellish, not knowing whether to bolt or not. "It—it almost sounded like—"

"I'm Grundy!" shrieked Grundy, fearful of the two bolting. "Stop! Tell this fool who I am! I'm Grundy—disguised! I was tracking down the bandit, and this fool collared me!"

"Here, none of that!" snapped the constable.

And he shoved Grundy along; and with that grip on his collar Grundy had to go. Trimble and Mellish, fairly shaking with excitement, followed in wonder. They had recognised the voice now, and they knew that it was indeed Grundy of St. Jim's. They knew that Grundy was playing detective; Wilkins and Gunn had spread the yarn round as another joke of the term.

But Grundy was more comforted now. Trimble and Mellish knew what was happening, and would soon see that he was rescued. Moreover, if he was taken to Rylcombe, P. C. Crump would soon recognise him.

He decided—wisely, for once—to go quietly.

But utter dismay held him when the constable, instead of turning on to the lane for Rylcombe village, took the opposite way.

"Here, where are you taking me?" yelled Grundy.

"I'm taking you to my cottage at Merton," said the constable. "There's a nice little cell there as'll hold you until I hear from Wayland what I'm to do with you, my lad. See? Now, no games, mind: just you get along quietly!"

And they got along—there was no help for it. Grundy was subdued; that tap from the truncheon was enough—more than enough.

Mellish and Trimble halted in the lane.

"Well, my only Aunt Janet!" panted Mellish. "It's Grundy! The born idiot's been collared by the bobby, and he's taking him to Merton! Did you ever?"

"He, he he!" giggled Trimble, highly entertained. "Come on, let's go and tell the fellows! What a scream! He, he, he!"

(Continued on next page.)

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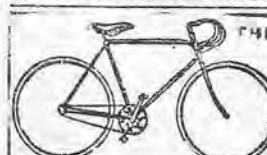
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WHEN ANSWERING ADVERTISEMENTS PLEASE MENTION THIS PAPER.

And with his works inside going like an alarm-clock, Baggy Trimble turned on his heels and boited back the way he had come. Baggy loved to spread startling news—true news, good news, or any other kind of news. But he had got some news now that would undoubtedly startle St. Jim's to its foundations.

Grundy of the Shell was arrested, handcuffed, and was on his way, in charge of a policeman, to the lock-up at Merton village!

Never had Baggy Trimble been so wildly excited; never had he been so bursting to tell news so exciting and so startling as this!

CHAPTER 12.

Tom Merry to the Rescue!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Hallo, Trimble!"

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. put on their brakes hard; with Baggy Trimble's fat form almost blocking the lane they found they had to.

"I—I say—"

"What the dickens is the matter with the fat ass?" said Tom Merry.

The chums leaped from their machines and stared at Baggy Trimble, who had run out into the middle of the lane, panting and gasping like old bellows.

"I—I say—"

"Well, cough it up, old bean!"

"I—I say—Grundy—" Trimble choked with excited emotion.

"Well, what—"

"G-Grundy!" gulped Trimble. "G-Grundy! G-g-Grundy!"

"Grundy three times!" said Lowther. "As if one wasn't enough!"

"G-gug-Grundy!" gulped Trimble. "He, he, he!"

"Well, what's the matter with Grundy?" demanded Blake.

"What the—"

"Arrested!" panted Trimble. "He, he, he!"

"What?"

"Locked up!"

"Wha-at?"

"Handcuffed! Taken away by a bobby!" spluttered Trimble. "He, he, he! Yanked away to prison! He, he, he! Yarrooooo!"

Trimble yelled as Tom Merry thumped his fat back.

"What the thump are you gassing about?" hooted Tom. "Grundy—arrested! What the dickens do you mean, you fat ass?"

"What I say!" howled Trimble excitedly. "It's a fact—absolutely a fact, you fellows!"

"You silly fat owl—"

"It's a fact!" yelled Trimble, his fat face ablaze with excitement. "Ask Mellish—here he is!"

Mellish came scrambling over the stile into the lane, and as he sighted the little crowd he ran over, just as excited and gleeful as was Baggy Trimble. It was surprising what an amount of pleasure Mellish and Trimble appeared to find in the fact that Grundy was arrested!

In a moment Mellish was confirming Trimble's startling news.

Tom Merry & Co. were thunderstruck.

"Taken for the—the bandit!" gasped Blake. "Oh, my hat! And he went off to track him down according to Wilkins and Gunn. Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake roared.

Tom Merry grinned, and then he became serious.

"It's awful, though!" he exclaimed, in great alarm. "I spotted him scooting off with a bag, and I wondered what his game was. Oh, my hat! He'll be locked up all night and taken before the magistrates in the morning."

"Bai Jove! Poor old Gwunday!"

"It's the school I'm thinking of as much as Grundy!" said Tom, frowning. "Think of the disgrace! He'll be able to clear himself—or the Head will clear him, of course. But the harm will be done by then. The born idiot has thumped the bobby, too, I bet—bound to have done!"

"My hat! Yes, rather!"

"We know what Grundy is!" said Tom soberly. "If the bobby was hauling him as you say, Mellish, then you can bet he's been giving trouble and perhaps assaulted the bobby. It's serious! It'll all be in the papers, and the Head will rave! It will mean the sack for that fool, of course!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry set his lips.

"How long ago was it, Mellish—since you saw them, I mean?"

"Only just now—we came here as hard as we could pelt!" gasped Trimble. "He, he, he! What a scream! I say, won't the fellows just— Here, leggo, Tom Merry!"

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"Not much!" snapped Tom. "Look here, Trimble, you're not to breathe a word of this at St. Jim's—not until I tell you you can, anyway!"

"Oh, really, Tom Merry—"

"If you do, you'll get the licking of your life from us—both of you!" snapped Tom, his eyes gleaming. "We've got to save Grundy somehow. You hear, both of you! You'll have us to deal with if you dare to tell the yarn at St. Jim's. Got that?"

"But, you beast—"

"That's enough!" snapped Tom, as Trimble began to grumble, while Mellish scowled. "You know me, and you know what to expect if you let it out. Come on, you fellows—quick!"

He leaped into the saddle, and though they were puzzled as to his intentions, Tom's chums followed his example. At top speed Tom led the way back along the lane.

At the cross-roads he turned swiftly on to the Abbotsford Road, and they guessed where he was making for then.

"Going to Merton?" gasped Blake.

"Yes; of course!" said Tom, through his teeth. "That bobby will be the Merton bobby, and he's taking Grundy to his cottage lock-up!"

"But we can't do anything!" said Digby, staring.

"We're going to try, anyway!" said Tom, setting his lips. "Grundy's an awful ass; but he's a jolly good sort, and I don't want to see the fellow sacked for a bit of asinine folly. Besides, it's the disgrace for St. Jim's I'm thinking of also! Grundy will be brought before the magistrates, perhaps, and— Oh, my hat! There'll be an awful rumpos, and the Head will never forgive that born idiot!"

"That's so!" admitted Blake. "But—we can't collar the bobby and release him, Tommy!"

"We may not get the chance!" said Tom glumly. "But desperate ills require desperate remedies, and we may get the chance to do something!"

"We can see the bobby and explain who he is!"

"But will the bobby let him go even then?" said Tom. "Depend upon it Grundy's done a bit of hard hitting, and that alone is enough to get him locked up. Besides, they won't let him go without someone in authority at St. Jim's coming here. We want to keep this from the Head's ears somehow, or Grundy's booked for the sack."

"But it'll be awfully risky—if we chip in—"

"We'll take the risk! If Grundy had actually done anything wrong it would be different, of course! It's just a mistake, and we're going to put it right—somehow!"

"Right-ho! We're game!" grinned Blake.

They put on speed and tore along the road to Merton. It was only a mile and a half at most across country by the field-path which Tom guessed the policeman was taking, and though the roadway was a good mile more, Tom Merry hoped to get to the cottage first.

He had no plan of action, but he hoped that a chance to help the unfortunate Grundy would present itself when the time came.

They rode through the straggling little village of Merton—familiar enough to the juniors. Then the cottage came in sight, and as it did so Tom Merry gave a groan.

Two figures were just approaching it, and even at that distance they could recognise that one was a constable. They did not need to guess who the other was.

"Done!" gasped Tom. "Hallo, he's yanking poor old Grundy inside! What—"

They saw the constable try the door of his cottage, and then he took a key from his pocket, inserted it in the lock and opened the door. Then they heard Grundy arguing heatedly—an argument which the constable ended by grabbing him by the coat collar and fairly hauling him inside.

Both vanished into the cottage.

"Wait here, you fellows—or, rather, you come with me, Blake, and we'll scout round!" said Tom, his eyes gleaming. "If we can do anything we will. But if it's hopeless we'll see the bobby and try to get him to listen to us."

"But—"

"Come on! No time to gas, Blake!"

Leaving their bikes with their chums, Tom and Blake hurried along to the cottage which stood well away from other houses. There was nobody about, and as a high hedge shielded the cottage, they did not trouble to keep out of sight.

Reaching the cottage, Tom led Blake round to the back. A yard, surrounded by a high wall, had been added to it. At a word from Tom, Blake crouched, and clambering on his bent back, Tom took a cautious peep over the wall.

In the yard was a shed, either a cycle or tool-shed. Next to that was a white-washed brick building, and the strong door and small, barred window told Tom what that was for.

As he took a peep, Tom was just in time to see the Merton constable emerge from the building, lock the door, and pass across the yard with the key in his hand.

Then he entered the cottage, closing the door after him. A minute later the tinkle of a telephone-bell reached them faintly from within the cottage.

"Ringing up Wayland Police Station to tell of his capture!" murmured Tom.

The junior's eyes glimmered suddenly, and he whispered to Blake:

"Look out—I'm going over!"

He shinned over the wall, and dropped down into the yard. He was taking a terrific risk, he knew, but Tom Merry was a fellow who liked risks. In a moment he had reached the cycle-shed, and was examining the door.

He chuckled as he saw that the key was in the lock on the outside, and, opening the door wide, Tom went inside.

A push-bike was there, together with an array of garden tools. On a shelf was a row of paint-cans and empty jars and bottles.

Without hesitation, Tom grasped a garden-fork and swept the whole lot of jars and bottles off the shelf.

Crash, crash, crash!

The noise made by the smashing jars and bottles was alarming—even to Tom.

Instantly he nipped out of the shed and hid behind the door, pulling it well back to shield him.

He was just in time. From the back of the cottage the constable came dashing, and he opened the inner yard door and ran across to the cycle-shed.

What he imagined had happened Tom neither knew nor cared—his daring plan had succeeded so far, and as the constable dived into the cycle-shed, Tom crashed the door shut, and springing on to it, twisted the key smartly.

From inside the shed came an angry, startled yell.

Tom grinned and raced for the house. From the fact that the constable had not carried the key of the cell in his hand, Tom guessed it would now be in the cottage somewhere.

It was. The first thing he saw on dashing into the kitchen was the key lying on the kitchen table.

Tom grabbed it and dashed back, his heart thumping with excitement. Blake had pulled himself up, and was peering in startled wonder over the wall now.

Without a glance at him, Tom ran to the white-washed building, and rammed the key into the lock.

The imprisoned constable was yelling furiously, and banging on the shed door.

Crash, crash, crash!

Tom's fears that it might not be the right key were soon settled. It fitted, and the next moment the door was wide open.

He sighted Grundy at once, and Tom felt deep thankfulness to see that Grundy's wrists were not handcuffed now.

"Hook it!" panted Tom, as Grundy blinked at him in startled amazement. "Hook it—quick, you fool! This way!"

He dashed out again and raced for the back door of the cottage. Grundy—for once—was quick on the uptake, as it were! He followed in a flash, and together they raced through the kitchen and living-room of the cottage.

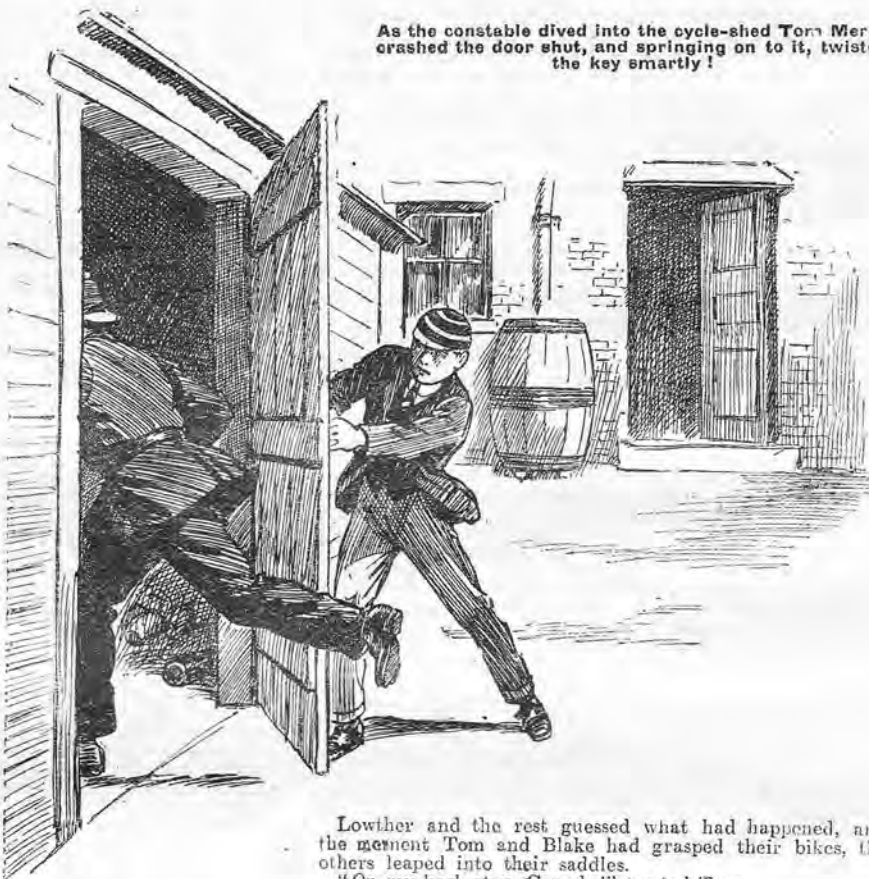
Tom had known the cottage must be empty save for the constable, or the latter would not have let himself in. They saw nobody, at all events, and a moment later they were in the road, racing for the bikes.

Behind them they heard a faint, furious yelling, and a terrific crashing.

"Quick! He'll have the door down in no time!" gasped Tom. "Oh, good man, Blake! Come on!"

Blake came racing round, and they tore at top speed for the juniors waiting higher up with the bikes.

As the constable dived into the cycle-shed Tom Merry crashed the door shut, and springing on to it, twisted the key smartly!



Lowther and the rest guessed what had happened, and the moment Tom and Blake had grasped their bikes, the others leaped into their saddles.

"On my back step, Grundy!" panted Tom.

"Right!" gasped the bewildered Grundy.

He jumped up, and the bikes raced away, and once round the nearest corner, out of sight of the cottage, Tom slowed down.

"Off you get, Grundy!" snapped Tom. "We've done our bit—the rest is up to you! Not a word of this! Cut back through the wood, and the sooner you get back into your togs the better, my pippin!"

"But—but how—"

"We'll tell you how and why when we get back to St. Jim's!" rapped out Tom. "Get off—and run like blazes, you fool!"

And leaping into the saddle, Tom drove at the pedals and tore after his chums.

Grundy, guessing something of the position at last, dived through the nearest hedge, and set off at full pelt across the meadows beyond, towards the woods. How it had all come about he did not know, but like Tom Merry & Co., he decided to go while the going was good!

CHAPTER 13.

Nicely Caught!

"THANK goodness!"

Grundy had never felt such overpowering relief in his life as he did when he came, at last, to the spot where he had hidden his clothes.

He was panting, and nearly dropping.

That mile and a half across rough fields and through the woods had been hard going, and Grundy had not spared himself.

Nor had it been without adventure.

Dashing into the woods, Grundy had barged full-tilt into a gamekeeper, fairly bowling him over. Naturally the man had been angry, and naturally he had been suspicious, obviously thinking Grundy was a tramp who had been up to mischief somewhere.

At all events he gave chase to Grundy.

But Grundy had succeeded in shaking him off after a hot chase, and now he was safe with his own clothes. Once changed into them, he had no need to fear anyone—or so he supposed.

He changed swiftly, and leaving the tramp's clothes safely hidden, Grundy reached the path and started out for St. Jim's.

Scarcely had he gone twenty yards, however, when he dodged swiftly back into the cover of the foliage lining the path.

Coming towards him was a familiar, slouching figure. It was Seth Booker.

He was plainly uneasy and suspicious, and he glanced now and again back over his shoulder as he came along. Then quite suddenly Seth Booker froze, and his eyes fixed on the path leading to the village.

Grundy followed his gaze, and sighted two girlish figures coming along hastily. He saw they were Spalding Hall girls, evidently hastening back to school in time for lock-up.

He only gave them a glance, however, for his eyes were on Seth Booker the next moment.

The rascal's eyes were glinting now, and it was clear he meant mischief. The sight of the girls had made him forget his recent narrow escape, and the temptation to rob them was proving too much for him.

In a flash he had whipped the black mask from his pocket, and adjusted it over his eyes. If Grundy needed further proof of his theory as to the identity of the mysterious bag-snatcher, he had it now with a vengeance.

The girls' voices were heard clearly now as they chatted together, never dreaming of the danger ahead of them. But Grundy did not wait for them to reach the spot.

He gave a low growl and leaped full upon Seth Booker's broad back.

There was a startled oath, and the next instant Grundy was fighting tooth and nail. In his fury and fear the fellow fought like a madman.

Suddenly there was a crashing of heavy feet, and through the trees burst the constable and a gamekeeper.

Against the two hefty men Seth Booker stood no chance whatever. He was pinned down fast, and the next moment the very handcuffs that recently had encircled Grundy's wrists were clicking shut.

Breathing hard, the constable rose and blinked down at him.

"This ain't the same chap!" he panted. "Still—"

"He—he's the Wayland bandit, anyway!" gasped Grundy, leaning back against a tree. "His—his name's Seth Booker, and—"

"He's the chap, right enough!" snapped the constable, almost grinning in his delight. "Seth Booker—eh? I know that feller, and I'll soon see!"

He wrenched away the mask, and then he nodded. Seth Booker glared up at him, savage and beaten.

"You got me!" he snarled. "But you wouldn't 'ave done but for this blamed kid, hang him!"

Grundy grinned—he could afford to grin now. Quite obviously neither the constable nor the gamekeeper had recognised him as the tramp. With his face cleaned, and in his smart flannels and school cap, Grundy looked a very different fellow indeed to the disreputable-looking figure of an hour or less ago.

"Yes, my pippin!" he replied, caressing his swollen nose. "I vowed I'd bowl you out, you rotter, and I've done it! You made a mistake when you attacked Miss Trent here!"

And Grundy grinned feebly at Miss Pamela, who was standing by, breathing hard after her exertions.

"But for me that brute would have knocked you out, Miss Trent!" said Grundy humbly.

Miss Pamela grinned.

"You've not got my bag back, though!" she retorted.

"You know the bargain!"

"I jolly soon will do!" said Grundy. "This beauty took it."

"Hang you!" snarled Booker, glaring up at Grundy. "You've got me, but you'll never find the stuff!"

"Won't we?" grinned Grundy, cheerful now. "If this giddy gamekeeper will stand by you with his gun ready I'll take the constable along to the loot!"

"You—you know where the loot is, young gent?" gasped the Merton constable.

"I fancy so!" grinned Grundy, his face looking ghastly as he grinned. "This way! You girls can come, too! Unless this brute's done away with your bag you'll jolly soon have it, Miss Pamela!"

"Oh, good!" said the young lady. "You—you're wonderful, Grundy!"

Grundy blushed at the praise, and the next moment he was leading the way to the cave. He knew the spot well enough, though he had never dreamed before of the secret it held.

He reached the hollow at last.

Though he had never had the chance to explore it yet, Grundy felt certain the loot would be there.

And it was.

In a scooped-out hole in the sandy floor, covered over with leaves, Grundy and the constable soon found what they sought.

The hole was crammed with purses, loose money, bangles, watches, and handbags, and many other trinkets and articles. Miss Trent stepped forward eagerly and picked out her own bag from the pile.

She opened it eagerly, and her eyes lit up as she drew out a small gold locket.

"Smart work, young gent!" said the constable. "But you—"

"I rather fancy myself as a detective!" explained Grundy modestly. "I decided to trail the merchant. I followed him here and saw him go inside this cave. But he gave me the slip again, and—"

Grundy paused. He realised he would have to mind how he explained the rest.

"I missed him after that; caught him just about to attack these girls just now, though, and—well, you know the rest!" he finished coolly.

The constable scratched his head.

"Well, there must be two of them, then—or perhaps a gang!" he grunted. "I caught one chap, and locked him up in the cell at my cottage over at Merton. But his pal—I s'pose it was his pal—tricked me and got him away. This chap's the chief one, I fancy, though, and we've got the loot! We'll get that other bloke yet!" he ended grimly.

"Come to me if you want any help, then!" grinned Grundy. "Anyway, I've had enough now, and I'll leave this stuff to you. My name's Grundy. You'll find me at St. Jim's at any time! And now we'll be getting off, or you'll be late for lock-up, Miss Trent!"

Tom Merry & Co. were waiting in the hallway when Grundy came in. Knowing what an unlucky fellow Grundy was, they had feared he had got himself into still more trouble, and their relief was great when they sighted his self-satisfied expression.

As luck would have it, Mr. Railton was crossing the hall at the moment, and he sighted Grundy at once, and stopped.

"Grundy," demanded the Housemaster sternly, "how come you to be in such a disreputable state? You have been fighting again! Never have I—"

"Sorry, sir!" said Grundy. "It couldn't be helped this time, Mr. Railton. I hope you'll excuse me, but I had a little scrap with the Wayland bandit!"

"Bless my soul! Did that scoundrel attack you, a boy—"

"Yes, sir. But I managed to collar him and hand him over to the police," said Grundy calmly.

"You—you did?" ejaculated the Housemaster, staring.

"Yes, sir! And I found the loot, and the police have it now. The bandit was a Rylcombe lounge named Seth Booker—an awful rotter!" explained Grundy, conscious that all eyes were staring blankly at him, and thoroughly enjoying the sensation. "You see, I suspected the chap—I'm rather good at detective work. I got two clues, followed them up, and bowled the brute out."

"You—you did, Grundy?" almost shouted Mr. Railton.

"Certainly, sir! The chap will be in the lock-up now, I expect. Inspector Skeat will be ringing you up about me soon, I fancy!"

"Well, upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Railton, at last. "You—you have surprised me very much, Grundy! I did not think you had— But, under the circumstances," he added hastily, "I shall certainly excuse you, Grundy! You have acted very pluckily and with commendable ability, and you deserve great credit for having rid the neighbourhood of a dangerous rascal!"

In the junior Common-room that evening George Alfred Grundy was the centre of attention. He strutted about and basked in unusual glory. But, for once, everybody gave him credit for what he had done—though everybody believed it had been done by accident! Still, he had done it—there was no doubting that. For Inspector Skeat did ring up that evening, and Mr. Railton came himself to the Common-room to fetch Grundy to hear words of praise from the Head!

"After all, it was nothing!" Grundy explained modestly, on his return. "But isn't Miss Trent a stunner, you fellows? She's the rippingest girl I ever met!"

And the juniors grinned and did not dispute it.

THE END.

(Look out for: "THE PHANTOM MOTOR-BOAT!"—next week's dramatic, full-of-pep mystery story of Tom Merry & Co. You'll vote it one of the finest yarns Martin Clifford has ever written.)

CHICK CHANCE—ADVENTURER!

*Chick Finds Africa the
Land of Perils and Adven-
ture—Africa Finds Chick
Ready for Anything!*

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

CHICK CHANCE, late Flight-Commander Chichester Chance, R.A.F., V.C., D.S.O., is rescued after a crash by Herbert and Horace, late air-mechanic and pilot-sergeant of Chick's old squadron. Later, they meet Howard Paige who asks Chick if he will fly to Central Africa to look for a Professor Latimer who has come into a fortune of half a million pounds, but does not know it. If Latimer does not return within three months the money is to go to Burke Roscoe, an arrant scoundrel. Chick agrees to go and to take Herbert and Horace with him. They set off by boat to Lakola, taking a plane with them. On the boat Chick's cabin is entered at night by Roscoe, whom Chick recognises by a coiled snake tattooed on the man's hand. Roscoe, however, escapes. Arriving at Lakola, the three chums are arrested by a Major Vigon, the officer in charge of the town, who charges them with gun-running and confiscates their plane and all their equipment. Chick is advancing upon Vigon when the room is suddenly filled with armed soldiers!

(Not read on.)



A Bigger Blow Still!

BROWN fingers twitched on triggers, and dark eyes squinted malevolently along the gleaming rifle-barrels. The odds were hopeless. Chick's face was white and grim as he shrugged his shoulders resignedly, and lifted his hands above his head.

"It's no use resisting! Put 'em up, boys," he said wearily. "This skunk's got the upper hand for the time being. I'll break you for this, Vigon! You're a disgrace to the twopenny-ha'penny, tin-pot uniform you wear. How much is Burke Roscoe paying you to pull this dirty game on us?"

The Belgian's lips twitched with mingled nervousness and fury as he pawed the butt of the revolver at his belt.

"This Roscoe you speak of—I have never heard of him!" he snarled. "You are under arrest for attempted gun-running, and your property will be confiscated! Take the dogs away, men. Search them, and lock them in the cells!"

The soldiers closed in about the three airmen. Menaced by rifle-barrels and gleaming bayonets, they had no option but to file out of the room and march away across the sweltering, sun-baked courtyard.

They entered another building, slithered along a dark passage, and, having been pawed all over for concealed weapons, were pushed roughly into a gloomy, noisome chamber that was feebly lit by an iron grating set high in one wall.

The massive door clanged shut, and the tramp of feet receded in the distance. Faintly from afar came the mournful bellow of a ship's siren, as the liner that had brought them all the way from England, lifted anchor, and prepared to resume its voyage to the Cape!

"Huh! This is a bit of all right, I don't think!" remarked the diminutive Herbert, as he blinked around the dimly-lit cell and finally perched himself on the stone ledge that ran the length of one wall. "Sit down and make yourself at home, Horace. Hey, mind you don't squat on that scorpion!"

"Scorpion!" Horace leaped a yard in the air, as a scaly, greyish reptile scuttled away across the floor and vanished into a crack in the crumbling wall. "Gosh! I'd sooner face a snake than a scorpion!"

"I think that's a snake over there in that other corner," said Herbert obligingly. "No, it's not; it's a bit of old rope. Don't look so down in the mouth, Chick; we've got out of tighter corners than this."

"You're right, Herbert—and, by jingo, we're going to get out of this one!" vowed Chick Chance, jamming his hands in his pockets and aiming a vicious kick at the door, that was as thick and as solid as a block of granite. "But I never thought we were going to land in such a mess as this when we came ashore, boys."

"Of course you didn't," agreed Herbert, producing a packet of cheap cigarettes from the lining of his sun-helmet. "But now we're in it we've got to think about getting out of it. This is where my brains'll come in useful."

Horace snorted contemptuously.

"Why, you animated wart," he scoffed, "if you had ten times as many brains as you've got now you'd still be half-witted!"

"Stop chewing the rag, you fellows!" protested Chick, who had made a thorough survey of the cell and realised the futility of attempting to force a way out.

The walls were at least two feet thick, the floor of iron-hard clay, and the barred window scarcely big enough to allow a cat to pass.

"The more I think of it," continued the young airman, "the more convinced I am that Burke Roscoe has a hand in this business. Vigon has no legitimate reason to place us under arrest because we brought a certain amount of firearms and ammunition ashore. But he means to keep us here for a couple of months, until it's too late for us to think of going in search of Eustace Latimer."

"Howard Paige'll think we started on our flight and got smashed up in the interior. In the meantime, Roscoe will go back to London, claim the half-million, and probably disappear with the boodle."

Horace and Herbert stared at one another in silent dismay. It seemed that their great adventure had ended in early disaster. They were beaten before they had actually started. They had lost the plane, their belongings, and their liberty as well.

"We've got to get away from here," said Horace. "We've got to escape."

"Supposing we do," muttered Herbert gloomily. "We couldn't do anything without the plane."

"Frank Barron, the agent, is our only hope," declared Chick, pausing in his restless pacing up and down the narrow chamber. "If only we could get word to him, he might be able to do something for us. He expected us on the boat to-day. He's sure to make inquiries when we don't put in an appearance."

In that Chick was right. Everything depended on Frank Barron and such influence as he might possess with the authorities in Lakola.

For hour after hour the three flyers were left to their own devices. The prospect of spending any length of time in their present surroundings was an appalling one. The heat was almost suffocating, and the cracked walls were alive with crawling reptiles and vermin.

Once the door was opened, and a soldier pushed in a tray containing a meal of sorts and a beaker of warm, brackish water.

It was late in the afternoon when the door opened for a second time, and closed on the figure of a tall man wearing a white drill suit and a pith sun-helmet.

Chick Chance jumped to his feet and stared eagerly at the newcomer.

"Mr. Chance?" asked the man. "This is a most unfortunate situation in which I find you. My name is Barron—Frank Barron."

"By gosh, I'm glad to see you!" exclaimed the lad, as he grasped the agent warmly by the hand. "We certainly

are in a nice fix, Barron! How soon can you get us out of it?"

"I don't know that I can get you out of it at all. The situation is more serious than you appear to realise. Despite all I have said to the contrary, Major Vigon is convinced that you are guilty of attempted gun-running, and he is determined to make an example of you."

Barron shook his head gravely. He was a thin-faced man with narrow, dark eyes and a neat, black moustache. He carried one arm in a sling, and his complexion was light for one who lived in such a tropical climate.

"But can't you appeal to the British authorities?" blurted out Chick.

"It would be weeks before the authorities could move in the matter. And in any case, Vigon has confiscated your plane and guns and ammunition as contraband goods. Much as I dislike to say it, I am afraid you will have to abandon this plucky enterprise, Chance. Mr. Paige has acted too impetuously in the matter. I don't think for one moment that there is the slightest chance of your finding Eustace Latimer alive."

"And," added Barron, with a rueful gesture, "the native guide—Lobula—who brought me that message never recovered from his wounds and fever. He is dead, and the secret of Latimer's whereabouts has died with him."

Chick uttered a groan of dismay. This was the biggest blow of all. To attempt to locate Latimer without the services of the native guide would be more hopeless than trying to find a needle in a haystack.

The Coiled Snake Again!

"HUMPH! It seems that our wings have been properly clipped!" exclaimed Chick miserably.

"The luck has certainly been against you," agreed Barron. He suddenly lowered his voice, and crossed to make certain that the door was tightly closed. "Look here, I don't want to see you fellows cooped up in here for the next couple of months. If you're willing to place yourselves in my hands, I think I can get you away from here and smuggle you aboard a boat that'll take you safely back to London."

"Back to London!" echoed Chick. "You're suggesting that we chuck up the whole business and crawl back to Paige with our tails between our legs?"

"What else can you do? I am certain that Paige would advise the same course if he knew the circumstances. You have lost your plane and all your kit, and the native guide is dead."

"Yes, I know it sounds pretty hopeless," said Chick slowly. "But I don't like to admit defeat so early in the game. I'm dashed certain that soundrel Burk Roscoe is at the bottom of this business!"

"Impossible!" protested Barron. "I don't suppose Major Vigon has ever heard of Roscoe. I am speaking for your own good, Chance. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll send a cablegram straight away to Paige and tell him how you're fixed, and ask him to wire instructions. How does that sound to you?"

"Pretty good," said Chick. "After all, Paige is our boss, and we'll stand or fall by his reply. I'm not throwing up the sponge without his permission."

"I admire your pluck; but the odds are all against you, old man. I'll come and see you to-morrow, when I've received Paige's reply."

Barron left the cell. The door closed behind him; and Chick and his chums stared gloomily at one another. They were not at all heartened at the result of the agent's visit. It seemed to have sounded the death-knell to all their hopes and ambitions.

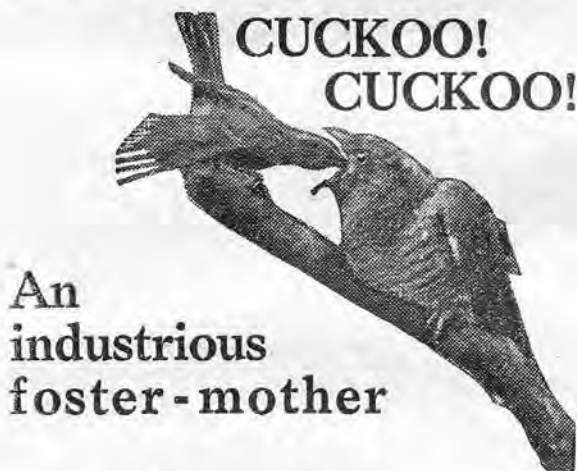
There was to be no thrilling aerial dash into the heart of unknown Africa. Instead they were to be packed straight back to England to report their miserable failure to Howard Paige, and the fate of Eustace Latimer, the lost explorer, and his daughter, would remain an unsolved mystery for evermore.

"Gosh! It's mighty tough luck," groaned Horace. "But I suppose Barron's right. We don't stand a dog's chance of finding Latimer without the plane, and that black fellow to guide us. How does Barron think he's going to help us to escape from this dog's hole?"

"Bribery, I suppose," suggested Chick. "I dare say he knows the ropes here in Lakola."

"Well, well, this is a smack in the eye!" sighed Herbert dejectedly. "I thought I was going to get me name and me photograph in the papers over this business. I've allus sort of wanted to do something really big in life."

"Go and whitewash an elephant," suggested Horace cynically, "or get a job as a window-cleaner at the Crystal Palace."



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Later in the day another coarse meal was pushed into them, also three straw-filled pallets, and a number of tattered, evil-smelling blankets. The dark hours of the night seemed interminable to the three young airmen, and the first gleam of dawn through the barred window of the fetid cell found them still wide awake, heavy-eyed, haggard, and dishevelled.

It must have been nearly midday when footsteps echoed in the passage. The door was unlocked, and Frank Barron walked into their midst.

Chick's face fell, and he shrugged his shoulders resignedly as he read the cablegram that the agent handed to him.

"Boys, listen to this," he said bitterly. "It's an answer from Howard Paige, and it puts the tin-hat on everything. Agree situation hopeless. Instruct Chance to cancel all arrangements, and return as soon as can be arranged."

Horace and Herbert uttered a hollow groan of dismay. Paige's instructions were final. They meant the abandonment of the daring scheme to find Eustace Latimer, the missing explorer, and heir to half a million of money!

"Well, we're entirely in your hands, Barron," said Chick, with a hopeless gesture. "Now we know the worst the sooner you get us out of this infernal place the better."

"I have made all arrangements—you will be free to-night," assured Barron, with a confident smile. "Major Vigon has left Lakola, and will be away for several days. His next in command has proved more amenable to reason—and money."

The agent winked meaningly, and glanced at his watch.

"I shall be back here for you soon after dark to-night. There is a vessel in the bay that is sailing for Southampton before morning. The skipper is a friend of mine, and at a given signal from me he will send a boat ashore to pick you up."

It was an inglorious end to what had promised to be a glorious adventure. Beaten in the first move of the game they were to be shipped back to England to report the utter failure of their mission, with the loss of the big monoplane, and all the kit and costly adjuncts that Howard Paige had supplied.

"Well, I suppose we'll be lucky to get away with our freedom," said Horace forlornly. "It's back to the old chewing-gum and cough lozenge game for us, Herbert."

It was an hour after darkness when a key rattled in the lock, and the cell door was thrust open.

"Come along, you fellows!" said Barron, flashing the beam of an electric torch. "It's all clear. You can walk out of here as though you owned the place."

They emerged in the courtyard of the government building, and walked towards the open gates. Chick noticed that there was no sign of the big crates and packing-cases that had contained the parts of their plane.

"Vigon has probably had them stored away," explained Barron, in answer to his question. "The plane and guns will be confiscated by the authorities. You're lucky not to have lost more than that."

The riding-lights of two or three vessels twinkled in the centre of the sweep of Lakola Bay. They passed several natives and white men as they walked boldly along the upper shore, but none paid any attention to them. From some beach-house came the tinkle of a cracked piano, guffaws of coarse laughter, and the clink of bottles and glasses.

And over all hung the throbbing stillness of an African night. Away to the east were the illimitable swamps, jungles, and forests of the Belgian Congo, into the heart of which Eustace Latimer had vanished two years previously.

Barron led the way down the firm, sandy beach, and halted in the shadow of a tin-roofed shed, that exuded an odour of dried copra.

"There's your boat out there," he said, nodding towards the waters of the bay. "You'll soon be safe aboard, and homeward bound. I promised to flash the skipper a signal about ten o'clock. Must be nearly that now."

The agent had discarded the sling that he had been wearing earlier in the day, and carried his left hand tucked into the front of his linen jacket.

He half withdrew it, to glance at the watch on his wrist, and, realising the slip he had made, hastily thrust it out of sight again. But he was too late—Chick Chance's sharp eyes had not failed to observe a tattoo on the back of the man's hand. It was the coiled snake!

There was a moment's tense silence. Chick drew a sharp breath of amazement, and he could feel the blood drumming in his ears.

"What trickery's this?" he jerked hoarsely. "You're not Frank Barron! By Heavens, you're Burk Roscoe himself!"

The supposed trader uttered a snarl of baffled rage, and one hand flashed to the gun on his hip. Once more

he was not swift enough for the quick-witted young airman.

Chick's clenched fist came across like the kick of a mule. His bunched knuckles caught the man squarely on the point of the jaw. He grunted once and pitched forward to the sand as though he had been struck by a thunderbolt!

"Suffering cats! Wot's the game, Chick?" gulped Horace, in an awed voice. "What's the great idea in soaking Barron on the button like that? He didn't speak out of his turn, did he?"

"Barron be blowed!" jerked Chick, as he knelt down beside the senseless man. "This is no more Barron than I am! It's Burk Roscoe! Look! Here's the tattoo mark on the back of his left hand!"

Horace and Herbert goggled bewilderedly at one another.

"Well, for the love of Pete!" exclaimed Herbert weakly. "What sort of a mix-up is this? What the dickens does it mean?"

Chick was doing some quick thinking. He sat cross-legged on the sand, watching Roscoe like a cat guarding a mouse hole.

"I reckon it's pretty clear," he said at length. "There's no doubt now that Roscoe and Major Vigon are in league with one another. Vigon tried to prevent us from landing at Lakola, and when we insisted on doing so he arrested us on a trumped-up charge. But he realised that he couldn't detain us for long, once Barron got wind of what had happened."

"So Roscoe came along, and coolly kidded us that he was Barron. He knew that we'd never set eyes on the man. His game was to pack us off back to England, and leave him with a clear field. Either that, or to shanghai us aboard some boat that was bound for the other end of the world!"

"Crums!" gasped Horace. "But steady on! Wot about that cablegram from old Paige?"

"A fake, of course!" declared Chick confidently. "Roscoe probably got hold of a blank cablegram-form, and filled it in himself. By gosh, I'll give the beggar his due. He properly bluffed us."

"Huh! I'd like to bluff him, right on the nose!" muttered Herbert vengefully. "That wasn't such a bad wallop you landed him, Chick."

Chick was busy. He had torn Roscoe's linen coat in strips, and was hastily tying the man's wrists and ankles together. Finally he jammed the remains of the jacket into his mouth in the form of an effective gag, and bound it in place.

"Reckon that'll keep him quiet for a while," he said grimly, as he carried him into the copra shed, and dumped him down in a dark corner.

"And how do we stand now?" asked Horace puzzledly. "What's the next item on the programme?"

"To find the real Frank Barron, of course," answered Chick promptly. "Don't you fellows realise that this discovery has altered the whole state of affairs? We're not going back to England! We're going ahead with the job that brought us here, if only we can recover the plane. Roscoe bluffed us that Lobula, the native carrier, was dead. He's probably alive, and waiting to guide us to where Eustace Latimer is to be found. We're going to win through yet, old sons. Pick up your feet; we've got to find Barron right away."

(Chick's not the boy to lose heart, is he, chums? But little does he know the startling surprise awaiting him when he does eventually find Barron. You'll be held spellbound with every line of next week's instalment of this powerful serial.)

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