

The Wonderful Grabbenheim

by GEORGE FITCH

I'M DISGUSTED with the world this morning. It's a nice old mud ball, but it needs to be kerosened. It has become badly infested with men. I'm one of them, not much worse than the rest—pretty ordinarily decent, in fact—and what did I do this morning? In rushes Mangler, whom I haven't seen for five years. He was one of my most loyal followers in college—voted for me for president of the freshmen class, got nine hash club votes for me for treasurer of the athletic association, and wanted to send me to congress. He admired me, Mangler did. He was always following me around, wanting to do things for me. And yesterday he rushed in with his hands out and I grabbed them and yelled, "Suffering cats, who left the barn-door open?" and "Hello, you goggle-eyed pirate," and other pet names, and was as glad to see him as if he had had cholera; because there was a directors' meeting in seven minutes and I had a luncheon date with a big customer and four days' work to pack into the afternoon, and my wife had at last made me promise by the holes in Ole Skjarssen's sweater—my most sacred oath—to harness up that evening and go over to the Van Bumptiouses for dinner.

Why couldn't he have come any other day in the year? But he couldn't, and he was going out that evening and was never coming back, as far as he knew, and while I gabbed along feverishly and tried to tell him what a national calamity it was that everything had stacked up that day and couldn't he stay over and wouldn't he have five cigars anyway and smoke them all at once, and, by Jove, that directors' meeting was due and could he drop around for half an hour from 4:32 to 5:02—while I was spilling all this old Mangler kept getting quieter and quieter and more uneasy and lonely around the eyes. He was perfectly polite and pleasant, but he didn't come back in the afternoon and I know what he thinks of me. Thank heaven, he's not as imaginative as I am. He doesn't think half as badly of me as I do of myself.

G'r'r! This day tastes like asafetida. We're all miserable, ungrateful mollusks. Man is made of forgetfulness, with a little hide stretched around it. Why, even back at school, when we manufactured a man once and he rose to fame and became the leading scholar of the college, what did he do? Just what any real man would have done. He forgot us. He threw us down. He pretty near ruined us. He was our greatest calamity. We didn't use any ungratefulness when we made him, but he had a streak of it in him as broad as a boulevard.

Grabbenheim his name was, curse him. We didn't intend to make him. It was just another of those fool, careless ideas which get into college boys' heads and grow like a fungus. Grabbenheim was a joke to begin with. Most all the roads to the gallows begin with a joke. But he shouldn't have been ungrateful for all that. Lord, what we did for that man!

Allie Bangs invented Grabbenheim. But it wasn't his fault. He didn't mean anything by it. He couldn't possibly have foreseen that the fellow would grow up and shame us. It was just a thoughtless piece of devilry, and if Professor Wogg, our mathematics professor, hadn't been so near-sighted and generally oblivious to life and its little unimportant details, nothing would have come of it. Allie just did it to amuse the class anyway. And goodness knows we needed amusement in Wogg's class.

It was in our sophomore year and twelve of us were preparing to wade through calculus under Wogg. We didn't take calculus because we loved it. We had no more use for it than had for us. The class was a sort of little back-water eddy into which most of us had drifted through condlents in our class schedules.

Remembering names and faces was Wogg's greatest trial. No, that is a mistake. He didn't try at all. He'd given up long ago. He was so near-sighted that he could hardly see to put on his glasses, and all students looked alike to him. When he made up his roll in the fall he would ask for all the A's and then all the B's and take our names alphabetically. Then he would call on us from his roll book, and the man who was reciting meant no more to him than a dim, misty shape with a name to it—any old name. And if he got a good mark opposite the wrong name or a flunk opposite the star scholar's name, that was all "rub of the green," as we say now.

On the first day of the winter semester that year Wogg made us up into a roll and when he had finished he peered out through those bull's-eye glasses of his and asked: "Have I overlooked anyone?" And quick as a flash Allie Bangs answered: "Mr. Grabbenheim." Some of us laughed at the joke, but the pro-

fessor didn't catch it, and he marked down "Mr. Grabbenheim" with great care after asking Allie how he spelled it and pretty nearly flooring him.

We didn't think any more of it. It was only a minor incident in a class where whist parties were a regular diversion in the back row. But two days later Professor Wogg paralyzed us by asking Mr. Grabbenheim to put the thirteenth problem on the board for the benefit of the class. It was a great joke and Allie was about to explain that Mr. Grabbenheim had been called to Turkey in Asia by the death of this family when King Rearick solemnly got up and put the problem on the board.

This was very funny and we hurt ourselves choking down our amusement while Keg explained the work and the professor said: "Very good, indeed, Mr. Grabbenheim." After class we had a lot of fun over it, and two days later, when Grabbenheim's name was called again, one of the boys who was up on that part of the lesson recited without a break. Grabbenheim was making a great record in calculus.

After class we held a little meeting and decided that with such prospects Grabbenheim ought to live. It would be a shame to cut him down at the beginning of so brilliant a career. Besides, it wouldn't be a bad plan to have a scholar in the class. So we decided that whoever knew the part of the lesson which was assigned to Grabbenheim was to recite it, and Grabby started out on his dazzling course.

In a month Grabbenheim was the sensation of the class. He had never fallen down on a recitation. This was only natural, since anyone of us who knew the problem would get up and recite for him. It was pretty hard on our two or three good scholars, because they had to watch out for Grabbenheim and their own marks, too, and it kept them on edge all the time. Moreover, every time a man recited for Grabbenheim he had to flunk for himself, for fear Professor Wogg would suddenly return to earth and wonder how two men could occupy the same chair at the same time. But we pointed out to them that the honor of the class was at stake. We had a star in Grabbenheim and it would never do to desert him. They were loyal boys and had big hearts and they saw the point—all but Simpkins. Everything would have been easy if Simpkins hadn't gotten jealous.

I never saw such a fellow as Simpkins, anyway. He was always kicking and objecting. There was no class spirit in him at all. He thought exclusively of himself. When the marks came out at the end of the second month Grabbenheim led the class by an enormous plurality, and what did Simpkins do but up and insurge. He had always been a good scholar and he couldn't bear to see anyone beat him. He declined to recite for Grabbenheim any longer. More than that, he threatened to expose him.

Think of having to worry along in college with an ingrowing disposition like that. We were furious. We met Simpkins casually after literary society meeting and took him out to a clay quarry half full of the dampest water you ever saw. There we talked to him like brothers. We pled with him not to risk his noble young life by contracting pneumonia from getting soaked in that water. And we pointed out just how this was certain to occur accidentally if he exposed Grabbenheim. That settled the exposure business—both kinds of exposures; but from that time Simpkins was a mortal enemy of Grabbenheim's. Twice he got up to recite for Grabbenheim and failed miserably. We had to take him out to the quarry again and plead with him some more.

When the marks were announced Grabbenheim stood higher than any man had ever stood in calculus before, and Simp was a very poor second. This pleased us so much that we decided to enlarge Grabby's sphere of action and let him see a little real college life. Sooner or later the faculty would begin to notice him and it would be all off, of course. But while Grabby lived we meant to have him enjoy himself. We were going to give the poor chap every chance to rise, and if that chump Simpkins stabbed him in the back he would have to answer to us, that was all. No homeless, parentless stranger was going to get the worst of it while we were alive to defend him. The rest of the class swore as one man to cherish Grabbenheim and see him through the semester.

It was hard work, because we all had to dig in and get some slight, murky inkling of what calculus was about in order to protect Grabby's record. But we didn't flinch.

We got so ambitious for Grabby that we entered him at the registrar's office in English lit and Latin prose composition. Not that we expected him to do anything with those studies. In

fact, he ignored the classes altogether and began to get faculty notices for cuts. But we didn't care about that. In fact, it pleased us, because at the end of the term the faculty would have before it the task of firing the best mathematics scholar who ever came to Siwash because he had flunked in two other studies, and it warmed our hearts to think of the trouble it would have deciding the puzzle—particularly if it tried to talk things over with Grabbenheim personally.

In the spring we began introducing Grabbenheim to the campus. Rearick wrote a few verses in his very best vein and sent them into the college paper under Grabbenheim's name. We got the athletic association's president to appoint him on a couple of committees. We fed the college reporters for the weekly with personals about Grabbenheim until the sheet was saturated with him. He had gone home to Chicago to see his sick mother. He was absent in Omaha considering a fine position which had just been offered him. He was attending a conference at Klown. People began to ask who this Grabbenheim chap was. But nobody seemed to know. Most of us thought he was a junior, but we hadn't met him. He was very exclusive, we had heard—he had a title over in Russia and had come away to avoid the nihilists or something of the sort. Pity he didn't mix more with the fellows.

About April we didn't have time to do much of anything besides arranging Grabby's career. He got busier and busier. Bangs cribbed an article on Russian social conditions from somewhere and entered it in the sophomore essay competition. It was so good that the faculty held meetings about it and tried to find Grabby in order to encourage him.

Still we weren't satisfied. Every night some of us met to discuss Grabby and improve him and hang some new and startling ornament on his record or disposition. Once we almost made him over altogether into a German officer in exile for fighting a duel. Pierce fought hard for it, but we voted him down. But we did consent to run him for office. This was another pet dream of Pierce's. He declined to be happy until Grabbenheim had been elected to some college office and had

ents of his resolved ourselves into an equally determined committee to protect him from the rude public and keep his privacy sacred. For a day we succeeded. Then the chase got too hot. When the calculus class convened it had seven visitors from other classes and Pierce had to get up when Grabby was called upon and explain that he had been summoned to Chicago on an important mission connected with his country.

In the meantime the one question on the campus was: Would Mr. Grabbenheim accept? Would he condescend to become acquainted? Bangs had taken the job of retailing the rumors concerning Grabbenheim's wealth and refinement. He had a good imagination and he worked it to the limit. By Friday of that week Grabby had become a grand duke in disguise, and when a letter from Chicago with a Russian crest on it reached the class president, twenty trembling hands helped him open it at the bulletin board, where it had been posted.

We had wired Snoddy Smith of last year's class, who was toiling upward in Chicago at that time, to put us up a nice letter. Cost us \$1.97 to explain it to him at night rates. Snoddy certainly did well. Don't know where he dug up the letter paper, but it was paralyzing. Plain, you know, but oh, so refined. Mr. Grabbenheim from the bottom of his heart thanked his classmates, whom he hoped some day to know, for the honor conferred upon him. (Did he presume in believing the college paper which he had just read before his departure?). Mr. Grabbenheim wished that he might accept, but oh, dear friends, your strange customs, your strange but delightful customs—he could not hope to get help here the president stopped and looked at the letter for a long time, while we cursed Snoddy under our breaths and swore that if he queer the game by his foolishness we'd get revenge if it took a lifetime—to get help to social usages at that dear old Siwash college. How could he accept, knowing so little? Ah, no, dear friends, but a lifetime of gratitude. As we say in Russia—

Then followed a row of jackstones and some splashes which looked so Russian that even I got a little bit dizzy. Snoddy was certainly rising to

loughby, a perfectly beautiful two-stepper from Kansas City, to go with me to the dance, and she had consented. Four days before it came off she wrote and begged to be excused. She hardly knew, she said, how to explain except that she had had a previous engagement, and that she had supposed it broken and that she had found it wasn't, and she knew I would understand, and wouldn't I be nice about taking a lot of dances, and she wanted me to be nice to her escort, who was a stranger in the class—in fact, it was Count Grabbenheim.

When I came to later I was gnawing contentedly at fragments of the furniture. Never had I been so mad. I had eaten quite a meal of raw chair legs before I was calm enough to rush off to Pierce for comfort. But Pierce was madder than I. Furniture did not satisfy his feelings. He was chewing the radiator. My affair with Miss Wiloughby was just a mild little thing of a month's standing, and I really had her successor in mind, but old Noddy had been clean and everlastingly gone to smash on Helena Toothby, the queen of our class—and Helena had just turned him down and broken her engagement—because an old friend who had no acquaintance in the college had thrown himself on her mercy and she felt it her duty to go with him to the dance.

Noddy and I leaned on each other for a while and fought for language—but not for long. Keg Rearick kicked the door in presently. Keg was past all such mild diversions as dining on anything. He was about to dissolve into high explosives. Amy Landeville had been tossing him up playfully and catching him as he came down for some months and had consented to go to the ball with him as a great favor. Keg was entirely devastated about her—terrible case—and she had just written, breaking her engagement for the party in great indignation—because she had passed him that day and he had been too busy looking the other way to notice her.

We three threw water on each other and put two and two together—thank heaven, this was no calculus problem. And then we went to telegraph Snoddy, promising him instant death at the earliest possible moment. But on the way we met Walls and Etherton, and when we saw their wild look we seized their hands and asked: "Brothers, did you get it, too?" They said they had. So we made up a Roman mob and charged the telegraph office, where we composed a message which had to be revised four times before the operator would take it. We didn't do the subject justice then, but our money gave out. So we sent it on to that skulking coward in Chicago who had taken our own child and had ruined us with him, and went home to dine on more furniture.

I got a reply in the morning. It was short but fairly explicit. It read: "I see you're crazy, but explain further. Never wrote said girls. Someone else is using your Grabbenheim."

That day we five and Andrews and Pudge Bigelow, who had also received the dull, destructive drop from their best young lady friends, met in the library, it being the most secret place we could find, and composed a grisly and horrible oath by which we swore to have revenge on Grabbenheim and other persons as yet unknown to the jury.

We sat around the library until Miss Hawkes, the librarian, became suspicious, never having seen us there before. But it wasn't until late afternoon that we found the plan. Then it all dawned at once like a beautiful sunrise. It was an inspiration—the idea of a lifetime.

Grabby would wreck the chemical laboratory. In so doing he would fill a long-felt want. We had been yearning to do it ever since we had had freshman chemistry. But we hadn't dared. It had been a popular diversion in years past, but had been overdone, and that year the faculty had served notice that any person found spilling sulphuric acid around the building and mixing up compounds that smelled to you high heaven would not only be expelled but indicted by the grand jury for malicious mischief. So we had suffered all year. Heavens, how we had suffered in that class! Professor Grubb was a fiend incarnate for piling up work and trouble and conditions. And now we would get even. Grabby would pile up the chemistry room for us.

We plotted fiercely all night. The dance was only three days away and time was short. The next day Pierce and I disappeared from our accustomed haunts in the afternoon. We had with us tools and a lunch. The old main building stands open until six, and it wasn't hard for us to ramble casually up to the third floor without meeting anyone and insert ourselves into Professor Wogg's room.

It was no trick at all to get out of Professor Wogg's room and into the chemical laboratory. The locks were up-to-date, but the doors weren't. They cut like cheese. It was just nine o'clock when we finally stood before our prey, and the moonlight filtering through the big narrow-paned windows made it unnecessary to use lights.

We worked mostly with acids. They are so satisfactory. We mixed them all together and poured them wherever they would do the most good. We burned villainous remarks on the wall paper. We used litmus paper by the bale and test tubes by the barrel. When we got tired of acids we went in for smells. The smells we discovered were superb. I smelled a lot of them the second day I was on the ocean last year—just at meal time. They were yellow-brownish green smells that tie your stomach up in a knot and wring it out like a towel.

We put chunks of potassium in all the water pots and stuck the professor's record book into a huge bowl of hydro-sulphuric acid to soak. Then we tipped out, carrying large beakers of the smelly triumphs we had produced and hurled them over the transoms into the other rooms. But before we went, being somewhat hurried, we dropped a clue. It was a foolish thing to do, but criminals always do it. No matter how careful you are when committing crime you are always bound to leave some damaging evidence. We dropped ours right on the professor's desk where he would be sure to find it. It was a handkerchief all stained with acid. And it had a name embroidered in the corner. Why on earth do men, especially reckless men, have their names embroidered on their handkerchiefs? This one would have been our ruin, only the name was "Grabbenheim."

We left a bunch of keys in a cabinet, too. There was a metal tag on the ring with the name "Grabbenheim," on it. Cost us 50 cents to have an old locksmith stamp that name the afternoon before. And down on the campus when we had slipped quietly out and had unostentatiously cooed into the shrubbery about four seconds after the night watch had turned the corner we left a hat. It is often done by men who are in a great hurry. And of course there is nothing so damning as a hat with the owner's name in it. Grabby shouldn't have decorated all his personal property with his full name. "G." would have been quite sufficient.

We slept late the next morning and wandered peacefully down into pandemonium instead of chapel. The college was buzzing like a hornet's nest just before the order to fire at random is given. The faculty was unanimously absent. It was meeting in executive session. Every few minutes it was sending out a new request that Mr. Grabbenheim appear before it immediately. The deputy sheriff was also looking for Mr. Grabbenheim. His popularity of the day before was as nothing beside his extreme desirability just then. People who had never heard of him before simply ached to get hold of him. I believe old Professor Grubb would have given a year of his life to have been allowed to converse with Grabbenheim for just a minute—with a meat ax.

As for the students, of course, the feelings were pretty well mixed. It was generally conceded that Grabby had done a noble and gallant deed, but that he had displayed unusual guinniness of intellect in the details. That was laid up of course to the fact that he was but a poor, dumb foreigner, unacquainted with our customs. But he had done his best, and there was great regret over the whole unfortunate affair—I mean the clues. The most particular and heartrending regret was displayed by seven young ladies for whom some of us had once had a tender regard. Never had I seen such passionate and despairing regret. Some of them wept openly.

At ten o'clock the faculty expelled Grabbenheim by a unanimous vote and exhorted the sheriff to capture him, dead or alive. Professor Wogg held out for mercy to the last. It almost broke his heart to lose Grabbenheim, but, as he had often complained, mathematics stood little show in this impractical world and genius got no consideration. I don't believe he has ever quite recovered from the blow, and he still quotes Grabbenheim's marks, I am told.

That afternoon most of us seven got notes from the young ladies who had dumped us overboard with such regret two days before. The notes were absurdly friendly. They were notes we would have given a great deal to have received a week before, but somehow they were merely painful at that time. Our faith in womankind was gone. We were embittered men. We went to the athletic dance, but we staggled it and stood for the most part in the corners, looking scornfully on at the proceedings. We could hardly condescend to dance with any woman, guilty or innocent.

Only one of the several girls appeared. Miss Toothby came in late—with Simpkins. He had been asking her to various affairs steadily for two years, but she had always had previous engagements. When they came in Pierce gave an awful start and remained absorbed in thought for some minutes. Then he looked at me. I looked back. Then we both looked at Simpkins. Then simultaneously something within us swelled up and burst into an awful and corrosive wrath. Dundernodules that we were! Why hadn't we suspected Simpkins before? No, we never entirely got even with Simpkins. He still lives.

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To Dream or to Do—
How often the world regrets the loss of achievements that men have contemplated—and never achieved! The inventions that the persistent have never worked out; the pictures that artists have rested content with seeing only in their brains; the books that have never got beyond their authors' outlines; the epics that poets have only planned; the hundreds of altruistic deeds existing only as impulses; how often mankind has regretted such losses. But instead of feeling sorry about it, pity the would-be doers. William James counsels these victims:
"Every time a resolve or a fine glow of feeling evaporates without bearing practical fruit it is worse than a chance lost; it works so as positively to hinder future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge."



KEG REARICK KICKED THE DOOR IN PRESENTLY. KEG WAS PAST ALL SUCH MILD DIVERSIONS AS DINING ON ANYTHING.