

EXTRA-LONG, EXTRA-GOOD SCHOOL STORY—INSIDE!

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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

WHANGER'S CIRCUS



THE SCHOOLBOY PRIZEFIGHTER!

George Alfred Grady On Show at Whanger's Circus.
(See the amazing school story of St. Jim's—inside.)

A SPLENDID EXTRA-LONG SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & Co.,—

Grundy *the* Prizefighter

To his chums at St. Jim's, Grundy's bright idea of joining a circus in order to earn his own living and track down a rascal, is just another of his mad-brained wheezes. But George Alfred sees it through, and, wonderful to relate, brings his latest role to a triumphant close!

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 1. Boiling Point!

"HUH!" That remark, expressive of the deepest disgust, proceeded from George Alfred Grundy of the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

Grundy was staring fixedly at his Latin grammar, a volume with which many of his precious hours were concerned. Grundy himself was bitterly opposed to Latin, to Livy, Virgil, Caesar, and, indeed, the whole of the scribes of the ancient world. To Grundy, their wisdom was a collection of the most priceless drivel, and nothing more.

During his free moments, Grundy was used to expressing that sentiment often to his long-suffering chums, Wilkins and Gunn; so often, in fact, that even they got a little tired of it at times. But in the Form-room, under the stern eye of Mr. Linton, Grundy was accustomed to keeping his private opinion of the classics to himself.

Hence the gasp of surprise which followed his disparaging "Huh!"

For Grundy was in the Form-room; and Mr. Linton, looking very severe, was endeavouring to excite some interest in P. Virgilius Maro in his Form. So far his success was not very apparent; but at least there had been no open sign of the boredom which every Shell fellow was feeling.

It was left for George Alfred Grundy to provide that.

"Huh!"

Grundy repeated himself, still glaring at his Virgil with disgust written clearly on his rugged but expressive features.

Mr. Linton started.

The Shell, to a man, jumped.

Even the slackers, like Racke and Crooke, woke up from dreams of "gee-gees" to gaze at Grundy.

Certainly the most thoroughly surprised person in the Shell Form-room was Mr. Linton.

He adjusted his glasses; he stared almost unbelievably at Grundy. Grundy did not notice him. He drew a deeper breath, quite a sigh, and once again that remarkable sound echoed through the Form-room.

"Huh!"

"Grundy!"

Mr. Linton's voice fairly snapped out the name.

It was Grundy's turn to jump.

He fairly leaped up in his seat as Mr. Linton's sharp summons caught his ears.

"Oh! Yes, sir?"

From Grundy's innocent, if slightly startled, expression, it might have been deduced that he was unaware of his deep sighs of a few moments since.

Mr. Linton's lips set.

"Grundy. You were making ridiculous noises—"

"Was I, sir?"

"You are well aware that you were, Grundy," snapped the Form master, breathing hard. "On three separate occasions I distinctly heard you voice some—some guttural ejaculation—"

"Some what, sir?" gasped Grundy.

"A guttural ejaculation, sir!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Oh! I didn't know, sir."

"What?"

"I—I mean, I was daydreaming, sir, I expect. You see—"

"You mean to assure me that you were—were actually daydreaming, sir, in your class-room?" roared Mr. Linton, growing quite purple.

"Nunno, sir. That is, I was, in a way—"

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"Grundy!" snapped Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir?"

"Come out before the class. I shall endeavour to ensure that you do not daydream again this afternoon."

Grundy looked rather dazed at that command.

But he came out before the class.

"Your hand, Grundy."

"But what am I being caned for?" ejaculated Grundy indignantly. "I haven't done anything—"

"That is the exact reason," snapped Mr. Linton grimly.

Grundy, still gasping with indignation, held out his hand.

"I protest— Yoop!"

Swish, swish!

"I— Ow-wow!"

"The other hand!" rapped Mr. Linton.

"Ow! Oh dear. I say— Yarooogh!"

Swish, swish!

Mr. Linton did not spare the rod. Perhaps he, too, found the afternoon a little trying, and Grundy more than trying. Grundy, at any rate, was squirming when the Form master tucked the cane into his desk again.

"You may go to your place, Grundy."

"Ow! Groogh!"

Grundy went, gasping and snorting, his hands tucked beneath his armpits. He sat down in his place quietly, and his eyes fastened on Virgil with an almost affectionate gleam. For the next quarter of an hour Mr. Linton found Grundy extremely attentive.

But the pain, severe as it was, wore off slowly. Grundy was nothing if not hardy.

And Mr. Linton, droning on about tenses and moods and the hundred and one little traps which Messrs. Virgil, Livy & Co. had laid in the long ago, began to pall on Grundy. As the ache in his hands abated, his mind slid off on its own track again.

"Grundy! Kindly construe."

Grundy jumped violently.

Mr. Linton, perhaps spottin' that he was dreaming again, had revisited him. It was Grundy's turn to construe—and he did not even know which page the class were on.

For once Grundy had the grace to colour.

"I—I—"

"Construe!" rapped Mr. Linton grimly.

"I—I don't know the place, sir," gasped Grundy unhappily.

Mr. Linton gazed at him fixedly.

When he spoke, his voice resembled the rumble of an approaching storm.

"I have punished you once this afternoon for inattentiveness, Grundy. Have you allowed your thoughts to wander again?"

"Oh dear!"

"I perceive plainly enough that you have. May I inquire," continued Mr. Linton, with considerable sarcasm, "what is the matter that obsesses your mind to the exclusion of your class work, Grundy?"

"I—I was just thinking, sir."

"Of what?"

"The—the—" Grundy paused.

"Kindly inform me, Grundy. I perceive that you have a paper concealed in your Virgil—is it anything to do with your pre-occupation?"

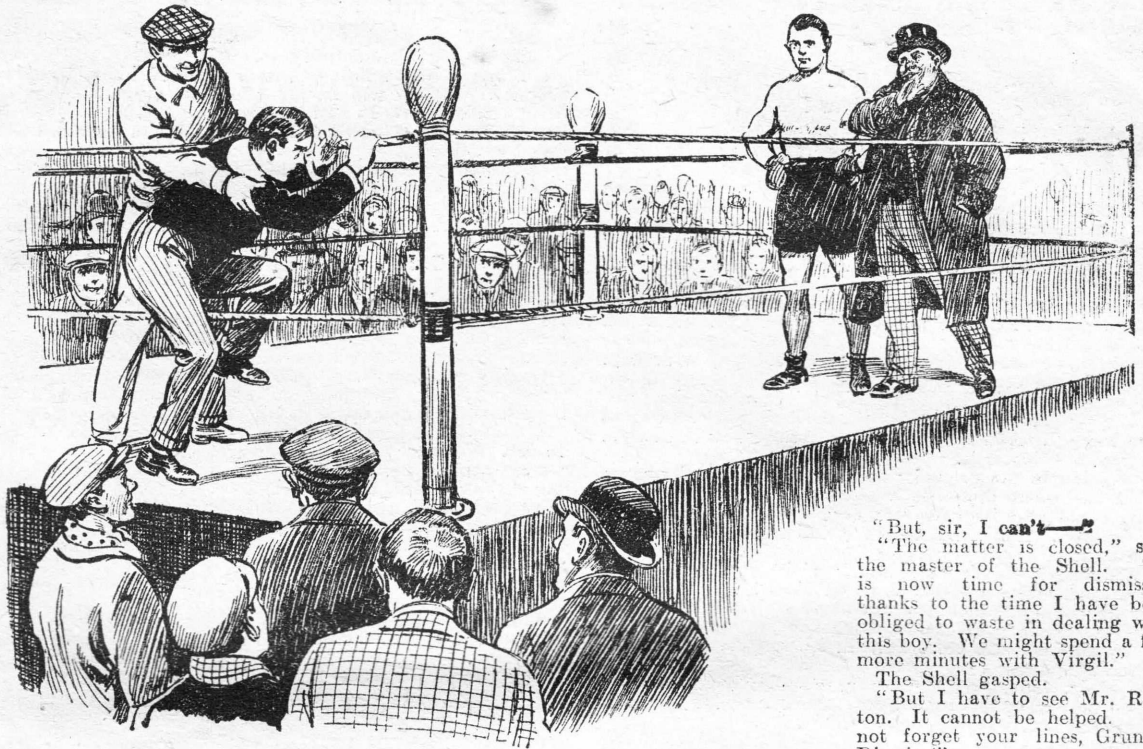
Grundy gasped afresh.

He had been studying the paper, under the impression that it was invisible to his Form master. Apparently Mr. Linton's eyesight was exceptionally keen. The rest of the Form grinned at Grundy's confusion.

"Kindly bring the paper to me."

There was no help for it.

—THE CHEERY, ADVENTUROUS CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!



With a crimson face, Grundy picked up the paper he had been studying and brought it out to Mr. Linton. The Form master stared at it, and stared again. It was a handbill, quite a striking handbill. It ran, in big, red letters:

**"WHANGER'S CIRCUS!
THE BIGGEST YET!!!!!!
THE MAMMOTH SHOW
of the WORLD!
Visiting Rylcombe To-day!
ALL STAR ATTRACTIONS!
Performing Sea Lions,
The Giant Woman,
The Double-Headed Dwarf,
The Tame Gigantososros,
The Genuine Dakota Indians.**

ALSO
'BASHER' BARNES,
Who will fight anybody,
forfeiting the sum of
ten pounds (£10) to ANY
MAN who can knock him
out in three rounds!

**POPULAR PRICES!
WHANGER'S CIRCUS!"**

There was a lot more in smaller print on the other side, but Mr. Linton did not stop to read the other side. That crimson and startlingly-worded advertisement for Mr. Whanger's circus explained sufficiently to him the cause of Grundy's inattention that afternoon. It explained why Grundy should have expressed his disparagement of Virgil as a counter attraction, quite absentmindedly, in the Form-room.

Mr. Linton gave the unhappy Grundy a glance. He did not bring the cane in evidence this time.
"Grundy!"
"Oh! Sir?"
"I take it that it is your intention to visit this—ahem!—circus after classes to-day?"
"Oh, of course, sir."
"You will do nothing of the kind."
"But, sir—"
"Instead, you will remain in your study and write me five hundred lines," said Mr. Linton coolly.

"But, sir, I can't—"
"The matter is closed," said the master of the Shell. "It is now time for dismissal, thanks to the time I have been obliged to waste in dealing with this boy. We might spend a few more minutes with Virgil."

The Shell gasped.
"But I have to see Mr. Railton. It cannot be helped. Do not forget your lines, Grundy. Dismiss!"

The Shell gasped again—with relief. Before Mr. Linton could change his mind with regard to interviewing Mr. Railton, they flooded out of the Form-room, bearing Grundy in their midst.

"Look here, stop shoving, Noble! If you put your elbow in my ribs again, Tom Merry—"
"Grundy, old man, you deserve a vote of thanks!" grinned the captain of the Shell. "You stepped into the breach just when Linton was thirsting for a giddy victim!"
"I'm the victim!" grunted Grundy.
"It had to be somebody, you know," said Monty Lowther comfortingly. "And in the circus, we'll do a few of the lines for you."

"I'll do fifty!" offered Kangaroo kindly. "Linton was just coming my way when you butted in, old chap."
"I'll do fifty!" offered Manners.
"Fifty here!"
"And here!"
"You won't have much to do, Grundy," said Tom Merry. "Only you won't be able to go to the circus. Never mind. Bear up, you know."
"Wait a minute!" interposed Grundy, speaking at last.
"Well?"
"I'm going to the circus—"
"What?"
"And I'm not doing any lines. Neither are you fellows," added Grundy coolly.
"But Linton will skin you!"
"My dear men, I'm getting used to it," retorted Grundy. "A few days ago the Head was down on me for slovenliness—"

"Well, whose fault was that?"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Then Railton caught me sliding down the banisters—"
"Shouldn't get caught!" said Kangaroo, shaking his head.
"And Knox pitched into me for cheeking him in the quad—me, you know!" said Grundy indignantly. "Linton gated me one day last week, and Kildare gave me a hundred lines this morning, and Monteith two hundred—for cheek, too! Now Linton thinks he can stop me going to Rylcombe to see the circus. Well, he's wrong! I'm going!"
"But—" began Wilkins.
"You see—" interposed Gunn.
"I'm going!"
"Grundy, old man—" began Tom Merry soothingly.
"Shut up!" roared Grundy ferociously. "I've said I'm going! Look out!"
Several Shell men skipped out of the way just in time as Grundy barged his way through them and disappeared through the School House doorway.

Wilkins and Gunn rushed after him into the quad, but by that time Grundy had reached the gates.

In spite of his Form master's orders, George Alfred Grundy was going.

CHAPTER 2.

The Last Straw!

"MY hat! There it is!"

On Grundy's face there appeared a beam of delight.

He had come within sight of the village green at last, after a swift walk from St. Jim's. A very swift walk indeed, for Grundy had more than a suspicion that he might have been pursued, either by prefects or his own chums. But there had been no pursuit, and here he was—at the circus!

In the centre of the village green a huge marquee was erected, with flags and pennons floating gaily from the poles which helped support it. Around the marquee were grouped innumerable side-shows, every one gay with flags and bunting of every kind.

Although perhaps Mr. Whanger's claim that his show was the biggest yet was a little exaggerated, it was certainly a large concern. And the people of Rylcombe had turned out in force to welcome it.

Admission to the ground was free; but the performance within the giant marquee, which took place three times daily, could cost its beholders anything from sixpence to five shillings. And it was the performance that Grundy had come to see.

"Walk up! Walk up! Walk right up, ladies and gentlemen! The greatest show on earth! A mammoth show, the likes of which you will never see again so long as you live! Take your chance while you may, gents! We are here to-day and performin' in Buckingham Palace to-morrow!"

A portly, top-hatted gentleman, standing on a rostrum before the marquee, roared out his blandishments to a grinning crowd. Grundy grinned, too.

"Walk right up, gents! Don't hesitate, whatever you do. If you miss Whanger's Mammoth Show, you miss the biggest treat in the universe! I am Whanger hisself, and I can tell you! Have you seen the world's most wonderful performin' sea-lions, I ask you?"

"Blessed if I want to, either!" murmured Grundy, chuckling under his breath.

"You have not. Have you seen the Giant Woman—twenty-eight stone avoirdupois, and not a pound less? Have you seen her, I ask you? Or the genuine Dakota chiefs, in their war paint? Or, last but not least, ladies and gents, have you seen 'Basher' Barnes, my protege, the boxin' wonder of the solar system? You have not? Then walk right in, I entreat you. Performance starts almost immediately. Pay at the box office, please!"

And, gasping with his exertions, the portly and top-hatted gentleman got down from his dais and took up a position at the side of the long queue which rapidly formed at the box office.

"My hat! This was worth it, I think!" murmured Grundy, feeling in his pocket.

Something like contentment reigned for a brief moment in Grundy's mind just then. He forgot the injustice which was heaped upon him at St. Jim's. He was going to witness the circus show—and Mr. Linton seemed very far away at that moment.

"Dash it all! Where's that note?"

There was a frown on Grundy's brow as he ran through his pockets again, more carefully. But no note came to light.

"Blow it! I know I shoved it in one of these pockets before I started!" ejaculated Grundy quite irritably.

He began to investigate his pockets with renewed care. Still no note was discovered. He paused at length, with a remarkable expression on his face.

He had "cut" detention in his study, left a pile of lines undone, to see Whanger's Circus. He could have sworn that before starting he had placed a pound-note in his pocket—being aware that he had spent the last of his small change. But the pound-note was not in evidence—he was stony. For five shillings he could witness the circus in comfort; but he had not five shillings. A humble sixpence would have taken him in among the village children; but even a humble sixpence was denied him.

With bitter chagrin Grundy realised that by some mischance he had left that note at St. Jim's—that to all intents and purposes he was as stony as a fellow could be.

"By gad! I remember! I put it in that other jacket!" Light dawned on Grundy at last.

But it did not lift the expression of grim disgust on his rugged features.

He glared at the long queue, steadily entering the big

marquee, almost with enmity. Envy gleamed in his eyes as he watched the shillings and the sixpences clinking in at the pay box. He had risked a terrific "row" at school for—nothing!

"My hat! I'm jolly well not standing this!"

Grundy's jaw set determinedly.

He was a determined youth; he prided himself on his firmness. Once he had set his mind on a certain object, he never left off until he had achieved it. It really looked as though, for once, Grundy was balked. But in Grundy there was a streak of grim obstinacy—and it had been brought to the top by the recent stormy happenings at school. At that moment Grundy felt that he would not have turned back from the marquee even if it had been defended by a horde of savage Dakotas, led by their alleged chiefs on exhibition within.

Somehow, Grundy was going in.

But how?

Money usually presented no problems to Grundy.

He was well supplied—too well supplied, some of the more needy fellows thought—by his Uncle George, not to mention several doting aunts and uncles.

Grundy was not at all used to having to consider the monetary side to any question. Hence, perhaps, the rather high-handed view he took of his present position.

It would have been possible, of course, to have walked up to Mr. Whanger and asked one of the St. Jim's fags who were crowding in at the marquee to vouch for him—and say that he would pay the next day without fail. It would have been possible to some fellows if they had been as keen as Grundy was to get in to the circus.

But it was quite the least likely thing to leap to Grundy's mind. Instead, his eye fixed upon a side entrance to the marquee—marked "EXIT ONLY"—which was guarded by a lean-looking man in uniform.

"That's where I go in," murmured Grundy coolly.

He strode up to the uniformed attendant with perfect self-possession.

The man motioned at once to the queue.

"Sorry, sir! Line up with the rest."

"I'm not lining up," answered Grundy calmly.

The man appeared a little surprised.

"You want to see the proprietor, sir? There he is—by the pay box."

"I don't want to see the proprietor, either."

"Well, what do you want, then?" ejaculated the attendant, giving Grundy rather a grim glance.

Grundy returned glance for glance.

The attendant was about a fifth of Grundy's weight, as a fighting man. Fighting his way into the circus would not have occurred to most fellows as a practical expedient; but it had occurred to Grundy, aided, no doubt, by the unsympathetic treatment he had been receiving at St. Jim's.

Grundy's view was that he had to take "it" out of somebody, though exactly what "it" was he would have been hard put to it to explain.

"I happen to have left my cash at school——" began Grundy.

The attendant grinned.

"That tale won't wash, youngster. Cut it out!"

Grundy crimsoned.

His fists clenched. But with really noble restraint, he went on.

"It's a fact!" he said coolly. "You probably don't know who I am—George Alfred Grundy, of St. Jim's."

"Any relation to Mrs. Grundy?" asked the man facetiously.

Grundy glared.

He did not appreciate little jokes about his name; least of all from this grinning circus hand.

"Look here——" he began heatedly.

"What's wrong there?" shouted Mr. Whanger, spotting that there was an altercation in progress. "What's wrong, Rolf's?"

"This young gent, sir——" began Rolf's, pointing to Grundy.

Grundy coloured, and gasped.

He did not want to be pointed out to all the populace of Rylcombe like that. As Rolf's pointed, Grundy shot round the corner of the marquee, out of sight. He heard Rolf's chuckle with burning ears.

But on this side of the marquee there was nobody to observe him.

With lightning rapidity, an idea presented itself to the Shell fellow's mind.

It was undignified; but there was no other way. Fighting his way in had turned out not quite feasible, after all. But, unobserved, he could crawl under the tent.

Grundy hesitated and glanced cautiously round; then he dropped on his hands and knees.

A moment later, and he was crawling cautiously under the canvas.

"Stop! Stop there!"

Grundy jumped violently, and shot out of the marquee into broad daylight again.

He sat up, to perceive a lean, cadaverous fellow with a peaked cap, inscribed, "Whanger's Circus," in gold lettering.

It was a different attendant; and for a moment Grundy thought he had seen the man before somewhere.

But he did not hesitate.

He was more than desperate.

After that one shout the man himself seemed dumb. He even tried to avert his face as Grundy scrambled to his feet. Biff!

It was a hefty punch, with all the force of Grundy's right arm behind it. It took the attendant full on his somewhat prominent nose, and sent him sprawling.

Before he could attempt to rise, Grundy had dropped on his knees and wormed his way under the canvas—he was in the circus!

It was the work of a few seconds to secure a good seat, at some distance from the spot where he had gained entry. Thereafter Grundy sat in a state of trepidation, expecting every moment to see the attendant rush in after him.

But the man did not make an appearance.

Grundy was surprised, but his surprise abated.

The man probably had realised that he, Grundy, was taking no rot. That whack on the nose had possibly instilled reason into him. At any rate, there was no fuss. And as the circus commenced, Grundy dismissed the attendant from his mind.

The performing sea lions were first.

Grundy sat through their act in silence. He had not come to see sea lions, however well trained.

Then came the Giant Woman.

This was a remarkable "turn," but it did not interest Grundy. In fact, as the show proceeded, he became decidedly bored.

The Dakota chiefs ran through their act, and were vociferously applauded; but not by Grundy. Even the obviously home-made Gigantosoros, proceeding under four men's power, one in each leg, failed to excite him.

But there was a gleam in his eyes at last, as Mr. Whanger announced the three rounds' exhibition bout between Basher Barnes and any gentleman who cared to take him on.

In the event of any gentleman knocking Mr. Barnes out inside three rounds, Mr. Whanger would forfeit to him the sum of ten pounds sterling. Grundy gazed absorbedly at the preparations.

"Basher" Barnes, a young enough fellow, but with the muscles of a Hercules, came into the ring to a storm of clapping. After a pause a local farm-hand went up to fight the Basher for three rounds and a purse of ten golden sovereigns.

Grundy watched, forgetting everything but the fight.

This was what he had come to see.

It was a good fight, but a short one—perhaps fortunately for the farm-hand.

The local had no chance against the professional, and the Basher knew it. He contented himself with playing with his man for the allotted space, at the end of which he was declared the victor on points, a decision with which nobody could quarrel. The farm-hand, looking very thankful that it was all over, came in for a round of applause, in which Grundy joined.

After the fight Grundy's interest lapsed.

He slipped out shortly before the end, and hastened on his way back to St. Jim's.

Now he had seen the celebrated Basher he had to pay the piper. Still, reflected Grundy, it had been worth it. His only regret was that he could not have a "go" at the Basher himself.

He came in at the gates in a preoccupied frame of mind, with Mr. Linton far from his thoughts.

He started as two fellows met him in the House doorway.

"Here he is!"

"You ass, Grundy!"

"Eh? What's wrong?"

"Linton wants you, for one," said Gunn grimly.

"Oh, blow Linton!" snapped Grundy. "Is that a letter for me?"

"Yes."

Wilkins handed the letter to Grundy, who slit it open.

"It's from Uncle George, I believe," said Gunn. "I know the writing."

"Yes," answered Grundy dully.

"Remittance?"

"No."

Grundy's chums stared at him as he made that monosyllabic reply for the second time.

CHAPTER 3.

Grundy's Resolve!

GRUNDY'S face was sober as he read and re-read the letter from his Uncle George.

Wilkins and Gunn, in deep concern, gathered round to read it, too.

It did not need a Sherlock Holmes to discern that Grundy had received unpleasant news of some kind.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, old man?" asked Gunn.

"The old chap isn't ill, what?" asked Wilkins.

Grundy shook his head.

He handed the letter to Wilkins, and stared grimly into space.

Wilkins and Gunn read the letter slowly, and their faces grew serious as they did so. It was brief, but very much to the point; not at all the kind of communication Grundy was in the habit of receiving from his Uncle George.

"Red Gables,

Bramleigh, Hants.

"My Dear George,—You must prepare for something of a shock in reading this letter. I have not written to you previously on the subject, as I hoped that the matter would be cleared up satisfactorily; but it has not.

"A fortnight ago my solicitor, Cedric Orme, absconded with a large amount in money and bonds worth several thousands. He has not left the country, and appears to be either lying very low or taking refuge with some obscure travelling company, most probably the former. Unless he is apprehended, my fortunes will suffer a very severe slump, and I am sorry to say that I shall have to ask you to manage on considerably less than you have been accustomed to receive.

"I had hoped that it would not be necessary for you to leave St. Jim's, but I have just received a report from your headmaster in which he considers your time to be in a large measure wasted. It is not so much that your class work is not satisfactory, but Dr. Holmes appears to regard you as something in the light of a dolt, and says in effect that I am wasting fees on you.

"As your uncle and guardian, I am loth to believe this, and shall make every effort to keep you at school for the rest of the term, at least. I am sure you will perceive that your future rests chiefly upon your own shoulders.

"I am sorry to write in this strain, and it is an unpleasant duty. I shall notify you at once if there is any improvement in my financial affairs.—Your affectionate uncle,

"GEORGE G. GRUNDY."

"My hat!" murmured Wilkins.

After perusing that communication, George Wilkins hardly knew what to say to poor old Grundy.

"Phew! It's pretty stiff, old man!" said Gunn sympathetically.

Grundy nodded.

"Come up to the study. We'll talk it over, if you chaps are agreeable."

"Oh, rather!"

In Study No. 3 Grundy threw himself down in the arm-chair with a very thoughtful expression on his face. His chums sat rather uncomfortably on the table.

Grundy did not break the silence for some minutes.

"Uncle George has been hard hit," he said at last.

"The police may bag the villain," suggested Wilkins hopefully.

"What's his name? Orme?" asked Gunn.

"That's the blighter," agreed Grundy. "I remember him—a foxy-looking sort of chap, beady little eyes and a soft-soapy manner. I never could understand quite why Uncle George stuck to him. And now the cad has absconded with bonds and ready money. If I could get my hands on him—"

Grundy's big fists clenched involuntarily.

"The police will get the man in the long run," said Wilkins comfortingly.

"They've wasted a fortnight already," retorted Grundy. "Every day the man is safer. He's probably lying low, waiting for a chance to get clear of England."

"Look on the bright side, old man," urged Gunn. "When the police have laid their hands on the villain your uncle will forget all about the Head's rotten report—"

Grundy grunted unintelligibly.

"You won't have to leave, old chap," said Wilkins reassuringly.

Grundy glanced up, with a gleam in his eyes.

"I know what I'm going to do," he announced coolly.

"Well, what?"

"I'm—"

Tap!

"Oh, blow you! Come in!" snapped Grundy.

The study door opened, and Levison of the Fourth glanced in.

"Hallo! What do you want, Levison?"

"Nothing, old bean. Linton passed me in the passage—"

"Blow Linton!" snapped Grundy.

"I say, is he coming here?" ejaculated Wilkins.

"No. He asked me to tell Grundy that he wants him at once—in his study."

"Oh!"

"Better go, old chap."

Grundy snorted.

"I'd advise you to buck up, too," said Levison warningly. "Linton was looking pretty, thunderous."

Grundy nodded.

"Shut the door after you, will you?"

Levison shrugged, and shut the door.

Grundy turned back to his chums, smiling calmly.

"Quicker the better, you know," remarked Gunn. "Can't twist Linton's tail just as you like."

"I believe I said 'blow Linton'?" asked Grundy imper- turbably.

"You said something potty," assented Gunn.

"Well, I say it again—blow Linton!" repeated Grundy. "That settles that, what?"

"You'll think differently if Linton comes up after you!" ejaculated Wilkins.

"Rot!"

Wilkins and Gunn drew deep breaths as Grundy settled himself again in the armchair. There seemed to be something wrong with him—reckless fellow as he always was. Mr. Linton was not a master to be played with—far from it.

Tap!

"Oh, my hat! Here he is!" gasped Wilkins.

The study door opened again, without an invitation.

A cheery, cheeky fag put in his head, and winked at the inmates of the study. It was Wally D'Arcy, captain of the Third.

"Grundy here? Oh, yes! Grundy, you're wanted!"

"Linton?" asked Grundy calmly.

"No. Knox."

"Blow Knox!"

"Blow him as much as you like, old bean," agreed Walter Adolphus D'Arcy, unmoved. "But he says you haven't brought in your lines, and he'll give you half an hour before he comes up with an ashplant. So-long!"

And the door slammed behind the irrepressible skipper of the Third.

Wilkins and Gunn stared at Grundy afresh. Grundy him- self appeared mildly amused.

Before any of them could speak there was another interrup- tion.

Rap, rap, rap!

"Linton!" breathed Gunn.

Crash!

The study door fairly flew open, and Reggie Manners of the Third grinned in at the doorway.

"What do you want, you cheeky young rotter?" snapped Gunn.

"Nothing, you cheeky old rotter!" retorted Reggie. "Message for Grundy from Kildare. If his lines aren't handed in inside a quarter of an hour, Kildare will come up and see why with an ashplant. That's a tip, Grundy. Pip, pip!"

And once again the door slammed violently.

Wilkins and Gunn were looking concerned now; Grundy was grinning as if the whole thing was no end of a joke.

"You potty ass!" began Gunn. "You'll be skinned alive before the evening's out. Kildare, Knox, and Linton!"

Rap!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wilkins faintly.

"Another one!" breathed Gunn.

Rap, rap!

Once again the door opened, and Joe Frayne, also of the Third, looked in.

"Allo, Grundy, ole bird! Message from Monteith. 'E says you 'aven't brought in your lines yet, and 'e'll give you ten minutes. I'd mind my eye if I was you, Grundy."

"Cut off, kid!" rapped Grundy. "I know all about Monteith."

Joe Frayne, grinning, disappeared.

As the door closed Grundy rose to his feet.

"You awful ass!" began Wilkins. "What next—?"

"I've made up my mind," said Grundy, with the utmost coolness.

"What to?"

"Uncle George says in effect that I'm a wash-out," said Grundy grimly. "Well, perhaps I am—as yet. Nobody in this school appreciates me at my true worth—not even you fellows. Tom Merry's jealous, and all the masters and prefects are down on me, as you've just seen—"

"Your own fault, you know," urged Wilkins.

Grundy glared.

"Don't mind me," he said sarcastically. "I'm used to it. But I'll show 'em; I'll show 'em something that will make them sit up and take notice."

"What potty notion have you got hold of now?" demanded Gunn.

"I'm a wash-out," repeated Grundy grimly. "Masters and prefects, and now Uncle George—they all say the same. Well, let them wait. I'm leaving St. Jim's—"

"Wha-a-at?"

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"Leaving St. Jim's," said Grundy firmly. "Until such time as the authorities can recognise my real worth."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm walking straight out—this very moment!" said Grundy. "My uncle is down on his luck; he thinks I'm going to let him scrape to keep me here in idleness. Not much! I shall get a job first—"

"Oh, you ass—"

"A job," repeated Grundy grimly. "Then I shall begin to investigate—"

"You—you fathead!" gasped Wilkins dazedly.

"Investigate this man Orme's disappearance," went on George Alfred firmly. "He must be in the country; I'll make it my business to hunt him down."

"You couldn't hunt down a giddy bunny rabbit!" roared Gunn.

"Shut up!" snapped Grundy didactically. "I said I shall hunt him down—like Sherlock Holmes—"

"Ass!"

"Only quicker," went on Grundy. "But the first thing will be to get a job. I know where I can get that—"

"Where, you footling imbecile?"

"At Whanger's Circus!" snapped Grundy. "I see they're advertising for one or two good sparring-partners for that man Basher Barnes. Well, I shall fill the bill. If I cut off now I shall be in time for the last performance—"

"Look here, chuck it while there's time!" urged Wilkins desperately. "This is all rot, and you know it, old chap!"

"Nothing of the kind. I'm going; this may be the last time I shall ever see you chaps—"

"Oh, what a relief—if it was true!" gasped Gunn.

"If that's all you've got to say, Cuthbert Gunn—"

"Nunno, old man. Chuck it, if you think anything of the advice of your old pals!"

"You're good pals—I'll say that," said Grundy unex- pectedly. "But you haven't got any brains; not that it's your fault, of course. Only it's so. So-long, Gunny!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Gunn, as Grundy wrung his hand crushingly.

"So-long, Wilky! I'll write to both of you," said Grundy, giving Wilkins a handgrip that made him gasp.

"You awful ass—" breathed Gunn.

"I say, we could manage him between us—" began Wilkins practically.

Grundy gasped. Then he jumped for the door.

Slam!

Wilkins and Gunn, resolved to "handle" Grundy for his own good, met the door as it slammed—met it with their noses. Wilkins let forth a wild howl, and Gunn staggered back with his hand to his nasal organ.

"Ow! Wow! The lunatic!"

"Let him go!" gasped Gunn. "The beaks will get after him. I hope they tan his hide off! Wow-wow-wow!"

CHAPTER 4.

Bashing the "Basher"!

ROLL up—roll up, ladies and gents! Positively your last opportunity to behold the world-famous Whanger's Mammoth Circus—the show patronised by all the crowned heads of Europe! Come in and marvel! Admission one shilling upwards; children half-price!

Mr. Paul Whanger, mounted on his rostrum, with a huge megaphone to his lips, was letting himself go to the full extent of his powerful voice.

Grundy of the Shell grinned as he came within sight of the circus again.

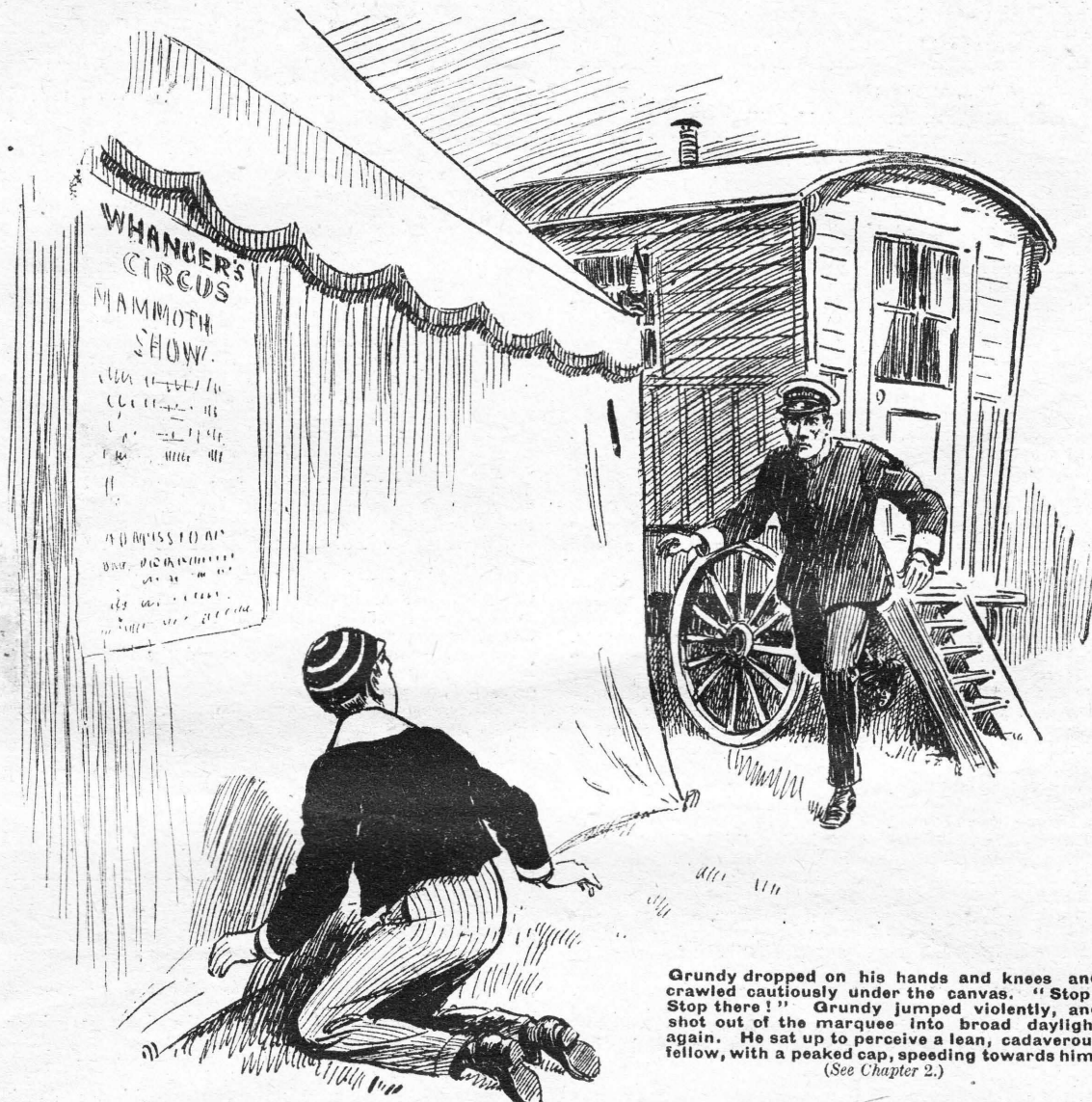
The flaring naphtha-lamps that lit up the huge marquee made the village green almost as light as by day, and a large crowd passed the pay-box and poured inside.

During the walk from St. Jim's, Grundy had had time to think out his position, and decide more clearly on his course of action.

He was not very clear as yet, but his resolve was firm enough. Uncle George, from whom he was used to receiving an endless supply of handsome "tips," was down on his luck. He might, by economising stringently, be able to keep Grundy going at school. But Grundy was the last fellow to allow other people to make efforts on his behalf. It was "up to" him, he felt, to strike out for himself, and, with his own native genius, perhaps straighten out his uncle's financial affairs at the same time.

That was the optimistic view which Grundy took of the matter—not a view which his chums could be expected to share, regarding Grundy, as they did, as being every imaginable kind of an ass.

In any case, to Grundy's mind there was the tone of the letter—the impression which Uncle George had that Grundy was wasting his time at St. Jim's—that he lacked brain- power, of all things. If there was one direction in which he felt the equal, if not the superior, of any man, it was



Grundy dropped on his hands and knees and crawled cautiously under the canvas. "Stop! Stop there!" Grundy jumped violently, and shot out of the marquee into broad daylight again. He sat up to perceive a lean, cadaverous fellow, with a peaked cap, speeding towards him.

(See Chapter 2.)

in brain-power. Grundy had resolved to prove that—and he was not going back to St. Jim's until he had.

After all, it was pleasant to feel that Railton and Linton, and Knox and Kildare, and Monteith and that crowd, were merely shadows of the past, of no more account than the idle leaves wafted upon the wind. Grundy felt that he held his future in his two hands, to make or mar as he chose. He had no doubt which it would turn out to be.

Uncle George, in league with the authorities at St. Jim's, considered him an ass. That was enough—more than enough for George Alfred. He would show them!

He had quite a definite plan of action—in theory. A job, followed by investigations re Mr. Cedric Orme, the solicitor. Following the methods of Sherlock Holmes, with hints from Ferrers Locke, Grundy felt that he would soon have Mr. Orme under lock and key. Then he would return to St. Jim's—on condition, of course, that Railton and company were reasonable.

But the first essential was to secure a job; even Grundy could see that clearly enough. A fellow had to have somewhere to lay his head at night.

He had come away with only the clothes he stood up in, though this time he had remembered to shove into his pockets all his available cash, amounting to seven or eight pounds, with some loose silver.

And he had reached the circus just in time for the last performance before the company shifted on to Wayland.

Grundy paid his admission, with quite a cheery expression on his face. Alone in the world, Grundy was supremely confident. At last he was going to be accepted on his merits, with no petty personal jealousy holding him down.

"Allo! You found your money, youngster?"

Grundy gave the man at the pay-box a glance. It was Rolfs, the attendant who had prevented him gaining entrance via the gap marked "Exit Only."

"I don't want any cheek from you, my man!" Grundy answered grimly. "For two pins—"

"Keep it till yer gets inside," suggested Rolfs, "and take it out o' the Basher, if yer got so much sauce!"

"Huh! That's exactly what I intend doing!" snapped Grundy.

"What—you! Haw, haw, haw!"

Grundy crimsoned.

For a moment he was tempted to "slog" the man as he would have done had he been back in the Shell corridor at St. Jim's. But he did not want to create a disturbance, especially in view of the fact that he hoped shortly to be working among the circus-hands.

Biting his lip, he passed inside the marquee with the queue, breathing a little hard. But once in his seat, all thought of the man Rolfs slipped from his mind, and he waited impatiently for the exhibition bout in which the famous Basher Barnes would appear.

The marquee was ablaze with light and almost full. The earlier turns bored Grundy almost to tears, but he sat through them grimly. The circus ring was cleared at length and a roped arena prepared by a host of helpers. The stage was set for the Basher's appearance—and for what Grundy regarded as his brilliant debut as a new boxing star.

Mr. Whanger, resplendent in astrakhan-collared coat and shining topper, stepped into the ring and called for silence through his big megaphone.

"Ladies and gents——"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Whanger!"

"Ladies and gents——" roared Mr. Whanger, purpling.

"Order!"

"Quiet, there!"

"Ladies and gents," repeated Mr. Whanger victoriously, "I 'ave pleasure in introducing to you the world-famed boxin' wonder, the new British 'Ope, Basher Barnes!"

"Hurrah!"

"Cheers for the Basher!"

"Hip-hip-hurrah!"

To the accompaniment of a terrific burst of cheering, the new British Hope stepped into the ring and bowed.

Grundy eyed him from a professional standpoint as he stood there in the light of the arcs.

The Basher was quite a young fellow, not much over twenty, but his development was herculean. He fairly rippled with muscle. Grundy himself was a hefty fellow for his years, but he had to admit that the British Hope looked like proving a tough proposition. Naturally, the thought of defeat never entered Grundy's head. But he felt that he would have to go all out—which was really to the good, as he wanted to make a good impression on his first appearance.

"Ladies and gents," shouted Mr. Whanger above the uproar, "I wish to make the usual challenge! If any gent among the audience wishes to take on the Basher for three rounds, 'e is more than welcome! 'E will find the Basher a 'ard 'itter, but as scrupulously fair a boxer as ever donned a mitten! And in the event of the challenger bein' able to knock out the Basher, I will forfeit the sum of ten pounds here and now—silver or notes, as preferred!"

There was a murmur at that.

At every performance there had been a similar murmur.

It had usually resulted in a local giant being pushed to the fore by eager friends and standing up to the Basher quite creditably for the three rounds. The British Hope had orders not to knock anybody out unless they proved dangerous. So far he had had an extremely easy time.

Mr. Whanger waited, with a pleasant smile, for the next victim. He did not look like a man risking ten pounds. Perhaps Mr. Whanger felt that his ten pounds was as safe as anything could be in an uncertain world.

But there was no rush.

"Don't all come at once, gents! Just think a bit! 'Ere's the Basher leavin' this district to-night, and nobody 'ave given 'im the knock-out yet! Ain't you goin' to 'ave jest another try?"

Still there was no rush—only a murmur.

Grundy rose to his feet.

He looked quite confident—not at all like a fellow going to his fate.

Grundy knew that he was going to a glorious victory, which made a difference.

Mr. Whanger eyed him rather peculiarly.

"I accept the challenge!" called Grundy, in a cool voice.

"What!"

Mr. Whanger almost dropped his cigar.

He could see that Grundy was no match for the Basher—in years, let alone brawn.

"I accept the Basher's challenge," repeated Grundy.

"But—but—you're only a youngster!"

"I'm older than I look," answered Grundy grimly, and hoping that it was true. He really did not know how old he looked.

"But—but the Basher will kill you, you young idiot!"

"Look here, is this challenge open to all?" demanded Grundy angrily.

"Play the game, Whanger!" shouted somebody. "Stand by your bargain!"

"Go it, kid!"

"We'll carry you 'ome!"

A roar of encouragement greeted Grundy's challenge.

Mr. Whanger shrugged his shoulders.

After all, it was immaterial to him. He would have preferred a heftier fellow, so as to make a better match, but Grundy was better than nothing. The circus proprietor had no fears for his money.

"Silence!" he roared. "Let the kid come up—we'll let 'im down lightly. Make way there, please!"

The crowd made way for Grundy to stride up to the roped space.

The Shell fellow climbed into the ring quite calmly, and allowed a circus hand to help him off with jacket and waist-coat.

He faced the Basher in his vest, while Mr. Whanger watched wonderingly.

"Let 'im off light, remember," he whispered to the Basher, as the gong sounded.

Barnes nodded and grinned.

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He spurred up to Grundy without anticipating anything serious coming through his guard. But he did not know Grundy. The Shell fellow had no science whatever—but his windmill methods were apt to carry all before them at the start. It took a hefty fellow to stand up to Grundy until he tired sufficiently to be "got at."

Barnes was slack. Grundy's fists fairly lashed the air. More by luck than judgment, one of them landed full on the Basher's chin, and the professional staggered against the ropes dazedly. The next moment Grundy was upon him, pounding away with both fists with all his might.

A less powerful fellow than Barnes would probably have gone down under that terrific onslaught, taking him off his guard as it had done. But somehow the Basher scrambled out of his corner into which he was hemmed, and came back at Grundy. The gong found matters fairly even.

It was a much-needed rest for the Basher. He gazed at Grundy with a new light in his eyes. Grundy himself squared up for the second round, coolly confident.

He led off with a rush again expecting to lay the Basher on his back in the first seconds. But this time the professional was more than wary, and he evaded Grundy's clumsy rush with ease. His right and left beat home in Grundy's face, and the junior staggered blindly. Barnes could have gone in and finished him then, but he refrained. Orders were orders.

He contented himself with playing with Grundy till the gong sounded. For Grundy it was not a pleasant round. His initial advantage was gone, and he found that he had bellows to mend. But he came up for the last round gamely enough.

Once again he rushed, and the Basher retreated under his rain of blows. Once the professional tottered with a right to the jaw—Grundy's famous right—but then it was Grundy's turn to totter.

He found himself retreating round the ring, and covering up feebly against a hail of blows that poured on top of him. He went down once, but leaped up again on the instant. But the Basher was too good for Grundy—even George Alfred realised that. He rolled on the resin from a left hook, and scrambled up, feeling very much the worse for wear. He gathered his failing energies for a last desperate rush, but staggered. His feet seemed unwilling to support him. At that moment the gong sounded mercifully.

"Good kid! You've got some pluck!"

"Well done, youngster!"

Grundy heard those shouts through a haze; he passed his hand over his eyes and stared at the Basher and Mr. Whanger rather glassily.

"I—I— Then I haven't won?" he ejaculated unbelievably.

"H'm!" murmured Barnes.

"Did you think you had?" asked Mr. Whanger, grinning.

"Ow! I meant to. Then I was going to ask you for a job——"

"Looking for work?" ejaculated the circus proprietor.

"That's it. I wondered if I'd be any good as a sparring partner, or something. But now it's no good——"

"Take him on," said Barnes quietly.

"My hat! Will you?" gasped Grundy, his eyes dancing.

Mr. Whanger paused.

"There's no denying you can scrap," he answered slowly. "And we need a new man. I'll see you in my van after the show, youngster. Barnes will put you to rights meanwhile."

Mr. Whanger took up his megaphone to resume the show. Grundy almost bubbled with delight as the Basher helped him out of the ring and led him away.

CHAPTER 5.

The Masked Boxer!

"T HAT ass!" breathed Wilkins.

"That frabjous dummy!" concurred Gunn.

"Didn't turn up for dorm last night!" said Wilkins.

"No news of him this morning, either!" gasped Gunn.

"Oh, the ass! The awful ass!" breathed Wilkins.

It was a committee of two that had met in Study No. 3 the next day to discuss George Alfred Grundy.

The opinion which Wilkins and Gunn held of Grundy was never at any time flattering.

They were loyal pals; but they could not profess to admire their leader. He was headstrong, and conceited, and often overbearing. He laboured under the totally erroneous impression that he was the brains of the Lower School, and that Wilkins and Gunn would be lost without his guidance.

As loyal pals, Wilkins and Gunn were accustomed to letting all that pass. It was more peaceful than eternal arguments with Grundy. And there was no denying that Grundy's frequent handsome "tips" from his doting uncles

and aunts made Study No. 3 a land overflowing with milk and honey—especially at tea-time. Grundy was not at all a bad fellow, in his way; though it was an unusual way. In a way, too, his chums were fond of him, and the thought that they had seen the last of George Alfred, and that he had gone out into a hard world to make his fortune on his lonely own, would have affected them.

But they did not think for one moment that they had seen the last of their leader. Whether he would return of his own accord, or be yanked back with the hand of a prefect on his collar, was uncertain. But it was certain that he would come back, one way or the other. Only Grundy himself was not aware of that.

The fact was that he had been absent when Kildare saw "lights out" in the Shell dormitory the previous evening, and that now, the next morning, he was still absent.

Already the Head was making searching inquiries. Wilkins and Gunn would be questioned before long, as Grundy's bosom pals. And they alone knew where and why he had gone.

"He must actually have joined the circus," said Gunn, after a pause.

"Or put up in the village," suggested Wilkins.

"Anyhow, he means business. What chance can the awful idiot think he's got of capturing the giddy absconding solicitor, Orme?"

"None at all!" growled Wilkins.

"Poor old Grundy! He always did think he was cut out to be another Sexton Blake or Ferrers Locke!" said Gunn. "The question is, what are we going to do about it?"

"What can we do?"

There was silence in Study No. 3.

"Of course, the ass is doing a really plucky thing," remarked Gunn, after a time.

"In what way?"

"He's refusing to let his uncle keep him here now that he's lost some of his money—and he really thinks he can get on the trail of the man Orme. As Grundy looks at it, he's acting as he ought to."

"Dear man, we've got to look at it from Grundy's personal standpoint," urged Wilkins impatiently. "You know what a frightful ass he is. He won't get a job—and he won't find Orme. What he will find is heaps and heaps of trouble. Grundy was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward!"

"I vote we tell Tom Merry and some of the others all we know, and go in force and drag Grundy back by the scruff of his neck!" said Wilkins impressively.

"Before the beaks do it—what?"

"That's it."

"I suppose—"

"Suppose what, ass?"

"I was thinking," said Gunn quietly. "You remember Uncle George said in his letter that the solicitor, Orme, is supposed to have joined some travelling company, or be skulking on his own—"

"Most probably the latter, I should think," said Wilkins.

"I don't know. His description has been circulated by now. He would find it difficult to take the cash and bonds with him wherever he went, and he would have to keep in disguise. If he took a job with, say, a circus—"

"You mean he wouldn't attract any special attention there, and dodge the police?"

"Till he saw a chance to get out of the country," said Gunn quietly.

"By Jove! Whanger's Circus—"

"It's only one chance in a thousand, of course," said Gunn. "But I don't know that Grundy is acting quite so much like his usual potty self after all!"

"What are we going to do, then?"

"Call in Tom Merry and ask his advice," said Gunn. "Come on, old chap!"

Wilkins and Gunn were both very thoughtful as they walked along the Shell passage to Study No. 10, occupied by the Terrible Three.

Tom Merry & Co. were at home, and the captain of the Shell waved the visitors into chairs.

"Welcome as the flowers in May, old beans! Why the worried brows?"

"Grundy?" asked Lowther, looking up from a comic paper.

"Grundy," answered Wilkins and Gunn in one voice.

Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners grinned.

They had heard, of course, that Grundy was missing. Possibly the matter was serious. But the mere mention of George Alfred's name was sufficient to raise a grin in the Shell. Grundy acted as a tonic to a good many fellows, though he did not know it.

"Well, cough it up!" urged Tom Merry hospitably. "We'll be glad to help you if we can. Do you men know where he's disappeared to?"

"That's just it," said Wilkins. "Listen!"

1,000 DOLLARS REWARD!

This is the price that's set upon the head of THE RIO KID. But woe betide the cowpuncher who sets out to capture this young outlaw, for the Kid is the quickest fellow on the draw in Texas.



Read the Amazing
Adventures of
THE RIO KID

In a Grand New Series
of Western Tales

NOW RUNNING IN
OUR TOPPING
COMPANION
PAPER

The POPULAR

On Sale Every Tuesday.

Price 2d.

The three occupants of Study No. 10 listened attentively while George Wilkins told them everything as they had had it from Grundy himself the day previously. There was surprise and sympathy in the faces of the Terrible Three when Wilkins had finished.

"Poor old chap!" ejaculated Lowther. "Fancy old Grundy having to leave. What on earth should we do when we felt blue?"

"Chuck joking, Monty," said Tom Merry quietly. "I can see that Grundy was serious enough when he left—he really thinks that he's going to get a job and support himself, and collar that chap Orme into the bargain. It's jolly plucky of him—"

"Oh, Grundy's got pluck!" agreed Gunn.

"So you think there might be something in the idea that Orme would join a circus, or something?" asked Manners thoughtfully.

"It's only a suspicion," said Gunn. "I don't know if it's occurred to Grundy yet."

"H'm!"

"You see, we thought you fellows might walk over to Wayland with us this afternoon after classes—the show shifted there last night, you know—and try to make the ass see reason," said Wilkins. "If he won't, he won't—and we'll lie low and let the beaks search on their own account. But there's no harm in trying. Even Grundy may feel a bit reasonable if he's had a night out in the fields."

"By Jove, yes!"
 "Or under a hedge!" grinned Lowther. "I suppose Grundy would have sense enough to get under a hedge—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This afternoon, then," said Wilkins.

"Right-ho!"

Wilkins and Gunn left the study, and they left the Terrible Three discussing Grundy. For George Alfred's chums the rest of the day passed slowly. They were asked once by Kildare if Grundy had left any note for them explaining where he had gone, to which they were able to reply truthfully enough that he had not.

After classes the two juniors put on their caps and coats, joined the Terrible Three, and headed at once for the gates.

Arriving at Rylcombe, they boarded the local train to Wayland, to which country town the circus had moved over night. If Grundy had joined Mr. Whanger's mammoth company, he had moved with it. If not, he was probably, as Lowther suggested, under a hedge.

The circus was pitched in a field on the outskirts of the town, but the marquee and flags were visible at some distance. The five juniors came up to the entrance with their eyes keenly about them.

Admission, as before, was free. But the second performance of the circus was in progress, and if Grundy had joined he would be inside.

"Can't spot him anywhere about," observed Lowther.

"Better go in," said Tom Merry. "We can cut like the wind and get back for call-over. If we get lines it can't be helped."

"This way," said Wilkins.

The juniors headed for the pay-box, and planked down their shillings. They were ushered into the giant marquee, and took their seats amid a swarming crowd.

"My hat! What a crush!" gasped Lowther.

"Phew! Rather!"

But the juniors were there on business, not pleasure. The sea-lions went through their turn, and the Giant Woman and the Dakotas followed, and the St. Jim's party waited heroically. In spite of Mr. Whanger's extensive advertising campaign, it was not a great show—not so good as many that came to Rylcombe, Lowther remarked.

But it was redeemed in all eyes by the star attraction—the exhibition between "Basher" Barnes and any local who cared to take him on.

"Now then, watch for Grundy!" murmured Wilkins, as Mr. Whanger came forward to announce the fight.

"Ladies and gents!" shouted the circus proprietor above the din. "I have pleasure in announcin' a short sparrin' bout between the world-famed Basher Barnes and the Masked Wonder, who has not been seen in this district before! After the bout, which will give you a taste of the Basher's quality, I shall be pleased to forfeit ten pounds in silver or notes to any gent who can knock him out inside three rounds!"

"Hallo! Haven't heard of the Masked Wonder before," murmured Gunn.

The juniors did not have to curb their curiosity long.

Basher Barnes was introduced to the audience, and he was followed by a hefty, youthful, boxer wearing a black mask. The bout had hardly commenced ere Wilkins gave a gasp.

"I know that right!"

"I fancy I've felt that left, too!" breathed Gunn.

"Grundy!"

"My hat, it is, too!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

There was no doubt about it, once the Masked Wonder sailed into action. There was no mistaking Grundy's windmill movements; it was a thing once seen never forgotten. And it made an admirable foil for the skilled methods of the Basher.

The five juniors watched, fascinated, as the Basher withstood his opponent's heavy rushes and fought him scientifically to the ropes. At the end of the bout the Basher was as fresh as a daisy, but the Masked Wonder was gasping with exertion. In spite of his fierce lunges, he had not succeeded in touching Barnes.

But the Wayland crowd was partial to a good loser, and they gave the Masked Wonder a round of applause, whereat the loser crimsoned.

Mr. Whanger helped the Masked Wonder out of the ring and led him out of the marquee. He returned to announce the challenge as usual.

But the St. Jim's juniors did not wait to see if anybody accepted the tempting bait of ten pounds. They hastened out of the marquee and headed for the rear.

As they had expected, there was a small hut pitched close by, with a notice over the door:

"PRIVATE. MASKED WONDER."

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"Come on!" said Wilkins.

He opened the door of the hut.

The man Rolfs met their gaze in surprise.

He was attending to the Masked Wonder, who was in the act of removing his mask. The latter stopped, as if frozen, as he caught sight of the faces in the doorway and gasped.

"You fellows!"

CHAPTER 6. Saving Grundy!

"GRUNDY!"

"The Masked Wonder! Oh, my hat!"

Some of the St. Jim's juniors were grinning as they surveyed George Alfred in singlet and shorts after his bout with Basher Barnes.

But Grundy did not grin.

He had, naturally, not explained to Mr. Whanger that he was a runaway schoolboy; and the circus proprietor had not taken the trouble to inquire too closely into Grundy's reasons for wanting a job. But recognition by Tom Merry & Co. in front of the man Rolfs was the last thing Grundy desired.

He acted with quite remarkable speed and acumen—for Grundy.

"Hallo! Some chaps who've helped me a bit," he ejaculated, with one eye on Rolfs. "You can sheer off now, Rolfs. I'll manage all right."

Rolfs nodded and withdrew, looking a little puzzled, however.

"You asses!" burst out Grundy, as the door closed behind him.

"Eh?"

"You fatheads! Don't you know I'm not supposed to be a schoolboy here?"

"Oh, I see!" murmured Lowther understandingly.

"I've got a job with the circus; but Mr. Whanger doesn't know I've run away from St. Jim's," explained Grundy more calmly. "Remember, I met you fellows recently—"

"I think you ran into us in the corridor the last time we saw you, didn't you?" grinned Lowther.

"You helped me somehow. Wilky and Gunny have at times, anyhow."

"Glad to hear you admit it," assented Wilkins. "This is a bit unusual, isn't it, Grundy, old man?"

Grundy breathed hard.

At the circus he had "shaken down" quite well overnight. But he had "rubs" with one or two of the men, and it had been an effort for Grundy to keep his temper in leash. With Wilkins and Gunn within reach again it was a greater effort not to drop back into the manners of the Shell corridor and knock their heads together.

But Grundy kept cool. These fellows had very kindly come to see how he was getting on, and Grundy was grateful. It, naturally, did not occur to him that they had come to take him back to St. Jim's.

"My hat, though, you seem to have fallen on a soft spot, old chap!" said Gunn. "Have they taken you on as a regular hand?"

"I'm sparring-partner to Basher Barnes," answered Grundy proudly. "Mr. Whanger is pleased with my form, and stars me as the Masked Wonder; I've only just finished my turn."

"We saw you," said Tom Merry, grinning. "You were lucky to get out of the ring alive!"

"Your mistake, Merry! I could have sent the Basher down any time I liked, but it would have been against orders."

"Then you're all fixed up and happy, what?" asked Wilkins, in wonder.

He had half expected to find his chum, as Lowther had suggested, under a hedge and glad to throw up his foolhardy scheme. Yet here was Grundy in a job and apparently perfectly satisfied with the progress he was making.

"You chaps thought I should be down on my luck?" asked Grundy keenly. "I'll bet you thought you could get me to come back to St. Jim's—"

"You'll have to chuck this, you know!" broke in Tom Merry.

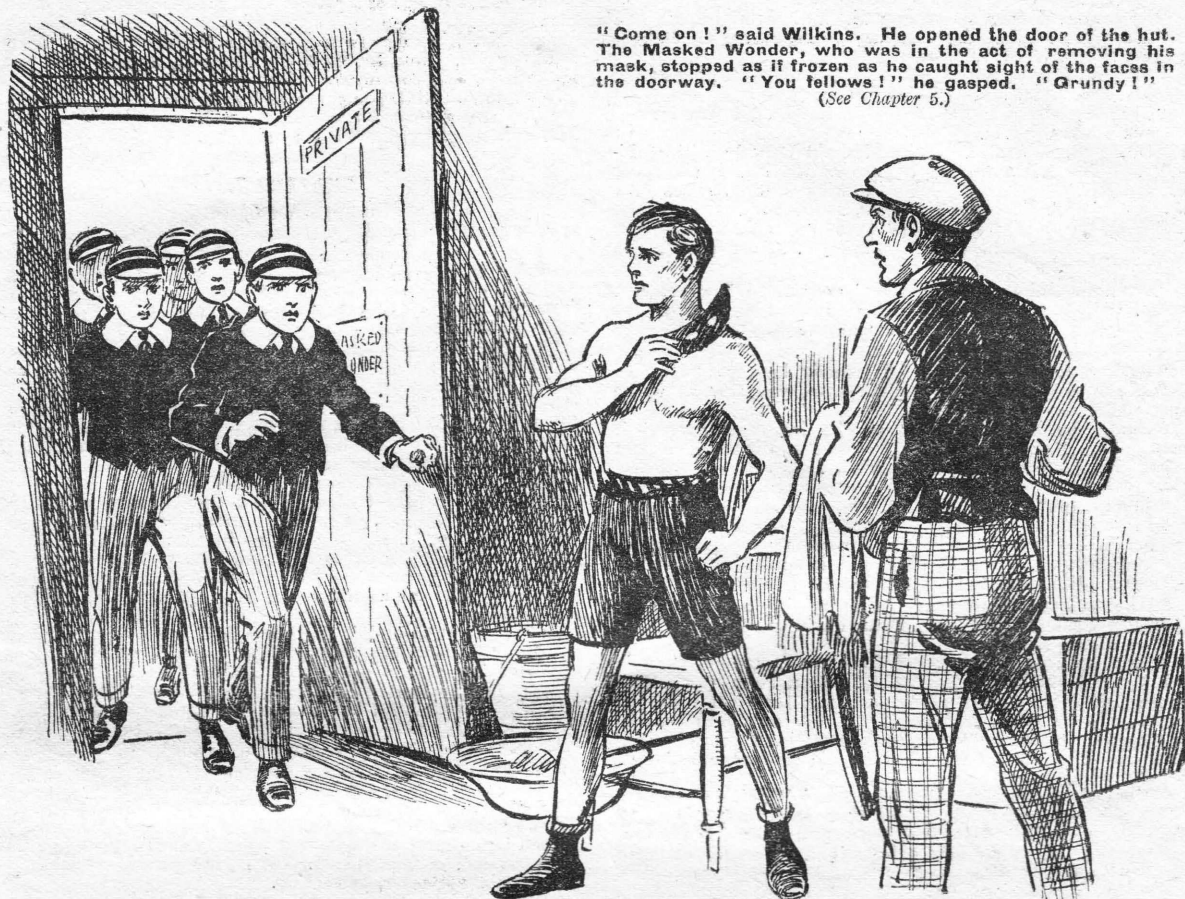
"Why?"

"It's impossible! The Head will write to your uncle, and he'll have the additional worry of knowing that there's a prize idiot loosed on the world—"

"A what?" roared Grundy ferociously.

"Besides, it's all tommy rot about tracking the giddy absconding solicitor," went on the Shell captain coolly. "He may be anywhere in England; it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. Can't you see that, you fathead?"

"I'm only waiting to get settled," answered Grundy grimly. "Once my position here is secure, I shall know that I'm supporting myself, anyhow. And this show travels all over the country. I know what the man Orme looks like."



"Come on!" said Wilkins. He opened the door of the hut. The Masked Wonder, who was in the act of removing his mask, stopped as if frozen as he caught sight of the faces in the doorway. "You fellows!" he gasped. "Grundy!"

(See Chapter 5.)

"Oh, you do?"

"I met him once in the hols. A hefty blighter with sleek, black hair and a bulging dome. I didn't like the look of him; but uncle trusted him. Rather a giant in his way. I'd know him again in a million if I saw him."

"If you saw him," agreed Tom Merry. "But you won't see him. Don't you realise that the police are combing the country for the man?"

"All the more reason why he should be hiding up in some out-of-the-way spot. You never know your luck," answered Grundy imperturbably. "In any case, I'm sticking on in this show so long as I can earn my own living. It will relieve Uncle George. Is that all you fellows came to see me about?"

"Of course, we could take him back by the scruff of his neck," observed Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

"Try it!" snorted Grundy. "I'm not called the Masked Wonder for nothing, you know!"

"We could manage even the Masked Wonder between us," said Tom Merry.

"If you try, I've only to call in some of the men," said Grundy coolly. "I jolly well shan't say I know you, and they'll chuck you out fast enough. I'm sticking here—that's final."

The five juniors gazed at Grundy, rather at a loss. Their original intention had been clear enough. They were going to take Grundy and bundle him back to St. Jim's willy-nilly. But, as Grundy said, he had only to call in the aid of some of the circus men, and the tables would be turned.

"After all, you're doing a jolly plucky thing," said Gunn. "That just occurred to you?" asked Grundy sarcastically.

"I don't want compliments; but you can let me alone."

"It's Grundy's business, if he chooses to stay on," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "I think you're an ass, Grundy!"

"Thank you for nothing!"

"You're only causing your uncle extra worry."

"Rot! He knows I can take care of myself."

"Luckily, you seem to be managing it," admitted the Shell captain. "But you'll never catch the solicitor—"

"Wait and see."

"But if you're sticking tight—"

"Absolutely!" agreed Grundy.

"We can only give you your head, then. We'll bring your letters on—"

"I've written to Uncle George; he'll write if there's any news," said Grundy.

"Well, if there's anything we can do, you've only to mention it," urged Wilkins.

"There's one thing—"

"Yes?"

"Keep the beaks off the trail if you can."

"Hasn't the Head inquired of Mr. Whanger if he's seen you yet?"

"My hat, no! If he did—"

"I know the beak was in communication with the village this morning," said Tom Merry. "He may not think of the circus."

"Linton will, though!" said Grundy grimly. "Remember, I cut detention to come here first."

"My hat, yes!"

"Keep an eye on Linton, if you want to do me a good turn, then," said Grundy.

"Rely on us, old chap. We'll do our best!"

"And don't worry about me, any of you," urged Grundy.

"I've made friends with the Basher and that man Rolfs—though he's a cheeky blighter—and there's only one fellow who doesn't like me."

"Who's that?"

"Fellow of the name of Graves," answered Grundy thoughtfully. "Thin, foxy-looking bouncer. I seem to think I've seen him before, though I can't for the life of me remember where. He's joined the circus recently to help with the baggage."

"Chap with a yellow moustache?" asked Wilkins.

"That's the man."

"I spotted him as we came in," said Wilkins. "He gave us a suspicious sort of look, I thought."

"Of course, I think I know why the fellow doesn't like me—"

"Why not?"

"I—hem!—fell out with him the first time I came to this show. You see, like an ass, I left my cash behind, and he spotted me crawling under the canvas—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And tried to yank me back," explained Grundy.

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"Well?"

"Of course, I wasn't standing any rot. I hit him."

"You—you hit him for stopping you sneaking in without paying?" stuttered Wilkins.

"Slogged him on the nose," said Grundy, grinning at the recollection. "He didn't follow me in."

"My only hat. I don't wonder he doesn't like you!" gasped Gunn dazedly.

"Oh, well, it can't be helped!" said Grundy philosophically. "The fellow shouldn't have butted in. I'm keeping an eye on him, though. He's the kind of blighter to play any dirty trick if he saw a chance, I believe."

"Well, Grundy just about takes the cake!" breathed Lowther. "I hope he doesn't brain you before we see you again, old man."

"We'll be toddling along now," announced Tom Merry. "And we'll bear in mind that Linton must be kept off the trail. I only hope something turns up to stop you following this little game too long."

"Wait a minute," ejaculated Grundy hastily. "I'll just see if the coast is clear. I don't want you fellows to be spotted."

Grundy went to the door of the hut and opened it cautiously. He peered into the dusk, and gave a violent start. He leaped back quite suddenly.

"My hat!"

"What's up?"

"Linton!"

The juniors looked startled as Grundy made that gasping announcement. They realised the enormity of Grundy's actions a little more clearly, perhaps.

"He's coming this way—he'll speak to Whanger!" breathed Grundy. "My hat, then it will be all up!"

Tom Merry set his lips.

"Keep cool, old man. We'll fix him. Come on, chaps!"

Like shadows the five juniors slipped out of Grundy's tent. In the distance, coming along the lane, they could see the figure of their Form master. There was no doubt that he was coming to the circus—evidently recalling Grundy's keenness on the show as exhibited in the Form-room during Virgil.

"What are we going to do?" breathed Wilkins faintly.

"In the circus, we can't let old Grundy down," whispered Tom Merry coolly. "Goodness knows, he's playing the fool enough, but he thinks he's doing right. We shall have to waylay Linton. Follow me."

There was a convenient hedge between the juniors and the approaching master. For this cover Tom Merry sped, followed closely by the rest.

Tom Merry rapped out his instructions.

"As he passes, rush out as though you were chasing me. Bump into Linton as if by accident; but see that he rolls in the mud. He'll have to get back to St. Jim's and change then!"

"I only hope he believes that it's an accident!" breathed Wilkins apprehensively.

Possibly that scheme, evolved on the spur of the moment, lacked something of finesse. It was risky, and it would not avert the danger completely. But there was no time to think of that. Grundy had to be saved from discovery. And it was his loyal pals who were called upon to make the sacrifice for him!

Mr. Linton was striding along the lane, en route for the circus. It had occurred to him that Grundy might be there, though he admitted that it was unlikely. There was no thought of ambush in Mr. Linton's mind at that moment.

He started as a sudden shout burst from the hedge.

"After him! Stop him, you chaps!"

A flying figure burst upon the Form master, and collided with him a good deal like a runaway express. Form master and junior rolled wildly in the muddy lane. A moment later four other juniors were rolling, too—with Mr. Linton, somehow, undermost.

"Wow!"

"Who's that under me?"

"Boys!"

Five juniors stiffened obediently at that sound.

Mr. Linton sat up as five forms were withdrawn from the region of his chest and waistcoat. The Form master was gasping with amazement and anger.

"Boys, what is the meaning of this—this outrage?"

Silence!

"I can only believe that it was an accident. If I thought for one moment that you intended to treat me in this manner—"

Mr. Linton's eyes glistened.

Tom Merry & Co. assumed their most demure expressions, and hastened to brush their Form master down.

Mr. Linton, grim and icy, permitted them to do so. Then he turned back towards the way he had come.

"In any case, your carelessness was outrageous! I am

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muddy—soaked! Your punishment will be severe! Follow me!"

And Mr. Linton set out grimly in the direction of Wayland Station. Tom Merry & Co. followed, a good deal like sheep being led to the slaughter.

They knew what was coming—but it was to save Grundy.

With really heroic resignation the five juniors followed Mr. Linton along the muddy lane.

CHAPTER 7.

Grundy Investigates!

"THAT'LL do, kid. You're improving!"

Grundy, late of the St. Jim's Shell, now of Whanger's Mammoth Circus, came breathlessly to a halt.

Basher Barnes, who had been putting him through a stiff practice bout, was a little "blown," too.

The circus had moved overnight to Burchester, a few miles from Wayland. Mr. Whanger followed the wise policy of remaining only a day, or perhaps two days, at each of the little towns and villages he stopped at. In this way he contrived to keep the attendances fairly high, an important factor when he had a big company demanding wages at the end of the week.

The marquee was already pitched, and Basher Barnes had decided to give Grundy a few tips before the exhibition in the evening. The Shell fellow, although full of "pep" and "go," was sadly lacking in the matter of science. The Basher had, with really exemplary patience, done his best to inculcate some idea of strategy in Grundy, and had shown him the uselessness of his wild rushes and wind-mill blows.

In that bout Grundy's gameness had stood him in good stead. Indeed, it was that quality, as much as his brawn, that had first attracted the attention of Paul Whanger.

After considerable tuition from the Basher, Grundy was still a long way from being a scientific boxer, but at least he understood more than he had done. In the Shell, Grundy could have licked any fellow with the exception of Tom Merry, or Talbot, or Kangaroo. Now he was in fettle to give any one of those hefty fighting men a good run for their money.

"Wow! You've made a mess of my nose, you ass!" gasped Grundy, as the Basher dropped his fists.

"Sorry! You fairly rammed it on my glove, you know," answered the Basher, chuckling.

"But you think I've improved?" asked Grundy anxiously, as he dabbed at the "claret."

"A whole lot, youngster," answered the Basher. "You're a match for any fellow of your weight, and I'd back you against him!"

Grundy's face glowed. He beamed at the professional, forgetting his injured nasal organ. This was the appreciation for which Grundy craved. At last—at long last—the world was beginning to appreciate him for what he was worth. Of course, boxing was only one of his many accomplishments. But it was exceedingly pleasant to have a boxer of the Basher's ability complimenting him on his prowess. Grundy's only regret was that Tom Merry & Co. were not there to hear it.

"Chuck it for a while now," gasped Barnes, peeling off his sweater and tossing his gloves into a corner. "We don't want to overdo it—what?"

"No; and there's a hand to be lent with the unloading, too!" exclaimed Grundy.

With a final dab at his nose he strode out of the marquee, and headed for the carts from which the circus paraphernalia was being unloaded. Grundy had joined the circus, and he intended to pull his weight. In a few moments he was as busy as the rest.

It was hard work, and even Grundy, hefty fellow though he was, began to feel the strain after a time.

He paused to mop his streaming brow, and caught Mr. Whanger's eye.

"Seen that fellow Graves about, youngster?"

"No, sir," answered Grundy, gasping with his exertions.

"He seems to be dodging the work," said Mr. Whanger, frowning. "Scout round, and see if you can spot him, kid."

"Right-ho!"

Perhaps Mr. Whanger, who was a considerate gentleman, had observed that Grundy was in need of a rest. At any rate, the St. Jim's junior was glad enough to take one.

He "scouted" among the caravans, still mopping his brow and dabbing occasionally at his nose. But the man Graves, to whom Grundy usually referred as "that foxy-looking bounder," was nowhere to be seen.

"Where on earth is the chap skulking?" ejaculated Grundy, coming to halt in the middle of the camp. Among the many caravans he could not tell which one belonged to the man Graves, and he had made a pretty thorough round.

But a movement from inside a caravan near by caught Grundy's eye, and he strode towards it.

He did not like Graves, as he had told Tom Merry & Co. And there was no doubt that the man did not like Grundy. He had a perfectly natural reason. Being a shrimpy fellow, he could not take Grundy on in fair fight and return that "slog" on the nose which Grundy had dismissed so airily.

But Grundy sensed some deeper enmity, though he could not fathom it. He seemed to remember seeing Graves before somewhere, but it was beyond him to recall exactly when or where. And he had an almost uncanny feeling that Graves recognised him, and was afraid that the recognition would be mutual. At any rate, he was careful to keep well out of the Shell fellow's way.

And now Graves was slacking, just the kind of thing that Grundy would have expected from him.

The St. Jim's junior arrived at the caravan wherein he had discerned movement, and looked in.

There was a gasp from the occupant, and he swung round with a face as pale as death.

It was Graves.

"You!" he gasped.

"Yes, me!" retorted Grundy ungrammatically.

"What do you want? Take it and get out!"

"Mr. Whanger sent me," answered Grundy, unmoved.

"He wants to know why you aren't lending a hand with the unloading."

"Hang Whanger! I didn't know the unloading had started."

"Liar!" said Grundy cheerily.

"You—you—"

"Hang Whanger as much as you like," continued Grundy calmly. "But I shouldn't let him hear you, if I were you. Anyway, you've got to do some work now. Quite a change for you, you slacker!"

Graves paused.

Really, he seemed uncertain whether to obey Mr. Whanger's orders or not.

As the man hesitated, Grundy glanced curiously round the caravan.

There were several boxes and one or two leather bags already there, apparently carted by Graves himself. He had been bending over one of the boxes when Grundy looked in, but had slammed down the lid on the instant. It was certainly a little secretive, but that was the man's own business. Grundy was a keen amateur detective, but he was not a Paul Pry.

"What are you staring at?" snarled Graves, at last.

"Eh? Waiting for you to make up your mind, old scout," observed Grundy coolly.

He glanced round for a space to dump the box, but the van was already littered up with boxes and leather bags.

"Get out of my van, hang you! I'm coming."

"Better get a move on, then, unless you want to get into Whanger's bad books," suggested Grundy kindly.

He walked unconcernedly away from Graves' caravan. A few moments later the man himself emerged, and passed Grundy on his way to the carts.

Grundy presented himself again, but Mr. Whanger waved him aside.

"Take a rest, kid. We want you fit and fresh for to-night."

"Right-ho, sir!"

Once again Grundy left the unloading, not at all sorry in his heart of hearts. The man Graves joined in with a set face to do his share.

Grundy's footsteps led him back past Graves' caravan, and he paused as he was hailed from behind.

"Hi, kid! Dump this in there, will you?"

It was Rolfs, with a heavy wooden box, similar to the others in Graves' tent.

"My hat! The fellow takes enough luggage, doesn't he?" ejaculated Grundy.

"It's only props that he's got to unpack," gasped Rolfs. "Here you are. They'll want me with that staging over there."

"Right you are."

Grundy shouldered the heavy box, and Rolfs slipped back to lend his aid with the staging. Grundy turned in at Graves' caravan, staggering a little with the weight of the wooden box.

He glanced round for a space to dump the box, but the van was already littered up with boxes and leather bags.

"My hat! I shall drop it in a minute!"

Grundy cast round desperately for a place to land the box, but there was none. Just as he made up his mind to dump it on one of the others his foot caught in something lying on the floor, and he staggered wildly.

For one giddy second Grundy and the heavy box tottered. Then, with a crash, the box landed, full on top of one of Graves' leather bags.

Grundy sprawled over after it, gasping.

"Oh, my hat! That's done it!"

He scrambled up again, surveying the bag beneath the box. It was a small bag, or rather it had been a small bag. Now it was a burst bag—a badly burst bag.

The contents were scattered on the floor of the van, and it was, as his gaze lighted on those contents, that Grundy gave a sudden start.

"My hat! What the thump—"

He bent down swiftly and picked up some of the things that had been forced out of the burst bag. The first thing that Grundy picked up was a hairy, brown mass—a false beard! A false moustache and side-whiskers were attached to it.

Grundy stared at those articles in amazement.

"Mum-mum-my hat! What on earth is this game?"

He bent down again, and found several sticks of grease-paint lying near. In the bag itself were bottles of lotion, and a smaller case which the weight of the wooden box pinned down.

Grundy gasped.

He had suspected the man Graves of being underhand in some way. The mystery was deepening. What did a circus hand want with a set of "make-up," such as the contents of this bag undoubtedly comprised? Graves was employed to help with the baggage and the horses, not to appear in the show at all. He had no need of make-up. Yet on the side of the bag were the initials, plain enough, L.G.

The bag obviously belonged to the man, and in it he was concealing a complete outfit for changing his appearance. Why? Grundy recalled the man's apparent anxiety when he had looked in on him unexpectedly a short while before.

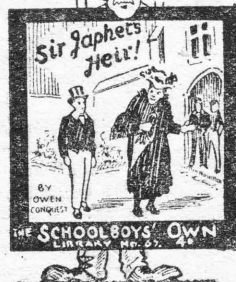
There was a very thoughtful expression on Grundy's face as he rose to his feet again.

"By Jove! The man's got some deep game on, sure enough. I wonder what it is?"

As he gazed at the bag Grundy realised suddenly that if Graves found him there he would at once accuse the junior of opening the bag. With that thought in his mind, Grundy turned towards the door.

(Continued on next page.)

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But as he did so there was a step without, the door was opened, and Graves appeared.

His face blanched as he caught sight of Grundy.

Grundy eyed him coolly enough.

"Well?"

"What are you doing here, you—you thief?" demanded Graves, his colour returning and his eyes flashing.

"I didn't come here to steal," retorted Grundy grimly.

"That's the kind of low-down accusation you would make, you rotter! But I've made a discovery."

"You spy!"

Grundy's lip curled.

"You know that's a lie, too," he answered contemptuously. "I came here to dump a box for Rolfs and tripped. The box fell on your bag and it burst. I couldn't help seeing what it contained."

Graves gazed with burning eyes at the burst bag pinned beneath the heavy box. It was easy to see that Grundy was telling the truth.

A hunted look replaced the anger on Graves' face.

"You—you—I believe you! That is some of the circus props that you have seen, Grundy."

"In a bag with your initials on it?" asked Grundy, watching the man keenly.

Graves bit his lip.

"Anyway, that is the truth," he answered shortly. "It is no business of yours. Get out!"

"Glad to go, I'm sure," said Grundy coolly. "All the same, I don't believe you, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

And with that Parthian shot Grundy left the man Graves to his contemplations.

Could the Shell fellow have seen the look of fear on Graves' face after he had gone, George Alfred Grundy would have been more suspicious than he was.

CHAPTER 8.

The Hand of an Enemy!

"SEEN Graves?"

Grundy grinned.

He was becoming used to being asked that question.

The stay of Mr. Whanger's circus at the little town of Burchester had proved popular, and the receipts at the box office more than satisfactory, mainly owing to the attraction of "Basher" Barnes and his sparring-partner, the Masked Wonder. But the wily Mr. Whanger was following his usual policy, and had decided to move on again before the receipts began to fall. The circus was due at Latham, at some distance, that night.

Latham was a town of considerable size, and there was the chance of good business there; hence Mr. Whanger's anxiety to get his show packed up and on the road in scheduled time.

In packing the innumerable "props" of the circus every hand was needed, and Grundy had turned to with the rest. But, as had occurred on many previous occasions, one of the hands was missing—the man Graves with whom Grundy had fallen out.

It was Rolfs who asked Grundy the question now.

Rolfs was very busy, perspiration streaming down his face, and he needed a helper on his particular job. But Graves, who should have been helping, was absent.

"He's not in sight," answered Grundy. "Wait a minute, and I'll give you a hand myself."

"He blinking well ought to be," snapped Rolfs grimly.

"The feller slacks about all day long, and never puts a hand to a piece o' work unless the boss is around."

"Half a second, and I'll rout him out for you," volunteered Grundy. "He's probably skulking in his van."

"Right-ho!"

Rolfs paused to rest while Grundy sped across the grass to Graves' caravan. The Shell fellow did not stand on ceremony. He poked his head in the doorway, looking grim.

"Graves, you slacker!"

"What? Oh, you!"

"Yes, me!" said Grundy, coolly. "Dodging work again—what?"

"I—you see—"

"Well, I'm giving you a straight tip," said Grundy warningly. "Rolfs is tearing his hair because you aren't helping him, and if Mr. Whanger comes round you'll be properly in the soup!"

Graves bit his thin lips, but nodded.

He closed the bag he had been opening when Grundy entered.

"I—I really forgot we were loading," he answered, rather lamely. "Tell Rolfs I'll be with him in a minute."

"Mind you are!" retorted Grundy.

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He returned to Rolfs and reported Graves' statement, whereat Rolfs sniffed.

"When he says a minute he means half an hour," he answered sourly. "Oh, yessir?"

"Whanger—here comes Graves, just in time!" breathed Grundy.

Mr. Paul Whanger, swinging a whip, strode up to Grundy, and gave Graves a grim glance as he hastened to aid Rolfs with the loading of the carts. But evidently more important thoughts than Graves' slackness were moving in Mr. Whanger's mind, for he fixed Grundy with a keen gaze and shifted his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"Feelin' fit, kid?"

"Fit as a fiddle, sir!"

"Good; You know we're giving our farewell performance this afternoon, and leaving immediately afterwards?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pr'aps you haven't seen the Basher this morning?"

"Can't say I have, Mr. Whanger," answered Grundy, a little puzzled.

"He won't fight to-day," observed the circus proprietor grimly.

"An accident?" ejaculated Grundy, startled.

"Slipped over a rope and fell on his wrist," said Mr. Whanger gloomily.

"Sprained it, sir?"

"That's about the size of it, my lad. See here! We're in a hole, no Basher to star here this afternoon, or at



A flying figure burst from the hedge as Mr. Linton came along the express. A moment later and four other juniors rushed upon the scene as Tom Merry had

Latham this evenin', and, as you know, his turn is the big attraction. I want to ask you to take a chance, my boy."

"Go ahead!" answered Grundy, his eyes gleaming.

He thought he could divine what Mr. Whanger was going to ask.

"You've improved a lot under the Basher's training," observed Mr. Whanger thoughtfully.

"You mean—"

"This afternoon and this evening we shall star the Masked Wonder, instead of the Basher, my lad. There won't be any exhibition bout, but the challenge will be made, as usual—and I'm relying on you to see me through. Do you think you can manage it?"

Grundy's eyes gleamed. Grundy had gallons of confidence. He had no doubt that he was suited—indeed, cut out—to take the Basher's place that day and stand up to all comers. There was no doubt in Grundy's mind that he could take on the best that Burchester or Latcham could put up and lick them with one hand tied—figuratively—behind his back. "I could do it on my head, sir. Don't you worry; you won't lose your ten pounds!" Mr. Whanger grinned. He gave Grundy a glance of approval. "You don't mind riskin' comin' up against a champion by accident, kid?" he asked. "I'll knock any fellow in Burchester or Latcham into a cocked hat," said Grundy confidently. "At any rate, I can hold out three rounds. They've got to knock me out to win, haven't they?"



... and collided with the Form master a good deal like a runaway scene, the foremost of them colliding with the unfortunate master (See Chapter 6.)

"That's what I'm relying on," observed Mr. Whanger coolly. "Maybe you'll have a tough time, but you ought to escape bein' put to sleep, with your training. I'll risk it if you're game, kid."

"Game enough," answered Grundy at once.

"That's settled, then."

And Mr. Whanger nodded and strolled away into the marquee.

Grundy was almost gasping as he thought of the glorious chance which had come to him—to show the circus crowd what a magnificent fighting man he really was; with a little training, Grundy was no doubt, as good, or better, than the Basher himself.

That he might get a good drubbing during his spell as deputy did not occur to Grundy. Grundy was never accustomed to counting odds. In the Shell passage at St. Jim's that little failing had landed him deep into trouble many a time and oft. But Grundy did not expect trouble on this occasion, any more than any other.

Mr. Whanger was taking a risk—a grave risk—though Grundy was the last fellow to see it. But the circus proprietor knew well enough that the boxing bout was the "star" item on his programme, and he was loth to do without it if it could be avoided. Grundy's performance that afternoon would show him whether he could continue to risk the Masked Wonder in the ring against all comers.

As for Grundy, he walked on air for the rest of the morning. As the "star" of the programme, he was not called upon to help with the packing, which was being pushed as far ahead as possible, ready for the journey to Latcham. The evening performance at Latcham depended on whether the show arrived in time, and Mr. Whanger did not wish to cancel it, unless he had to. Every performance made a difference to the company's prosperity.

As the afternoon drew on Grundy felt ready to hit the stars with his sublime head.

This was to be his triumph; and his sole regret was that Wilkins, and Gunn, and the rest of the Shell would not be there to witness it.

The Shell fellow passed Graves on his way to the dressing-room, and Graves gave him a twisted smile. Grundy nodded cheerily. He did not cherish any dislike of the man, especially at that moment. He could not dismiss the conviction that he had, at some time, seen the man before, but he was beginning to wonder if that was only fancy. And just now he had thoughts only for the boxing bout, which was almost due.

As Grundy disappeared into his dressing-room Graves paused and turned back. He stopped outside the partition and listened. Mr. Whanger was within, giving Grundy his last instructions and cautioning him against taking risks. Basher Barnes was there, also, and their voices came plainly to Graves, listening a yard or two away.

"Be careful, kid. And remember what I told you—keep them off, and don't worry about knocking them into the audience."

"Rely on me," came Grundy's confident voice.

"Whatever you do, remember there's ten quids going west if you lose," urged Mr. Whanger earnestly. "Ten golden quids, mind you!"

"You needn't worry," came Grundy's voice cheerily. "Your money is safe as houses."

Graves permitted a thin smile to appear on his narrow features as he listened.

There was a sound of movement from within, and he slipped back into a convenient fold of the big marquee just as Mr. Whanger and the Basher emerged.

For a few moments Grundy would be left unattended.

As the circus proprietor and the Basher disappeared into the circus ring Graves slipped into Grundy's dressing-room.

"Hallo! What do you want?" ejaculated the Masked Wonder in surprise.

"Looked in to wish you good luck," answered Graves cunningly.

"Thanks!" answered Grundy, lacing his shoes.

Graves glanced rapidly about him as Grundy bent down to his shoes. There was a cup of Bovril on the table, which Grundy was evidently intending to drink. Graves drew a hand swiftly across the cup and something slipped into it, like a minute pill.

Grundy, his shoes fastened, looked up again without noticing anything. Graves' swift movement would have passed unseen by a keener fellow than Grundy.

"Still here?" asked the Shell fellow, raising his eyebrows.

"Best of luck!" said Graves, smiling quite pleasantly. "Here come your seconds."

Grundy's seconds entered the room as Graves left it.

In a few moments all thought of the man fled from Grundy's mind. He drained the cup of Bovril and allowed his seconds to massage his muscles. Then, as a call came from without, he rose to his feet.

A short walk, and he stepped into the ring, in the full glare of the arcs, and with a sea of faces stretching away on every side.

Grundy hardly heard Mr. Whanger's announcement.

"I have pleasure in presenting the Masked Wonder—"

Around him on every side was a sea of white faces, and a murmur of applause greeted his appearance.

Some fellows might have experienced a qualm or two. Not so Grundy. This was recognition, the balm that Grundy's soul yearned for. Everybody waited on his movements—which was just as it should be. Grundy felt that this was a moment which he could look back upon in later years and feel that he had lived.

He took his seat in one corner with the utmost coolness.

Even his seconds were surprised by the lack of nerves in their charge.

Mr. Whanger droned on, enlarging on the skill of the Masked Wonder, and explaining that he was deputising for Basher Barnes, indisposed.

Then came the challenge—the Masked Wonder against any local who felt that he would like to secure ten pounds.

Mr. Whanger made the challenge in some trepidation.

He hoped devoutly that there would be no response.

Grundy, quite cool and confident, stood in the centre of the ring, awaiting his opponent.

"The Masked Wonder will fight anybody——" repeated Mr. Whanger, reassured by the lack of immediate response in the audience.

"I'll take him on!"

Mr. Whanger stopped, and stared at the challenger, standing on his seat.

"Will you please step up here, sir?" he requested, after a pause.

There was a movement in the audience, and the challenger made his way up to the ring.

Mr. Whanger stared in dismay as the man came closer.

Only Grundy seemed unperturbed.

Mr. Whanger helped the challenger into the ring, almost trembling with fright. The challenger seemed confident enough. He had reason to be.

He was a hefty fellow, nearly six feet in height, and proportionally broad. He was perhaps twenty-four or five. A glance was sufficient to see that he worked in the open air and did not know the meaning of nerves.

"Your—your name, please, sir?" asked Mr. Whanger.

"Stiles—Sam Stiles, of Hucknell's Farm."

Mr. Whanger hardly dared breathe.

This man would have been a tough handful for the hefty "Basher"—there was no doubt about that. The mere thought of Grundy facing him was sufficient to unnerve Mr. Whanger.

"I say, I'm ready, you know," called Grundy, rather impatiently.

He did not see any reason for delay.

"The—the Masked Wonder will fight Sam Stiles, of—of Hucknell's Farm," gasped Mr. Whanger, at last.

He gave Grundy a compassionate glance as he stepped out of the ring.

Grundy did not appear to notice it.

"Seconds out! Time!"

CHAPTER 9. Thrown Out!

SAM STILES, of Hucknell's Farm, left his corner and sparred warily into the middle of the ring.

Grundy advanced quite cheerily to meet him.

He did not look dismayed by the really imposing physical development of the hefty farm-hand.

It was left to Mr. Paul Whanger to look—and feel—a variety of qualms and apprehensions as the opponents closed in on each other.

At that moment Mr. Whanger bitterly regretted risking his ten pounds on Grundy; that ten pounds, Mr. Whanger felt, was as good as lost already.

Of course, Grundy would put up a good fight; the circus proprietor knew that. But against the muscle and sinew of Sam Stiles, his chances were slim indeed. It looked as though one good punch from Mr. Stiles would crumple Grundy on the resin.

If only the Basher could have taken the ring; but the Basher was nursing a badly-swollen wrist, otherwise this awful situation would never have arisen.

Mr. Whanger had to content himself with advice, sotto voce, to Grundy from the ringside.

At first, the Masked Wonder did not seem to be finding his opponent such a tremendous handful as might have been expected.

Sam Stiles was hefty, with plenty of muscle and grit. But he was slow, not to say cumbersome, and Grundy, quick on his feet as he usually was, could skip round the farm-hand with ease and administer a blow as opportunity arose.

"Good lad! Oh, good lad! Keep away from him!" urged Mr. Whanger.

Grundy, at first, acted according to plan in a manner that somewhat reassured Mr. Whanger.

Sam Stiles, obviously unused to a ring, swung a number of clumsy blows at Grundy, all of which the Shell fellow dodged easily enough, and in return he landed quite a number on various portions of Mr. Stiles' ample anatomy.

And, as the bout continued, Grundy took matters easily, all according to the instructions impressed upon him by the circus proprietor. By the end of the first round, the Masked Wonder had slowed down considerably, and was

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contenting himself with dodging the farm-hand's swinging blows, giving little in exchange.

Grundy went to his corner and sat down, breathing a little heavily, and looking tired.

He did not look up as Mr. Whanger approached him, and whispered excitedly:

"Feeling all right, kid?"

"I'm all right," answered Grundy thickly.

"Well, you look tired," answered Mr. Whanger. "Never mind—he's easier than I expected. Just hold him off—and land one or two on your own account when you see a chance."

"Rely on me, sir."

"Time!"

Mr. Whanger watched the combatants spar up for the second round with considerably more confidence than he had done previously.

Grundy could hold his own, if he was careful, and Mr. Whanger felt that his ten pounds were safe again.

But either Sam Stiles was improving, or Grundy was getting slower; that was speedily apparent in this round.

The farm-hand's clumsy swings began to find a billet, and more than once Grundy staggered under the impact. In return, he made one or two fierce rushes, which somehow seemed to peter out ere he had done the damage which Mr. Stiles' wide-open guard invited. Mr. Whanger looked quite anxious as the round proceeded.

"Grundy! Wake up, kid! What's wrong with you?"

There seemed to be something seriously wrong with the Masked Wonder. He was becoming slower and slower, and his blows lacked the fire and fury with which they had been invested at the commencement. Sam Stiles, gaining confidence, was beginning to "walk" right into his opponent, and knock him right and left.

There was a gasp from Mr. Whanger and Grundy's seconds as a hefty slog from the farm-hand stretched Grundy on the floor just as the gong sounded.

"By heck! See what's wrong with him!" snapped Mr. Whanger.

Grundy was helped to his feet and assisted to his corner, where the furious efforts of his seconds in some measure revived him. But there was a glassy look in the Shell fellow's eyes as he stood up for the third and last round.

"Go into him, kid, for all you're worth!" breathed Mr. Whanger desperately. "If you don't, he'll lay you cold before the finish!"

Certainly, it appeared to be the intention of the burly Mr. Stiles to "lay" Grundy "cold" before the end of the contest. The bait of ten pounds, and Grundy's apparent inability to defend himself, encouraged the farm-hand considerably.

And in this round the display of the Masked Wonder was futile. He went to pieces as Sam Stiles came into him, swinging his hefty fists recklessly. Grundy covered feebly, recalling the instructions of Mr. Whanger and the Basher, but it was useless. Against Mr. Stiles' fierce pommelling, his guard dropped, and the farm-hand's big fist crashed home on his jaw.

For a moment Grundy staggered wildly, a world of stars and comets fleeting across his gaze. Then Mr. Stiles' other fist crashed home, and all went black.

With a grunt, Grundy subsided feebly on the resin and lay prone.

"Up!" gasped Mr. Whanger, almost hopping with anxiety. "Up, you young idiot!"

"Pull yourself together, Grundy!" hissed the "Basher."

"Up, man!"

The referee was counting, and in front of the Burchester crowd he could not "hang out" the ten seconds. Even if he had, Grundy did not show the slightest sign of moving.

While Sam Stiles stood aside, gasping but triumphant, the referee counted Grundy out. As he held up Mr. Stiles' hand, a burst of cheering threatened to lift off the roof of the marquee.

Mr. Whanger's face was a study.

After a most promising start Grundy had simply gone to pieces, offering no resistance at all in the third round. He was still inert on the resin when the circus proprietor motioned his seconds to take him away.

He watched Grundy being carried out of the ring, with a grim expression. Defeat in a hard fight he could have understood and taken in a sporting spirit. It had been a risk putting Grundy up at all.

But when the Masked Wonder had had Mr. Stiles at his mercy, when he could with the greatest of ease have danced round him until the close of the bout, it was another matter. Grundy had obviously collapsed from some cause other than Mr. Stiles. The latter had merely taken advantage of Grundy's inability even to stand unaided.

Perhaps Grundy was ill; that was a possible explanation. Mr. Whanger hoped, for Grundy's sake, that such was the case. Otherwise, there was a reckoning awaiting the Masked Wonder.

But at the moment it was "up" to Mr. Whanger to smile, for the audience were calling for a speech from Mr. Stiles, and for the ten pounds which the local champion had won.

With really iron fortitude Mr. Whanger stood up in the ring and congratulated Sam Stiles on his skill and pluck. Then, amid cheers, Mr. Whanger paid over the ten rustling notes to the delighted farm-hand.

There were beads of perspiration running down Mr. Whanger's face when he had finished and Mr. Stiles had rejoined his friends among the audience. It was the first occasion on which the circus proprietor had had to pay up and look pleasant. Basher Barnes had never let him down.

The clown followed the boxing bout, and Mr. Whanger was more than thankful to relinquish the stage to him. He felt that he wanted a rest, and—more important—a word with Grundy. Of course, it was probable that Grundy was ill; but if not, Mr. Whanger had a good deal to say on the subject.

"The—the young villain!" he gasped, as he accompanied Basher Barnes to the dressing-room of the Masked Wonder.

As the circus proprietor straightened again his expression was set.

"What—what, isn't there a smell of some kind?" asked the Basher, sniffing, too.

"Spirits!" snapped Mr Whanger.

"By gad!"

"The—the young rascal smells of spirits!" rasped Mr. Whanger. "I think that explains a lot. He must, somehow, have dosed himself before the fight—"

"And, probably, not being used to it, took too much!" muttered the Basher.

"That's it! Graves!"

"Sir?"

"Has anything been given him since he was brought in here?"

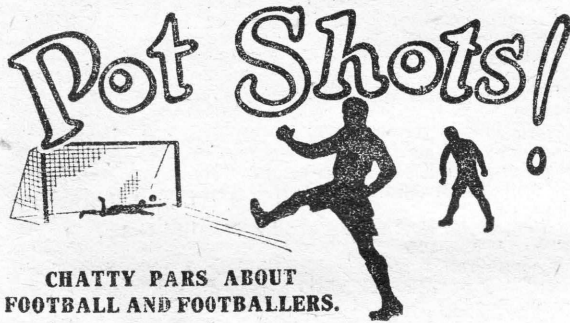
"No spirits, sir. I've been here the whole time."

"As I thought. You are right, Barnes. Ah, here are Rolfs and Burke!"

Grundy's seconds entered the room, and stared at Mr. Whanger's grim countenance.

"Rolfs, have you given the lad any spirits?"

"No, sir. I've some brandy here—"



OF the first hundred penalty kicks awarded in big football this season over thirty—or very nearly a third—failed to produce a goal. Strange, but true, that an expert shot cannot hit a space of eight yards from twelve yards out.

It is officially estimated that Association football raises an annual sum of £60,000 for charity. Obviously, people other than shareholders or professional players profit from the game.

Curtis, the Cardiff City forward, who is now only twenty-one years of age, has a unique football record. He has been on the winning side in an "English" Cup Final, a Welsh Cup Final, a Charity Shield match, has played for Wales in schoolboy and amateur Internationals, and also for Wales in an International proper. Talk about dreams come true!

Under the jurisdiction of the Football Association there are 30,000 clubs. Only about four hundred of these are really professional sides.

There is much better support for Southern Third Division matches than for Northern Third Division games. Indeed, usually, the number attending the Southern Third matches on a Saturday afternoon doubles the attendance at the same number of Northern Third games.

Scottish League teams must now wear black pants when visiting and white ones when playing at home. Very often, of course, the white knickers become black before the end of a match, but that is neither here nor there.

It is rather surprising to find that only about four of the big football grounds in England have a public clock. If the players want to know the time it is necessary for them to ask the referee.

A gentleman in Nottingham can surely lay claim to be the champion supporter. Anyway he is chairman of the supporters' clubs of both Notts County and Notts Forest.

James McPherson, for twenty-five years trainer to Newcastle United, has had twenty-six players through his hands who have gained International caps—a very good average.

A. G. Bower, the famous Corinthian and English International full-back, is a very good golfer—on the plus one mark.

When Hadyn Price was manager at Grimsby Town he decided one day to play Harry Storer at left-half. "What a mad idea!" remarked one of the officials. This season Harry Storer has played for England as a left-half.

When Jock Simpson played at outside-right for Falkirk he scored 33 goals in one season. That stands as a record number for an outside-wing man.

Here is a twisted proverb: The shot that lacks fire usually ends in smoke.

"Must have been ill," opined the Basher. "He wouldn't have let us down otherwise."

"I hope not," breathed Mr. Whanger—"I hope not, for his own sake! If that fellow Stiles was in league with him—"

"By Jove, I should hope not!" ejaculated the Basher. "We'll see!" snapped Mr. Whanger grimly. "Here we are. Now, Grundy—"

Mr. Whanger swept aside the flap of the dressing-room and strode in.

The Basher followed him closely.

Both stopped and stared at Grundy.

The Masked Wonder was seated, or, rather, propped, in a chair, breathing heavily, and still oblivious of his surroundings. The man Graves stood beside him, smiling slightly.

He ceased smiling suddenly as Mr. Whanger's glance settled on him.

"Graves, where are his seconds?"

"Gone for something to revive him, sir. I stayed to look after the kid and to dress him."

Mr. Whanger nodded.

He glared grimly at the inert form of the Masked Wonder.

Then he sniffed. With a sudden movement he bent towards the unconscious junior, and caught his breath.

"His breath smells strongly of spirits. That explains his state in the ring. Give him the brandy."

Whether Grundy was under the influence of spirits or not, he revived quickly enough on the administration of the brandy.

At the sight of the grim faces around him something of the truth seemed to dawn on Grundy.

"My hat! Did I win, sir?"

"You did not!"

"Oh dear! I remember—I don't know what came over me. I feel all fuddled now, too. By Jove, I've lost you some money, Mr. Whanger!"

"Never mind that now!" snapped the circus proprietor. "The fact is that you dosed yourself with spirits before the fight, instead of the Bovril I gave you—"

"I didn't!" ejaculated Grundy indignantly. "Anybody who says so is a liar!"

"Your breath tells its own story!" retorted Mr. Whanger coolly. "It has been suggested that Stiles was an accomplice of yours, but I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt."

"I tell you—" began Grundy excitedly.

"There's nothing for you to say. Your engagement here

finishes immediately. See that he leaves at once, Graves, and you, Rolfs!"

And, with a grim face, Mr. Whanger left the tent. Grundy, his head swimming, stared helplessly at Graves and Rolfs as they gripped his arms.

"I tell you I didn't! I tell you— Lemme go, you rotters—"

Grundy's fuddled brain refused to cope with the situation. He was led into the open and beyond the confines of the circus. There, on a grassy bank near the lane, he was dumped, very much like a sack of coals.

Graves paused for a moment to chuckle mockingly, but Grundy did not hear him.

He held his head in his hand, and let the wind play around his temples.

How long he remained like that he did not know.

CHAPTER 10.

A Startling Clue!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"No!"

"But, I say—"

"Nothing doing!" said Tom Merry, and Manners, and Lowther, in unison.

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth glared.

The Terrible Three were strolling in the quad with Wilkins and Gunn that sunny half-holiday, meditating on Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn were so deep in meditation that they had not even noticed Trimble.

But Trimble was not the fellow to remain content in oblivion for long; he was usually bursting to communicate some tittle-tattle or other to any fellow who had the patience to listen to him. If it was not tittle-tattle, it was a loan; and in either case, Tom Merry & Co. had other and weightier matters on their minds just then.

Hence their somewhat abrupt response to the fat Fourth-Former's opening.

"Look here—" spluttered Trimble, glaring indignantly as the juniors strolled away from him.

The juniors strolled on. Trimble broke into a trot and overtook them again.

"Look here, you beasts, don't you want to hear the news?"

"Eh? Isn't it a loan?" demanded Monty Lowther, condescending to notice Trimble as he joggled at his elbow.

"No, you rotter!"

"Well, my hat! I ask you, how was a fellow to know that?" ejaculated Lowther.

Trimble breathed hard and deep.

Here he was, a fellow fairly bursting to impart news, and the recipients were displaying an almost heart-breaking lack of interest. For once, Trimble did not want to borrow anything; he had news to give away. And there was no encouragement.

But Trimble was nothing if not a stickler. He was used to lack of appreciation in the Lower School at St. Jim's.

"Roll away, Trimble, and let a fellow think in peace!" growled Gunn, making a motion with his foot.

"Yes, give us a rest, old fat bean!" urged Wilkins.

"Can't you see we're thinking about Grundy?"

"Exactly!" said Trimble in triumph.

"Well, why don't you roll, then?"

"You don't want to hear about Grundy, what?" grinned Trimble.

"Eh? Do you know anything, you fat eavesdropper?"

"I may—" began Trimble, closing one eye.

"Cough it up, then—sharp!" snapped Wilkins.

Perhaps Grundy's idiosyncrasies had made Wilkins a little short-tempered recently; at any rate, he had no patience to waste on Trimble.

"Well, you might be civil to a chap, after he's taken the trouble to get it from the Head himself—"

"I'll bet the Head doesn't know!" grinned Lowther.

"Did your shoelace come undone outside his study door?"

"Ahem! Anyway, I know what I know," answered Trimble mysteriously.

The Terrible Three grinned. Wilkins and Gunn breathed hard.

Grundy, as their chum, was bad enough. He was, indeed, the bane of Wilkins' and Gunn's existence. But Trimble was not their chum, and they did not feel disposed to stand on ceremony with him.

"Look here, you fat idiot!" snapped Wilkins. "If you know anything, cough it up! If you don't, roll away—sharp!"

"I say, you know—"

"Sharp!" roared Wilkins.

"Ow! All right, then. Lemme alone, you rotter! I heard the Head jawing to Linton—"

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"Oh, dear! They've got on his trail at last!" groaned Gunn.

"Linton said he thought of inquiring at a circus that was here a few days ago," went on Trimble, with an appreciative glance at Wilkins' boot. "He went as far as Wayland, but you fellows ran into him and upset him in the mud—"

"And got a record licking each," remarked Tom Merry, reminiscently. "My palms are still aching, I know that."

"Linton thinks there's only a slim chance of Grundy's having joined the circus; but he's going to have the company looked over when it touches another town," explained Trimble, satisfied now that he had the attention of his audience at last. "He's informing the police by telephone, and if Grundy's among the circus hands, he'll be routed out at once. If not, neither Linton nor the Head can imagine where the ass can have gone to. I say, do you fellows know anything?"

Trimble gave Tom Merry & Co. a very quizzical look as he noted the effect of his news upon their faces. Beyond the Terrible Three, Wilkins and Gunn had kept their own counsel, and Grundy's whereabouts was a deep mystery to the rest of St. Jim's.

"My hat, then it's all up!" remarked Wilkins grimly.

"He'll be caught!" murmured Gunn.

"I say, you chaps know where he is!" exclaimed Trimble, gasping with excitement.

Wilkins raised his boot.

"Scat!" he rapped grimly.

"But you know where—"

Biff!

Perhaps it was ungrateful of Wilkins, after hearing the news that the Fourth-Former had to impart. But Wilkins was exasperated. His foot caught Trimble on the rear of his well-filled trousers. It started Trimble off quite effectively.

"Come back if you want another!" called Gunn.

"Yah! Beast!"

Trimble rolled away in high dudgeon, with his curiosity unappeased. Whatever Wilkins and Gunn knew, they were not communicating that knowledge to Trimble.

As Trimble left them they convened a council of war.

"The beaks are after the silly ass!" said Gunn grimly. "Once the police get on the trail of the circus, they'll have him in a brace of shakes!"

"Well, it was a potty notion, running away like that, of course," remarked Lowther.

"Mad as a hatter!" agreed Gunn. "But that's not the point. Grundy won't stay on at St. Jim's, knowing that his uncle has to go short to pay the fees; and, of course, the champion ass has some wild idea of collaring the guilty solicitor—though that's rot! If he's yanked back to St. Jim's, the programme will be off. I fancy Grundy will never forgive us for not warning him. What do you think, Wilky?"

"Same as you," answered Wilkins at once. "Grundy's every sort of a silly ass; but he's doing a plucky thing, and it's up to us to warn him. After that, if he gets collared, it can't be helped!"

"And there's that letter that came this morning—by the writing it's from Uncle George," put in Gunn. "There may be something in it to alter Grundy's plans. I suggest we run over to Burchester—that's where they've moved to now—and let him have it, together with the news that Linton has put the police on his trail. You fellows agree?"

Tom Merry and his chums did not pause long.

Foolhardy as Grundy's remarkable conduct was, it was certainly "up" to his chums to let him know the turn of events ere he was brought back ignominiously with a figure in blue as escort. And Wilkins and Gunn were particularly anxious to learn how their chum was faring alone in the world. At their last meeting, certainly, he had seemed to be holding his own well enough. But with an ass of Grundy's calibre, one never knew what might happen.

"We're game," said Tom Merry, after a few seconds. "We can bike over to Burchester and get back easily before call-over. What do you say, Monty?"

"I'm with you."

"And you, Manners?"

"Oh, anything for a quiet life!" assented Manners resignedly. "We'll play keepers to Grundy for this afternoon, if you like."

"Let's get the bikes, then," said Wilkins, eager to get off.

Five juniors headed for the bike shed, and in a few moments they were wheeling their machines out of gates, watched at a safe distance by Baggy Trimble, curious, but with his curiosity unappeased.

It was a long ride to Burchester, at some distance beyond Wayland, but Tom Merry & Co. undertook it cheerfully enough on behalf of the egregious George Alfred.

Tom Merry & Co. were feeling a little tired as the spire of Burchester church came in sight at last, but Wilkins and

Gunn, in their anxiety for Grundy, seemed hardly to have noticed the distance.

"Where shall we find the circus?" asked Lowther, as they rode along the High Street in a bunch.

A kindly native directed them, and in a few minutes more the party rode on to a wide green, on which was pitched the Mammoth Circus of Mr. Paul Whanger.

"There's the marquee," said Wilkins, pointing ahead. "The performance is on, by the look of it."

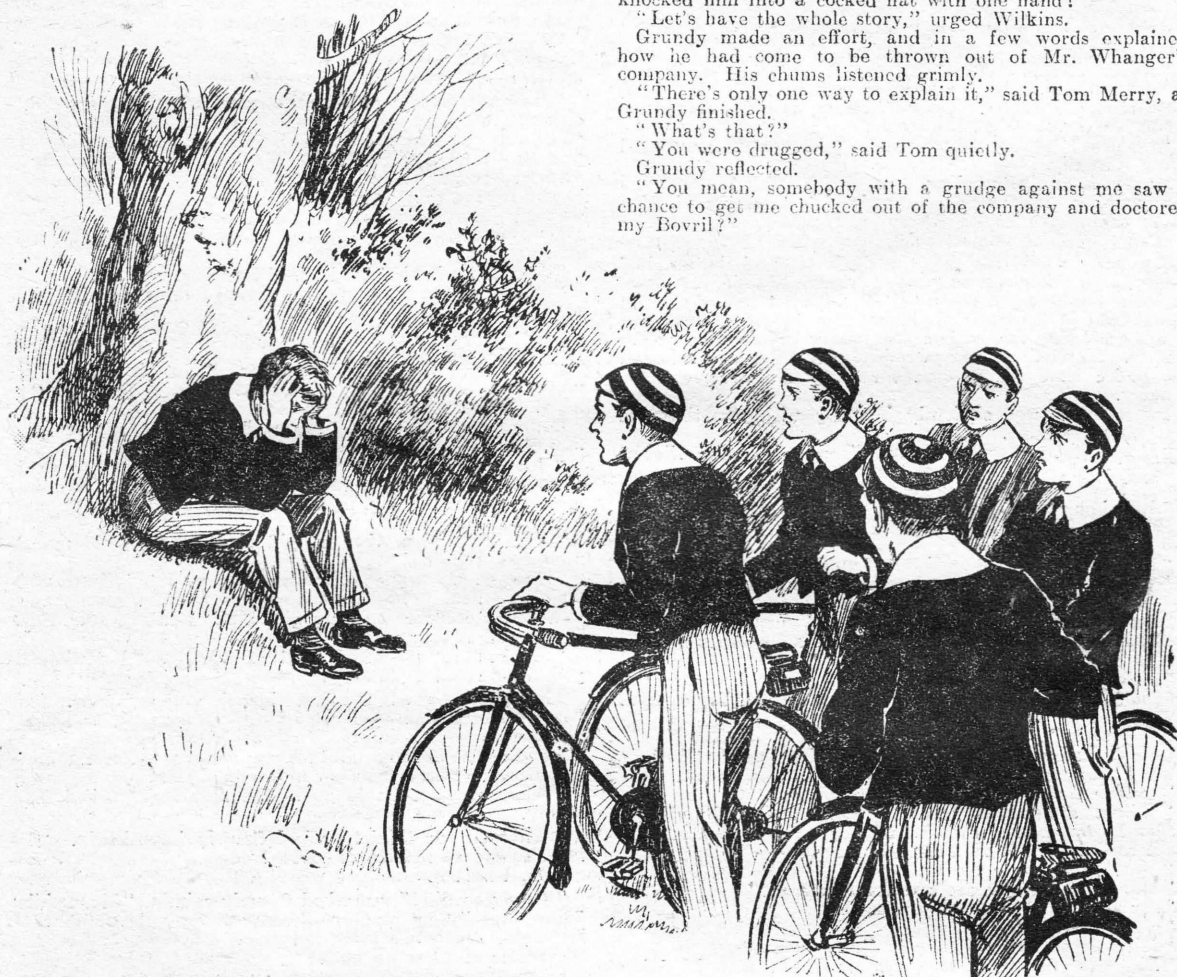
"Stop!" sang out Tom Merry unexpectedly.

"Eh? What's the matter?"

"Who's that over there on that bank?" asked the Shell captain quietly.

"Grundy!"

It was Grundy in the flesh—seated on the grassy bank



George Alfred Grundy was seated on the grassy bank, his head held in his hands, completely oblivious to his surroundings. "My hat!" ejaculated Wilkins. "Grundy! Grundy, old man! Wake up! It's your pals come to see you!" But to the astonishment of the five juniors, Grundy did not look up. (See Chapter 10.)

whereon Graves and Rolfs had deposited him—his head held in his hands, and completely oblivious to his surroundings.

"My hat! He looks awfully down!" ejaculated Wilkins, jumping off his cycle. "Grundy! Grundy, old man! Wake up; it's your pals come to see you!"

To the astonishment of the five juniors, Grundy did not look up as they approached him. Even when they halted before him he remained in his dejected attitude, just as if he had not heard their voices.

Tom Merry leaned forward and shook his shoulder gently. "Grundy, old fellow. What's wrong?"

Grundy moved at that.

He dropped his hands and lifted his face to stare at the juniors. Even then he did not appear to recognise them at first. But, with a sudden start, he regained some of his faculties.

"My hat! Wilky—Gunny! Tom Merry! What—what are you fellows doing here?"

"Question is, what are you doing, sitting on a bank looking like a moulting owl?" demanded Monty Lowther grimly.

"Am I?"

Grundy gazed quite dazedly at the grassy bank, as if trying to recall how he had got there. His chums gazed

at him, surprised and not a little startled. There was something more than peculiar about Grundy.

"Oh, I remember!" ejaculated Grundy at last. "I was licked—a hefty farm chap—and they chucked me out of the circus."

"Suppose you pull yourself together and tell us just what's happened, old chap?" suggested Tom Merry soothingly.

Grundy passed a hand across his forehead before going on. His brain was growing clearer now. Light seemed to dawn on him at last.

"My hat! I was licked, you know—and I had him at my mercy!"

"Licked by whom?"

"A hefty farmer johnny," explained Grundy, recollection flooding back. "I must have been ill. Why, I could have knocked him into a cocked hat with one hand!"

"Let's have the whole story," urged Wilkins.

Grundy made an effort, and in a few words explained how he had come to be thrown out of Mr. Whanger's company. His chums listened grimly.

"There's only one way to explain it," said Tom Merry, as Grundy finished.

"What's that?"

"You were drugged," said Tom quietly.

Grundy reflected.

"You mean, somebody with a grudge against me saw a chance to get me chucked out of the company and doctored my Bovril?"

"That's it. It's plain enough that you've been dosed in some way," said the captain of the Shell coolly. "The same fellow must have spilled some spirits on your clothes and given you a little to drink the moment you'd been carried to your dressing-room. Who was with you then?"

"I don't know, I was unconscious," answered Grundy.

"But Graves was with me when I woke up."

"You fell out with Graves previously, you say?"

"More than once," agreed Grundy.

"Any other enemies?"

"Not that I know."

"Graves is the man, then. Though what his reason could have been, beyond personal spite, I can't imagine. It was a big risk to take just for that alone."

"I say, is that a letter for me?" asked Grundy, suddenly catching sight of one in Gunn's hand.

"Here you are, old man—from Uncle George."

Grundy tore open the flap eagerly enough.

He read the letter through two or three times, a peculiar expression on his face.

"Matters improving?" asked Wilkins hopefully.

"No; but there's news of a kind," said Grundy slowly.

"What's that?"

"Uncle George mentions this time what he didn't say before," answered Grundy. "When the solicitor decamped, March, uncle's butler, went too. The police suspect that Orme and March are in league."

"Likely enough."

"My hat!" yelled Grundy suddenly.

"What's up?"

"March!"

CHAPTER 11.

Grundy Comes Out Strong!

FIVE juniors stared at George Alfred Grundy rather fixedly.

Since reading that letter from his Uncle George, Grundy's manner and speech had been, to say the least, peculiar.

"Take it calmly, old man!" urged Tom Merry.

"March!" repeated Grundy, almost dazedly.

"Exactly. But don't go off the deep end about it, you know," murmured Monty Lowther soothingly.

"March, the butler!" gasped Grundy, as if hardly able to credit the evidence of his senses.

"Oh dear! He's gone this time—quite gone!" murmured Gunn dismally.

Really, it was astounding.

Something in Uncle George's latest communication appeared to have affected Grundy profoundly. But what, it was impossible to conjecture.

The letter stated that March, Uncle George's butler, had disappeared at the same time as the rascally solicitor, Orme. It did not take a great deal of brain power to deduce that March was in league with the solicitor in some way. But it did not bring the juniors any nearer the solution of the matter. March and Orme were probably miles away, though the police were taking care that they did not leave the country.

Yet Grundy was obviously bursting with something of tremendous import.

"March, the butler!" repeated Grundy, his voice vibrant with triumph. "I thought I knew the blighter!"

"Eh? Knew March, you mean?" asked Wilkins.

"You know him jolly well, I expect," remarked Gunn. "You see him every holiday. I dare say I should recall the chap if I saw him."

"He's disguised!" rapped out Grundy, his intellect working at full blast, so to speak, after its enforced rest under the drug.

"March is?" asked Gunn. "I'm not surprised. I dare say the solicitor, Orme, has changed his appearance a little, too."

"He's disguised," said Grundy, trembling with excitement. "I thought I knew him—now I know the rotter for certain. He's here!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Grundy had succeeded in astounding his chums at last.

They fairly stared as he made that announcement.

"March—here?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Within a hundred yards!" answered Grundy grimly.

"Now I can see a lot that was foggy before. You remember I said I fell out with the man Graves—"

"Yes?"

"March and Graves are one and the same!"

"My only hat!"

"Great snakes!"

"It's a fact," said Grundy coolly.

"But—but—What on earth would the man be doing in a circus?" asked Lowther.

"Lying low," said Grundy. "I'm as certain as anything that I'm right. Listen. The first time I set eyes on this fellow Graves, I thought I'd seen him somewhere before, though I couldn't recall when or where. That was when I crawled under the canvas to get into the circus—and slogged him on the nose for trying to stop me. He didn't follow me in and kick up a fuss—as I expected he would. Why?"

"Because he recognised you, and was afraid you would spot him, in spite of his make-up?" ejaculated Gunn.

"Just that. Then I've fallen out with him lots of times since I joined the show," went on Grundy coolly. "I knew he wanted to get rid of me, but I didn't think much about it. Now he's played this trick—drugging me, and messing around me with spirits, to get me thrown out of the company. Never suspecting, I fell into the trap—and he's got what he wanted. But for this letter, I might never have spotted him. He's wearing a false scalp—"

"By Jove! That's a tall order!" murmured Lowther.

"It's true. I know he's got a supply of make-up in a bag—I dropped a heavy case on it, and it burst open," said Grundy, grinning slightly at the recollection.

"Then—then you're positive that one of the men the police want is here—right under our noses?" breathed Wilkins.

"Goodness knows why I didn't think of it before," answered Grundy, shaking his head. "As soon as I read that the butler was missing, it came to me in a flash. Of course, he acts and speaks differently, but he's the man, right enough."

"What are we going to do, then?"

Grundy paused, a deep furrow on his brow.

He felt that, for once, the decision rested with him. He had set out to earn his own living and collar the crook, or crooks, who were responsible for his uncle's robbery. That there was anything fortunate in one of the crooks falling right under his nose, did not appear to occur to Grundy. He took it all as the result of his brilliant genius for detective work.

But there was no doubt that, fortunate or not, one of the wanted men had, in reality, fallen completely in his path; so completely that even Grundy could not miss him.

"I can't understand the man joining Whanger's circus, though," put in Lowther thoughtfully. "He's only hung up here—with the risk of discovery all the giddy time."

"He can't get out of the country without being spotted," observed Grundy. "He daren't enter a big town, or get about too much in public. This is a good hiding-place for him, until he can reach the sea—probably at some pre-arranged point, where he will meet Orme. Has it occurred to you fellows that Whanger's show is heading for the sea—which is just what March would want. We've come a good few miles nearer the Channel since I've been with the circus."

"Something in that," admitted Lowther.

"The thing is, we've got to arrange some definite plan of action," went on Grundy coolly.

"Go ahead, then!"

"I've got a scheme—"

"We'll hear it," agreed Lowther. "Not that it will be much use, being Grundy's. But still, we'll give him his head. Run on, old chap!"

Grundy glared, but he "ran on." Even Grundy realised that the matter was too serious for ragging.

"We could rush in on the man and collar him ourselves, of course; but that wouldn't do so much good as my scheme. He would probably call in the circus hands to help him, and throw us out."

"Especially when they caught sight of you, old man," remarked Wilkins.

"Exactly. In any case, in the scrap we should have with the circus men, he might get away—or, at least, get a chance to hide the evidence he's got with him. What we shall have to exercise is diplomacy."

"Good man!" concurred Lowther heartily. "But what do you know about diplomacy?"

"Now," observed Grundy, ignoring the interruption, "in the circumstances, I can't go into the circus, or I shall get thrown out, as before. But you fellows can, and if you tip one of the drivers, he'll let you ride on one of the carts to Latcham, where the show moves to-night."

"What do we want to go to Latcham for?" asked Tom Merry.

"What do you think?" asked Grundy impatiently. "To keep an eye on a March, of course!"

"Oh, I see!"

"Time you did!" remarked Grundy calmly. "Meanwhile, Wilky and Gunny and I will scoot to the police station at Latcham, which is a fair-sized place, I believe, and inform the police of what we know."

"Will they swallow your story?" asked Tom Merry. "It sounds a bit steep to a stranger, you know."

"I can prove who I am by some letters, and so on. Wilky and Gunny can vouch for me, too—and their school caps will show that I'm a St. Jim's fellow. While you fellows are looking after March, I shall be getting the police to lend a hand. When the circus stops at Latcham, you fellows will watch your chance and shut March in a caravan, or something—"

"Ticklish job, without raising the alarm," observed Tom Merry. "Never mind. We can manage it!"

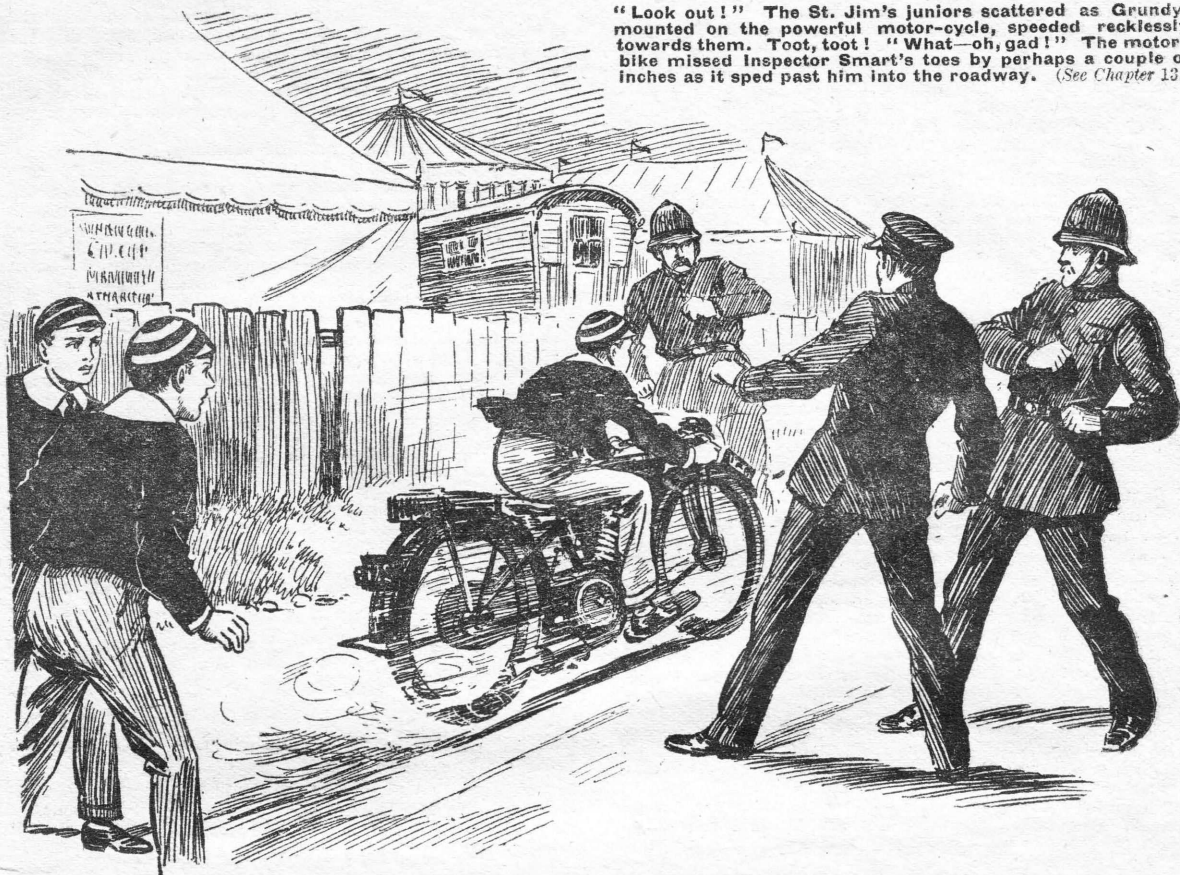
"Then I'll bring up the police," concluded Grundy triumphantly. "I shall confront March with a score of them, and I think that will settle his hash. The circus men won't resist the police, and I shall be surprised if a lot of the booty isn't found in March's baggage—ho's got enough. What do you men think?"

There was little to be disagreed with in Grundy's scheme, on reflection. Only Monty Lowther had a suggestion to make.

"Suppose you cut off to the Burchester Police Station?" he suggested. "And save waiting till the show reaches Latcham."

"No good!" objected Grundy. "Look, they're coming out from the afternoon performance now. In a few minutes the men will be packing the last of the props and moving off. We don't want March to scoot in the hurry and bustle."

"Look out!" The St. Jim's juniors scattered as Grundy, mounted on the powerful motor-cycle, speeded recklessly towards them. Toot, toot! "What—oh, gad!" The motor-bike missed Inspector Smart's toes by perhaps a couple of inches as it sped past him into the roadway. (See Chapter 13.)



I know Whanger will put on speed to Latcham, because he hopes to get in a late performance after he arrives."

"Then we're to travel with the company," said Tom Merry. "That's settled, then. You're showing quite a lot of intellect in your old age, Grundy. As soon as you get off, we'll ingratiate ourselves with one of the drivers."

"Good enough. Come on then, Wilky. And you, Gunny. I'll borrow your jigger, Merry!"

"I say, take Monty's—" began Tom Merry hastily. Grundy swung a leg over the saddle unconsciously.

"Take Manners!" roared the captain of the Shell. Grundy waved a hand airily as he pedalled away with Wilkins and Gunn.

"So long!"
"You—you— He'll fall off and bust it. And I only had it enamelled last week!" breathed Tom Merry sulphureously.

"Bear up. It's in a good cause," urged Manners, grinning. "Better get fixed up for a ride. They're loading the last of their stuff already."

In an innocent group, the Terrible Three strolled among the carts into which Mr. Whanger's men were piling the "props" of the circus.

A portly, grim-looking gentleman approached them, a long cigar protruding from one corner of his mouth.

He gave the three juniors a grim glance.
"Well, my lads, what are you doing around here? The show's over."

"We know that," answered Tom Merry politely. "We wondered if you'd let us speak to the—the Dakota Indians. We—we think they're wonderful!"

Tom Merry crimsoned as he made that request. From Manners there came a slight cough, and from Lowther a faint gurgle. But fortunately Mr. Whanger did not notice anything.

"You can speak to them, if you like," consented Mr. Whanger, a little suspiciously. "Of course, you'll find they speak English—been in England a long time now."

"Of—of course!" agreed the Shell captain.
"Could—could we ride with them in one of the caravans as far as Latcham?" asked Lowther, feeling perhaps that it was his turn.

"Look here, I don't allow—" began Mr. Whanger. He paused as Tom Merry slipped something into his hand.

He gave the junior a look, and then glanced surreptitiously at the ten-shilling note nestling in his palm. Mr. Whanger was a big business man, or regarded himself as

such. But ten shillings was ten shillings, especially after he had lost ten pounds only that afternoon.

He nodded quite amiably towards the caravan containing the genuine Dakotas.

"There you are, young gentlemen. Ride to Latcham if you like, and have a chat with them. Shove your bikes up behind the caravan."

"Right—ho!"

The Terrible Three piled their two remaining bikes behind the caravan and mounted beside the driver, a sombre gentleman known as Big Eagle. Whether they were genuine or not, the Dakotas kept up the illusion for Tom Merry & Co.'s benefit.

During the journey to Latcham they conversed with Big Eagle and Lynx Eye and Red Cloud and Black Arrow and Laughing Water and Sitting Snake.

They were glad when Latcham came in sight at last.

CHAPTER 12. Cornering March!

"BEHOLD!" said Big Eagle.

The Terrible Three beheld with considerable satisfaction.

They beheld the circus pitch at Latcham, on which the long line of caravans and carts had just drawn up. "Here we are, then," observed Monty Lowther, glancing at his watch. "My hat, it's past call-over!"

"It means a licking if we're on a wild-goose chase," remarked Manners. "Still, it's for old Grundy. I wonder—"

"So do I!" agreed Lowther.
"I think we're all wondering exactly what that fellow Graves looks like, what?" asked Tom Merry, grinning.

"Grundy didn't point him out to us," said Manners. "I suppose he didn't have a chance."

"Try Big Eagle," whispered Lowther. Tom Merry nodded.

He turned on his most innocent expression for the benefit of the impassive Dakota chief, who was backing the horses.

"I say, Big Eagle—"
Big Eagle continued backing the horses without turning his head.

"O mighty chief of the Dakota tribe—" supplemented Lowther tactfully.

Big Eagle appeared suddenly attentive.

"The young gentleman wishes to pow-wow with Big Eagle, yes?"

"Just that," assented Tom Merry. "We've been asked—hem!—to find a chap named Graves, one of the hands working here. Could you show us the man?"

Big Eagle paused from his work to glance impassively over the circus hands, most of whom were feverishly busy unloading.

The three juniors waited with great anxiety.

Big Eagle motioned at length with great dignity towards a foxy-looking fellow hanging around on the fringe of the activity, and obviously avoiding doing any more than he was obliged.

"That is he," observed the Dakota chief.

"Oh, thanks awfully!"

"Much obliged," added Manners.

"Our thanks are due to the mighty leader of the Dakota nation," observed Lowther; whereat Big Eagle smiled appreciatively.

Tom Merry slipped down from his perch on the caravan, and his chums followed him across the greensward.

Now that March, alias Graves, had been indicated to them, there was no doubt in their minds. Disguised or not, the man could not conceal the shifty look which his nature had given him.

But caution had to be observed.

Their plans were all cut and dried; but it was considerably easier to cut and dry plans than to put them into execution with success. And the slightest slip meant that Grundy's carefully laid trap would fall to pieces.

Grundy had by far the simpler task in presenting himself to the police at Latham and securing their aid. He could prove his identity easily enough with the letter from his Uncle George, backed up by the testimony of Wilkins and Gunn. He would have no difficulty in bringing along the police to apprehend the butler, March.

But Tom Merry & Co. had to keep the man under supervision, and if possible get him safely into a caravan. That task was likely to exercise their ingenuity.

"What are we going to do?" asked Manners, rather thoughtfully.

"Well, we've got the man under our noses—that's something," said Lowther. "We needn't let him out of our sight, what?"

"Grundy was right; it will be a lot safer if we can trap the fellow somehow," said Tom Merry. "Otherwise, I can see him scoting for dear life at the first sign of a man in blue; and unless we're right at hand to collar him he may get away."

"What do you suggest, then?"

"I wonder which is his caravan?" asked the Shell captain, running his eye over the numerous caravans around the big marquee.

"We'll tip one of the men and find out," said Manners.

"Wait a minute. I'll ask Big Eagle," put in Lowther. "He's not likely to be in league with the man in any way."

"Good egg!"

Lowther, appearing at his most demure, approached the mighty Dakota chief again and nodded cheerily.

"Hail, O mighty chief!"

"Hail, paleface!"

"Greetings to the sun and the moon and the stars!" said Lowther cheerily. "Can the powerful chief answer the question of the ignorant paleface?"

Big Eagle made a spacious gesture, indicating that he could.

"The paleface desires to learn which is the wigwam of the paleface Graves, whom the great chief pointed out to him just now."

Big Eagle wrinkled his brow a little at that request.

Flattered and pleased at the flowery address of the St. Jim's junior, he could perceive plainly enough that the Terrible Three had some unusually keen interest in the man Graves and his movements.

But it was, of course, none of the Dakota's business, and after Lowther's unusual politeness, he felt in an obliging mood. Mr. Whanger did not address him habitually as the sun and the moon and the stars.

"The wigwam of the paleface Graves stands behind the great wigwam," answered Big Eagle complacently.

"Oh, thanks. That's all I wanted to know!" ejaculated Lowther. "Will the powerful chief deign to accept a token of the gratitude of the ignorant paleface?"

Something chinked in Lowther's palm, and Big Eagle held out an avaricious hand.

He accepted the token of the paleface's gratitude with silent dignity.

Lowther rejoined his chums, grinning.

"Did Big Eagle cough it up?"

"Like a bird!" chuckled Lowther. "This way, my children. It's behind the marquee, so Big Eagle says."

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In considerable excitement, the Terrible Three strolled to the rear of the great wigwam, as the Dakota chief described it. A number of the circus hands were still busy securing the guy-ropes, and they did not pause to glance at three curious schoolboys. The curious schoolboys strolled on their way, apparently innocent enough, but with their eyes very much open.

"That's it," observed Lowther suddenly.

"My hat, yes."

"Anybody about?" asked Manners cautiously.

"Just a second," said Tom Merry coolly.

"Well?"

"We don't want the booty—if any—without the man himself," said the Shell captain calmly. "What we've got to do is this. One of us will go into Graves' caravan, and let himself be seen—"

"What?"

"He will do it just when Graves happens to be looking," explained Tom Merry patiently. "The fellow dodges all the work he can—he's always glancing about him. He'll spot whichever of us it is going into his van—"

"And come dashing across like a giddy lion defending his young!" grinned Lowther.

"Just that," assented Tom Merry. "That's where our diplomacy comes in."

"Where?"

"One of us will be in the caravan as Graves dashes in," said the captain of the Shell. "The other two will be waiting outside, just out of sight. As the man dashes in, we take him fore and aft, so to speak, at the same time. Bump him over, tie him up—and wait for Grundy. How's that for a scheme?"

"H'm!"

"Not bad," admitted Lowther, after some thought.

"Jolly sound, you mean," said Tom Merry. "Can you think of anything better?"

"Not just at present."

"Leave the thinking to me, then, old chap. Now, I'll be the man to go into the caravan—you chaps keep just out of sight. See?"

"This is a bit high-handed, you know," observed Manners thoughtfully. "Suppose the police don't take any notice of Grundy's yarn, and we have to answer for tying up Graves?"

"Dear man, there's a risk," agreed Tom Merry. "But it's for Grundy's uncle's sake. And the police can't fail to take notice of Grundy—he can show them proof of his identity. Take cover."

Manners and Lowther took cover obediently, at a little distance from Graves' caravan.

Tom Merry, with an assumption of nonchalance, strolled up and down just outside the van, waiting for Graves to catch sight of him.

He did not have long to wait.

Graves did not believe in overworking; he took frequent rests from his labours at the carts, while Mr. Whanger's back was turned.

During his rests, Graves glanced around the circus pitch, little escaping his keen, ferrèty eyes. It was while glancing round casually that his gaze fell upon a junior, standing before a caravan, and taking cautious stock of his immediate vicinity.

As Graves watched, the junior suddenly disappeared inside the van.

For a moment, the man stood as though frozen.

The thought of a schoolboy nosing about among his baggage seemed to spur him to sudden action.

Ignoring several requests for aid with the heavy cases which were being unloaded, Graves made a dash across the greensward.

He arrived outside his caravan, almost gasping with excitement.

He burst into the van like a hurricane.

A schoolboy turned round to meet him, and there was a violent collision. The two went to the floor in a struggling heap.

"You—you— What are you doing here?" hissed Graves fiercely, scrambling to his feet.

Then he spun round, as there was a sudden rush from without. Two juniors fairly whizzed into him. With a crash and a yell the man went over—Manners and Lowther and Tom Merry piling on top of him.

"Groooogh! Gerroff! Gerrough!"

Graves could do little more than splutter ferociously beneath the combined weight of the three juniors.

"Grab him!" gasped Manners grimly.

"I've got his fins!" snapped Lowther. "Anybody got a cord?"

"Hold him a minute," rapped out Tom Merry.

He cast his eyes about the caravan for a length of cord or rope with which to secure the man's hands.

Graves, realising with an access of fury that he had walked into a trap, struggled desperately.

Tom Merry was obliged to relinquish his search in order to help hold the man down.

"My hat! I know that voice!" ejaculated Manners.

Voices—mingling with a well-known tone that sounded above them—came to the ears of the Terrible Three as they gripped their captive.

"Grundy!" gasped Tom Merry. "Oh, good egg!"

"Grundy—and the police!" grinned Lowther.

At the mention of police, Graves gave a sudden wriggle.

He knew that he was in a trap; now he knew why the trap had been laid. With all the strength at his command he fought to get free of the grasp that held him down.

"This way, please," came Mr. Whanger's voice, excited and alarmed. "This is his van. Graves himself does not appear to be about."

"Come on!" came Grundy's grim tones.

The door of the caravan was flung open, and the burly form of George Alfred Grundy of the Shell appeared in the opening.

He was greeted by three chirrups from the Terrible Three.

"Cheerio, Grundy!"

"Here you are, old chap!"

"We've got him safe!"

"My hat! Here he is!" roared Grundy. "Here you are, inspector."

The inspector from Latcham followed Grundy into the van, and two stalwart men in blue bent down to relieve the Terrible Three of their captive. Then Graves was taken outside.

He stood between two policemen, his face white.

The inspector from Latcham eyed him with satisfaction.

"There's your man," observed Grundy, quite calmly. "I think you'll find the proof in his baggage, inspector."

Graves bit his lip.

He made a sudden wriggle, and at the same moment his leg curled cunningly round that of one of the policemen holding him.

Next moment, Graves was darting away; but the inspector leaped in his path. At the same moment Grundy leaped, too.

There was a collision—between the inspector and Grundy.

Had Grundy intended to aid Graves to escape, he could not have done it better.

As Grundy and the inspector rolled on the ground, gasping, Graves dashed out of sight.

CHAPTER 13.

Grundy's Luck!

"YOU—you young jackanapes!"

Inspector Smart, of Latcham, sat up, almost purple with rage and mortification.

He had listened patiently at the police station to Grundy's story, and remarkable though it was, he had regarded Grundy as rather a bright youth. His opinion of Grundy had fallen quite suddenly. He was inclined just then to the view that George Alfred was nothing more nor less than a dolt.

The inspector scrambled to his feet, dusty and angry and crimson.

"Quick, men, get a move on!"

"After him!" gasped Grundy.

"Oh, you ass!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Come on!" snapped Grundy, dashing in the direction Graves had taken.

His chums followed him with a rush.

Grundy gritted his teeth as he caught sight of the man Graves, or March, astride a motor-cycle and just gliding into the roadway. A moment later and the engine roared, bearing Graves away from his pursuers.

The inspector and his men arrived in the road a second too late. The motor-cycle shot out of reach, going at full stretch.

Tom Merry & Co., their faces grim, paused at Grundy's side to state their opinions of him.

"You frightful dummy—"

"Barging in the way—"

"Shut up!" snapped Grundy.

"You—you—"

"Can't you see he's got clean away?" shrieked Wilkins. Grundy did not deign to reply.

His recent error did not appear to have disconcerted him. Perhaps he regarded it in the light of an unfortunate mischance, to be blamed on nobody.

While his chums stared after the rapidly disappearing figure on the motor-cycle, Grundy's keen glance was sweeping the circus enclosure. His gaze lighted suddenly on a powerful machine—a motor-cycle—leaning against a hedge at some distance.

What benevolent chance or fate had placed that motor-

bike against the hedge just when it was wanted. Possibly the owner might object to a reckless fellow like George Alfred borrowing it without permission. Such considerations did not even occur to Grundy just at that moment.

He broke into a run and sped swiftly across the meadow. He dragged the motor-bike away from the hedge and started it up.

What Grundy did not know about motor-cycles would undoubtedly have filled volumes. But he had, through watching other people, learned how to start one up.

The engine roared, and Grundy leaped into the saddle.

In a moment the powerful machine leaped forward, speeding recklessly towards the St. Jim's fellows.

"Look out!"

"Grundy—"

"Go it, old man!"

Grundy's chums scattered before the charge of the machine. It swept past, and plunged wildly across the grass towards the inspector and his men.

Toot, toot!

Grundy had time for only two feverish toots as he approached the police, very much after the manner of a tornado.

"Stand clear!"

"What—oh, gad!"

The motor-bike missed Inspector Smart's toes by perhaps a couple of inches as it sped past him into the roadway.

The inspector stared after Grundy dazedly, unable to express himself for some moments.

In those few moments Grundy was well under way.

The engine was running well, though it was kicking up a terrific din. The din did not worry Grundy, however. It served to warn people of his approach, and saved using the horn.

Far ahead, on the long, white ribbon of road, Grundy espied the man Graves, going as hard as his machine would take him.

Whether Graves had the faster machine remained to be seen; Grundy piled on all speed.

He swept along the road like a streak, hanging on for his life. And as the motor-bike warmed to its work, it seemed to go faster and faster to the hapless rider.

"Oh, dear! Oh, my hat!"

It was Grundy's hat—or at least, his cap!

The cap blew away astern, and still the machine roared on ahead. Grundy could dimly make out Graves, and the man seemed to be maintaining his distance ahead.

"My aunt! Wish I could get more out of her!" breathed Grundy.

Hanging on to the handle-bars with one hand, he fiddled with the controls, in the hope of increasing speed. He was successful—much more successful than he expected.

Chrrrrk! Chrrrrk! Zzzzzzzooooom!

Two terrific splutters, and the engine soared into a soft, purring note, and the machine fairly flew.

Grundy knew he was on a powerful 'bus. He knew just how powerful now.

Every effort was demanded now to keep on the road.

Each corner brought Grundy's heart into his mouth, but luckily there were few corners as yet, and those not sharp ones. He hesitated to think what would happen at a hairpin bend.

Again he looked ahead, and though his eyes were half-shut against the streaming wind, he could descry Graves' machine, closer than it had been before.

With a feeling of exultancy, Grundy realised that he was overhauling the man—that, barring accidents, Graves was his prisoner!

A long, straight stretch of road loomed ahead, and a resolve came into Grundy's mind. He would overhaul the man before they reached another turn—ride alongside and force him into a ditch. With his face set, Grundy tinkered again with the controls.

Zzzzzzzooooom!

Even Grundy realised that he was getting out of his mount the best that it was capable of now. And it was good enough—Graves, spurt as he would, was being fast overhauled.

Grundy gripped the handlebars afresh, his jaw set.

Forcing the man into the side of the road was likely to prove a dangerous undertaking, but there was no other way. He would not stop unless he was compelled.

Zzzzzzzooooom!

Taking the outside berth, Grundy crammed on all speed. He drew level with his quarry, and for a moment he caught a glimpse of the man's burning glance.

But Graves still kept on, though he knew that he could not get away.

Grundy plucked up his courage to attempt the forcing movement, but a sudden sweep in the road drew his attention.

They were fast approaching a corner—and a more acute one than hitherto. Desperately Grundy tried to reduce speed. Graves shot ahead—glad of the slightest chance to gain a lead again. He disappeared round the bend—and Grundy, with more caution, zoomed round in his wake.

Crash, crash, crash! Whoooooosh!

Grundy swerved involuntarily to the side of the road, and jammed on his brakes to the full.

He fell, rather than stepped off his mount.

Then he gave a gasp—and a breathless chuckle.

The chase was ended.

Graves had survived the turn—but his machine had skidded badly instead of coming back into the straight again. It had crashed through a flimsy wooden fence, sending its rider hurtling through the air to land with a heavy thud.

There was a roar on the road, and the inspector, with his constables, swept on the scene in a borrowed motor-car.

"Gad! You got him, then!" ejaculated Inspector Smart in complete astonishment.

"Naturally, sir," agreed Grundy coolly, who had pounced on the fallen man. "What did you think I should do?"

The inspector tactfully refrained from stating what he had expected Grundy to do. He had had an uneasy feeling that he might have run across a corpse at any point along that road. It was a relief to find Grundy not only safe and sound, but with the wanted man in charge.

Grundy started up his machine again and glanced back at the inspector and his prisoner.

"You won't want me again, sir?"

"No. We can get this fellow as far as the station without help, thanks," answered the inspector, with faint sarcasm.

"Right-ho! I'll get back to my friends, then."

At a more sedate speed this time, Grundy rode back to the circus enclosure at Latham, leaving the police to follow with March.

Tom Merry & Co. were waiting anxiously as Grundy rode up.

"Here he is! What luck, Grundy?"

"Caught the bounder all right," answered George Alfred, with a grin.

"You mean to say you collared him all on your own?" demanded Wilkins.

"Just that, old chap. My brains, you know."

"Well, if you give us your word—"

"I've said so more than once already."

"Well, my hat! Who'd have thought it?" asked George Wilkins blankly.

Certainly, not one of Grundy's loyal pals would have thought it. They were obliged to admit, in the face of their extensive previous experience with Grundy, that for once he had done something really worth while; that for once he deserved the honours for which his ambitious soul yearned, and could not be happy without.

There was a record "spread" in Study No. 10 that evening.

The guest of honour was Grundy of the Shell.

Before a huge crowd extending into and along the corridor, and comprising the Terrible Three and Study No. 6, and Talbot and Kangaroo, and Levison and Cardew and Clive, not to mention Figgins & Co. of the New House, and, last but not least, Wilkins and Gurn, Grundy was called upon to give an account of how he brought the butler March to justice and saved his uncle's fortune.

Grundy, who had been on the telephone, in a most official manner, with Inspector Smart, did not have to be asked twice.

Some of the fellows yawned during the recital, but fortunately there was sufficient tuck to last out Grundy's eloquence.

"So March was hoping to lie low in the circus and gradually make his way to the sea, where he would have met the solicitor Orme?" asked Kangaroo, as Grundy finished.

"That's what it boils down to," admitted Grundy.

"And then they would have got clear of the country, with your uncle's cash. I suppose March had some of it with him, what?"

"Half," said Grundy. "But March has told them where to lay hands on Orme, in the hope of getting off lighter himself. They'll soon recover the lot."

"So you're coming back to St. Jim's for good, then?" grinned Kangaroo.

"Oh, rather!"

There was a sudden shout in the corridor.

"Grundy! Is Grundy here?"

Kildare of the Sixth looked into the study.

"Adsum, Kildare."

"Head wants you, sharp. Better cut along."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He's going to 'bunk' you for running away!" squealed Trimble from the fringe of the crowd.

Grundy's face was apprehensive as he made his way to the Head's study.

His chums waited in considerable anxiety for his return.

When Grundy came back he was grinning.

"Licked?"

"Flogged?"

"Expelled?"

"Neither," said Grundy coolly. "Congratulated!"

Whereat the juniors could only gasp.

When the august Head himself recognised Grundy's good work, nothing that the Shell could say made much difference, and it was some weeks before Grundy ceased to remind the Lower School of his short but meteoric career as Grundy, the Prizefighter.

THE END.

The GEM² LIBRARY



"SAVED, SIR!"

STARRING ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY!

There is, perhaps, no one more grateful of a good service rendered him than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the elegant swell of the Fourth, and, perhaps, no one more fortunate than the down-and-out individual who claims to have saved Gussy's life.

That his gallant rescuer is a "fraud" and an out-and-out scoundrel makes no difference to Gussy's gratitude; he's convinced that in giving his rescuer a helping hand he's doing the right thing.

Blake & Co., Gussy's bosom chums, are, however, convinced that a "helping foot" would meet the case better!

Don't miss—

"STANDING BY A RASCAL!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,

next week's extra long story of the chums of St. Jim's.
ORDER YOUR "GEM" EARLY, CHUMS!

A STICKER! More than one attempt has Valentine Mornington made to get Biggs, the gardener's boy, the "sack," but Jimmy Silver & Co. have always managed to chip in and spoil his rascally scheming. This week, the dandy of the Fourth puts another rascally wheeze into operation!

HIS OWN ENEMY!



A GRAND NEW SCHOOL SERIAL DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., OF ROOKWOOD By OWEN CONQUEST.

And Peele & Co. knew it also, and they took care not even to mention Biggs' name or Erroll's outside their own select circle.

Amongst themselves, however, they discussed the fellows they hated many times and often—though Peele & Co. had learned to take care how they spoke of Erroll to Mornington. Though Morny had bitter enough things to say himself concerning his former chum, curiously enough he would allow nobody else to say them.

It was against the innocent Albert Biggs that Mornington's bitter animosity was aimed. It had all happened since he had come to Rookwood. He was the cause of it all. Before he had come Mornington was respected by all—a fellow high in the estimation of his fellows. And he had been happy in his deep friendship with Kit Erroll.

Now, in a short few days, all that had changed. He was scorned and looked upon with contempt by the majority. Even Tubby Muffin curled his lofty lip as he passed him, making sure Morny was in no position to kick him when he did it, of course. And he was out of the footer, and, worst of all, he had lost Erroll's friendship for good.

That it was all through his own folly—his giving way to his passionate temper—he would not admit. It was all the fault of Biggs—a ragamuffin from the slums!

It was an unjust, unreasonable view; and at the bottom of his wayward mind Valentine Mornington must have known it. But he allowed his passionate temper and bitter jealousy and prejudice to blind him to the truth.

In any case, nothing would have induced his proud and haughty nature to admit it and to give up his campaign now.

It was Valentine Mornington whom Jimmy Silver & Co. were discussing when Tubby Muffin came along with his unmusical cachinnation.

"He, he, he!" he repeated, joining the Fistical Four. "I say, you fellows, Morny's at it again!"

"Oh, scoot, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver. He did not wish to discuss Mornington with Muffin.

"Yes, clear off!" snapped Lovell.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,041.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

KIT ERROLL befriends an old acquaintance in Albert Biggs, a one-time waif of the slums, who comes to Rookwood and takes up a post as gardener's boy. Valentine Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, appeals to Erroll to "drop" his ragged friend; but Kit refuses. In consequence of this, Mornington plots with Peele & Co., three shady rascals, to eject Biggs forcibly from the school. The attempt proves futile, and Mornington is severely reprimanded and awarded a Forno licking. Bitter at this treatment, the dandy of the Fourth persuades Peele to "play" the role of policeman, arrest Biggs as a thief and a vagabond, and then send the lad to London to be left stranded there without a penny. At the crucial moment, however, Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Fourth, succeed in ringing the changes on the shady schemers, with the result that Mornington and his cronies are roughly handled.

(Now read on.)

Tubby Muffin's News!

"HE, he, he!" That unmusical cachinnation came from Tubby Muffin of the Fourth.

It was some days later. Since the remarkable happenings on the footer field at Rookwood, the feud between Mornington and Albert Biggs, the garden-boy—or, rather, between Mornington and Peele & Co. and others in addition to Erroll's humble chum—had seemed to be dropped. Mornington did not exchange a word with Jimmy Silver & Co.—indeed, few in the Classical Fourth at Rookwood would speak to him. Erroll and Morny were, of course, not on speaking terms in any case. The very fact that Mornington was now on such pally terms with Peele & Co. was sufficient for the decent fellows to give him a wide berth.

But Mornington did not seem to care, though his eyes gleamed curiously whenever he met any of the fellows whom he knew despised him for his conduct in the matter. He knew he was out of the footer now, and he pretended to care little. He went his way quietly, and for days nothing happened.

Jimmy Silver & Co., however, knew him better than to suppose that he had given up his campaign. They knew he was only biding his time; that he knew others in addition to the Fistical Four were keeping their eyes on him and on Peele & Co.

"We want no alarm clocks, old chap," said Putty Grace. "Take it somewhere else, Fatty."

"Alarm clock! What d'you mean?" said Tubby.

"Isn't that an alarm clock making that noise inside you?" said Putty blandly. "Run away and let it run down somewhere else."

"You silly ass!" grinned Tubby. "He, he, he! I say—"

"There it goes again!" said Putty Grace. "Here, let me stop it, Tubby."

"Hold on!" gasped Tubby, as Putty Grace made as if to punch his ample waistcoat. "I say, Morny's at it again. You ought to chip in and stop his rotten game, Jimmy. Not that I approve of backing up a low outsider against a Rookwood man," ended Tubby loftily. "Only—"

"Oh, cheese it, and cut off!" snapped Raby.

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver.

It was curious that they were just discussing Morny and his ways. In the ordinary way Jimmy Silver took little notice of Muffin's chatter. It was usually the result of eavesdropping, and he rarely took advantage of Tubby's news.

But he felt it just as well to do so on this occasion.

At dinner he had noted the fact that Mornington had dropped his sullenness and bitter scowls. His face had worn its old mocking smile—a certain sign, under the circumstances, that Morny was up to mischief.

"What is it, Tubby? What's Morny up to now?"

"He, he, he!" grinned Tubby. "I happened to over-hear—"

"Prying again!" sniffed Lovell.

"Not at all. It was like this—"

"Now for a whopper!" grinned Raby.

"Oh, I say, Raby—"

"What's Morny up to?" snapped Jimmy Silver. "Out with it, you cackling fat dummy!"

"He, he, he! He's going to dress up as the Head and order that chap Biggs to cut down all the laurels in the Head's shrubbery."

"What?"

"It's a fact!" grinned Tubby Muffin. "So the kid will get sacked, you know. Rather thick, what? I say, you won't tell Morny I told you, though?" ended Muffin in sudden alarm.

"Phew!"

The juniors looked at each other in a scared way.

If Biggs took the order from Morny—if he did cut down the shrubbery in front of the gates of the Head's private entrance, there was nothing more certain than serious trouble for Albert Biggs. The sack probably.

Dr. Chisholm took great pride in his garden, and he would "tear his hair" at such wanton destruction.

There would be a most frightful row, the juniors realised that. In any case, Babbage would tear his hair if the Head did not. He would insist upon having a new boy with less destructive tendencies. So far as they had heard, Albert Biggs was giving every satisfaction at his job. He was a hard worker, and he was tidy and painstaking. Babbage was not likely to stand a destructive lad, anyway.

And if the order came from Dr. Chisholm himself, or if Biggs believed it came from him, he would, whatever his own private thoughts concerning such an order, carry it out to the best of his ability.

That much was certain.

"Well, the—the rotten cad!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "What a rotten trick! I knew the cad was hatching some mischief or other. Are you quite certain of this, Tubby?"

"Absolutely!" said Tubby Muffin. "I thought it a rotten sort of wheeze myself. I knew the cads were up to something. The beasts little dreamed I was behind the couch—I mean just passing the door—and happened to hear what they were saying, you know."

"You heard all that while you were passing the door?" grinned Raby. "What a whopper! You were behind the couch in their study, of course!"

"D-did you see me?" gasped Tubby. "I say, don't tell Morny, for goodness' sake! He might blame me about a cake being missing. It was only a measly cake, anyway; not a plum in it or a raisin. Morny's getting mean, I think, as well as dashed bad-tempered."

"So that was it!" said Lovell grimly. "You went into their study to pinch a cake, and when they came in you hid behind the couch, eh?"

"Certainly not! At least, I didn't pinch any cake. It was that cad Gower who scooped it, I bet. I say, you won't let on to that cad Morny, will you?" demanded Tubby anxiously. "I've suffered enough, having to crouch down behind that rotten couch all the while they were talking

the plot over. Morny's bound to think I touched his cake, though I only went to—borrow a Latin grammar!"

"You—you fat fibber!"

"Oh, I say, Newcome—"

"Cheese it, Newcome!" snapped Jimmy Silver, his face dark. He did not doubt Tubby's story now, not for a moment. It was just like Tubby Muffin to go after Morny's cake, and just like him to hide when they came in.

"Tubby, you ass! Where's Morny and his pals now?"

"In the woodshed, getting ready, I expect," grinned Muffin. "I followed them from the study and watched 'em go there. Then I cut along to look for you, Jimmy. I knew—"

"Then the cads are doing it at once?" snapped Jimmy.

"He, he! Yes. Morny's been scouting round, and found out Babbage is in the kitchen garden at the back, while Biggs is at the front, digging or something. He'll have to do it now, anyway, because of afternoon classes."

"You're sure Morny himself is impersonating the Head?" said Jimmy. "I should have thought those cads had had enough of that sort of thing."

"That's why Morny's doing it," grinned Muffin. "Peele refused to take the job on. He said he'd had enough. So Morny's doing it on his giddy own. Awful ass, ain't he?"

"Well, my hat!"

"He, he, he! I say, can any of you fellows oblige me by changing a cheque, by the way?" asked Muffin carelessly. "If you like, you can hand me half-a-crown now, and then hand me the rest when the cheque comes to-morrow. Yoop!"

Tubby Muffin howled as Jimmy Silver threw him a shilling, catching him on his podgy nose with it. But Tubby pocketed the coin after grumblingly picking it up again, and as Lovell lifted his boot, the fat junior took the hint and departed—hurriedly. Jimmy felt the information was worth a bob, and he did not want to hear Tubby's usual explanation about the cheque. He knew it existed only in Tubby's vivid imagination. It was just Tubby's little way of borrowing money he could never pay back.

"Well, you're going to look into this, Jimmy?" said Lovell, his frank face angry and indignant. "We can't let a thing like that go on."

"Not likely," said Jimmy Silver through his teeth. "I didn't want any further trouble with Mornington. But it seems he's determined to keep his games up, and we'll see he finds trouble all right. We're going to put the kybosh on his game, anyway."

"But how?" said Newcome. "We can't show him up—can't sneak, at all events."

"We're going to stop it, anyway!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "Come on—we'll sneak in the Head's garden, and risk getting caught. And we'll keep an eye on Biggs, and if Morny does turn up—well, we'll give him ginger!"

"Good egg! We're on!" said Putty Grace.

Without hesitation, Jimmy's chums and Putty Grace followed him as he led the way and scudded round Sergeant Kettle's lodge to the Head's front garden, climbing the fence after a hasty glance about them.

But nobody was in sight, and reaching the garden they began to look about for Biggs.

The trees lining the winding drive hid them from the house, and almost at once they sighted the new gardener's help. He was working away with a hoe on a flower-bed some yards from the thick laurels of the shrubbery.

"Oh, good!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "Quick, better hide at once! No knowing when Morny will come along."

"Hold on!" whispered Putty Grace. "What about that giddy old engine over there?"

"Eh? What about it?" said Jimmy Silver quickly. "Oh, you mean that old garden engine and hose? By Jingo! I see!"

"Good for you, Putty!" chuckled Raby. "Let's hope there's some water in it!"

Along by the fence some distance away, and just by the side of the house was a garden engine and hose—an ancient tank on wheels with pump and hose complete. Followed by the rest, Jimmy Silver scudded down to it, running on the grass bordering the gravel-path. On either side bushes and trees hid them all from the toiling Biggs, and the house.

To their joy the tank was half-full of water—though it smelled none too fresh. In a flash the daring juniors had whirled it round and were running it back along the grassy border to the shrubbery.

The ancient vehicle made plenty of noise, but they were heedless of that. In a few breathless seconds they had reached the shrubbery. Selecting a spot well hidden, they rapidly uncoiled the hose, which was wound round the tank. Jimmy Silver grabbed the nozzle.

"Man the pumps, me hearties!" he whispered cheerfully. "I fancy dear old Mornny's booked for a surprise when he does turn up. Hallo, Biggs has heard us! Oh, blow!"

Biggs had undoubtedly heard them. He was staring at the border of trees and shrubs that hid the grassy border along which they had trundled the engine. And even as Jimmy spoke, he started as if to come towards the spot where they were hidden.

But just as he did so he pulled up short again as a step sounded on the gravel. Then an august form in cap and gown came across the lawn towards him.

It was the figure of Dr. Chisholm—at least Biggs thought it was, and he waited respectfully, his hand going to his cap.

"Now for it!" murmured Jimmy Silver breathlessly. "Jingo! Supposing it should happen to be the real Head, though? We'll have to risk it, anyway. Ready?"

"What-ho!"

"Then go it with the pump—now!"

And Jimmy's chums "went it" with the pump.

A Damp Reception for the "Head!"

SWOOOOOSH!

From the nozzle in Jimmy Silver's hand shot a shining stream of water. It went up into the air gracefully, and then it dropped—splashing on the lawn scarcely a yard from the august, awe-inspiring figure of Dr. Chisholm.

It drenched him from head to foot, and a sprinkling of water reached Biggs, the gardener's boy, and he leaped back with a startled yell.

The next moment Jimmy had the range, and the stream took the staggering figure in cap and gown full in the face, almost bowling him off his feet.

"Oh crikey!"

Albert Biggs stared aghast—terrified out of his wits at the startling calamity that seemed to have befallen the Head of Rookwood—a gentleman for whom Albert Biggs had a most terrifying respect and awe.

But even as he stared, his terror vanished abruptly—giving place to amazement and bewilderment.

For as well as the Head's mortar-board, that solid, shining stream of water had washed away that majestic white hair—and quite a lot of the pinky complexion, likewise the pince-nez.

As Biggs stared, transfixed, the deadly stream fairly enveloped the staggering, spluttering figure in the flying gown.

He turned and dodged and twisted, but the stream followed him remorselessly. In less than a minute he was soaked to the skin from head to foot.

"Go it, chaps!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "By Jingo! My heart was in my mouth at first in case it was the Head himself after all. But now I can recognise Mornnington's dear old chivvy. Tubby Muffin was right, then. Go it! Let the howling cad have it good and strong!"

"What-ho!"

Clang! Rattle, rattle! Clang!

Swoooooosh!

"Well, I'm blowed! It's—it's that there Master Mornnington!"

Even the scared Biggs had recognised the drenched figure in the gown now. It was Valentine Mornnington right enough—the fellow who hated Biggs with a deadly hatred, the fellow who had vowed to hound him from Rookwood! His figure was padded well, and his face still bore traces of grease-paint and make-up. But it was Mornnington without

a doubt—Mornnington who had been masquerading as the Head of Rookwood.

And he had done it well enough, though now Biggs could see from his height alone that he was an impostor.

But why—what—

Biggs' startled glance shot towards the engine, and its crew. Jimmy Silver & Co. were well hidden, likewise the garden engine. But the stream came from the shrubbery—a fact Mornnington saw only too clearly.

His face fiendish with passion, and with water streaming down him, he gave a gasping cry, and made a rush towards the shrubbery, heedless of the deadly stream.

Swoooooosh!

Mornnington staggered drunkenly the solid stream hitting his face, blinding and half-dazing him. But he recovered himself and came on with a rush. There was nothing of the coward about Mornnington, despite his many faults.

"Back up!" called Jimmy Silver.

The pump ceased to clank, and the hose-pipe, giving a final shake and a shudder, ceased to gush forth water. The next moment Jimmy Silver & Co. were on their feet and met the raging Mornny.

Crash!

He went to earth with five juniors grasping him.

"You rotten hounds!" he spluttered, recognising Jimmy Silver. "I guessed it was you! Hang you—hang you!"

"Hold him, chaps!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Hallo, here's friend Biggs! Keep cave, Biggs, old chap!"

Biggs came rushing up, his face showing his utter bewilderment.

"Young gents," he gasped, "what—what's this 'ere? If you're copped 'ere—"

"We'll explain in a second, Biggs!" said Jimmy, taking a hand in holding the raging Mornnington down. "Just you keep cave—"

"I dunno what you mean by cave!" muttered Biggs.

"Keep a look-out for anyone coming!" grinned Jimmy.

"Now, Mornny, my pippin, the game's up once again! Better take it quietly."

"Much better!" said Putty Grace cheerfully. "If the beaks happen along—if they hear the row and come to investigate—well, you're for the high-jump! The Head won't approve of you taking him off to play your rotten tricks on Biggs!"

Mornnington ceased to struggle abruptly. He knew only too well that Putty was right—that it was madness to create a bigger row.

"You've got me—beaten me again, hang you!" he hissed. "Let me go! I shan't struggle again!"

The juniors released him—they were only too glad to do so, for Mornnington was very wet. He staggered to his feet, looking a sight with his wet, bedraggled gown and clothes, and ruined make-up.

He stood, fairly trembling with fury and bitter humiliation. Once again his plotting had miscarried; once again he had got the worst of it—though how it had come about he could only guess.

"Who—who gave me away?" he said, choking with the rage that gripped him. "You knew—"

"We knew your rotten game—yes!" said Jimmy Silver scornfully. "You were going to order this kid—the fellow who had never willingly harmed you—to cut down all these laurels. It was a caddish trick! You meant him to get into serious trouble—to get the sack! But, luckily, we got on the game! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, you howling rotter!"

(Now look out for next week's thrilling instalment of this grand serial, chums. You'll enjoy every line of it.)

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