

GRUNDY THE PATRIOT!

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



PEPPER THE MISER!

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

GRUNDY THE PATRIOT!

By
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CHAPTER I.

No Coming to Terms.

"I'M not an unreasonable chap. Everybody knows there ain't a more reasonable chap breathing than I am."

It was George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell at St. Jim's, who spoke. Seven heard; but, judging from appearance, the whole seven were left profoundly unconvinced.

Grundy's claim to sweet reasonableness was not an easy one to concede.

The scene was Study No. 10 on the Shell passage; and the seven were the occupants of that celebrated apartment—Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Harry Manners—and the chums of Study No. 5 of the Fourth—Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, George Herries, and Robert Arthur Digby.

"If I was first—and I was—then I was first," said Grundy, "and there's no more to be said about it."

"Think not!" said Tom Merry sweetly. "We've got the key, you know, Grundy. There's a sort of kind of platform for argument there, I fancy."

"Yas, wuhah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus, but he did not look or feel quite comfortable. Guesy had a very tender conscience; and he shared with the other six a knowledge—or, at least, a strong suspicion—which worried it.

For Grundy had been first, and there was no denying it. There were other considerations, it is true, but Grundy had a point in his favour there, and a big one.

"What I like so much about Grundy is the final way he puts things," said Monty Lowther blandly. "If he was first—and he says there can be no doubt about that—on the face of it it's a tenable hypothesis—"

"What kind of hippopotamus?" inquired Herries.

"I shouldn't stand that if I were you, Grundy," remarked Digby, shaking his head. "A chap in your position ain't to be called a hippopotamus by any low japer that likes."

"I pardon your gross ignorance, and do not do Grundy the injustice of imagining that he shares it," said Lowther loftily.

Grundy did, as a matter of fact; but Grundy was not going to admit that he did not know a hypothesis from a hippopotamus, and, anyway, Grundy had no burning desire to argue with Lowther, who used words over his head, and saw humour where he could not.

"Look here, Merry," he said, "you ain't quite such an ass as some of those chaps. You can talk reason if you choose."

"Thanks!" replied Tom drily. "But isn't it rather like—"

"Don't say casting pearls before—"

"That's just what I was going to say, Monty. But on second thoughts I won't."

"Oh, ring off, Lowther!" hooted Grundy. "I ain't talking to you!"

"Then it was a mistake to address me by name, Grundy, and you have only

yourself to blame if there is a misapprehension."

"I hired that barn first, Tom Merry," said Grundy obstinately. "And I want the key, so hand over!"

"We know you want the key," Blake answered, while Tom smiled an inextinguishable smile. "That ain't the thing. What we want to know is why you want the barn?"

"That's no affair of yours," retorted Grundy. "But I don't mind telling you. I'm going to start a St. Jim's Parliament, and I need the barn for it."

"Oh, weally, Gwunday, you cannot be allowed to fweeze on to our scheme in that outrageous fashion!" protested Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Oh, can't I? You chaps seem to think you can freeze on my barn!"

"You can't start a St. Jim's Parliament, Grundy," said Blake. "You might start a monkey-house, I should think. You, and Gunn, and Wilkins—oh, and there's several more chaps who would be eligible candidates! But not a Parliament."

"Another hypothetical flight!" murmured Lowther. "And a certain glimmering of reason in it, too! For, if we, being asses—"

"Glad you admit it!" snapped Grundy.

"My dear chap, that's merely a hypothesis."

"It ain't a lie, anyway," said Grundy. They stared at him. For Grundy, that was quite a smart repartee. The fellow was brightening up.

"If we, being asses, can do it, then why should not you?" went on Lowther, unperturbed. "For, taking it that the animosity is an essential factor, who can deny your possession of it in the most superlative degree?"

"I want that key, Merry!" hooted Grundy.

"It's no good yelling at me, old scout. That won't get you the key. You say you've hired the barn. Now there are three fellows here who were with me when I hired it, and—"

"That's no odds! I can bring thirty who weren't!"

"Grundy's notions of the rules of evidence are crude," remarked Lowther.

"You're a silly idiot!" snapped Grundy.

"I'm not prepared to say that Pepper, who strikes me as a shifty merchant, wouldn't let the barn to two people," Tom continued. "In fact, I think he's just the chap to do it. But you've seen my receipt for four weeks' rent, and I've got the key. When I say 'I' I mean 'we.' We're all in it, of course, and you know well enough that the idea of the Parliament was ours, and so was the idea of hiring the barn. You cribbed them both."

"Cribbed be hanged!" burst in Grundy, greatly wroth. "You wouldn't agree that I should be Prime Minister in your potty Parliament—you might have known that! I should start one on my own affair, that! And, as for the barn, I—I—"

Grundy paused.

In no respect, at least—may, in two respects—Grundy was like Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He had a sense of honour, and he had a conscience.

He was by no means proud of the fact that he had got his information about the intended hiring of the barn from that sneaking spy, Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth. No one at St. Jim's despised Baggy more heartily than did the great George Alfred.

And that was a weak spot in his armour. It is true that he had not encouraged Trimble. Indeed, he had disconcerted him severely. And he had refused to pay for the information.

But, he had used it to get ahead of the rival brigade; and he did not feel quite easy in his conscience about that. Perhaps it had not been playing the game.

Anyway, he did not want to discuss it.

"As for the barn," said Tom, "let's see your receipt. You've seen ours, and it's only fair we should see yours."

Grundy would have produced the receipt at once if it had been in his possession. But it was not.

Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, whom Tom Merry had called "a shifty merchant," and whom Rylecombe called a miser, had the agreement which Grundy had signed, and that agreement included the receipt for the money paid. It had not occurred to Grundy that he ought to have had a copy of the agreement, or that the thing was useless unless he had such a copy. For Mr. Pepper was quite capable of suppressing it and denying its very existence if it suited him so to do.

"I'm not going to show you the receipt," Grundy said obstinately. "I suppose my word is good enough, and if it ain't, I've Gunn and Wilky to prove it. And we met you chaps on the way to Rylecombe when we were coming back. That proves we were before you!"

And just there was the weak spot in the armour of the seven.

Undoubtedly, Grundy had been first in the field.

They did not disbelieve anything he said about that.

But their standpoint was that he had tried to score over them by getting ahead, and had blundered. It was for him, not for them, to repair that blunder. They were willing to help him in dealing with Pepper—but not while he stuck to his present unreasonable attitude. The barn was of no real use to him, whereas they particularly wanted it.

"You've shelled out five quid to a shaper without even getting a receipt for it," said Tom. "We're sorry for you, but it ain't our bizness. Let's come to terms. There's nothing against your standing as a candidate when the elections come off, and if you get in—well and good! I shouldn't wonder if you did—there are lots of asses about!"

"Lots and lots of asses about!"

"But the high degree of assiness required to induce anyone to vote for Grundy—"

"Oh, you dry up!" roared Grundy. "I'm listening to Tom Merry!"

"Sorry—my mistake!" replied Lowther. "I thought you never listened to any voice but the mellifluous organ pertaining to George Alfred Grundy. Proceed, Thomas!"

"If I get in—but there ain't any 'if' about it, because it's jolly certain I shall—then I'm to be Prime Minister!" said Grundy eagerly. "That's understood, isn't it?"

"Not by me!" said Tom, grinning.

"Eh? What do you mean? D'ye suppose that I'm going to come to terms for anything—sorry of that? Have a little sense, Tom Merry! Where is there a chap better fitted for the job than I am? Who is there among your crowd—"

"Well, there's Gussy. It was his scheme, to start with. And there's Blake; he says he would be a heap better than Gussy," said Tom. "And there's Lowther—he's a Prime Minister is expected to be an eloquent sort of fellow, isn't he? There's Manners, too—not so eloquent, but like a parrot; thinks a lot, you know. And there's Herries; if it goes by the size of a chap's feet—well, Herries has a mighty good understanding. And, of course, there's Dig. I don't know what Dig's qualifications are, but he's got 'em. We've all got 'em, you know. And there's little me. I've got 'em, too! There may be a few others; Talbot, perhaps; Kangaroo—Australians are the fashion in politics; or Dane—he's a Colonial, too; Skimmy—magnificent inventive genius—"

Tom stopped.

"What are you asses holding your hands to your ears for?" he demanded, after a glance around.

"Till the record is through, Tommy," said Lowther. "If I'd had any doubt before that you meant to run for the place, I shouldn't have any now, for you are getting into training to give Asquith himself the giddy knock-out!"

"That's enough!" said Grundy, with a look of lordly contempt. "I'm going. If I'm to be told to my face that fellows like Blake and D'Arcy and Lowther are my superiors—"

"You must be jolly well potty if you need telling that!" snapped Blake. "Everyone else knows it. Bunk, before you get bumped!"

"You'll go now!" roared Blake.

"Kim on, you chaps! Bump him!"

And Grundy was bumped. And Grundy went, sulky but indomitable.

George Alfred Grundy never knew when he was beaten.

CHAPTER 2. Grundy & Co.

"WED better go along to that blessed barn to-night and see about finding some other way in," said Grundy, coming out of deep thought with a suddenness that was rather electrifying to his study-mates, Gunn and Wilkins.

Gunn and Wilkins were pursuing the prosaic paths of prep.—Grundy was chancing his arm with Mr. Linton on the morrow. He could not be bothered with prep, he said, when he had so much to think about.

"Eh?" said Gunn.

"Rot!" said Wilkins.

"Rot or not, we're going, George Wilkins, so you can make up your mind to that!" said the great war-chief of Study No. 2.

"You may be going. That don't say I am," replied Wilkins.

"Much better said Tom Merry's study and collar the raid," growled Gunn.

"Yes, ever so much!" agreed Wilkins.

"What's the use of breaking bounds,

after lights-out in weather like this, too, to go pottering round a dashed old barn?"

"If you chaps aren't going to back me up—"

"Who said we weren't? We don't mind as long as there's any sense in it. But there isn't any sense—"

"That's for me to say, William Gunn! You can do as you like, of course, but I'm going."

If Wilkins and Gunn had believed that Grundy meant what he said when he told them that they could do as they liked, they would have stared. But luckily, they would not mean it in the very least. He always expected Wilkins and Gunn to do as he liked. And why should they mind, when everyone knew what an extraordinary reasonable chap he was?

"There's nothing there but D'Arcy's dog," said Gunn weakly.

"I suppose you want to get what that fellow Wootton got," remarked Wilkins, grinning at the memory of Wootton, major of the Grammar School, attacked in rear by Binks, the terrier, which had been some time the property of Mr. Pepper, but now belonged to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"The dog won't meddle with me. I'd like to see the dog that would interfere with me!" said Grundy. "I like dogs, and they always know when people like them."

"I should have thought that what really mattered was whether they liked you," said Gunn.

"Well, they do," said Grundy. "They always do!"

"Do you think dogs look at people's faces much, Gunn?" asked Wilkins meditatively.

"Hanged if I know! Why?"

"If it don't, that might account for it," replied Wilkins.

Grundy glared at him.

"I thought you were going to see Pepper and get the whole bizney settled," said Gunn.

"I've been down there twice. The dirty kennel of a cottage is shut up, and no one seems to know where the rotter is. But I'll let him know what I think of him when I get near him!"

"He won't mind much about that," said Wilkins. "He's got your giddy chink—that's what he cares about."

"Of course it is!" Gunn agreed.

Grundy glared at them both. They were rubbing it in, and Grundy did not like that operation.

"It's all very well to grumble at everything, and order chaps around as if you were a commander-in-chief, and swank—"

"You dry up, or you'll get a thick ear, George Wilkins!"

"Who said I meant you? I might have meant Gunn. But if the cap fits—"

"Chuck it, I tell you!"

"And I tell you that I ain't jolly well going to get out of my warm bed to-night to go pottering round that mouldy old barn for you or anyone else!"

"Nor yet me," said Gunn.

It was more in error than in anger that Grundy eyed them now.

They were going back on him. He would not have expected this of the faithful Wilkins and the devoted Gunn.

"Right-ho!" he said loftily. "We'll say no more about it. I'll go alone."

But the other two did not quite mean him to do that.

They were not going to encourage him. But if he went they would go with him. He would be certain to wake them up, they would say.

But he did not.

The great George Alfred felt really hurt. Perhaps these fellows thought he could not do without them—was afraid to go alone!

Well, he would show them, that was all about it.

It was a beastly night, cold and windy, with sharp, short showers of rain now and then. But the weather could not daunt Grundy.

He had no great relish for the expedition. It really was not a cheerful business to carry through on his own.

When he saw the vague shape of the barn looming up before him through the gloom of the soggy field, he almost wished he had not come.

He tried the door. That would be fast, of course. Tom Merry would never forget so simple a precaution as locking up.

But the door was not locked!

Arthur Augustus was responsible for that omission. He had been to see his dog Binks, quartered in the barn for the time being. And he had duly taken back the key to Tom. But, though he thought he had locked up, he had not. In his hurry he had taken out the key after turning it. But it was not into the lock that the tongue had shot. It was outside, and a tug at the door brought it open at once.

And now, having found that he could get in, Grundy paused on the threshold, not at all sure that he wanted to.

It did not seem much use. The barn was empty; and even if the rival party had had any of their belongings there, Grundy was not at all the sort of fellow to damage those belongings out of spite.

What was the use of it?

He asked himself that question. In the stillness the breathing of Binks sounded loudly in his ears.

Now Binks woke up, scented the intruder, and growled.

Grundy marched in. He had not been brazening when he said that he could always make his friends with dogs. Binks had held him at bay a day or two earlier, it was true; but there was no reason why he should fear Binks now; and he didn't fear him.

He walked straight up to the terrier, and patted him on the head.

That was a bold stroke, and it paid. Binks sniffed at him, and then licked his hand. Binks very likely felt a bit lonely in the barn, and was glad of a visitor.

As Grundy stood there, with the dog's paws on one of his knees, and his hand on the warm head, Binks growled again; but plainly not at Grundy, for he gave Grundy's hand a kind of nudge with his head at the same moment.

Now, Grundy heard what had come earlier to the sharp ears of Binks.

Someone was prowling round the barn.

The barn had been started with the intention of building a bungalow, which explains a number of windows. These windows were rather high up in the walls, and were covered with flaps at the present.

There was one of them just above Grundy's head. The flap did not fit quite closely, and a tiny space of what was scarcely light—rather a darkness less dense than that around it—marked its place.

Now, as Grundy looked up, the glimmering of light increased, and he heard a sound as of someone pulling up the flap from outside.

Binks growled again, but Grundy made no sound. He waited, with his eyes on the growing glimmer. He was not at all afraid, but he was very curious indeed.

And then words were spoken that made him feel very glad he had come.

But that was not a high sound, as of something thud upon the floor. And the words told what that something was.

"Let's hope you can reach that, you brute! If you eat it, you won't go

wasting any more food that's needed by the nation!"

The voice was easily recognisable as that of Mr. Erasmus Pepper.

Grundy was considered by many people at St. Jim's to be rather slow and stupid. Perhaps he was not quite so much so as they thought.

At any rate, he jumped at once to the right conclusion in this matter. Mr. Pepper was trying to poison Binks!

It was a foul trick—a trick that made Grundy indignant on the instant.

He grabbed Binks by the collar, and then felt around in the darkness for the poisoned food. His fingers touched something smooth and slightly damp, and he seized it.

Binks struggled—not savagely, but hard. He was not hungry, but he had smelt the piece of meat, and he wanted it. But for Grundy, Binks would, beyond doubt, have been dead before morning. Binks did not know that, of course; but all the same, he seemed instinctively to know that Grundy was a friend.

CHAPTER 3.

The Miser!

GRUNDY was thinking as hard as he had ever thought in his life. Binks barked. Grundy did not try to pacify him. He was thinking too hard for that.

To Grundy, the thing that Pepper had attempted seemed little better than murder. One does not call it murder when a dog is killed, but most lovers of dogs feel that way about it. And this was so basely treacherous an attempt. Grundy had heard how the dog had come into D'Arcy's possession. Pepper had threatened to drown it if he did not buy it, and Arthur Augustus knew that he was partly to blame, and his heart was too tender to refuse. Grundy looked upon D'Arcy as no end of an ass, but he had plenty of sympathy with him in this matter.

Having sold the dog, Pepper had no right to execute it. But a man who would let his barn to two different people was not likely to be particular about that sort of thing.

But why did he want Binks out of the way?

There was some mystery here, and upon that mystery Grundy's mind was at work.

What was Pepper up to?

No good! Grundy felt sure of that, at least.

Binks went on barking. It was just as well for it covered any noise Grundy might make. And Grundy was not specially light-footed.

He stole out of the door of the barn, and round the back, keeping close to the wall.

But all was dark there. Pepper seemed to have disappeared.

Then Grundy saw a ray of light where he had certainly not expected to see one—where, in the natural order of things, no ray of light should be.

It came from under the barn!

The floor of the barn in front was practically level with the ground outside. But the ground sloped away considerably to the rear, and there the floor was some five feet or more above ground-level.

Thus there was a kind of cave under the barn. But it was not open. It had been built up with bricks.

Evidently there had been some notion of using this bricked-up part for storage, quite possibly of coal. There was a strong wooden door in it, and Grundy, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 507.

feeling his way round in the gloom, found it hippos with his hands.

He knelt down in the wet grass to investigate. He found a chink, and was able to see inside.

Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper was there, and he was digging!

It was an awkward task, for he had to do it on his hands and knees. He was using a broad, strong trowel in lieu of a spade; but he had already made a hole at least six inches deep.

What could be his motive?

A man does not dig for potatoes under a barn at eleven o'clock at night—or, indeed, at any other time, unless he is a lunatic; and Mr. Pepper, with all his eccentricities, was assuredly no lunatic.

Then into the wondering mind of Grundy there came memories of the village gossip about Pepper and his miser's hoard.

They were true, then! There seemed very little doubt that they must be true.

Grundy had never, to his knowledge, seen a real live miser before.

He looked at Mr. Pepper with enhanced interest, but by no means increased respect or approval. Grundy was open-handed to a fault; and a miser was not likely to find favour in his eyes. Moreover, this was such a very dirty and unpleasant miser.

Mr. Pepper, with his long nose, his lean face, and his scarecrow clothes, was quite up to Grundy's conception of a ghoul. Grundy was not at all sure what a ghoul was, but that was the name which he mentally bestowed upon Pepper.

A horrible thought came into Grundy's mind—a thought evoked by the ghoul notion, possibly.

Suppose Mr. Pepper was not a miser, but a goose? Suppose he was digging for a body?

Well, Grundy would stick it out, anyway. But he did wish Wilkins and Ginn had been there, as they would have been had they not proved themselves ungrateful rebels. Their presence would have been comforting. And if there really was a body, their evidence would be uncommonly handy. Grundy's story might be treated with scorn when he told it.

But just as Grundy was thinking this, he saw something which caused him to breathe a long sigh of relief.

It was not a body. It was a chest!

The digger had got down to it now. The light of the lantern by which he was working shone right down upon it.

It was a metal chest, and very heavy, to judge by the difficulty with which Mr. Pepper lifted it out a minute or two later.

He opened it. Grundy saw that he did not have to unlock it, and that detail stayed in his memory.

Then a piece of sackings was pulled back, and in the light of the lantern, there shone the gleam of gold.

Gold! Sovereigns and half-sovereigns! The chest was full of them!

Grundy gasped. Never in his life before had he seen gold in such quantities. He had seen a bank-shovel full of it, and paper or canvas bags lying hard by, which he knew were also full; but the contents of that chest would have filled many scores of bags, he fancied, and would have kept a bank cashier counting for no end of time.

Mr. Pepper was not a bank cashier. It might have gone ill with his bank if he had been. But he evidently meant to count all that gold. And Grundy was so fascinated by the sight that he never even thought of moving.

"Got so much that he dare'n't keep it at the cottage," the watching junior

uttered to himself. "He said something about coming to live here. I guess that was because he didn't like to be so far away from it. But he reckons it ain't safe to keep it where he is, and I suppose that's why he let the barn. Even if any of us had got into this show underneath we shouldn't have thought of digging."

Mr. Pepper took up a handful of the gold, and then let it drizzle back into the chest again, coin by coin. He smiled a cunning, greedy smile as he listened to the musical rick of the coins.

Then he dabbed his hands in it, and his smile was more gloating than ever. There came into the mind of Grundy the memory of a book his uncle was very keen on. One of Charles Dickens's, it was, and Uncle Grundy said it was the very best novel ever written, and had told his nephew about it more than once. An' Gunn had read it, too, he knew.

Gunn was a whole lot for Grundy. There was an old chap named Boffin in it, who pretended to be a miser. Grundy could not remember why, and it seemed to him a middling silly thing to do, anyway. But old Boffin used to collect books about misers, and had a regular library of them.

Blewberry Jones and Dancer and Vulture Hopkins—the names of the misers through Grundy's mind, though he could no longer have remembered one of them an hour earlier.

Well, here was a miser worse than any of them! Grundy felt sure of that.

What a yarn it would be for old Uncle Grundy! How he would rub his hands over it, and chuckle, and think George Alfred was no end of a fellow to have witnessed such a thing.

And how Gunn and Wilky would wish they had come when he told them!

Now Pepper had begun to count. He was stacking the coins up in little heaps on the ground. It was not too level, and now and then a heap would fall, with a tinn chinking. Then Pepper would set it up again, and say something nasty—but he never swore, Grundy noticed—and go on with his counting.

Ten in each—twenty piles already—all sovereigns. That meant two hundred pounds—Grundy worked the sum in his head, though mental arithmetic was not his forte—and it had hardly made any difference at all to the chest, it seemed to him.

And Grundy never even noticed that his trousers were wet through at the knees, or that he was shivering with cold. A sharp shower rattled down, making him wet as to the upper parts; but he paid no heed even to that.

He knelt there fascinated.

The fascination was not that of greed. What ever it was, Grundy had none of the spirit of the miser in him.

Money was a useful sort of thing to have, of course. Uncle Grundy had it in plenty, which was quite nice for George Alfred, whose tips were more lavish than those of any fellow in the Fourth, or Shell, except Cardew.

But there was this sense of hoarding it like this? Reasonable people don't do it—only nasty, low misers. Reasonable people put it in a bank, and drew cheques when they wanted some of it. They did not come grubbing under a barn at dead of night for it like this.

But Mr. Pepper had not come to get money, it seemed. Considering the way in which he lived, and the fact that he had lately had seven pounds from St. Jim's fellows, he could hardly need to decrease his hoard.

No; he had come there to count it and gloat over it, the wretched miser! And he had brought poisoned meat along to kill D'Arcy's dog—to kill Binks, whom Grundy counted a friend!

Something ought to be done to a man like that!

And then another thought came into the mighty mind of George Alfred Grundy.

"Why, no chap had a right to possess all this gold at a time like this!

The Government had asked for gold, Grundy did not understand why. Mr. Linton had given some long-winded explanation in class one day; but Grundy hadn't followed that. He had been thinking of something else at the time.

But he was certain of the fact. It was not patriotic to have gold. Notes were the proper and decent thing. A sovereign was almost an unknown thing at St. Jim's these days. Evey Raacke & Co. did not dare to flaunt sovereigns about.

Could the rotter be punished for it? And if he could, would one witness be enough to convict him?

"Hang Wilky and Gunny! Why didn't they do the straight thing, and come along with me?" muttered Grundy.

CHAPTER 4.

Following their Leader.

WILKINS and Gunn had not come along with Grundy merely because he had omitted to awaken them when he got out of bed.

They had quite meant to go, though they had said otherwise. It was not their way to desert the great Grundy, however silly they might consider his schemes to be.

Gunn awoke some time after Grundy had gone, and discovered that his leader's bed was empty.

"Groogh! Wharrer matter?" asked Wilkins, roused from sleep by Gunn's shaking.

"The silly fathead has gone!" whispered Gunn. "Don't make a giddy row! There's no need for the whole dorm to know all about it!"

"All right!" growled Wilkins. And he got up and began to dress.

Breaking bounds after lights out was not in the line of either Wilkins or Gunn, any more than, as a rule, it was in that of Grundy.

But they did hesitate now, though they were no keener on going than they had been when Grundy proposed it—or, rather, gave his lordly orders concerning it.

There was no difficulty about getting out, and no alarm attended the venture. But when they found themselves in the road to Rylcombe, with clouds moving fast overhead, and the wind making an eerie sound in the tree-branches, they did not acquire any increased liking for the venture.

"Ugh!" said Wilkins. "It's beastly party, and there'll be rain before long. I'll be in."

"Can't be helped!" replied Gunn philosophically. "We were bound to come!"

"I suppose so, Gunny, though I'm blessed if I can see what use it is! We never can hold old Grundy back when he's made up what he calls his mind to do anything."

"Well, he's hope he won't be doing anything to-night," said Gunn hopefully. "There ain't much he can do around that barn."

"There's D'Arcy's dog," said Wilkins. "That ain't big enough to eat him. Cheer up, old scot!"

No more was said till the two stood inside the gate to the field.

"Here comes the jolly rain!" said Wilkins.

"Can't be any sign of him," returned Gunn, peering through the gloom.

The small ray of light which Grundy had seen at the back of the barn.

"I don't believe he's here at all!" growled Wilkins. "Pretty idiots we shall look if he only sneaked down to get the



Called Out for Snuffing!

(See Chapter 5.)

key from Tom Merry's study, and never went outside at all!"

"There's the dog barking. Someone's about, Wilky!"

The gusty rain drove hard in their faces as they moved towards the barn. Binks heard their approach, and barked more loudly than ever. But neither Mr. Pepper, who was just finishing his counting, nor George Alfred Grundy, who had just begun to realise that he was wet and cold, and that watching a miser gloat over his hoarded gold was not quite equal to a really good cinema film, took alarm. Binks had never ceased to bark more or less, and they supposed the sounds under him caused his vocal efforts.

"Why, the giddy door's open!" said Gunn, in surprise.

"Don't go in!" breathed Wilkins, tugging at his arm.

"You needn't lug my arm off!" snapped Gunn. "I don't mean to go in. I haven't any pairs of bags to spare, if Wootton major has!"

But Gunn wondered that Wilkins should be so nervous. In general, Wilkins was a trifle the bolder spirit of the two, for Gunn had more quiet tastes, and the fellow who is keen on reading is seldom a fellow of iron nerve.

"I don't like the look of things!" muttered Wilkins.

"You can't see anything but darkness," answered Gunn. "Come along round by the back. Old Grundy may be there."

"I only hope he ain't lying inside, croaked, or something," was the cheery reply of Wilkins.

But Grundy was not by any means croaked, though he was hardly by this time in the thickest of conditions.

He did not want Pepper to suspect his watching, and now he was wrestling desperately with a sneeze. If he could not choke it down it would give him away. Pepper might feign deafness, but it was a mere pretence, Grundy was sure.

Atish—
It had come! But even as it came, something—somebody stumbled against

Grundy in the darkness, and fingers gripped his nose.

It was quite an accident. The fingers were those of Wilkins, and Wilkins was never more surprised in his life than when they closed upon something fleshy and cold—and never much more frightened. For a second he could not think what it could be; in the next second he made out that it was Grundy—dead, probably. And then he knew that Grundy could not be dead, for, if dead men tell no tales, neither do they shoot out large fists, to take a fellow in very painful fashion in the region of the waistcoat.

"Ugh! Yoooop!" growled Wilkins.

"Slush, you ass!" hissed Grundy.

"Is that you, Grundy?" whispered Gunn, who had twigged the ray of light, and had some notion of the necessity of caution.

"Ow! That hurt, Grundy!" moaned Wilkins.

"Don't you suppose it hurt when you grabbed my nose, ass?" hissed Grundy. "But shut up! You'll spoil everything if you make a row!"

He peered in again through the chink.

Mr. Pepper had not taken alarm. Perhaps the accidental grip had upon the nose of Grundy had turned that sneeze into something harmonising better with the barking of Binks than it might have been had it pursued its own course. Any way, there was noise enough altogether, from the wind and the pelting rain, and Binks, to make it by no means wonderful that he should fail to hear.

"What's up?" asked Gunn, still in a whisper.

"Come away!" hissed Grundy.

He had forgotten for the moment about wanting witnesses, in his fear lest Pepper should hear.

The three stole round to the front of the barn.

"Let's get inside," said Grundy.

"No fear! There's that blessed dog—
"Don't be a funk, Wilky! The dog
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 507.

won't—atishoo—but you! I've made friends with him."
 "He keeps on barking all the same," said Wilkins, entering gingerly, and stopping short just inside.

"That's the chap underneath," said Grundy.

"Underneath? What do you mean?" asked Gunn.

"If they had thought about it at all, they had supposed Grundy to be peering into the barn. But they had not had much time to think."

"Underneath, I tell you. There's a place over so big there, but not high enough to stand up in. Must have been made for smugglers or something," Grundy answered, with quite a flight of imagination.

"Oh, eriker!" said Gunn. The notion of smugglers rather appealed to him.

"I failed entirely to appeal to Wilkins."

"Let's cut!" he said. "We don't want to go mixing ourselves up with a giddy gang of smugglers. Taint't—taint respectable, and I'm jolly sure the Head would be down on it. Besides, they might have pistols and—and things."

"Fathead! There ain't any smugglers there," replied Grundy, with difficulty restraining his impulse to shout at Wilkins.

"Well, who is there?" inquired Gunn.

"That rotter Pepper!"

"What on earth is he doing?"

"You'd never guess! I say, though, you'd better come round to the back again, and—There! I never saw—"

"It's so good now. Keep still, whatever you do! He's coming!"

Grundy's speech was a little too disconnected to be followed easily. But, fortunately, both the other two saw the dim figure of Mr. Pepper, and they had no desire to attract his attention by making a noise.

They went in front of the barn, and through the wood and the rain the sound of his voice came to them.

"Hang the dog! He isn't dead yet, it seems!"

"What's he mean?" whispered Gunn.

"But Grundy was struggling with another sneeze, and could not answer at the moment."

Mr. Pepper failed to perceive that the door of the barn stood ajar. He moved away.

"Atishoo—atishoo—atishoo!"

Grundy could keep it no longer. But Mr. Pepper was out of hearing now.

"You'll be in the sanny for this," said Wilkins consolingly.

"You fat headed idiot! You ought to be in a lunatic—atishoo— asylum!" fumed Grundy.

"What the merry dickens have I done?" asked Wilkins in injured tones.

"I must say, you ain't a very grateful chap, Grundy!"

"Grateful—atishoo! When you—atishoo—jolly nearly mucked up the whole bizney—atishoo—blundering about like that! You've no—atishoo—"

"Well, you've got enough of that for three, and I'm jolly sure I don't want it," replied Wilkins unfeelingly.

"But what is the bizney?" asked Gunn.

"Is old Pepper a smuggler?" chimed in Wilkins.

"No; he's—atishoo—"

"He ain't half as much of that as you are, Grundy. I didn't notice that he'd got it at all."

"I'll—atishoo—punch your fat head, George Wilkins, if you—atishoo—"

"I ain't going to if I can help it. But I expect Gunn and I will both get it. It won't be so rotter, in sanny with all three of us together, anyway."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 507.

"Chump! I'm not going into sanny—not likely! I've got important business to attend to—atishoo!"

"You're talking riddles, Grundy," said Gunn, quite puzzled.

"I'm talking—atishoo—"

"You are, chiefly," said Wilkins, disposed to be humorous now that he had got over his alarm, "though I ain't sure that I should call it talking, exactly!"

"I'm talking sense!" rapped out Grundy.

"It's a nice change!" replied Wilkins.

"At least, it would be if a chap could tell the difference!"

"Oh, dry up, Wilky!" said Gunn.

"What did that sharp-nosed old rotter come there for, Grundy?"

"To poison—atishoo—"

"He don't seem to have killed it descending scenery!" remarked Wilkins to the surrounding secrecy.

"D'Arcy's—atishoo—"

"Oh, has D'Arcy got it too?" inquired Wilkins.

"I'll give you—atishoo—"

"Thanks, but I haven't any use—What are you doing, Gunn, you silly chump?"

"Kicking a fat-headed ass! And I'll do it every time you interrupt old Grundy with your puffing jokes! Go on, Grundy, old chap!"

"Look here, Gunn—"

"What's the use in the dark? Not but what your face looks a giddy sight better in the dark, when a chap can't see it, Go on, Grundy! He came to poison D'Arcy's dog, the rotter! And—"

"If you kick me again, William Gunn—"

"Here you are!" said Gunn generously.

"I don't grudge you that, Wilky!"

"He's a miser! I've seen his board of gold! Atishoo!"

This exciting statement came in time to prevent the assault upon Gunn which Wilkins was meditating.

"Didn't they say so in the village?" said Gunn. "You remember I told you, Grundy?"

"What do they know about—atishoo!—it in the village?" spluttered Grundy.

"Don't you go trying to rob me of the credit of finding out, you chump!"

"I don't see—"

"Of course, you—atishoo—don't! You chaps haven't any intelligence or any detective instinct—atishoo—or—"

"Grateful, ain't he, Gunn?"

"What on earth have I got to—atishoo—"

"Because you've caught a giddy coid playing detective and being so jolly intelligent, I guess," said Wilkins, unable to let that chance pass.

And Gunn did not kick him. Gunn considered it was up to George Alfred to show a little gratitude.

But George Alfred did not see it at all, and for the rest of the way back he was in a proxy of sneezing, and could tell them no more.

CHAPTER 5.

Sent To Sanny.

"**H**ALLO, Grundy, old boss! What have you been doing to your face?" asked Harry Noble, generally called Kangaroo, in the Shell dormitory next morning.

Grundy's face was most certainly not normal. It was swollen and bleared; there were red runs round the eyes, and he used his handkerchief in a gingerly manner, which suggested that his nose was very sore indeed—as it was.

In short, Grundy had a nasty cold, and he knew it. But he was not prepared to admit it.

"Nothing. What's my face to do with you, Noble, is it growled."

"Nothing. I'm glad of that," replied the Australian junior briefly.

"You should have said, 'What has my noble face to do with you?'" corrected Monty Lowther.

Grundy scowled at him. That was all Grundy felt equal to. He was not in fit condition for a wordy warfare with Lowther.

He sat on the edge of his bed, feeling a queer disinclination to dress.

Grundy was no sluggard, and he did not like that feeling a bit.

From the bed of William Cutbree Gunn came a most unmistakable sneeze.

"Hallo! You got it, too, Grundy?" inquired the voice of George Wilkins.

"Ass! I—atishoo!"

"Told you how it would be! I—atishoo—"

Wilkins and Gunn were now sneezing against each other as if for a wager.

Grundy looked at them with indignation. What did they mean by having colds? He didn't knelt ever so long watching Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper gloat over his board of gold. It was like their confounded check!

"Sister that, you two!" he hoated.

"Anybody been treating Grundy & Co. to a dose of pepper?" asked Tom Merry, toweling his body briskly at the washstand.

"I'd give anybody who jolly well tried it on a whorpling!" growled Grundy.

"Things like that do happen in No. 3," remarked Clifton Dane.

"It's been rather overdone this time, I think, though," said Manners.

"Look at poor old Grundy's dial! Look at the unfortunate old image's eyes! Look—"

"Do you want a thick ear, Manners?" hoated Grundy.

"Not particularly. Why? I was offering you ray—ahem!—respectful sympathy. It isn't customary in really good society to hand out thick ears in return for that."

"Well, it is in the society I—"

Monty Lowther held up a warning—and dripping—hand.

"No more of these revelations, Grundy, I implore!" he said. "Do not go on to confess that you are unworthy of companionship with us pure, high-souled youths! Do not—"

"I wasn't going to!" roared George Alfred. "But I don't mind saying that I wouldn't be seen dead with you!"

"It may—or again it may not—be curious, Grundy, but I should be quite sorry to be seen dead with you," answered the humorist of the Shell blandly.

After that conversation ceased for a brief space—a circumstance caused by the fact that Lowther had immersed his head in a basin of water—and Grundy began to struggle into his clothes.

"I think I shall stop in bed," said Wilkins. "I've got a nasty cold."

"You jolly well won't!" hoated Grundy, who had a far worse cold than Wilkins, and knew it.

"You can't nurse your cold—if any—here, Wilkins. You'll have to go to the sanny," Talbot said.

"Yes, that's true. Beastly nuisance! I could do with a day in bed, and plenty of hot, buttered toast. But I'll get up, I think."

"You'd better!" snorted Grundy.

Somewhere at the back of Grundy's some that needed using there was a kind of vague notion that those colds could be made as nought by denying their existence. So Christian Scientists are said to believe. But it is not on record that any of them ever had any

success in getting rid of a genuine case of toothache by denying it. And Grundy's cold, though less painful than toothache, was far more patent.

He didn't care about his breakfast a bit, and the appetites of Gunn and Wilkins were also a trifle off. Perhaps that was due, in the case of Wilkins, to the absence from the spread of hot, buttered toast.

But they were not in a sneezing mood in Hall, and no one in authority noted their unfitness.

In the Form-room they were soon detected, however.

Grundy happened to be right in the direct range of Mr. Linton's eyes, and it was not long before he was brought to book.

"Grundy," said the Form-master, "in the days when I was in charge of a very junior Form, it sometimes chanced to me to be obliged to warn a small boy that the use of his handkerchief—if he possessed that article—was more desirable than snuffling. I cannot doubt your having a handkerchief, Verb. sap."

"Sarcastic old beast!" muttered Grundy.

The use of a handkerchief was positively painful to him. He did not want to snuffle, of course. Nobody wants to snuffle, as he indignantly thought. But a chap can't keep on sneezing and blowing a nose that feels as though it had been squashed almost into pulp!

"Wilkins!" snapped Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir?"

"Did you hear what I said to Grundy?"

"Oh, yes, sir. You told him to blow his nose, sir."

"That is an incorrect version of my speech. I merely gave him a hint. With only a desire to excite the position of the Shell in the body politic of this school, I consider that a boy in my Form should be beyond the stage when the ministrations of a nursemaid are necessary."

Wilkins blew with a blast like the blast of a trumpet. Then he whispered something very uncomplimentary to Mr. Linton into the ear of Gunn.

"Serve you right! A chap ought to be up to blowing his giddy nose without being told about it," responded Gunn, whose nasal organ was less sore.

"Gunn, you were talking."

"Yes, sir. A-tish—oo!"

As if Gunn's big sneeze had forced them to it, Grundy and Wilkins both sneezed violently. Not a single sneeze. They kept on sneezing and stop for the lives of them. Gunn chimed in at intervals; but for fully a minute Grundy and Wilkins gave a continuous performance.

They ceased at last. Then Mr. Linton's voice was heard again.

"Grundy—Wilkins—Gunn! Come out here!"

These three came forward. Grundy's massive face wearing a look of extreme reluctance. George Alfred Grundy was quite a truthful fellow; but if he had seen the slightest hope of getting Mr. Linton to believe that the cold was a mere delusion he would not have stopped short at a lie just then. But he would not have considered it exactly a lie.

How could a cold be a cold when Mr. George Alfred Grundy had made up his powerful mind that he was not going to let it?

"Yes; you all three have had colds. And colds are, in the opinion of many eminent medical men, infectious. Good gracious! I may have my whole Form down! I may be attacked myself! Go at once to the matron, and tell her that I say you're to go to the sanatorium, and stay there until you are quite recovered."

The trio went. Gunn and Wilkins did

not appear absolutely inconsolable. But Grundy was in a state of angry dejection.

"That's done it!" he muttered.

"Done what?" inquired Gunn.

It was quite a reasonable question; but Grundy did not answer it politely.

"Ass!" he said, and then snuffed.

As he was away from Mr. Linton now, he saw no cause for abstaining from snuffling.

They saw the matron, and she quite concurred in Mr. Linton's decision, though she seemed to think that it was for her, rather than for him, to decide, within a quarter of an hour they were snugly tucked up in bed in the sanatorium.

"This is rather a lark," said Wilkins, now fully resigned. "It's no sort of day for footer, and I dare say they'll give us something decent to eat."

"Feed a cold, starve a fever," they say, I shall tell Miss Marie that, and she'll see we don't go short of grub."

"You're a pig, George Wilkins!" snorted Grundy.

"Eh? Why am I a pig?" retorted Wilkins hotly.

"I've often thought of asking that," said Gunn. "But it ain't really a first-class conundrum, because the answer is so jolly easy."

"Oh, is it? What is the answer, then?"

"Because you were born so, I suppose."

"I'll jolly well come over to you, Gunn, and—"

"Can't be did, old top! Here's Miss Marie coming!"

Marie Rivers came in. She was young to be in so responsible a position as that of nurse at a school sanatorium; but she had never been before wanting, and she made her patients observe discipline.

"I say, Miss Marie!"

"Yes, Gunn."

"Here, I say, Miss Marie!"

"One moment, Wilkins, please! Gunn spoke first."

"I want a book. It won't hurt me to never read it? A Scott would do. I've never read 'Peveril of the Peak,' because it didn't look very interesting; but I think I could tackle it now."

"I could tackle a plate of hot, buttered toast and a few sardines. I should think anything like that in oil would be a good thing," said Wilkins.

"Isn't time for a meal yet, Wilkins," said Miss Marie. "Why, less than an hour ago you were at breakfast."

"Well, I couldn't eat much then."

"Perhaps some grub!"

"Yah! Oh, sorry, Miss Marie! Of course, I didn't mean to say 'Yah!' to you. But grub! Not jolly well likely!"

"Have you read 'The Fair Maid of Perth,' Gunn?"

"No. Is it all right?"

"I think you'd like it better than 'Peveril.'"

"Peveril with the Hump!" growled Wilkins. "I remember Gunn bragging he's read all Scott. Can't you tell me something I'd like better than hot, buttered toast, Miss Marie?"

"So I have—pretty nearly, anyway. Why don't you have one, Wilky?" said Gunn.

"I'd rather have the leg and breast of a chicken, with bread sauce."

"I'll fetch the book, Gunn. Isn't there one I could get for you, Wilkins?"

"Yes. I'll have a cookery book, if I can't have some grub."

Miss Marie laughed.

She knew that Wilkins was not as greedy as he pretended to be. But he cared little for reading.

"Can I get anything for you, Grundy?" asked the girl gently. She thought Grundy looked much more ill

than Gunn or Wilkins. And his cold was a worse one. But the indomitable spirit of George Alfred rose above such things as colds.

"No, thanks. Yes, you can, though, if you will. But I don't suppose you would, Miss Marie," said Grundy, almost wistfully.

"What is it?"

"Could you get me something out of Tom Merry's study?"

"Well, yes, if Tom—if Merry doesn't mind, of course."

"Oh, I say! That won't do at all. He mustn't know."

"I'm afraid it's quite impossible, Grundy."

"Yes, I thought you'd say that. I daresay you're right—I'm not grumbling. And it would be rough on Binks."

"I don't know Binks," said Miss Marie, half suspecting Grundy of raving.

"He's a dog—D'Arcy's dog. Not a bad little tyke—and, of course, he must have his grub."

"Like me; only I don't seem likely to get mine," said Wilkins pointedly.

Miss Marie laughed. Her curiosity was naturally aroused.

"What was it you wanted me to get, Grundy?" she asked.

"Why don't she ask me that?" murmured Wilkins.

"Nothing much. Only a key. It doesn't matter, really."

Miss Marie was mystified, naturally. But she saw that Grundy did not want to be questioned, and she went to fetch Gunn's book from the library.

CHAPTER 6.

Grundy's Great Plan!

"WHAT are you bothering about the key for?" asked Wilkins.

"Oh, never mind. It ain't a matter of the key, really, I can work it without that, I dare say."

"Work what?"

"Don't ask silly questions, William Gunn!"

Grundy's cold had not improved his temper a little bit. He had the grace to be civil to Miss Marie, at least; but that may have been such a strain on him that he found it impossible to speak to Gunn and Wilkins fairly and softly.

"All right! Don't tell us if you don't want to. I'm fed up with that rotten barn, anyway, and I don't care a rap about the St. Jim's Parliament or any other piffing parliament. I'm going to read Scott, and be happy—as happy as my nose will let me. It's getting worse."

"Serve you right! You sneered at me for being told to blow mine," said Wilkins.

"Blow your noses!" snapped Grundy.

"We don't want to!" answered Wilkins.

"I mean—hang your noses!"

"Couldn't do that without hanging ourselves, old scout."

"Hang yourselves, then!"

"Can't be did," replied Gunn solemnly. "Miss Marie would have the fright of her life if she came in and found us hanging here."

They were not hanging there when Miss Marie returned five minutes later.

Gunn was very grateful for his book, and Wilkins, though he professed to be grievously disappointed at the non-arrival of the cookery book, looked fairly resigned, which was easy, as he had not really wanted it.

But Grundy had nothing to say. And Miss Marie, realising that he was really much sicker than her other two patients, went over and sat down by his bed.

"I could ask Merry for the key, of course, if you particularly want it," she said softly.

"I—oh, I dunno. That would be no good. It doesn't matter, thanks, Miss Marie."

"Was there anything you wanted D'Arcy telling about his dog?"

"Oh, blow D'Arcy! No, but I don't mean that—at least, blow D'Arcy, all right—but I didn't mean to be rude to you, you know."

Gunn had started "The Fair Maid of Perth."

Wilkins was listening and grinning.

Silence for a few minutes.

Then Grundy said an unexpected thing.

"Miss Marie, you're no end patriotic and all that, aren't you?"

"I hope I am. Yes, I think I am. Perhaps I ought to be out there nursing. But I don't know. My father was so glad that I should be here. And there is really plenty for me to do, and someone must do it. Besides, I'm not a trained nurse, you see."

"They'd have been jolly pleased to have you," said Grundy. "But it ain't a bad thing you stayed at home. There was that nurse out in Belgium—the Huns shot her, you know."

"Yes—Miss Cavell. She was a great woman!" answered Marie Rivers, with soft, shining eyes.

Wilkins wondered what on earth old Grundy could be getting at. He had thought at first that Grundy was gone on Miss Marie, and had meant to clap him about it. But this did not sound like that, and that kind of thing was quite out of Grundy's line.

"Oh, rather! But I believe, you'd have done the same in her place."

Miss Marie's eyes shone more than ever.

Wilkins felt that he had never properly realised before how pretty she was.

"I don't think I ever had a nicer thing than that said to me," was the girl's answer, after a moment's pause. "It wasn't a compliment. I never make 'em," growled Grundy. "Rot, I call them! I think so, and that's all about it."

"That's better than a compliment."

"Suppose a chap knew of something that—that might be of big use to the Government?" went on Grundy. "Wilkins, you bouncer, if I catch you listening, I'll—"

The threat remained incomplete, because of Nurse Marie's presence. But it made Wilkins keener than ever to hear, and it fetched Gunn out of Chapter 1 of the volume of Scott, in which he had rather stuck.

"I think everyone should do all that he—or she—can to help," the girl said. "But this ain't a simple matter. It's the sort of thing that takes brains. That's why it's no good me telling Wilkins and Gunn about it."

Wilkins and Gunn deemed it best to let that slight pass without comment.

"I'm afraid I am not very brainy!"

"Yes, you are, Miss Mary. It's like this. The Government wants all the think it can get hold of, don't it?"

"I believe so."

"And gold particularly."

"Yes, I don't know why. Sometimes it has seemed to me that as the paper money does so well the gold can't matter much. But that is stupid, of course. I know I must be wrong."

"I shouldn't call it stupid exactly," said Grundy. "It's—I suppose it's what they call the feminine way of looking at it. What are you enquiring at, George Wilkins, you dashed donkey?"

"Hush! I don't think Wilkins was enquiring, Grundy."

"I know he was. I know the bouncer. He hasn't the sense of a boiled owl—not half of it! I could explain all that

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 567.

about the gold to you, Miss Marie's, of course; but you don't want to be bothered."

"Oh, go on, Grundy, old top!" said Gunn.

Gunn thought Grundy on the currency question, rates of exchange, the international gold balance, and all that kind of thing might be funny.

"We'll take it for granted," said their young nurse firmly. "Go on, Grundy, please!"

"I'm not talking to you two outsiders! Understand that!" said Grundy fiercely. "And if either of you butts in again, you'll know what to expect!"

"Grundy—please!" said Gunn humbly.

"Well?" Grundy barked out the querying "Well?" But he was rather pleased with Gunn's sudden accession of humility. He thought it showed a very proper and becoming frame of mind.

"Do you mind if we blow our noses while you're talking, Grundy?" There was no doubt about the sniggering of George Wilkins this time.

"That's the sort of thing a fellow has to put up with, Miss Marie!" said the great George Alfred bitterly.

"They don't mean any harm, you know. It's only—oh, only their very infantile sense of humour."

"Don't come now, Miss Marie, you wouldn't say that if you'd heard old Linton said to Grundy and Wilky this morning!"

"If you tell that, William Gunn—"

"You'd never be such a cad, Gunn! Dry up!"

Gunn only wanted a little encouragement to tell. But he did not get it. "Don't interrupt Grundy, please, Gunn," said the nurse, smiling so that the reproof should not be too severe.

"Well, I know of a chap who has a whole hoard of gold. He ought to have given it up and taken notes in exchange, oughtn't he?" Grundy went on.

"Yes. It was asked for, and it was his duty to do it."

"Well, he didn't, and he jolly well won't, unless he's forced to. And I'm the chap to make him do it!"

Miss Marie was in some doubt. Grundy was not bright-headed, and there was nothing specially improbable in his half-told story. But the girl remembered the key that he had wanted out of Tom Merry's study, and that was so very curiously mixed up with a dog belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; and she wondered whether—whether—

she did not know quite what Grundy was alluding to. Wilkins, and it seemed to her that they had some clue to the mystery. But she did not question them.

"I should think he would be punished. But having to give up the gold will get him in the ribs, anyway."

"He would have notes instead, of course! I am not sure that there is a penalty. I think so, though."

"He wouldn't like notes—not like he does the gold. You ought to see the old huns counting it over, you'd understand them! But there can't be any doubt he ought to let the Government have it, can there?"

"I should say, not the least."

"And it would serve him right if he didn't get anything at all for it, wouldn't it?"

"But he would, you know. I feel sure it wouldn't be forfeited."

"It jolly well would if a chap—a chap bold enough and brainy enough to put the thing through, like—oh, like me, for instance, collared it, and sent it to Lord George anon—What's the word?"

Gunn and Wilkins maintained a discreet silence. This was getting interest-

ing. Grundy's mighty brain had entertained many wild schemes; and some of them had been lawless enough. But none had been quite so lawless as this. And it was lawless in a manner that commanded some sympathy from Wilkins and Gunn.

They knew Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, and they would not have sorrowed had his hoard been forfeited.

But it was too thick. If old Grundy tried it on, he ran a pretty big chance of getting into prison. He had never thought of that; it was not the sort of detail Grundy would be likely to think of.

"That isn't the sort of thing anyone could do, Grundy," said Marie Rivers.

"But why not? I can't see why not?"

"Because it wouldn't be honest."

"Well, it would be—well, then, patriotic! That's the only word that says what I mean. And be—and he ain't honest, and he's rotten unpatriotic, too!"

"Anyway, you can't do it, so I wouldn't bother about it, if I were you."

"Oh, can't I?" growled Grundy.

Conversation subsided. Grundy dropped off into a fitful dose.

Miss Marie went. She had duties to be attended to. Gunn read, Wilkins yawned, and watched drops of rain chasing each other down the window-panes. It is not an exhilarating amusement. The one or two books might have been better value. Wilkins got tired of it very soon.

"Gunny!" he said.

"Oh, ring off!"

"The Fair Maid of Perth," by means of a little judicious skipping—Gunn had discovered that there were bits in Sir Walter that could be skipped—had begun to grow interesting.

"Unhook your nose from that book, bless you, and listen!"

"Oh, well, there'll be no peace if I don't, I suppose!"

"Gunny, do you think the old ass will try it on?"

"Dunno. He might. It's rather his line. But I tell you straight, Wilky, I'm not going to be in it. Old Grundy means well, and he's patriotic enough, really—I mean, if they let him, he ain't he'd go like a shot, and grumble if they didn't send him to the giddy front in five minutes."

"I know all that. He's as decent an old ass as there is breathing. Everybody knows that. But this is right off the rails! You simply can't collar a chap's nose like that, and reporting it! Don't that seem rather—well, a low dodge? Informing ain't the cheese, you know!"

"I'm not going to inform," spoke the voice of George Alfred. "But that money's jolly well going where it will do some good—that's enough for you two to know. Shut up, and let me think!"

CHAPTER 7.

Grundy On The Committee.

"THAT'S the only way to do it, I think," said Talbot.

The question was that of the manner in which members of the St. Jim's Parliament were to be elected.

There had been no end of discussion on the point. The difficulty was that everyone wanted to stand for election, which left no one to form an electorate, and vote for them.

Talbot's proposal was that the whole school, from the Shell downwards, should form the electorate, everyone having a vote in each election. The number of seats, to start with, was to be limited to twenty. The number of candidates would, therefore, be one hundred and twenty,

and that number could be arrived at by allowing everyone in the Fourth and Shell the right to stand, and limiting the number of seats to be allotted to the fag tribe.

The fag tribe might not be greatly pleased, but that did not matter much. If all of them who liked were allowed to contest an election, there would be danger of getting the House swamped with fags, which the Shell and Fourth were quite sure would never do. For, only in exceptional cases—as when a fellow like Tom Merry was concerned—would a fag vote for anyone else if he had the chance to vote for a fellow-fag.

That would have been against the principles of fagdom.

"There are going to be some grumblers, though!" remarked Tom Merry. "Suppose Figgy is drawn to stand again Kerr, or Lowther against me?"

"The misfortunes of Figgy and Kerr might leave me still a philosopher," admitted Lowther. "But if I were drawn against you, Tommy, I should kick."

"Because you know you'd have no earthly?" asked Manners.

"Not at all, my son! Because Tommy is essential to the Brit—or—to the St. Jim's Constitution, and my inevitable victory over him at the polls might have the most disastrous consequences."

"Rats!" said Blake. "If you and Gussy are kicked, there will be a chance for someone else to get a word in now and then, not unless."

"I cannot say that I wholly approve of Talbot's suggestion, great as my appreciation is of his livings, as a general rule," said Arthur Augustus anxiously. "It is pos—of course, it is very unlikely, but, still, it is pos—that I may be drawn against someone capable of conveying more votes than I."

"Mr. Frinrance!" replied Blake, grinning. "But what's the matter with that, Gustavus? That's all right, you know. That won't worry anyone except you."

"It will wot up the whole blessed bizney, bad Jove!"

"Then you must be a ewas idiot, Blake! Tell me, I pray, what would be the use of a House of Commons without a Pwemial?"

"Depends upon the Premier," said Monty Lowther. "A year or so ago the British House of Commons wouldn't have been much worse off without one."

A loud tap at the door prevented Gussy from answering. The Terrible Three, the four from No. 1 Talbot, Dams as delegate from Study No. 11, Levison from No. 9, and Julian as another representative of the Fourth, were all there. No room was left for anyone else, and no one else was wanted.

"Oh, come in, if you can get in!" said Tom.

George Alfred Grundy appeared. Some days had passed since the three were packed off into sunny To-day they had been let out as cured. They had appeared in the Shell Form-room, but none of those now present had had speech with any of them as yet.

"Oh, Grundy, glad to see you're fit again, old chap!" said Tom cheerily.

These sentiments are shared by all present, and, beyond doubt, by the rest of St. Jim's," said Monty Lowther, rising from his seat, and bowing politely. "Without you, Grundy, we have felt dull and bored. Now you have returned, and the sun shines again!"

"It's raining like one o'clock!" returned Grundy, with a glance out of the window at the dripping eaves in the Close.

"Like a half-past twelve, rather, to be exact," said Lowther, consulting the



Arthur Augustus is "Fluttahad"!

(See Chapter 10.)

clock on the mantelpiece. "But I spoke in the language of metaphor, Grundy."

"You mean you were telling silly lies!" retorted Grundy. "Thanks, Merry. I'm all right again now."

Grundy did not thank Lowther. He did not see that there was any need for doing so.

"Having repeated for duty, hadn't you better clear, Grundy?" asked Clifton Dane.

"Eh?"

"He means go—GO!" explained Lowther, determined to be kind. "But perhaps you don't understand Canadian?"

"Eh?" said Grundy again.

"Doesn't appear to understand anything!" murmured Lowther. "He wasn't quite so bad as this before he went into sunny, was he? I seem to remember that he had occasional gleams of intelligence then. I wish he would display one now. It would relieve my mind no end!"

"The dashed pep you call your mind, Lowther, wants burying!" hooted Grundy.

"There's your gleam, Monty!" said Manners.

"We're holding a meeting, Grundy," remarked Herricks.

"So I see," answered Grundy. "If there's a chair to spare I'll sit down." "But you haven't been asked!" howled Digby.

"Eh? Asked? No need for that, I should think. I've a right to be here, haven't I?"

"I move that Grundy be elected to membership of this committee," said Tom Merry unexpectedly.

Tom may have had in his mind some notion of coming to terms with Grundy about the barn. That was what Manners thought, anyway. He said that he seconded the proposition.

It was rather a surprise for Grundy, but he tried not to let anybody see that it was.

"I move as an amendment, that Grundy be forthwith and immediately,

if not sooner, chucked out on his neck," said Lowther.

"Oh, wally, Lowthab, that is seaweely the cowweed card, in the cirs!"

"Shurrup, Gustavus! I second the amendment," said Digby.

But the amendment had no chance. It would merely be wasting time to put Grundy out, and it might cause a row, which would bring a prefect or a master upon the scene. And there really was no special reason why Grundy should not be on the committee—beyond the fact that he would be quite certain to know better about everything than all the rest. And, as he would not be allowed to play the Dictator, that did not matter very much.

So Grundy, with a scowl at Lowther and Dig, took his place, and within two minutes had quite forgotten that anyone had objected to his taking it.

"That's the scheme, Grundy," said Tom, having briefly explained Talbot's notion. "I suppose you agree with us that it's all right on the whole?" Of course, we may have to change it in some small ways."

"It ain't a bad scheme!" growled Grundy. He had some respect and more than a little liking for Talbot, who treated him with less rudeness than did most of the Shell and Fourth. "I could have thought out a better one, if you'd called me in sooner. But it will do."

"We didn't call you in at all. You butted in!" said Dig.

"You'd better leave it to me to arrange the pairing-off for the elections," Grundy said, disregarding Dig.

"Not going to be any pairing-off," replied Tom. "Don't I tell you lots will be drawn?"

"I don't agree to that," said Grundy. "No one ever expected you to agree with anything!" remarked Lowther.

"I don't agree to all, Merry. Take my case, Frinrance. If I am drawn against

"Anyone but Crouke, Racke, McEllich,
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Tribble, or a few others, your chance would be all up the spout!" put in Lowther.

Tom frowned at him. He was not being at all diplomatic. And it was not fair to drag all the rotters into the discussion as to Grundy's chances. It might be true that his best chance of getting elected would be to find one of them in opposition, but the little ways which prevented Grundy from being quite persona grata with the Lower School generally were very different from the little ways which made those fellows despised.

"I'm not listening to your dashed rot, Lowther!" roared Grundy. "Look here, Merry, suppose I'm drawn against Wilkins? He's knocked into a cocked hat, of course; and I lose one of my chief supporters—not that Wilkins is much use, you know—but there you are. I've drawn against you! That keeps you out, sure as eggs! And I consider that, on the whole, you are one of the chaps who ought not to be left out."

"Kind of you, Grundy—no end!" said Tom. "But I'm prepared to take the risk."

"The thing can't be done that way!" "It's going to be done that way! We've settled it!" said Tom firmly. "You hadn't any right to settle it without me!" hooted Grundy. "I suppose I'm a member of the committee, with as big a claim to an opinion as the next man—what?"

"Yes; but this was settled before you were a member," said Levison. "And you ought to know well enough that Tom Merry only wanted to see that you should come in to pacify you, and the rest of us agreed so that we shouldn't have to waste time in bumping you!"

"You call it a waste of time bumping me!" howled Grundy, not quite sure which part of Levison's speech to object to most strongly. "It's like your rotten check, I must say! —"

"Be easy, Grundy! There are a quite some of us who don't consider it a waste of time, and are prepared to do it at any minute!" Lowther said.

"I'd jolly well like to see you do it!" "Strikes me you will before you've finished!" Blake said.

"Vaus, watah! You weally cannot expect to have everything your own way, Gwunday!"

"Rats to you! I'm not going to stand this. It was like the dashed cheek of you chaps to settle everything before I came! That's always the way. But I won't have it, I tell you straight! This committee is going to recongrat—I mean, recongrat—I mean—"

"It's going to be altered, anyway!" said Tom Merry, decidedly. "We have had enough of this!"

"If you'll kick out Lowther and Levison and start all over—"

"Not so, Grundy! It's your way are going to kick out, if you can't take a hint and go!"

"Try it, that's all!"

"Right-ho!"

A dozen willing hands profaned the sacred person of George Alfred Grundy. He was forced towards the door, which Levison, grinning, held open for his exit. "Yooop! Yaroooool! Oh, chuck it!" "We're going to!" chortled Lowther. "Out it goes!"

And out Grundy went, to land with a mighty thump upon the floor of the passage.

"All right! We'll see! You fellows will be sorry for this!" he roared.

"Yes—I think not!" grinned Blake. "Can the Ethiopian change his spots?" murmured Lowther, as the committee returned to its deliberations.

Well, I don't know that Grundy's

exactly an Ethiopian, but we made him shift, so he must have changed his spot!" replied Levison.

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy On The Job!

"GRUNDY says I'm to ask you for the key of the barn, Merry," said Wilkins.

"Did he say you were to take a thick ear back with you, Wilky?" inquired Manners.

"No, he didn't. And, what's more, you can't give me one, Manners!"

"I think I could," Wilky said. "Come along to the gym, and let's see!"

"No, you don't, old scout!" said Tom Merry. "You're coming to footer practice! We've wasted enough time through this beastly rain, and now it's cleared at last, you can't be spared to hand luxuries to Wilkins!"

"You can consider your left ear as duly indebted to Wilkins," said Lowther.

"All sorted! And Manners can consider himself presented with two black eyes and a thick nose!" answered Wilkins. "Now I'll take the key, and go!"

"You'll go without taking the key, and that's exactly what you expected when you came," said Tom Merry.

"Well, so it is," admitted Wilkins. "But you know what old Grundy is. It's no use arguing with the chap."

Wilkins departed, and informed Grundy of the result of his mission.

Grundy growled at that, and growled again when Wilkins and Gunn said they were going to footer.

But he only growled. He did not try to stop them by force. And when they had gone he strolled out of the gates and down the Rylcombe road to the barn.

It was a day after Grundy's brief membership of the election committee. He had not visited the barn since the night when he and Wilkins and Gunn had all caught bad colds there.

Grundy had not expected Tom Merry to hand over the key to Wilkins—it was merely by way of asserting what he considered his rights that he had sent that faithful henchman along to ask for it.

There was another key which he wanted much more than that one—the key which unlocked the door of the store-room under the barn. But, of course, Mr. Peoper had that, and it would not be of much use to send Wilkins to him.

He found the barn open, and from within it proceeded the noise of carpentering activities.

This rather surprised him, for he had not heard that while he had been in sanny the Lower School generally had taken in hand the task of converting what had been started as a bungalow and finished as a barn into the fit habitation of a legislative assembly.

Planks had been got in and packing cases brought along to cke out any deficiencies. Rows of seats were being constructed, and tools littered the floor.

But the fine morning had given an opportunity for footer practice such as had been unusual of late, and only three amateur carpenters were at work.

They were all of the Third—D'Arcy minor, Levison minor, and Manners minor.

"Hallo, old Grundy!" said Wally; while Binks ran to his saviour and made no end of a fuss of him.

"Don't let me have any of your cheek, D'Arcy minor!" replied the great George Alfred.

"Do you call that cheek?" inquired Wally. "That's only being civil, though I'm hanged if I know why we should be civil to you, anyway!"

"I suppose your majors have sent you down here to get on with the work?"

observed Grundy, into whose head a great scheme had just flashed.

"Then you'd better get a new supposer—that one's so jolly good," said Keggie Manners. "We don't take orders from our majors, any more than we do from other louts in the Shell or Fourth!"

That was so obviously intended for Grundy, that Wally and Frank Levison were surprised he should let it pass. But he did.

"You seem to be pretty hefty at carpentering," remarked the Shell fellow, loading Binks.

All three stared.

"Have you gone and got reformed in sanny, or anything like that, Grundy?" asked Wally.

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"Cause it ain't much like you to say anything civil to a chap!"

"I'm civil enough to those who are civil to me. But I don't stand cheek—not from anyone."

"Oh!"

The three fags were about to resume their interrupted job when Grundy said:

"I wonder whether you three would go down to Rylcombe for me?"

"What for?" asked Wally.

"I—I want you to take a note for me to a chap there," answered Grundy.

What he really wanted was to get them out of the way for half an hour or so. But it would never do to tell them that. And why he had not done so if he ordered them in his usual domineering manner, D'Arcy minor, Levison minor, and Manners minor were independent youths, who feared no one, and yielded obedience to no person unauthorised to exact it.

But it chanced that they were distinctly hard up at that moment, and they knew that stinginess was not one of the great George Alfred's faults.

They looked at one another. No one had warned them not to leave Grundy alone in the barn, and, indeed, the dispute as to the ownership of the building had scarcely reached the fag regions, owing to Grundy's spell in sanny. But for that he would have made so much noise about it by this time that everyone at St. Jim's must have learned of it.

"What is it worth?" asked Wally bluntly. "We don't fag for Shell chaps for nothing, you know."

Grundy considered that there was at least one fellow in the Shell for whom any fag ought to be pleased to fetch and carry on demand. But he did not say so.

"Oh, a bob each!" he replied. "You'll have to wait for an answer to the note."

"That ain't so bad," said Reggie. "You're a heap more decent chap than you look, I must say, Grundy. I'm out!"

And if Wally and Franky ain't, I'll go alone, and take the three bob!"

"No, you jolly well won't!" snapped Wally.

"Not likely!" added Frank. "There's a bit too much of the pi-g about you, young Manners!"

A bob each was not wealth. But the three had not a halfpenny among them at the moment, and this was certainly liberal payment for walking a mile or so.

"Hand over the boblets! We're your men!" said Wally.

"Here you are. But I shall have to write the note first."

Grundy's brain was working with a speed which it was quite unused. There really wasn't anyone in Rylcombe to whom he wanted to write; but he thought of someone to whom he might pen a note with a quickness which surprised himself.

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book,

and scribbled in pencil upon it a pre-emptory demand to Mr. Pepper to hand over to the bearers the agreement concerning the barn which he had signed.

He did not in the least anticipate that Mr. Pepper would do anything of the sort, and he rather hoped that that gentleman would not be at home. If he were, he might argue the matter, and tell the three fags more than it was advisable they should know.

But that had to be risked. Unless they were got out of the way for a little while Grundy would lose a chance which might not recur.

"This is private, but I haven't got an envelope," he said.

"If it's private, that's enough for us," said Wally, with something of the dignity which so distinguished his brother Gussy.

"We shan't look at it, honour bright!" added Frank Levison.

"Honour bright!" chined in Reggie Manners.

"Where's the bounder live?" inquired Wally.

"In the cottage behind the post-office."

"Oh, I know! And suppose he ain't at home?"

"Wait for him a bit. You needn't make yourselves late for dinner, you know," said Grundy graciously.

"We ain't likely to," replied Reggie.

"Shove it into the letter-box or under the door, I suppose," said Wally.

"The fags departed. Binks, though off his chain, did not go with them. Perhaps he preferred Grundy's company to theirs—or he may have had no desire to see his former master again.

As soon as the trio had gone, Grundy began a close inspection of the barn. He went outside first, and round to the back. But the door which gave access to the under part was stout, and its lock was good, and the brickwork near was comparatively new and quite sound.

Grundy made up his mind that he could only get down there through the floor of the barn—which was what he had expected.

No one else was about. If anyone came—well, that must be risked!

He examined the planking of the floor, and chose a spot in a far corner at the back, away from the work in progress. Then he got together a selection of tools, took them to his corner, and proceeded to loosen a couple of boards.

Binks, with one ear cocked knowingly and the other down, sat and watched him. Grundy did not mind Binks, but he did hope no one else would happen along.

He growled a good deal and perspired more over his task, but he got it done in very fair time. Grundy was less of a duffer with carpenter's tools than he was in the playing-fields.

The boards were up, and his way was clear to the place below—and to Pepper's board of gold!

Then he went to the door.

There was no sign of the three fags. There was no sign of anyone else.

Grundy glanced at his watch. He calculated that he had at least ten minutes to spare, and he could not resist the temptation to go down and make sure that the miser's hoard was still there.

"Stay there, Binks!" he said; and the dog made no movement to follow him.

He threw himself into the dark place behind the boards, his head against the boards above, he made his way to the spot where the chest was buried.

Then he lighted a match.

There was no sign of any disturbance of the hard ground. And it seemed only reasonable to suppose that if Mr. Pepper had removed his hoard he would not have

troubled greatly about making everything look just as before in a place where he had no reason to think anyone would go. There would have been loose earth, evidence of digging.

But there was nothing of the sort. The hoard was still there—Grundy felt sure of that.

His mind was quite made up as to what he should do.

George Alfred Grundy was a patriot. He was also a fellow who had a very high opinion indeed of his own judgment.

As a patriot, he felt the hearing of that gold by Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper was wrong—wicked, even!

And as a fellow of judgment and discrimination, of infinite resource and utter fearlessness, he felt that he was the very individual who could best handle the situation—see it that the Government had the gold and that Mr. Pepper received paper money instead. But that detail Grundy was content to leave to the Government. Personally, he had no objection to the principle of confiscation being applied to Mr. Pepper's hoard.

Nothing more could be done now. He would need to make extensive preparations before attempting to remove all that weight of gold. Help would be wanted—that was where Wilkins and Gunn would come in. He must just give them their orders, and stand no silly nonsense from them. Their attitude in fact had made it evident that they did not quite see eye to eye with him.

But that was unnecessary. They had only to do as they were told.

Grundy scrambled up into the barn again. He was surprised to find it so much darker. Binks barked welcome, and jumped up to lick his hands. But he got no notice for the moment.

CHAPTER 9.

An Afternoon In The Barn.

"OLD Grundy was jolly civil for once," remarked Frank Levison, as the three fags made their way to Rylcombe.

"Yes; but he wanted something, that's why," said Wally shrewdly.

"Licks me why he couldn't have sent the letter by post, and saved two-and-eleven, though," said Reggie Manners.

"Two-and-eleven ain't to be sneezed at in these hard times, you know."

"Oh, old Grundy's simply rolling in o'f," Wally replied.

"Three bob's a pretty useful little lot when you're stony, and I'm not quarrelling with him for wanting a special messenger. All the same, it's queer. One of us would have gone for a bob, and the other two would have gone along with him for company."

"I think Grundy wanted us out of the way," Frank said.

"But what for?"

"How should I know, Reggie?"

"Well, you seem to know so much, young Levison!"

"Grundy can't run away with anything, and he wouldn't if he could," Wally opined. "He ain't that sort. Of course, the old ass Gus' done it. He's been the rascal's fancy to that. But I ain't a dogkeeper, and, anyway, Binks can't stay there after the place is fitted up."

Mr. Pepper was not at home when they reached his habitation.

"My hat, what a mouldy old show!" said Wally. "I shan't stay here long, so the faggers had better turn up soon. We've got the boblets in Rylcombe, you bounder!"

That proposition was agreed to, and it had the natural effect of making their wait for Mr. Pepper very short indeed, as they wanted to get away and dispose of their windfall.

There was no letter-box, but they duly

tucked the note under the door before going.

Some need for haste arose on the way back, and Wally volunteered to go along to the barn and lock-up—if necessary—while his chums ran on.

"He ain't here!" murmured Wally, looking round for the great Grundy, and seeing only Binks. "Come here, Binky! He might have chained you up before he mizzled, I think!"

Binks came obediently, and was chained. Then Wally went out, locked the door, and slipped with the key.

Grundy, down below, did not hear him. Thus it was that when Grundy came up again he found the barn dark, which did not matter, and locked—which did!

"Open the door, you silly chump!" roared Grundy.

No one answered. Wally was by this time using brush and comb upon his head at St. Jim's, in great haste, for already the fellows were flung in to dinner.

"Open the door!" roared Grundy. "You may think this is a lark, but I jolly well tell you—Open this door!"

The door remained shut, and Binks began to bark in sympathy with his two-legged friend. Binks did not care about darkness any more than Grundy did.

But it was not chiefly to the darkness that Grundy objected.

"I shall be late for dinner!" he growled. "Pretty nice state of affairs, I must say! I'm hungry, too!"

It began to dawn on him after a while that he would not only be late for dinner, but too late for dinner—which was worse.

Then his brain moved—slowly, for it was not an apparatus of which quick work could be expected—to further consideration of his case.

The day was not a half-holiday. Someone might come along to the barn between dinner and classes; but that was quite an off-chance. The length of the interval was not great enough to allow of doing any work worth mentioning in it.

The fags might remember that they had left him there. But if it was they who had locked him in, they had done so unwittingly, while he was below, and they would naturally think that he had gone away during their absence on his errand.

They would be sure of it, indeed. He was invisible when they looked in—if they had looked in. It might have been another hand which had locked the door. On the whole, their testimony, if required, would tend to prove that he was not in the barn—and he had not been in it when Wally came, but under it.

Anything might have happened to him for all that anyone at St. Jim's could tell. He might have run away—been run over—had a fit—anything! But nothing would matter much if only he could get out in time for classes.

Absence from table in Hall would at worst mean an imposition. Absence from classes would mean a demand for an explanation, and Grundy had a very strong objection to explaining this affair.

What he had to do was to keep cool and think of some way of getting out.

Then he went into the sea. There ought to be lots of ways. The barn was not a dungeon, and no end of fellows had escaped from real dungeons. Gunn, whose taste in reading was for the romantic adventurous, had told Grundy about some of them.

Monte Cristo, for instance. He had himself put in a sack, supposed dead, and was chucked into the sea. Then he just ripped up the sack, and it was all serene—only a bit of swimming to be done.

Grundy could have done that, all right, he was sure.

But there was no sack, no sea, no anyone to carry him away. And if he could

once got outside, the sack all the rest of it would not be needed. So Monte Cristo did not help.

There was a chap named Something-or-other Whatsname, too. The Pope made a prisoner of him in Rome, and he took the screws out of the hinges of his door, and filled the places with wax mixed with rust, and got down walls, and broke his leg, and crawled away, in spite of all. But it took him weeks to attend to those hinges, and he broke his leg, after all, and that would not suit Grundy, with an urgent patriotic scheme in hand.

So Benvenuto Cellini really wasn't any more help than Monte Cristo!

And then there was the Earl of Nithsdale, who was by the way behind for getting mixed up in some rebellion or other. His wife came to see him in the Tower, and he went out in her clothes. But Grundy had no wife, and was not in the Tower, and wouldn't have been seen in female dresses for anything.

So that was no go again!

It will be gathered that imprisonment was doing something for Grundy. It was making him think. As a rule, he only thought he thought—which is a slightly different matter.

And now he began to think to more purpose.

It dawned upon him that the problem he had to consider was that of escape from this barn, not from the Chateau d'If, or the Castle of San Angelo, or the Tower of London.

"Silly ass, Gunny!" he said to himself. "Sticks his blessed nose into books about chaps in prison—why, there was one in that 'Fair Girl of Dundee,' or whatever it was he was reading in sunny—he told us the yarn—a Scottish prince—they starved him, the rotters! I bet they jolly well wouldn't have starved me! I'd have got out somehow. And I'm going to get out of this. Let's have a look round. Come on, Binks!"

Binks was released from the chain, and gladly accompanied Grundy on a tour of inspection.

The lock was altogether too much for Grundy's attempts at forcing it. He was not in dead earnest as to those attempts, either, for he still hoped to get hold of the key, and take possession of the barn—though he had begun to think that he would have had more than enough of the place pretty soon.

The walls were quite solid. The place underneath was no use at all. It was just as hard to get out of there as out of the barn.

But there were the windows!

When Grundy thought of them, he would have patted himself on the back had the operation been anatomically feasible. Most fellows would have thought of them at once, even though they were obscured by the flaps which covered them from outside. And had not Grundy seen Mr. Pepper lift one of those flaps to drop in the bit of poisoned meat which had been designed to make an end of Binks?

But Grundy was sure that no one else—hardly anyone, at least—in his position would have been struck with so bright an idea. It was very like a stroke of genius!

There were two windows—big ones. They were high up in the walls, quite out of Grundy's reach.

But they had to be reached, and Grundy was not long in thinking out a way.

He took one of the planks which the amateur carpenters had got in, and planted it against a wall. It reached to just below the window at the front. But it would not stay in place; it slipped either from the wall or at the foot. And as it was patently impossible that Grundy

should stand and hold it, and yet at the same time climb up it, some more hard thinking had to be done.

The result was that Grundy, unheeding the damage done to the floor, whittled and chipped in it a resting-place for the end of the plank, and thus succeeded in getting it fairly firmly fixed.

By this time his eyes had got accustomed to the gloom, which was not really darkness, and he could see very well.

Now he had to swarm up the plank to the window. It sounds easy, but Grundy did not find it so.

Gymnastics was not his forte. Three times he slid down when very near the top. When at last he managed to grip the ledge of the window, he was very proud, very dusty, and quite irrationally proud of his feat.

Time had flown, and if he was to be at St. Jim's in time for classes he would have to hurry up. Dinner was irrevocably lost; but he could make up for that at tea-table.

Perhaps the need for more haste helped to make him clumsier than usual. But that was unnecessary, for the great George Alfred was a clumsy chap at best.

He was in his shirt-sleeves now, and those sleeves had suffered by contact with the dust of the walls. His face was begrimed, and the perspiration which had run down it had made channels in the grime. Altogether his grin of triumph might have frightened anyone who saw it. But no one did see it.

And he grinned it too soon.

Anyone else would have noticed the fact that the flap was fastened by a wooden clamp. But Grundy had seen Pepper pull up the other window from outside, and he took it that one had only to push this one up from inside. That one should be fastened when the other was not simply did not occur to him.

He sighed, and strained with all his strength, which was more than the strength of most men.

"Hang the thing!" he muttered. "The other went up easily enough. But I can't be bothered with going to that now. This is bound to slip if only a chap pushes hard enough!"

He shoved again, forgetting completely his very precarious position astride the plank, holding on by the muscles of his thighs.

The plank slid.

"Yaroooh!" howled Grundy as he struck the floor with a mighty whack.

Then he lay very still, and Binks came and sniffed at his face, and whined and yelped, and licked him again and again, but he got no reply!

CHAPTER 10.

Arthur Augustus Sees An Apparition!

"WHERE is Grundy?"

It was Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, who asked that question.

No one could answer it.

Grundy's absence from Hell had been noticed, of course. But no one had thought much about it. Fellows did miss dinner once in a way, and paid the penalty, unless the excuse offered was good enough; and there was an end of it.

After dinner everybody but Wilkins and Gunn forgot all about Grundy. And even those two did not worry.

But they were thoughtful now. This was queer, to say the least of it. Gunn, who had more imagination than either of his chums, wondered whether Grundy had gone off to carry out his grand scheme on his own, and had encountered the miser while trying—with the best possible motives, of course—to lift the miser's board.

If that had happened—well, anything might have come of it!

Grundy was a hefty chap, stronger than Pepper probably. But Pepper might carry concealed weapons. Gunn thought it quite likely.

He whispered his doubts to Wilkins. "Rot," said Wilkins. "It wouldn't go in the daytime anyhow."

"Wilkins and Gunn, you are whispering together!" snapped Mr. Linton. "You are more likely than anyone else present to have information as to Grundy's whereabouts. Do you know anything—and, if so, what?"

"We don't know anything, sir," replied Wilkins, with just the correct amount of injured innocence. "We haven't seen Grundy since just after morning classes."

"Did he say then where he was going?" asked the Form-master.

Gunn answered that, perceiving, more quickly than Wilkins did, that it was best not to say anything about the barn, since to do so would involve lengthy explanations. Mr. Linton knew nothing about the projected parliament for St. Jim's, and might not approve of it.

"Along the Rylecombe road, sir," said Gunn.

"H'm! This kind of thing cannot be tolerated. Unless Grundy can proffer a better excuse than I have any reason for anticipating, he will be punished severely for his absence."

Gunn passed the rest of the afternoon in a nervous state, obsessed by visions of Grundy as the victim of Mr. Pepper. And Wilkins did not feel too bappy. It was really mysterious, at best.

The rest merely wondered. They had no knowledge of the miser's hoard, or of Grundy's great scheme to apply it to the benefit of the nation.

Half-past four came. Classes were dismissed, and there was a great trampling of feet in the Form-room passage. But Grundy had not appeared.

"Tell Grundy that he is to report himself to me immediately on his return," Wilkins, Mr. Linton had said. "If he is not back within an hour, perhaps you had better remind me of his absence. It is unlikely that anything serious has happened to him; but, of course, it is always possible."

That speech did not tend to make Gunn and Wilkins any easier in mind. They spent the next ten minutes in wandering all over St. Jim's, inquiring whether anyone had seen Grundy since their eyes had last been gladdened by the sight of his rugged visage and burly form—or words more or less to that effect.

And at last they came upon the three fags.

"We left him in the barn," said Reggie, grinning. "You must have locked him in, Wally."

"Not jolly well likely!" retorted "A'Arcy mmoor. "He wasn't there when I locked up—I could take my oath of that."

"What did you leave him there for?" asked Gunn.

"Well, I like that!" said Wally hotly. "We ain't Grundy's keepers, are we? You two chums may be. He needs looking after. But it ain't our bizney to look after him."

"I say, though, what about that note he sent you with?" suggested Curly Gibson. The rest of the Wally brigade had heard about the stroke of luck the three had had, and had come in for a few of the chocolate caramels in which one of the shillings had been laid out.

"What note was that?" asked Gunn quickly.

"To a fellow named Pepper, who

lives behind the post-office at Rylcombe," answered Frank Levison.

"My hat!" gasped Gunn, staring at Wilkins.

Gunn had gone quite pale. This seemed like a confirmation of his worst fears.

"Silly fathead!" growled Wilkins. "Why should—"

"Oh, shut up! You don't want to let these kids know anything, do you? But I'll bet— Oh, get your bike and come along!"

Gunn and Wilkins rushed for the bike-shed. The fags naturally followed them. Something was up, that was pretty certain, and the fags wanted to know what it was.

Meanwhile, directly the Fourth were dismissed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, not even aware that Grundy was still absent, had unlocked the key of the barn, and had gone off to see Binks.

The question of what to do with Binks was exercising Gussy's noble mind. The barn could not be regarded as anything but a temporary habitation for the ferrier, of course. It was not good for him to spend so many hours in partial darkness and without company, Gussy was sure.

As he drew near he heard the whining and yelping of Binks.

"Poor fellow!" he said to himself. "I must weally see about findin' another place for him. Pewwaps the old soldiah, who was good enough to take charge of Figgy's Spot, would consent to give him house-room. But I am not suah how Binks and Spot would get on togethah."

Now the note of Binks had changed. He was yelping with evident delight.

"He knows my footstep," said Gussy to himself.

But that fact—if it was a fact—did not account for the joy of Binks.

It was for joy at seeing Grundy show signs of life after lying for fully two hours as if dead that Binks yelped.

The key grated in the lock. Grundy struggled to his feet in a dazed, uncertain way.

He did not know where he was or what had happened to him. He would hardly have known himself, had a mirror been available.

And Arthur Augustus did not know him. Out of the darkness of the barn, as the door swung open, there burst upon Gussy a horrible apparition; big, black of face, terrifying!

Arthur Augustus had as much pluck as most, but he was fairly taken aback. "Yooooop! Owl! Yow!" he yelled, drawing back.

"So it was you, was it?" hooted the apparition, brushing him aside with a strong arm. And the voice of the apparition was the voice of George Alfred Grundy!

"Oh! weally! Upon my soul, Gwunday, you put me quite in a flutah! My heart is beatin' nineteen to the dozen, I decaah! Stop! Gwunday! I say, Gwunday, stop!"

But Grundy rushed on.

He was in desperate haste to get to the school in time for classes. He had not the slightest idea that he had been lying on the floor of the barn for over two hours; and he still fondly imagined that speed might save him.

Any other fellow, even if he had not thought of looking at his watch, would have seen by the sun that it was past four o'clock. But Grundy paid no heed to anything like that. He just bolted blindly.

"My hat! Here he is!"

"What in the wide world has he been doing to himself?"

The voice were those of Gunn and Wilkins. The two jumped off their bikes

at the gate of the field as Grundy rushed up.

"Out of the way, you silly ass! I shall be late for classes!" pulled Grundy.

"Not likely! There ain't any more afternoon classes till Thursday," said Wilkins.

"Wha-a-at? What day's this, then?"

"Tuesday, of course. I say, Grundy, where have you been all this time?"

"All which true? What time is it, you silly fathead?"

"Close on five," replied Gunn.

Grundy groaned and gasped. He put his hand to his forehead in a way that was almost pathetic. He really could not understand.

Arthur Augustus came hurrying up, with Binks capering beside him. "Old Gwunday was locked up in the barn, dear boys," he said.

"Then it was your minger who locked him in. But young Wally swears he wasn't there," said Wilkins.

"He wasn't, either," spoke the voice of Wally, who had just come up, with half-a-dozen of the fag tribe behind him.

"He wasn't, Wally—"

"Yes! I tell you! I looked all round before I looked up, and there wasn't the ghost of a sign of him."

"Talkin' about ghosts, I ask your pardon if I behaved with any lack of politeness to you a few moments ago, Gwunday," said the swell of the Fourth. "I weally took you for—for an awful apparition. You quite frightened me."

"Ugh! I must say you're easily scared, D'Arcy!" granted Grundy.

"My hat! I dunno, though. Old Grundy would have scared me," confessed Curly Gibson frankly.

"I ain't sure he wouldn't have done me," said Wilkins. "Do you know what you look like, Grundy?"

"Look like? What should I look like? Like myself, I suppose!" snapped Grundy.

"No. Worse even than that—heaps worse!" answered Reggie Manners.

"I'll cuff your head, young Manners! I'm not going to stand—"

"Better not stand there any longer," struck in Gunn. "Linton's in a bit of a hurry to see you, you know. You've cut afternoon classes, and the old boy don't quite cotton to that kind of thing."

Grundy's hand went to his forehead again. Then it passed to the back of his head, and found a large and very painful bump. Grundy began to understand.

"Here, I'll take your bike, Wilky," he said. "I must have fallen down in the barn and—and fainted or something! Can't think what made me do it."

Wilkins did not refuse to lend his bike. It was no use to refuse, because Grundy would have taken it anyway.

Grundy rode headlong for St. Jim's, and then rode with him.

"What on earth—" began Gunn. "I ain't going to explain anything—not yet!" snapped Grundy.

"You'll have to explain to Linton!"

"I jolly well sha'n't!"

"Look here, old chap, don't be a pig-headed mule! There will be no end of a rizzly row—"

"You think! I've more important things to think about than any silly row by a silly Form-master at a dashed silly school!"

That was Grundy the patriot speaking, and Gunn understood, though Wilkins might have failed to do so.

"You'll have to tell Linton some yarn, old chap, unless—"

"If you mean some dashed lie, that only shows you don't know me, William Gunn!"

They raced up to the gates, dismounted, and ran their bikes across the

"Where are you going, Grundy?" asked Gunn.

"To clean myself up, of course!"

"But Linton said—"

"Hang Linton! Do you think I'm going to show myself to him like that?"

For, now Grundy had seen himself in a mirror, and wild horses would not have dragged him before Mr. Linton in that plight.

Twenty minutes, and Gunn's help, given willingly, though accepted with grudging, made a difference. Grundy marched off to interview the Shell Form-master.

Gunn and Wilkins—the latter having now returned—hung about waiting for him. But when they next saw him he was being escorted by Mr. Linton to the Housemaster's study.

"He won't tell Linton, and he's being taken to Raitlon to have the screw put on," said Gunn.

"Well, if I knew old Grundy, he won't tell Raitlon either. And that means he'll jolly well get it in the griddy neck. But they won't sack him, at least, I don't think so. Raitlon knows old Grundy. If the old ass is ever so obstinate, it ain't because he ain't straight. That will count."

Perhaps it did. Probably it did, for it was true that Mr. Raitlon knew from old how set and obstinate George Alfred Grundy could be, with the best possible intentions.

"Did you tell them?" asked Gunn, in an eager whisper, as Grundy came along the corridor with a sullen gleam in his eyes, and his face very red.

"Of course, I didn't! I'd made up my mind not to. Didn't I say so?"

"Yes, but—"

"There's no 'but' about it, William Gunn!"

"What have you got?" inquired Wilkins.

"Eh? Got? Oh, a thousand lines of Virgil, and a fortnight's gating. But I don't care!"

"Of course, you'll drop that silly wheeze now? About Pepper's gold, I mean?"

"Not jolly well likely!" snapped Grundy.

And he meant it—they could see that. There was no room for argument.

Whatever his faults, old Grundy was a stickler!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"PEPPER'S GOLD!" by Martin Clifford.)

NOTICES.

Football—Matches Wanted by—

WEMTOWN ATHLETIC (late Dunwoe Athletic).—15.—A. Brown, 69, Hows Street, Kingsland Road, E. 2.

BIRKENHEAD NORTH END ATHLETIC—16—7 mile radius.—Michael Halligan, 73, Duke Street, Birkenhead.

ST. HUGH'S JUNIORS—15-16.—Gerald O'Neill, 168, Earle Road, Wavertree, Liverpool.

AVONDALE—16—10 mile radius—players also wanted.—A. Carter, 19, Gibson Square, Islington, N.

ST. GEORGE'S ROAD UNITED—15—4 mile radius.—George H. Elam, 100, St. George's Road, Fenchurch, E. 3.

WIGSTON JUNIORS—16—5 mile radius.—A. Franklin, 27, Burgess Street, Wigston Magna, near Leicester.

PATRY OFFICE—164—Private ground, Lloyd Park, Walthamstow.—E. R. Brooks, 25, Lloyd Park Buildings, W. C. 2.

SEAVIEW F.A.—15—5 mile radius.—T. Eginton, 12, Liscard Crescent, Wallasey.

TROENHILL ATHLETIC—16—15 mile radius.—C. Halstead, 187, Court Terrace, Slaitwhard Road, Thornhill, Dewsbury.

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THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA

Our Great New Serial Story.



NEW READERS START HERE.

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA are PHILIP and PHILIPPA DERWENT, known to their friends as FLIP and FLAP. They have with them a remarkable cockatoo, whose name is COCKY. Flip takes the bird to Highcliffe, to which school he is bound, while Flap goes to Cliff House. They fall in on the way with some of the Highcliffe nuts, and GADSBY forces a quarrel on Flip, and is well thrashed. The Colonial boy, however, makes friends with the other nuts, and especially with PONSOMBY, TUNSTALL, and MERTON. But VAVASOUR and MONSIEUR MINOR are less disposed to like him, and MR. MOBS is not taken to him at all. Flap meets MARJORIE HAZELDEN, PHYLLIS HOWELL and CLARA TRAVELIN, of Cliff House, and finds chums in them. She gets to know that PETER HAZELDEN, of Greyfriars, Marjorie's brother, is in some trouble—he is, in fact, in debt to Ponsomby, with whom he has been gambling during the holidays. She writes to her brother, warning him against Ponsomby, and Flip does not like it. By the contrivance of Gadsby, Ponsomby sees the letter, but does not appear to mind. He keeps it. Merton and Tunstall go along to Cliff House with a message from Flip to Flap, and play hockey with the girls. Ponsomby and Vavassour turn up, but the game stops on their arrival. Ponsomby gets Langley, the Highcliffe captain, to give Flip a place in the school foter eleven, with a view to depriving Courtenay's team of his help. Some of the nuts get into scrap with the Famous Five of Greyfriars, and Flip, Merton, and Tunstall come to their rescue. The upshot is that Flip fights and beats Bullpunch, and has an inconclusive combat with Bob Cherry. Ponsomby arranges a five-a-side battle—the nuts versus Harry Wharton & Co. SQUIFF (otherwise S. Q. I. FIELD) goes over to Highcliffe to settle details, and Hazeldene rides with him. Hazel plays banker with Gadsby and Vavassour in the study shared by Flip, Merton, and Tunstall, who are with Ponsomby at the time.

(Now read on.)

Hazel Agrees.

"I MUST say you're makin' pretty free with our quarters, by Jupiter!" remarked Merton, sniffing in a marked way.

"Oh that's all right, old man!" said Gadsby. "You fellows don't mind a whiff or two of smoke—what?"

"There's more than a whiff or two here," said Flip, looking hard at Hazeldene.

He looked hard at Hazel because he did not know him, and yet felt that he ought to. It was Hazel's likeness to Marjorie that puzzled him. Flip had not seen much of Marjorie as yet, but he remembered her very well.

Not quite well enough to place Hazel at once, however. And so he gave Hazel what Hazel took for a hostile stare.

The Greyfriars junior's nerves were jangled, and at his coolest he was not specially tactful.

"No need to stare at me!" he said irritably. "These fellows said you wouldn't any of you mind. If you think it's an intrusion, come them, now. And I haven't interfered with your confounded bird, though I don't mind owning I felt inclined to."

"I don't see why you should," answered Flip gravely and courteously enough, though he felt nettled. "That wouldn't be quite the thing for a guest to do, would it? I didn't intend to stare, either. It was only that I thought I ought to know you, but I couldn't remember who you were."

"Oh, beg pardon!" said Tunstall. "Wasn't aware you were strangers. Derwent—Hazeldene of the Greyfriars, Remeny."

"I know now," said Flip. "It was of your sister you reminded me."

Nothing was better calculated to make the uncertain temper of Peter Hazeldene flare up than the mention of Marjorie at that moment.

Marjorie hated and dreaded his association with these Highcliffe fellows. Probably this chap knew that from his sister, Hazel thought. It looked like it, anyway.

"Oh, keep my sister's name out of it!" he said unpleasantly.

Flip gave him one flashing look, then turned his back.

Hazel's weak, handsome face flushed redly. Contempt always bit him hard.

Vavassour sniggered, and Tunstall caught him by the shoulder and swung him round.

"There's the door," he said. "Can you take a hint, Vav?"

"No!" said Merton. "Anyone might think you were waxy about our usin' your study for a little game!" growled Gadsby. "You were occupying ours, y'know; so it's six of one and half a dozen of the other."

"We've come out of it now, so—well, perhaps you're quicker than Vav at takin' hints," Gadsby, replied Tunstall.

"Oh, if you want us to go—"

"That's the idea—oh, Merton? We're going to have tea, you know. Sorry, but we can't ask you fellows to stay."

"The thing ain't worth makin' a fuss about, by Jupiter!" said Merton. "But if you want my opinion, Hazeldene might be a little more civil and a little less snappish."

Flip turned.

"Oh, if you any more, old chap," he said. "I didn't intend to give Hazeldene any offence, and I don't understand why he took it as he did; but it really ain't worth talkin' about."

Gadsby, Vavassour, and Hazel went out together.

"That's just that bouncer's high an' mighty way," Hazel, said Gadsby, in the passage. "If anyone ventured to make remarks about his sister the fat would be in the fire in a moment; but it's another giddy pair of boots when it's yours, of course. An' you can't mention his name."

"Oh, ring off!" snapped Hazel. "I don't believe the chap really meant any harm."

"Hazel can take a snub without gettin' his back up about it, you know, Gaddy," said Vavassour.

"Who's been snubbed?" demanded Hazel fiercely.

"By nobody—nobody in the wide, wide world, of course," Gadsby answered, with a chuckle. "Vav or I might have fancied we'd been if a chap had turned his back on us as that fellow did. He turned his on you; but it's better to take these things smilin'. Keep on smilin', Hazel, old sport. It suits your face, by gad!"

But Hazel's face at that moment wore but a faint, smiling aspect. The sneers of these two had aroused fresh all that was

worst in him, and he was full of resentment. Gadsby touched Vavassour's arm, and whispered in his ear:

"Not another syllable! I fancy we've landed the fish!"

Hazel's face cleared as he entered the study where the great Pon awaited him. Through Gadsby's timely loan he was able to meet Pon without apology.

"How do, Pon?" he said. "Got any use for a couple of pictures of the Houses of Parliament?"

And he threw down the two pound notes.

"Eh? Oh, good—doo-doo good!" said Pon. "You're quite a wit, Hazel, by gad! But there was really no hurry, you know, old chap. Don't hand these over if you're going to miss them."

Hazel did not in the least believe that speech genuine.

"Oh, I sha'n't miss them, as far as that goes!" he said airily. "Sorry I can't settle up in full to-day. But I won't be long, I promise you. Debts of honour must be paid, of course."

"It's all right—quite all right!" said Pon, putting the two notes into his elegant Russia leather pocket-book. "Stay an' have tea, Hazel!"

"No; I must be going," replied the Greyfriars junior. "Has Squiff gone?"

"No. He's takin' tea among the halces," Pon, said, grinning.

"Eh? I don't understand."

"Our saintly brigade, y'know—Clare an' me—"

"Can't say I have."

"They say he's begun to sprout wings in the hole, can't say I'm surprised. He's too dashed good to live, Clare is!"

"An' it would suit your book very well if he gave it up—eh, Pon?" said Gadsby.

"Oh, not at all! (Clare's mother to me, only I'm not keen on dashed angels—they ain't my sort. T-a-t-a, Hazel, if you must go!")

Vavassour and Gadsby went down with Hazel. He did not look for Squiff. He did not particularly care for riding back with Squiff. But Hazel was not fond of his own company.

"Look here, old chap, it wouldn't be half a bad wheeze to play that wretched cockatoo a trick," said Gadsby.

"It's a bit waxy," said Hazel. "But I don't mind sellin' you Derwent's airs and graces 'don't suit me; and I should like to take him down a peg."

"Oh, dash it, easy enough to do that!" repeated Gadsby.

"How? I don't see how Vav's precious, potty plot for taking the cockatoo to Cliff House is going to do it."

"What do you mean?"

"The great five-a-side battle is fixed for to-morrow afternoon," Gadsby said slowly. "If the bird is sold, it'll be sold after dinner to-morrow. Derwent would scratch the engagement. He'd be off after his beloved Cocky, an' everyone might wait till the dashed bird was found, by gad!"

"I don't see much in that," answered Hazel. "You know well enough, Gaddy, that your five haven't the ghost of a chance against ours. I reckon your best man, I suppose, but I reckon Bob Cherry and Wharton and Bull are all at least as good as he is. I'm

rather looking forward to seeing him put through it."

"But there's more in it than that, Courtney wants Derwent to play for the Form team against St. Jude's to-morrow. If he don't turn up to time for the fight Pon will imagine he's turned it up for the footer, said Gadsby."

"He might if he was deaf and blind and dumb," said Hazel suspiciously. "Not unless I should think."

"That would be kinder over to St. Jude's to play. What's to hinder us from playing? He's changed his mind 'n' gone with them, by gad! That's as easy as fallin' off a form."

"It was undoubtedly as easy for Gadsby to tell her as to fall off a form, but I could not see the use of this particular departure from the truth."

"Pon would find out afterwards," he said. "There would be a dashed row between them first, though."

"It's you Pon would jump on, Gaddy." "Not likely! We've only to say we made a mistake over a misformed 'n' an ill varden."

"Well, I don't see what good it would be for me to make a row between Pon and Derwent," Hazel said obstinately.

"You don't want to play in the siddy place, do you? You can see too much of the chap. But any one can see Pon's little game. Cliff House—that's the name of it, by gad!"

"Now the right hand to lead, and I have explained why he wanted to keep Marjorie and the nuts apart. It may have been partly because the nuts knew too much about his little ways. Well, Hazel confessed to his sister—which was always when he needed help from her—he never confessed fully. And the Greyfriars fellows did not tell tales. The nuts were not to be trusted."

"And there were lots of things they might let out incautiously if they established a friendly row with Marjorie and the rest, as Harry Wharton & Co. had done since they were out."

"And partly, no doubt, it was a better feeling for with all his weakness Peter Hazeldene was not bad at heart. He hated the notion of a public scolding meant for Gadsby and their set."

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply.

"Haven't you heard about the hockey fracas?"

Vavasour opened his mouth to speak, but shut it again in haste.

"It was not for him to spoil Gadsby's lies by telling out the truth."

Merton and Tunstall had wandered over to Cliff House again, and had been allowed to keep goal, one on each side, for the girls.

"They had told Flip about it, and he had sent his cousin to see if there was a pretty sort of amusement, and they would be much better employed at footer. Moreover, they would get in the neck if Miss Primrose caught them. No, he said, they were not to go; but if they were prepared to risk it he didn't see that it was any affair of his."

But Hazel was not thinking of Merton and Tunstall. Gadsby's words occurred up in his mind. The case of Pon and the nuts, of Monson and Vavasour being taken over a siddy house by Derwent—who, as having a girl here, was good in the same privileged position as Hazel himself—to play hockey with the girls.

"That was exactly what Gadsby meant him to imagine."

And Hazel did not like it.

"That, too, was exactly what Gadsby wanted."

Gadsby himself had not been to Cliff House. Why had not he? Flip he had not seen. He had not seen his sister since he had parted from her at the station, though he was beginning to think it was time he looked her up.

And when Pon and Vavasour had gone, they had only spoiled the game for Merton and Tunstall. The Cliff House girls were not keen on hockey any more. They had, though, those good-looking fellows; and there might be some among the Cliff House brigade who were not so bad as they looked.

Miss Primrose will jolly soon put a stop to that sort of thing," said Hazel uneasily.

"What do you mean? It's you, said Gadsby. It might be good for giddy necks who've been brought to know. There isn't a window she's likely to go to that looks over the field. An' plays. Those two young ones there now who they're a single one of 'em, they're not to be supposed or farm labourers or some bally rot of that sort."

"I don't want to be in a know better" snapped Hazel. "I'm not saying there's any real harm in it—I'm not a straitlaced ass. But it will

get the girls into a row sooner or later—bound to be. He ought to see that."

"What can you expect from a Colonial bouncer?" returned Gadsby. "They can't look at things the way a chap of breeding does. They'll like you or me or Vay here, or a bouncer—ed, I call him! An' Brown—an' Delamy—there are two more of them for you."

At heart, Hazel had a good deal more respect for the Three Colonials—as Greyfriars sometimes called them—than he had for any of Gadsby or Vavasour. But he did not say so.

"Look here! Oh, hang it all, I don't see how that silly scheme with the bird is going to help," he said.

"Anyway, it's one up against Derwent," said Gadsby cunningly. "Look here, Hazel, old man, I don't want you to be grateful or any such foolish rot, by gad! But you can't deny the fact you've a leg on today, 'n' I've come to do as much again—for a pal, y'know."

"It was a little better than a belief. But Hazel did not say it that way. He recognized the fact that he was under an obligation to this fellow, and he felt very sore with Flip Derwent—that was all.

"After all, it's no more than a tape. What do you want me to do?"

Gadsby proceeded to explain. Vavasour was a shrewd man, but Gadsby had taken it over, and now he had all the details out and dried, though he had been talking about it for some time. Vavasour considered, and had no time to think.

Bunter Butts in.

PETER HAZELDENE lingered outside the Higglefife walls, wishing himself somewhere else—almost anywhere else—in fact.

It was the day fixed for the fight of five against five—the day after Hazel had borrowed from Gadsby, and agreed to take the money to money Flip Derwent by abducting Coeky.

Gadsby had thought out all the details. Hazel was not asked to use his brains; and, indeed, Hazel had no great talent for plotting of this sort.

He waited now until Gadsby or Vavasour—but Vavasour was hardly likely to take the time to come along and lower Coeky's cage over the wall, as he had been arranged. And fifty yards away there also waited a tradesman's boy from Courtfield, with a cart and bicycle.

But the boy was to take Coeky, Hazel following on his bike. For Hazel, himself, to attempt getting the big cage from Higglefife to Cliff House in broad daylight would be worse than a walk would be certainly be seen. But it would go into the carrier, and Gadsby had fixed up with the boy, whom Hazel did not know.

But the boy was to take him now, and did not like the look of him.

"Couldn't I expect any decent kid to be kept on doing Gaddy's dirty errands, though?" he muttered to himself. "But I wish I hadn't touched this rotten dodge."

For it had just occurred to Hazel that he also was lowering himself to the part of a schemer in Gadsby's schemes.

He looked at his watch.

"If they don't jolly soon show up I'll chuck it," he told himself.

But he had a warning that he might have to wait some time. It was impossible for Gadsby and Vavasour to do anything until the coast was clear—that is to say, until the school boys and Tunstall were outside the school buildings. They were now going to risk being caught in the abduction of Coeky.

Flip never did stay indoors when he could be out, unless the weather was very bad; indeed, though, and Merton and Tunstall had fallen into his ways to some extent. So, as the schemers would get their money, Hazel was from his lurking-place Hazel saw Pomsonby, Drury, and Monson stroll out along the side of the school buildings.

A little later Flip and Merton and Tunstall came out of the school, took the Pegs drive. But Hazel did not see them.

There came a low whistle from the inside of the wall.

Hazel answered it.

"That you, Hazel?" sounded Gadsby's voice.

"Yes. Got the thing, Gaddy?"

"Oh, rather. Whistle that young cad from Courtfield up, and I'll put it over."

"Hurry up. Suppose someone came along and spotted you," replied Gadsby nervously. The whistle he gave to warn the waiting boy was distinctly tremulous.

"I'm on my way," said Gadsby. "There's a good cover this side of the secluded corner, by gad! Anybody along the road? Just shuck behind the hedge if you see anybody."

"Nuts! But the boy. He's here now," said Hazel.

Two seconds later the face of Gadsby appeared over the top of the wall. He grinned as he saw Hazel. The wince-faced boy with his carrier, tucked up behind, too. But Hazel did not feel like grinning.

Gadsby pulled up by a rope a big parcel enveloped in brown paper. No one who had not got a clue to the plot and had suspected it of containing a bird-cage. The boy from Courtfield had not been told what he was to take. He stared at the parcel now. Whatever its contents might be, he was tolerably certain that there was something underhand about the whole business. But he did not like it any the less for that. He was an uneducated man, but he had a natural heart towards ways that are dark, and he would be done more than this for the half-sovereign Gadsby had promised him.

"The parcel is covered. Hazel snatched at it. From inside came the voice of a cock at it.

"Here, I say! Don't jolly well jiggle so?" said Coeky.

"Is there a kid in there?" asked Master Gebazi Gittins, the boy from Courtfield.

"It's not a kid. It's only a bird," replied Hazel hastily. "You just mind your own business! It's nothing to do with you what it is; you're only paid to carry it."

A bird—an' a toker! Like that?" said Gebazi, squinting his head.

"Didn't you ever hear a bird talk?" snarred Hazel.

"Yes, I did then. A mate of mine 'nd a jacker once—a rare one 'w were, too. But if there's any more 'w took in the bird, he'll be no more, that's another five bob up your shirt, Mr. Gaddy. You didn't tell me as there was anything that sort of."

"Flip!" said Coeky shrilly. "Uncover Coeky, Flip!"

"Oh, hang it, someone will be hearing the beast!" said Hazel, in alarm.

"It's all right, Gittins—you shall have the other five bob, 'n' you'll take in the bird. It's all that the talkin' matters to you, by gad! Mind you don't do any dashed talkin', that's all!"

"I sha'n't say no think to nobody," answered Gebazi, taking the parcel from Hazel's hands, and moving towards his bike.

"I say, Hazel, old chap, what are you after here?"

Gadsby dropped from the wall. Hazel was groned in anguish of spirit. "There was scarcely anyone he would not rather have seen at that moment than Billy Bunter."

That was his first thought. His second was different.

After all, it was not so bad as it might have been. Bunter could be bribed; and Gadsby appeared for once in a way to be liberal about bribing. It was rather unlike Gadsby, but he had a plan.

But Gadsby had disappeared, and it was not even certain that Bunter had seen him. And Hazel had no cash to use for bribing purposes.

Billy Bunter rolled off his bike—or, rather, off Lord Maveverer's bike, which he had borrowed—without saying anything about it to the carrier. He knew that Manly disliked being awakened from his doze to answer questions, and was by no means sure that the reply would have been in the affirmative had the question been put.

"Oh, so away," growled Hazel. "I don't want you!"

"What's in that parcel?" asked Bunter. "Tuck of some bird. But why are you fetching tuck from Higglefife?"

"I'm not fetching tuck-it ain't tuck, you silly fat idiot!"

"Oh, jolly Hazel, I'm accustomed to more civility than that—especially from a fellow who are doing things that they wouldn't like known! What are you grinning at, you cheeky young swain?"

"This was Master Gittins, who was probably about Bunter's own age, but wizen and undersized. Gebazi would have been lost in Bunter's clothes.

"At such a time as this and the Courtfield youth, with more candour than politeness. 'My sam, if ever I see such a fat one afore in all my puff! Come to think on it, I've seen you

In Courtfield, but not close to, like this 'Cec. Lumme, you fair take care!

"If you are not more careful, my lad, I shall be forced to give you a thrashing," said Hazell, but he might as well have spoken to the wall, for he had no more to say.

"Come now!" said Hazell, snarling up. "Stop this silly rot," snapped Hazel. "You chaps, not that you are, but you are to be careful. And you dear old Bunter, unless you jolly well want a thump ear."

Bunter ignored the threat. "Hazel, really, I do not think that's Derwent's cockade," he said. "What are you going to do with Derwent's cockade, hazel? The fellow's a friend of mine—I've lent him money before now—and, of course, I shall tell him I shall 'I'm air' asked, 'I should like to 'im in the breadbasket jest once! 'E wouldn't arf double up, I bet! You say the word, sir, an' 'I'll 'im 'im! What's to do, now, is this silly fat nose into my business—an' yours—an' Mister Gadsby's?"

Bunter caught at Gadsby's name. "Now, in this 'is a sacred," he said eagerly. "Now I know what you're up to; Gaddy wants to get even with Derwent for that liking he had, and he's got you to help him. That's a very nice way of putting it, I must say! But you needn't think I'm going to keep dark about it—a chap of my will-know him principles!"

From the interior of the carrier, into which the parcel had now been thrust, came the voice of Cocky. "Fat—fat—fat! Fat as a pig! Ugly fat—beak fat!" said the fat man.

"That there's to your address, orker!" remarked Hazell. "shall I 'im, young Gaddy? Or my say the word an' I'll give 'im such a wallop in the breadbasket as'll stop all his chorling!"

Bunter had flushed redly as he heard Cocky's uncomplimentary remarks. It was rather an unorthodox line for Cocky to take, Bunter, perhaps. But it did not really matter very much, because Bunter did not contemplate anything in the way of an heroic rescue.

"Shut up!" snapped Hazel angrily. "Yes, Bunter, I know all about your blessed high principles, your rotten blackmail! That's your game, and it's no use your trying to deny it."

"That isn't a very nice way of putting it, Hazel, really, it ain't," replied Bunter. "To hear him, one who did not know him might have thought that Hazel's lowly opinion hurt him in his tenderest feelings."

"Hazel, do you see an' fellow put it?" growled Hazell. "It's a lie to say you're a chum of Derwent's! And if there was any borrow, I'll bet he didn't do it! What you're not for his sake, I'll swear. I'll give you a thump to be squared—that's all about it. But Gaddy will have to do it. I haven't any chink."

A fat smirk weathered the features of William George Bunter.

"Oh, really Hazel! It isn't a matter of squaring me you know!" he said. "I bore I'm above that sort of thing. But I'm sorry to hear that you've had a row with Derwent. It turned up, it may never come. You can read any day in the paper how honest dishonest those Post Office people are, you know. And if Gaddy would only give me a loan, I'll be glad to square him. I'll give you a thump."

"At any moment someone might come along the road and see more than Hazel wanted seen."

Gadsby had been lying doggo behind the wall, listening to every word, and quite as wrathful with Bunter as Hazel was.

"Now he popped up his head. "Oh, you're there, are you?" said Hazel unrepentantly. "I think you might have stayed before now. You've given me a thump another half-sov, I guess. This rotter's fat mouth has to be stopped, and that's the only way to do it."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Bunter, smirking. "But if my dear old pal Gaddy would like to oblige me with the loan of a quid, I should be no end grateful, really. And as for the thump before now, there isn't any harm in a thump, is there? I'm not the chap to spoil sport, anyway."

Gadsby made a way face. His revenge was proving expensive. He had lent Hazel two pounds, and now he had provided him with the promise could be broken, of course; but Gadsby counted the two pounds as lost. Hazell was to have fifteen shillings, as it would have it, too, he knew, and he was to be paid with. Now Bunter demanded a sovereign; and whereas Hazellena had the

Courtfield youth were necessary accessories to the plot, Bunter had merely butted in, and would do nothing to ruin the cash.

But he had to be paid. Gadsby saw that. If Gadsby could help it, Bunter would get very little chance of talking to any Highcliffe fellow for some time after this. He was sure to blab.

"I might do what blabbing he liked at Greiffrans; that was Hazel's look-out. But he must not have the opportunity of letting out anything at Highcliffe."

"Anything so much, Gaddy, old pal!" said Bunter, reaching out to take the pound note which the Highcliffe junior had extracted from his pocket-book. "I'll be sure to pay you back."

"I shall be glad to hear that, Mr. Gadsby," said Hazel coolly.

"Oh? What are you talking about you young imp?"

"What anybody's after these days—oh! I want my war profits—see? You don't think as 'ow I'm going to let myself be fobbed off with less than that fat himine is getting? I'll keep 'is 'later-trap shut, do yer!"

"My hat! 'I this ain't— Oh, I'm flushed."

"Now then, guv'nor!"

"There was a threatening note in the voice of Hazell. The young rascal had heard too much."

Gadsby groaned, and gave in. "You shall have it," he said.

"There was a reason for Hazel's change of front, added though it might seem. But Bunter did not suspect it."

Hazel's notion was that Bunter, now that he was in the chair, might as well be in it up to the neck.

It would be safer so. He would not be so likely to let out the secret if his share in the plot was something more than a passive one."

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and Vavasour watched the three depart together, leaving the coast clear for them.

At Cliff House the girls were in the hocky-field, and playing hard.

"The 'ow does your sister, Flip?" cried Merton. "By Jupiter, can't she scoot!" Merton's no end neat, too, the way she keeps the ball close to her stick—as if she'd got it on a dashed string. She's scooted the Howell charmer; an' that's sayin' a lot!"

"Better!" said Tunstall. "All the dach, an' more cleverness."

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The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday: "PEPPER'S GOLD!" By Martin Clifford.

This week's story leads up to next, but does not make the mistake of telling you in advance of what happens when Grundy puts into execution his real purpose. Merry & Co. took a hand in the game, of how Trimble wanted to take a hand, and how Cuts wanted in and complicated matters. You will also read of how the ordinary elections went—how many votes Baggy bagged, and who stood against whom.

TO ALL LOYAL READERS.

This is a season of the year when evenings are long, and everybody reads more than in the summer.

Because of that it is just the right time for doing us a good turn by introducing the Gem to any of your chums who don't already know it.

Try this, and write to let me know how you get on. I shall be interested, I assure you.

I think such a picture as that on this week's cover, which is something quite out of the ordinary, is likely to arouse the curiosity of anyone to whom it is shown. And I feel sure that anyone who reads this week's story will want to read the sequel next week.

Correspondents often ask how they can help me. This is the one way which really counts—the offering to increase the circulation of the paper. And it really is not a hard task to get new readers.

I am confident that my papers have never been better read than they are now. They are smaller, but we crowd in all the news, and if any of you don't read the "Magnificent," I can say to you are missing a treat!