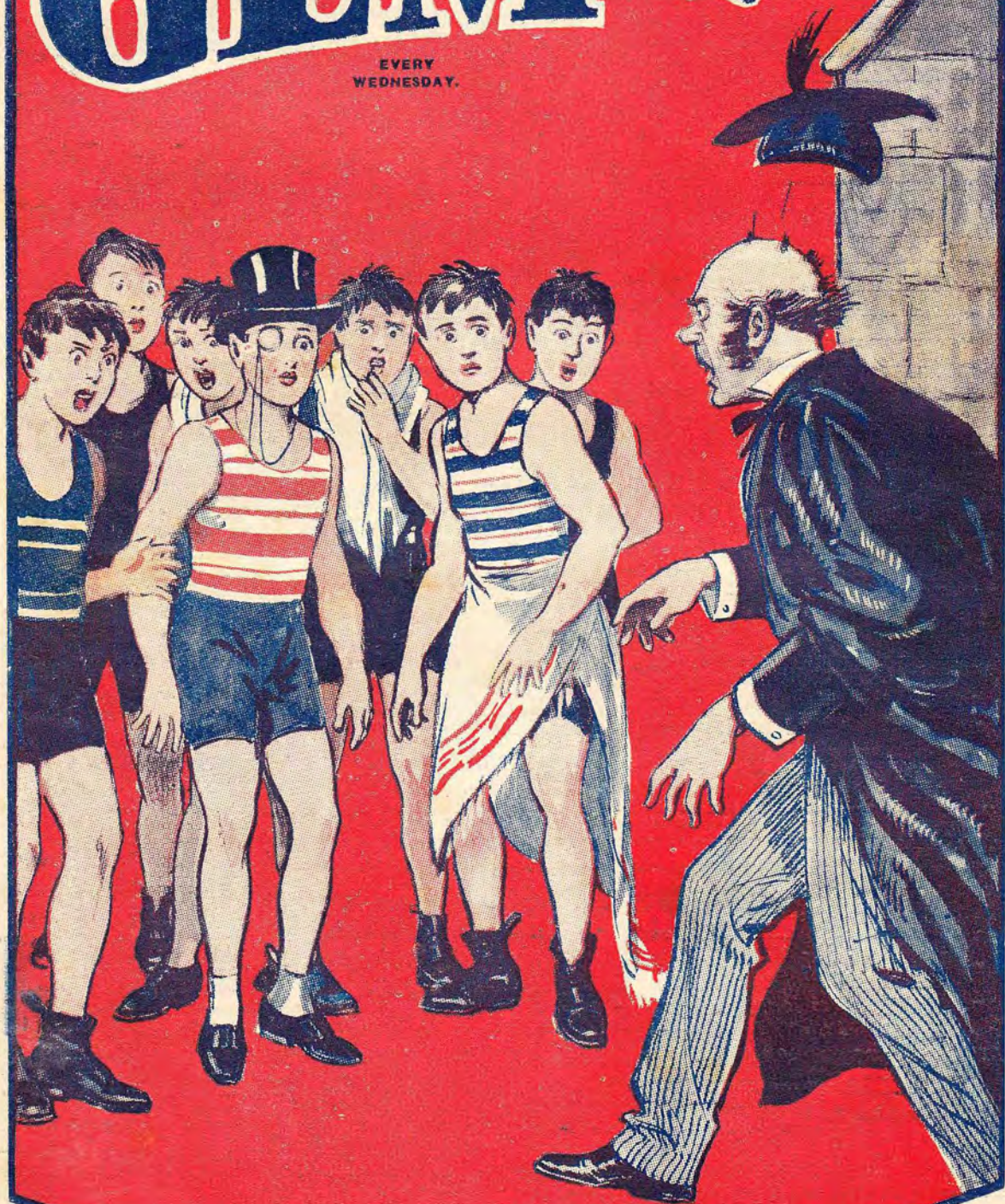


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THE GEM

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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DON'T READ IT IN YOUR BATH! GRUNDY'S EFFORTS TO SWIM—

GRUNDY *the*

by Martin Clifford

CHAPTER 1.

Grundy Makes a Splash!

"LIKE a fish!"
"Hem!"
"Like a giddy fish!" repeated George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell at St. Jim's, with emphasis. "Like a conger-eel! You've seen a conger-eel flashing through the water, you men?"

Wilkins and Gunn, Grundy's faithful followers, who were walking across the quad towards the gates with their great leader, shook their heads.

"Can't say I have, old chap," said Gunn. "What about it?"

"Well, that's what I'm like in the water, anyway," said Grundy. "The water's my natural home. I'm just as much at home in the river or the sea as I am in this blessed quad. In other words, I'm a born swimmer!"

"Hem!"

"The finest swimmer in the Lower School, in fact!" said Grundy, glaring from Wilkins to Gunn. "What's more, I'm prepared to wallop anybody who doesn't agree with me. Do you chaps agree with me?"

"Hem! Yes, rather, old man!"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Wilkins, with rather an anxious glance at Grundy's clenched fist. "I always did say you were a good swimmer, old fellow!"

"Just as well for you!" growled Grundy. "Now, that being admitted, can you fellows give any explanation of the attitude of that ass Merry in leaving me out of the swimming trial this afternoon?"

Wilkins exchanged a wink with Gunn.

"Rather surprising, old chap, I must admit," he observed.

"Surprising! That's not the word for it!" snorted Grundy. "It's the most staggering thing that's happened for terms. We're winding up the swimming season with a gala on the river, and, for the honour of the School, we've simply got to pull off the relay race with the Grammar School—"

"Hear, hear!" said Wilkins and Gunn cordially.

"Yet this so-called junior captain of ours"—Grundy's lips curled slightly—"deliberately leaves me out of the trial. Me, you know! What reason can he possibly have?"

Wilkins and Gunn shook heads.

"Do you think it's possible that he doesn't realise what a tip-top swimmer you are?" asked Gunn gravely.

Grundy frowned.

"I suppose it's just possible. Not very likely that he can be so ignorant, though. After all, he's seen me in the water—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you silly asses, what the thump are you cackling at?" hooted the great man of the Shell.

"Hem! Sorry, old chap! I was just thinking of that

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A New, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.

screamingly funny joke you told us the other day. The one about one rode a horse and the other rhododendron, you know," explained Gunn glibly. "Scream, wasn't it, Wilky?"

"Oh, rather! Grundy's stories always are rather funny!" gasped Wilkins. "Go on, old chap!"

"Merry's seen me in the water," continued Grundy, a little mollified at hearing the gratifying reason for his followers' merriment. "So there's no excuse for him. He must know jolly well that I can beat anyone else in the school hands down. Yet he leaves me out. Why is it?"

"Echo answers, 'Why?'" grinned Wilkins.

"It's because he's jealous—that's why?" declared Grundy. "I've experienced it before at cricket. I shall expect to get it again, now that the footer season's beginning. But I really did think I'd get a square deal at swimming."

"Too bad, isn't it?" sympathised Gunn.

"Worse than bad—it's awful!" growled Grundy.

"Merry's going just a bit too far at last. To add insult to injury, he even includes you fellows in the trial. If it wasn't so tragic it would be funny. Giving a trial to hopeless, incompetent fat-heads like you—"

"Look here——" said Wilkins and Gunn simultaneously.

"And leaving out the chap who taught you all you know about swimming," said Grundy, thereby distorting the truth rather considerably. "Could injustice go farther? You fellows on the way to the swimming trial, and me coming along to watch! Br-r-r-r!"

"No need to come along if you don't want to, old man," said Gunn, almost hopefully.

"Eh?"

"You can stay away, old chap, if you feel it so keenly. Go for a walk, or punt a footer about——"

Jumping Jupiter! Grundy's going to tackle the channel swim! Grundy, the World's Worst Waterbaby!

—THE CHANNEL WOULD MAKE YOU DROWN WITH LAUGHTER!

CHANNEL SWIMMER!



Five minutes later Wilkins and Gunn emerged with Tom Merry and a crowd of other juniors, all in swimming kit.

Grundy rose and met them. He bestowed a curt nod on Tom Merry, who responded with a cheery grin.

"One moment, Merry!"

"Hallo, Grundy, old scout! Come to watch the sport?" asked Tom genially.

Grundy frowned.

"Not exactly. Got something better to do than to watch a lot of third-raters like you paddling about. What I've come for is an explanation."

"Have a dozen, if you like!" said Tom Merry agreeably. "What sort of an explanation do you want?"

"I want to know why you've left out the best swimmer in the Lower School from this so-called trial?"

"But I haven't. I put myself down as a matter of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy glared.

"Making a joke of it—eh? Still, you know what I mean all right. I could beat anybody on your blessed list with my hands tied behind my back."

"Yes; but it's a relay race, not a dive to the bottom," explained Tom Merry. "You see, old bean—"

"You funny ass!" hooted Grundy. "I mean swimming—not what you fellows look on as swimming, but real swimming—my kind!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I'm here to say that there's nobody in the Lower School who can hold a candle to me at swimming!" roared Grundy. "Short or long distances, they're all the same to me. I could swim to the boathouse while the rest of you were taking off—"

"Great pip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or beat you all for endurance, if it comes to that! One of these days," said Grundy impressively, "I'm going to swim the Channel!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Swim the Channel! The English Channel—Dover to Calais!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "Grundy—Channel swimmer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled.

Grundy only glared.

"Cackle away, you silly cuckoos!" he growled. "Suppose you think I'm not good enough to do it?"

"Well, there's just a doubt!" gasped Jack Blake of the Fourth. "Only a slight doubt, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackling idiots! Anyway, that's beside the point. The point, for the moment, is that I've been left out of this trial. What I want to know, Merry, is, are you going to change your mind?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Fraid not, old bean. I don't want to hurt your feelings at all, but you're really not good enough."

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"You silly ass!" roared Grundy. "Think I'm going to take it lying down, then, you idiot?"

"Don't see what else you can do!"

"Well, you jolly soon will see, then! When I said I was coming down with you to watch, I didn't mean that that was all I was going to do. I shall do several other things while I'm there. Tell Tom Merry just what I think of him, for one!"

"Hem!"

"And punch his nose for another!" said Grundy. "That'll give him something to think about, perhaps."

"But—"

"Grundy, old man—"

"Don't dawdle! I haven't got all the afternoon to waste."

"No; but—"

"And I don't want any 'buts' from you, Wilkins, either! I get rather tired of 'buts' from you fellows. March!"

Wilkins and Gunn decided to abandon their objections and march.

They went out of the gates and down the lane, then struck off across the footpath leading down to the river.

Quite a number of juniors, many carrying swimming costumes and towels, were walking in the same direction, and there were many grins as Grundy came along. Since the trial list had been posted up on the notice-board that morning Grundy had made his views on the relay race with the Rylcombe Grammar School team quite clear to half the Lower School. With Grundy turning up for the trial, they saw the possibility of a little fun in the offing.

They were not disappointed.

Wilkins and Gunn, on reaching the riverside, went to the changing-hut that stood some distance back from the water's edge.

Grundy sat on the bank of the river while they changed, moodily watching candidates for the relay race team diving in.

Grundy took a step forward.

"And that's all, is it?"

"Just about all!"

"Right!" said Grundy.

So saying, he raised his big fist and made a rush at the leader of the St. Jim's juniors.

Tom dodged—hurriedly. He was standing at the water's edge, and a push from Grundy would only have knocked him into the river; but Tom preferred a less exciting method of going in.

The result was disastrous for Grundy.

Grundy had intended punching the junior captain on the nose. But he didn't succeed in punching any part of his intended victim. All he managed to punch was thin air.

Grundy, overbalanced, fell forward.

Splash!

"Whoooooop!"

With a wild yell George Alfred Grundy disappeared under the water, to reappear half a dozen yards out in the stream.

He struck out. But alas for Grundy's boasts! The great man of the Shell found that swimming, fully clothed, was not particularly easy in the swiftly moving current of the Rhyl. He made no progress whatever, and even showed signs of going under again.

There was a shout from Tom Merry.

"Fish him out!"

"What-ho!"

Tom and half a dozen others dived in and raced to the rescue. In a matter of seconds Grundy was being towed in to the bank again, amid cheers from the onlookers.

"Well saved, Tommy!"

Grundy, oozing water, crawled up the bank. He might have been expected to show signs of gratitude to his rescuers. But Grundy evidently didn't feel that the situation called for gratitude. Possibly he felt annoyed; for a budding Channel swimmer to experience the humiliation of being fished out of a river a few yards from the bank was certainly rather annoying. Grundy undoubtedly looked annoyed.

"Well, that's that!" remarked Monty Lowther. "And now, Grundy, resuming what you were saying about that Channel swim—"

CHAPTER 2.

Grundy Gets His Own Back!

"H A, ha, ha!"

The juniors shrieked.

"Carry on, Grundy!" chortled Figgins of the New House. "You were talking about starting from Dover—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And finishing up at Calais. Or was it Hamburg?"

"Or New York?" chuckled Cyrus K. Handcock, the new junior from U.S.A. "I guess it's just about as reasonable!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy shook himself and gasped.

"Ow! Poof! I think I swallowed some water! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to laugh at, you howling idiots—"

"Your mistake; there is!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, do we think there's anything to laugh at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently the fellows did see something to laugh at, for they were roaring.

"Oh dear! You'll be the death of me, Grundy!" remarked Tom Merry. "Too bad to laugh, but I really couldn't help it. After talking about swimming the Channel—"

"Look here—" said Grundy.

"You fall into the Rhyl and we have to rescue you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy shook himself again and snorted like an old war-horse.

"Cackling idiots! Think you rescued me, then?"

"Not think, old bean! We know it!"

"Rot! When you fatheads grabbed me, I was just striking out—"

"You were just going to the bottom!" corrected Jack Blake.

"I could have reached the bank easily—"

"You could have reached the bottom a jolly sight more easily!"

"It's all bosh!" hooted Grundy. "This is a conspiracy, by James! You fellows know dashed well that I'm the best junior swimmer in the school—"

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"What—still?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jealousy! That's what it is!" snorted Grundy. "You try to sit on me because I'm modest and don't boast—"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Great pip! Say that again, Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All because I've never asserted myself—never pushed myself forward!" roared Grundy. "But this swimming business has put the lid on it, and I shan't be so modest now. I'll do something that'll jolly well force you to admit my worth. Perhaps swim the Channel—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"From Dover—"

"Don't!" almost wept Monty Lowther. "Save the rest for another time, or I'll bust!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To Calais!" finished Grundy, grimly determined to say his say. "Perhaps if I do that—"

"If!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll sit up and take notice! Anyway, blow you—all the lot of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled. Grundy, after glaring round the crowd almost wolfishly, tramped off, still oozing water.

The first thought of the great man of the Shell was naturally to get back to St. Jim's and have a rub-down and a complete change of clothing.

As he passed the changing-hut, however, something happened to cause him to alter his programme slightly.

The changing-hut was deserted now, the swimmers being all down by the riverside. There was nobody in charge, and, as the spectators were all too interested in the trial to keep an eye on things, the swimmers' belongings were completely unattended.

Grundy observed that circumstance in passing the open door of the hut.

Just past the hut he observed something else in the shape of an empty lorry driving slowly up the slope from the direction of a bungalow that was being erected farther down the river.

Grundy was not, as a rule, subject to sudden inspirations. Possibly on this occasion, however, his immersion in the Rhyl had stimulated his mental processes. At any rate, inspiration did undoubtedly come to George Alfred Grundy as his eyes turned from the changing-hut to the lorry.

"By gum!" he said.

Then he smiled. It was rather a watery smile, but a smile for all that.

"I'll show 'em!" he muttered.

He rushed over to the track which the lorry was ascending and held up both hands as a signal for the driver to stop.

The driver looked by no means pleased at having to halt in the middle of the steep incline, but he did stop eventually. After that, he directed a glare at Grundy.

"Makin' a man stop! Wot's the idea?" he inquired unpleasantly.

"I want you," answered Grundy calmly. "Got a job for you, in fact. You see that hut over there—"

"An' who are you, wantin' me? Stoppin' a man on a 'ill 'cause why, 'cause you want 'im! Look 'ere, young shaver—"

"Quick, there's no time to waste," interrupted Grundy. "I'll pay you, of course. There'll be a pound for you and it won't take more than ten minutes—"

"A pound, did you say?" asked the lorry driver, his expression undergoing a sudden and surprising change.

"A whole pound!" said Grundy, holding up a bank-note, which, though dripping with wet, looked quite negotiable.

"For ten minutes' work?"

"Won't take you much longer."

"Right! I'm on, guv'nor!" said the driver, a beaming smile replacing his previous scowl. "Wot is it?"

Grundy jerked his thumb in the direction of the changing-hut.

"There are some togs in there belonging to those chaps you see in the water. I want you to hike 'em all out and put 'em in your bus, then unload them at St. Jim's. I'll come with you and look after them at the other end."

"H'm! All fair an' square like, I suppose?"

Grundy grinned.

"I'm not pinching them, if that's what you mean. They're all chaps I know from St. Jim's, and they've just been taking a rise out of me. This'll be my way of showing 'em what's what. It's just a lark."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the driver. "Well, sir, if you're sure I shan't get into no trouble about it—"

"Of course you won't, I'll see to that. Get busy!"

Grundy meant to punch Tom Merry, but he missed, over-balanced, and fell with a splash into the river!



The driver dismounted, leaving his engine still running, and followed Grundy into the changing-hut.

Clothes were in all directions inside the hut—on pegs, on hangers, flung across boxes and chairs, and strewn over the floor.

"Take 'em!" said Grundy, with a sweeping gesture round the hut.

"My heye! All of 'em?"

"All the lot! I'll help you!"

And Grundy set the example by rapidly jerking suit after suit from a row of pegs along the wall and piling them up in his arms.

The lorry driver waded in.

Four hands made a light job of it. There were something like twenty suits of clothes to be removed, not to mention underwear, but two trips on the driver's part and one on Grundy's were sufficient to clear the hut with the exception of boots and towels, which Grundy was merciful enough to leave.

"Done it!" remarked Grundy's assistant, after he had piled the "swag" in a heap at the back of his lorry.

"And no one any the wiser!" said Grundy, with satisfaction, after a hurried glance back at the river where the swimming trial was in full swing. "Now run me up to St. Jim's like the dickens. I'm wringing wet."

The driver jumped up into his seat and Grundy climbed in beside him.

The lorry started off again.

Five minutes later they were at the gates of St. Jim's, where Taggles the porter greeted both the lorry and Grundy with a stare.

Grundy dismounted.

"Want you, Taggles!" he announced.

"Look 'ere, Master Grundy—"

"Run all this stuff up to the Shell dormitory at once. It doesn't all belong there, but they can sort it out when they get back."

Taggles jumped as his eyes fell on the pile of clothing inside the lorry.

"Which I'll report you—" he began.

"You mean you'll accept a little present from me!" corrected Grundy, slipping a ten-shilling note into the crusty old porter's hand. "And buzz this stuff up to the dorm in double-quick time. Driver! What's your name?"

"Bill 'Arris, sir!" grinned the lorry driver.

"Well, Bill Harris, thanks for helping me. Here's what I promised you."

"Thank you, sir! You're a gentleman!" remarked Bill Harris. "An' if you ever need 'elp again—"

"Don't suppose I shall, but I'll remember you if I do!" said Grundy. "Cheerio!"

And the great man of the Shell rushed off to the School House to change, leaving Bill Harris pocketing his pound note with an air of great satisfaction, and Taggles staring after him as though mesmerised.

CHAPTER 3. Grundy's Win!

"MY clobber!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth made that exclamation as he stood in the doorway of the changing-hut.

The swell of St. Jim's had just come out of the water and walked up to the hut, towelling himself as he did so.

In the doorway he stopped, his noble face the picture of bewilderment.

"My clobber! What the mewwy dickens—"

"Anything up, Gus?" called out Jack Blake, from the river bank.

"Yaas! My clobber!"

"What about your blessed clobber?"

"It's not heah, deah boy. It's gone!"

"Eh?"

"Completely disappeared. Uttahly vanished, in fact!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of unsympathetic laughter from the crowd of swimmers leaving the water. Laughter, in the circumstances, was, perhaps, hardly in good taste. But Gussy's immaculate clobber usually did excite merriment at St. Jim's. D'Arcy himself took the subject of his personal adornment very seriously, which possibly explained why others treated it humorously.

"Somebody run off with it, then?" inquired Figgins.

"Pweicely!"

"Gentlemen!" said Figgins solemnly. "This is where the universe crashes in ruins around us. Gus will have to walk back in his bathing costume!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"You ought to have a detective to watch 'em!" said Monty Lowther. "Stands to reason that togs like yours would attract any old clo' dealer who happened to pass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any weason for cacklin'! I forgot to mention, by the way, that all the west of the clobber has gone as well!"

"Wha-a-at!"

The juniors' grins vanished with startling suddenness. The swimmers crowded up to the door of the changing-hut and looked in. Then they yelled.

"Gone!"

"All the lot of it!" roared Jack Blake. "Why the thump didn't you say so at first?"

"I told you my clobber had gone."

"Nobody worries about your clobber, fathead! But what about ours?"

"Quite a different matter!" grinned Digby, who, being one of those who had not been into the water, could afford to grin. "But who the thump—"

"Grundy!" yelled Wilkins.

"Eh?"

"It's Grundy! That silly ass—"

"Oh, my hat! Of course!"

"It's Grundy!" groaned Gunn. "Of all the fooling fat-heads—"

"Surely the howling idiot hasn't—"

"But he has!" roared Herries. "Come to think of it, I did spot him standing by the hut while I was in the water. There was a lorry at the back. He took 'em away in that!"

"Oh, great pip!"

The swimmers looked at each other in utter dismay.

"That's it, right enough," said Tom Merry. "He went off in a fearful rage. This is what he's done to score over us."

"M-m-my hat!"

"Oh dear!"

"The—the dummy!"

"The howling, shrieking idiot!" moaned Figgins. "He's taken all our clobber and left us stranded! I'll slaughter him!"

"We'll pulverise him for this!" muttered Blake. "But what the merry dickens are we to do now?"

"Get dried, first," said Tom Merry. "Don't want to catch colds through it, anyway. After that—"

"We can wait here till the rest of you bring up fresh togs—"

"And catch colds, anyway!" grunted Blake. "That's no go. Only one thing. He's left us our boots. We must hike through the woods as we are and sneak in by the back gate, trusting to luck not to be spotted."

"Bai Jove! I uttably wefuse to walk home in a bathin' costume an' boots—"

"Then you can wait here all night!" snorted Blake.

"Let's get dried!"

The swimmers, their expressions almost homicidal, streamed into the changing-hut and started drying themselves. That had to be done, anyway.

The fellows who, luckily for themselves, had taken no part in the afternoon's swimming, stood outside the hut, grinning. They could see the funny side of the affair.

Tom Merry emerged at last, wearing boots as well as his swimming garb. A crowd followed him, similarly attired, and there was a chuckle from the crowd. The boots and the swimming costumes formed a ludicrous contrast which was irresistible.

"My hat! You do look good!" commented Digby.

"Don't think I'm unsympathetic, but it's rather funny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, can it!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Crowd round us as much as you can and we'll make a start. You ready, Gus?"

"I tell you I uttably decline— Yawwooop!"

"March!" said Jack Blake, who had forcibly ended

D'Arcy's objections to returning to St. Jim's without his clothes by the simple process of seizing him by the neck and hurrying him forward. "And don't talk!"

"I uttably wefuse— Whooop!"

And Arthur Augustus gave up refusing and marched with the rest.

Escorted by their grinning colleagues, the unhappy swimmers tramped through the woods.

Fortunately, the woods seemed to be deserted, and they arrived at the road that skirted St. Jim's without meeting a soul. They even got across the road and through the side gate without attracting attention. But there their luck deserted them.

Just as they were making down the gravel path towards the school buildings a figure in cap and gown appeared round the shrubbery, and there was a groan from the crowd.

"Ratty!"

It was Mr. Ratcliff, the sour-tempered Housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's. Mr. Ratcliff looked at them and jumped.

"Boys!"

"Oh!"

"Oh dear!"

"How dare you!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "Perambulating through the school grounds in bathing costumes, indeed! How dare you, I say!"

"Bai Jove! If I might explain, sir—"

"You will not explain, D'Arcy! I refuse to listen to explanations of such inexcusable behaviour! Return to your House at once and I will report the matter to Mr. Raiton. Figgins!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I am disgusted at your associating with these School House hooligans in such a disgusting orgy!" said Mr. Ratcliff, fairly rolling the words on his tongue. "You and the rest of the New House boys will get dressed immediately and thereafter report to me for a severe caning. Go!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"But, Mr. Watcliff—" began Arthur Augustus.

"I forbid you to speak, D'Arcy!"

"Nevahtheless, Mr. Watcliff, I insist on disabusin' your mind of the ideah that I should willingly consent to appeah in public—"

"Silence!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall report you to Mr. Raiton for insolence as well, now!"

"But, my deah sir—"

"Go!" shrieked Ratty; and he streaked off to the School House to carry out his amiable intention of reporting the School House miscreants without waiting to argue further with the indignant swell of the Fourth.

"That's done it!" remarked Figgins, with a grimace.

"Wait till we get Grundy now!"

"We'll get him first!" said Blake grimly. "If he's in the School House now we'll get him in the next few minutes!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And, consoling themselves a little with that thought, the School House party took leave of Figgins & Co. and made off to their own quarters.

Running the gauntlet of scores of curious School House juniors did nothing to improve their tempers. Roars of laughter and a hundred-and-one facetious questions greeted them on their journey up the stairs, and by the time they reached the Shell dormitory the School House swimmers were fairly raging.

Tom Merry led the way into the dorm. In the doorway he stopped with a sudden exclamation.

"My hat! Grundy!"

"What!"

"He's here!"

And so he was! George Alfred Grundy, large as life and twice as natural, as Monty Lowther afterwards remarked, was calmly sitting on his bed regarding with great satisfaction a huge pile of miscellaneous clothing that stood in the centre of the dormitory.

Grundy looked round as the door opened. Then he laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha! So you've arrived! Look at you! Boots and swimming costumes! Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy roared.

Tom Merry and a dozen School House juniors also roared—but not with laughter. As they roared they moved forward as if moved by a common impulse.

"So it was you!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Little me!" grinned Grundy. "Some jape—what! Ha, ha, ha!" Then Grundy's tone suddenly underwent a startling transformation. "Whooop! Yaroooooh!"

"Scrag him!" came a yell from the swimming contingent.

And the probabilities were that Grundy would have been well and truly scragged but for an untimely interruption.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, came through the doorway, his brows thunderous.

"Boys!"

"Cave!"

"Railton here!"

"Oh crikey!"

The scraggers hastily abandoned their scragging, and the scragged staggered to his feet, a little though not much the worse for wear.

"Disgraceful!" said Mr. Railton, who looked for some reason unusually annoyed. "Merry! You were leading an attack on Grundy!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Utterly disgraceful! Any repetition of such behaviour

and I shall gate all concerned for a month!" snapped Mr. Railton. His eye swept sternly round the scantily-attired crowd. "I have just received an astonishing report from Mr. Ratcliff to the effect that a number of you have been out of the school premises clad only in swimming costumes. Seemingly that report is correct."

"Oh, sir!"

The juniors understood Railton's ill-humour. Ratty had been "rubbing it in."

All eyes were turned on Grundy. Grundy grinned ruefully and took his cue.

Whatever his faults, Grundy could always be relied on to play the game.

"It was all my fault, sir," he said.

"I was hoping they'd get through without being spotted; but they haven't, so I'll own up!"

"You admit, Grundy, that you were responsible for all these boys appearing in public in swimming costumes?"

"That's it, sir."

Grundy explained. Mr. Railton's brow cleared a little as he listened. It was not the wholesale orgy which Mr. Ratcliff had described, after all, and the Housemaster felt considerably relieved.

"Very well, Grundy," he remarked when Grundy had finished. "I will talk to you in the morning and perhaps convince you at the same time that such exploits as this are, to say the least of it, unwise. In the circumstances I shall not punish the rest of you."

"Thank you, sir."

"Were any New House boys concerned in the affair?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Several, sir," answered Tom Merry. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to mention the matter to Mr. Ratcliff—"

A half-smile appeared on Mr. Railton's face.

"I will do so at once, Merry. Now you will get changed, boys. And kindly leave the punishment of Grundy to me; otherwise, there will be trouble for some of you!"

Mr. Railton, with a nod, quitted the dormitory, and with his going ended Grundy's little jape.

Grundy, though faced with the prospect of an extremely painful ten minutes in the Housemaster's room in the morning, chortled. Canings, even from Mr. Railton, meant little to him.

Grundy's victims, on the other hand, though relieved that they were not to suffer more than they had suffered already, felt by no means happy. They would have given weeks of pocket-money to have been allowed to finish scragging the great man of the shell. But after Railton's warning that was impossible, so they had to listen to Grundy's chortles and simply fume.

It was Grundy's win!

CHAPTER 4.

Grundy's Momentous Decision!

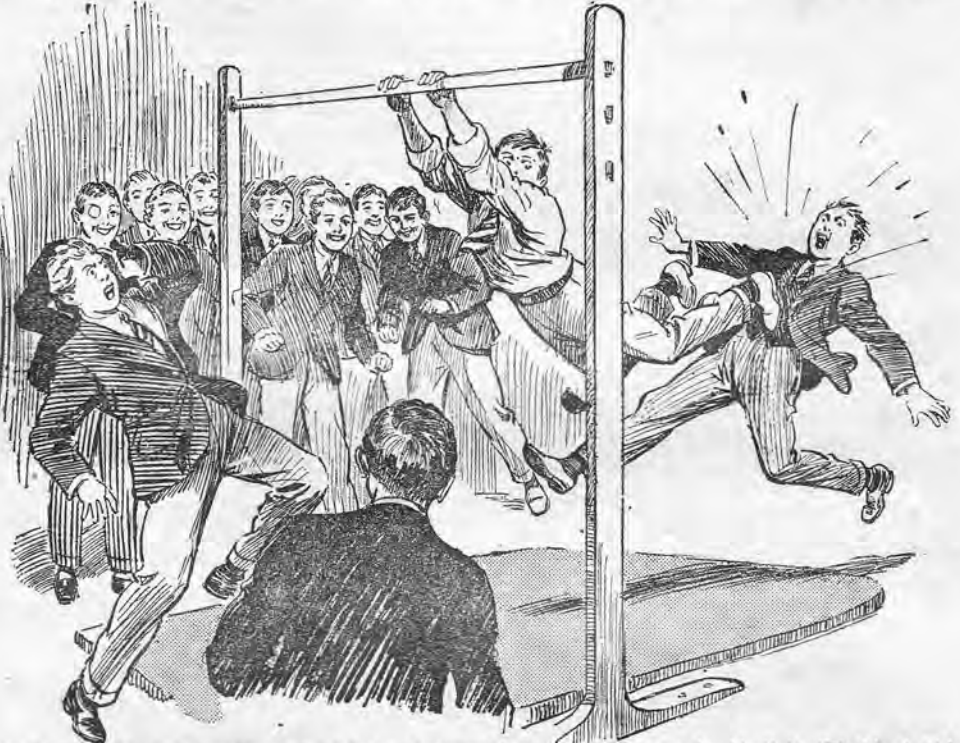
"WHY not?"

Grundy asked that question in Study No. 3 on the following evening.

Wilkins and Gunn, who had just finished prep, looked up with a start. Grundy had been silent for five minutes, and that phenomenal and almost unprecedented state of affairs had brought about an atmosphere of peace which gave Grundy's voice the quality of an unexpected clap of thunder.

"Why not what?" asked Wilkins.

"If you mean why not do some prep, I should say it's a jolly good idea," remarked Gunn. "So far, you've spent



Wilkins got the side of one of Grundy's big shoes on his ear, and Gunn received both heels in his chest!

the evening staring out of the window. Linton may be waxy about it in the morning."

Grundy grunted.

"Don't be an idiot, Gunn. Prep's very necessary for chaps like you and Wilky, who're a bit dull and slow-witted at school work. It's different with me, of course."

"Why, you silly ass—"

"Blow prep! I've been thinking of something more important than prep."

"That motor ride you promised to take us some time ago?" suggested Wilkins. "It's very good of you, old man—"

"Blow the motor ride! That can wait," said Grundy. "I'm talking about swimming."

"Oh!"

Wilkins and Gunn looked a little grim. They had not altogether forgotten yet how Grundy had left them and the rest of the crowd to walk home in their swimming costumes.

Grundy had not forgotten it yet, either, retaining the liveliest recollection of the "licking" he had received from Mr. Railton that morning. Wilkins and Gunn remembered it in a different way, but no less keenly.

"It's that relay race with the Grammar School that's worrying me," said Grundy. "Now that the trial's over I suppose Merry will soon be posting up the team."

"Bound to."

"And I shan't be in it," said Grundy moodily. "Pretty rotten, I call it."

"Can't be in everything, old chap," said Gunn consolingly. Grundy snorted.

"Think I want to be in the team for my own honour and glory, you fathead? It's not that at all. What I'm thinking of is the good name of the school!"

"Oh crikey!"

"With me out of the team St. Jim's will be whacked hollow; nothing can stop it. That's what maddens me, and that's why I'm so jolly anxious to get in."

"No good telling Merry that!" grinned Gunn.

Grundy sniffed.

"Tom Merry! No good telling that chap anything. I'm always telling him what a tip-topper I am at everything, and it doesn't seem to make the slightest difference!"

"Ha, ha! I mean, it's rotten, isn't it, old fellow?"

"Rotten's not the word for it!" growled Grundy. "But I fancy I see a way out this time. That's why I said 'Why not?' just now. I was referring to my idea."

"Go ahead!" said Wilkins, stifling a yawn with some difficulty.

"I said something about swimming the Channel when I was arguing with Merry yesterday. You may have heard me mention it?"

"Got a faint recollection of it, old man!" said Gunn, with a wink at Wilkins. "But you weren't serious?"

Grundy smiled.

"Perhaps I wasn't—then. But I've been thinking it over since. Supposing I did decide to make a bid for swimming the Channel—"

"M-m-my hat!"

"It would put me on rather a different footing in the swimming circle here. For some reason which I don't pretend to understand most of the chaps seem to laugh when I start talking about swimming. All that would stop when I got round that I was attempting the Channel swim. They'd be simply forced to take me seriously then."

"H'm!"

"And so I say, 'Why not?'" said Grundy, repeating his question. "I've made up my mind, anyway. I'm going to try it. And Tom Merry will have to put me in the relay race team on the strength of it. Savvy?"

Wilkins and Gunn looked at each other and smiled.

"Fancy I get you," said Wilkins. "You're going to spread it about that you're going to swim the Channel so that Merry will be forced by public opinion to shove you in the relay race team."

"Exactly," nodded Grundy.

"And all the time it will be cod-stuff; you'll have no intention of trying the Channel swim at all. That it?" asked Wilkins.

"No; it's jolly well not!" snorted Grundy. "You got the first part right, Wilkins, but you're completely off the rails in the second. You see, I really do intend to swim the Channel?"

"Eh?"

"Deaf? I said that I really intend to swim the Channel."

"But, you crass ass—"

Grundy abandoned words for deeds, and made a rush at the sceptical Gunn. That was enough for Gunn. He and Wilkins streaked out of Study No. 3 like lightning, slamming the door after them with a slam that rattled the window.

Grundy heard them tramping down the passage, still laughing. He sat down, breathing hard, and started on his letter to Uncle Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn, in the space of the next ten minutes, informed all and sundry in the Lower School of Grundy's momentous decision. It was too good a joke to be kept to themselves.

Laughter was soon ringing out in the Junior Common-room, in the Fourth and Shell passages, and even in the Third Form room. Grundy had often appeared in a humorous light; but nothing that Grundy had done before seemed half so funny as his proposal to swim the Channel.

The great man of the Shell emerged from Study No. 3 at last, holding a letter in his hand, and wearing a look of considerable satisfaction on his ruddy face.

He got quite a shock to find a crowd in the Shell passage cheering his progress.

"Here he comes!"

"Hurrah!"

"Drop us a line when you get to Calais, Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy smiled.

"They've told you, then—Wilkins and Gunn?"

"What-ho! It's the biggest sensation ever!" grinned Clifton Dane. "When do you start, Grundy?"

"Just as soon as my uncle can arrange details!" answered Grundy cheerfully. "Of course, I shall do it all right."

"Oh, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"You'll see," said Grundy; and he went downstairs to post the all-important letter to Uncle Grundy. He left the crowd on the verge of hysterics.

CHAPTER 5.

On the List!

HIS letter posted, Grundy returned to the Shell quarters and looked into Study No. 10, where the Terrible Three had just finished a late prep.

There was a very cheerful air about Grundy. He felt that he had at last struck a blow that would earn him the recognition he was sure he deserved as the best swimmer at St. Jim's. That was the reason for his visit to Tom Merry. As a prospective conqueror of the Channel, he couldn't possibly be left out of the relay race team now. That was how Grundy looked at it, anyway.

The Terrible Three greeted Grundy without enthusiasm. They were still feeling a little sore over the little jape in the changing-hut.

"Wiped up the Channel yet?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Not yet. But that's partly the reason I dropped in," said Grundy. "You see, I've decided to do it."

"Eh?"

"I've just written off to my uncle, and he'll arrange for a boat and so on. Some time next week I shall swim the Channel—probably in record time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't see anything to laugh at!"

"Look in the glass on the mantelpiece, old bean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Grundy. "Well, that's that, anyway. Now, Merry, I want to know about that relay race. Chosen your team yet?"

"Just done the trick!" answered Tom Merry.

"Look here. By announcing my intention of swimming the Channel I've established my position as one of the best swimmers in the school. Now there's only one thing for you to do, Merry: put me on the list!"

Tom Merry wiped the tears of merriment from his eyes.

"And is that all you want, Grundy?"

"Just that!"

"Then I'll do it," said Tom, to the surprise of his colleagues. "I'll put you on the list. Good enough?"

"Quite good enough!" smiled Grundy. "You'll cross out Handcock's name—"

"Not at all. I shan't cross out anyone's name!"

Grundy stared.

"Then how the thump will you do it? Can't have five in the team."

"Naturally not. But you're not in the team, you see!"

"But you just said—"

"I said I'd put you on the list; so I will. But it won't be in the team. I've already chosen three reserves—Figgins, Talbot, and Kangaroo. You'll be the fourth. You'll go on the list all right. As fourth reserve. Get the idea?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners and Lowther roared.

Grundy blinked. For a moment he seemed on the verge of an apoplectic fit. Then a change came over him. Slowly he began to smile again.

"That's a promise, is it?"

"Absolutely. You'll be fourth reserve in the relay race."

"So if one of the team and the three first reserves are crooked, I swim for St. Jim's?"

"That's it," nodded Tom Merry. "Of course, it's not very likely—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But if it does happen, I promise you you'll swim for the school. Satisfied?"

The Terrible Three naturally anticipated that Grundy would be very far from satisfied. But, to their utter astonishment, he grinned and nodded.

"Good enough. Of course, it's not exactly what I wanted, but it will do. Mind, it's a promise!"

"It's a promise, certainly," agreed Tom Merry. "But—"

"Can't wait; I've got a lot to do. So-long!" said Grundy.

And he tramped out of the study, leaving the occupants of No. 10 staring after him in a state of great surprise.

(Continued on page 10.)

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GRUNDY, THE CHANNEL SWIMMER!

(Continued from page 8.)

Grundy was apparently satisfied to figure on the list as fourth reserve, after all. Tom Merry's gentle little jape seemed to have tailed off rather like a damp squib.

CHAPTER 6.

A Leader's Lament!

"Ha, ha, ha!" Thus George Alfred Grundy, as he sat down in the armchair in Study No. 3, after returning from No. 10.

Wilkins and Gunn, who had run into their leader in the passage, and returned with him, stared.

"What the thump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grundy. "Oh, my hat! This is funny—really funny. Or it will be, anyway. The jape of the term, by gum!"

"Whose jape is it—yours?" inquired Gunn.

Grundy nodded.

"Mine, absolutely; and it's a stunner. You know what my japes are like as a rule?"

"Oh, my hat! Yes, rather!"

"Well, this one's even better than usual!" chuckled Grundy. "I've been to see Tom Merry about the relay race team, as I told you I would."

"Half a minute, Grundy. You can count us out of this, right away."

Grundy ceased laughing.

"Eh?"

"We're not coming in on this wheeze at any price. Are we, Gunny?"

"I'm not, anyway," grunted Gunn. "Think I'm going in for a wholesale kidnapping campaign just to get you in the swimming team? Not likely!"

"Call it off, old chap," advised Wilkins. "It'll only lead to trouble."

Grundy regarded his two lieutenants more in sorrow than in anger.

"So that's it, is it?" he remarked. "Deserting me just when I need you. By gum!"

"Nuff to make anybody desert you. Of all the potty ideas—"

"This is the gratitude I get," said Grundy bitterly. "After all I've done for you in the past; after all the battles I've fought for you; all I've taught you in cricket, footer, and games generally, you turn on me like this. 'Nuff to make a chap lose his faith in human nature, by James!'"

"Yes, but, you silly ass—"

"I ought to bash you, of course. I ought to knock your silly heads together till I knocked some sense into 'em."

"What about knocking some sense into your own first?" asked Gunn pointedly.

But Grundy was too sad to be drawn into a campaign of assault and battery by pointed remarks.

"I won't do it," he said. "I know I ought to do it, for your own good, but I feel too disheartened. Don't

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"Come out on your neck?" inquired Wilkins.

Grundy snorted.

"Take more than Merry and his pals to put me out on my neck, I can tell you. Not that they were wonderfully friendly, I'll admit."

"Of course, Merry included you in the team, as soon as he heard about the Channel swimming business?" murmured Gunn sarcastically.

"Well, no. Strangely enough, he didn't."

"Astonishing!" said Wilkins.

"Pretty funny sort of behaviour," assented Grundy.

"Merry, all over. However, he's putting me on the list. As fourth reserve."

Wilkins and Gunn jumped.

"Fourth reserve, did you say?" asked Gunn.

"F-f-fourth reserve?" stuttered Wilkins. "Not ninetieth reserve, or four-hundredth reserve, then?"

"No; just fourth!"

"Four fellows will have to be disabled before you come into the picture," pointed out Gunn.

"Not necessarily disabled."

"Well, prevented from turning up, then."

"That's different," said Grundy. "If one of the team and the first three reserves are prevented from turning up, then I turn out for St. Jim's. Well, that's just what's going to happen."

"But how do you know it is?"

"Because I'm jolly well going to make it happen!" grinned Grundy. "With your help—"

"With—with our help?"

"With your help. I'm going to collar Handcock, Figgins, Talbot, and Noble, and get 'em out of the way for the afternoon of the race. Handcock's in the team, and the others are reserves, you see. When I've done that, with your help, I shall simply buzz down to the river and await my call."

"M-m-my hat!"

"And—that's your great jape?" asked Gunn faintly. Grundy nodded.

"That's it. It'll be the jape of the term. Merry, with his usual fatheaded ideas, will be tearing his hair and expecting St. Jim's to lose the race. And I shall just dive in and walk away with it. It'll be the biggest come-down Merry's ever had! Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy roared.

Wilkins and Gunn could only gasp for a few moments. Then a look passed between them, and Wilkins touched his leader on the shoulder.

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refer to it again. Let the whole matter drop, and get up and come along with me to the gym."

"What ever for, old man?" asked Wilkins, in surprise.

"To help me train for my Channel swim, of course," snorted Grundy. "I suppose you're going to say you can't do that, now?"

"Well—"

"If you do, then I shall simply have to do something—probably wipe up this study with the pair of you!" said Grundy ferociously. "Coming along?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Rather! Only too pleased, Gunny, ain't we?"

"What-ho!" said Gunn promptly.

"Thanks, awfully!" said Grundy, sarcastically. "In that case, we'll march."

And they duly marched.

CHAPTER 7.

In Training!

QUITE a crowd joined Grundy and his two henchmen on their way to the gym. Since Grundy's momentous announcement they had been waiting about in the Shell passage for developments, and when the door of Study No. 3 opened, and the three tenants trooped out, they fell in at the rear with great enthusiasm.

"Going to start now, Grundy?"

"Thinking of swimming down the river to the coast first?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy bestowed a lofty look on the hilarious juniors.

"No cackling, you idiots! Remember that you're talking to a chap who's going to break all records across the Straits of Dover pretty soon."

"You mean all records to the bottom of the Straits of Dover, don't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll see," said Grundy, darkly. "Some of you are going to get a surprise soon, I fancy. But I won't waste breath on you. I'll need it all for my strenuous training soon."

"Where's this?" asked Noble of the Shell, better known as Kangaroo.

"In the gym. These chaps are going to help me."

"Oh, my hat! Mind if we come along?"

Grundy smiled. He was never averse to an audience.

"No objection whatever, provided you don't kick up too much of a din, or get in my way," he said, with great condescension. "Not often you get the chance to see a

genuine Channel swimmer at his training work. You may learn a bit."

"Oh, great pip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This way for the Channel swimmer! No charge for admission!" sang out Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy led the way to the gym. Wilkins and Gunn, looking the reverse of enthusiastic, followed. After them came a noisy crowd of juniors, all very anxious to see the unusual sight of a Channel aspirant training for his swim in the school gymnasium.

The crowd was reinforced by a strong contingent, passing the junior Common-room. The Terrible Three of the Shell, and Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth, who had just gone down to the Common-room and started a discussion on the subject of the prospects for the forthcoming footer season, abandoned even that engrossing subject, and fell in with the rest when they heard what was on. Most of the others in the Common-room followed their example.

By the time the gym was reached two-thirds of the School House, Fourth and Shell, had come to look on.

Grundy fairly beamed. This was all he could have wished. The presence of the great crowd gave him a wonderful opportunity of showing the Lower School what a really remarkable fellow he was. Grundy made up his mind to take advantage of the opportunity.

"Now," he said, flinging aside his jacket and waistcoat. Wilkins and Gunn looked round at the crowd a little uneasily.

"I—I say, old chap, don't you think you'd better postpone it till another evening?" asked Gunn. "There's rather a crowd—"

"All the better!" said Grundy. "Don't argue, you men. Just hold the bottom of this rope while I shin up it."

Wilkins and Gunn gave up objecting, and held the bottom of the climbing-rope, which was suspended from the ceiling. There didn't seem to be any possibility of trouble in that simple act, anyway.

But they had reckoned without their host. Grundy grasped the rope and hauled himself up, hand over hand.

He had almost reached the top, when—

"Ow!" yelled Grundy suddenly. "Look out!"

"What's up?"

"Blessed wasp trying to sting me!" roared Grundy. An instant later he was descending the rope again; but not hand over hand this time. The wasp which Grundy had found at the top apparently didn't like Grundy, and it was very evident indeed that Grundy didn't like the wasp.

Grundy fairly shot down the rope. Wilkins and Gunn, in attendance at the bottom, didn't stand an earthly.

Crash!

"Whooop!"

"Ow-wow! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd yelled. So did Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn, though on a somewhat different note.

"First blood to Grundy!" yelled Monty Lowther. "Carry on, ye cripples!"

Grundy and his lieutenants sorted themselves out and got up again, groaning.

"Ow! Never mind! Lucky you fellows were there to break my fall!" said Grundy, philosophically. "I don't think I'll go up the rope again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pull out that vaulting-horse, you men, will you? Wilky and Gunn, you stand the other side, in case I don't land all square."

"Oh dear!" said Wilkins.

But he and his brother in misfortune took up their stand on the other side of the vaulting-horse. To make life in Study No. 3 at all bearable they simply had to give Grundy his head, now and again.

Grundy took a short run and vaulted the horse easily enough. Grundy, as a matter of fact, was by no means a poor gymnast, allowing for a slight clumsiness which characterised most of his activities.

"Jumped, Grundy!" said Tom Merry. Grundy thought he would try it again. He did so, quite successfully. He even did it a third time.

Fourth time was unlucky.

It was particularly unlucky for Wilkins and Gunn. Grundy's two supporters had become rather too confident as a result of their leader's three successful leaps. They were not quite prepared for disaster.

But disaster came, swift and sudden. Somehow, instead of coming over the horse with his feet, Grundy seemed to make a headlong dive this time. Half-way over his arms shot out. One clasped Gunn affectionately round

the neck, and the other smote Wilkins with terrific force in the region popularly known as the "bread-basket."

"Yaroooooh!" yelled Gunn.

"Yoooooop!" hooted Wilkins.

Then they collapsed, with a bump that shook the floor. Grundy crashed on top of them.

Grundy was up first. That was only natural, in the circumstances. He stood on his feet a little dizzily, gasping.

"Ow! You silly asses! What did you want to drag me down for?"

"Oh, my hat! Insult to injury!" roared Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wilkins and Gunn staggered up, their expressions almost homicidal.

"You—you—" said Wilkins.

"You—you—" said Gunn.

"Oh, don't jaw!" snapped Grundy. "You fellows have got too much to say. If you jawed less and attended more to the business in hand, we'd get on better. Stand by while I swing on the bar!"

"Won't be happy till he breaks his neck!" almost sobbed Lowther.

Grundy, not yet beaten, climbed up to a horizontal bar just above the vaulting-horse, and hung from it by his hands while Wilkins and Gunn stared up at him almost bereft of the power of action.

Grundy very quickly gave them the power of action. The exercise he was doing apparently consisted in swinging backwards and forwards. The first swing was quite a small affair, the second took him farther out, and the third—

Grundy's unfortunate lieutenants got it again! Grundy, unintentionally, no doubt, swung back his feet rather a lot on the backward journey, and swung them forward to a corresponding degree on the return.

Wilkins and Gunn were standing one each side of their leader. Wilkins got the side of one of Grundy's big shoes on his ear, and Gunn received both heels in his chest.

Crack!

"Yoooooooop!" shrieked Wilkins for the second time in two minutes.

"Ouch! Whoooooop!" howled Gunn, in agony.

Then they acted. As though suddenly electrified, they rushed at the gracefully swinging George Alfred Grundy and dragged him down.

Grundy emitted a yell.

"Ow! What the thump—"

"Slaughter him!" roared Gunn.

"Squash him!" howled Wilkins.

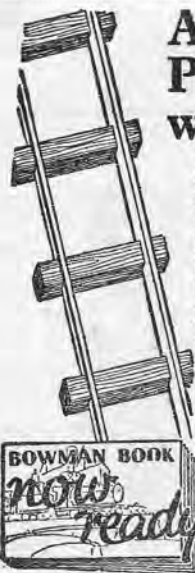
"Oh, my hat! So this is how they practise to swim the Channel!" remarked Herries. "Well, now we know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

During the next minute Grundy certainly had the finest training he could have got for his approaching battle with the waves. The infuriated Wilkins and Gunn seized him and bumped him and rolled him over and swung him round with a violence which could not have been exceeded by the wildest seas.

Strangely enough, Grundy didn't appreciate it in the slightest. He struggled and yelled and threatened and

(Continued on next page.)



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pleaded, as though rough treatment was the last thing on earth he wanted. Wilkins and Gunn carried on regardless until they had tired themselves out. Then they dumped Grundy in a corner of the gym and made for the door, while a couple of score of spectators laughed hilariously.

Grundy stared after his retreating followers dazedly. "Ow! Oh crikey! Ow!" was all he seemed able to say for several seconds.

"What's the next item, Grundy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy leaned against the wall of the gym and gasped.

"Ow! There won't be a next item! Oh crikey! Those idiots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" said Grundy.

And, with the utterance of that classic monosyllable, Grundy's demonstration of Channel swimming training came to an end. Thereafter Grundy's training was carried on in the strictest privacy!

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy's Coup!

LETTER for you, Grundy!" Wilkins flicked a letter on to the table in Study No. 3 as he spoke.

Grundy glanced at it and grinned.

"Good egg! This is from my uncle. It'll be about the Channel arrangements. Half a jiffy!"

He opened the envelope and unfolded the letter that was inside.

Several days had passed since the exciting events in the gymnasium, and peace once more reigned in Study No. 3. Grundy's proposed Channel swim was still the subject of much hilarity in the Lower School.

Nothing had happened. Most of the juniors were of opinion that nothing would happen. That Uncle Grundy would ignore his nephew's plea for assistance in his wild project was the general view.

The St. Jim's juniors, however, did not know Uncle Grundy. Uncle Grundy's chief hobby, as a matter of fact, was his nephew. George Alfred was the apple of his uncle's eye. The elder Grundy was convinced that his nephew was one of the shining lights of St. Jim's, and that nothing that George Alfred set his hand to was impracticable or impossible.

Wilkins and Gunn, who knew Uncle Grundy's weakness better than most St. Jim's fellows, waited rather curiously to hear the contents of the letter. It seemed to them unlikely that even Grundy's uncle would go so far as to support Grundy's preposterous proposal for an attempt on the Channel. But they were quite prepared for anything.

It was the unlikely that happened. Wilkins and Gunn could tell that by the smile that appeared on Grundy's rugged face as he read the letter.

"Good news?" inquired Gunn.

"Tip-top!" answered Grundy jubilantly. "Nunky's a sport! Listen to this:

"My Dear Nephew,—I duly received your letter, and was delighted to hear of your continued progress in school work and sport. Your proposed attempt to swim the Channel has my warmest approval. Knowing your all-

round ability, I feel sure that the great feat lies within your powers. I have made arrangements for the hire of a tug to accompany you from Dover, and enclose the card of the owners herewith. Unfortunately, business prevents my attending personally, but you are at liberty to make your attempt at any time you wish. Wishing you the best of luck.—Your affectionate

"UNCLE."

"My hat!"

"Something like, what?" said Grundy. "Here's the card. 'The Anglo-French Marine Company.' Everything's fixed, as I said it would be, you see. Hurrah!"

"Great pip!"

"It's a cert now—an absolute cert!" said Grundy enthusiastically. "Nunky's fixed up everything in apple-pie order, you can bet. All that remains is for me to swim the Channel!"

"Oh crikey! Is that all?"

"I shall do it; no doubt whatever about that!" chuckled Grundy. "Just imagine Tom Merry's face when he reads in the papers that I've swum the Channel! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, when are you going to do it?" asked Gunn.

Grundy pondered.

"Can't do it to-day. That's impossible, with the relay race coming off this afternoon."

"But you're not in the relay race," said Wilkins, with a stare. "That is, unless—"

"Unless you're still thinking of that potty stunt you mentioned the other day!" finished Gunn. "But, of course, you've chucked that now, haven't you?"

Grundy frowned.

"Who said I'd chucked it? Far from it, as a matter of fact. If I get those fellows out of the way, and win the relay race for St. Jim's—"

"If!" murmured Wilkins.

"That'll make a double triumph of it, won't it? Clinch it for all time, by gum! They've told me I'm no good as a swimmer. Well, I'm going to show 'em they're wrong, and jolly well rub it in! Get that?"

"But you can't—"

"There's nothing I can't do!" snorted Grundy. "It's a peculiarity about me. I've noticed it many times. Some chaps would never think of kidnapping four men to get a place in a swimming team—"

"My hat! I should think not!"

"But I'm not like that. I think of it, and I jolly well do it, too. You watch out and see! Better still, come in and help me!"

"Not just now, thanks!" said Gunn hurriedly. "Anyway, old chap, don't you think it's a bit thick, in a way?"

Grundy shook his head.

"The end justifies the means. Look at it this way. I'm the best swimmer in the Lower School here, and without me there's more than a chance that St. Jim's will lose the race. Would you stand idle and see the old school let down just because of squeamish doubts about whether it's done?"

"Hem!"

"I'm not going to, anyway!" growled Grundy. "I'm going to get those third-raters that Merry's put in front of me out of the way and take my proper place as a member of the team."

"Going to do it on your own, old chap?" inquired Wilkins.

Potts, the Office Boy.



"All on my own!"

"But how the thump—"

"Keep your peepers open and you'll see what you'll see!"

With which cryptic remark the great man of the Shell pocketed his uncle's letter and quitted the study.

The conversation thus ended took place just after breakfast. By dinner-time Wilkins and Gunn had dismissed from their thoughts George Alfred Grundy and his dark hints at mysterious plots. They regarded his threat to kidnap the four swimmers who took priority over him, to use one of Cyrus K. Handcock's expressions, as "guff."

But Grundy meant business. Unknown to his colleagues, he had laid careful plans for the furtherance of his aims.

He had repaired to Study No. 3, and wrote out four notes. Wilkins and Gunn would have been surprised to read the contents of those notes; but they were not there to read.

This is what the first note contained:

"It may be to your advantage to turn up underneath the skool wall opposite the stile at 1.45 prompt to-day.

"A FRIEND.

"P.S.—Don't breathe a word about this to anybody."

The others were identical with the first except that the times given varied in each case by five minutes. Grundy was thereby given four appointments starting at 1.45, and concluding at two o'clock.

Grundy smiled with satisfaction as he read the first note. Wilkins and Gunn, had they been present, might have pointed out one or two imperfections in the spelling. But Grundy was blissfully ignorant of the existence of such imperfections, and he felt thoroughly satisfied.

His next move was to address four envelopes. Then he went downstairs and secured the services of Toby Marsh, the House page. Toby, for a consideration, was very willing to undertake the task of delivering the letters, and equally willing to keep the name of his employer a deep secret.

Grundy quitted the House. All seemed to be going well. All continued to go well.

The great man of the Shell strolled across the quad, and went out of the big gates and down the lane.

Opposite the stile leading to the footpath through the woods an enclosed motor-lorry was waiting.

It was the same lorry which Grundy had found so useful on the occasion when he had transported the trial swimmers' clothing back to St. Jim's. Grundy grinned at the sight of it and waved cheerfully to Bill Harris, the driver, who was standing by the vehicle reflectively smoking a cigarette. Bill Harris touched his cap in return.

"You got my letter, then?" said Grundy.

"Yes, sir; thank you very much. Wot's the little game this time, might I ask?"

Grundy smiled.

"Nothing much. There'll be four chaps from the school come along here soon, one at a time. I want you to take 'em for a ride."

Bill Harris stared.

"They got a funny idea of enjoyment, ridin' in a lorry, ain't they?"

"It's not their idea—it's mine. Matter of fact, I don't suppose they'll want to go at all. That's why I told you to bring plenty of cord and some scarves. We shall have to bind and gag 'em. Savvy?"

"Ho, I see!" remarked the lorry driver, a little

dubiously. "Which I 'ope there ain't likely to be no trouble over it."

"No trouble at all!" Grundy assured him. "In any case, I'm responsible. Any trouble comes home to me; I'll see you righted. You're game, of course?"

"Game for anything, sir!" said Bill Harris, who had evidently not forgotten Grundy's lavish ways. "Ow, exactly, do we get these fellers? Set about 'em?"

"I'll give you the wheeze. But there's no more time for jaw now. Here comes Kangaroo. He's the first."

Noble of the Shell came swinging down the lane, holding an envelope in his hand which Grundy recognised as one of those he had given to Toby.

He started on seeing Grundy.

"Hallo, Grundy! What are you doing here?"

Grundy beckoned him.

"Come over here for half a sec, Kangy. It's important."

Kangaroo, looking rather curious, came over.

The instant he drew abreast the lorry, Grundy acted. One spring took him on to Kangaroo's back, and the Australian was bowled clean over.

"Come on, Bill! The cord!" panted Grundy.

Kangaroo uttered a yell.

"You silly ass! What the thump—"

He did not say much more. Bill Harris was at work, trussing him up like a fowl, in a brace of shakes, and, having completed that task, he neatly wound a scarf round his victim's mouth and stifled Kangaroo's protests altogether.

"Into the van with him!" said Grundy.

And Noble of the Shell was transferred to the van only a minute before Cyrus K. Handcock came into view.

Luck was all with Grundy and his fellow-bandit. They caught the American junior just as they had secured Kangaroo. In less than a quarter of an hour they had also made prisoners of Figgins and Talbot, who followed.

"That's that!" said Grundy, when at last the four juniors were reposing safely on the floor of the lorry. "Thanks very much, Bill. Now take 'em for a good long ride, and don't release 'em till after half-past three; that's important. Here's what I promised you."

A couple of crisp notes changed hands, and Bill Harris winked and saluted.

"Rely on me, sir; I'll carry out horders to the letter!" he said.

Grundy nodded, and departed, whistling.

Another minute, and Bill Harris was bowling through the sunny Sussex lanes.

Grundy's coup had come off entirely as planned.

CHAPTER 9.

Down the Course!

"GO it, Kildare!"
"Kildare wins!"
"Hurrah!"

Kildare of the Sixth climbed on to the finishing-raft, winner of the 440 Yards Senior Handicap, and the crowd yelled applause.

The St. Jim's Swimming Gala was in full swing. Boats at the side of the river and the river banks themselves were crowded with spectators. Several tents on the bank near the starting-raft, gaily beflagged, added a touch of

Great Minds Think Alike!



colour, and as it was a perfect late summer day, the scene was altogether delightful.

"Now for the relay race!" remarked Herries, who was standing on the bank near the winning-post. "Where are the chaps?"

"Here's Tommy!" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry, wearing a long wrap, came on the scene. He was looking rather worried.

"Seen Handcock, you men?" he asked.

"Saw him a little time after dinner," answered Digby. "He was making for the gates. Hasn't he turned up, then?"

Tom shook his head.

"Not a sign of him. Can't make it out. He was as keen as mustard when I spoke to him at morning break."

"Then where can the silly ass have got to?"

"Goodness knows."

"Only one thing, in that case," said Manners. "First reserve will have to take his place. Where's Figgy?"

"That's just it—where is he?" asked Tom Merry. "I've sent scouts out all over the place, and he's not to be found anywhere."

"Great pip!"

"But that's not the worst. Talbot's missing as well; he's second reserve. And to crown everything, even Kangaroo seems to have disappeared now!"

"My hat! Then they've all gone!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Every man-jack of 'em!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, they are a collection of prize fatheads!" said Herries, in disgust. "What the thump are you going to do?"

"Take on the fourth reserve, of course!" came a new voice from the edge of the group.

George Alfred Grundy shoved his way through the crowd, grinning. He nodded to Tom Merry.

"So they've left you in the cart, Merry? Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. Here I am!"

Tom Merry stared as he observed that Grundy, underneath his macintosh was already attired in a swimming costume.

"What the thump— Oh, my hat!"

He remembered. Temporarily he had forgotten putting Grundy on the list as fourth reserve. Now he remembered.

"Fit as a fiddle, and ready to win the race for St. Jim's—that's me!" said Grundy cheerfully. "I suppose we'd better get to the starting-post, Merry?"

"You—you—you're not seriously suggesting swimming for St. Jim's in the relay race?" gasped Tom Merry.

Grundy frowned.

"I'm not suggesting anything. I'm insisting on my rights, that's all. I'm on the list as fourth reserve, ain't I?"

"Yes; but—"

"Then there's no 'but' about it," said Grundy. "One of the team and three reserves have dropped out. Now I come in, as arranged!"

There was a yell from the crowd.

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke, Grundy! We're not looking for a cert licking from the Grammar School!"

"Well, that's what you'd have got if the other duffers had turned up!" snorted Grundy. "You're on another kind of cert with me in the team. I shall make victory certain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Tom Merry did not laugh.

"Look here, Grundy, play the game!" he urged. "I know I made a promise—"

"Exactly! And I'm going to make you keep it!"

"But it wasn't meant seriously. Naturally, I didn't think for a moment that four of the crowd would fail to appear."

Grundy laughed grimly.

"Well, the unexpected has happened, and now you'll have to keep your promise!"

"But—"

"Mr. Railton wants you, Merry!" called out Wally D'Arcy of the Third from the back of the crowd. "The Grammar School are ready to start!"

Tom Merry groaned aloud.

"Grundy! For goodness' sake! If you insist, I shall have to stick to what I said. But can't you see—"

"I can see that Railton's getting impatient, if that's anything. Let's get down to the starting-raft!"

"You crass ass—"

"Oh, rats!" said Grundy. "Don't you worry, Merry; I'm at the top of my form to-day! Victory's assured; I guarantee it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry gave it up. He had made the promise, and as Grundy insisted on holding him to it he had to bow to the inevitable.

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"Come on, then!" he said gruffly. "It's three swimmers and one deadhead against the Grammar School now!"

"Why, you silly ass—" gasped Grundy.

Then, overcoming his feelings in view of pressure of time, he followed the junior captain through the crowd and down to the starting-raft.

There was a buzz from the spectators as they spotted Grundy.

"Grundy!"

"Surely he's not—"

"But he is!" yelled Oliver of the Rylcombe Grammar School. "Merry must have gone off his nut; he's making us a present of the race!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammar School supporters were delighted. The Grammar School team, which consisted of Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, Wootton, and Carboy, fairly beamed.

The St. Jim's crowd, on the other hand, were utterly dismayed. They knew Grundy of old. If it was possible to make a mistake, Grundy was the man to make it. True, he could swim. He could do everything, after a fashion. But Grundy, representing St. Jim's in a race with speedy swimmers like Gordon Gay and his team! The St. Jim's crowd almost wept at the thought of it.



Fatty Wynn was home! Grundy leapt forward

"You are late, Merry!" remarked Mr. Railton, who was the official starter.

"Sorry, sir! I had to find a reserve at the last moment. We're all ready now. You swim third, Grundy."

"Don't you think it would be better if—"

"You are under your captain's orders, Grundy," broke in Mr. Railton. "Please do not delay the start."

Grundy shrugged and conceded the point.

Jack Blake and Frank Wootton, who were leading off their respective sides, stood ready on the edge of the raft. Mr. Railton raised his pistol.

Bang!

They were off!

Both were fine swimmers, and all the way they were neck to neck. Their hands touched the finishing-bar almost simultaneously.

An instant later Fatty Wynn and Carboy were in the water, and now the advantage went to St. Jim's. Fatty Wynn was as much at home in the water as he was on land, and had a fine turn of speed. He forged well ahead

of his Grammar School opponent and was lengths ahead on the return journey.

Grundy and Frank Monk waited their turn. Grundy's eyes were gleaming now. He would show them! He would pile up the odds against the Grammar School as odds had never been piled up before!

"Do your best, Grundy!" murmured Tom Merry. Grundy hardly heard him. He was watching for Fatty Wynn's hand to touch the finishing-rail, when, by the rules of the race, he would be entitled to dive into the water to win the great race for St. Jim's!



upon the waters of the Rhyl!

"Now!" said Tom Merry.

Fatty Wynn was home! Grundy dived.

At least, he meant to dive. But Grundy wasn't very good at diving, and what he actually succeeded in doing was to fall flat into the water with a mighty splash that fairly saturated the raft.

"Go it, Grundy!" howled the Grammar School crowd exultantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy was a little dazed by his collision with the waters of the Rhyl. But he went. Setting his teeth grimly, he struck out.

Unfortunately, he struck out in the wrong direction. Instead of swimming down the course, the great man of the Shell accidentally started swimming back to the starting-raft.

The spectators gasped. Then they yelled.

"Hi! Come back!"

"You haven't finished yet, Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy might have carried on for quite a long way without realising his mistake had it not been for the raft. That formidable structure, however, lay straight in his path, with the inevitable result that Grundy's head and the side of the raft very quickly came into violent collision.

Crack!

"Yaroooooh!" yelled Grundy.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Relay racing—a la Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Other way, you howling idiot!" yelled Jack Blake.

Grundy tumbled to it at last. Amid roars of laughter he reversed, and started swimming in the right direction.

Meanwhile, Frank Monk of the Grammar School was already half-way down the course. The advantage which Fatty Wynn had gained was well lost.

Grundy succeeded in turning it into a very big disadvantage before he had finished. He certainly could swim when he got down to it; but equally certainly he could not swim fast. Frank Monk gained length after length on the return journey, and Grundy was far, far behind when Gordon Gay, the Grammar School's last man, dived in.

It was all over bar shouting! The position was hopeless for St. Jim's now. Tom Merry dived in when Grundy at last reached the finishing-rail, and raced as he had never raced before. But Gordon Gay, by that time, was already on the return course, and it was impossible to catch him up.

There was a yell from the Grammarians on the banks.

"Hurrah!"

"Grammar School wins!"

Gordon Gay finished his race without exerting himself, then hauled himself on to the raft, grinning cheerfully, while a hundred Grammarians howled with delight.

The unexpected had happened. Seldom indeed did the Rylcombe Grammar School juniors get a chance to chortle over St. Jim's in the realm of sport. Thanks to Grundy, however, they had been presented with an overwhelming victory. Needless to say, they made the most of it, and by the time the programme came to an end most of the St. Jim's fellows, in their exasperation, had begun to regret most heartily that the idea of a relay race had ever been thought of.

CHAPTER 10.

Monty Lowther's Wheeze!

"WHERE'S that idiot?"

"Where's the lunatic?"

"Where's Grundy?"

Four excited-looking juniors swooped down on a group of lugubrious sportsmen returning across the fields from the swimming gala later in the day. The lugubrious sportsmen looked round, and there was a yell.

"Here they are!"

"My hat! Hancock and the others!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a stare. "Where the thump did you chaps get to?"

"Where's that guy Grundy?" yelled back Hancock. "Take me to Grundy, somebody, and I'll make him so his own mother won't know him!"

"What do you want Grundy for?"

"So I can jump on him for stopping me from swimming this afternoon!"

"Eh?" yelled a dozen voices.

"It's quite true," said Talbot. "The duffer kidnapped us, and sent us for a ride in a lorry, so that we shouldn't swim in the relay race!"

"M-m-my hat!"

"Bai Jove! It seems almost incredible—"

"But it's true enough," said Wilkins. "Remember how he tried to get us to help him, Gunny?"

Gunn nodded.

"He's had this all fixed up for days. Oh, what fatheads we've been! We didn't take it seriously—never thought he could do it—"

"Hero he is!" roared Figgins. "Slaughter him!"

Grundy himself tramped upon the scene from the direction of the river. He nodded calmly to the four fellows whom he had last seen being carried away by Bill Harris.

"Sorry I had to inconvenience you chaps. You've heard the result?"

"We lost, I suppose, if you swam!" snorted Kangaroo.

Grundy frowned.

"We lost, certainly; but it was no fault of mine. If only the other three had backed me up—"

"What?" came a howl from the rapidly swelling crowd.

"We should have won with ease. But they didn't. Merry should have put me in last. The result might have been different then. As it was, we were licked, all through the bad swimming of the other three!"

"You—you—"

For some seconds the juniors were incapable of retort either by word or by deed. Even Grundy, they had imagined, would be subdued after the wretched exhibition he had given in the race. But the reverse seemed to be true. Grundy was, if anything, more jaunty than ever. The idea that the St. Jim's defeat was in any way connected with his display had apparently not occurred to him.

"Well, this beats Barney!" breathed Tom Merry. "After getting into the team by a trick, and losing the race for us—"

"Why, you silly ass——" said Grundy.

"You have the nerve to blame us! Only one thing the idiot will understand, chaps," said Tom. "I suggest we give him a taste of it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wag him!"

"Bump the imbecile!"

Grundy stepped back a pace.

"Look here——" he began.

"Collar him!"

A dozen hands reached forward to grasp Grundy. Then came an interruption—the same unwelcome kind of interruption that had occurred on the occasion of Grundy's celebrated jape on the trial swimmers.

"Boys!"

"Oh crikey!"

It was Mr. Railton again! The Housemaster of the School House walked into the crowd, frowning.

"Very unseemly behaviour for the termination of the gala," he remarked. "This is the second time I have found a crowd of you attacking Grundy. What is the trouble, Merry?"

"Hem! Nothing much, sir," answered Tom Merry, red-dening. "It's—it's a sort of rag."

"I do not approve of this sort of rag, Merry!"

"We didn't mean anything serious, of course, sir."

"I will accept that assurance, Merry. But I cannot allow a repetition of behaviour like this. Grundy must be left alone, or I shall have to take very severe measures. You understand?"

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"Very well."

Mr. Railton went his way, looking as though it was far from very well.

Naturally, the juniors could do nothing in the face of such a warning. So Grundy went unruffled, so to speak, with the result that he was able to express his own peculiar point of view on the afternoon's events without let or hindrance.

All the way back to St. Jim's he talked and talked, the whole sum and substance of his talk being the denseness and ineptitude of Tom Merry and all his friends, and the cleverness and ability of George Alfred Grundy.

And the juniors could only fume and long with a great longing for a means of teaching Grundy a lesson that would penetrate even his peculiar brain.

That, at any rate, was all they could do just then. But satisfaction was coming to them more quickly than they realised.

Monty Lowther was responsible for the change in the situation—a change that was destined to finish up in a really first-class "rag." Lowther frequently had brain-waves. He had one now. Returning with the crowd to St. Jim's, he suddenly began to smile. He was still smiling when he got back to Study No. 10, with Tom Merry and Manners. Then he explained.

"Got it!" he said. "Just the wheeze we've been waiting for. Just the one-and-only wheeze in the world for making Grundy realise that he can't swim for toffee, and that nobody looks on him as anything more than a joke!"

"Sounds too good to be true," observed Tom Merry, shaking his head sadly. "But hope springs eternal in the human breast. Cough it up!"

"I'm thinking of that Channel swim of Grundy's. You've heard of it, of course?"

"Heard of nothing else lately," said Manners, with a grimace. "Of course, it's as mad as the rest of his stunts. He'll get about twenty yards out of Dover and then conk out!"

"Exactly!" grinned Lowther. "That's just where my wheeze comes in. This is the idea. From now until he goes to swim the Channel we'll butter him up as if we really think he's going to do it——"

"Eh?"

"And get everyone else in the House to do the same. Get the idea? Nothing will hold him then. We can flatter him and pull his leg until he thinks he's capable of swimming the Atlantic Ocean!"

"But——"

"We'll be with him on the day of the attempt. I'll be in the boat his uncle's providing, armed with the moving-picture camera Grundy owns——"

"Oh!" said Tom Merry, beginning to get an inkling of what was coming.

"And you, Tommy, and perhaps Blake, can start off swimming with him, while I start turning the handle. First reel: Grundy's great start. Second reel: Grundy collapses and has to be towed in by his humble assistants, Merry and Blake!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That'll be the end of the picture," grinned Lowther. "Now for Grundy's fall. With luck, we ought to be able to arrange for the negative to be developed on board. We can bring in that chap from the Wayland film-printing firm who has done stuff for us before, and he might even be able to make a print for us before we land again. And while he's on the job, we can be busy kidding Grundy that he nearly did it. Anything is good enough for Grundy, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Armed with the film, we all go back to St. Jim's. Crowds turn out to welcome the chap who nearly swam the Channel——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grundy is carried in triumph to the Common-room to address the mob on 'How I Almost Swam the Channel'——"

"Great pip!"

"And everybody cheers like mad. Then the lights are lowered and we start projecting the film. And the truth comes out at last!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Even Grundy will see it when it goes up on the screen. Blind as he is, he'll be simply forced to see that he didn't get more than a few yards away from Dover. That's where we start chortling. If I'm anything of a prophet, there'll be plenty to chortle over!"

"Ha, ha! Oh, rather!"

"You can imagine what Grundy's lecture will be like. Well, just imagine his face when the lecture's followed by facts—taken with his own camera!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It'll be the biggest come-down for Grundy that ever was. Hard-necked as he is, he'll never want to mention

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swimming again as long as he lives! And if we achieve that result we'll have done something! Well, what do you think of it—Ow! Lemme alone, you asses!" concluded Monty Lowther, as his two chums started thumping his back as though they were doing it for a wager.

From which it was to be inferred that Tom Merry and Manners considered Monty Lowther's wheeze O.K. and Al at Lloyd's, and in every way satisfactory.

During the next few days George Alfred Grundy had what Cyrus K. Handcock called a "break." The one topic of conversation in the School House at St. Jim's seemed to be Grundy's attempt on the Channel.

Grundy was pleasantly surprised; then extremely gratified. He had always known, of course, that he was the most important fellow at St. Jim's, but that fact had not always been universally acknowledged. Now, the fellows seemed to have recognised it with a rush.

Grundy came into his own at last. Juniors stood in admiring groups just gazing at him; leading figures in the Shell and the Fourth hung on his words. Grundy found it exhilarating beyond description. Life at St. Jim's took on a new meaning for him. Unconsciously, Grundy began to swagger. His rugged face took on a haughty, rather patronising expression. He seemed to grow several inches taller. So self-important did Grundy become that one or two began to wonder a little uneasily whether he wouldn't burst if the process went on much longer.

Naturally, in the circumstances, Grundy was very willing to accept the offers of assistance he received from Tom Merry & Co. He graciously consented to allow Tom Merry and Blake to accompany him part of the way across the Channel, and was quite happy to allow Lowther and the Wayland film-printer to make any arrangements they liked for securing a moving-picture record of the historic event.

Without being aware of it, in fact, Grundy eventually reached the stage of having left practically all the arrangements for the entire affair in Monty Lowther's hands.

Which, of course, was precisely the end that Monty had aimed at!

CHAPTER 11.

Swimming the Channel!

"NOW for it!"

Tom Merry made that remark.

It was the following Saturday afternoon, and Tom was standing on the beach at Dover, right at the water's edge, with Grundy and Blake.

All three were attired in swimming costumes, and two of the three were grinning. Those two, needless to say, were Merry and Blake. Grundy was not grinning. On the contrary, his rugged face contained a look of deadly seriousness.

Grundy's great hour had arrived! The stage was set for the drama of Grundy's attempt to conquer the Channel. A short distance off the shore was the squat little tug which Uncle Grundy had hired from the Anglo-French Marine Company, for the purpose of accompanying his nephew across the water to the French coast. Monty Lowther could be plainly seen on deck turning the handle of Grundy's movie camera, which was directed towards them.

"Ready, then, you men?" asked Grundy.

"Ready, ay, ready!"

"Off we go, then. Remember what I told you—as soon as you begin to feel tired, get on to the boat. Naturally, I shan't expect you to hold out in the same way as I shall."

"Naturally!" chuckled Blake.

They waded into the water. Grundy led the way. He seemed to be in rather a hurry, and the wild thought occurred to Tom Merry that perhaps the great man had an idea that the swim to Cape Gris-Nez could be accomplished in a couple of hours. Certainly he had not troubled to get a late pass from the school. Neither had Tom Merry and Blake, for that matter; though, in their case, the omission was the result of their firm conviction that the only Channel-swimming that was going to happen that afternoon would happen in Grundy's dreams.

Grundy went from wading to swimming, making a line for the hired tug. Tom Merry and Blake followed his example. The great Channel swim had begun!

Conditions for the attempt were ideal. The weather was mild and not too sunny, and the sea was as calm as a mill-pond. Swimming in such conditions was easy even for Grundy.

"Stick it, you chaps!" he said encouragingly.

Merry and Blake grinned. The injunction was quite unnecessary, for they were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

They were fully prepared to carry on for a long time before they felt the necessity for encouragement.

The tug loomed up in front of them, and Monty Lowther gave them a shout.

"Aho, there! Keep it up, Grundy! I'm getting some fine pictures!"

Grundy waved his hand cheerfully.

"Rely on me, Lowther—Owooooooh!" he concluded suddenly, as he received a mouthful of sea-water.

Lowther chuckled and went on turning the handle.

The tug began to move slowly now, keeping level with the three swimmers. Tom Merry noticed the captain looking down from the bridge with rather a blank expression on his bronzed face. Apparently he was a little perplexed by the whole business, which was not unnatural in the circumstances.

"Feeling all right, you chaps?" gasped Grundy, as he pegged away.

"Fine!" answered Tom Merry. "You?"

"Great!" gasped Grundy. "I did think for a moment then that I felt a twinge of cramp, but it was nothing. Ow!"

"What's up now?"

"Ow! Funny sort of feeling down my spine!" gasped the budding Channel swimmer. "Look here, Merry——"

"Stick it, Grundy!" chuckled Blake.

"Ow! Look here, I think I'd better have five minutes' rest. I suppose that's allowed?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No harm in that!" panted Grundy, who had begun to look quite groggy. "Man's entitled to five minutes on the boat occasionally!"

"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. Then he called out: "Ease her up, cap'n!"

The captain grinned and gave the required order, and the tug slowed down to a halt.

Grundy, looking more dead than alive, crawled up the ladder leading to the deck, and Monty Lowther, beaming delightedly, still kept on turning the handle.

A five minutes' interval followed. Whether intervals of that kind were allowed in official Channel swimming was a very doubtful point, but Tom Merry and Blake decided that they would give Grundy his head.

On the deck of the tug Grundy dropped into a chair and allowed himself to be vigorously towelled by the film-developing gentleman from Wayland. Finally, he stood up again and looked over the side to Merry and Blake, who had contented themselves with resting at the foot of the ladder.

"You chaps ready?"

"Ready for anything!" grinned Tom.

"Ought to have come up with me, really; but still, you're not swimming the Channel, so it's different with you!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Lowther. "But carry on, Grundy!"

Grundy nodded and climbed down the ladder again, his rugged face grim and set.

Once more the great man of the Shell started swimming.

Tom Merry signalled to Blake, and they drew closer to their host. Both could see that Grundy would not last much longer.

Grundy struck out and swam on doggedly, panting painfully as he went.

"O.K. old bean?" asked Blake.

"Ow! I—I— Right as a trivet!" gasped Grundy.

"My hat!"

It didn't require a very powerful pair of glasses to see that that statement was a decided exaggeration of the facts. Grundy certainly was not as right as a trivet. He was not at all right. His strokes were weakening, and he was gasping painfully.

Two minutes passed and he was at his last gasp. His eyes had closed, and he was floundering about hopelessly.

"Giving up, old sport?" asked Blake, a little anxiously.

"Ow! How much farther?" asked Grundy faintly. "We—reaching—France—yet?"

"Ha, ha! Not quite!"

"Just a little more to go," grinned Tom Merry. "Better chuck it up, Grundy!"

"Ow! I'll finish—I'll——"

At that point Grundy did finish, though not exactly in the way he had meant it. Tom Merry and Blake heard him utter a sort of sigh. Immediately afterwards he went under.

Tom Merry shouted.

"Blake! We'll get him!"

Blake needed no asking. He was diving under before Tom had concluded. Tom went under, too, and meanwhile on the deck two of the crew were running forward with lifebuoys.

Fortunately, Grundy was in no real danger. Both his companions were trained in life-saving, and when they reappeared on the surface of the water they had him with them.

The tug had stopped, and lifebuoys were floating beside them. Tom Merry slipped one over the head of the half-unconscious Grundy, then held him round the ears while Blake adjusted it under his arms.

"All serene! Haul him up!" yelled Blake.

The men on deck hauled, and George Alfred Grundy, aspirant to Channel honours, was taken out of the sea less than two hundred yards from the spot where he had started.

Grundy's Channel swim was most decidedly "off"!

CHAPTER 12. Grundy Wakes Up!

"HURRAH!"

"Good old Grundy!"

"Three cheers for the Channel conqueror!" yelled Herries.

And three mighty cheers rang out across the St. Jim's quad.

Half the school seemed to have turned out to welcome Grundy on his return from Dover. Manners and others had spread the news of Lowther's great jape far and wide, and not many fellows had felt like missing the climax. As soon as word came from advance messengers that Grundy and his Channel swimming assistants had arrived at Rylcombe they had rolled down to the gates in battalions.

Grundy had fully recovered from his immersion now, and was none the worse for it. He felt considerably better for it, in fact. Merry and Blake and Lowther had carefully refrained from enlightening him as to how much of the Channel he had swum. Grundy, who had lost all sense of time and place in the water was consequently under the fond delusion that he had almost brought it off.

He smiled his most expansive smile as he heard the cheers. This was something like! A prophet was not without honour in his own country always in spite of all that had been said to the contrary. St. Jim's had recognised the genius of her brilliant son at last!

Of course, this rousing reception was the least the fellows could have given him in the circumstances. They had been tardy in acknowledging his greatness. Figuratively speaking, he had had to take them by the scruff of the neck and force them to acknowledge it. Still, they had acknowledged it at last, and Grundy felt himself swell with pride.

He took off his cap in graceful recognition of their welcome, and passed through the gateway of St. Jim's between two rows of cheering juniors.

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Grundy!"

"Speech! Speech!"

Grundy halted.

"Gentlemen—" he said.

"Hear, hear!"

"Tell us all about it, Grundy."

"Gentlemen! You do me proud! You honour me!" said Grundy. "Of course, I know I deserve it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's gratifying, all the same—very gratifying!" said Grundy. "Now as to telling you all about it. My friends here have suggested that I give a lecture in the Common-room, on 'How I Swam the Channel.'"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good wheeze, old chap!"

"There's only one thing against that suggestion—that I didn't actually succeed in completing the course."

"Oh, shame!"

"Still, I did the next best thing—I nearly swam it!" said Grundy. "If you like a brief account of that small achievement—"

"Oh, my hat! We'd love it!" grinned Kangaroo.

"Well, in that case, I'm your man! I understand that they've already taken a print of the cinematograph film Lowther took of the affair. After I've given my lecture, you'll probably be interested to see that."

"Hear, hear!"

"No time like the present," said Monty Lowther. "Let's adjourn to the Common-room."

The juniors were only too willing to adjourn, and the entire crowd marched en masse up to the School House and swarmed upstairs into the Common-room.

Everything was ready. Chairs had been arranged in rows, and a small cinematograph projector, owned by Figgins of the New House, had been installed at the back of the room, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1.176.

while a sheet borrowed from the House dame had been stretched up on the wall.

Tom Merry took the chair.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," he said. "I don't want to waste your time when I know you're all waiting to hear the hero of the hour—Grundy of the Shell."

"Hear, hear!" said Grundy cordially.

"Instead of doing that I'll call upon Grundy himself to tell you just how he did it."

"Hurrah!"

Grundy stood up.

"There's little to tell, as a matter of fact," he said modestly. "We started off from Dover. The sea was merely roughish. Some people might have called it wild; but to me it was merely roughish."

"Go it, Grundy!"

"Merry and Blake came in with me for the first mile or two. It was very decent of them; matter of fact, I didn't know they could swim so well before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I had a bit of a breather after a while—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well, a man can't be expected to swim the Channel without an occasional breather, can he?" said Grundy argumentatively. "So for a minute or so I had a rest on the tug. Then I really got going."

"Hurrah!"

"Mountainous seas were running now," said Grundy, whose memories of the swim had evidently become a little distorted—"seas that would have terrified most men. Was I terrified of them?"

"Not likely!"

"You've taken the words out of my mouth, gentlemen! Far from being terrified of them I gloried in my battle with the ocean. Mile after mile I battled on. Before me I saw the white cliffs of the French coast. Victory was in sight!"

"Oh crikey!" murmured Monty Lowther, almost limply.

"Then, gentlemen—I'm not afraid to tell the truth!—I found myself giving out at last. To all intents and purposes I had already achieved the impossible. Now I found my strength leaving me. On I struggled. It was—well, it was titanic," said Grundy, with an effort, "this mighty struggle between a human being and the forces of Nature. But I could feel I was fighting a losing battle. Gentlemen, I just failed to reach the French coast."

"Hard luck, old bean!"

"It was—dashed hard luck!" said Grundy. "Don't ask me to remember the closing stages—I can't! I suppose I must have been swimming unconsciously for hours. Then they lifted me out of the water. I'd lost—but I had at least gone down fighting, and no man could have done more!"

"Hurrah!"

"Gentlemen!" concluded the great man of the Shell. "With all modesty, I say that I put up a wonderful show. I didn't quite do it, it's true, but I'm jolly sure I worked harder than any Channel swimmer has worked before. That's about all, I think, and now I'll ask Figgins to show you the film of my wonderful effort!"

Grundy sat down amid roars of applause.

"Now for the picture!" grinned Lowther.

He and Manners between them pulled the curtains across the windows to shut out the light of the sun which was setting across the quad, and Figgins switched on the illuminator of his movie projector, throwing a brilliant white beam across the room on to the screen.

There was an excited buzz as the film began.

The scene was the beach at Dover, taken from a boat a little way out at sea.

Three figures could be seen entering the water. They were recognised instantly.

"Merry and Blake and Grundy!" called out Figgins, from behind the projector. "Gentlemen! You are now witnessing the start of the great Channel swim!"

Loud applause greeted the announcement.

That applause, incidentally, was the last that was given in the Common-room that night. Laughter, not cheers, was the order after that.

The audience grinned as they observed the cumbersome way in which Grundy was floundering towards the camera. They chuckled as the great man of the Shell climbed out of the water on to the deck of the tug within a hundred yards of the beach. They laughed aloud as Grundy began to show signs of tiring while still within a stone's-throw of land.

Then came the finish, with Merry and Blake saving the dizzy and utterly defeated aspirant to Channel honours,

while the white cliffs of Old England, not of France, shone prominently at the back of the picture. And the crowd roared and howled with delirious delight.

The lights went up.

Grundy was sitting at the side of the screen, blinking dazedly.

"I—I—" he stuttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the entire Common-room.

"Then—then I didn't get very far out, after all!"

"Not very far!" gurgled Lowther. "Only about a thousandth part of the way!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy mopped his brow.

"It beats me. I—I thought—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought I'd nearly got there. Yet according to this film—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors couldn't wait to hear him out. They just shrieked.

"Look here—" mumbled Grundy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's face, as Lowther afterwards expressed it, was worth a guinea a box. The juniors couldn't resist it.

The film had come to Grundy as a revelation. Grundy really had been under the impression that he had all but completed his Channel swim. But now, with a few turns of the handle of Figgins' projector, the dream had been dissipated.

Even Grundy saw the painful truth at last. He had been

ignominiously rescued from the water only a couple of hundred yards from the English shore, and his rescuers, Merry and Blake, whom he had regarded as merely minor figures in the enterprise, had been still as fresh as paint! For the first time since the swimming craze had taken possession of him, Grundy felt a doubt as to whether he was such a genius in the water after all.

"Oh dear!" he muttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crikey!"

Grundy sat down for a few seconds, staring with dull eyes at the hilarious crowd. Then he got up and fled. His humiliation was complete.

Little was heard from George Alfred Grundy for quite a time after that. The great man of the Shell dodged his colleagues as much as he could and went for long tramps alone. Never before had Grundy been seen in such a subdued frame of mind. It was a change indeed—but a change for which the long-suffering juniors of the Lower School at St. Jim's were devoutly thankful.

He came round in time, of course. Nothing in the world could keep Grundy down for long. But it was noticeable that he studiously avoided discussing swimming. And never, under any circumstances, did he refer again to the time when his amazing attempt on the English Channel had ended in such complete disaster.

THE END.

(Next week's GEM will contain another ripping, long story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "GUSSY, THE SLOVEN!" Make sure of reading it, chums, by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

Send Your Question To The Oracle!



Our whiskery old wonder is fairly bursting his bald pate with pride at not yet having been tripped up with a teaser. Have a shot at lowering his colours, chum!

THE office-boy's back from his holidays, chums, looking brown, and the Editor's back, looking blue. And when the Editor saw me, he said, "Hallo, so you've come back as well, have you? And where did you crawl away to for your fortnight?"

"I went to a quiet little village in the country, sir," I told him. "Ha!" said the Ed. "And couldn't you get a job in that little village?" "What sort of a job do you suppose they would give me?" I asked. "Well, they might have given you a job as the oldest inhabitant," said the Ed.

Much to the old Ed's amusement, I informed him that I was mistaken for the oldest inhabitant several times while I was in that village.

"One day, sir," I told him, "a dear old lady came up to me and said, 'You must have lived here for hundreds of years; perhaps you could show me some historic remains in this village—apart from yourself, that is?'"

"I said 'Yes, ma'am, I can,' and I took her along and showed her the pump. 'That pump,' I said, 'is so old, ma'am, that the water that comes out of it is discoloured.' And why is it dis-

picking up a letter, "is a question from a reader in Ilford. He wants to know why people use the expression 'that's the cheese,' when they mean that something or other is 'the thing'?"

"That, sir," I said, "is a very interesting query, which I will answer forthwith. The expression has nothing to do with cheese of any kind, but comes from an Urdu word 'chiz,' meaning, of course, 'That's the thing,' and before long the chiz was turned into cheese."

"I see," said the Ed., "chiz is an Urdu word?"

"Yes, sir."

"Urdu know that?" said he, fiercely.

"I've studied the language," said I. "Urdu is a kind of Hindustani, but a great many words in it come from the Persian and Arabic, and it is spoken by Mussulmans, or by Hindus who have come under Mussulman influences."

"The next query is from George Haynes, who lives in Manchester. He wants to know why certain chestnuts are called 'horse-chestnuts,' and if they have any practical use?"

"The horse-chestnut, sir, is said to get its name from the fact that years ago, in

coloured?" she asked. "It's discoloured," I said, "with the paint it washed off the sides of the Ark."

When I told the Editor this, he told me I was an old humbug, and I said I had better trot into the sanctum and answer some of the readers' queries, so in I went, wondering if you fellows had found any real teasers for me this week.

"First of all," said the old Ed., "is a question from a reader in Ilford. He wants to know why people use the expression 'that's the cheese,' when they mean that something or other is 'the thing'?"

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"The next query is from George Haynes, who lives in Manchester. He wants to know why certain chestnuts are called 'horse-chestnuts,' and if they have any practical use?"

"The horse-chestnut, sir, is said to get its name from the fact that years ago, in

Constantinople, these nuts were used to relieve short-windedness and cough in horses. They've quite a lot of uses, some of which I will recount in brief for George's benefit. Mixed with alum-water, the horse-chestnut makes size or cement, which is very offensive to vermin, and when mixed with two parts of wheaten flour it produces a strong paste used by bookbinders. If they are introduced into the ground, they will kill the worms. They are used in some countries in the bleaching of flax, hemp, silk, and wool. They are also introduced in the manufacture of starch. In Geneva two pounds of horse-chestnuts are given to the sheep every morning and evening, and when given to cows, in moderate quantities, they are found to increase the yield of the milk and improve its flavour. Pigs and deer like them, and they can be given to poultry, after being boiled—the nuts, that is, not the poultry. The bark of the horse-chestnut is used for making yellow dye, and is also employed in tanning. The wood is soft, and is not of much use, except for common kinds of carpentry and turner's work. The leaves—"

"That'll do," said the Ed. "We'll leave the leaves, and pass on to a puzzler from a Chelmsford reader. Fred Richards wants to know why a drinking glass is called a tumbler?"

"Years ago, sir, drinking vessels were often made with rounded or pointed bottoms, and if they were put down they tumbled over. The only way they would stand was upside down."

"Will Stebbing asks how many regiments wear the headdress known as the bushy?"

"In Great Britain bushies are of two kinds. There is the hussar bushy, which is cylindrical in shape, and is worn by Hussars and the Royal Horse Artillery. And there is the rifle bushy, which is a folding cap of astrachan, and looks something like a tall Glengarry. It has a plume in front. The full dress feather bonnet of the Highland Infantry is sometimes called a bushy, and so is the bearskin cap worn by Foot Guards and Fusiliers."

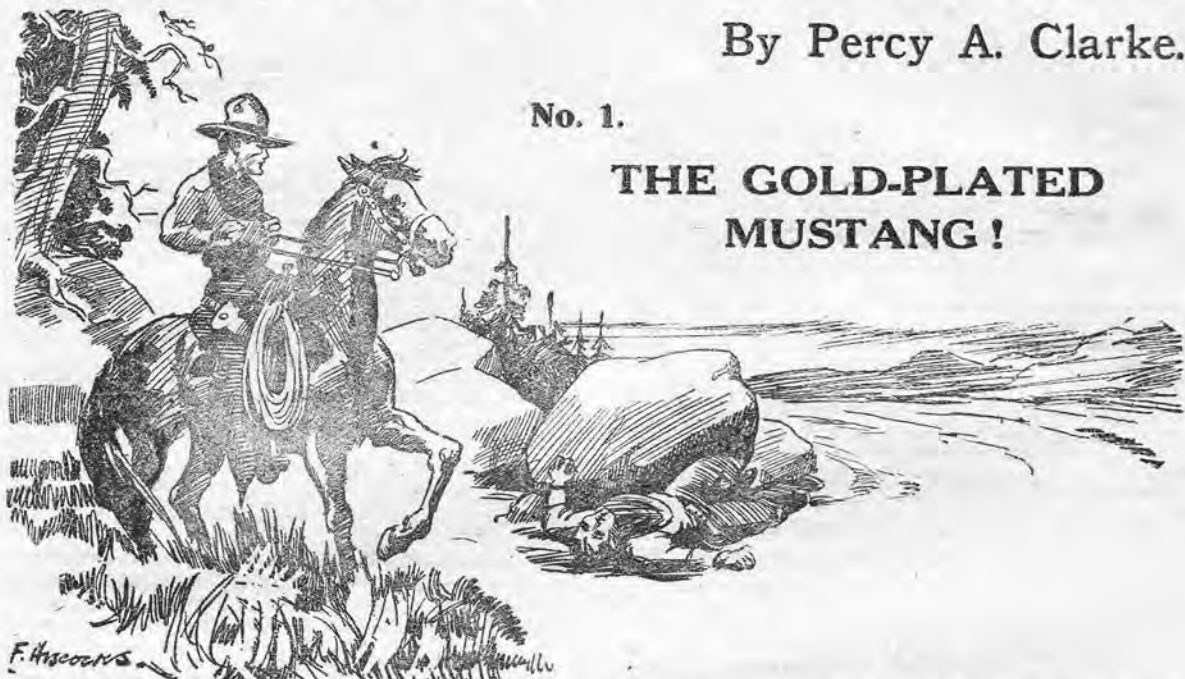
FIRST OF OUR GRAND NEW SERIES OF THE WILD AND WOOLLY WEST!

Buck of the Broken K!

By Percy A. Clarke.

No. 1.

THE GOLD-PLATED MUSTANG!



CHAPTER 1. Detective Buck!

BUCK MORAN was a cowpuncher, and nothing special in cowboys—at least, not to look at. He wasn't very big, but what there was of him was good! Five feet three he stood in his socks, broad in the shoulder, rather bent in the legs an account of range-riding, tanned in the face, and blue in the eyes.

He was never known to say a word too many, and he was never too scared to say what he thought, if that same was ever necessary. In his work he was plumb efficient, he drew his money monthly, and had a good time, and after that he just craved peace and quiet.

One fine morning, when there was nothing much to do, and all day to do it in, he sat on a corral rail whistling away at a piece of wood with his jack-knife. As he worked he whistled, and his merry blue eyes twinkled with happiness.

Then a shadow fell over his work, and, glancing up, he saw the owner of the Broken K, Colonel Worth, glaring at him.

"Busy?" queried the colonel harshly. "Yeah, I'll say you are. Pretty boy, the next time I go way back to New York, I'll buy you a rattle to play with."

"Kind of you, boss," said Buck, with a grin. "Only don't waste your dollars buyin' a doll for your little daughter, boss, because I'm making her one right now."

He held up the work he was carving, and sure enough it was just beginning to take shape. The colonel could make out the head and the arms, and the scowl on his bronzed face gradually changed to a smile.

"That's fine, Buck," he said. "And the girl will value that more than a five-dollar cutie from a Manhattan store. But put it away and find Rawlins. I want him, may pronto!"

"Sure, I'll fetch him," said Buck.

He slipped from the corral rail, stowed the carving and his jack-knife somewhere about his person, and walked off towards the bunkhouse in the rolling gait of the horse-man, more at home in the saddle than on his feet.

Yet he was quick—surprisingly quick—in all his movements. The boss wanted Sid Rawlins, the manager, and

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what the boss wanted the boys were never slow in obtaining for him, because he was popular.

But Buck had some difficulty in finding the manager. He was nowhere around the ranch buildings, but while Buck searched for him he came riding in on his skittish pony.

There was no need for Buck to do any announcing, because the colonel had seen the arrival of Rawlins, and came over to him. Buck was close beside them.

"Where've you been, Rawlins?" asked the colonel.

"Round the lines," said Rawlins curtly. He was a sour-tempered man, and could be vicious when the colonel wasn't looking. "There was a break in the fence down by the gully, and I set the boys mending it."

"Seen Brady?" asked the colonel abruptly.

Rawlins stared, and there was fear in his eyes.

"Brady? No," he said. "Hasn't he got back yet?"

"He hasn't, and it's high time he had," snapped the colonel.

"I'll go look for him," suggested Rawlins hurriedly.

"No, I want you here," retorted the colonel. "Besides, your pony isn't fresh. Buck, come here!"

"I'm here, boss," said Buck.

"Last night I sent Brady to Pecos City for the pay-roll. Alone?" queried Buck in surprise. "And Laredo's gang is in the hills?"

"He went alone because of that," said the colonel. "Mind, I'm trusting you because you're plumb on the spot."

"Air you doubting me, boss?" said Buck curtly.

"No, I'm warning you. There's trouble, right now. I argued that if I sent a posse of men for the pay-roll, they'd sorter advertise the fact, and Laredo would bring his greasers down and shoot 'em down, and high-tail it for the border with the dollars. Get me?"

"I sure do," said Buck.

"So Rawlins and I put our heads together. We sent Brady over to Pecos with only ourselves knowing where he was going and why. We figured he'd collect the pay-roll and be back here before Laredo knew anything about it."

"And he's late?"

AT GRIPS WITH THE GREASERS!

Buck and Smoke defeat the Mexican Bandits

"Four hours overdue," said the colonel grimly. "Mind, Buck, this is in confidence."

"Safe with me, boss," said Buck. "I'll go look for Brady. See you later."

He walked away to the corral and roped his horse. His movements did not seem hurried, yet he never wasted a second. The colonel watched him, a frown of anxiety on his face. Rawlins was scowling.

"A secret that's shared ain't a secret a-tall," said Rawlins.

"Buck is safe," said the colonel. "I'm plumb sure of it."

"Safe, perhaps," said Rawlins. "Good enough for roping steers and branding 'em. Beyond that he's got no brains. He's simple—"

"That's all you know," snapped the colonel. "Buck's happy-go-lucky, but I'd trust him, and then some! Besides, Brady hasn't returned with the dollars. Only you and I knew he was going for the pay-roll. Should he be found with a bullet in his heart, isn't it better for him to be found by a third party, with no axe to grind?"

Rawlins shrugged his shoulders and turned away. He had no answer to make.

Buck rode away on his mustang. Like Buck himself, that horse wasn't anything special to look at. Lots of people laughed openly at that horse, but Buck wouldn't have changed him for half a dozen thoroughbreds.

"Hit her up, Smoke!" he said. And the horse sped away at an easy gallop along the trail for Pecos City.

Smoke was leggy, said the cowpunchers of the Broken K. His legs sure were noticeable, but they were strong-looking legs. His body was knobby, perhaps, and his head wasn't what you might call an oil painting. In colour, the horse was a creamy white with great splotches of tawny brown.

Buck had bought him from a puncher who was down and out. At that time Buck had to be content, because he couldn't afford any more for a horse that anyone would have paid for such a misfit as Smoke. But it wasn't long before Buck found out he had a bargain. Looks aren't everything, and Smoke had amazing endurance and speed; but, above all, he had brains under his wagging ears.

"But, look here, cowboy," Buck had said. "What in tarnation do you call a brown and white mustang Smoke for?"

"Well, why not?" laughed the seller. "Where there's smoke there's fire."

"Then let's hope he's hot stuff," said Buck. And sure enough, he found out that Smoke was hot stuff, though lots of people didn't know it.

And when Buck gave Smoke to understand he was in a hurry, he had no need to use his spurs. Smoke just kicked up the dust and consumed the miles. He had a tireless, long-legged action. His tail stuck straight out behind him, his ears were laid back, and, in actual fact, he smoked along.

Buck was keeping his eyes well open, but for a long time he saw nothing suspicious. On the plains there was not a soul in sight, which wasn't surprising, but when he came to the rocky foothills, where the trail wound in and out amongst the boulders, it was only natural to go slow. This was the very place for an ambush.

And suddenly, without waiting for the pressure of Buck's knees and the tightening of the bridle rein, Smoke came to a halt. Buck's blue eyes glinted, and his teeth came together. Half under a great rock lay the body of a man, and instinctively he knew it was Brady.

Buck drew his six-shooter and gazed about cautiously. He saw nothing and heard nothing, so he dismounted and went to the fallen puncher, turned him over, and glared at the neat hole drilled in his forehead.

He rose and studied the surroundings, giving special attention to the ground. He saw a few footprints, and it was clear that only one man had approached the murdered cow-waddy.

"Plumb disgustin'," growled Buck. "Poor Brady was jest shot down as he came through the defile, and never had a chance to draw his own gun, leave alone use it."

Brady's two guns were still in his holsters. A whinny told where his horse still waited somewhere amongst the rocks. Buck studied the lie of the land. From the way Brady had been coming it was fairly easy to estimate whereabouts the murderer had been lying in waiting amongst the rocks.

Buck roamed around for half an hour before he found the exact spot. He saw the same footprints as he had seen near Brady's body, and, stooping, he picked up one cartridge case, which he examined.

"A Winchester!" he muttered. "The coyote! Hid behind here, and drilled poor Brady without warning. But, say, cowboy, Laredo's lot are all Mexicans, and since when did greaser bandits carry Winchesters? What are we thinking, huh?"

He went back to the scene of the murder and had another search. He found a button—just a plain black

button. But no Mexican wears plain black buttons any more than an ordinary cowboy. A range boss, a manager, or even a doctor, might wear black buttons on his black riding kit.

Buck pocketed the evidence, and his face was grim. He roped in Brady's horse, and, after a struggle, managed to get the murdered man on the animal's back. It was a mournful ride to the Broken K.

The waddies rushed out to help as they saw Buck coming in with his find. Rawlins was to the fore, white-lipped and stern.

Buck hitched his horse to the corral rail; then, without warning, he left the men and walked direct to the colonel's office, entering without knocking, shutting the door, and planting his broad back against the panels.

"Colonel," he said, "jest watch outer the window. From whar you're sitting you can see the boys, to say nothing about another critter I'm not trusting. I want to talk, and what I want to say is plumb private."

The colonel nodded grimly.

"I'm listening," he said.

"I searched out there, colonel," continued Buck. "There was evidence—a black button what never came off a Mexican nor a cow-waddy, and a spent cartridge from a Winchester what I found behind a rock overlooking the trail."

The colonel was white. He stared out of the window. When he spoke, he did not so much as turn his head.

"Are you thinking the same as I am, Buck?" he asked.

"Waal," drawled Buck, "if you're thinking of a guy who wears a black coat and owns a Winchester, and knew that Brady was coming home alone with the pay-roll, then, colonel, we're thinking alike. But I had a look-see at his coat, and there ain't a button missing. He might have sewn another one on."

"The evidence is not conclusive," said the colonel.

"I'll say not," admitted Buck. "But, colonel, I'd like the chance to go to Pecos for another dose o' dollars and for him to know I've gone."

"Too dangerous," said the colonel.

"Dangerous nothing!" cried Buck. "I'd bring the jack home. Leastways, if I didn't my horse would. That cayuse sure has got more sense than some humans. Try it, colonel, and should Smoke come home alone, jest look in the saddle-bags. Get me?"

The colonel thought it out, then he rose and went to the door, flung it open, and went out to stand on the veranda calling for the manager.

"Rawlins, just a minute!"

The manager came, looking worried.

"It's the work of a cowardly skunk!" he flared up.

"Never mind that now!" snapped the colonel. "I'm sending Buck into Pecos to lodge information with the sheriff."

"And tell him from me," cried Rawlins, "if he don't corral Laredo and his greaser bandits he'd better give up his job!"

The colonel ignored the interruption.

"While Buck is in Pecos he can take a cheque to the bank and bring back a wad of dollars to replace the pay-roll we've lost."

"Say," cried Rawlins, "that's asking for trouble!"

"No, it isn't!" said the colonel sharply. "We sent Brady alone, and failed to pull it off. But Laredo won't think we'd try the trick again so soon. It's bluff, and if any fellow can do it, his name's Buck Moran!"

"Yeah, that is so!" agreed Buck quietly. "Give me the cheque, colonel, and I'll hit the grit."

Rawlins' eyes glittered as the colonel handed over the cheque; but Buck took no notice. He stowed the piece of coloured paper in his shirt-pocket, and went out, with his rolling gait. He delayed his departure only long enough to water his horse and give him a feed of alfalfa grass. Then he was off, and taking his time about it.

CHAPTER 2.

Buck Wins Through!

Buck was not in a tremendous hurry. He wanted to get to Pecos, talk to the sheriff, cash the cheque, and start for home an hour or so before sunset. It would be dangerous in the foothills for a solitary rider carrying a bag full of dollar bills, but that danger was just what Buck Moran was hankering after. He was hoping with all his heart that the guy with black buttons on his coat and who carried a Winchester because he hadn't the nerve to get at close quarters with a revolver, would try stopping him as he had stopped poor Brady.

"Say, Smoke," said Buck to his horse, "there ain't many doggone fools in Texas who go out axing to be

murdered, yit there's sich a one forking you now. Can you beat it?"

Naturally, Smoke made no answer, unless the wagging of his ears meant anything. He kept on at a steady, loping trot over the plains, through the defile, and in and out amongst the rocks of the foothills, down to the mesa with the silver ribbon of the Pecos River glittering in the distance, and so to Pecos City.

Buck called on the sheriff, and went to the bank. Then he idled his time away. Not until one hour before sunset did he make any attempt at leaving Pecos City. Yet before he left he spent at least a busy half-hour, during which he stowed the dollar bills in his saddle-bags, then filled a business-like canvas bag with torn newspaper, with a few dollar bills just on top to make it look like a lot of money, should any inquisitive person take a peep inside.

He hung that canvas bag on his saddle-bow, forked his cayuse, and rode out of town trying hard to look terribly worried and serious, while all the time he was merry and bright. Buck always liked trouble and danger, even if he made out he didn't.

Over the mesa to the foothills he took his time, resting Smoke at every chance. Then, as the sombre rocks appeared before him he showed signs of agitation and nervousness, in case he was being watched. The sun had sunk in the west, and the moon was rising. Buck was plumb glad to see the moon because it was included in his plans. He wanted to see the moon glint on the barrel of a Winchester.

He urged Smoke to a loping canter and entered the rocky defile, eyes and ears alert, one hand resting on the butt of his six-shooter. Carefully he studied the rocks ahead of him, and suddenly something poked over a boulder. But it wasn't the barrel of a Winchester. It was a Mexican sugar-loaf sombrero!

Buck was puzzled, but that didn't stop him acting. Even as he shot sideways out of the saddle there was a flash and a crack from the rock. The bullet would have gone clean through Buck's forehead, if he hadn't anticipated it. As it was, the dose of lead knocked off his Stetson.

Buck fell from his horse, dragging the canvas bag with him. For a brief second he staggered and leant against Smoke, then he slapped the horse's flank.

"Home, Smoke, you ole critter!" he whispered in the wagging ears.

Then he slumped forward on his face.

Smoke, reared, cavorted, then came down on all four hoofs, set his ears back, and careered along the trail for the Broken K outfit, his tail streaming out behind him like a banner.

Buck had a six-shooter in his hand. There were men moving up amongst the rocks, cautiously, and the Broken K waddy watched from between half-closed eyes. Plainly he saw three Mexicans amongst the boulders. Guns in their hands, they were advancing, prepared for any trickery. Three more were on the other side of the trail. It was a carefully prepared ambush, but all Buck's theories about the murder of Brady had gone west.

Greasers don't wear black buttons and don't carry Winchester, he kept telling himself. Yet there they were, after the Broken K pay-roll. He lay very still, waiting for his turn to move, and trying to think things out. Only the colonel and Rawlins knew he had the money. Of course, he may have been seen at the bank in Pecos City, but Buck doubted that possibility.

On their way down to him two of the nearest greasers passed behind a rock, and Buck decided to get away from there.

In a flash he was on his feet, a six-shooter in either hand and the canvas bag slung on his arm. His body heaving, he blazed away, and two of the bandits yelped and slumped in their tracks. Then he was darting to one side and round behind a rock, bullets humming round his head like bees.

He didn't know where he was going. All his clever plots and plans had gone astray. He had bargained for one man, and that man was Rawlins, the manager of the Broken K. But he had run full pelt into Laredo's gang of Mexican bandits. And the only thing he could do was to lure them from the trail so that Smoke could carry the dollars home. What happened to himself remained to be seen.

Madly he climbed the steep slope, taking advantage of every deep shadow. He reached the top and slithered down the other side. He came to a rough path that ran along the side of the mountain, and since it afforded a firm foothold he stuck to it, running as hard as he could go.

But the greasers knew those hills as thoroughly as Buck knew the Broken K corral, and they took a short cut. They were slightly ahead of him and above him, and their bullets were buzzing dangerously close to his head.

Buck left the track and dived into a gully, then up the other side to another ridge. The Mexicans were close behind him. He turned on the ridge and blazed at them. His fire was so hot and accurate they darted to cover. He put holes through their sugar-cone hats until they resembled sugar-dredgers. He showered lead all over them, and all round them, until they were too scared to show an eyelash round the rocks that concealed them.

Then suddenly Buck broke and fled for it again, raced furiously down the slope on the other side of the ridge to a line of rock, broke through a narrow pass, careered round a boulder, and then discovered his mistake.

He couldn't stop himself. Immediately before him was a steep, shingly slope. As he tried to pull up, the ground crumbled under his feet, and he slid down on his back fifty feet, helplessly, finally bringing up against a rock with a jar that rattled every bone in his body.

In a flash he scrambled to his feet. The greasers were at the top of the slope, lead-slinging at him. He dived behind the rock that had broken his fall and found another beaten track. He fled along it, but he was having enough. That smack against the boulder had knocked a deal of wind out of him. And then, to make matters worse, a greaser suddenly mounted a big rock and potted him neatly in the arm. It was only a flesh wound; but the sudden shock of it threw Buck down heavily.

He was in the open, so he couldn't stay there. Gritting his teeth, he turned, and, with his guns, drove his pursuers to cover with a hail of lead. Then he dashed round a bend in the face of the cliff, and finding the black mouth of a cave near by, he dashed into the welcome darkness, and, lying flat, waited for the greasers to appear at the entrance, fully revealed in the brilliant moonlight.

But those greasers weren't quite so foolish as that. They knew very well that Buck could pick them off one by one as they appeared. They halted close by the entrance to the cave and yelled at him.

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"NO SURRENDER"

There was a flash as Buck whipped sideways out of the saddle and a dose of lead knocked off his Stetson!



Rawlins, the Broken K manager, sneering at him. And Rawlins held the canvas bag.

Laredo, the greaser bandit chief, held a gun at Buck's ribs, and another greaser took the six-shooters from Buck's belt where he had deposited them while he crawled the tunnel.

Rawlins was chuckling with huge enjoyment.

"Aren't we smart, Buck?" he sneered.

"Like nothing, you are!" retorted Buck.

"You set a nice trap for me, didn't you, Buck? You reckoned I got Brady—"

"You're not denying it?" said Buck sharply.

"No need to. I did it. I wanted the money; and dead men tell no tales. But you thought if I knew you were coming alone with the I'd try the trick again and you'd be ready for me."

"You talk like a book, Sid," said Buck grimly.

"Only I wasn't born yesterday, Buck. I tipped off Laredo, and he set his men on the trail to get the dollars—and we're splitting the jack. You gave 'em the slip on the trail, and you were so plumb smart you crawled right into the lions' den."

"Snakes' hole," corrected Buck. "Get it right, Sid. But won't I spill the beans when I get back! You an' Laredo'll have to quit this country."

"A dozen sheriffs couldn't catch me here," put in Laredo. "I not scared."

"And I'm going back to the Broken K," said Rawlins, with a grin. "I'm out riding, looking for you because your horse came in on his lonesome."

"Thanks for the information," said Buck, grinning. "Smoke sure is a fine horse."

"I'll go back," said Rawlins. "They'll never find you nor your carcass, and some folks'll think Buck Moran rode off with the money."

Buck was taking stock of his whereabouts. Laredo's hide-out was high up in the mountain—right at the top, in fact. Over Buck's head was the bough of a mountain ash that grew close beside the tunnel entrance, which was Laredo's back door. Above was the edge of a small plateau that formed the very crest of the mountain.

It looked as if Buck's number was up, especially if Rawlins suddenly took a peep into the canvas bag and realised how he had been fooled.

"May I ax you, Sid," said Buck, "jest how you propose to bump me off?"

"A bullet," said Rawlins. "And I'll do it myself."

"Do it quickly, then," said Buck, preparing himself. "And mind I don't get away. Get all the greasers to hold me while you done shoot, Sid. You might miss."

The taunt brought an angry flush to Rawlins' cheek.

"I'm not taking any risks with you, Buck Moran!" he snarled. "But I don't want greasers to help me. Stand aside, Laredo!"

The Mexican withdrew and the revolver was no longer pressing against Buck's ribs. Rawlins dropped the canvas bag for a moment.

"T'row out ze money, gringo! We tak' money, go 'way, not hurt you."

"Come in and fetch the dollars!" invited Buck.

"You t'row it out or we come fetch it!"

"Yeah, you're welcome!" retorted Buck. "Come right in, gents! Don't stop to wipe your feet none!"

The brim of a sugar-cone hat showed round the edge of the cave mouth, and one of Buck's six-shooters spat fire. The hat went back sharply, and Buck laughed.

"Step right in, gents! There's bullet broth f'r tea!" he yelled.

The greasers were talking outside; but Buck couldn't make out what they said. He soon found out, though, for after a time they began to throw lighted brushwood into the cave. The stuff smoked and flared, filling the cave with fumes.

Buck tied his handkerchief round his mouth and nostrils, but he knew he couldn't stop there. He retreated to the far end of the cave in an attempt to find purer air, and he chuckled at his discovery.

At the end was a tunnel leading into the heart of the mountain. As far as he could tell, it was a natural tunnel. If it hadn't been for the lurid flames of the burning brushwood he would never have seen it.

"Think they're going to smoke me out, same as coyote, huh?" he grunted. "Waal, we'll try cheating 'em!"

He stooped and crawled along the tunnel. It turned and twisted, and it was dark and damp.

"Doggone it!" growled Buck. "Where's the end?"

He seemed to have been crawling for hours, when suddenly he saw a spot of light ahead, and, heartened, he increased his pace. He could hear no sounds of pursuit; but, he argued, if the pursuers had found out where he had gone they hadn't the grit to follow him.

He approached the end of the passage and gulped in the fresh air.

"Shan't be sorry to get sky over me head," he told himself.

But as he crawled out of the passage and rose to his feet a revolver was clapped to his ribs and a husky voice sounded in his ear:

"Up wit' 'em, gringo!"

Buck couldn't argue. He raised his hands above his head. The canvas bag dropped from his arm, and was grabbed up savagely. Men were laughing at him. He had crawled plumb into Laredo's mountain stronghold. Twenty or more Mexican brigands were there, grinning. But what interested Buck more than the Mexicans was the sight of Sid

"You'll go out quick, Buck," he said, drawing a revolver. Buck dropped his hands. Laredo was rather nervous. "No!" he called sharply. "Put up your hands, gringo, an' keep 'em up."

Buck's hands shot up again smartly. He caught hold of the bough over his head. His life hung by a thread, but if he had to die he meant to die fighting. He swung himself viciously as Rawlins stepped forward to shoot him. His boots shot out and caught the manager under the chin with a force that sent him backwards, half senseless.

Then Buck performed a somersault on that bough. Guns cracked and bullets whistled round him. He felt the searing touch of one pellet in his leg, but he took no notice. Only a flesh wound.

He swung right over and came down on the plateau above with a crash, then he rolled away from the edge, scrambled to his feet, and ran.

It was a mad trick, but it was better than standing still to be shot down like a dog. Even then he was a long way from safety. The Mexicans were after him. Rawlins was after him, safe in the knowledge that Buck had no guns.

Buck found himself running along a ridge of rock and began to recognise where he was. It was from this ridge he had fallen down the slope of shingle. An idea was being born in his busy brain. The Mexicans were shooting at him and the bullets whistled all round him. His leg was hurting him and bleeding profusely. He couldn't go much farther at that rate.

As he ran he prepared his trick. He tore his shirt and soaked a fragment with blood from his leg, then smeared his shirt over the region where he thought his heart was. He smeared blood on his forehead, then looked out for the slope of shingle.

He came to it. The Mexicans sent a hail of lead at him, and missed him. But he flung up his arms and purposely fell down that slope, rolling over and over like a shot rabbit. Then he lay very still at the bottom, face upwards, so that Rawlins could see the blood marks he had prepared.

Buck caught the branch above his head, and out shot his boots, catching the manager under the chin!



It was risky and there was a lot of chance. The greasers arrived at the top of the slope, Rawlins with them, and peered down in the moonlight.

"That's got him," growled Rawlins. "Two of you go down and dump him somewhere—anywhere you like. I'd better get back. Been away from the ranch too long as it is."

Only two Mexicans descended that slope to dispose of Buck, who they thought was dead. Rawlins and the others went back the way they had come and disappeared.

Buck lay very still. The two greasers made no attempt at caution. They slithered down to him and scowled at him. "Do it may pronto," said one, "and get back."

He stooped to put his hands under Buck's arms, when suddenly Buck came to life. His fist shot up and crashed on the greaser's nose, so that he sat down, a look of pained surprise on his face. Buck's other hand flashed out and grabbed the gun from the Mexican's belt. He spun round and fired from the hip, as the second Mexican was drawing his gun. The man grunted and collapsed in a heap.

Greaser Number One reached for another gun, but Buck kicked at him. The toe of his boot crashed on his temple, and he went to sleep in an uncomfortable attitude. Then Buck left that part of the world. Hastily he climbed up the slope of loose shingle. It wasn't easy, and his wounded leg pained him terribly, but it had to be done.

He kept well in the shadows of the big rocks, and crossing the next ridge, dropped down to the trail where he had been ambushed in the first place. After that, he had to keep well concealed and struggle back to the plain as best he could, then walk home, limping painfully, with blood in his boot, towards the Broken K outfit.

The sun had been shining about an hour when Buck arrived. Colonel Worth saw him first and met him on the veranda of his house.

"Buck, I'm plumb glad to see you. I thought you were done for, like poor Brady."

"Smoke brought the money home, I hear," said Buck, grinning.

"How did you know about that?" asked the colonel.

"Sure, Sid Rawlins told me," said Buck. "You see—"

And just then Rawlins came swaggering round the corner of the house. When he saw Buck he started as if he had been shot. His hand went for his gun; but as quick as thought Buck snatched the colonel's gun, and it spat fire viciously. The bullet hit Rawlins' gun hand, and his weapon dropped to the ground.

The boys came running up, and there was no escape for the rogue manager. They grabbed him, and had it not been for the colonel they would have lynched him. Later in the day the sheriff took him to Pecos City to stand his trial.

There was no doubt of his guilt. Buck testified, for one thing. But in Rawlins' pocket they found the dollar bills which Buck had placed in the canvas bag to make it look like a bag of money, and Buck had taken a note of the numbers of those bills on a piece of paper which had reached Colonel Worth in Smoke's saddle-bags. That clinched it.

As for Laredos, he left those parts for a time.

"You're a brick, and then some, Buck," said the colonel.

"Mebbe so, boss," said Buck, grinning. "But don't forget Smoke. He's the cutest boss a man ever forked, and he brought the dollars home. A prime, gold-plated mustang, that animal is, and I'll shoot it out with any hombre who says he isn't."

"Yeah," drawled the colonel. "When I need help again I'll come direct to Buck Moran and Smoke, the gold-plated mustang."

"You might do worse, boss," said Buck.

And while his wounds were healing up he finished the wooden doll he was carving for the colonel's daughter.

(Aren't Buck and Smoke great guys, chums? There'll be another grand yarn of these two pals in next week's GEM! Don't miss it!)

GRIPPING YARN OF ADVENTURE THRILLS IN THE ROYAL NAVY!



(For Opening Chapters, See Page 26.)

BY
DAVID GOODWIN

"Well Done, Ned!"

WITHIN thirty seconds the big boat was lowered, cast loose, and brought alongside the gangway.

"Third cutter manned, sir!" cried Ned, saluting from his place in the stern-sheets.

Down came a messenger with a missive to be conveyed to the commander of the Prince Egbert, the battleship next in the line.

Ned was off on his errand at once. The twelve oarsmen made the cutter go at a racing pace, and the midshipman carried out his orders, returned as quickly, and came neatly alongside. He saw his boat hauled up to the boom, and her crew out of her save the boat-keeper, and reported himself.

Number One, though with plenty of other things on his mind, had kept a watchful eye on the trip.

"Very good, Mr. Hardy!"

You will have charge of the third cutter till I deprive you of her. Remember, I expect the top notch of smartness on all occasions, and I accept no excuses. Take your station for orders."

With a deep sigh of relief at having acquitted himself decently, Ned returned to the boat-deck. Life was worth living, after all. Presently he heard a whispered remark from one of the boat's crew that was not intended for him.

"What d'ye think of our new snottie, Ben? Hot stuff—eh?"

"They can put his bib and tucker away. He'll make an officer," murmured the speaker's companion. "I'm for backin' him up."

"Brother o' Hardy, who got broke last month, ain't he?"

"Silence there, on the boat-deck!"

Ned had a slack time of it for the next hour, for the cutter was not wanted, and he had nothing to do. The first cutter, with Wexton as the midshipman in charge, returned from an errand, and was immediately sent away to Southsea. Ned watched her go enviously. He would have liked that journey—a real voyage of his own. Oddly enough, his chance very soon came. Two guests, who had been brought aboard in a pinnace to lunch with the captain, were now to go ashore. The pinnace was no longer available, and the third cutter was called to the gangway.

"Mr. Hardy, take these gentlemen to the landing-stage of the Royal Albert Yacht Club at Southsea," said Number One. "Your coxswain will show you where it is."

"This is my lucky day," thought Ned; and in another minute the cutter was pulling briskly for Southsea, about two miles distant. The Victorious was soon left astern.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the coxswain under his breath to Ned. "Fine breeze right behind us. I don't think the first lieutenant'd mind if you was to sail her, sir."

The hint was just what Ned wanted. He had been aching to get the sail up; but did not know whether it would do to give the order.

"In oars!" he said. "Step the mast and hoist the sail! Right!"

The thing was done smartly, and in less than a minute the cutter was flying before the wind like a racer, with her sheet broad off. The

boats of the Victorious had fine big balance lugsails—much handier than the old dipping-lugs. Ned's craft soured along with a frothing wake behind her, and the coxswain, who thought he would have to do the steering, found the middy was more at home with a boat under canvas than himself.

NED'S FIRST COMMAND!

Heroic Rescue of a Bluejacket!

Ned had spent most of his holidays yachting with his father since his earliest days, and had a small rater of his own. He made the cutter fairly fly on a course straight as a dart; but he sailed her with care none the less. He thought it might make him unpopular if he drowned two of the captain's guests. He made his crew sit in the boat's bottom, according to rule.

The visitors were much interested in Ned Hardy, and chatted with him pleasantly as he sailed them homewards. One of them was a peer of the realm, but Ned thought that dignity was very small potatoes alongside the third cutter's midshipman.

It was a swift and brief journey to the yacht club causeway, and there the visitors left, thanking Ned with much courtesy as they bade him farewell. He thought them not bad fellows for landmen.

"Wind's dead agen us going back, sir," said the bo'sun's mate to Ned. "Shall I down sail?"

The middy took a swift survey of the distance, and saw

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that the ebb-tide running out of Portsmouth Harbour would help him to windward.

"No, I shall sail her," he said at once. "Cast off! Flatten in the sheet!"

The cutter leaped away on her homeward journey. It is a very different thing beating against the wind to running before it, and calls for all the skill of the seaman. The boat had to cut as close to the wind's eye as she could and tack across and across in zigzags. But the way Ned handled her and got the utmost out of her pleased the boat's crew hugely.

There is nobody so popular with men as a young officer who knows his work.

"There's another cutter beating out," said Ned, glancing at a boat under sail tacking across his course.

"That's our first cutter, sir. Mr. Wexton in charge," said the coxswain.

"By Jove, so it is!" said Ned to himself; and as the boats neared each other he saw Wexton's dark face look towards him with a malicious sneer that made Ned flush up.

Ned was willing to be at peace with all now; but he already knew well enough that Wexton was his enemy. Whatever the reason, Wexton, of all the midshipmen, had treated the boy with the most galling contempt, and it was he who had approved Mr. Grimshaw's action of the day before.

"Been attending a court-martial?" called Wexton viciously as the boats passed.

Ned bit his lips, but made no answer.

"I'll tell them you're coming when I get aboard," said Wexton scornfully, as his boat dashed away on the opposite tack.

"He means to beat us to the ship, sir," said the coxswain.

"Does he, by Jove!" exclaimed Ned. "We'll see about that! Hang up to windward there, men! Ease your sheet a bit!"

The crew were all as alert as weasels at the prospect of a race. The wind was blowing strongly now, and Ned drove the cutter for all she was worth.

He knew that if the other boat arrived first she would reach the gangway under sail, and he would have to unship his mast and sneak alongside under oars after the winner had made room. He'd be hanged if he'd let that insulting bouncer beat him!

Right up to the farther beach sped Ned's cutter, and then round like a bird and away on the other tack, so that she crossed Wexton's cutter again. Then they both went about and reached away to the westward as hard as they could go.

"We're leadin' her!" hissed one of Ned's men excitedly. "We're drawin' away a bit!"

"It'll be a feather in our cap if we can beat her, sir!" murmured the coxswain eagerly. "She's the fastest cutter on the ship an' she started first."

"We'll beat her," said Ned, watching his vessel like a cat as she drove through the short, steep waves. "Sit tight, lads!"

The first cutter was a longer boat than the third and carried more canvas. But, none the less, Ned's genius for sailing began to tell, and his crew gradually clawed to windward of the other. His crew were as delighted as beanfeasters when they saw their own middy beating the other by sheer skill.

The two boats, heeling over, were flying over the sea, the spray smashing aft over them in showers. Wexton's sallow face, glaring over his gunwale like an angry monkey at seeing himself outdistanced, made Ned burst out laughing. The other middy shouted something in a harsh voice, but Ned did not hear what it was. He was busy with his own job.

They were rapidly nearing the Victorious, though the wind, being against them, did not allow them to point straight at her. Very soon the cutters would have to whip round so as to reach her on the other tack. That was where judgment was needed. A few yards too far or too short before turning, and all advantage would be lost.

Ned took a swift glance round. The way was clear. There was no boat at the ship's gangway. A long black torpedo-boat was rushing up from the eastward, passing the Victorious, but Ned judged her pace, and saw it would be easy enough to clear her.

"Ready about!" cried Ned.

Round went the cutter and away on the other tack, neatly cutting out her rival. Wexton used some language that luckily did not reach Ned. It seemed to the latter, as he glanced ahead, that the whole starboard-watch of the battleship was more interested in the cutters' race than discipline would dare to allow. Ned cleared the oncoming torpedo-boat by a good distance as she came tearing along with a feather of white spray leaping before her bows.

"It's our win!" cried the coxswain.

Ned's boat was a full fifteen yards in front. Wexton, hardly able to control his rage, luffed hard to try and shoot to windward. This brought him on a slant across the course of the torpedo-boat he had been too savage to notice.

There was a warning hoot from the swift little warship's siren as she turned to starboard. Wexton, seeing her so close, lost his head and gave his boat the wrong helm.

"Great guns!" gasped Ned's coxswain. "She's into them!"

Ned glanced back and gave a cry of horror. There was a wild shout from Wexton's cutter, and at the same moment the torpedo-boat's steel stem struck her with a sickening crash and cut clean through her, hurling her crew into the water in a heap.

"Slack the sheet!" cried Ned, forcing his helm hard up and whirling the cutter round to speed to the rescue. The torpedo-boat, unable to stop, drove through the mass of struggling men, her propeller churning the water into foam. "They're done for! They're dead men!"

Ned to the Rescue!

HARDLY had the cry of warning died away, when the cutter went flying to the aid of the helpless crew, with her sheets eased off, and the water frothing past her sides like champagne. Ned held his course straight as an arrow to the scene of the disaster, and shouted to his men to be in readiness.

"Stand by with the lines and buoys!" he cried. "Every man bear a hand on his own side to get 'em aboard!"

The torpedo-boat had stopped her engines in the nick of time as she shot through the scattered mass of men, else there would have been the added horror of struggling swimmers cut up by her screws, and a wake of reddened foam to tell the tale. She was not a moment too soon. But the black vessel was going at so fast a pace that she shot a long way ahead before she could be stopped, even after the swimmers were passed.

Aboard the Victorious the whistles were piping shrilly, and boats were being lowered away with astonishing speed; already two whalers were making for the spot as fast as oars could drive them. But Ned was easily first, and well for the capized crew that he was so.

"Heaven send she didn't cut any of the men down with her stem!" exclaimed Ned.

"They're all afloat, sir!" said the coxswain.

"Except Jim Brinkman. Where's he?" cried one of Ned's crew.

"Tread water, lads; we'll soon have you out of it!" shouted Ned. And with a wide sweep round the scene of the late collision, he brought the cutter head to wind among the swimming men. "Look out there, bowman!"

Two of the swimmers—the first cutter's oarsman and her coxswain—were quickly alongside and hauled aboard, and Ned was congratulating himself in the belief that there was no mishap or loss of life after all, when he saw the commotion of a struggle close under the surface near by, and an arm was flung upwards desperately through the trough of wave.

"There's a man sinkin'!" cried the boatswain's mate. "He's hurt—"

In the flash of an eyelid

Ned Hardy leaped up and dived for the spot where he had seen the arm disappear. He saw that not a second was to be lost, and that one of the crew, either injured or seized with cramp, was going to the bottom, as men will in such a case.

The middy's spring from the gunwale carried him far. Down he went, the water roaring in his ears, and his hands came right upon the struggling seaman. The next moment he felt himself gripped as if in a vice.

THE STORY SO FAR.

Midshipman Ned Hardy, son of a line of sea captains, is appointed to the Victorious, the same ship from which his brother Ralph has been cashiered in connection with a robbery. Ned is convinced that his brother is innocent, but his father turns Ralph from the house. Aboard the Victorious Ned finds a friend in Jinks and an enemy in Sub-lieutenant Grimshaw. As the result of a "leg-pull," Ned mans a boat and performs his duties so skillfully that he is officially put in charge of the third cutter. Almost immediately comes the order: "Man the third cutter!"

(Now read on.)

The man, whoever he was, had entirely lost his head, his lungs had partly filled with water, and, with the terrible blind grasp of the drowning man, he had seized upon his rescuer.

In the blurred green light around him, five feet below the surface, Ned realised that he was within an ace of being drowned by the man he had hoped to save, and that, unless he could get free, his life was not worth a rush.

The boy struggled desperately, but the man was heavy, and his sodden clothes were dragging him down. Ned's uniform was swiftly growing weightier with the water, and helped to hamper him. The seaman's grasp grew more convulsive, and seemed to paralyse Ned, so fierce was it.

It was a terrible thing to be dragged down by a witless sailor. Though the bluejacket was one of the smartest of the battleship's crew, and a strong swimmer, he had been half-dazed by a crack on the head when thrown from the cutter, and, reviving only to find himself half-drowned and sinking, no more knew what he was doing than a man who had never been in the water before. His grip pinned one of his rescuer's arms, and his other hand was clutching the boy's right shoulder.

Ned kicked out with all his might, and managed to raise him to the surface for a moment, when he drew a gasping breath, only to be plunged under again. They had come

"They be all right, sir! Take a nip o' this brandy—you'll need it!"

Ned waved the brandy aside—he did not feel the need of it, and was anxious about the rest of the swimmers; but as soon as he could see around him, he realised that all the difficulties were over. Two men were being helped in over the cutter's bows, and three boats from the *Victorious*, besides the torpedo-boat's dinghy, were picking up the others. A cheer came across from the ship, and Ned did not realise that the best of it was meant for him.

"Cutter, ahoy!" came the hail from the first of the two whaleboats. "Tell off your men!"

"They're all picked up, sir! None missing!" came the reply, after a pause of a few seconds.

"Here, give me the tiller!" said Ned, taking it from the coxswain. "Who are these men you've just taken aboard? Why they're our own men!"

"Yessir. They went overboard after you," said the coxswain; "but you an' Brinkman came up an' down so promiscuous like that they couldn't get on to you in time."

"Thank you, lads!" said Ned, as the two seamen saluted. "Douse that sail, boatswain's mate, and out oars! How's the man I got?"

"He's all right, sir—only a knock on the head an' a black eye; he'll soon come to," said the bluejacket who was



The torpedo-boat's steel stem struck Wexton's boat with a sickening crash and cut clean through her!

up a considerable way from the cutter, and only showed for a brief second or two.

"I'm done!" thought Ned, as he felt himself going down for the second time. He strained with all his might to reach the top, and the two struggled violently as their heads came up, the seaman's eyes fixed and staring like a madman's. With a last effort Ned managed to free his right shoulder, and the next moment he dealt the sailor such a crashing punch in the eye that the man's grip shifted, and, with a swift wrench, Ned was free.

It was the very best thing he could have done, and nothing else could have saved him.

A rousing cheer from a dozen throats reached Ned's ears, and the cutter came flying towards him. A voice that seemed to be right overhead roared out:

"I've got 'em! Bear a hand!"

Ned, who was holding up the now almost unconscious seaman, felt himself seized from above, and willing hands heaved them both on board the cutter, Ned spluttering and gasping, and the seaman with a beautiful blackened eye.

"Well done, sir! That was a man's job!" cried the bluejackets lustily; and it needed no conjurer to see that Ned had won the hearts of his crew for good and all.

The midshipman, clutching the gunwale to steady himself, looked round him hurriedly.

"Have you got the others? Out oars, there! Get them in!" he gasped.

attending the half-conscious Brinkman lying on the boat's grating. "But he owes you his life, sir!"

"Ay, he does!" blurted out the young seaman who had gone overboard with the other. "He was my raggy, sir. I thought he was gone. If ever an officer did a pluckier thing—"

"Dry up!" said Ned. "There was nothing in it. Give way, men. We don't want to be last boat at the gangway."

The cutter forged ahead, Ned still insisting on steering, with rescuers and rescued aboard. And as she passed the second whaleboat he saw Wexton looking like a drowned rat, sitting in her stern-sheets. Ned, forgetting their rivalry, felt his sympathy go out to his late foe.

"Beastly hard luck, old chap!" he called out. "You didn't get hurt?"

Wexton made no reply, and did not even turn his head.

"Hurt! Not him!" growled Ned's coxswain, under his breath.

The whaleboat sheered off, and the second cutter, with several of the rescued men aboard, passed by close. One of the latter, with a wink, called out in a hoarse whisper to Ned's bowman:

"Wish we could ha' change snotties with yer, Jack! You've got the best o' the swap!"

Ned's crew chuckled.

"Silence there, in the boat!" cried Ned sharply. "In port oars! Way enough!"

The cutter shot alongside the gangway, and willing hands helped Ned aboard, for he suddenly turned giddy and sick as he stood up. The strain of that struggle under water had tried him more than he knew.

"The ship can thank you that she ain't lost one of her company, sir," said the warrant-officer, who helped Ned out, enthusiastically. "Hold on! We'll give you a lift up on deck."

"No, thanks; I'm all right, quartermaster," said Ned, pulling himself together. "Swallowed some of the Solent, that's all. Got to go and report."

He hauled himself up the gangway steps at a run, feeling very shaky, but intent on getting his duty done, and reporting himself aboard according to routine. He found himself right in front of the first lieutenant, who had come down to the boat-deck.

"Smartly done, Mr. Hardy!" said the first lieutenant warmly. "You've justified me in giving you charge of the cutter, and I'm glad you're not hurt. Never mind your report now. Cut away below and change your kit. Tell the steward to get you some hot grog. You're looking queer."

The next thing Ned knew, a brother midshipman had slid an arm through his, and hustled him down to the midshipmen's flat by way of the gun-room, where Hart, who had just come in, led a hearty chorus of congratulations.

"You're a credit to the mess, youngster," said Hart. "A nailing good kid, by Jove! May my red, right hand wither at the wrist if I dirk-scabbard you for the next month!" he added.

And the sub-lieutenants all had a word of chaffing praise for the boy. Even Grimshaw, seeing how the wind blew, gave him a brief nod. Jinks literally forced a tumbler of steaming grog down Ned's throat, which brought the colour back to the midshipman's cheeks, and checked the chill and fatigue.

"Well done, old chap!" said Jinks, giving his chum a terrific slap on the back as he took him along to the sleeping-flat. "We all saw you go overboard after that chap; and you didn't lose any time, either. He jolly near scragged you, didn't he?"

"The poor beggar didn't know what he was up to," said Ned, dragging off his soaking jacket. "I had to black his eye, or he'd have drowned us both. But there was nothing in it. It didn't last a minute, and, of course, the men soon got us aboard."

"Well, kid," said Jinks—he was quite ten months older than Ned—"you've shown yourself worth your salt, and you'll have no more trouble with the midshipmen's mess after this little job. It isn't only the going overboard after Brinkman, but the way you beat the first cutter in the race out was ripping good work. The betting was two to one on Wexton. His boat's the faster, you know. I've won ten bob over it."

"Have you, by gum?" said Ned. "You can share it with me."

"You bet! We'll go halves. Wexton puts on enough side for a dozen. But I know a good boat-sailor when I see him. Here, I'll give you a towelling down," said Jinks, plying a rough towel vigorously on Ned. "Feeling better? Must be a rummy sensation getting strangled under water. Lucky for Brinkman it wasn't that ass Wexton who went in after him. But Wexton wouldn't have gone."

"Oh, of course he would!"

"I know Wex better than you do, old man." Jinks glanced through the scuttle. "The torpedo-boat's commander's going off in his dinghy. He's been aboard here before the captain."

"Will he get hauled over the coals?"

"Not he. It was Wexton's fault; he mucked the whole thing. If he hadn't got in a funk and lost his head he'd never have got run down. He won't be too gay over this. He hates you like poison."

"Don't see why he should."

"He's got a down on you for something. Never liked your brother Ralph. Wexton sucks up to Grimshaw, you know."

Ned subsided into silence, as he always did when his brother's name was brought forward. He had finished dressing, Jinks chatting the while, when a message was passed below.

"Mr. Hardy to the captain's cabin at once, please!"

"Hallo!" said Jinks. "The owner's going to look into this job himself. Look alive, Hardy!"

Ned hastened to the cabin as fast as he could, wondering what the captain would have to say. He was joined on the way by Wexton, who had also been sent for.

The two middies soon found themselves at headquarters of Captain Raglan.

"Come here, young gentlemen," said the captain briefly.

The midshipmen stood to attention before the desk. The captain addressed himself first to Ned.

"Mr. Hardy, I congratulate you on the skilful manner in which you handled the cutter in a grave emergency, and on the prompt courage with which you went to the rescue of a drowning man. The incident is greatly to your credit, and I have sent for you to mark my approval."

Ned flushed to the roots of his hair with pleasure.

"In future, Mr. Hardy, none the less, you must remember that an officer in command of any vessel, whether in a boat or a battleship, must never leave his post under any circumstances; not even to save life, for the results may be more serious. You committed a fault there. You are new to the Service, and the mistake in this case was a good one. You may go to your quarters now. You will remain in charge of the third cutter, and I have no doubt you will continue as well as you have begun."

Ned saluted and left the cabin, feeling that life was worth living indeed.

(Young Ned's as plucky as they make 'em, isn't he, chums? And well he need be, for there are heaps more thrilling adventures ahead of him. Look out for next week's gripping instalment. You'll enjoy it no end.)

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