

GRUNDY'S SECRET SOCIETY

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



A BIT OF A SPILL!

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GRUNDY'S SECRET SOCIETY!

A Magnificent
New, Long, Complete Story of
Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's.

By
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CHAPTER 1.

An Invitation to Tea.

"I SAY, you fellows!"
It was George Wilkins of the *Shell* Form at St. Jim's who spoke from the doorway of Study No. 10, the famous apartment occupied by the *Terrible Three*.
"Say on, Wilky! Speech is free," said Monty Lowther.
"Grundy wants to know whether you'll all come to tea in our study this afternoon?"

The three looked rather surprised. They certainly did not consider the great George Alfred Grundy as an enemy. But an invitation to tea from him was an event out of the ordinary. Grundy was various kinds of an ass. But, for all that, he was quite a decent fellow; and Tom Merry & Co. preferred to keep the peace with him—as long as he would let them.

But he never would let them keep it long. Grundy had a fixed idea that he was afraid of anyone else in the Lower School—so every respect that mattered; and he was absolutely sure that nothing but base jealousy prevented him from playing a role of distinction in the football and cricket eleven.

Definitely a day or two before he had had to be put out of No. 10 on his neck. He had looked in to express his surprise and disgust that his name was not in the team list just posted. When Grundy started out to express his surprise and disgust he seldom stopped till he had been hurried forth bodily. And even after that he would actually seem as surprised and disgusted as ever!

There was really no satisfying Grundy. For these reasons the invitation to tea came as a mild shock to the *Terrible Three*.

"Rather a new development, this, isn't it?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, I dunno. There isn't a chap at St. Jim's readier to whack out than old Grundy," replied Wilkins.

"This was quite true, and no one knew it better than Wilkins. It had been a lucky day for Wilkins and Gunn when Grundy came to St. Jim's, after having, by his own account, made Redcliffe too hot to hold him.

Neither Wilkins nor Gunn had much pocket-money. Grundy had a lot, and out of his superabundance he was generous, and even lavish, to his study-mates. But the friendship of Wilkins and Gunn for the great George Alfred, though not without its "upboard" side, was based on other things than self-interest. They really liked him. And so did lots of other fellows, who refused to accept him as being at all the remarkable all-round man he made himself out to be.

"But why does he ask us?" inquired Tom Merry. "Last time we talked with him he expressed the lowest possible opinion of our manners, our intelligence, our sense of fair-play—"

"And, in short, everything that is ours," chipped in Lowther.
Wilkins grinned.

"I dare say," he said: "He's always doing it. You don't want to take any notice of old Grundy."

"Not even when he asks us to tea?"

said Manners. "Oh, I don't mean about that. That's straight enough."

"Anyone else coming?" Tom asked. "Lots! Blake, and that crowd, Figgins and Kerr and Wynn—Clive and Cardew and Levison. Oh, and plenty more!"

"Is Grundy aware that there is a war on?" demanded Lowther severely.

"At such a time—"

"That's just it! You must all bring your own bread. Oh, and your sugar, too. But the grub's nearly all stuff that's not rationed, you know. Cakes made with oatmeal instead of flour; fish dishes in place of ham and sausage-rolls, and that sort of thing. Jolly good stuff, too, all of it! I've sampled it."

The menu sounded interesting, even enticing. For St. Jim's was taking seriously the rationing business, and study teas had become very frugal meals in general.

"How did he work it?" asked Manners.

"He had a whacking big hamper from home. His people were afraid he'd get thin on the rations, I reckon. And he's got more stuff from Weyland. All sorts of things that don't come under the ration rules. Some of it is vegetarian tuck. Nut-foods, and so on. It ain't half as beastly as you might fancy. But I don't mind owning I like lobster better."

"Shall we go, you chaps?" said Manners.

"Oh, I think so," answered Tom. "If old Grundy wants to be friendly there's no need to choke him off."

"So that Grundy hath provided the fatted calf, shall not this study furnish the prodigals?" Lowther said.

"Rats! There ain't any veal. Veal's dead off," said Wilkins.

Monty Lowther sighed.

"Some of Grundy's failings seem catching," he remarked.

"What do you mean, ass?" snapped Wilkins.

"Do you chaps ever tumble to a joke?"

"Oh, we can get on to a joke all right. Has anybody made one lately?"

And with that Parthian shot Wilkins left.

"The sense of humour is sadly lacking at St. Jim's," said Monty Lowther pathetically.

said Tom, smiling.

"You are over their heads, old chap," said Tom, smiling.

Manners granted again.

"The pig movement is, no doubt, an excellent wheeze, Manners," said Lowther blandly. "But I have not yet heard that the Head has agreed to the transformation of Shell studies into pig-styes!"

"I guess he thinks this study may as well go on in the old sweet way—as a lunatic asylum!" growled Manners.

"It will have to, I suppose—till you change out!"

"Peace, children!" said Tom.

CHAPTER 2.

Taking Tea With Grundy!

THE festive board was spread, and there was quite a gathering of the class around it. In point of fact, the study which Grundy shared with Wilkins and Gunn was crowded to its utmost capacity.

Besides the three occupants, there were present the *Terrible Three*, Blake, Herries, Digby, and the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Talbot and Skimpole, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and Redfern, from the New House, Noble, Dane, Glyn, Levison, Cardew, and Olive.

The party not only filled the study, but overflowed into the passage, where a borrowed table or two had been set up. Most of the leading members of the Lower School were there.

Some of them sat on the floor. Among these were Skimpy, whose great mind rose superior to such common things as chairs. Monty Lowther had suggested that Grundy must have invited the scientist of the Shell for fear the vegetarian viands provided should go begging. And certainly Skimpy was greatly interested in the foods of this kind, and was sampling them all with perseverance and appetite. But he was not the only one who tried them, though he might be the only one who tried nothing else.

Skimpy had a large patty on the plate balanced upon his meagre legs. The patty had a nicely-browned crust that was quite a plausible imitation of pastry, and its inside was of some nut-food, which one might readily mistake for meat, if one had totally forgotten what meat tasted like.

Monty Lowther sat behind Skimpy, and away from the table. For want of any other support for his plate, he had balanced it upon the scientist's head. Skimpy, absorbed in meditation on some theory propounded by the learned Professor Balmyscrumpt, and absorbing nut-meat patty, was quite unaware of this fact.

Lowther was not experimenting with nut-foods. Like Wilkins, he considered lobster good enough.

"I say, Skimpy!" said Kangaroo suddenly.

Skimpy turned his mild, inquiring eyes upon the speaker, and Lowther's plate shot over, depositing its contents upon the nicely-creased trousers of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Yooop!" howled the swell of the Fourth. "Yaroooogh! Oh, weally, Lowthah, what an unskillfully silly ass you are!"

"My dear fellow, I am really not to blame. Why didn't that ass Skimpy keep his noddle still?"

"I am not conscious of any guilt in the matter," said Skimpole stiffly. "I was quite unaware that you were making

use of my head. You desired to address some remark to me, I believe, Noble?"

"Oh, no, old sport!" replied Kangaroo cheerily.

"But you certainly gave me that impression."

"Can't help that. All I wanted was to see what would happen if you moved your dome of thought. I've seen, and I'm satisfied!"

Lowther and D'Arcy both glared at Kangaroo. Then Lowther laughed, and asked for another plate of lobster, which Levison obligingly passed to him.

But Arthur Augustus continued to glare. It was a comprehensive glare. Aided by his celebrated monocle, it included Lowther, Skimmy, and the Australian junior.

"Don't Gussy, don't!" pleaded Noble. "I wither beneath your wrath! Cut it short, do, old chap, or you'll spoil my appetite!"

"Kangaroo, I am supvised at you! I weally thought that your mannahs were bettah than this. Lowthah, I regard you as a clumsy idiot! Skimmy—"

"I repeat that I am quite unconscious of any guilt in the matter, and I would add that no person possessed of a due sense of logic and an elementary idea of justice could for one solitary moment think of attributing blame to me," said Skimpole firmly. "As a practical individual, I should suggest that a temporary retirement for the purpose of—er—changing your nether garments

"Good notion!" chimed in Grundy. "You ain't half such an ass as you look, Skimmy. If D'Arcy clears out for a bit, and comes back with a clean pair of bags, and a better temper—"

The glare which Arthur Augustus had bestowed upon Lowther, Noble, and Skimpole, was as nothing to the glare which he gave Grundy now. He stood with his trousers plastered with lobster, and the monocle jammed into his right eye, and regarded Grundy in the most scathing manner.

But it was of no effect. That sort of thing never did have any effect upon George Alfred Grundy.

"No good staring at me—I didn't do it!" he said. "And if I don't grumble about my grub being wasted, I don't see why you should get on your ear about a little accident like that to your precious bags. You've got another pair, haven't you? If not, I can lend you

"Weally, Gwunday—"
"Oh, I don't mind a bit. You'll find them in my box in the Shell dorm. It ain't locked. They won't be an exact fit, I expect, as I'm not sparrow-legged; but—"

Gussy retreated in high dudgeon. As he went down the passage roars of laughter sounded in his ears.

Grundy was in high feather.

The spread was a first-class one, in spite of the food regulations. Everybody voted everything jolly good, with the possible exception of the vegetarian experiments. And even these found an ardent appreciator in Skimmy.

Now, except for Wilkins and Gunn, every fellow present was to be numbered in the ranks of the opposition. Not one of them—and here it is unnecessary to except Wilkins and Gunn—had at all the same high opinion of George Alfred Grundy's capabilities as George Alfred Grundy himself had. In fact, there was not one of them but had at one time or another expressed the lowest opinion of those shining capabilities.

Grundy was no quitter, however. They might say what they liked—all that they said failed to move him. He stood firm as granite, sure of himself. And



"I anoint thee, King George Alfred the First!"

(See Chapter 3.)

as it was absolutely out of the question that he should be moved, was it not reasonable to suppose that they might be? It seemed so to Grundy.

He was not quite foolish enough to fancy that he would bring them over by treating them to a lavish spread at a time when such spreads had become rare.

No; he regarded that merely as a first step.

They had come here for the feed, and in common politeness they could not refuse to listen to him after the feed was disposed of. He had never had a fair hearing before. If he could get one now the power of his eloquence was bound to tell.

Grundy had no doubt at all about his own eloquence.

So he waited—not too patiently. He was wondering when that fellow Wynn would have finished. Nearly everybody else had stopped now. But Fatty still went on. It was some time since he had had such a chance as this. He was making the most of it, and thinking kind things about Grundy as the giver of the feast. He beamed as he ate, and ate as he beamed.

But Grundy frowned. Fatty, quite unconsciously, was cutting into the time he had intended for his great speech. The mighty George Alfred was getting annoyed. When Grundy got annoyed he usually said things which, in a calmer moment, even he would have recognised as injudicious.

Gussy returned, resplendent in another pair of breeches—not from Grundy's box—but declined to have any more tea. And now at last Fatty Wynn had also finished.

Then did Grundy get to his feet.

"I'm jolly glad to see you chaps here!" he said. "For a lot of you it's the first time you've come to tea with me, but I hope it won't be the last. We haven't always—er—pulled together in the past, but I trust that—hum! ha!—a

better state of things will—er—prevail in the future."

He paused. Not that he intended to stop there. He had quite a lot more to say yet. But some of them thought he had finished. They had never regarded Grundy as an orator, but they thought that this was a decent little speech, and if Grundy really meant to stop playing the giddy ox and trying to boss everybody, they were content to let bygones be bygones—especially if, in such lean times as these, Grundy intended to give more such spreads as this.

No one felt this more than Fatty Wynn, to whom the food ration business was a real hardship; and though the genial Fatty was no orator, he thought it up to him to propose the health of the founder of the feast, and to say really nice things in proposing it.

So Fatty got up, beaming still.

But he ceased to beam when Grundy roared: "Sit down, Wynn! Hang it all, we've been waiting for the last half-hour or so while you stuffed yourself, and after that it's a bit beyond the limit for you to be butting in like this before I've fairly begun!"

"If you grudge me what I've eaten, Grundy, it's a pity you ever asked me along," replied Fatty. "That isn't what I meant to say when I got up, but it's jolly well all I've got to say after you start in to talk like that!"

"Hear, hear!" cried George Figgins.

"Don't be such a silly ass!" snapped Grundy. "I don't grudge you anything. I shouldn't mind if everybody here had wolfed as much as you have. There's stuff left over still, though I don't know whether there's as much as all that. I could afford to do this sort of thing every blessed day if I chose. Mind you, I don't say I am going to. That would be too much for you to expect, I think. But I don't suppose there's another chap in the two

Forms who could give a spread like this twice in a term. I'm not bragging; I'm just stating plain facts."

"Oh, dry up, Grundy!" whispered Gunn. "That ain't the way to talk to fellows, you know!"

"If you think you know better than I do what I ought to say to my guests, you'd jolly well better take my place and say it, William Gunn!" roared Grundy.

Gunn thought he did know better. In fact, Gunn was sure of it. But as for taking George Alfred's place and saying it, Gunn knew that any attempt to do that would be more than his own place was worth, so to speak.

So he subsided. He had done his best. The result was, as usual, nil.

"I am always game to stand treat to my friends, and I want to be friendly with all you chaps," went on the orator.

They had come in a friendly enough spirit, but Grundy was making some of them feel now that it had been a mistake to come at all. The New House four—Virgins, Kerr, Wynn, and Redfern—were particularly annoyed.

"I want to talk sense to you fellows," continued Grundy.

"The desire is a laudable one," put in Lowther. "Why not make a start now?"

Grundy favoured the humorist of the Shell with a look that was nothing short of Hunnish. He seldom understood Lowther's jokes, but he knew when he was being got at, and he had no love for the japing Monty.

"Look here, I don't want any of that cheap funny stuff of yours, Lowther!" said Grundy. "This ain't the time for it, or the place. I've stood a lot of japing from you fellows, being a good-tempered chap, and not caring about taking it out of other chaps below my fighting weight, you know. But I'm not used to it. At my old show the chaps looked up to me, and all that."

"By gad, must have been a queer show, that!" remarked Cardew lazily. "Do you mind givin' me the address, Grundy? I may get sacked from here some day, an' I should like to move in to a show where chaps have got a habit of that sort."

"There's a heap of difference between you and me, Cardew, let me tell you!" snorted Grundy.

"My dear man, I shouldn't think of denying anything so evident as that! I should be beastly low-spirited, by Jove, if I had any doubt of its truth. But don't mind me—get on with the washin'!"

But Grundy did mind Cardew. He minded him even more than he minded Lowther. It had been a mistake to ask Cardew—Grundy saw that now.

There was Levison, too. Levison's cynical grin annoyed Grundy extremely.

What had he asked them for? They did not count for so much as all that in the Lower School. He wished now that he had extended invitations to Dick Julian & Co. instead. But they had treated him with abominable disrespect only a short time before, and though he cherished no rancour, he had not seen the force of being too friendly with them.

Better than them was Levison and Cardew, though!

Grundy was really getting quite put out.

CHAPTER 3.

Ruitions!

"YOU chaps know very well that I can wipe the floor with any of you, if I choose!" continued Grundy affably.

That was not at all the sort of state-

ment likely to pass unchallenged, though it was so far true that probably only three fellows there—Tom Merry, Talbot, and Harry Noble—were Grundy's superiors as fighting-men.

But there were plenty of others who would not have feared to stand up to Grundy, and who certainly would not have gone under without a struggle. And at Grundy's lordly statement a chorus of dissent arose.

"I should jolly well like to see you wipe the floor with Tom Merry!" shouted Manners.

"I shouldn't," said Tom smiling. "Talbot's too much for you," said Jack Blake hotly. "And I wouldn't mind—"

"Same here!" cried Figgins.

"Weally, Grunday, I am most assuabedly not prepared to admit that you can—"

"Kangaroo could knock you out in three rounds, you bragging ass!" said Clifton Dane.

Skimpole's meek voice was heard.

"In my humble opinion, this discussion is a most unsuitable one," said Skimmy.

"I should not now describe myself as an absolute and convinced pacifist, though there was a time— But the war has modified my opinions. I do deprecate, however, and that most strongly, any such unseemly—"

But Skimmy was howled down. It did not matter that Skimmy was quite in the right. Skimmy often was howled down when his attitude was equally correct.

"Oh, rot!" hooted Grundy. "Shurrup, Skimmy! You don't know what you're talking about! As for the rest of you, you know jolly well that I could lick most of you with one hand behind my back, though it wasn't so much scrapping I meant as—as what you might call general superiority."

"Is the general on the retired list?" asked Lowther blandly. "I can't say I have heard of him at the front. Relative of yours, may I ask, Grundy?"

"Oh, ring off, you silly idiot! I—"

"I really think it's about time we cleared out," said Tom Merry. "As I understand the invitation, we were asked to tea, but—"

"Oh, we've had tea!" replied Lowther; "and now we're getting 't again, with w-a-d-d-l-e after it."

"Let's go," said Figgins. "I've had enough of this, for one."

"Jolly polite sort of thing to say you came just for the grub, and mean to do a bunk now you've had it, I don't think!" howled Grundy.

The withering sarcasm failed to wither anybody. It made Levison grin. It made others grin, too, for that matter; but it chanced to be at Levison that Grundy looked.

That grin roused Grundy's wrath to a still higher pitch.

"See here, Levison, I strained a point in asking you," he said. "I don't care much about fellows of your type, and

But now Levison's back was up, and not Levison's alone.

Cardew spoke before his chum had a chance.

Grundy's spread appears to have been a kind of bribe to get us to listen to his oratory," he said. "And I must say that I, for one, haven't been bribed high enough. It would take something pretty steep to induce me to sit mum an' listen to all this bombast. Put a price on the entertainment—without the speechifyin', for which I've no use—an' Levison an' I will cash up an' go, Grundy!"

Levison flushed. He was never at all well supplied with pocket-money, and at that moment he had not sixpence in the world.

"If you don't care about fellows of my

type, I think it's rather a pity you asked me, Grundy," he said. "I'll go now, anyway."

He and Cardew got up. Sidney Clive also rose.

"If you chaps are going, I go, too," he said. "Much obliged to you for the tea, Grundy—not so much for the oratory. That isn't your forte, you know, old scout."

"You aren't goin' without cashin' up, are you, Clive?" gibed Cardew. "It's not the thing, you know. It's not what Grundy expected, an' what Grundy expected would certainly be the thing. Grundy's programme was that we should all fill ourselves up to the giddy necks, an' then sit here meekly listenin' to him while he discoursed on the glories of King George Alfred the First, monarch of the Lower School of St. Jim's! It was a bit off to ask Merry, in the cives., perhaps, but I dare say the new monarch thought it might be for the deposed King Thomas's good!"

Grundy fairly stuttered with anger. Cardew's gibes were so very near the truth. Grundy may not have meant actually to propose that Tom Merry should abdicate in his favour at once; but he had intended that this tea-party should mark a distinct stage on his way towards "getting his rights." And Grundy would never have been satisfied that he had his rights until he had been acclaimed as indisputably leader of the junior forms.

"Well," said Clive, "it seems rather a queer thing to do after being asked to tea. But what's the figure, Grundy? You've done us jolly well, and I won't kick at anything short of five bob!"

"You—you—"

Grundy was too enraged to get out what he wanted to say.

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr. "I'm with you chaps. Poor, but honest, you know. I shouldn't think of shelling out five bob for a tea in an ordinary way; but if the blessed tea's got to be paid for before we can decently cut the cackle, let's pay for it, and do a bunk!"

Nearly everybody was on his feet now. But some of the crowd did not look too happy.

It was all very well to talk about paying for the tea they had had, and no doubt it was worth the price Clive suggested, for old Grundy really had done the thing uncommonly well. But there were several of them who had not five shillings, and did not know where to raise that sum, and these felt none too comfortable.

"You silly asses!" roared Grundy. "Do you think I'm going to put up with this sort of thing? It's a beastly insult, that's what it is, and I won't have it at any price!"

"Talkin' about prices, Grundy," drawled Cardew in his coolest tones, "will you be good enough to mention a figure? We rather want to go."

Grundy rushed at Cardew. Lowther was in his way, and he seized Lowther by the ear, with design to sling him aside.

Manners, just behind Grundy, caught him a sharp and scientific rap on the funnybone, and Grundy's grip relaxed at once.

"Who did that?" he hooted, swinging round. "I'll jolly well slay him, whoever it was!"

Lowther, angry, but joking still, caught up a tea-basin, and emptied it over Grundy's head.

"I anoint thee King George Alfred the First!" he said solemnly.

"Yooop! Yarooogh! Oo-yow! Let me get at him!" howled Grundy, with tea-leaves bestrewing his head, and streams of brownish liquid chasing one another down his rugged countenance.

But Blake and Dane got between him and Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd. "Is that how you like it done, Grundy?" asked Herries.

"You ain't exactly attendin' to business, you know, Grundy," said Cardew. "I asked you—"

Grundy snatched up a cup, and hurled it at Cardew's head.

Cardew ducked. The cup struck Gussy under the chin, and tea-leaves shed themselves adown Gussy's waistcoat.

Till that moment the sympathies of Arthur Augustus had been to some extent at least, with Grundy.

To Gussy it seemed distinctly off the rails to accept a fellow's invitation to tea, and then, because the fellow happened to annoy you, to offer him payment for the spread.

But Grundy really had gone beyond the limit. It was very wrong of him to insult Levison as he had done. No doubt Cardew and Clive had been right in standing up for their chum. And this last outrage had fairly put the lid on the whole thing.

"I insist on an immediate an' exemplary apology, Gwunday!" howled Gussy, with as much dignity as was consistent with an undisguised howl.

"Oh, go and eat coke, you tailor's dummy! It wasn't chucked at you."

"But it hit me, Gwunday an' I—"

"Jolly good job, too! Some of the rest of you will be getting it in the neck, if you aren't careful!" hooted Grundy. "I'm fed up with the lot of you. Clear out!"

"Mayn't we hear the rest of the oration, your Majesty?" asked Lowther.

"I say, this thing's gone far enough. We'd better clear," said Talbot gravely.

"It will be a jolly long time before I ask you!" Grundy roared.

"Are you goin' to offah me an apology, Gwunday?" asked Gussy hotly.

"I'll offer you a thick ear, and give it you, too, if— Ow, yow! Who did that?"

The remains of a lobster had smitten Grundy in the back of the neck.

Nobody answered. Grundy snatched up what was left of a cake, and hurled it at D'Arcy.

He hit someone else. That was almost a matter of course. Grundy was very far from being a crack-shot.

Herries was the victim. Herries liked cake in the proper place, but did not consider the outside of his neck that place. The cake hit him on the chin, and crumbs went down between his collar and his skin. Moreover, as the cake acted rather on the shrapnel principle of dispersion, a biggish piece caught him in the right eye.

"Let me get at the rotter!" roared Herries; and he tried to push his way through the crowd.

Grundy snatched up a handful of pineapple chunks, and threw them at Herries. They failed to find the correct range. Figgins, Digby, and Noble got them in unequal shares.

"Rush the silly idiot!" shouted Figny in a towering rage.

But not all of the crowd wanted to see Grundy rushed. After all, he was their host, and it would be better if proceedings came to an end without an actual riot.

"You'd better drop it, old chap!" said Wilkins in the ear of Grundy. "You'll get bumped if you're not careful!"

"Get bumped? Hanged if I don't like that! Get bumped in my own study, do you say? What do you think I asked these chaps here for?"

"Bribery and corruption!" answered a still, small voice, which was yet quite plainly heard.

It was either Lowther's or Kerr's; but no one was sure which.

"Let's get them out quietly if we can!" said Talbot.

"Agreed, old chap—if we can! But it's going to be a pretty tough job!"

There was enough truth in the suggestion of the still, small voice to make Grundy even more furious.

"All that be jolly well blessed!" he roared. "I asked you rotters to tea, and give you the sort of spread that you only get once in a blue moon, and then—"

"Start chucking the relics of the feast at your guests!" put in Tom. "That ain't quite the top note in hospitality, you know, Grundy!"

"I haven't chucked anything at you, have I?" hooted Grundy.

"No. And I think on the whole, you'd better not!"

"Here goes, then!"

"It was the teapot this time. It failed to hit Tom; but it would have hit Talbot if he had not put up both hands and made a catch worthy of the field-man he was.

"Oh, well caught, sir!" cried Levison.

"Rush the silly ass before he does anybody real damage!" shouted Figgins.

CHAPTER 4.

Settling Up!

THERE followed a concerted rush upon Grundy.

He managed to hurl a cup and two saucers at his attackers before he went down. And, being down, he still struggled, writhing beneath a dozen foemen.

Somebody grabbed at the cloth, and there was a clatter of broken crockery as the remnants of the spread and the tea equipage came hurtling down upon the writhing heap.

Lobster-shells, fragments of cake, vegetarian-patties, tinned fruit, the drainings of teacups—all these and much more descended, causing confusion.

"Groooh!" howled Figgins. "What silly ass did that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared those who were not in the heap.

"Please let Grundy get up!" said Cardew politely. "I want to pay him before I go!"

Grundy got up. The confusion caused by the tablecloth avalanche helped him.

Wallowing amid squashed food and smashed crockery, he yet contrived somehow to shake himself free of the arms that held him, rise to his hands and knees, and spring to his feet. And he went for Cardew at once.

Cardew did not try to dodge. But before the furious Grundy could get within striking distance Tom Merry and Talbot and Kerr collared him and dragged him back. And next moment he was down again; for Figny and the rest of the attackers were almost as angry as he by this time.

"Oh, you beastly sweeps!" hooted Grundy. "Twenty to one!"

"Shut the ass up, somebody!" panted Figgins. "He'll bring the prefects down on us!"

Digby snatched up a handful of tea-leaves, cake-crumbs, and other miscellaneous matter, and jammed it promptly into Grundy's mouth.

It shut him up. Also, it came very near indeed to choking him. And by the time he had finished spluttering he felt very little like lifting his voice again.

"Tie the boulder's legs up!" said Manners, snatching a ball of stout string from the manbedsheff.

As he stooped with it the big fist of Grundy smote him hard upon the head. It was lucky that the head of Manners was by no means of the eggshell type.

"Take that!" howled Grundy.

"And—"

But he got no chance to repeat the blow, for three or four fellows yanked him over, and in a moment he was swathed in the tablecloth, which they then proceeded to tie up around him, with his arms inside.

Then they drew off to gaze at their handiwork. Grundy's angry red face, smeared and sticky, glared at them with a terrific glare.

"Ha, ha, ha! Blessed if I saw anything funnier in my life!"

Wilkins and Gunn lovably protested. They had not been able to help Grundy. It would have been of no use at all their trying. But they had not deserted.

"Oh, I say, cheese all that, you fellows!" said Wilkins.

"You can't wolf a chap's grub, and then treat him like that!" said Gunn.

"Oh, can't we?" rapped out Figgins. "He asked us to tea, and we had tea. We didn't know that we were to be jawed at and insulted by this silly jesser, or to have things chucked at us! And we're not jolly well going to stand it!"

"You got his wool off!" said Gunn weakly.

"Rats! He started it, by what he said to old Fatty and to Levison! Just you dry up, you two, unless you want a dose of the same medicine!"

Wilkins and Gunn dried up. They had no such desire.

Now Grundy writhed up on to his elbows and glared at Tom Merry.

"I suppose I've got you to thank for this, Merry?" he fumed. "A beastly put-up job, I call it!"

Grundy might call it that; but he knew it was nothing of the sort, as he would realise when he got cooler.

"You can suppose what you like, Grundy!" said Tom. "Supposin's free, anyway! But you're wrong."

Tom had not laid a finger on Grundy, except to drag him back when he tried to go for Cardew. Others had stood by and watched, too. Figgins, Manners, Digby, Herries, Clive, Dane, Glyn, Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus, Noble, Redfern, and Lowther had all shared in the attack, or in the trussing-up which had followed it. But Tom and Talbot, Kerr and Fatty Wynn, Levison and Cardew had stood aloof. And, of course, Skinny-pole had not shared in such riotous proceedings. They had shocked Skinny very much indeed.

"You know you were at the bottom of it all, Tommy!" said Lowther, shaking his head. "You are well aware that without your approval we should never have dared to lay hands upon the august person of his Majesty King George Alfred the First! It is true that he assaulted my ear with his royal hand; but, naturally, I should ask your leave before I proceeded to slosh him for that! Herries again—"

"Oh, shurrup, you old gasbag!" said Tom. "Come along, Talbot! I'm off!"

"You're not goin' without payin' for your tea, Merry, are you?" asked Cardew. As he spoke he laid a ten-shilling currency-note on the table.

"That's for me an' Levison!" he said.

"And here's my little lot!" said Sidney Clive, plunking down two half-crowns.

Tom did not half like it. It seemed too big a humiliation to put upon Grundy, ass as he was—just the sort of sardonic thing Cardew, and Levison might do, for they were apt to be bitter when their tempers were roused. But it was not the sort of thing Tom Merry fancied, and he was rather surprised that Clive had fallen in with the suggestion.

Not Clive alone. Kerr came forward now.

"For us four!" he said, as he put down a pound-note. "All serene, Reddy, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 482.

old scout! Settle up when you like. I'm flush just now!"

But Kerr wasn't flush after he had parted with that sovereign, if he had been so before.

Redfern, as hard-up as Levison, looked grateful. Figgins and Patty Wynn took Kerr's action as very much a matter of course. He chanced to be the one among the three of them who was in funds—that was all.

"This is for our study," said Arthur Augustus, also producing a pound-note. "An' I must say, Grundy, that with every disposition to be on friendly terms with any fellow who behaves himself decently, I wearily cannot bring myself in futchah to regard you as anything but a wank outsideah!"

"You rotten set of cads!" howled Grundy. "I'll pay you all for this!"

"You're making a mistake, Grundy," said Talbot gravely. "It's we who are settling up, not you!"

Talbot, too! Still Tom hesitated. It was not easy to pierce the thick hide of George Alfred Grundy; but he saw that that thick hide had been fairly pierced now. Poor Grundy was positively writhing with rage and shame.

"You'll have to settle up for me, Tommy," said Lowther. "If you can't, I must stay here in pawn for the amount, and when you come along to redeem me you may not find me alive."

"Me, too," said Manners. "I haven't a blessed bob to my name!"

Already Glyn, the wealthy man of his study, had paid for three—himself, Noble, and Dane.

It had to be done, Tom saw. He did it; but he did not half like it, nevertheless.

"Do you think I keep a giddy tuck-shop?" howled Grundy.

"Not likely! Why, you can't even keep your temper! If you tried keeping any sort of shop, you'd find yourself in the Bankruptcy Court in about two ticks," answered Lowther.

"Bankruptcy Court be hanged! I've more tin than all you blessed paupers put together!" howled the captive.

"See if the total's correct, Monty," suggested Manners.

"There were eighteen of us, besides Wilkins and Gunn," said Lowther.

"Five times eighteen is four pounds ten shillings. Is that O.K., Manners? You're better than I am at the higher branches of mathematics."

"Oh, come along, and stop your rotting!" said Tom. And the last visitors passed out.

"It was a trifle rough on old Grundy, though, that cashing-up where," said Tom to Talbot, in the passage.

"Yes, a bit. I shouldn't have thought of it myself. But he fairly asked for it. He was distinctly nasty to Levison, and to old Patty, too."

Inside the study they had left Grundy roaring at Wilkins and Gunn.

"Look sharp!" you fatheads!" he yelled. "Get this beastly thing off me! Oh, only let me get at those cads!"

Wilkins and Gunn obeyed, though they fervently hoped that Grundy would not go for his guests. For Wilkins and Gunn would have been expected to follow his lead, and they had no relish for such very forlorn hopes.

The string was cut, and Grundy, throwing the tablecloth aside, jumped to his feet, and snatched the currency-notes from the table.

"What are you going to do with the cash, old chap?" asked Gunn.

Grundy rushed into the passage with head down, like a charging bull, blundered into somebody, and, never doubting that it was one of the enemy, thrust the notes into his face, yelling:

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"Take your beastly money back, you rotter!"

But it was not one of the enemy. It was Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, with whom Grundy had colluded.

The stalwart skipper seized Grundy by the collar.

"Yarooogh! Oh, it's you, Kildare! I'm sorry, if it comes to that; but you can't blame a chap when he's jolly well been tried beyond endurance by a set of sneering paupers, as I have!"

"What on earth is all this about?" asked Kildare, gazing in astonishment at the notes. "Lucky for you that was only paper-money, Grundy! If you had chucked it in my face in silver, it's a hiding you'd have had. And I've a jolly good mind to give you one as it is!"

"Leggo!" howled Grundy. "I haven't time to explain now; I've other fish to fry!"

"The frying will have to be postponed. I think," replied Kildare. "I want to know the meaning of this!"

Grundy was too enraged to give an intelligible explanation. But Wilkins and Gunn managed one between them.

"The point is, then," said Kildare, "that you feel you can't keep this money? I quite agree with you there."

"The point isn't that at all!" hooted Grundy. "The point is that I'm jolly well going to ram it down the throats of the rotters who put such a beastly insult upon me—me, Grundy!"

"You jolly well aren't going to do anything of the sort!" said Kildare grimly. "It wasn't a pleasant way to treat a fellow; but you seem to have asked for it."

He still held Grundy by the collar, though it taxed all his strength to keep the writhing junior from breaking away.

"Keep the money yourself! Give it to the giddy heathen!" yelled Grundy. "Let me go and smash those rotters up—that's all I want!"

"But that's a heap more than you are likely to get, you young ass—can't you see that?" snapped Kildare. "What can you do against a whole crowd? Better go and put your head in a bucket—you need to cool off a bit, you know!"

"Leggo my collar!" said Grundy sulkily.

"If you'll give me your word that you'll have a wash before you start in killing anyone!" returned Kildare.

Wriggling was no good. Grundy unwillingly gave the promise required.

"Here's the money!" said the skipper. "I don't want that, and what's more, I won't take it!" growled Grundy.

"I'm collecting for the Serbian Red Cross Fund, and I haven't got a tremendous whack so far," Kildare said slowly. "I don't want to take you in a moment of foolish impulse, Grundy; but if you really feel like that about it, and I can believe you do—"

"Oh, take it, Kildare!" said Grundy hastily. "Jolly good notion!"

And he went off to wash, vaguely comforted.

CHAPTER 5.

Gunn's Notion.

"IT was silly rot!" said Wilkins. "We told you so from the first."

"You can't get round those fellows that way."

"Not likely!" said Gunn. "You may spend no end of cash on them, and what do you get out of it? Just nothing at all!"

"Something had jolly well got to be done!" growled Grundy. "I'm not going to have things going on like this!"

"Like what?" inquired Wilkins.

"That's the question. What have you got to complain of, old scout? I don't

see that there is much the matter," said Gunn.

And Wilkins and Gunn really did not see. They were not specially ambitious. Grundy was. That made all the difference.

From the point of view of his chums, Grundy had nothing to grumble at. He was allowed more pocket-money than anyone else in the Shell, except Rakce. He could have been on good terms with everyone who mattered if he had only refrained from going about asking for trouble. When he was put out on his neck—a thing which happened to him fairly often—it was simply because he had butted in.

But Grundy's view of the case was very different!

Here he was, George Alfred Grundy, the biggest fellow in the Shell, and the best all-round man—for Grundy firmly believed in his own abilities. And what recognition ever came his way?

There was no place for him in the footer team—no place in the cricket eleven.

When he protested against his unjustifiable exclusion, his protests were treated as jokes. When he continued to protest he was bumped!

Grundy was sure that the other fellows ought to treat him with respect.

But, who ever did? Why, nobody!

By rights the junior captaincy should have been his. There was nothing Grundy felt more absolutely certain of than that. It was the corner-stone of all his ambitions, for once he was skipper he could seize everything else he wanted as a matter of right.

But Tom Merry showed not the slightest sign of clearing out to make room for him.

That fact caused Grundy to take at times a very gloomy view of Tom Merry's character.

The fellow seemed all right. Everyone but the rotters liked him. Grundy himself liked him, in a way, and with reservations. Tom Merry was conspicuously fair, except where Grundy was concerned. There he seemed to be quite blind. It was this blindness which made Grundy feel that Tom Merry was not quite the good fellow others thought him.

"Everything's the matter!" Grundy growled. "It's got to be put a stop to, so just you understand that!"

"If you're going to put a stop to everything—"

"Don't be a bigger ass than you can help, George Wilkins! You know very well what I mean!"

"Blessed if I do!" returned Wilkins.

"And blessed if I believe you know yourself!"

"Look here. I've got a certain position in the Form, haven't I?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Oh, yes, of course! Come to that, any of us has. Not that it makes much odds."

"Idiot!" roared Grundy. "I'm not talking about chaps like you, and Gunn! I'm talking about me—me! A different thing altogether! You must be a fat-headed lump if you can't see that!"

Neither Wilkins nor Gunn resented the snub. They were used to that sort of thing from Grundy. It really did not mean much, though it got to be a bit of a nuisance at times.

But neither of them took Grundy at all at his own valuation, and it is to be feared that Gunn was pulling Grundy's leg when he said:

"Look here, old scout, Wilky and I know well enough who ought to be top-dog in this giddy Form, you bet! But you go so ram-headed at things. You won't listen to a fellow's advice."

"I'm always willing to listen. There ain't a more patient and reasonable chap breathing than I am!" roared Grundy.

"You know that yourselves. But you're such silly chumps that you never have any advice to give that's worth hearing. You don't talk a hundred words of sense in a blessed term?"

"Oh, all serene! If you don't want to hear, don't listen, that's all," said Gunn.

"I am listening, you potty idiot, ain't I?"

"Not much, is he, Wilky?"
 "He's chiefly telling us what particularly fat-headed idiots we are, and as we've heard that scores of times before, there ain't much chance of getting forward on it, is there, Gunn?"

"If you've got any suggestion to make, William Gunn—"

"Don't howl at me like that, Grundy. What I've got to suggest is more or less secret, and it's no good bellowing like a bull when you are talking secrets."

Grundy snorted.
 "Oh, go on!" he said. "Any notion of yours is safe to be a wash-out. But go on! I won't have you saying that I'm too obstinate to listen. I pride myself on having an open mind; you know that."

"What you want to do is to ring off on this silly scheme of getting round Tom Merry and the lot that hang on to him," said Gunn, in a low voice. "I've got nothing against them, mind you, but they aren't going to let you in, however hard you try to squeeze in. Cause why? They know your game is to be top-dog."

"Well, and oughtn't I to be?" snapped Grundy. "I can thrash any chap in the Shell or the Fourth, and I'm always ready to do it! I can lick the best man among them—into a cocked hat as an all-round athlete—if only I got the chance! But I never do get it. That's Merry. Rank jealousy, I call it! I'm brainier than any of them. I won't say but what Kerr is pretty clever at detective work, but only in a rough rule-of-thumb sort of way; not a bit like my deductive method, based on Sherlock Holmes. I—"

"Yes, old chap, we know all that," said Wilkins. "What's the giddy wheeze, Gunn?"

Gunn leaned forward, and spoke in an eager whisper.

"A secret society!" he said.
 "Rats! Piffle! Bosh!" replied the great George Alfred.

"Oh, I dunno!" said Wilkins. "You haven't given old Gunn a chance to explain yet. But none of the chaps who came to tea to-day would join up—not if the society was up against Tom Merry, you know, Gunn."

"Of course they wouldn't," answered Gunn. "And it's not to be up against Tom Merry only. It's against them all!"

"That's all very well. But where do I come in?" asked Grundy.

"Why, at the top, old scout! Where else? You'd be president or grand master, or whatever we liked to name the head officer of the society. You'd issue your orders, and it would be for the rest of us to obey them—see?"

"I see," replied Grundy thoughtfully. "And I must say that it isn't such a rotten bad scheme—for you, you know, Gunn. You seem to have been using what you call your brains—for once, anyway. Grand Master will be best, I consider; it sounds better than president."

Gunn winked at Wilkins.
 "Just as you like about that, Grundy, old chap," he said. "Of course, the scheme will run into a bit of cash."

"Eh? Do you jolly well think I'm going to pay chaps to join the society? Not likely!"

"No, not pay them. There will have to be fees, and all that sort of thing, of

course. That will keep them kind of interested."

"Oh, I don't mind that!" said Grundy.
 "But who will join?" Wilkins asked.

"Oh, plenty of chaps in the Shell and the Fourth! And lots of the fags—if we want them."

"Wouldn't have 'em at any price!" Grundy growled. "And as for the two Forms—there's precious few chaps who count for anything but stick like leeches to Tom Merry. The rest are no good!"

"Not by themselves, I dare say. But with you to lead 'em, you know, old man—"

That was quite a diplomatic stroke of Gunn's. Grundy looked no end pleased. In imagination he saw himself breathing the stern spirit of revolution into the minds of such inconsiderable persons as Jones minor and Mulvaney minor and Tompkins, and forming out of them a secret army which, in due course, might overthrow Tom Merry's rule.

"But how would you work it, Gunn?" he asked. All his own ideas were very vague.

"Lots of things we could do," said Gunn cheerfully. "Firstnast, suppose D'Arcy had offended you—"
 "He has often, the silly ass!" growled Grundy.

"Well, we'd cite him by a secret message to appear before our tribunal; and if he jolly well didn't come we'd jolly well fetch him! Then he'd be tried for impudence, or whatever it might be, and you'd pass sentence of punishment on him, old chap."

Grundy rubbed his big hands together. The picture of himself passing sentence of punishment on the woe of the Fourth for impudence was one that appealed to him greatly.

"But I say, Gunn, they'd know, you know, and they'd combine together to put the kybosh on the thing."

"Oh, no, they wouldn't! How should they? We shall all be disguised, of course, and speak in assumed voices," Gunn said.

"It's a ripping good notion," said Grundy, "and I'm jolly glad I thought of it! That's the worst of you fellows. You haven't a scrap of invention. You'd never have thought of a thing like this in a hundred years, left to yourselves, you know."

Gunn and Wilkins looked hard at one were used to having Grundy take credit for anything that was thought of in their

study, but this really was the outside edge.

"I say, old man, it was Genny's idea," said Wilkins.

Grundy looked at him with withering scorn.

"That's your fellows all over," he said, in his most superior tones. "You can't discuss anything without thinking that you invented it, whereas you never invented anything in your silly lives. But never mind. Let Gunn take the credit for the idea if he likes. I don't care. There's plenty more where that came from. No one can say that I'm ever at a loss for ideas."

And the great George Alfred stalked out.

Gunn and Wilkins looked hard at one another.

"That's old Grundy all over!" chuckled Gunn.

"What are you stringing him for?" asked Wilkins. "There's nothing in it, you know. Nobody's going to follow Grundy's lead. Everybody knows what an ass he is, though I'm not denying that he's a first-rate chap, in spite of all his assiness."

"They'll follow all right, if they're offered inducements enough," said Gunn. "It's better than wasting spreads on Tom Merry and that lot, anyway. And there's going to be something in it—lots of fun in it for us, if you ask me!"

"Yes, there will be that," Wilkins admitted. "Where's he gone to now, I wonder?"

"Looking for trouble somewhere, I should say," grinned Gunn. "He's always doing it."

CHAPTER 6.

Bumped!

GUNN was quite right. The great George Alfred had gone out looking for trouble.

The memories of yesterday's tea-party still rankled in his mind.

Grundy was not vindictive. He could forgive and forget as well as most.

But he had his dignity to maintain, and he felt that if it was to be properly maintained he must take further notice of the insult put upon him by the fellows who had insisted on paying for their teas.

Grundy could not see what he had done to deserve that. It had hurt his

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feelings far more than the rough treatment that had gone with it.

The fellows in his own Form had abstained from chipping him about it all. Tom Merry, Talbot, and one or two others felt that the thing had been carried too far. After all, Grundy had meant well in asking them, and it was not quite the thing to fling a fellow's hospitality back in his face.

So even Lowther had not tried to improve the occasion.

But in the Fourth the feeling was not precisely the same, and the chums of No. 6 had spoken words that morning which Grundy felt called for further notice.

Jack Blake was therefore marked down as the first victim of Grundy's vengeance.

"Oh, come in, idiot!" yelled Blake, as Grundy knocked at the door.

Grundy entered, frowning.

"I must say you're not too polite, Blake," he remarked.

"Oh, go out, please!" said Blake. Grundy glared at him.

"Sorry if I wasn't polite enough that time, I said 'please.'"

"Look here, Blake—"

"I'm looking, Grundy. But I can't keep it up long. It's too painful, and I'm not quite a hero."

"Why don't you wear a mask, Grundy?" asked Digby.

"You leave my face alone!" snorted Grundy.

"We should be very pleased to do so, Grundy," said Arthur Augustus blandly.

"But not hear. Take it out into the passage, and we will guarantee to leave it alone there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You asses! You dummies! Here, haven't you got anything to say?" roared Grundy, turning upon Herries, who had not yet spoken.

"Eh?"

"Deaf, aren't you?"

"No."

"I asked you whether you hadn't got anything to say."

"Oh, you're always asking silly questions!"

"Have you anything to say?" yelled Grundy.

"Yes," replied Herries mildly.

"Say it, then, you chump!"

"Good-by, Grundy!" said Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the other three.

"The fact of the matter is, Grundy, you are not wanted here," said Blake.

"It's being rather blunt, I know; but one has to be blunt to get down to the level of your intelligence."

"I came here to see you, Blake," said Grundy sternly.

"Well, you've seen me, and you haven't been charged anything for it," replied Blake.

"I won't detain you any longer. Fare thee well, Grundy; and if for ever, then you won't be coming back, which will be a great relief, though not quite what the poet said."

Grundy's reply to that was not made in words. Slowly and impressively he took off his jacket.

"What are you after, Grundy?" said Digby. "You haven't come to sweep the chimney, have you? That's the only job that needs doing here; but I fancy it's a bit above your skill."

"I've come to give Blake a thrashing," answered Grundy.

"Much better try the chimney, old scout," said Blake cheerily. "There may be more marks, but they'll rub off easier."

Grundy rolled up his shirt-sleeves.

"This," said Blake, "is where I begin to tremble! Look under the table, Gustavus, and see how my knees wobble!"

"You insulted me yesterday, Blake."

"Did I, Grundy? There were a lot of insults flying around, I seem to remember, so I won't contradict you. What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to thrash you. After that I shall attend to Herries. Then—"

"I'm going to ring up the undertaker, and the coroner," said Digby, rising.

"You silly fathead! Stop these rotten jokes, and take a chap seriously, can't you?" shouted Grundy.

"Just what we shall do, if you don't sling your hook, Grundy," said Blake.

"We shall take you seriously, carry you out with even more seriousness, and bump you with the greatest possible seriousness."

"Buzz off, Grundy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I do not mind admittin' that what was done yesterday was not too well considered. However great a bounder a fellow may be, it is up to othah fellows who have better mannaahs an' more highly developed intelligence, to remember the laws of hospitality—What are you doin', Dig, you uttah ass?"

Digby was winking an imaginary crank somewhere in the neighbourhood of the speaker's waistcoat.

"Only grinding the organ, Gustavus," said Digby. "Go on, old chap. I can keep it up for a long time, and you hadn't got half-way through the tune yet."

"Weally, Dig, I—"

"You fellows are like a beastly infant school!" said Grundy, in high dudgeon.

"Can't you talk seriously?"

"I was under the apprehension—"

"I am talking to Blake, D'Arcy, so just shut up!"

"Attah that exhibition of your mannaahs—"

"Now, then, Blake!" shouted Grundy. Jack Blake put up a hand, as if hiding a yawn.

"Still here, Grundy!" he said. "I must say you're pretty slow at taking a hint."

"So are you, I fancy," returned Grundy, with a heavy attempt at a sneer. "I told you I meant to give you a thrashing."

"Why, so you did! I remember now. But it's really of no consequence just now. Some other time will do—any old time, in fact."

"It won't do for me!" said Grundy sternly.

"I'm afraid he'll have to be bumped after all, you chaps," said Blake. "It's a frightful bore; but he won't be happy till he gets it. Regular Pears' soap kid, you are, Grundy?"

"Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy all advanced towards Grundy.

"Keep off!" he hooted. "I give you fair warning I shall hit out, and some of you—Yaroooh! Stoppit! Blake, your funk, why won't you—Ow-yow!"

"No need for me to," said Blake. "You're doing all the ow-yowing there's any need for. Got your end all right, Gussy and Dig? Right-ho! One, two, three—bump!"

And bump it was. George Alfred Grundy smote the linoleum with a mighty smite.

"Again! One, two, three—"

All along the Fourth Form passage heads were being thrust out of doors.

"Sure, an' it's nothing at all, at all," said Reilly in disappointed tones. "It's only old Grundy being bumped!"

"Quite a sell," said Cardew. "I really thought something was happenin'."

"Come in, old chap," said Levison major. "We can see Grundy bumped any day in the week!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Vehme.

"WHEN did you get the notion, Gunny?" asked Wilkins. "Out of my head, of course, ass!"

"First thing I ever heard of you thinking out for yourself, blessed if it ain't! Bet you cribbed it from somewhere. You've been reading a jolly lot lately—Scott, and all those back numbers."

"Old Scott ain't half such a back number as you think, Wilky. He's a bit long-winded, I know, but there's rare good stuff in some of his yarns."

"I know; I've read 'Ivanhoe,'" said Wilkins.

Gunny snorted.

"That's nothing to brag about. Everybody's read 'Ivanhoe.' I've read the whole jolly lot, though 'St. Ronan's Well' and 'Peveril of the Peak' were rather teasers to get through."

"Well, that's nothing to brag about, either," replied Wilkins.

Gunny's bookish tastes were of comparatively recent development, and neither Wilkins nor Grundy quite approved of them.

"I dunno. I don't believe there's another chap at St. Jim's who could say as much."

"There ain't another chap who would be such an ass," Wilkins returned frankly.

"Oh, ring off! As a matter of fact, I got this dodge out of one of Scott's—Anne of Geierstein; rather a wash-out in some ways, but with good bits in it."

"I knew you'd cribbed it somewhere."

"Cribbing be hanged! That ain't cribbing."

"Well, p'raps not. I don't suppose they mentioned old Grundy in Anne Whatsername."

"Anne of Geierstein." You're an ignorant old ass, Wilky!

"You're another old scout! But never mind about Sister Anne. What about the giddy secret society?"

"It was called the Vehmegericht, or the Vehme for short, or sometimes the Holy Vehme."

"Sounds beastly German!" commented Wilkins.

Just then Grundy came in, scowling. Grundy was fresh from his bumping, and quite naturally, not in the best of humours.

"Eh? What's that about Germans?" he snipped.

"Only—"

"Oh, never mind that now! I've got more important things to talk about, William Gunny!"

"Well, you asked—"

"Don't be a bigger ass than you can help. See here, how soon can we get this secret society bizny started?"

"If there's any hurry about it—"

"Of course there is a hurry! What a chump you are! Haven't I got to have Blake up before it, to be tried and sentenced and punished? What's the good of the blessed wangle if—"

"Been quarrelling with Blake, old chap?" inquired Wilkins.

"Oh, go and eat coke! I say that Blake's to be the first person to be brought before me as Grand Master, and that ought to be good enough for you."

Wilkins had a momentary doubt as to whether Grundy as Grand Master of a secret society might not be even more difficult to bear than Grundy as just the ordinary George Alfred Grundy.

But a moment's reflection convinced Wilkins that, as far as he and Gunn were concerned, it would be hardly possible for Grundy to exercise a more drastic despotism. And as far as others were concerned—well, that was their

look-out. They were not obliged to stand it if they did not choose.

Moreover, both Wilkins and Gunn really felt rather keen about this scheme. It would be a novelty, anyway, and Gunn's imagination had been fired by his reading of Scott. Gunn would have liked to be Grand Master himself, and administer sentence. But that was out of the question if the magnificent George Alfred came in. There was only one place for him in it.

"We might start it directly," said Gunn. "Wilky and I were talking it over just now."

"What was that about Germans, then? Look here, Gunn, we don't have any beastly Huns in this!"

"Oh, don't talk rot. How can we? There aren't any Huns here. I was only telling Wilky about a secret society in the Middle Ages called the Holy Vehme, and he said it sounded German."

"So it does. None of your—"

"But it's only the name. Don't you see, fathead?"

"I see. And it ain't really half a bad name. There's a good mysterious sort of sound about it. What did it do?"

"No end of things. It was beastly powerful, and no one knew who belonged to it. So it bossed everything, in a secret, underground sort of way. It had more power than the Emperor, or the King of France, or the Pope."

"What—a mouldy lot of Germans?"

"Don't be such an ass, Grundy! They weren't all Germans. There were Frenchmen, and Italians, and lots of others."

"But what did they do? That's what matters."

"I'm trying to tell you, but you keep interrupting. They bossed things—pretty nearly everything."

"That would suit me all right," said Grundy fervently.

Gunn and Wilkins grinned. There was no doubt whatever that bossing pretty nearly everything would suit Grundy all right; but Gunn and Wilkins could not quite see their secret society doing all that.

"How did they work it, old scout?" asked Wilkins.

"I'll get the book and read to you—"

"Hanged if you will, though!" said Grundy. "You just go on telling us your own way; we don't want any rotten old books! And if Wilkins keeps on butting in, I'll—"

"Blessed if I don't like that! I've only spoken—"

"Shurrup! Get on with the washing, Gunn!"

"They had secret tribunals, who met in dark, underground places, and were robed all in black," said Gunn impressively. "And they wore hoods, and sometimes even the members of the tribunal didn't know who the head one really was."

"That don't go!" said Grundy, with immense decision. "My giddy tribunal's jolly well going to know who I jolly well am, and they'd better jolly well not forget it, either!"

"Oh, that's rather a different thing, you know."

"Well, cut out the different parts. I don't care much about them. Go on where it fits in."

"Better let Gunn tell—"

"Didn't I say you were not to keep on interrupting, George Wilkins?" roared Grundy.

"My hat, it's you—"

"Dry up, or I'll stay you!" Go on, Gunn! That ass talks to much."

"The bit you would like best is about how they used to get their victims—I

mean, the chaps who had offended them, and had to be tried," went on Gunn.

"Yes, that sounds about my line," said Grundy. "How did they work it?"

"Well, you see, they had their agents everywhere. You never knew when you might be running up against one of them. The chap you bought a sword from—the Johnny who groomed your horse, the priest you confessed to, the innkeeper—any one of them might be a sworn agent of the Vehme. And he had to obey orders—you bet!"

"Oh, of course!" said Grundy.

"To Grundy it was evident that the secret society could only be organised properly on one basis—that of complete and unhesitating obedience to his orders. Whether he would get the members to see the matter in quite the same light was another question, and one he did not stop to think about."

"In the book—"

"Hang the mouldy old book!"

"But I've got to tell you this, fathead! The Earl of Oxford, who was travelling on the Continent in disguise—this was in the times of the Wars of the Roses—"

"Keep the rotten history out of it, Gunn, do!"

"Oxford was let down in his bed to yaults under the inn where he was staying, and the Vehme, all in black, and hooded, tried him there."

"My hat, that sounds all right!" said Grundy. "That's what we'll jolly well do to Blake! Blake for a start, I mean, and the rest of them one by one—all the rotters who insulted me yesterday! That will make them sit up, you bet!"

Grundy had no patience to listen to any more from "Anne of Geierstein."

That history rot, he said, did not matter. What was to be done now was to rope in members at once, make them swear oaths of dread secrecy, get the stuff for the hoods and robes, and collar Blake. It all seemed perfectly simple and feasible to Grundy, and he congratulated himself again and again on having been struck with such a really brilliant idea. He was quite sure it would never have occurred to the inferior brains of Gunn and Wilkins.

"Pity the name's German," he said.

"I like the sound of it all serene."

"It don't matter a scrap," said Gunn. "The asses who will come in—ahem!—I mean, the chaps we shall collect, won't know. We can tell them it's Russian, if you like. Anything might be Russian."

"Levison is the chap we really need," remarked Wilkins thoughtfully. "He's such a deep beggar. He could think of some dodge for bringing Blake up to the scratch."

"Levison be hanged!" retorted Grundy wrathfully. "Ain't my brains good enough for you? It strikes me, George Wilkins, that if you ain't potty you're jolly near it!"

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy's Mysterious Parcel.

GRASS was never allowed to grow under the rather large feet of George Alfred Grundy when he had a project in hand.

Gunn and Wilkins had to go to Wayland with him that afternoon, though they would have preferred the cricket-ground to the dusty roads.

Things had to be bought. Nothing would do for Grundy but that they should be bought at once, and that Gunn and Wilkins should come with him to buy them. He scoffed at the idea of trying the Rylcombe shops, which seemed to the other two better, as being nearer.

But after all, a cycle-ride on a May

afternoon is pleasant enough; and at Wayland there would be ginger-beer ad lib., and any amount of the kind of refreshments that did not trench upon the food rationing scheme. So Gunn and Wilkins were reconciled to the idea before the time came to start.

The shopping was duly done. Grundy in confab with a young lady assistant in the draper's shop about the stuff to be made up into robes and hoods tickled Gunn and Wilkins no end; but Grundy was far too flustered and anxious to notice their grins. The expected refreshment did not fail, and the three started back in excellent spirits.

Just outside Wayland they overtook four more cyclists from the school—the chums of Study No. 6. They had ridden over twenty miles, and were taking this last stage at an easy pace.

Grundy put on speed, and rode past them with his nose in the air, deigning not to notice them.

"Come along, you chaps! We'll race you back!" cried Wilkins.

"No, thanks! We know better than to race with Grundy. Got a slight preference for getting home alive," said Blake.

"And for keeping out of the ditches," added Digby. "You never know your luck when old Grundy's barging about all over the road on that jigger of his."

Wilkins grinned, spurred to catch up his leader, and left the four behind.

"Haven't you any sense of dignity, George Wilkins?" demanded Grundy.

"Eh? Me? No, not particularly. What's the row, old scout?"

"You ought to know better than to speak to those bounders while you are in my company."

"I say, that's going it rather strong, you know, Grundy! If I'm not to speak to any chap who has helped to bump you, I might almost as well be dumb—Yaroooh! Silly ass! Wharrer doing?"

In his wrath Grundy had come near to sending Wilkins flying off his machine. He calmed down a bit now.

"Well, you just be careful!" he growled. "And don't you forget that lot are the enemy!"

Neither Grundy nor Wilkins had noticed that, in their slight collision, the parcel which had been fixed to the carrier behind the great George Alfred had fallen off.

But as the four in the rear came up Digby twigged it.

"Hi, Grundy!" he yelled. "Hi, Wilkins—Gunn! You've dropped something."

But either they heard not, or, standing on their dignity, regarded not.

Digby was always a good-natured fellow. He jumped from his bike and picked up the parcel. It had split in falling, and some black cloth showed through the tear.

"I say, you fellows!" he cried. And the other three dismounted and came back to him.

"What tommy-rot are they up to now?" said Blake, poking the black stuff with his forefinger.

"Personally I altogether refuse to take the vey slightest interest in any of the proceedings of such an intowleable person as Grunday!" said Arthur Augustus loftily.

But he also applied a forefinger to the contents of the parcel.

"Going to put Grundy's study in mourning, I should say," remarked Herries. "No bizney of ours, anyway. Let it lie, Dig. The bounders can come back for it!"

"No, I won't do that," answered Digby.

He remounted, balancing the parcel on his handlebars.

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"They won't thank you, old chap," said Blake.

"My hat, what's the odds about that?"

The three ahead had now disappeared from sight in a dip of the road.

Then an unearthly yell split the air. "Yaroooh!" howled Grundy. "What are you—Oh, you idiot!"

As the chums of Study No. 6 crested a rise they saw what was happening.

The legs of the great George Alfred Grundy waved wildly from a gorse-bush. Grundy's bike lay in the middle of the road. The bikes of Wilkins and Gunn were a little to the left of it, and a little to the left of them Wilkins and Gunn lay on the grass, hugging each other round the neck, and speaking words which were not exactly loving.

A young and restive horse, ridden by an angry, old man in white whiskers, leggings, and other things, reared and plunged, and did other fancy tricks close by.

The four at once jumped off. "Ah! You lads have some sense!" roared the horseman. "As for these silly young donkeys—"

A roar like the bellow of an enraged bull broke in on his speech. Grundy, full of wrath and gorse-prickles, had just emerged from his temporary retirement. It was more than Grundy could bear to be called a young donkey by the individual on the young horse, whose fault the spill must have been—unless it was Wilkins' or Gunn's. Grundy was absolutely certain it could not have been his.

"Look here, you—"
"None of your impudence, you pudden-headed, bull-voiced, young idiot!" snapped the rider.

"Gerrring"
It was all Grundy could get out for the moment.

"Do you know who I am?" he thundered, at length.

"I don't. And I haven't any wish to! I should say that the head of the nearest lunatic asylum would be the most likely person to supply the information—if I wanted it. But I don't. Clear that scrap-iron of yours out of the way, and let me get on, that's all I ask!"

The stranger was not wholly reasonable, Blake considered. Like most Yorkshiremen, Blake knew a bit about horses, and it occurred to him that on this moorland road, with no hedges or fields to shut it in, there was plenty of room for a horseman to pass.

If Blake had been riding a young horse he would not have kept it on the hard road. But there were too many gorse-clumps for the moor to provide very good going, and, in any case, it was not Blake's business.

So he refrained from criticism, and tried to pour oil on the troubled waters by saying

"Oh, it's not really so bad as that, sir! Grundy's a frightfully clumsy chap, but he's not actually potty!"

The stranger smiled grimly. Herries picked up Grundy's bike, which was not quite scrap-iron, but as a bike had scarcely been improved by the fall.

The stranger rode on. Grundy turned in anger upon Blake.

"What on earth do you mean by such ghastly checks?" he howled.

"Check? My good chap, I haven't—"

"What are you doing with my parcel?" snapped Grundy, his eyes lighting upon it at that instant, and his wrath thereby turned upon Digby.

"Picked it up in the road a bit back. I suppose it's yours, as you say so; but I didn't actually see it drop. However, you can have it, Grundy."

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"I should jolly well think I can have my own parcel!" yelled Grundy. "Which of you rotters has been making holes in it to see what's inside?"

"Weally, Gwunday, your violent language an' your base aspersions are only worthy of a Hun!" said Gussy indignantly.

"Go and eat coke, you tailor's dummy! Who's been—"

"If you want another bumping, Grundy—"

"Oh, dry up, Grundy, do!" said Wilkins, who had now ceased to hug Gunn.

"It's rot to—"

"When I want your opinion, George Wilkins—"

"Come along, you chaps, and leave them to it!" said Blake, with a grin.

"We don't want to meddle, in family quarrels!"

"Tata, Grundy!" said Dig, as he mounted.

"Good-bye, dear boy, an' may you be in a bettah tempah when we meet again!" Arthur Augustus added.

They rode on. Grundy & Co. could not follow at once. Their bikes needed examination first, and Grundy's, at least, wanted some emergency repairs.

"Wonder what the stuff in the giddy parcel is for?" said Herries.

"No affair of ours, anyway," said Blake.

But, in fact, the stuff in the parcel concerned Blake, at least, as nearly as anyone, with the exception of Grundy!

CHAPTER 9.

The First Meeting of the Vehme.

NO. 1 STUDY on the Shell passage was not exactly a cheerful apartment.

The fellows called it "Nobody's Study," and there were tales told about it which caused the more timid of them to shun it. Others shunned it for a more practical reason, keeping out of it because there was only one way of getting into it. That way was by committing some school crime black enough to entail upon the criminal the penalty of solitary confinement. Then he went to Nobody's Study, because its one use was as a punishment-room.

But on a certain breezy, sunny, green and blue and golden afternoon in May Nobody's Study was in use.

It was not a compulsory cricket day. On Little Side a scratch game was in progress, with a full twenty-two engaged. The Terrible Three were all there, and the chums of Study No. 6, and Talbot, and Figgins & Co., and Redfern & Co., and Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn, and Julian and Hammond, and Reilly and Kerruish, and Levison and Clive.

But there was no second game, as there sometimes was, even on non-compulsory days. And quite a number of those who would have been playing in second game had there been one were in Nobody's Study.

It was a bold stroke to use that apartment. As long as they avoided making too much noise there was small fear of anyone's suspecting their presence there, for who was to know that Mulvaney minor had found a key which fitted the lock?

Not all of those who were away from the playing-fields had gathered in Nobody's Study. Skimpy was poring over some ponderous tome. Cardew, whom cricket in large doses rather bored, though he could play it well if he chose, had strolled off somewhere alone. Crooke and Racks had gone off together on one of their "sporting" expeditions.

Most of the rest had rallied to Grundy's banner. Some of them thought a secret society would be jolly good fun; a few

may have cherished designs of rotting up the show if it did not chance to suit their taste; but one and all were keen on at least one feature of the affair—the feed which went with it!

Except for Wilkins and Gunn no one who had been a guest at Grundy's tea-party was included. They would not have joined, anyway, and Grundy said that he would not have had them had they begged him to let them come in.

So the crowd was scarcely representative of all that counted for most in the Shell and Fourth, and it was not a difficult thing for Grundy to pass in a position of lordly superiority.

His attitude amused some of those present and annoyed others. But no one showed annoyance or amusement. There was grub in it at worst, and in these hard times grub was well worth knocking under to Grundy for—especially as when once it had been cleared up the knocking under needed not to be continued.

Grub had undoubtedly been the magnet which drew Baggy Trimble. Grub had drawn Gore, too. In the old days he might have joined Grundy out of antagonism to Tom Merry & Co., but not now. Buck Finn was brought by the same attraction. But Mulvaney minor, Tompkins, Smith minor, Lorne, Jones minor, and quite a lot of the rest were really interested in the secret society dodge, and anxious to see how it would work out.

There were three or four chairs in Nobody's Study now, besides the one which was an item in the usual plain furnishing of that apartment. Grundy had discouraged the notion of each fellow bringing his own chair. It would be noticed, he said—sure to be. It really seemed to Grundy that the one chair should have been sufficient. As long as the Grand Master of the Vehme sat, what was the odds who stood, or sprawled upon the floor?

But Wilkins and Gunn considered that they, as members of the tribunal, should also have chairs; and Gore said he meant to have one, anyhow; and Smith minor had also insisted. Gore and Smith minor thought that, being in the thing, they might as well collar all the honour and glory there was going free; and they perceived that a seated member stood a much better chance of getting on the tribunal than a mere floor-crawler.

Grundy had done things well in the grub line—he always did. Many familiar viands of old times were absent from the spread, for they came under the food rationing regulations, and Grundy was loyal and patriotic. But their places were supplied by an unusual quantity of the sort of things that didn't count. To Grundy it was of small importance how much he paid for sardines and tinned salmon and fruit, and he had laid in a big supply of crisp oatmeal-cakes, which were quite good in place of bread.

"I say, Grundy!" squawked Baggy Trimble. "I suppose the tuck-in is the first item on the programme? He, he, he!"

"Then you suppose wrong, and you'd better go out and look for a new supposer!" snapped Grundy.

But at that a chorus of dissent arose. "We'd certainly better mop up the grub first, Grundy," said Gore. "If we were caught in this show, you know, it would most likely be confiscated."

"And a pretty nice sort of thing that would be, you know!" chimed in Baggy again, contemplating the stack of food with gleaming eyes and a mouth that watered visibly.

"We'd certainly be wiser to get it down our necks," Smith minor said,