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THE CADS OF ST. FRANK'S



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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CHAPTER 1.

LEAVE IT TO HANDFORTH!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, adjusted his famous monocle, and surveyed the tea-table with entire approval.

"Good, Phipps," he observed. "Congrats., old miracle! I mean to say, this is a sight to gladden the saddest heart—what?"

"I think everything is in order, sir," said Phipps evenly.

It was within a minute of five o'clock, and Archie's study in the Remove passage was looking cheery and inviting. The November evening was wet and cold, and a high wind was moaning and whistling round the grey buildings of the old school.

But within Study E, in the Ancient House, comfort prevailed.

The fire was burning with a merry crackle, the softly-shaded lights were artistically arranged, and the tea-table was glittering with delicate china and burnished silver. There were dishes of cakes and pastries, assortments of appetising sandwiches, and there were places set for three. The air was filled with the fragrant aroma of tea and buttered toast.

This particular study was always a haven of peace and luxury, for Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne was one of those favoured youths who possessed every privilege that money could buy for him. Fortunately, Archie was level-headed, and he never abused these privileges. Although he was known as the Genial Ass, he wasn't such a chump as he

looked. He spent nine-tenths of his life in slacking—slacking at lessons and slacking at sport, but occasionally he would have a tremendous burst of energy, in which he would make up for lost time.

Nobody in the Remove was particularly surprised when Archie won first honours in a paperchase, or when he quarrelled with a redoubtable enemy, and administered a sound thrashing. After such exploits as these, Archie would consistently slack for another few weeks—in order, as he expressed it, to "thoroughly restore the good old tissues."

Of course, he didn't really need Phipps at all. Phipps was his valet, and Archie relied upon him for everything. In fact, it was popularly supposed that Archie would be quite helpless if Phipps suddenly left him. But this was only a myth. When Archie was sufficiently determined, he could do almost anything. The trouble was, he was hardly ever sufficiently determined. He took life easily.

"What-ho!" observed the elegant junior, as the school clock began to solemnly chime. "Five of the best, Phipps. Five merry old thingummies of the what-d'call-it. Clangs of the clapper, what? Guest No. 1 should, according to all the rules of punctuality and etiquette, be staggering down the corridor tea-wards as it were. And guest No. 2 will then roll up, bright and cheery, at five past."

"I trust the plan will be successful, sir," said Phipps.

"It's a duet, old lad, for I'm trusting, too," he admitted. "At the same time, I've got to

admit that these worries are affecting the old grey matter so dashed acutely that it's absolutely turning mottled. I mean to say, the dear chappies are priceless sportsmen, and all that sort of thing, but they need a frightful amount of handling."

"You must be very tactful, sir."

"Good gad! Tactful, what?" said Archie. "Absolutely. Tact, in fact, is the absolute stuff to shove across them. You can trust the young master to rally round with oodles of the celebrated Glenthorne discretion."

"I am sure of that, sir," agreed Phipps firmly. "Shall I remain, in order to officiate, or would you prefer to be alone?"

"Yes!" said Archie stoutly. "Absolutely!"

"You would prefer me to remain, sir?"

"Absolutely not! You can rely upon the young master to handle this situation with efficiency," said Archie. "Be good enough to do your famous evaporating trick, Phipps, old ghost! Unless my ears deceive me, guest No. 1 is already at the gates."

Following a tap on the door, Ralph Leslie Fullwood entered. He was smiling and polite, but the smile wasn't quite like his usual one. It had an air of being forced.

"By Jove, Archie, you're doing the thing in style!" he said, with a glance of satisfaction at the table. "I'm not worth all this special display."

Phipps discreetly vanished, and Archie waved his guest to a chair.

"Pray refrain from such priceless rot," he said severely. "I mean to say, distinguished guests require something out of the good old rut. Something, I mean to say, absolutely top-hole, with silver-plated knobs on!"

Fullwood laughed.

"Well, it's very decent of you, Archie, I must say," he remarked. "I'll admit I've been feeling a bit lonely lately, and tea in your company will be a double pleasure. Brent's joining us, I suppose?" he added, as he glanced at the table again, and noted the third place.

"Brent?" said Archie, with a start. "I mean, dear old Alf? Oh, what-ho! That is to say, make yourself frightfully at home, dear old pea-nut! Take a chair, dash it. Take the good old lounge. Spread yourself out, laddie!"

Archie's manner was slightly confused, but Fullwood didn't seem to notice it. As a matter of fact, the third place was not set for Alf Brent at all—although Fullwood's assumption was justified, seeing that Brent was Archie Glenthorne's study-mate. However, Fullwood didn't know that Brent was having tea that day with some of the fellows over in the Modern House.

"This must have cost you a pretty penny!" said Fullwood soberly.

"I say," protested Archie. "Odds personalities and embarrassments! I say, old chunk of cheese! A bit dashed mouldy, what?"

"The cheese?" said Fullwood politely.

"No, the good old reference to the pieces of eight, as it were," said Archie. "The

cash, dash it! I mean, no chappie comes into another chappie's study to tea, and passes such dashed remarks about pretty pennies, and all that sort of rot! It simply isn't done, old melon!"

"Sorry!" grinned Fullwood. "I didn't think you were quite so strict on the formalities, old man. We'd better wait for Brent, I suppose?"

"Brent?" repeated Archie. "Yes, rather! I mean, absolutely not! That is, you see, as it were, Brent—To put it absolutely neatly, laddie, Brent, so to speak, is—Well, what-ho!" he concluded briskly.

"As clear as mud!" said Fullwood. "What's the idea of this evasion—"

A tap came on the door, and Archie gasped.

"Odds holes and fixes!" he ejaculated.

"Just in time to save me from a somewhat frightful posish, by gad! Come in, dear old tulip! Welcome to the groaning board, and all that rot!"

The door opened, and Clive Russell walked in, smiling.

"On time to the minute, Archie," he said genially. "Hallo, another guest, eh? Good egg! I—"

He broke off as Fullwood turned round in his chair, and his whole expression changed. The smile vanished from his face, and he flushed slightly. And Fullwood, for his part, rose to his feet so abruptly that he tipped the chair over backwards. A strained, tense silence followed.

Archie instinctively sensed trouble, and trotted out the Glenthorne tact.

"What-ho!" he said hastily. "Introductions required, what? Clive—Ralph! I mean to say, Fullwood—Russell! Kindly dash about, and get acquainted, as it were. And now—tea! Good old brew—the stuff that shoves sundry chunks of cheer into a cove!"

He bustled about with the tea-pot, and was so anxious to appear unconcerned that he poured tea into the sugar-basin before he realised what he was doing. In the meantime, Clive Russell and Ralph Leslie Fullwood, the former chums of Study I, continued to look at one another with complete embarrassment. Clive, who was nearest the door, turned back.

"I'm sorry, Archie," he said quietly.

"Eh?" ejaculated Archie. "I mean, what?"

"When you invited me to tea this afternoon did you not know that Fullwood would be here?" went on Clive. "Did you ask me to come so that you could—well, so that you could force me into his company?"

Archie nearly dropped the tea-pot.

"Good gad!" he gasped. "The fact is, laddie—"

"Did you?" insisted Clive.

"Well, I mean, to be absolutely accurate—"

"For the third time, Archie—did you?" demanded the Canadian junior.

"Well, dash it, yes!" said Archie stoutly. "I thought it was a rather priceless scheme to bring you obstinate blighters together. I

mean, two of the best, what? Two of the brightest and chirpiest—"

"I'm awfully sorry, Archie, but I wouldn't have accepted your invitation if I had known," interrupted Russell. "So I hope you'll excuse me."

He opened the door and went out.

"I say," panted Archie. "I say! I mean, dash it, I say! Odds disasters and calamities! Clive, old corn-cob! Why, dash it, the chappie's gone!"

He turned, and looked at Fullwood in acute distress.

"I appreciate your motives, old man," said Fullwood quietly, "but you shouldn't have done this."

"Oh, but I say, look here—"

"It wasn't quite fair to either of us," went on Fullwood. "After all, this quarrel is our affair, Archie, and we don't want any interference."

"Good gad! I—I didn't absolutely mean to—"

"Don't misunderstand me, Archie," interrupted Fullwood, squeezing the distressed junior's arm.

"I don't mean anything nasty. Your motive was good, and I think Russell will appreciate it as much as I do. At the same time, we can't patch up our quarrel over a cup of tea."

"You frightful fathead!" said Archie indignantly. "I mean to say, you fatheaded fright! Odds idiots and mules! Why can't you be sensible, and

bung forth the glad hand? I mean, these dashed squabbles are nothing, when it comes down to—"

"This affair of ours is more than you imagine, Archie," interrupted Fullwood. "So, under the cirs, let's call this tea off."

He went out without waiting for Archie to reply. And as he closed the door and turned down the corridor, he ran into Edward Oswald Handforth, the famous leader of Study D.

"Hallo!" said Handforth. "You're looking a bit wonky about the gills, aren't you? What's the matter with you, you ass? I just passed Russell, and he was worse! Wouldn't even answer!"

"Cheese it, Handy!" growled Fullwood. "It's our affair!"

He passed on and went into his own study, and slammed the door. Handforth took a deep breath as Archie joined him.

"Mad!" he said grimly.

"Laddie, be good enough to rally round!" said Archie desperately. "A frightful frost. An absolutely perfect frost. dash it! In other words, a ghastly failure! I tried to

heal the good old wound, and I've only made it worse. I mean, what about it?"

Handforth gave one of his snorts.

"Oh, so you've been trying to patch up that silly squabble, eh?" he said tartly. "You can't expect to perform a miracle like that, my lad! Leave it to me. I'll be the peacemaker."

Archie looked alarmed.

"You!" he said blankly. "I mean—you a peacemaker? Odds contradictions and wonders! Absolutely imposs, laddie! I mean, a firebrand as peacemaker, what?"



CHAPTER 2.

DOING HIS BEST!

HANDFORTH gave Archie a cold look.

"I may be a firebrand—I'm proud of it—but when it comes to giving good advice, I'm right on the mark, too," he said firmly. "So I don't want to hear any more of your sarcasm, my lad! Understand?"

"After all," said Archie, "a chappie can only judge another chappie's character by the other chappie's deeds. And, as a peacemaker, I don't remember any frightful successes on your part, old cheddar. I mean to say, you're more dashed likely to precipitate

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a gory battle than to end a row."

"If those idiots won't see reason, it'll be their own fault if there's a gory battle," said Handforth curtly. "In the first place, what are they quarrelling about? That's what I want to know! I've tried to get to the bottom of it two or three times, but they won't confide in me."

"Which merely proves, I mean, that they've got a certain amount of sense, after all," said Archie firmly. "Personally, I'm convinced that it's all connected with that twenty quid."

"What twenty quid?"

"Why, the other day Russell received twenty of the best from his pater," explained Archie, with a worried frown. "And Fullwood, it seems—at least, that's how I figure it out—appears to have the frightful impression that dear old Clive got the money in some murky fashion. And all this misunderstanding is the result. I mean, a word would straighten things—"

Archie broke off suddenly, and an expression of acute horror came into his face.

"Odds blunders and bloomers!" he gasped. "I mean to say, good absolutely gad! Kindly forget what I've just been saying, laddie!"

"Forget it?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"Absolutely," urged Archie. "In fact, absolutely with knobs on! Absolutely with balloon tyres! The fact is, I'm not supposed to refer to that priceless twenty quid at all! Dear old Clive requested me to say nothing!"

Handforth smiled indulgently.

"That's all right," he said. "You can trust me, I suppose? As long as you haven't told anybody else, the secret is still intact. Although I'm hanged if I can understand why there should be any secret at all," he added. "Huh! So Fullwood is mad enough to suspect Russell of shady tricks, eh? I'll soon put this thing right, my lad."

Archie adjusted his monocle mournfully.

"And there's tea, don't you know," he went on. "I mean, a really priceless blow-out, as it were. And both the guests missing, dash it! And my own appetite positively bunkered, by gad! What, dash it, is the use? All that ripping spread going to waste!"

"What's this?" asked Willy Handforth, of the Third. "A ripping spread going to waste! Where? Chubby, my son, corn in Egypt!"

Edward Oswald's minor had just been passing through the corridor at the moment—indeed, at a most opportune moment, in Willy's opinion. He and his chums were hard up, and tea was still being hunted for.

"Clear off!" said Handforth, frowning. "Who told you to interfere?"

"I'm not interfering," replied Willy. "But if there's a spread going to waste, as Archie just intimated—"

"Absolutely," interrupted Archie, nodding. "In my study, laddies! The good old guests have trickled away, and the toast and the what-nots and the how-do-you-do's are simply going mouldy for want of appetites. One of life's major tragedies!"

"Don't you worry, Archie," said Willy kindly. "You needn't let a little thing like that bother you. Chubby and I will rally round. We'll settle this little problem for you. Won't we, Chubby?"

"It's settled already!" replied Chubby Heath promptly.

They scuttled off, and Archie was so full of his own worries that he did not take any notice of them. Instead, he dashed for Study H—which was occupied by Ulysses Spencer Adams, the American boy. But just at the present, Clive Russell was "digging" there, too.

"Oh, I say!" burst out Archie, as he found Clive alone. "I say, old boy—"

"I'm sorry, Archie, but I can't come to that tea-party of yours—"

"Absolutely not," agreed Archie. "Perhaps it was a frightfully bad move on my part, but I was only acting for the best, old dear. You see, it gives me a pain to see you chappies at loggerheads. And I thought—well, I mean, Phipps and I put our heads

together, as it were, and we gathered that a little quiet chit-chat over the tea-cups would be beneficial. But I must confess that Phipps was dashed dubious, even from the start. A brainy lad, Phipps!"

"Yes," said Clive, without interest.

"But that's not the point, old onion," went on Archie concernedly. "You remember that matter of the twenty pounds? Fullwood thinks you got it in some mouldy way, or something? And you won't explain, although it's a present from your pater, to open up a film studio, or something frightfully ripping of that sort?"

"My father sent me the money to buy a home film camera and projector," said Clive Russell bluntly. "Fullwood thinks I got it by gambling. And as long as he chooses to have such rotten thoughts about me, I don't want to speak to him."

"Well, the fact is, I just told Handforth about that good old twenty," said Archie, in distress. "A slip, old lad. I mean, you told me in confidence, and—"

"It's all right, Archie," interrupted Clive, with a smile. "There's nothing very secretive about it, after all."

"Then you're not absolutely furious?" asked Archie, with relief. "You don't regard me as a traitor, or anything foul of that sort?"

"No, you ass," smiled Clive. "Forget all about it."

Archie went out, greatly eased in mind, and when he arrived back in his own study, he found Willy Handforth & Co. in full charge, making the special spread look decidedly silly.

"Good man!" said Willy, as he glanced round. "We've left you a chunk of toast, Archie, and two sandwiches, and—"

"Good gad!" interrupted Archie, gazing at the invaders in dismay. "I mean, all this barging in, what? Slightly ragged at the edge, I mean to say! Uninvited guests, and all that sort of stuff!"

"You said the spread was going to waste—"

"By absolutely gad, so I did!" said Archie, with a start. "Right-ho! In other words, carry on, sergeant! Proceed with the doings. Archie has lost his appetite, and will indulge in meditation. Kindly take no notice. Go ahead, and clear the dashed board."

He sank down on the lounge, and the fags took him at his word. In the meantime, Edward Oswald Handforth was talking seriously to Church and McClure, his long-suffering chums of Study D.

"Yes, I'm going to Clive Russell, and I'm going to ask him what the dickens he means by keeping up this squabble!" he was saying. "I'm going to bring those two chaps together, and make them shake hands."

Church grunted, and McClure merely shook his head.

"That's what I'm going to do," said Handforth sternly. "I don't like to see these ruc-

tions. What's more, I won't have them. I'm going to Clive Russell, and I'm going to talk to him like an uncle."

Church sighed.

"Well, why not go?" he suggested wearily.

"Eh?"

"Why not go, instead of jawing at us?"

"That's exactly my intention!" retorted Handforth. "These fellows need looking after like children! Fancy squabbling over nothing! Why, it's disgraceful! Just like a couple of infants!"

His chums could hardly refrain from grinning. In Study D, squabbles were of daily occurrence—with Handforth himself as the instigator, in nine cases out of ten. And neither Church nor McClure could remember one of these squabbles which had arisen from a really adequate cause. But Handforth could never see his own shortcomings—although he spotted them with lynx-eyed swiftness when they revealed themselves in others.

He went out, and marched to Clive's study.

"So you're here!" he said accusingly, as he blundered in.

The Canadian boy, who was still alone, frowned.

"Where did you expect to find me?" he asked impatiently. "If it's all the same to you, Handforth, I'm not in the mood for your tommy-rot just now. I want to be alone. I'm worried. I don't feel like talking. I don't want to answer any questions, and I've got a headache. Are those hints enough?"

Handforth brushed them all aside in one sweep.

"I've come here to give you some good advice," he said firmly, as he closed the door. "You've had a row with Fullwood, haven't you? He and you are at loggerheads. There's been a row over some money. Well, I'm going to settle it. Is that quite clear?"

Clive Russell groaned.

"It's too clear!" he replied unhappily. "But you can't do anything, Handy. What's more, I wouldn't want you to do anything, even if you could. For goodness' sake, leave us alone."

Handforth sat down on a corner of the table.

"Nothing doing!" he replied calmly. "I've come here to settle this quarrel, and I'm not going to leave this study until I've succeeded!"

"In that case," replied Clive, "you'd better make plans to spend the rest of your life here!"

Schoolboy quarrels were commonplace enough at St. Frank's. As a rule, they broke out without any warning, lasted for a day or two, and were then healed up to the satisfaction of both parties. And afterwards, the quarrellers wondered what they had been at loggerheads about.

This affair between Clive Russell and Ralph Leslie Fullwood was different.

It was much more serious than an ordinary study row. And it had originated as a direct consequence of the new regime at St. Frank's—the Honour System, which was now in full swing.

Professor Grant Hudson, of Hale University, U.S.A., was at present the headmaster's distinguished guest. He it was who had suggested this experiment at the famous public school. And for some little time St. Frank's had been "on its honour." In other words, although the ordinary rules and regulations held good, nobody was obliged to obey them. The fellows were simply on their honour to do so. They could, indeed, defy the school authority with impunity, and "get away with it." Happily, there were very few who deliberately took this mean advantage. In practice, the new order of things had resulted in a general improvement. The boys were on their honour, and they took the greatest possible trouble to obey every rule and regulation with strict and scrupulous care.

The whole school felt that it was necessary to show Professor Hudson that a great British college could be placed on its honour, and come through with flying colours.

There were a few, however—the known rotters such as Forrest & Co., of the Remove, and the irresponsibles—who regarded this change as a glorious opportunity for having a good time. They had no particular code of honour, so why should they worry about adhering to the rules?

They lazed in bed long after the rising-hour, they missed lessons with impunity, and rolled home, after a visit to the pictures, or a spree, an hour or so beyond the usual bedtime. At first, indeed, this section of the school had caused the headmaster a great amount of worry. It seemed that the Honour System was a failure.

But the boys themselves took matters in hand.

Dick Hamilton, the captain of the Remove—quiet, but extraordinarily capable—organised a Vigilance Committee. And the other Forms followed his lead. The Vigilantes promptly instituted a strict watch. War was declared on the "Blots." All the fellows who acted dishonourably were classed as Blots, since they were deliberately attempting to besmirch the school's honour.

These gay youths soon discovered that their newly-found freedom was a myth. Unless they obeyed the rules in the ordinary way, they suffered punishment far more drastic than those which had been administered under the old regime! The Vigilantes were absolutely grim and merciless.

CHAPTER 3.

PATCHING IT UP!



TRICHTLY speaking, Edward Oswald Handforth's activity was a piece of intolerable interference. But he didn't mean it to be

such. And Clive Russell, fortunately, knew him so well that he thoroughly understood that his motives were of the best.

And this quarrel between Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Clive Russell was an outcome of these recent changes. Some of the ordinarily decent fellows were being drawn into bad habits—led away, perhaps, by the very nature of the novel liberty. Clive Russell had been absent one whole night, and Fullwood had wrongly assumed that his Canadian chum had absented himself without leave. As a matter of fact, Clive had had his House master's permission, but Fullwood was still ignorant of this.

And then, in the morning, Fullwood had seen Clive with a lot of money—twenty pounds, or more. And he had known for a fact that Clive had only possessed three pounds overnight!

Again, Fullwood had jumped to an unworthy conclusion. He had assumed that Russell had visited a disreputable gambling club, and that he had won the money at roulette. Foolishly, he had half-accused Clive of this—after having heard lies from Forrest & Co. that Clive was guilty. And the Canadian boy was so upset by the suggestion that he had taken no steps to disabuse Fullwood's mind. Indeed, Clive's very attitude had seemed to indicate that he was guilty.

And so the trouble had gone on, without either party making any attempt to clear up the misunderstanding.

One reason for the prolonged disagreement was that Clive, in the bitterness of his pique, had cleared out of Study I, and had joined Adams, in Study H. So the two former chums had very little opportunity of meeting. They studiously avoided one another about the school. And, indeed, they had not spoken a couple of words during the last three days.

Most of the other fellows had seen their aloofness, but very little notice had been taken, for everybody assumed that the pair would soon be united again. And, in any case, it was always a risky business to interfere in a study quarrel.

And now Handforth, after two or three days of valiant restraint, had made up his mind to act.

"Yes," he said firmly, "this quarrelling business has got to be settled. What's more, I'm going to settle it."

"Be a sportsman, Handy, and leave it alone," replied Clive quietly. "When Fullwood and I want to speak to one another, we'll know what to do, without any advice from you—"

"My dear ass, that's all piffle!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "Do you think I don't know what these silly misunderstandings are? They always drag on unless some sensible chap acts firmly. Archie tells me that your pater sent you twenty pounds? It was supposed to be private, but he let it out by accident. Of course, it's safe with me—"

"Archie told me that he made a slip," said Russell. "It doesn't matter—there's nothing in it. My father sent me the money to buy a film camera and a home projector. But I don't see what you can do, Handy—"

"Fullwood thinks you got that money squiffily, doesn't he?"

"Squiffily?" said the Canadian boy.

"Well, you know—betting, or gambling, or something."

"Yes, he thinks that, I believe."

"And all this trouble has grown out of it?" demanded Handforth.

"I guess so," said Clive, with a nod.

"Then, you poor fathead, why don't you tell Fullwood the truth?" asked Handforth indignantly. "You silly chump! You hopeless lunatic! You dotty ass! You're worse than he is—because you know the truth, and he doesn't! It's up to you to go to Fullwood, and to tell him the facts about that twenty quid. Then he'll know that his accusation was wrong, and he'll take about ten minutes babbling out his apologies. You'll fall on one another's necks, grab fists, and be pals again."

Occasionally—very occasionally—Handforth did actually give good advice. This was one of those very exceptional moments. Without any question, his suggestion was brainy. Direct action—that was Handforth's policy. And this situation between Russell and Fullwood was clearly a case for direct action, and nothing else.

As Handforth had intimated, a word from Clive about that money—the truth as to its source—would clear all the suspicions from Fullwood's mind. And he, being a decent fellow, would promptly admit the injustice of his suspicions, and would humbly apologise. It was a certain way to peace.

"Well?" demanded Handforth, as Clive remained silent.

"Oh, I don't know," said the Canadian junior uncomfortably.

"You don't know what?"

"I don't know what to do."

"Haven't I just told you, you donkey?"

"Yes, but I'm not sure I feel like doing it," replied Clive awkwardly. "After all, it's up to him to take the first step."

"How the dickens can he—when you're the chap who knows the truth?"

"He shouldn't have such rotten suspicions!" growled Clive. "Doesn't he know me? Why should he jump to such hasty conclusions? It's his business to come to me, and to apologise. Then I'll tell him about the money."

Handforth gave one of his loudest snorts.

"Talk about mules!" he said, with a glare. "Why, you idiot, he'll apologise until he's hoarse—after you've spoken to him. Perhaps it's up to him to apologise without any explanation—I'll admit that—but you can't expect miracles. Why can't you be content with his regret afterwards?"

Clive's eyes suddenly sparkled.

"You're right!" he said breathlessly. "Perhaps it did look rather rummy to Ralph, when you come to think of it. And if I explain that I was out that night with Mr. Lee's permission, and that I got the money from my father by registered post the next morning, he'll be decent enough to apologise. And that'll put everything straight."



Clive Russell's frantic struggles were smothered as the East House cads gagged him with a scarf, and then tied his hands. He heard Enoch Snipe titter excitedly; then came the sound of Forrest's voice. What fresh villainy had the cads planned?

"By George, then you're going to take my tip?" said Handforth eagerly.

"Yes, I guess I will!" said Clive, nodding.

"Good man!" declared Edward Oswald, jumping off the table. "Then the whole quarrel is as good as over. You can always trust me when it comes to a question of peacemaking!"

He hustled off, full of satisfaction. And Clive Russell stood for a few moments, thinking over what his late visitor had just said. Then, with a flushed face, he went out in search of Ralph Leslie Fullwood.



CHAPTER 4.

BERNARD FORREST'S CHANCE.

BY an atrocious piece of bad luck Clive practically ran into Forrest & Co., of Study A, outside his door. And at that very moment

Fullwood was in sight farther down the passage.

Forrest acted on the instant.

"Hallo, Clive, old man!" he cried cheerily, as he slapped the Canadian youngster on the back. "Doing anything this evening?"

Clive gave him a cold glance.

"Not with you, Forrest!" he retorted shortly.

"Good man!" grinned Forrest, his voice louder than ever. "Come along to my study, and I'll give you a great time. In half an hour, then? Fine! That'll suit me to perfection. We'll have the cards already."

"Cards?" repeated Clive, staring. "What are you talking about?"

But Forrest had gained his end. Without question, Fullwood had heard those words, but Fullwood had now gone into the lobby, out of earshot. So it didn't matter what Clive now said.

"You're always welcome in Study A," said Forrest coolly.

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Clive coldly. "What's the idea of this rot, anyhow? You know well enough that I don't play cards—with you, or anybody else."

Forrest shrugged his shoulders, and Clive walked off hurrying towards the lobby, where he had seen Fullwood going, out of the corner of his eye. Forrest glanced cunningly at Gulliver and Bell, his precious pals.

"Pretty neat, eh?" he said softly.

"I can't understand the idea," said Gulliver, with a blank look.

"Poor chap—you've got no brains!" retorted Forrest.

During the past two or three days he had been doing everything in his power to maintain the misunderstanding between the chums of Study I. On several occasions he had deliberately kept Russell in conversation—and always in Fullwood's sight. His object was to make Fullwood believe that they were thick together, as this would lend colour to Fullwood's present suspicions.

Bernard was very bitter against Fullwood. For on that fatal night in question—the very night that Clive had been absent—Fullwood had frustrated Bernard Forrest's plan to visit the roulette club, by locking the enraged Bernard in his bed-room cupboard, and keeping him there. Ever since then, the leader of Study A had been seeking revenge. And his vindictive nature sought a revenge that would entangle Fullwood hopelessly within its meshes.

This latest step had been the best yet, for although Fullwood had heard Forrest's words, he had not heard Clive's.

Entering the lobby, the Canadian boy decided to put an end to this nonsense then and there. He was acting on the impulse—the impulse that Handforth had instigated. And there was no time like the present. Reflections might lead him to hesitate, and to put off the explanation altogether.

"Say, Fullwood!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood turned just as he was about to enter the cloak-room. He gave Russell a peculiar look—a look which was altogether hostile. For a fraction of a second, Clive almost decided to turn on his heel, and walk off. There was something in Fullwood's attitude which antagonised him again—just when he was in this conciliatory mood, too.

"Well?" said Fullwood bluntly.

"I'd like a word with you," said Clive.

"Go ahead. But make it as short as you can."

If this conversation had taken place in a film cartoon icicles would have been hanging from Fullwood's words. In fact, he gave his former chum not the slightest encouragement. Indeed, quite the contrary.

"Hang it, you needn't talk in that tone!" said Russell, rather hurt. "I'm the injured party, not you. But isn't it about time we put an end to all this idiotic bunk? I'm sick of it, anyhow!"

"Oh!" said Fullwood, with a distinct sneer in his voice. "That's strange! I thought you were just getting thick with Forrest. I'm

surprised that you should desire my company again!"

The bitterness in his words was so acute that Russell's peaceful motives vanished. He glared angrily.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

If only he had taken Handforth's advice literally, and had grabbed Fullwood by the shoulders, and forced him to listen to his few words of explanation, the air would have been completely cleared. But human nature being what it is, Clive flared up.

"Confound you!" he went on. "I don't desire your company, and you can think what you like about me. You can have all the rotten suspicions——"

"Suspicious!" interrupted Fullwood curtly. "It wouldn't matter if they were only suspicions. Are you trying to deny that you're not thick with that cad Forrest? Do you think I haven't got ears?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Clive angrily.

"Don't try to bluff!" retorted Fullwood. "What were you just arranging? So you're going to Study A in half an hour, eh? And Forrest is going to have the cards ready. What do you take me for—a fool?"

Clive Russell started back.

"Do—do you think I've just arranged to play cards in Forrest's study?" he asked.

"I don't think anything about it—I've got ears!"

"You cad!" blazed Clive furiously. "What's the good of trying to tell you anything? I was an idiot to speak to you at all! Your mind's full of rotten, dirty suspicions! As for Forrest, I should think you're more likely to seek his company than I am!"

"What!" shouted Fullwood.

"Especially in the small hours—on the razzle!" added Clive, taking a keen pleasure in uttering the words. "It wouldn't be anything new to you!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood winced, and turned pale. That taunt cut him to the quick, and his mental pain was obvious. In a flash, Clive regretted his hot words, and hastened to undo the damage.

"I'm sorry!" he muttered. "I—I didn't mean——"

"Oh, don't apologise!" interrupted Fullwood. "I can't expect anything else. I was fool enough to hope that all that was dead and gone; but a chap can't thrust his past into the background, and leave it there. It's always liable to jump out and floor him."

In former days, Ralph Leslie Fullwood had been the leader of Study A himself, but now he had learned better sense. In point of fact, the Canadian junior had had a large part in reforming him. And Clive bit his tongue with vexation after he had uttered those taunting words. They were unfair—they were unjust and caddish. Fullwood had never once gone back; he had never shown the slightest desire to associate with his former companions. His conversion to real decency had been genuine.

"I didn't mean that just now," said Clive huskily. "But you drove me to it, Ralph. Why can't you listen to me for a minute, and have this beastly quarrel settled?"

"Settled!" repeated Fullwood biting. "Who said that I wanted it settled? I may have been a cad at one time, but nowadays I'm rather particular. And I'd like to know by what right you jibe at me? Haven't you got twenty pounds in your pocket that you won at roulette?"

"It's not in my pocket—it's in my desk," said Clive bitterly. "And I wish I'd never had the money. You're wrong about the roulette, too. Your mind seems to run on that confounded game——"

"Oh, don't make things worse by lying!" said Fullwood harshly.

"You—you rotter!" shouted Clive, his anger bursting out again. "I'm fed up with this bickering! What's the good of trying to explain anything? You've got roulette on the brain!"

"I happen to know what the game is—and I know how it can grip a fellow," said Fullwood quietly. "I'm sorry to see that you've become one of its victims——"

"Oh, we'd better stop talking!" interrupted Clive heatedly. "As for roulette, if you went near one of those confounded tables with twenty pounds in your pocket, it wouldn't last you more than ten minutes! Once a victim, always a victim!"

"You ought to know!" snapped Fullwood. "Perhaps you're going to visit that infernal club again to-night?"

"Confound you!" roared Clive Russell. He turned on his heel, and marched back towards his own quarters, so quickly, in fact, that Forrest & Co. hardly had time to dodge into Study A. Handforth came into his own room just as Clive was passing.

"Well," he said genially, "fixed it up?"

"No, I haven't!" snapped the Canadian boy.

He tried to brush past, but Handforth held him. And Church and McClure stood in the doorway of Study D, looking concerned.

"Hold on!" said Edward Oswald. "What's the idea of this black look? Didn't you take my advice? Didn't you go to Fullwood——"

"Yes, I did—and I don't want to speak to him again!" interrupted Clive hotly. "I don't want to see him, or know anything about him. As far as I'm concerned, I guess he's a stranger!"

He tore himself away and walked off.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth blankly.

"So much for your marvellous peace-making!" said Church. "We don't like to say 'I told you so,' Handy, but it's a big temptation."

"You fathead!" roared Handforth. "You've said it!"

"Well, we warned you about butting in——"

Handforth didn't wait to listen. He rushed off down the corridor, and came face to face with Fullwood at the end.

"Oh," he said, halting. "What the dickens is the meaning of this? What have you been saying to Russell? I told him to come to you and explain everything, and now he says that you're a stranger to him!"

"If it comes to that," said Fullwood, "he's a stranger to me!"

"You babbling lunatic!" snorted Handforth. "I can explain——"

"I don't want to hear it!"

"But I know where Russell got that twenty quid——"

"So do I!"

"You don't!" shouted Handforth.

"You only think——"

"I don't think—I know," interrupted Fullwood curtly. "If Russell has been telling you anything else, he's been lying! Perhaps he's fooled you in the same way as he's fooled some other chaps. But I know! And I don't want to know any more about him!"

And before Handforth could open his mouth to say anything further, Fullwood pushed past, and walked into his own study.

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CHAPTER 5.

THE BEGINNING OF A PLOT.

BERNARD FORREST took a deep breath.

"By gad," he murmured gloatingly, "I've got him now! Do you hear, you fellows? I've got him! I've got him!"

Gulliver and Bell were rather startled. There was something in Forrest's very tone which scared them. They knew that he was vindictive and revengeful, but his present tone of voice was utterly evil.

"I say, chuck it, you know!" muttered Gulliver uneasily.

"Go easy, Forrest!" said Bell, with a nervous titter.

But Forrest merely grinned with unwholesome delight.

"I've got him, I tell you!" he repeated. "I told you that I'd get even with Fullwood, didn't I? Well, to-night I'm going to trap him! Do you understand? I'm going to catch him in a tender spot."

"But—but I don't see that the position's any different," said Gulliver. "Those two chaps have been squabbling for days, and things haven't changed."

"Haven't they?" asked Forrest. "Didn't you hear what they were saying?"

"Yes, but how does that alter anything?" said Bell.

"You poor, brainless dolt!" said Forrest pityingly. "Doesn't Fullwood believe that Russell planned to play cards with us here? He swallowed that! I meant him to overhear, and he did!"

"Yes, but——"

"And what about that taunt, just before they parted?" went on Forrest. "Russell told Fullwood that he couldn't go near a roulette table without losing money! And Fullwood has got half an idea that Russell will be off to the club to-night. Could anything be sweeter? Oh, yes, we've got him! Just a little wangling, my sons, and it'll be done!"

His excitement at the prospect of "getting" Fullwood was unpleasant to witness. Even Gulliver and Bell, hardened as they were, felt uncomfortable. But then, they hadn't the same revengeful spirit against Fullwood. They hadn't been locked in a cupboard, as Bernard had been!

"They've played into my hands," went on Forrest, a gloating note sounding in his voice. "Russell even told Fullwood that his money was locked in his desk! That was a piece of useful information. And to-night, after lights-out, we'll get Fullwood into such a position that he'll ruin himself!"

"Why, what are you trying to get at?" asked Gulliver curiously.

"This!" said Forrest.

He sat down near the fire, and his chums bent close to him. The high wind thundered in the chimney, and whistled against the window. Forrest's eyes were glittering with the hateful emotion which gripped him.

"Just this!" said Forrest softly. "After lights-out, I'll trick Fullwood into visiting that roulette club. I shan't need to take any further steps. Once he's near that wheel—he'll fall!"

Gulliver and Bell looked incredulous.

"Rot!" said Bell. "You can't do it."

"Can't trick him into going there?"

"You might do that, but you'll never make him fall, as you put it," said Bell. "Fullwood's one of these goody-goody rotters nowadays. A roulette wheel won't have any effect upon him."

"Won't it?" said Bernard Forrest. "Just you wait! I don't set myself up as a student of human nature, but in this instance I'd bet a year's pocket-money on it! When Fullwood gets into that club, he'll be finished."

"Don't you fool yourself," said Gulliver. "He's chucked up that sort of game for good."

You'll have to think of something pretty tricky——"

"We won't argue. Time will prove whether I'm right or wrong," interrupted Forrest coolly. "I shall only use trickery to get him into the roulette-room. After that, I'll let the wheel do the rest."

"You're dreaming," said Bell. "He'll ignore it!"

"By gad, I'm going to enjoy this!" said Forrest. "And I'll advise you fellows to watch closely. There'll be some interesting developments." He rose briskly to his feet. "But now we've got to think of a plan," he continued. "We've got to work things so that Fullwood will jump to certain conclusions. He's ready to believe anything just now, and that's where we shall trap him. And there are other things to prepare, too."

Half an hour later, as Fullwood was sitting moodily in his study, he heard voices out in the corridor, as two or three fellows passed along.

"Jolly good game, Russell, old man," came Forrest's voice. "I'll pop out now, and see about the bikes. Must prepare in advance——"

The words became indistinguishable as the footsteps receded. But Forrest had said all that he intended—and Ralph Leslie Fullwood had heard. He sat in his study, his lips curled with contempt and scorn.

"He's properly thick with those cads!" he muttered.

At any other time Fullwood would have been first to suspect trickery. He would have dashed to his door and flung it open—to find out if Clive Russell was actually there. But now, in his present mood, he instantly assumed that he had accidentally caught a few genuine words. So they were getting their bicycles ready! And that meant a jaunt after lights-out. A jaunt—where? There were no two answers to such a question.

Fullwood's brow became black. After all, he was a Vigilante, and he made up his mind then and there, that he would keep a particularly sharp eye on Clive Russell after lights-out. Although he didn't much care what happened to his chum now, he had a strong sense of duty. And as a member of the Vigilance Committee, it was his charge to put down an attempt to break bounds. It didn't occur to him that such words would never have been openly spoken if Clive was actually contemplating a night jaunt.

As a matter of fact, Clive had been in his own study when Forrest & Co. had passed down the passage, and he hadn't the faintest suspicion that a plot was beginning to shape itself.

Shortly before bedtime the next move was made.

Clive had left his study, and was going along to the junior common-room when Parry minor, of the Third, breathlessly pulled him up. Parry minor had been waiting round the corner, but Clive knew nothing of this.

"I say, Russell, just a tick!" said the East

House fag. "Clifton wants you in the East House. He asked me to come and fetch you."

"It's raining, isn't it?" asked Clive irritably.

"No—it's stopped now."

"Well, I don't feel like going out—"

"But Clifton says it's important," urged Parry minor. "You know he's keen on puzzles and things. He's inventing one about different countries, or something, and he wants some tips from you about Canada. He told me not to come back without you. I say, don't be mean!" he added plaintively. "I shall get an awful bumping if you don't be a sport!"

"Oh, all right," growled Clive. "I don't want you to get into any trouble. But I wish Clifton would choose his time better!"

The Canadian junior was always good-natured, and at any other time he would have gone across to the East House willingly enough. But after his recent set-to with Fullwood, he was feeling utterly miserable and downhearted. He didn't feel like obliging anybody.

No sooner had he got down the Ancient House steps when half a dozen figures loomed up out of the gloom. Parry minor had spoken truthfully about the rain, for the sky was now clearing, although scudding clouds were drifting raggedly across the moon. The high wind was blustering noisily.

"Collar him!" said one of the dim figures quickly. "And don't let him make a sound!"

"Hey! What the—"

The Canadian junior got no further, for he was simply bundled over, and many hands effectually smothered him. A cloth was wrapped round his head, his arms were held behind him, and he was lifted clean off the ground. He struggled frantically, but in vain.

He was amazed, in addition to being furious. Why should these fellows single him out for a rag of this sort? In a bewildered condition, he was borne across the Triangle towards the East House. A halt was made just before they reached the steps.

"It's all right—no chance of those Ancient House chaps interfering now," said a voice, which Clive recognised as Merrell's. "Right-ho, Forrest, we've got him. You can leave him to us now."

"Better bind him with your scarfs," said Forrest.

Clive felt his wrists being roughly bound behind him, and he was set upon his feet, and held there. He struggled again, but he could do nothing against so many opponents. Indeed, he only exhausted himself.

"He'll cool down soon," murmured Forrest. "We can trust him to you, can we?"

"As safe as houses!" came Marriott's voice. "We'll hold him."

A titter came from another junior, and Russell recognised the unpleasant tones of Enoch Snipe. So he was in the hands of those three rotters of Study No. 15, in the

East House! And at the instigation of Bernard Forrest! Obviously, there was something fishy about this—something more than a mere rag!



CHAPTER 6.

THE VIGILANTES AT WORK!

LIVE RUSSELL felt somebody breathing near him. "Sorry to trouble you, old man, but you won't come to any harm if you take it meekly," said Forrest. "These East House fellows are going to make you nice and comfy for the next few hours."

Clive could make no response, for his mouth was covered.

"Oh, by the way," went on Forrest. "I think you've got a matter of twenty quid in your desk, haven't you? It's very unsafe to leave money lying about like that, in the study. I think I'd better hand it over to your pal, Fullwood, for safe keeping."

Clive tried to struggle again.

"So I'll just take it, and give it to him," continued Forrest. "Is that understood? If you want your money, ask Fullwood for it to-morrow. It'll be in his possession."

Clive heard no more, for one or two of the juniors became alarmed at somebody's approach, and the young Canadian was hustled swiftly into the East House. He was carried upstairs before anybody noticed his entry, and within a minute he was bundled into a small box-room, and the door was closed. Then the covering was taken from his head, although his wrists were not released. Indeed, his helplessness was increased by the fact that a rope was tied round his ankles.

"You—you rotters!" he burst out. "What's the idea of all this? What's Forrest up to? Some dirty game, I'll bet!"

"Keep cool!" said Merrell. "You needn't raise your voice, either. If you try to shout, or make any outcry, we'll gag you!"

"What's the game, confound you?" asked Clive fiercely. "What does Forrest want with that twenty pounds of mine? Why is he giving it to Fullwood? You cads, why can't you answer?"

But it was useless. The East House juniors would give him no satisfaction. They not only refused to answer his questions, but they took measures to prevent him putting any more. They decided that it would be better to gag him, and obviate the possibility of any discovery. So a silk handkerchief was bound round the lower part of his face, and he was transferred on to a mattress. A rug was thrown over him, and two of the juniors went out. Clive understood that one would continue to watch over him, and that his captors would take it in turn to perform this duty. Obviously, there would be no escape for him.

Over in the Ancient House, it was bedtime, and the Remove went upstairs in the usual way. Most of the fellows were anxious

to obey the rules honourably. And those who felt like ignoring them remembered that the Vigilantes were alert and active.

It was soon discovered that there were only four absentees—Forrest & Co. and Clive Russell.

"We shall have to take more serious steps with these fellows," declared Dick Hamilton, as he spoke to a group of Vigilantes in the upper corridor. "It'll have to be something drastic, too."

Handforth snorted.

"Why don't you take my advice, and keep them under observation throughout the evening?" he asked. "And then, at bedtime, drag them upstairs by force?"

"We can't spend all our time looking after such outsiders," replied Dick. "We've got to punish them so effectively that they won't do this sort of thing again. Forrest & Co. have tried to get out night after night, and we've prevented them. But this evening they've failed to come up to bed. Perhaps they think they can roll in after midnight, and escape scot-free."

"Then they'll think wrong!" said Tommy Watson.

"We'll wait up for them, and pounce on them when they come in," said Handforth grimly. "We'll swish them, and tan them, and—"

"There won't be much sense in waiting up," put in Dick Hamilton, shaking his head. "It'll be sufficient if one fellow keeps watch, and just notes the time they come in."

"What, and then let them calmly go to sleep?" asked Handforth, amazed.

"Yes," nodded Dick. "The punishment can easily wait over until to-morrow. You needn't worry. Handy—they'll get their swishing all right. But there's no earthly reason why a crowd of us should miss our sleep on account of those cads."

"There's Russell, too," said De Valerie, with a frown. "It's a bit rummy about Russell, isn't it? He's not the kind of chap deliberately to ignore the bell."

"But he's done it," said Handforth. "And he'll have to suffer the same as the others. We can't make any exceptions."

"That's true enough," agreed De Valerie. Fullwood was just hurrying past, and Dick Hamilton pulled him up.

"I say, Fully," he said. "Do you know anything about Russell?"

Fullwood was looking intensely worried.

"No, nothing definite," he replied.

"Then you suspect something?"

"Well—in a way, yes," admitted Ralph Leslie. "But don't worry. If I find out that he's been breaking the rules, I'll report him."

"What's the matter with you two?" demanded Dick curiously. "I don't want to interfere, but hasn't this quarrel of yours been going on long enough? You're like a couple of wild cats, ready to fight one another at a moment's notice—and yet, in your hearts, you're as friendly as ever you were."

"Are we?" retorted Fullwood. "You know a lot, don't you?"

"I know something, anyhow," replied Hamilton coolly. "My dear chap, you give yourself away by your very actions. Russell hasn't come to bed, and you're all on the jump. You're worried stiff about him. Do you think you'd care a jot whether he came to bed or not if you didn't think something of him?"

Fullwood grunted.

"Oh, I suppose you're right," he admitted gruffly. "I don't mind confessing that I'm fearfully concerned about the chap. I'd like this squabble of ours to be cleared up; but, somehow, as soon as ever we face one another, we start slanging each other at full speed!"

"After all my efforts, too!" said Handforth scornfully. "What's the good of trying to bring peace to a couple of chaps who jump down one another's throats as soon as ever they meet?"

Fullwood looked utterly miserable.

"I expect it's some rotten kink in human nature," he said. "I meant to have it out with Clive this evening, and to put things straight. But as soon as he spoke to me I just barked at him. I don't know why—I didn't mean to—but you know what it is."

"Well I'm jiggered!" gasped Handforth. "And Russell told me that he was going to bury the hatchet, too. You're a funny couple, I must say! The next time you meet you'll probably fight one another with daggers!"

"We've done that already," said Fullwood. "At least, our looks have been daggers. And now the fathead isn't in his bed-room. Well, I'm a Vigilante, and I'll take this affair in hand. I'll find him!"

Dick Hamilton caught his arm.

"If you do, Fully, and if he starts slanging you take no notice," he advised. "It takes two to make a quarrel, you know. Remember that he's in a touchy mood. Just let him go for you, and then talk things over quietly. If you don't start another wordy war, you'll soon arrive at an understanding."

Fullwood went off with a nod. He was all on edge to go, although the other Removites had no idea where he was off to, or what his suspicions amounted to. They were content to leave Clive to him.

Fullwood, as a matter of fact, had remembered those words of Forrest's—those words that had been purposely spoken in the Remove passage. And Fullwood jumped to the conclusion that Clive had gone off somewhere with the cads of Study A. It was a point that could be settled, however.

If Clive's bicycle was missing, it would be a significant clue. And Fullwood wanted to make sure about his chum's machine before he made any further investigations. It was the first essential step to take.

Fullwood was by no means undecieved. He still thought his Canadian chum had taken the wrong road—that he had been drawn, somehow, into an intimacy with Forrest & Co. And Fullwood bitterly, blamed himself for this. Clive, left to himself, and brooding over



Just as the Vigilantes were clambering over the wall, the two cyclists came by. "Pedal for your life, Fully!" they heard Forrest yell, as Dick Hamilton flashed his torch on the pair. What was Fullwood doing with the cad of the Remove at that time of night?

his quarrel, had turned to the cads for consolation. Perhaps he had even cultivated them on purpose to show his complete indifference to his former chum.

So the sooner this breach was healed, the better.

"I've been a cad," muttered Fullwood wretchedly. "If the chap's made a slip, what of it? Heaven knows I made enough slips at one time! Instead of accusing him, and setting myself up as a judge, I ought to sympathise with him. By gad, what an outsider I've been! And now it may be too late! I shall never forgive myself for this!"

He remembered every word of their talk in the lobby. And he seemed to realise, with a guilty start, that Clive had been ready to make friendly advances. But it was so easy to think these things now! When they met, he would probably be impelled, by some little demon, to utter fresh taunts. He steeled himself, however, and swore that he would cast that little imp of mischief away from him.

He went outside, and made his way to the bicycle shed in the cold, blustering wind. It wasn't until he reached the shed itself that he realised that the door would be locked. He paused, wondering what he should do.

And as he stood there, a figure revealed itself near by.

"Who's that?" asked Fullwood sharply.

"Only me," came Forrest's voice. "Oh-ho! So you're on the night game, too, are you? Caught in the act, my fine saint!"



CHAPTER 7.

INTO THE TRAP!

BERNARD FORREST was hugging himself.

He had spent a chilly twenty minutes out there, hoping and trusting that Fullwood would come. And here he was! Forrest had taken a chance, and he had scored a bullseye.

From the very first he had guessed that Fullwood would come to the bicycle shed to see if Clive's machine had gone. And, sure enough, he was here! How was Fullwood to guess that the unhappy Clive was a captive in the East House—held prisoner by some of Forrest's unsavoury friends?

"I haven't got time to refute your rotten accusations, Forrest," said Fullwood curtly. "I don't feel inclined to take the trouble,

either. What have you done with Clive Russell? Where is he, you cad?"

Forrest chuckled.

"Where is he?" he repeated coolly. "Well, at a rough guess, I should imagine that he's just nearing Bannington by this time."

"You're lying!" retorted Fullwood. "You've enticed that poor chap into your filthy clutches, and he wouldn't go off without you—"

"And yet he's gone," interrupted Forrest, with exasperating calmness. "He went about a quarter of an hour ago, with Gulliver and Bell. I'm waiting for somebody else, and then I'm going to follow. Do you think we're afraid of you and your confounded Vigilantes? We don't recognise the authority of the Vigilance Committee, and we're ready to stick up for our independence."

Fullwood gripped him fiercely.

"Never mind the Vigilance Committee," he said, his voice becoming hard and steely. "I'm thinking about Russell. What has he gone to Bannington for?"

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you?"

"I mean to know!" snapped Fullwood, between his teeth. "Answer me truthfully, you worm, or I'll smash you! I'll give you ten seconds! I mean it! I'll knock your teeth down your throat!"

Forrest was genuinely alarmed.

"Don't be a fool!" he said hastily. "And you needn't think that I've induced Russell to go to that roulette club. It was his own idea entirely. He won twenty pounds there the other night, as you know."

All Fullwood's anger left him.

"Yes, I know!" he muttered miserably.

"Well, he's gone there again—to turn that twenty quid into a hundred," said Bernard.

"You liar!"

"Don't you believe it?"

"No, confound you, I don't!"

"All right—you can do the other thing," said Forrest, with a shrug. "I tell you that Russell has gone to that club, you blind idiot! If you don't believe me, try to find his bicycle. Go and see if his money is in his desk. I don't want you to take my word for it. What do I care whether you believe me or not?"

Without a word, Fullwood turned away and ran off. He didn't mean to waste any time by looking in the bicycle shed, for he believed that Clive had actually gone. But he didn't believe that he had taken that twenty pounds, in order to gamble with it.

But it would be easy enough to settle the point!

Fullwood knew that the money had been in Clive's desk. For Clive himself had told him that it was there. If that money was missing, then the evidence would be conclusive—and Fullwood wanted to find out without a moment's delay.

He ran indoors, sped along the Remove corridor, rushed into Study H, and switched the light on.

He located Clive's desk in a moment. It was one of those small desks which stand on

a table—rather a nice affair, made of polished mahogany, with an inkstand at the top. Fullwood pulled at the lid, and it came up without any trouble. He had often remonstrated with Clive for leaving the desk unfastened, especially when it contained money. But Clive held that there were no thieves in the Remove, and that it was perfectly safe to leave his valuables unlocked.

"Not a sign of it!" muttered Fullwood breathlessly.

The money was certainly not there; but there was an empty cash-bag, of the type that one obtains from a bank. Its presence in the desk was significant, for it seemed all too certain that Clive had taken the notes out, and had left the bag behind.

"Oh, the idiot—the hopeless mug!" muttered Ralph Leslie unhappily. "He's getting deeper and deeper. I ought to know! Wasn't I the same myself once? It's the easiest thing in the world to go along that crooked road without realising it!"

He turned away and stood there, breathing hard. What could he do? Wait until Clive came back, or— Then he started, and found himself looking at something on the table. It was a volume of an encyclopedia—a big one, obviously borrowed from the school library. And it was lying open.

And, staring up at Fullwood, was a photograph of a roulette wheel!

The encyclopedia was open at the page where the game of roulette was described! What further proof was necessary? Here, in Clive's study, was this evidence—obviously left there in a careless moment. Russell had looked up the encyclopedia in order, perhaps, to get a perfect knowledge of the game—to memorise the various points in connection with it. And he had left the reference volume there through sheer thoughtlessness.

So Bernard Forrest's words were true! Clive had taken his money, and had gone off to that beastly club to gamble! He was being drawn deeper and deeper into the vortex!

Little did Fullwood imagine that it was he who was the victim!

It had been a cunning thought of Forrest's to place that open volume in Clive Russell's study. For it proved the deciding factor—and, then and there, Ralph Leslie Fullwood made up his mind.

"I'll go!" he muttered tensely. "By heaven, I'll find the poor chap, and drag him away from that hole by force!"

Fullwood was really fond of his chum. He realised it now. Only an hour or so earlier he had told himself that he didn't care a snap for Clive, and had not the slightest interest in his doings.

But now he knew the truth.

He was worried about his study-mate, and he was suddenly filled with a tremendous desire to pull him back—to stop him from continuing his headlong course along the downward path. And the best way was to rush to Bannington, and drag him out of that club!

All his bitterness against Clive vanished. If he acted quickly, he might be able to pull him back in time. Forrest was going to that club, and Fullwood believed that he would be able to overtake the leader of Study A before he arrived. Then he would force Forrest to take him into that club!

How blindly Fullwood was falling into the trap!

He who had laid so many cunning plots of his own in the past, was now falling a victim to a scheme of the very type which he had been so adept in himself! Clive Russell was utterly innocent. That money of his had come to him honourably from his father. And yet here was Fullwood, ready to rush off to a gambling club to rescue Clive, when the latter was only in the East House! All along the line, it was Fullwood who was being baited. And, unhappily enough, he was not merely biting at it, but swallowing it whole!

He rushed out, his mind now firmly made up. He would drag Clive back before the intoxication of this new freedom got hopelessly into his blood.

Fullwood remembered the key of the bicycle shed this time, and he went and fetched it without compunction—although it was strictly against the rules to take the key without permission from a master. But what did rules matter now? Fullwood was thankful for the present regulations. He felt that he was doing nothing dishonourable.

He was lucky—at least, he thought he was—for when he got to the bicycle shed, he found that Bernard Forrest was still there. The leader of Study A was just about to move off with his bicycle.

"Hold on!" rapped out Fullwood harshly. "I want you!"

"Oh," said Forrest, "if you're going to start any of that Vigilante business——"

"Confound you—no!" snapped Fullwood. "I'm thinking about Russell."

"Have you found out whether he's taken his money or not?" asked Forrest harshly. "Do you still call me a liar? Considering that Russell told me exactly what his plans were, and that I saw him leave with Gulliver and Bell, there's no need for you to pretend——"

"I'm not pretending anything," broke in Fullwood. "I'm satisfied that you've trapped Russell into your bad habits. And I'm going to that club, so that I can drag the poor chap away."

Bernard Forrest laughed.

"The righteous rescuer, eh?" he sneered. "You'd better be careful——"

"Go to the dickens!" said Forrest. "A likely story! You want to have a flutter yourself, but you're too much of a hypocrite to admit it! If it comes to that, you were always partial to roulette, weren't you?"

Fullwood seized the other so violently that the bicycle crashed over.

"Steady!" gasped Forrest

"Any more jeers and taunts from you, you rat, and I'll make your face into a jelly!"

said Fullwood tensely. "You're going to take me to the club, and I give you fair warning that I won't stand any nonsense. I'm going to get Russell out of it—and if you don't help me, I'll——"

"Oh, all right!" said Forrest hastily, and with a sudden note of fear in his voice. "I'll do it. But don't let your fists run riot, you ass! I'll get you into that club, and you can take Russell away as soon as you like. Goodness knows, we don't want any fuss about it!"

Fullwood relaxed his grip.

"All right," he said with a nod. "Wait here until I get my jigger!"

Forrest waited, and a minute later they started off. And while Ralph Leslie Fullwood thought that he was about to rescue Clive Russell from a trap, he was walking into the most cunningly devised net himself!



CHAPTER 8.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

Forrest, the position seemed almost too good to be true.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was acting exactly as he had planned; precisely as he had hoped. He believed that Clive Russell was in the roulette club, and he was going there to rescue him.

From the very first, Forrest had hoped to succeed, but he had never really believed that things would turn out so perfectly. There had been so many possibilities of failure. A word from Russell might have prevented the whole thing—an advance from Fullwood would have had the same effect. But these events had not occurred. And Fullwood was caught!

Very soon, now, it wouldn't matter a hang if he discovered the truth. Once he was within the roulette-room he would fall! Bernard Forrest was certain of this. There was something almost uncanny in his positive conviction.

"Why don't you chuck up this pretence, Fully?" he asked, as they wheeled their bicycles down the private road towards the lane. "Here's a good chance to have some sport. Russell's there already, and I've only got to introduce you as a pal of mine, and everything will be plain sailing. You can go to the club then as often as you like. And as you're one of the Vigilantes, it might help all of us."

"Shut up!" said Fullwood curtly.

"You can't pretend that you're serious," went on Forrest. "Why not come out in your true colours, and admit——"

"I'll smash you, if you don't shut up!" muttered Fullwood angrily. "I'm going to this club to drag Russell away—and for nothing else. I don't want any of your rotten hints or insinuations. We shall get on a lot better if we don't talk. Remember, I

can fight you to a finish at any minute I like, and if it wasn't for the fact that I need you to get me into that rotten club, I'd slaughter you on the spot. So don't goad me any more!"

"Have your own way," said Forrest sneeringly.

They had just reached the gate at the end of the private drive. It was locked, so they had to lift their machines over. At the same moment a party of five Vigilantes came out into the Triangle, some distance behind them. They were Dick Hamilton, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, Handforth, and De Valerie. As a matter of fact, they were looking for Fullwood.

"There's something funny about it, I tell you," De Valerie was saying. "I happened to be looking out of the window, when I saw Fullwood creeping along near the wall. I'm not so sure of him, you know."

"Then I am," said Dick Hamilton. "There's nothing wrong with Fullwood. If he was creeping along, as you say, he had a good reason for it."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Handforth. "Fully's all right."

"Don't forget his lovely past," said De Valerie.

"Hang it all," protested Dick, "that's not fair, Val! If it comes to that, you weren't exactly an angel when you first came to St. Frank's!"

"What!" said De Valerie, colouring.

"Those who live in conservatories shouldn't have stones thrown at 'em!" said Handforth severely.

De Valerie chuckled.

"I suppose you mean those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones?" he asked. "Well, you're right—and I withdraw my remarks about Fully. It isn't fair to rake up a chap's past, in any case. I always maintain that a fellow ought to be judged by his present actions."

"Exactly!" said Dick Hamilton. "And Fullwood is only out to-night because of Russell. I can't quite get the hang of it, but —"

"Hallo! What was that?" interrupted Handforth quickly. "Didn't you hear a noise?"

"Yes—over by the side gate," muttered Watson.

"It sounded metallic," said Dick. "Somebody lifting a bicycle over the gate, I should imagine."

"By George," breathed Handforth, "let's run—"

"No sense in that," broke in Dick. "The best thing we can do is to dash for the outer wall, further down the Triangle, and nip over. In that way, we'll cut the fellow off, whoever he is."

"Good idea!"

The Vigilantes sped off like the wind. Two sides of the Triangle were occupied by the school building, but the third side was the

outer wall of the grounds, leading direct on to the road.

Cutting round the rear of the gymnasium, the juniors broke through the shrubbery, reached the wall, and leapt up. In a moment they were swarming over. But at that very moment, two cyclists came by, dimly visible in the weak, watery moonlight.

"Who's that?" rapped out Handforth fiercely.

"Pedal for your life Fully!" came Forrest's voice. "They'll have us!"

Dick Hamilton's electric torch flashed out, the beam slicing through the gloom unerringly. For a flash the two cyclists were illuminated—Bernard Forrest and Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

Fullwood was gritting his teeth. He knew how bad this looked, but there was no time to stop to make explanations. Besides, what would have been the use? Nothing could alter the fact that he was setting off with Forrest to visit that unsavoury club. And he was doing it in order to rescue his former chum from the toils. And now he had been seen! Seen with Forrest, obviously sneaking away on a forbidden jaunt.

It was hard luck, but it couldn't be helped now.

Just for an instant, Fullwood had thought about enlisting the Vigilantes, but he had just as quickly dismissed the idea. While it would be possible for Forrest to introduce him as a friend, it was out of the question for a whole crowd to go to that club. They wouldn't be admitted. No, it was far better for Fullwood to go alone. And if the fellows didn't like to believe his explanations afterwards, they could believe what they chose.

The Vigilantes were believing it already.

"Did—did you see that?" breathed Handforth aghast.

He stared blankly down the lane, after the receding machines.

"Forrest—and Fullwood!" muttered Tommy Watson. "Well, I'm blessed!"

"Going off after lights-out. Back to his old tricks!" roared Handforth indignantly.

"The giddy hypocrite! And he's a Vigilante! We'll drum him out for this—we'll send him to Coventry for the rest of the term! The rotter deserves the sack!"

Dick Hamilton was looking thoughtful. As usual, the quiet skipper preferred to be guided by his common sense rather than by impulse.

"It looks a bit suspicious, I'll admit, but don't jump to conclusions," he said quietly. "Until we hear the facts, it's not fair to judge."

"But we can believe our own eyes, I suppose?" asked Watson.

"To a certain extent—yes."

"But we saw him with Forrest!"

"Yes," said Dick Hamilton gruffly. "Perhaps Fullwood was simply doing his duty as a Vigilante."

"By George, yes," admitted Handforth, with a start. "That's true enough—and I must admit that I've got tons of faith in

the chap. I believe Fully's true blue. So let's wait until he comes back, and hear his report."

It was Dick Hamilton who had brought the others to this way of thinking. Somehow, he generally managed to imbue others with his own level-headedness. And schoolboys, as a rule, are only too ready to draw hasty inferences.

And while they returned to the Ancient House, Fullwood and Bernard Forrest were getting nearer and nearer to their destination.

Very sensibly, Forrest had said nothing during the ride. He had his intended victim on the string now, and it was safer to lead him along cautiously. Any further attempt to sneer at him, or persuade him to be a "sport," might precipitate a fight. And Bernard Forrest was infinitely inferior to Fullwood when it came to a matter of boxing. Besides, a scrap might ruin everything.

Fullwood, for his part, had no inclination to talk.

His thoughts were mainly on Clive Russell. He was a victim to all kinds of torturing fancies. He could see Clive at that roulette table—gambling feverishly, his common sense thrown to the winds, his eyes ablaze with the unhealthy excitement. He could picture the Canadian boy getting deeper and deeper into the toils of these new companions of his.

And there was Fullwood's own position. He, a Vigilante, had been seen riding off secretly with the leader of Study A. What would the other fellows think? What construction would they put on this circumstance? And what action would they take? Undoubtedly they would question him when he got back—they would drag out the whole sordid truth. So even if he—Fullwood—cleared himself, he would only involve Russell by this very explanation.

But he was set upon this course now, and he was determined to go on. It was a determination that could only be commended. But how little did Ralph Leslie Fullwood realise that he, himself, was the only dupe.

ger behind that hedge, Fullwood, and follow me. The bikes will be all right there."

Fullwood said nothing. He placed his machine where Forrest indicated, and glanced up at the house. It was one of the modern villas on the outskirts of Bannington—one of the new dwellings which had cropped up in this part of the town. Bannington, like most other places, had its own share of building activities. And the house which the juniors now faced was one of the newest.

It was detached, and standing in its own ground—quite one of the better class residences. An electric light was gleaming behind the glass-fronted door. Fullwood was looking sombre as he walked up the path.

Dimly, he remembered the past. At one time of day there had been a house called the Hermitage, not very far from this spot—indeed, it had been only two or three hundred yards farther on, but was now no more. On its site stood one of these new villas, and the old place was only a memory.

There was every reason for Fullwood's brief period of recollection. The Hermitage had been a kind of a gambling club, with a roulette table as the main attraction, too. But the house had been burnt to the ground, and the builders had soon effaced all sign of the blackened ruins.

This new club was a very different proposition. It was on a much smaller scale, and was run by some men who

belonged to the racing fraternity, so Forrest understood. Bookmakers who had been temporarily warned off the course, and who were running this miniature casino to fill in time.

Most of the clients were old customers, men who were well accustomed to gambling in every form, and there was not much risk attached to this little game. Forrest and his friends had gained admittance because they were well acquainted with a certain Mr. Snagg, a kind of bookmaker's tout, who knew that these St. Frank's fellows were safe. For their own sakes, they would never dare to breathe a word about this place!

Forrest did not trouble to ring the bell. He tapped upon the glass of the door top, and almost immediately the door was opened. A man in livery gave the two juniors a friendly nod.

"Here we are again!" he said cheerily. "Friend of mine, Withers," said Forrest, with a wink. "Quite O.K."

"That's all right," replied the man. "Mr. Snagg told me that any of you young gents was to be let in without question. Wish you luck, sir."

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CHAPTER 9.

THE TABLE OF CHANCE.



BERNARD FORREST jumped lightly off his bicycle.

"Here we are," he said softly. "Shove your jig-

"Thanks," said Forrest.

He had been in the habit of tipping Withers very liberally, and the man, in consequence, was one of his best friends.

The two juniors gave up their overcoats and caps, and then Forrest led the way down the hall, and turned into a corridor. He opened a door, and they both walked into a big room.

Apparently it had been designed as a billiard-room, and perhaps as a ball-room. But now it was put to quite another use.

In the centre of the apartment stood a full-sized roulette table, and round it were numbers of punters, both sitting and standing. All round the four walls of the room were small tables, at which other guests were playing poker, or bridge or solo whist—and all for high stakes. There were no restrictions here.

Fullwood felt his heart thump, and he stood there, looking round eagerly.

He was thinking only of Clive Russell. He searched the room for his old chum. But quite unknown to him—quite subconsciously—this scene revived those old memories again.

In that other gambling place, he had spent many an hour at the roulette table. He had won money, and he had lost money. The fever had gripped him. That had been in the days when he had been blind to the benefits of leading a clean, decent life.

"Doesn't seem to be here," remarked Forrest softly. "That's funny, too. He came along in advance, with Gulliver and Bell—Hullo, here's Snagg! Better be civil to him, you know, or you'll soon get chucked out."

A dapper little man came up—the last person one would imagine to be a bookmaker's tout. He looked as harmless as a kitten, and he was all smiles and geniality. There wasn't a trace of the orthodox racing type about him.

"Going to try your luck again?" he asked smilingly.

"Yes," said Forrest, shaking hands. "This is a friend of mine."

"Pleased to meet you," said Mr. Snagg.

"I—I just came to have a look round," said Ralph Leslie gruffly.

Mr. Snagg, who was apparently acting M.C., went off to greet another new arrival. And Fullwood turned a suspicious glance upon his companion.

"Russell isn't here!" he said curtly.

Bernard Forrest laughed.

"And because you can't see him at first glance, you think I've been lying, eh?" he retorted. "You seem to forget that there are other rooms in this house—Hullo! There's Gully! He'll be able to tell us something."

Gulliver, of Study A, came over as Forrest signed to him. He gave Fullwood a queer little grin.

"Where's Russell?" asked Fullwood harshly.

"Oh, he won't be long," said Gulliver.

Fullwood started.

"Hasn't he arrived yet?" he asked sharply.

It occurred to him, on that instant, that it might be possible to meet Clive Russell outside, and to prevent him entering this place altogether. Such a thing would be better than Fullwood had hoped for. He had only come here to drag Russell away, and Forrest's companionship already irritated him beyond measure. The whole atmosphere of the room disgusted him.

"Well?" he said fiercely. "Where's Russell?"

"Haven't I told you that he won't be long?" replied Gulliver. "He came in here for a bit, and then went off with Bell—"

"Oh, he's been here to-night, then?" asked Fullwood.

"Of course he has," grinned Gulliver, with a glance at Forrest. "He's a sportsman, too. There wasn't much doing, so he said he'd prefer to wait until the game livened up a bit, and he went off with Bell to meet Wellborne. They'll be here before long."

Fullwood took a deep breath.

"So Russell is mixed up with Wellborne, too?" he asked bitterly. "You've dragged him into that rotten River House set, have you? By Jove! Why can't you leave a fellow alone?"

"Don't be a fool!" said Forrest curtly. "Russell didn't need any dragging, I can assure you—unless it was dragging back! We've had the deuce of a time to hold him in check. He's a swift worker!"

Fullwood bit his lip. He knew how easy it was for an ordinarily decent fellow to be suddenly whirled into the vortex of this kind of "fast life." And it all too frequently happens that such fellows get the fever in an exaggerated degree, and temporarily lose their balance.

The Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellborne, of the River House School, was the leader of a set of young cads who outrivalled the Knuts of St. Frank's. To hear that Clive Russell was in such company came as an added blow.

"I'll make you suffer for this, sooner or later," said Fullwood tensely. "Russell may be a fast worker, as you call it, but he would never have gone in for this sort of thing unless you had egged him on."

"Oh, well, we needn't argue about it," said Forrest lightly. "You forced your way into this place, and I hope you're satisfied. The sooner you can clear out, the better. We don't want wet blankets here!"

"I'm going!" retorted Fullwood briefly.

"Now!"

"Now?" said Gulliver, with a startled expression.

Forrest gave him a fierce, warning glance, but when he turned to Fullwood, he was looking perfectly indifferent.

"My dear chap, you can go as soon as you like," he said. "In fact, as I just said, the sooner the better. But you needn't think that you can intercept Russell, and prevent him coming in."

Fullwood started. The leader of Study A had accurately read his thoughts.

"Who's going to stop me?" he demanded, glaring.

"Wellborne, for one," replied Bernard Forrest coolly. "Carstairs, for another. Coates, for a third—to say nothing of about three more. Do you think they'll let you say two words to Russell?" he added sneeringly. "You idiot! You've only got to interfere with them, and they'll smash you!"

And Fullwood felt that Forrest was right. It would be better in every way to wait here, in this room, where Russell was certain to come. The cads would never dare to kick up any noise in the club itself. And Fullwood would be able to take Russell aside, talk to him quietly, and lead him out.

The duped junior was still being led on by this elaborate fiction. Fullwood was no fool, but there was nothing whatever to tell him that Forrest's story was a lie from beginning to end. He hadn't any clue. His first suspicions about Russell had apparently been verified, and it was firmly fixed in his mind that the Canadian boy was involved in all this unhealthy turmoil.

And Forrest's plan was cunning to the point of being evilly inspired. He had got Ralph Leslie Fullwood here, and now he was going to make him wait, idle—with nothing to do except look on at the various gambling activities. Fullwood would think that he was waiting for Russell—but Russell would never come, for he was still quite harmless and helpless in the East House at St. Frank's.

And when one has time to waste, and there is roulette to watch, there are interesting possibilities in the situation!

And Forrest now produced his trump card

going to wait here for Russell, you'd better give him this when he comes in."

He held out a roll of notes.

"What's that?" asked Fullwood sharply.

"Twenty quid—Russell's money," explained Forrest, grinning. "He asked me to take charge of it until I got here. I expect he was afraid of losing it, you know. He said he wanted the benefit of my advice and experience."

"Better hang on to it, Forrest," said Gulliver quickly.

"By gad, I suppose I had," said Forrest, nodding. "Russell might be a bit mad if he finds that I've handed it over to this human damper. Yes, Fullwood, I think I'll hang on to it myself. When Russell comes in, tell him I'm upstairs, will you?"

Fullwood, his eyes glittering, made a sudden grab.

"I'll take that!" he snapped.

"Confound you! What the— Leave my hand alone!" gasped Forrest. "You infernal interferer—"

He broke off, and for a moment they struggled. But Fullwood had succeeded in wrenching the little bundle of notes away, and he pocketed it.

"It's safe now, anyway!" he panted.

"You rotten cad!" snarled Forrest, red with fury. "Give me that money back!"

"I won't!"

"It belongs to Russell—"

"That's why I've taken charge of it," replied Fullwood, with a note of satisfaction in his voice. "When Russell comes in, I shall know exactly what to do. These roulette hounds won't see any of Clive's money to-night!"

"All right, hang you, have your own way!" said Forrest, his voice vibrating with passion. "You dirty dog! You know I can't make a scene here, and you're taking advantage of it!"

He glared at Ralph Leslie, and marched off. Fullwood took a deep breath. He hadn't hoped for anything so excellent as this! Without that money, Clive would be rather helpless.

Forrest and Gulliver brushed through a curtained inner doorway which led to a further room. At once they were hidden from view, and Bernard Forrest's expression changed. He grinned with gloating triumph.

"Gad!" he murmured tensely. "He's bitten!"

"With all his teeth!" breathed Gulliver. "I say, for half a minute I was afraid that the whole thing was going west. You know, when the ass talked about going out—"

"Yes, and you nearly ruined it!" said Forrest. "If Fullwood had caught sight of your face, he would have smelt a rat. It was a good thing I was on hand, so that I could distract his attention."

Gulliver was looking rather bewildered.

"But even now I can't see what's going to happen," he said.

"You'll see soon enough, if you stand here!" replied Forrest. "Where's Bell?"

CHAPTER 10.

ON THE BRINK OF DISASTER!



"WELL?" asked Forrest casually. "Are you going, or not?"

"No—I'll stay here," snapped Fullwood.

There was such a look of relief on Gulliver's face that Forrest inwardly anathematised him. It was just like the dolt to give the game away! Forrest had known from the start that everything would take its present course. He had foreseen every difficulty, and had prepared himself against it. But Gulliver, being less brainy, had feared that Fullwood would go—and his going would spoil everything.

"You're going to stay, then?" said Forrest. "All right—you'd better amuse yourself by having a look round. There are plenty of interesting things to watch—particularly the roulette. Come on, Gully—we'll go upstairs and try our luck at pontoon."

"Good idea," said Gulliver, nodding.

"Oh, by the way," went on Forrest, bringing out that trump card of his as though he had just remembered something. "If you're



The gloating cads of Study A watched breathlessly as Fullwood fingered the pound note. The gambling fever was gripping him—would the temptation be too strong? The cads had lured him there and it looked as though their dastardly scheme would be successful.

"Over in that alcove by the window."

"Better fetch him—this'll be worth watching," chuckled Forrest. "By gad! And that poor fool thinks that Russell is cut with Bell, and that they're coming here with those River House chaps!"

"And Wellborne & Co. don't even know about this club!" grinned Gulliver.

"As far as we're concerned, we can just stand here and watch," continued Forrest. "There's no need for any more trickery, my lad. Unless I'm a Dutchman, the roulette wheel will do the rest."

Gulliver looked dubious.

"That's what you've been saying all along," he remarked. "But I don't believe it. I think we ought to fake something so that Fullwood is practically forced to start gambling—"

"In the first place, it's unnecessary; and, in the second place, it's impossible," interrupted Forrest. "If we did anything like that, Fullwood would smell a rat in a moment. No, let the wheel have a chance now."

"You really think he'll knuckle under to it?"

"It's as certain as the sun's shining."

"Which isn't!" said Gulliver pointedly.

"Don't quibble!" frowned Forrest. "The sun is shining somewhere, isn't it, you idiot? I saw a film once about roulette. A confirmed gambler became reformed, and then happened to be near a roulette wheel, long afterwards. He thought he was safe at first, but the clicking of the ivory ball was too much, and in the end he gave way. That's what's going to happen with Fullwood."

"You can't take any notice of these films," said Gulliver.

"Not as a rule—but this one's different," replied Forrest calmly. "Drips of water will wear away a stone in time—and the sound of the wheel will have the same sort of effect upon Fullwood, only it'll be a thousand times more rapid."

"You seem pretty confident."

"My dear man, I'm certain," replied Forrest. "Fullwood's got the gambling spirit in him. It may be dormant at the moment, but it's there. He's held it in check for a good bit now—but chiefly because he's kept himself away from temptation. But he can't keep away from it here—it's staring him in the face! And now he thinks he's alone—away from the eyes of any St. Frank's fellows. I mean—he'll sideslip. Just you watch!"

There was something rather alarming in Bernard Forrest's certainty. The cunning of this scheme was so evil that it almost approached the diabolical. There was Ralph Leslie Fullwood, a bare yard or two from that roulette table. He believed that none but strange eyes were around him. And he had twenty pounds in his pocket of Clive Russell's, in addition to his own money! Forrest had worked that last move very cleverly. For, of course, he had fully intended to give the twenty pounds to Fullwood from the very start. But it had been



The gloating cads of Study A watched breathlessly as the ball scuttled round the revolving wheel. The temptation was gripping him—would the temptation be to their das

done in such a way that Ralph Leslie believed that he had seized it by force.

And there he was—waiting!

He had time on his hands, and now it was just a matter of human nature. Were Bernard Forrest's convictions right, or would Fullwood be strong enough to withstand the growing temptation?

At present, he was not aware of any temptation. He was watching the door, waiting for the first sign of Russell. And yet, at the same time, he was subconsciously aware of a growing tendency to listen to the clicking of the ball as it scuttled round the revolving wheel.

Once or twice he glanced at the table, and watched the players.

He shook himself and edged off. Then he found himself getting nearer again, his thoughts full of what he would do as soon as Clive came in. He would grab the ass, talk to him like an uncle, and force him to leave the place. And he had his—Clive's—money in his pocket! Everything was satisfactory.

His attention became fixed on the table again—on that spinning wheel.



ngered the pound note. The gambling fever had lured him there and it looked as though he would be successful.

"By Jove, what fools!" he muttered contemptuously. "And to think that I was like that! I wonder how on earth I could have been such a blind idiot? Pleasure, eh? It's an imbecile's game!"

He was familiar with all the points of the game. Almost without knowing it, he got nearer. He craned over somebody's shoulder as he watched the croupier. All round, faces were tense, and expressions were varied—some gloating over their winnings, and some haggard over their losses.

"Make your game, gentlemen," said the croupier easily.

Fullwood watched him as he lifted the ivory ball, and spun the roulette wheel. The wheel went swiftly in one direction, whilst the ball spun in the opposite.

And that was all it really amounted to. The wheel was divided into thirty-seven compartments, one compartment each for thirty-six numbers, and one for zero. And as the wheel slowed down, so the ball reduced its velocity, and at last clicked into one of the divisions.

"Twenty-seven!" shouted somebody, leaping from his seat, mad with excitement.

"Lucky dog, Jim!" said one of the others enviously.

Fullwood watched with a slight feeling of contempt. There were plenty of other exclamations round the table, and the very air was full of a kind of tense feeling of fever.

"Twenty-seven, black, impair and passe," said the croupier.

Fullwood half turned away. He knew all the tricks. And he told himself that the "bank" had the best of it every time. The reckless players backed the numbers, which meant a chance of thirty-seven to one. Others, more cautious, placed their stakes on the line between two numbers, or on a row of three numbers. There were endless combinations that could be chosen.

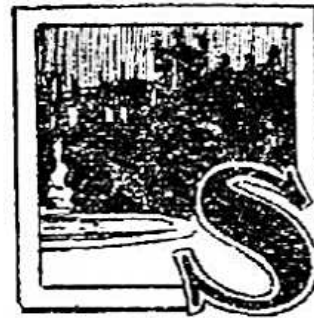
Columns of numbers could be backed like this, and the more timid punters could take an even chance by backing red or black. And always the wheel kept spinning, and the ivory ball kept bouncing and bounding round.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood watched the ball. After all, there was something rather fascinating in seeing exactly where it was going. Click-click-click! It was slowing down in the shallow basin of the wheel, clicking over the little metal studs.

"By Jove, that's rummy!" muttered Fullwood, after a few minutes. "If I had backed a certain row of numbers, I should have won every time. Peculiar how these runs happen—"

He pulled himself up with a jerk, and started guiltily. He shook himself, and turned away. He looked at the door, grimly remembering why he was here. And over by the curtains, Bernard Forrest smiled patiently. He was watching his victim—and waiting. Already, the signs were revealing themselves.

Fullwood was on the brink, although he had no knowledge of it!



CHAPTER 11.

RUSSELL ON THE TRACK!

T. FRANK'S was asleep.

At least, the great school had every appearance of being asleep, for no lights were showing. The blustering wind continued to buffet and whistle round the old walls, and the sky was still overcast with scudding clouds.

But in the East House, at least, somebody was awake.

Clive Russell, of the Remove, had had no wink of sleep that night, although it was now long past the ordinary bedtime. The unfortunate Canadian junior was still in that little box-room—still bound—still a prisoner.

Beside him, hunched up on a stool, sat Marriott, a blanket over him, reading by the light of a flickering candle. The blind of the little apartment was closely drawn.

The door opened, and Merrell came in.

"I suppose I've got to relieve you, haven't I?" he asked, yawning. "My only hat! I wish we hadn't taken on this beastly job."

Marriott stared at him.

"You don't look particularly bright as a night watchman," he said tartly. "In two or three minutes you'll be asleep, you ass! Wake yourself up. You've got to put in an hour before Snipe comes to relieve you."

"Oh, rats!" said Merrell. "I suppose it's got to be done."

"We took Forrest's money, and we've got to finish the job," growled Marriott. "We promised to keep this chap here until Forrest came back, and it's up to us to earn our money. So don't be a beastly slacker!"

Merrell sported.

"It's easy enough for you to talk!" he said grumblingly. "You know jolly well you can go to bed and stick there. Forrest can't be more than a couple of hours—and that means that this game will finish either in my spell or Snipe's. No wonder you're so jolly chirpy!"

"I've done my whack, haven't I?" asked Marriott indignantly.

The other Fourth Former grunted again, and sat down on the stool, yawning. And Marriott, with a cheerful nod, went off to bed—confident, as Merrell had intimated, that he would not be required again.

Clive Russell, who had heard the little conversation, realised how impossible it was for him to escape. Not that it was much use escaping now, anyhow. What was the use?

Clive was in a state of acute anxiety.

He knew that these rotters were involving Ralph Leslie Fullwood in some kind of trap. Otherwise, there would have been no reason for all this activity. Besides, hadn't Forrest said that he was going to give his—Clive's—money to Fullwood? What did that mean? Something shady, Clive was certain.

Somehow, the very knowledge that Bernard Forrest was plotting against Fullwood made Clive forget all his own animosity. He and Fullwood had had a squabble—they had slanged one another—but, at heart, they were still genuine friends. And in this extremity, Clive worried intensely. What were they doing to Ralph? What dirty business were they engineering?

More than once he had attempted to escape, only to receive a jab in the ribs, and to hear a curt voice ordering him to keep still. Alone, he knew that he could have worked free from his bonds in no time. But under the eye of a constant watcher, any such movements were impossible. Bernard Forrest was taking no chances!

Clive's bonds were not particularly difficult to conquer. He was only loosely tied, and he

was not suffering any discomfort. These outsiders had at least provided him with a mattress to rest upon, and a blanket to cover him. But directly he made a move, he was gruffly ordered to "cut it out."

Merrell had brought a book with him, and he essayed to keep himself thoroughly awake by lighting a cigarette. And there he sat, nodding over his book, with the cigarette drooping from his mouth.

"Oh, hang!" he muttered at last.

He irritably put the cigarette out, flung the book aside, and got off the stool. He sat on the floor, with his back against the wall. It was more comfortable like this. He glowered upon Clive Russell, as though that helpless youth had done him an injury.

"An hour of it!" muttered Merrell drowsily. "Oh, crikey!"

He yawned again, and nodded off—only to start up.

"I expect I shall have a beastly time, waking that worm, Snipe," he mumbled. "But perhaps they'll be back before then. Ho-hum! This is awful!"

Still again he yawned, and firmly resolved to get up after a minute, and walk about. He couldn't trust himself to remain in his present recumbent position. He was feeling too drowsy. It would never do—never do—to—

David Merrell remembered no more, for even while he was telling himself that he must keep awake, he fell asleep. It was the very natural result of taking up that position, instead of remaining on the stool, as Forrest had strictly ordered. Sitting on that stool, which had no back, a fellow would naturally awaken himself on the instant if he dozed off.

Presently, Merrell's snores sounded even and regular.

And Clive Russell, wriggling cautiously, managed to sit up. He looked at the Fourth Former with eager, anxious eyes. One glance was sufficient to tell him that Merrell was not merely dozing, but soundly asleep.

"Just what I expected!" murmured Clive. "Now to business!"

From the first moment of Merrell's entry, Clive had hoped for this development. The chap had been half asleep even before he took charge. Clive was under no illusion that he would gain much by escaping. He would know nothing, and suspicions weren't of much use, anyhow.

He had half an idea that Fullwood was being enticed, somehow, to visit that roulette club. But, without any certain knowledge, what could Russell do? He didn't even know where the confounded place was, beyond the fact that it was located somewhere on the outskirts of Bannington.

Thus, while Fullwood believed that Russell had been tricked into that gambling den, Russell himself had the same suspicions regarding Fullwood.

Still, the Canadian boy was sick and tired of being held a prisoner, and it would be some relief, at least, to get free. It did not take him longer than five minutes to wriggle

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out of the bonds which secured his wrists behind his back. The rest, of course, was simple.

He tore away the improvised gag, unfastened his ankles, and cautiously stood up. Not that there was any particular need for care. Merrell was so soundly asleep that a saxophone solo would not have aroused him!

Clive hesitated for a moment, wondering if he should pounce upon the Fourth Former, and tie him up while he slept. But why should he? Far better to creep out without taking any action. Merrell wouldn't arouse himself unless he was disturbed, and there was nothing to fear, in any case. Once Clive was out of the East House, he would be safe.

So he left Merrell just as he was. He left the candle guttering in its holder—quite safe, as he could see—and then silently opened the door. He slipped out, and drew the door to after him. Then, with scarcely a sound, he padded down the corridor, reached the staircase, and made his exit through one of the small ground-floor windows.

He shivered as he stood out in the East Square. The wind was shooting through East Arch with tremendous velocity, and there was an icy chill in it. And Clive was cold after long inactivity. He didn't waste a moment.

Running through the arch, he made his way across the Triangle, and found a way into the Ancient House. All the doors were locked, but one of the lower passage windows was unfastened. The cads of Study A had obviously left this means of entry open.

But Clive was not thinking of Forrest & Co. at the moment. Hurrying upstairs, he went to Fullwood's dormitory—which, until recently, had been his, too. He softly entered, and switched on the lights.

The comfortable little bed-room was empty. Fullwood wasn't there. And for a moment Clive stood pondering. Just as he had suspected! There was some dirty business afoot!

He soon made up his mind, and a moment later he was in Handforth & Co.'s dormitory. The chums of Study D were all fast asleep, and Clive Russell looked at Edward Oswald in wonder. That Removite was lying on his back, with his mouth wide open, and the snores which proceeded from it almost drowned the noise of the buffeting wind outside.

"How on earth do those chaps sleep?" muttered Russell, in astonishment.

He took a stride forward, and roughly shook Handforth by the arm.

"I say, Handy!" he muttered. "Wake up! I want to know if you've seen anything of Fullwood—"

"Got you!" roared Handforth, in a devastating voice, as he sat up like a Jack-in-the-box, and grappled with the astonished Clive. "Now then, you rotter, I've caught you in the act! Sneaking out through the skylight—"

"Steady!" gasped Clive, in alarm.

"Up, the Vigilantes!" hooted Handforth. "Help!"

"You ass!" shouted Russell. "You'll awaken the whole House!"

Handforth blinked suddenly, and gazed at Clive dazedly.

"Hallo!" he said. "What are you doing here? I—I thought— Well I'm jiggered!" he added, looking round. "Then those Study A cads weren't escaping through the skylight, after all? I must have been dreaming!"

Clive Russell was looking anxious.

"I say, Church, does he always dream like this?" he asked tartly.

"Nearly always," replied Church, with a sigh.

"Never mind about dreaming!" put in Handforth, getting out of bed. "What's the time? And what are you doing here, fully dressed, my lad? You'd better give an account of yourself!"

"You needn't worry about me," said Clive Russell. "I want some information about

Fullwood. He's not in his room, and I've got an idea that there's some funny business afoot."

"Then you're right!" said Handforth grimly. "There is!"

"Then—then you know something?" ejaculated the Canadian boy.

"Yes, I do—and I want to know some more!" replied Handforth, with a snort. "We saw that precious bounder, Fullwood, going off on the razzle with Forrest! And it'll be all up with him if he can't provide a good explanation!"

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CHAPTER 12.

PLENTY OF FRIENDS!

 FULLWOOD—going on the razzle with Forrest?" repeated Clive Russell breathlessly. "Look here, Handforth, I guess that's all wrong! It's a plot—a put-up job!"

"There you are!" exclaimed Church.

"That's what Dick Hamilton said, Handy. He told us not to be too hasty."

"But we saw him, didn't we?" snapped Edward Oswald. "We saw him riding down the lane with Forrest—"

"I knew it!" muttered Clive. "The hounds! They've got him!"

"Got him?" repeated Handforth. "I wish you'd make yourself clear! You haven't told us what *you've* been doing yet," he added suspiciously. "I don't want to judge too harshly, Clive Russell, but, as a Vigilante, I want to know what you're doing fully dressed at this hour of the night."

Clive was in no mood for Handforth's dictatorship.

"I'll explain that afterwards," he said gruffly. "Fullwood has been tricked by those rotters—"

The door opened, and Dick Hamilton and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West came in.

"Want any help here?" asked Dick. "We heard death cries, or something. Handy in mortal agony, by the sound of it—although he certainly looks all right. What was the idea of waking everybody up, Handy?"

"He was dreaming, that's all," said Clive, irritated by these delays. "I shook him up too suddenly, I suppose. He tells me that you saw Fullwood going off with Forrest some time earlier?"

"Yes," replied Dick Hamilton, nodding. "And just before that he was scouting about for you, Russell. He was anxious about you,

too. It doesn't seem as though your quarrel was very serious."

"Hang the quarrel!" replied Clive. "There's something a lot more important than that to be dealt with. Do you know that I have been kept a prisoner for hours over in the East House?"

"By those Fourth Formers?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Yes, but at the instigation of Forrest!" said Clive.

And he explained exactly what had happened. His listeners were impressed, and Handforth grew more and more excited.

"So they grabbed you like that, did they?" he said at last. "And they kept you in that box-room, bound and gagged? And Forrest planned it all, eh? As soon as he comes back, I'll smash him—"

"Be a sportsman, Handy, and cool down," urged Clive. "It doesn't matter about Forrest just now. It doesn't matter about his punishment, either. They've tricked Ralph, and I wish I knew what the game was. Forrest told me that he was going to take twenty pounds out of my desk, and that he was going to deliver it into Ralph's hands."

"But why?" asked Handforth.

"It's easy enough to guess," said Dick, frowning. "It's a plot—it's a put-up job, I should imagine, to get poor old Fullwood into a mess. Have you looked in your desk, Russell, to see if that money has really gone?"

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"No, I came straight up here."

"Better go and have a look, then, and we shall know where we are."

"Yes, I suppose I'd better," said Clive, nodding.

He hurried out, and was back within three minutes.

"It's gone!" he announced breathlessly.

"Then Forrest meant what he said," declared Dick, looking grave. "I don't know the details, but it's pretty easy to put two and two together. We know that Forrest has got his knife into Fully, owing to that affair the other night, when Fullwood locked him up in his cupboard. Well, judging by the facts we know, I should imagine that your capture was the beginning of a plot, Russell."

"That's what I think," agreed Clive. "But I don't see——"

"Forrest must have made Fullwood believe that you had gone to that gambling club," continued Dick shrewdly. "That explains why we saw them going off together. Fullwood thought you were there, don't you see, and he was anxious to drag you away."

"By jingo!" said Clive, staring. "That's it, of course! Ralph thought I made that twenty quid at roulette! That's chiefly why we had the row, you know! Forrest must have told him that I was off to that place again, or something."

"And having got him there, Forrest has probably handed him your twenty quid," growled Dick. "You see, he wants to put temptation into his way—to make him go back to his old games. It's just the kind of subtle trickery that Forrest specialises in. Forrest has got him into that club by false pretences, and the poor chap won't realise the truth until he gets back here and finds you in bed."

"I say, what a rotten piece of work!" said Clive hotly. "These Study A cads ought to be slaughtered for this!"

"Don't you worry—they'll get something they haven't bargained for," said Dick Hamilton, with a steely note in his voice. "We'll teach them a lesson they won't forget for weeks! But for the moment, let's be thankful that both of you chaps are O.K. Your own absence is satisfactorily explained, Russell, and we know that Fullwood is the victim of a trick, too. Forrest & Co. are the only culprits. And they'll pay the price."

"By George, they will!" said Handforth fiercely.

"So, for the present, we'd better get back to bed——" continued Dick.

"What!" shouted Handforth, breaking in indignantly. "What did you say? We'll go back to bed?"

"Of course!"

"You're mad!" snorted Edward Oswald. "We're Vigilantes, aren't we? We've got to get up a big posse, and rush to that beastly club, and rescue Fullwood from the toils! And you're talking about going back to bed!"

What kind of a Vigilante do you call yourself?"

Dick smiled, and soothingly patted Handforth's arm.

"Simmer down, old man," he advised. "We mustn't break bounds like that in the middle of the night—especially when there isn't any adequate cause. As for Fullwood, I don't think he wants any rescuing."

"But they've trapped him!" roared Handforth.

"You can lead a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink," replied Dick.

Handforth glared.

"We're not talking about horses!" he yelled.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "Can't you understand, you fathead, what Dick means? Fullwood doesn't want any rescuing because he's got enough sense to keep out of the trap."

"But he's in it!" retorted his leader.

"Forrest's game will come to nothing if Fullwood shows enough strength of mind to resist the temptations of that club," replied Dick. "Personally, I've got plenty of faith in him. You needn't worry, Russell, old man. Take my advice, and go to bed. Fully's all right—he'll never succumb."

"Of course he won't," said Tommy Watson. "Fullwood's a thoroughly decent chap now, and he'll never be tempted by trickery of that sort."

And the others were of exactly the same opinion.

"Then you think it's all right?" asked Clive, with relief.

"Perfectly all serene, old man," smiled Dick. "If we can't trust Fullwood, it's a pity. Why, hang it, it would be something like an affront if we went there to rescue him. And if he *does* give way, just because he's up against a roulette table, he won't be worth saving, that's the way I look at it."

"Let's go to bed, and get our well-earned sleep," said Watson. "We'll hear Fully's story to-morrow."

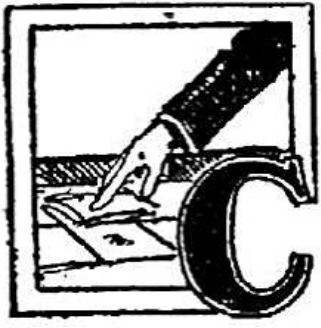
Handforth gave a disgusted grunt.

"Then we're not going out?" he asked disappointedly. "We're not going to round up those cads, and pulverise 'em? I call it a fraud! I was just getting my muscles in good order for Forrest."

They all went out, leaving Handforth still grumbling. Clive Russell, much comforted, went off to bed. His alarm had gone. Indeed, he was feeling intensely relieved for the moment. Those expressions of faith in Ralph Leslie Fullwood's character had been good to hear. And Clive resolved that he would put an end, once and for all, to his silly quarrel with his study chum.

On the morrow he would have everything out, and the cobwebs would be swept away for good.

But Fullwood was still out—still in that club—and there would be a grim price to pay for this night's outing!



CHAPTER 13.

TEMPTATION!

LICK-CLICK-CLICK!

The ivory ball rolled lazily into one of the numbered slots of the roulette wheel, and Ralph Leslie Fullwood watched with complete fascination. "By gad, it's uncanny!" he muttered. "Sixteen—for the third time in succession! And nobody had a cent on that number!"

In that roulette room there was a feeling of tension. Some newcomers had arrived—racing men, by the look of them. They had obviously been drinking heavily, and were not only in a reckless mood, but they had plenty of money. For over fifteen minutes they had been placing very high stakes on the table. People were grouping themselves round, watching.

And a change had come over Fullwood.

At first, he had kept an almost constant watch on the door, so that he would be able to intercept Clive Russell as soon as he came in. But, by degrees, his glances grew less frequent. And he hadn't looked towards the door now for over five minutes. His attention was solely attracted to the clicking ball and the spinning wheel.

There was something uncanny in that fatal fascination.

Indeed, although Fullwood had been in the room for little more than half an hour, the effect of the place was already written upon him. His face was flushed, his eyes were glittering with excitement, and all thoughts of his supposedly tricked chum had left him.

His eyes were for that wheel—his whole attention was concentrated upon the numbers, the columns of numbers, the red and the black. He watched how some of the punters were winning, and how some of them were losing. It was extraordinarily gripping, once one allowed the game to get a fair hold.

Behind the curtains at the other end of the room, three figures were lounging. Forrest & Co. were pretending to be chatting—for they did not want anybody to guess that they were deliberately watching somebody. And while Forrest was coolly at his ease, his two companions were impatient.

"I say, what on earth's the good of this?" demanded Gulliver, voicing his protest for the tenth time. "Fullwood's still there—still standing by. He'll never fall, as you call it, Forrest. He'll never risk a cent on that table."

"And we're losing all our time," grumbled Bell.

Forrest smiled.

"We've never spent time to better advantage," he replied calmly. "The trouble with you chaps is that you're too jolly impatient. If you'd only stand there, and jaw a bit less, we should all be pleased."

"What's the use?" asked Bell irritably. "What on earth's the good of messing about like this? Over half an hour—and Fullwood

hasn't moved a yard! He just stands there, and does nothing!"

"What do you expect him to do?" asked Gulliver. "Why don't you admit that you're wrong, Forrest? The chap won't play, even if we wait all night."

"We shan't have to wait all night," said Forrest. "They kick us out at one o'clock, anyhow."

"Then we shall wait until one o'clock, and spend all our time skulking behind these confounded curtains," growled Bell. "Just as Gully and I have found a winning streak, too. Hang it all, Forrest, it's a bit thick! We might have won quids by this time."

"And you might have lost all you've got!" said Forrest tartly. "It needs brains to play roulette properly. If you fellows have won anything at all, it's either fool's luck, or because I've been at your elbow, advising you what to do."

His disgruntled chums did not refute the statement.

"Well, anyhow, there's no reason why we shouldn't try our luck," said Bell, after a short pause. "There's only about another hour left—"

"Just over an hour and a half, to be exact," said Forrest.

"Well, we'll go and try—"

"You'll stay where you are!" said Bernard, his voice curt and icy. "I'm running this show, and you'd better take notice of me. You fools! Do you think Fullwood is going to start playing if he sees any of us about? The only chance is to leave him to himself. So shut up!"

"Oh, it's no good talking like that—"

"Look at him!" said Forrest tensely. "By gad, look at him! Look at his flushed face, and the way he keeps looking round at everybody. I'll give him another ten minutes."

Gulliver and Bell were pretty unscrupulous, but there was something about this game of Forrest's which went against even their grain. It seemed so callous—so much like torture—to stand there, waiting for their victim to tumble headlong into the abyss.

And Forrest was certainly right.

There could be no two ways of explaining those emotions of Fullwood's. He wasn't just watching with mild interest while he passed the time away. He had forgotten about Clive Russell. The fascination of the wheel had gripped him again—just as it had gripped him in the past.

In the old days he had gambled because he had wanted to gamble—because he had had it in his blood. But since then he had changed his ways, and had found that the false excitement of gambling was unhealthy and unworthy. He had found infinitely greater pleasure in cricket, in football, and in boxing, and such like sports.

But here he was in the midst of his old surroundings again—those surroundings which he had never expected to see again. And, by Forrest's cunning, he had been flung into them precipitately—placed within easy reach of that fatal temptation



Fullwood was mad with fury at the way he had been tricked into dishonour. He tore into the trio of cads with all his strength ; but however he might thrash them, he could not wipe out the consequences of his own folly that night.

There was no gradual process—no drifting back into the old ways. Without warning, he was surrounded by a veritable disease of gambling. And after telling himself that he was totally indifferent, he was finding that the clicking of that roulette wheel held him in a grip that was not to be denied.

Gradually at first he had slipped back, but now he was tumbling through the period that had elapsed since his last "flutter." In some uncanny way—in a way that was almost frightening to see—he was becoming the old Fullwood again. The old cool, cynical, gambling Fullwood!

So far, he was unaffected, for although he was on the very edge of the chasm, he still maintained his equilibrium. But it seemed perilously likely that he would soon take the plunge that Bernard Forrest was awaiting.

Once he pulled himself up with a jerk. Even this would not have happened, only one of the men at the table gave a loud laugh as a companion lost two fivers in one turn of the wheel.

"You're doing well, Russell, old man!" chuckled the punter.

Russell! It was the name which brought Fullwood up with a jerk. This man was named Russell—and there was nothing particularly remarkable in that, since it was a comparatively common name. But it had served its purpose. Fullwood looked round at the door, and then cast an anxious glance all round the room. He could see neither

Russell nor Forrest nor any other fellow belonging to St. Frank's. Indeed, he was the only youngster in that whole company. And it suddenly became apparent to him that nobody was taking any notice of him.

"You fool!" he muttered, with a half-scared quickening of his heartbeats. "You weak, miserable idiot! Hang this game! Why can't Russell come? I'd better go out—I'd better wait out in the hall."

That suggestion of his was a brainy one, but he didn't adopt it. It seemed so weak—so cowardly to confess that his will was not strong enough to allow him to remain near this roulette wheel. Instinctively he knew that it was gripping him—but, fiercely, he told himself that it wasn't doing any such thing.

"Make your game, gentlemen," droned the croupier.

Fullwood turned, and again he started. It alarmed him to realise how eagerly he had turned, how feverishly he had glanced at the table to see what stakes were being placed.

Hang it! What did he care? What interest had this accursed game got for him? No interest at all! He was safe enough here—he was only waiting until those cads came in with Clive Russell!

He laughed at his sudden alarm, and assured himself that there was no possibility of him getting really in the grip. And then, before he knew it, he was conscious of the

increasing fascination which drew his attention to the wheel.

The stakes were placed, and the croupier spun the wheel.

Again Fullwood watched, and he uttered an audible gasp when the wheel stopped, the ivory ball rolling into the "sixteen" slot.

"Again!" breathed Fullwood. "It's absolutely crazy! And nobody's had sense enough to back that number!"

He watched the croupier pulling in the piles of silver and currency notes with his long rake. He watched him pay out a tenth of what he had drawn in. And again the "gentlemen" were requested to make their game.

Fullwood had been fingering a pound note in his pocket for some little time. He didn't even know that he was doing so, and his next action was equally unconscious. He took the pound note out, and placed it on "sixteen." Just for that instant he was the old Fullwood in every way. He had forgotten everything that had happened recently. He only knew that he was beside this table, and that "sixteen" was consistently winning.

Click-click-click!

The wheel spun, and Fullwood found himself watching with blazing eyes, and with his heart thumping wildly within him.

Click-click-click!

The ivory ball went more slowly as it bounced over the metal studs. And then, with an almost deliberate action, the ball rolled into the "sixteen" slot.

Fullwood had won!

"Got it!" he ejaculated breathlessly.

He stood there, gloating and triumphant. The croupier pushed a pile of notes towards him—thirty-seven pounds! Fullwood didn't see the glances of curiosity that were bestowed upon him by the other players. He only knew that he had scored a bullseye with his very first shot.

Behind the curtains, the cads of Study A were watching with all eyes.

"Great Scott!" gasped Bell. "He's playing!"

"He's won something, too!" muttered Gulliver.

Forrest gave a soft laugh of satisfaction.

"Well?" he asked coolly. "What did I tell you?"

that amazingly lucky number, and that the lucky number had won. But he must have done it subconsciously, for his own self was not actually responsible.

"I've played!" he muttered, the full shock hitting him violently. "After all I'd told myself, too! I'm mad—I'm absolutely off my rocker! How did I get this money?"

"Now then, young 'un," said somebody near his elbow. "If you're going to play, sit down. Don't stand there, obstructing the view."

"Sorry!" muttered Fullwood hastily.

He sat down in a chair just vacated by a disgusted punter—another little trick of fate. If that man had not invited him to sit down he would probably have wandered away, brought to a full-stop by the consciousness of his recent action.

But now he was actually at the table—sitting there. And almost before he knew it he was drifting again. Inwardly, he was aware of a dull, bitter anger—a fury against himself for having won that money. He didn't want it—he hated gambling! But, all the same, he recklessly put his whole winnings on number "sixteen" again. The croupier shook his head.

"Ten pounds the limit," he said shortly.

"It's your loss, anyhow," retorted Fullwood.

He left two fivers on the table, and watched. And the peculiar thing about it was that he knew he was atrociously weak. And yet he couldn't stop himself. He wanted to get up and walk away—to leave the place altogether. It was growing on him, and he felt that he would soon be engulfed.

But yet he sat there, as the proverbial snake is charmed by the sounds of the pipes. Much as Fullwood wanted to dash out, he hadn't the power to move. That deadly fascination gripped him.

Click-click-click!

Number "sixteen" lost, and, somehow, Fullwood felt glad. He put another ten pounds on it, and lost again—and then he abandoned himself to the gamble. It was the last thing in the world that he had intended doing. But he just couldn't help himself. He was weak—he was a fool—but the grip of that game was greater than the strength of his will.

Under other circumstances, perhaps, he would have acted differently.

For example, had he been normal he would almost certainly have withstood these temptations with a front of complete indifference. But this evening he was feeling embittered and reckless. Clive Russell—the very chum who had helped so much in putting him on the right path—had joined these gambling cads. So what did it matter what happened? It was this reckless spirit which was leading Fullwood on now—which was making him forget everything.

And Bernard Forrest was the sole culprit.

For all Fullwood's assumptions were wrong. They were based upon the lies that Forrest



CHAPTER 14.

DEEPER AND DEEPER!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD found his hands full of money, and he stood there in a species of trance for a moment.

And then, as though something had suddenly opened up a flood of light within him, he knew the truth.

"Good heavens!" he breathed, aghast.

He stared at his hands in amazement. That money! As though in a dream, he seemed to remember that he had put a pound on

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had told him. If he had been informed, even at that moment, that Clive Russell was safely at St. Frank's, and had never entered this place, he would have got up from the table and walked out.

But Fullwood thought that Clive was in the thick of it all. And he didn't particularly care how things went. It was this rash spirit of his which had always led him on in the past. He had been keeping a tight grip on himself, and had conquered all temptations. But now that grip was relaxed, and he just let himself drift.

Within ten minutes he was playing like an old hand

He was the Fullwood that St. Frank's had known earlier, with the gambling spirit uppermost.

"There you are, my sons," said Bernard Forrest coolly. "It just shows you what a student of human nature I am! There he is—gambling away like the merry dickens' Oblivious to everything. There's just a chance that he'll win a pile—but it's far more likely that he'll lose every cent he's got, including Russell's little dole!"

"My only hat!" breathed Gulliver. "I say, Forrest, you're a deep bounder!"

"Deep isn't the word for it!" said Bell, with admiration.

Bernard Forrest grinned again.

"You can always trust me to know how to go to work," he said smoothly. "I knew exactly what treatment to give Master Fullwood! Didn't I say from the very first that he'd give in? Didn't I tell you how successful I should be? And didn't you sneer at me, and call me a lunatic?"

Forrest was patting himself on the back boastfully and conceitedly. He forgot that Ralph Leslie Fullwood would never have succumbed but for the fact that he was worried about his Canadian chum. That was the factor which had made all the difference. Without it, Fullwood would never have tumbled into this cunning ill-natured trap.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't go out now, and join in the game," went on Forrest. "He's so blind to everything that he wouldn't even see us."

"Shall we go?" said Bell eagerly.

"Why not?" asked Gulliver.

"On second thoughts, it wouldn't be wise for us to start playing to-night," said Forrest, looking at his watch. "There's not a great deal of time left—only just over half an hour. And it's a mad thing to start roulette on the last lap. It doesn't give you a chance to recover from a bad patch. Let's keep out of it, and watch Fullwood."

"It doesn't matter now if he spots us," said Gulliver. "He's hopelessly done for himself after this display. By gad! We've got the laugh on him, haven't we? If he starts any of his rot, we'll soon settle his hash!"

"And he's a Vigilante!" said Bell mockingly. "Look here, couldn't we make a bit out of this? Couldn't we offer to keep the affair a secret if he whacks out—"

"Chuck it!" said Forrest coldly. "I'm not a very particular chap, but I draw the line at blackmail, you rotter!"

"Blackmail?" gasped Bell. "I—I didn't mean—"

"I've had my revenge, and that's all I want," interrupted Forrest. "I've tricked this hound into going back to his old ways, and it'll be such a shock to him afterwards that he'll never hold his head up again. Besides, do you think I want it to be kept a secret? The whole Remove is going to hear of this, my sons! We're going to stand by and see the chaps pointing their fingers at Fullwood!"

And Fullwood, in the meantime, continued his game.

He was getting rather feverish now. He was losing. Within the space of ten minutes he had got rid of all his own money, and had penetrated into Clive Russell's twenty pounds. In a dim sort of way, he knew that this money wasn't his—but he also told himself that it wasn't Clive's.

For Fullwood thought that it had been won in this very gambling room. So the sooner it was gone, the better!

All the same, his gambling spirit—so unexpectedly revived—urged him not only to get the money back, but to increase it. He tried everything. He put some notes on numbers, other notes on black and red, and varied the order of things continuously.

But a kind of retribution was dogging him.

Nothing he now did was right. He lost continuously and consistently. Every scrap of money he put on the table was ruthlessly raked away by the croupier. Then came a momentary change. He won ten pounds at a single hazard—just as he was down to his last ten-shilling note, too.

"Now the luck's changed!" he told himself feverishly.

But it was only a flash in the pan. As quickly as he had won the money, as quickly he lost it. With a dazed sensation of shock, he suddenly realised that his last ten-shilling note had gone, too. He felt through his pockets frantically. And with a dull shock he found that he was utterly broke. Clive Russell's money had gone, his own money

had taken the same road, even to his final sixpence.

He looked round rather dizzily, and it was with a peculiar mechanical movement that he took out his watch. The croupier misunderstood that action.

"Sorry," he said. "Nothing but cash."

Fullwood started to his feet.

"I—I wasn't thinking of—" He paused, looked at his watch through a kind of mist, and then stared at the croupier. "No, I wasn't going to offer you this watch," he muttered. "I—I'm done."

"Broke?" asked somebody near him.

"Yes," said Fullwood huskily.

"Then all I can say, young shaver, is that it serves you right," retorted the man. "I've seen a few reckless young idiots in my time, but your play fairly takes the biscuit! If anybody deserved to lose all his cash, you did! Better cut this game in future, kid!"

Fullwood didn't reply. He reeled away from the table, still only half conscious of what he had been doing. He wasn't aware of any feeling of guilt, or of remorse. He was too bewildered for that.

He couldn't understand why he had lost.

It was puzzling. He had played according to an old system that he had once worked out—a system that was absolutely infallible. He had proved conclusively—on paper—that it was a sheer impossibility to lose if only this system was consistently maintained.

And he had left the table without a penny in his pocket!

In his present dazed condition, he couldn't think of his responsibility, or his guilt. He wondered why on earth he had lost, and kept wondering. He stood some little distance from the table, looking at it dully. He felt somebody near him, but took no notice. Then he felt a grip on his arm.

"Pretty good game, eh?" said a voice.

Fullwood started. He couldn't have started more violently if a hornet had stung him. That voice belonged to Bernard Forrest, and it was eloquent of gloating triumph—full of sneering vindictiveness.

Fullwood spun round.

"You—you saw me?" he panted hoarsely.

Forrest laughed outright.

"Saw you?" he jeered. "I've been watching you all the time. Clive Russell *will* be pleased when you explain to him that you've thoughtlessly left his twenty quid in the croupier's pocket!"



CHAPTER 15.

THE AWFUL TRUTH!

FORREST had been joined by Gulliver and Bell, and all three of them were grinning broadly. There was nothing friendly

about these grins—nothing pleasant about them. They were rather more like distortions of the features—expressions of malice and open hostility.

"So you're broke to the wide, eh?" went on Forrest. "That's too bad! That's the worst of this game—you never know how the luck's going. Let's hope you have better fortune next time. I hate to see a chap losing all the time—especially when it's somebody else's money."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," jeered Bell. "I've heard that Russell simply loves to have his money thrown away in chunks. It's one of his Canadian peculiarities!"

And Bell tittered loudly at his feeble attempt at humour.

"You saw me?" muttered Fullwood, in agony. "I—I didn't mean to— That is, I—I don't seem to remember—"

"You didn't mean to slide back into the old rut, eh?" interrupted Forrest coolly. "Of course you didn't! Nobody ever means to—but it just happens. I told my pals that you would succumb to the wheel if only you got near enough to it. And I was right, wasn't I?"

Fullwood felt as though his head was bursting.

"Where's Russell?" he asked thickly. "I don't want to hear any more of your taunts—any more of your confounded sneers! I came here to fetch Russell! Where is he?"

"A nice kind of rescuer, I must say!" mocked Forrest. "It's like a policeman going in to catch a burglar, and then helping to rob the safe! Oh, you're a great success as our tame little rescuer!"

"You miserable cur!" rapped out Fullwood. "Where's Russell?"

"At St. Frank's, of course," said Forrest. "Where do you suppose he'd be?"

"Don't lie!" said Fullwood, trying to steady his voice. "You know as well as I do that Russell came here—that he went away to meet Wellbourne and those other cads from the River House!"

"I know that, do I?" grinned Forrest. "Then I know double! My poor, deluded innocent! You surely don't imagine that Russell came here, do you?"

"What!" muttered Fullwood, his very brain going dizzy.

"Russell is at St. Frank's," explained Forrest, seeing no reason why he should deny himself the pleasure of telling Fullwood the truth. "You thought he'd gone out on the razzle, didn't you? Oh, no! We just collared him, and locked him away in a box-room."

"I—I don't understand!"

"Then let me enlighten you," went on Forrest genially. "First of all, you'd better understand that the whole thing was a put-up job."

"A put-up job?" breathed Fullwood. "It's not true! You can't tell me—"

"But I am telling you," interrupted the leader of Study A. "So what's the good of butting in? Remember how I spoke to Russell in the Remove passage? Poor lunatic! You didn't know that I was just fooling you, did you? Russell didn't come

and play cards with us. He's too confoundedly goody-goody for that! I was only leading you on—so that you'd fall into the trap easier."

"Go on!" said Fullwood thickly. "I don't believe a word of it, but you'd better finish! So you call this a trap, do you?"

Forrest shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm just calling a spade a spade—that's all," he replied. "If you don't like to believe it, you can do the other thing. But if you've got any common sense, you'll soon know which is the truth and which isn't. In any case, you'll know it soon enough when you get back to St. Frank's—because Russell hasn't been out at all."

"And what about the twenty quid?" grinned Bell.

"That money was won in this hole," breathed Fullwood. "I've lost it—what's the good of denying it, when you've been watching me? I've lost it—and a good thing, too! Russell doesn't want that dirty money!"

"His father wouldn't like to hear you say that," smiled Forrest calmly.

"His father? What do you mean?" blazed Fullwood, seizing his tormentor by the shoulders so fiercely that Forrest yelped. "Answer me, you dirty rat! What do you mean—his father?"

"Take your filthy paws off me!" snarled Forrest, wrenching himself away. "I mean what I say. That money wasn't won in this place at all. You've been quarrelling with Russell, haven't you? And about that twenty quid, eh? We told you he won it at roulette—but that was just our joke."

"Joke!" echoed Fullwood tragically.

"You seemed so jolly suspicious that we wanted to please you," went on Forrest, with a grin. "You silly fool! That night that Russell was away, he was simply at the River House School, with some of his chums. And that twenty pounds came by registered post—a present from his pater!"

"And you've gambled it all away!" giggled Bell.

"Is this true?" breathed Fullwood, knowing full well that it was. "Is this absolutely genuine?"

"You'll know when you get back to the school," replied Forrest. "You hopeless ass! If you had only had half a dozen straight words with Russell, you would have found out that all your suspicions were groundless. But you couldn't do a sensible thing like that, could you? You just blundered on—and then walked neatly into my little trap. Thanks awfully! I think we can call it square now, can't we? I told you I'd get my own back, Fullwood. Well, I'm satisfied."

Fullwood turned aside, and his vision was so blurred that he could scarcely see anything. He felt stifled—he wanted to get out—to be in the open air, so that his brain could be cleared.

He was too stunned to think of smashing his fist into Forrest's face. It wasn't a fight that he wanted now. His one desire was to

be alone—so that he could think. He wanted to sort out this tangle, and to find out exactly how he stood.

He didn't know how he got outside.

He seemed to have a dim recollection of getting into the hall, and somebody handing him his overcoat and cap. But he didn't put them on. He just took them, and went out. He lurched to the gate, and found himself in the road. And there, under the stars, his brain cleared. The cold wind of the November night beat upon him, and the full nature of his position came upon him with the shock of a thunderbolt.

He didn't need to think twice. Any verification of Bernard Forrest's explanation was unnecessary. The sneering way in which it had been uttered—the gloating note in Forrest's voice—had been unmistakable. All that had gone previously had been false.

But that explanation was the truth!

Of course it was the truth! Clive Russell had been decent from the very first. Fullwood could see it now. The scales had been torn from his eyes, and his vision was clear. No wonder Clive had been so bitter—no wonder he had become furious! For Fullwood had accused him of dishonourable behaviour without cause.

And that money!

It was like another blow. That money of Clive's had been a present from his father. And he—Fullwood—had gambled it away! The realisation of this was so staggering that the unfortunate junior was nearly crazy.

His period of madness had only lasted for that fatal hour or so. The fever now dropped from him like a cloak. And the stark truth, in all its horror, came flooding over him. It left him dazed and bewildered—and yet the knowledge of what he had done was crystal clear.

Clive had never been to this place—had never seen a roulette wheel—and his anger had been justified from the very start. What was to happen now? How could Fullwood go to his chum and tell him that he had played roulette with that money, and had lost it?

There was not the slightest fear that Ralph Leslie Fullwood would go back to his old habits. The phase had come, and it had gone. It was ended for ever. And now that it was over, he was utterly aghast. He simply couldn't believe that he had done this thing.

The fact that Clive was utterly innocent made all the difference in the world.

For now Fullwood knew that he had played fast and loose with his chum's very own money—not gambling gains that had come to him by the roulette wheel. And Fullwood could see, too, that Clive would naturally regard his actions in the very worst possible light. What else could he do?

It was one thing to be in that roulette room, amid the glamour of the feverish "sport," with the clicking of the ivory ball in his ears. But it would be another thing to tell Clive what had happened.

Stated coldly, in the quietness and privacy of a St. Frank's study, the thing would sound outrageously impossible. Fullwood couldn't excuse himself. He must confess that he had slid back, and that he had behaved not only with complete dishonour, but with complete dishonesty!

He had used his chum's money—had taken it without permission—and had lost every penny of it! To replace that sum was impossible, for he had only recently received a big tip from home, and that had all gone, too.

For a wild moment, Fullwood thought about bolting. He couldn't face St. Frank's again—he couldn't bear to see Clive Russell's accusing eyes upon him. He had disgraced himself—he had placed himself beyond the pale of decent society.



CHAPTER 16.

FULLWOOD HITS OUT!

ALLO! Walking home?"

Fullwood started round - as he heard the voice.

- Without knowing it, he - had been wandering down

the road, his thoughts too acutely miserable for him to know which direction he took. His overcoat still hung on his arm, his cap was still tucked in his pocket, and the wind was blowing his hair about untidily. He was chilled through and through, but he didn't feel it.

Three bicycle lamps winked at him. Forrest & Co. had jumped from their machines, and were gloating over their victim. Ralph Leslie Fullwood looked at them in a strange sort of way.

"You've left your bike behind," said Forrest. "No, don't thank me for reminding you—I'm a generous chap. You'd better not leave it in that garden, or you might get into trouble to-morrow."

"You'll catch a cold, too," said Bell. "I say, you know, he's looking a bit queer!" he added, with sudden alarm. "I say, Fully! What's the matter with you?"

Fullwood didn't answer. He was looking at Bernard Forrest. This was the fellow who had caused it all—he, with the help of his unscrupulous pals, had engineered the whole business! They had lied in the first place, and had caused the quarrel between himself and Clive. They had wrought the whole trouble.

And Fullwood's helplessness passed.

It went abruptly, and for a few moments he was like a fellow possessed. He was conscious of one thing, and one only. These vindictive cads had plotted against him, and they were the cause of his downfall.

"You curs!" panted Fullwood harshly.

He seized Forrest's machine, and wrenched it away. With extraordinary strength, he tossed it to the side of the road, where it

(Continued on page 41.)

Rousing New War Serial!You can begin it to-day!**SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!**

By

ROGER FOWEY**FIRST CHAPTERS.**

When Germany declares a war of revenge on England and France, Tom Lee and his chum, Jack Bennett, are in the Form-room at Cliff House School. They see German war vessels landing troops, and the school is shelled. The chums discover that a master in the school is a spy named Stutz, but the German gets away. The chums come across Buster Kirk, another Fourth-Former, whose brother has been killed. The Germans make good their landing, and the chums retire with the British soldiers to Denge Village. There they meet Bill Jennifer, who is trying to get

an old tank working. He succeeds; the trio join with him and a gunner and attempt to check the invaders. The chums in the tank do good work, but while they are a quarter of a mile out of the beleaguered village, the machine suddenly stops. The petrol tank is empty, and, at that moment, they discover that their ammunition is as good as exhausted! The tank is sighted by enemy vessels at sea and shells crash to the side of the road. "We're done!" gasps Bill Jennifer. "They can see us from those ships—they'll batter us to bits!"

(Now read this week's thrilling instalment.)

Trapped in the Tank!

THE crew of the old tank gazed at one another through the smoke-filled gloom, while a second shell crashed to the roadway a bare dozen yards from the war-worn fighting machine. Shell-splinters and flints spanged on the armour plating in a vicious tattoo, and the echoing roar of their impact filled their ears with sound.

"Those German boats can see us as plain as anything!" Bill Jennifer gasped. "Once they get the range, they'll blow us to smithereens!"

"Then we won't wait for 'em to do it!" Jack Bennett yelled to him. "We'll run for it back to the village!"

"Some hope we've got!" Buster growled. "Have a look out!"

Jack peered through the periscope above his Lewis gun, for which he had but two drums of ammunition left. In the rough grass-land all about, in the ditches and behind the hedges, he could see skulking Germans hugging low to the earth. Some were firing at the British raiding party which had followed the tank a little distance out of the village and were now returning, other Huns were blazing uselessly at the still

shape of the metal monster; Jack could hear their bullets crashing and drumming.

He could see that, once they left the shelter of the tank, they would be shot down by scores of eager German rifles. Even as he realised it, he sighted a little squad of Huns creeping nearer the tank; the men wore a queer equipment, and in the little loops all over it Jack sighted the shapes of high-explosive bombs. Evidently the squad was creeping close to try and shatter the tank's tractors.

It didn't matter much if they did, now, because the tank had no petrol and couldn't move. For all that, Jack snapped a fresh drum of ammunition on to his machine gun, waited until the squad made another rush, and they let them have a burst of bullets which mowed the bombers down.

"Better try and signal the village—somebody might rush out with petrol!" Bill Jennifer said, and with his words, Tom Lee reached up to one of the observation ports and snapped it open. From a pocket of his tunic, he whipped a white handkerchief, slipped it out and waved it to and fro, then ducked to look through a periscope.

"Shut that port—you'll get bullets through it!" Bill snapped, and the gunner reached over to

close it—his movement aided by a perfect fusillade of bullets from the watching Germans.

The chums knew that the tank would be under observation from the village, and right on the heels of Tom's signal came a flirt of white flags from a broken roof in the village—a watchful signaller was telling them that he was ready for a message.

"Send one word!" Bill Jennifer exclaimed. "'Stuck' will do, and for the love o' Mike don't get a bullet in your hand, boy!"

"Got to chance that!" growled Tom, as he clicked the port open. "I'll dab my handkerchief out quick for a dot and longer for a dash."

"They'll tumble that!" Bill assured him. "It

Whang-g-g-g-g!

His words were drowned in a mighty concussion that shook the tank from end to end, as another giant shell scored a tremendous crater full across the road and absolutely plastered the side of the tank with debris.

Tom, white of face and grim-lipped, clicked open the narrow, oblong port and stuffed his handkerchief through in a preliminary wave; he got an answering signal from the man on the roof in the village, and then he began to transmit swiftly:

Dot-dot-dot — dash — dot-dot-dash — dash-dot-dash-dot — dash-dot-dash.

S-T-U-C-K The signaller in the village read the word and sent back "O-K"; then he disappeared as Tom whipped his handkerchief in. It was sheared in half a dozen places by bullets which had rapped on the roof of the tank, and there was blood on his hand where a sliver of plating had scored across one knuckle.

"It's all right," he said. "Only caught the skin! Done my hanky in, though!" and he grinned a little. "It'll be a— Hallo! Gosh!"

It seemed as though the very earth all round them erupted, as two batteries of guns from the ships got fairly into action. The first shells at the tank had been merely sighting shots; now they had got the range the Germans meant to blot out the intrepid crew.

They were firing from a distance of nearly a mile, and the explosions of their shells threw up an absolute screen of smoke and earth, through which splinters of steel struck in a murderous shower.

The German ships fought with little interruption from seaward. The enemy had laid a giant mine-field at either end of the Channel, and had to contend only with British war vessels in the South Coast ports. The British Navy was fighting hard in the North Sea, battling against big and surprising odds, and could do little to hinder the invader in the South.

Inside the tank, the crew of five held to the leather handholds about their guns—waiting for the direct hit which would wipe them into oblivion. Jack was the only one who kept his eyes glued to a periscope, watching the roof from which the signaller had taken Tom's message.

He caught only glimpses of his objective, because the haze of smoke kept blotting out the village. For perhaps half a minute the enemy barrage lasted, then it died away as the German gunners paused for observations—they saw the tank still intact!

Watching, Jack saw the signaller on the roof again, his flags slicking and asking for an answering signal before he gave his message. Jack called to Tom, and once more the shot-torn handkerchief slipped out to the open, waved, and was withdrawn. Then, together, Tom and Jack spelled out the message which came to them.

"P-A-R-T-Y C-O-M-I-N-G R-E-S-C-U-E G-I-V-E C-O-V-E-R-I-N-G F-I-R-E."

That was all.

"Good lads!" exclaimed Bill Jennifer. "But how the dickens can we cover their advance if we ain't got any ammunition? Still, we'll do the best we can. You take one gun, Jack—let your fat mate have another an' Tom can have the third—that's all we can bring to bear on the road to the village, the way we're placed. Have a look at your ammo., and fire single shots. I've got half a dozen drums left here—ain't been shotin' so much as you chaps!"

For half a minute they scuttled about the tank; at the end of that time they had accumulated just ten drums of unexpended ammunition—four hundred rounds to serve three guns and cover the advance of the rescue party.

"Pick the Jerries off as best you can!" Bill ordered, as he took his stand at a periscope in the roof. "As soon as— Ah, here they come! Scotties, by heck! Look at 'em!"

Over the hastily re-erected barricade at their end of the village, kilted Scotsmen were pouring, bayonets glittering in the afternoon sunlight. Sight of them evoked a hail of shot from the Germans concealed between the tank and the village—some of the Jocks fell, but the rest came on, a full two hundred who spread across the road and to the fields on either side, charging the hiding Huns with cold steel; driving grey-clad figures before them.

"That's good enough!" roared Bill Jennifer. "We won't wait for 'em, lads. Take a drum of ammunition and a gun each and get out of this tank an' meet 'em! Off you go while I fix this engine!"

He leaped, box-spanner in hand at the great six-cylinder engine as he yelled the words, while the artilleryman clanged open one of the tank doors, wrenching his own Lewis gun out of its socket as he moved. He jumped to a shell-hole outside, flopped to his stomach and began to pick off what Germans he could see still blazing at the tank—keeping them down and preventing them firing at the trio of Cliff House Cadets as they followed him out with their own weapons.

Inside the tank, Bill Jennifer was stuffing little nuts through the spark-plug holes—nuts which would score and wreck the cylinders if the Germans attempted to start up the engine and use the tank against the British.

Bill had the job done in a matter of seconds, then he dived through the hatch, bringing a Lewis gun with him, joining the others in the shell-hole, and in that moment, the ships' guns renewed their bombardment of the tank!

Scots to the Rescue.

THE shell-hole in which the five had dropped was big and deep. Shells aimed at the tank crashed and thundered all about them as they dropped to the bottom of the depression, huddled together and wondering when a shell would fall where they lay.

All around, the earth was up-torn, riven and tortured by the monstrous missiles that hurtled from the sea. A stunning tumult of shuddering sound struck the ears of the five as though the very world was splitting—to fade abruptly as the German gunners once more paused to observe the effects of their fire.

Still the tank was unharmed! It seemed that hardly an inch of road surface around was not scarred by shells, yet the great tank remained unscathed. But the three chums from Cliff house and their two companions did not pause to observe that.

"Make a dash for it!" Jennifer yelled. They were all too deaf to hear what he said, but his gesture was eloquent. They followed him out of the shell hole and trotted down the road to

where the ten-score Scotsmen were advancing at the double.

From the barricade in the village, machine-guns and rifles were pouring a covering fire, and the Scots were roaring like madmen as they advanced, shooting as they doubled along or pausing to use cold steel on some hiding enemy.

A company captain raced ahead of them, grinning as he neared the chums.

"Jest th' five o' ye—that a' there is?" he asked cheerfully. "A braw fecht ye made, laddies—we'll get ye awa' th' noo!" He tucked a whistle to his lips and blew shrilly, waving the walking stick that he carried.

Clearly through the clamour the whistle sounded, and the yelling Scots halted and turned, while the chums passed through their ranks.

Jack saw a Scottie lying on his side on the road, white of face and with blood streaking down his thigh from under his kilt. The boy dropped his Lewis gun and bent above the wounded man.

"It's ma' leg," the man groaned. "But dinna fash ye'sel, laddie, ye canna lift me. Get ye awa'—Ah-h-h!"

He groaned as Jack tried to lift him, then Buster Kirk was at the boy's side. "Get him up—across my shoulders!" Jack exclaimed, and the fat Fourth-Former showed that there was strength in his well-padded limbs as he obeyed.

Doubled up under the weight of the wounded man, Jack trotted on, while the Scottie gritted his teeth and stilled his groans that he might not let the stout-hearted boy know how much he was hurt at every step Jack took.

And now the rest of the rescued tank crew discarded their machine-guns, and followed Jack's example. Many of that rescue-party had been wounded and hurt in their advance, and the men from over the Border stayed their retreat to pick up their wounded.

But there were some whom they left there in the rough grass—kilt-clad warriors who had died that the chums might live. When kindly hands helped Jack and Tom and Buster through the barricade and relieved them of their burdens, the three glanced back.

The rest of the Scottish detachment were coming in—back of them, Huns were hugging low to ground as they picked them off with shots in the back, until a pair of Hotchkiss' guns, jutting from under the eaves of a small barn, stammered a leaden protest and the hail of bullets swept the enemy to silence.

Behind the barricade, Britishers were cheering—cheering the boys who had manned the old tank and the Jocks who had brought them in. Brigadier Gordon was there, and he drew himself upright as Bill Jennifer saluted and reported the tank out of action.

"You did well!" the Brigadier snapped. "I'll see that a report of this goes to the proper quarters. You—and the gunner—and these three boys have done wonderful work this afternoon. I think we shall be able to hold the village now, until reinforcements arrive. Now get some food and rest—you've done your share of fighting for a while."

Three minutes later, and they were in Jennifer's Tuck Shop—all except the gunner, who went off to seek what was left of his battery. There were half a dozen dead Germans in the shop—which had been recaptured by the British as they followed up the tank in its last attack.

Bill led the way to the back, then lifted a wooden flap in the floor.

"We'll go down to the cellar," he suggested. "The Germans ain't goin' to be long before they start shellin' the village properly—so we might as well eat in comfort!"

They took bread and tinned meat, pickles, pastries and lemonade from the shelves and went

below for their second meal in the shop. It was now late in the afternoon, and the three chums were feeling the need of refreshment—and sleep. The past few hours had been so crammed with movement and excitement that it was beginning to have an effect on them.

They ate by the light of candles that Bill Jennifer brought down with him, and they sat on piles of old sugar and flour sacks. Those sacks were comfortable and restful, and Buster began to nod after he had eaten for a while.

"Think a sleep 'ud do me good," he muttered.

"Won't do none o' ye no harm!" Bill Jennifer said. "You might just as well have a snooze—the reinforcements'll be down from Lydd soon. Those Huns'll run like hares soon's our boys get on the job. Snatch half an hour's sleep, th' three o' you! I'm goin' to Brigade Headquarters to see if there's any tanks comin' along—I might come in handy again if there are!"

All was quiet when he left the chums in the cellar. The German attack had died away, and the Britishers in the village were now strengthening their defences. Bill shut the flap tight, and in no time at all the three were sleeping on the old sacks; the two candles guttered down and were snuffed out by the necks of the bottles in which they had been stuck, but still the trio slept in the silent stillness of the cellar.

Out on the English Channel, the smooth waters were tinted blood-red by the slanting rays of the setting sun—and with the dying day the Germans launched a new and deadly attack upon the sadly depleted forces that held Denge village. In vain Brigadier Gordon waited for reinforcements—they did not come.

The handful of Britishers battled gamely against the concerted might of two parties of invaders, until the Huns swept round behind the village and cut the railway line to Lydd. Then, with the barricades broken and hand-to-hand fighting raging along the cottages and in the lanes, the British troops were slowly driven out of the village and back across Denge Marsh.

They went with darkness falling, fighting every inch of the way—while the three Cliff House cadets slept on in the cellar beneath the ruined tuck-shop.

Caught in the Enemy Lines!

IT was Jack who woke first. The darkness in the cellar was complete, and he lay for some moments wondering where he was.

Absolutely no sound came to his ears, and he grinned in the darkness—it seemed to him the silence could mean but one thing: British reinforcements had come and had driven the enemy away, that was why it was so quiet.

He crawled over to where the candles lay, picked a fresh one from the bundle that Bill Jennifer had brought down and lit it. Tom and Buster were still slumbering peacefully, and Jack decided to let them rest while he found out what had been happening.

He made for the rough stairs which led almost vertically to the flap in the shop floor. He mounted them, reached the flap, pushed it up a couple of inches—and almost let it crash back at what he saw!

A German was sitting on the counter with his back to the shattered doorway; he had removed his steel helmet, and his stained, grey uniform was open at the neck. His square-shaped head was close-cropped, and he was munching at a rounded chunk of liver-sausage, while a mess-tin stood open on the counter beside him.

Back of the man, Jack could just glimpse the dark street. Shadowy figures of Germans showed, and, as he watched, a field-gun was trundled past, men putting their weight on the wheels or hauling at ropes. He saw a few wounded being

helped into the village—for the tuck-shop was only just inside Denge—and then he heard, faint and distant, the continuous rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire in which the thud of guns was mingled.

It was as Jack watched the eating German that he glimpsed a faint movement on the dark stairway at the side of the darkened shop. For a moment Jack thought that it was another German, and then he made out the shape of a khaki uniform. A second afterwards, and he saw the stalwart figure of Bill Jennifer creeping down the stairs his gaze fixed on the German.

Jack did not need any telling what had happened. The Huns had captured the village. How Bill came to be creeping down those stairs, he did not know; but this much Jack did realise, once the enemy knew there were Britishers in the shop they would receive very short shrift.

Treading on the side of the stairs, Bill Jennifer came slowly down. He bunched himself on the bottom one, stepped to the floor—and then the Hun was hauled backwards with one of Bill's hands at his throat, and the other occupied in gagging the man with the chunk of liver sausage!

Jack tipped back the cellar flap and jumped to Jennifer's aid. Bill grunted as he recognised Jack through the gloom, and in twenty seconds they had the German helpless, his head swathed about by a sack and a hank of clothes-line wrapped about his ankles and his arms.

"Get him in the cellar—quick!" gasped Bill. "Get down first and douse that candle—it might be seen!"

Jack dropped sheer to the cellar. He landed on Buster and woke the fat junior to startled exclamations. A couple of swift sentences of explanation silenced him. He woke Tom, then the three of them took the scared German as Bill lowered him through the opened flap. He closed it after him, then Jack re-lit the candle.

"We've got to shift—and lively!" Bill exclaimed. "O'd Jerry started a terrific attack when I was t'other end o' the village, an' I couldn't get back to you chaps. I waited until things quietened down an' then slipped through. The place is full o' Germans—they was attackin' Lydd itself when I got through. They got Littlestone an' New Romney, an' darned if there ain't another lot got ashore at Dymchurch! They've gone clear across the Marsh, an' now they're shellin' Appledore!"

"And you—you came back for us?" asked Tom.

"You bet I did!" Bill grinned. "I knew you was shut up in here, by the way you was sleepin' when I left you wasn't likely to wake for a bit. It's nearly ten o'clock o' night an'— But look here, let's get out the back way. I reckon that if we get clear o' here, we can cut across Walland Marsh an' get back to our own lines, so—"

"But what about the reinforcements?" asked Jack blankly. "Didn't they come? The Brigadier—"

"Reinforcements?" Bill laughed a little harshly. "Some hopes o' reinforcements, mate! There's three landin's been made up on the east coast, besides two air raids on London! The Germans have got ashore up by Pegwell Bay, that's nigh to Ramsgate an' all along to Whitstable, a head-quarters man told me. There's been warships up to Sheerness, an' they've smashed the forts flat—an' spies have put the minefield what we had there right out o' action! I tell you, the Jerries'll be in London afore we know where we are! There's been too much doin' for reinforcements to come this way—they reckon the Germans will 'ave the whole o' Kent by this time to-morrow! Don't stop for no more talk now, let's get out o' this—if we're copped, it'll be a blank wall an' a frin' party for the lot of us, 'cause they ain't takin' no prisoners! An' don't forget that we're right inside the enemy lines!"

They left the captured German where he was, and Bill led the way back to the shop. They proceeded cautiously turning through the doorway and gaining the little yard at the back. Bill Jennifer had been obliged to effect an entrance by shinning up a rainwater pipe to one of the upstairs rooms; he could not get in by the back way, because the German was practically facing it.

Now, however, that the Hun was no longer a danger, they could leave the old tuck-shop by the quickest route and they soon found themselves in the open air. The yard gave place to a cultivated garden—with a shell-hole in the centre of what had been Bill's father's cherished radish bed.

The three skirted the hole, and reconnoitred from a screen of raspberry bushes. A field lay at the back, with a party of Germans skirting the far corner, to disappear into the gloom. At the side of the field nearest the garden there were some dark, squat buildings—pigsties. A grim fight had raged around them, for the chums could make out the crumpled figures of Britishers and their foes.

"Ain't got a rifle between us!" Bill muttered. "I'll get 'em from over there—then if we are copped we'll be able to go out scrappin'! Come through the fence, an' then sit tight!"

They followed him through a gap in the palings, then stopped while he went ahead. In less than a minute he was back, dragging four rifles and with his pockets stuffed with clips of cartridges. The chums loaded their weapons and snicked home the safety catches, then Bill growled:

"I know the lie o' the land here better'n you chaps—best let me show you the way. We'll slip round these pigsties; then chance it over the field. After that we'll go bang across the marsh, an' chance what we find. Ready?"

They stole forward. Behind them, the village street was rumbling with enemy life. Lights showed here and there. They heard hoarse, guttural shouts, the clatter of waggons. Seaward, the muttering growl of heavy artillery sounded continuously; by the shore, the ships of the invaders were still hammering away at some unseen targets inland—the flashes of their biggest guns bringing an unreal light to the roofs of what buildings were left standing in the village.

Beyond the black stretches of Walland Marsh, to the north of the village, the night sky was streaked with ruddy flames—where buildings were burning in ancient Rye, on the left, or where shells had taken effect in Appledore, eight or nine miles north-east. Between those distant, leaping flames the blackness was slashed by stabbing tongues of fire from gun-muzzles interspersed, here and there, by the stark-white glow of Very lights as Englishmen sought the invader who advanced under the purple cloak of night.

Germany had struck swiftly and with effect. Ere war was officially declared, almost, she had launched her hordes in her war of revenge. Her invasion had come so suddenly, at spots so remote, that Britain's defences had been divided; the heroic battle of Denge Village had gone for naught, save that the invader had been held for a little while.

Stutz Again!

THE three schoolboys and the man from the Tank Corps skirted the tumbled forms about the tarred pigsties, and then a whispered word from Bill Jennifer stayed them, as the darkness ahead was suddenly slashed by the ray of a search-light. It was aligned on a white-washed wall a hundred yards away.

"That's the back o' the police-station," Jennifer whispered, and instantly Jack remembered the

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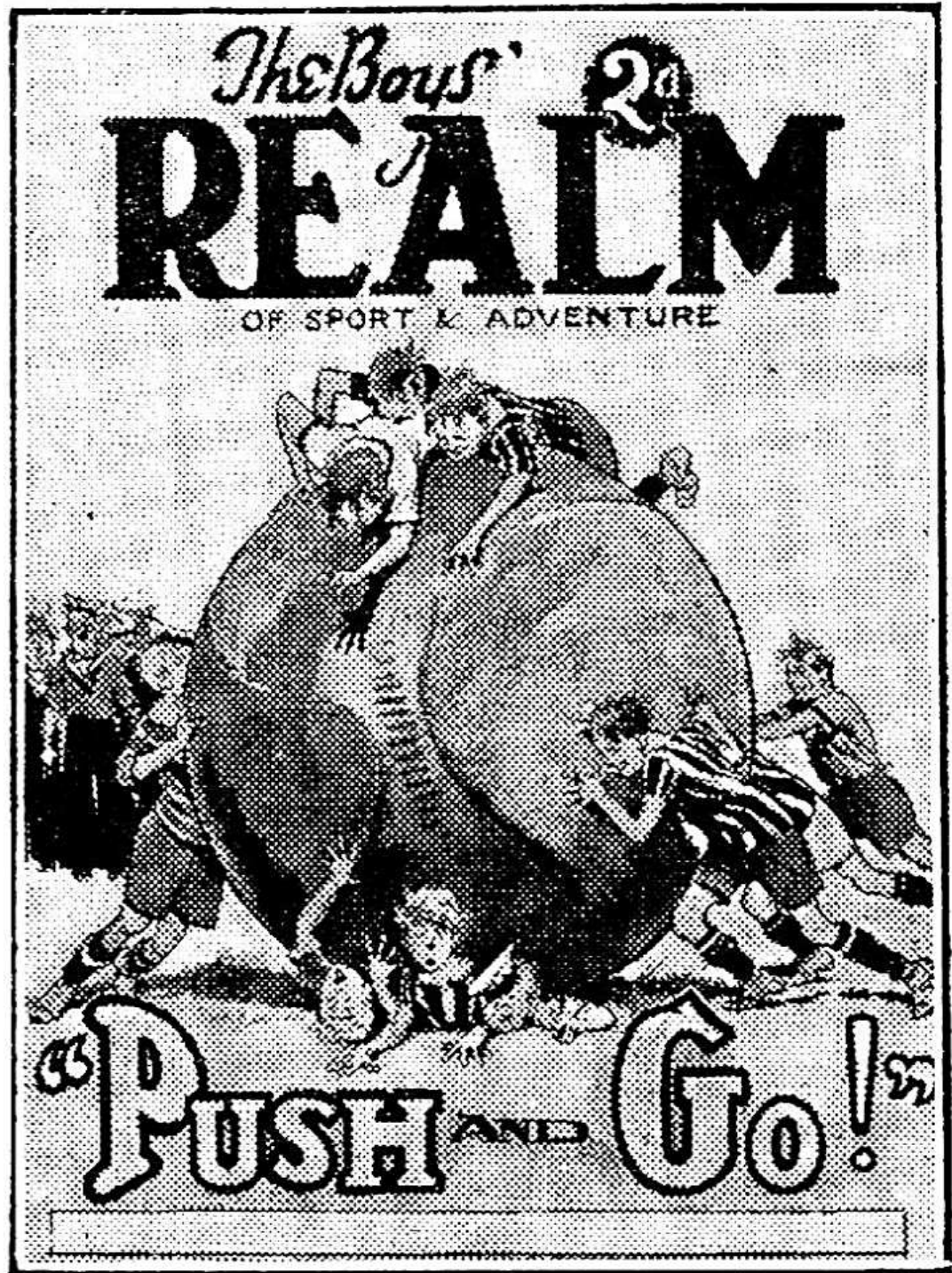
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Here they are again! That's the Raggies—underneath the pushball! Look out for this lively cover on the Bookstalls.

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glimpse he had had of the village policeman. Constable Hazlett had been kneeling by the front of his cottage, shooting down the street at the enemy, when Jack and the rest went by in the tank.

The little party paused, watching; into the searchlight's brilliant ray there marched a compact squad of Germans with an officer at their head. They halted by the wall as the officer barked an order, turned when he barked again and marched away from the wall for twenty paces, then faced about and halted.

There were six Germans. By the wall they left a single man—and the chums gasped as they recognised old Hazlett himself. He stood there with his chin held high; his blue uniform was dusty, and in place of a steel helmet he now wore regulation headwear. He did not move, but remained stiffly at attention.

"What the deuce—" began Bill Jennifer.
"It's a firing party!" Jack gasped. "They're going to shoot him!"

Even as he spoke, the six Germans raised their rifles, while their officer unsheathed his sword and lifted it, to give the signal that would bring the village policeman's doom.

"Gosh! Old Hazlett—many's the time he's clipped my ear for scrumpin' apples!" Bill Jennifer breathed. "An' they're—they're goin' to—
Here, I ain't goin' to have this! Jack, you pick

off the blokes wi' the search-light—I'll take the officer. You other two let the firin' party have it—hot an' strong! Down now!"

They dropped to the lank grass of the field, safety catches clicking back from their rifles. Jack cuddled his cheek about the cold stock of his weapon, sighted for one of the two men at the searchlight, then—

"Let 'er go!" growled Bill, and his rifle spanged at the same moment.

Four shots snapped out almost as one. Two men dropped from the firing party; the officer fell; a man pitched headlong from the searchlight—and the second fell as Jack fired again. Four rounds each the quartette fired—and that Hun party suffered the fate to which they had led the rural constable.

"Hazlett—this way! This way, Mister Hazlett!" Bill Jennifer was up and yelling and he ran forward with the rest. "Quick—quick!"

The constable stood like a man dazed. In the cottages all about, the chums heard Germans shouting. Two came running to the field, to drop as Buster Kirk fired from the hip—chance shots that had good effect.

Jack raced ahead, clubbed his rifle, and slashed blindly with the butt at the back of the searchlight. He must have hit loose wires, for the light died abruptly, and then he ran on, clawing at Hazlett through the darkness.

"Come on—across the field!" he gasped, then the others were round him, aiding the dazed constable away, while Huns poured on to the scene.

A friendly ditch on the far side of the field sheltered them at last, and through the gloom, they watched the dim figures of the Germans streaking across the field at an angle, evidently under the impression that a dim-seen party of their own machine-gunners were the men they sought.

"Thought—thought I was—dead!" Hazlett muttered. "Who is it? What—young Jennifer? Thank ye, lad! Glory be, I thought I was a goner. I came back for Sneaky Bates—I 'rested him last night for poachin' round the Walland Hall Woods, an' he's locked up in his cell. Been there all the time! I remembered him an' come back for him. Bein' a prisoner, like, I couldn't leave 'im there! Then they collared me, marched me straight round the back an'—an'—"

"Sneaky!" Buster exclaimed. "He's in the—cell—locked in?"

"Yes. I ought to get 'im out?" the constable said shakily. "'Tain't right he should be there—'sides, he ought to go to Appledore, 'fore the magistrates to-morrow!"

They all knew Sneaky Bates—the most notorious poacher in the district. He was an old, wizened fellow, as full of cunning as he was of fun. Even if he was a poacher, he was a decent sort of chap in his way; many a chat had the three Fourth-Formers had with him, and what Sneaky didn't know about the wild life of the marsh and woods wasn't worth knowing.

"Couldn't we make a dash for it?" Jack asked.

"The cell's at the back," Hazlett said eagerly. "I got the key. I bet they ain't found him yet—old Sneaky wouldn't let 'em know he was there! He—"

"I'm game!" Bill Jennifer said. "Things have quietened a bit—let's chance it!"

Nothing was stirring in the field now, so far as they could see. They left the ditch and crawled on hands and knees over the grass. As they neared the white-washed wall, they could see Germans moving among the forms of the firing party, and the search-light was being dragged away.

A trumpet sounded from somewhere in the village. It was some kind of call, for every German in sight hurried off, leaving only still figures that would never move again.

"Coast's clear—come on!" Bill growled, and the five went on, rifles ready. They went through the doorway in the wall, found the cell—really a little white-washed outhouse. The door was locked, and Hazlett opened it cautiously.

"Come on, Sneaky!" he hissed through the gloom. "Keep quiet!"

The slim figure of the poacher came out of the darkness within the cell.

"'Bout time!" he grunted. "Got anythin' to eat? I ain't dared to breathe for hours—what's up?"

"There's a war on!" Hazlett told him. "Now, are you comin' quiet, Sneaky, or 'ave I got to put handcuffs on ye?" and he laughed a little. "Strikes me we'll 'ave to wash out that little bit o' poachin' you did," he said. "There's Germans all round us, an' we got to get away quiet or—"

His words froze on his lips as, from the side entrance of the police cottage, two figures stepped, one bearing an electric torch, the beam of which he flashed on the ground.

Faint lights behind the two showed them in silhouette revealing the peaked caps and furred coat-collars of enemy officers. A glance showed that the pair were of high rank, for there was gilt braid about their caps.

The white beam flicked up, and for an instant it limned the little party of Britishers—the boys in their cadets uniform, Bill Jennifer, the policeman in blue with silvered buttons that gleamed and winked in the light, and the wizened, crouching figure of Sneaky, the poacher.

The officers were more startled than the others. They stood rooted to the spot, while Jack suddenly hissed:

"Collar 'em—we'll take 'em with us!"

He dropped his rifle as he spoke, and lead the rush. He grabbed the wrist of the nearest officer as his hand dropped to the revolver at his belt. Jack jerked the grappling fingers away, then smashed his right fist with all his strength at the man's jaw.

The fellow staggered backwards, his cap flicking from his head as he thudded against the wall. In that instant, the other German dropped the torch he carried, and, as it fell, the light slashed across the features of the man whom Jack had all but knocked out.

It was Stutz!

Stutz! The spy who had posed as French master at the school—the spy who had directed these German hordes to Britain's shores by wireless from the ivy-clad clock-tower of Cliff House School!

Stutz—the man whom the whole of the British Secret Service was striving to lay by the heels!

(Can the chums capture Stutz? More thrilling chapters from this exciting war story next Wednesday—and don't forget the wonderful coloured stand-up figure of CHARLIE CHAPLIN which is being GIVEN AWAY with next week's issue!)

NINE MEN'S MORRIS!

"ANSWERS" GREAT GAME OF SKILL.

The winter evenings are upon us, and we gather round the fire trying to think of a fresh diversion to pass the hours.

Here is a game that everyone will welcome!

"Shakespeare's game," the game of NINE MEN'S MORRIS, was originally an outdoor game, but owing no doubt to the inclemency of our English climate, it became an indoor game, played on a carved oak board with men carved of the same material.

These sets were expensive, and therefore the game did not receive the popularity it deserved.

But ANSWERS has now made it possible for everyone to be able to play. An attractive board and men have been prepared, and are now on sale at any newsagent or toyshop for eighteenpence!

THE CADS OF ST. FRANK'S



(Continued from page 34.)

crashed over with a clattering jar. And the next second he swept the other two bicycles aside, too.

"Look out!" gasped Bell. "He's dangerous!"

"Forrest, I'm going to smash you!" said Fullwood, in a whisper.

But it was such a whisper that Bernard Forrest backed away in fear.

"Don't be a fool!" he muttered. "Don't go mad—"

Crash!

It had been unnecessary for Fullwood to warn his enemy to put up his hands. His object was so obvious that Forrest had guarded himself by instinct. Not that that guard was of any use. Fullwood's driving blow swept it aside, and Bernard found himself reeling back with a streaming nose.

Crash! Slam! Thud!

"You cads—you beasts—you hounds!" he panted, as he lashed out. "You've been gloating, haven't you? Well, now you're going to howl!"

It was a kind of despair that drove Fullwood on. And it was despair, also, that caused Forrest to yell for help.

"Come on, you idiots!" he gasped. "Pounce on him! Drag him off! He'll kill me! Confound you, why can't you drag

His words were stopped by a sudden right-hander which took him on the mouth, and gashed his lips. And before he could recover, his left eye was made a perfect match to his right eye. And Gulliver and Bell, spurred into action, rushed upon Fullwood from behind.

And then the battle really started.

Fullwood took them all on. He wouldn't have cared if there had been a dozen. He felt like it. And he was more than a match for his three opponents, even though they used every foul blow that could be aimed. Fullwood was absolutely inspired. Every blow went home—and every kick and punch that was aimed at him went wide.

It seemed to him that the battle lasted for an hour.

Suddenly he found himself without any opponents.

They were all on the ground—groaning in agony. And there was no deception about it, either. Forrest was knocked clean out—senseless. Gulliver had received such a hiding that he was frightened out of his wits. And Bell was in a sort of trance, with a feeling that both his ears were as big as cabbage leaves, and in his dazedness it seemed to him

that his nose was covering his entire face. He didn't care what happened.

"So you've thrown it up, eh?" panted Fullwood contemptuously. "Yes, you can beat a fellow by your dirty trickery, but you're not much good in a fight! Well, I've paid you a small instalment, anyhow."

He turned away, and went up the road for his bicycle. The fight had done him good. It had brought him back completely. All his panic was gone. The feeling that he was about to go mad had completely left him. He was icily calm, and he had already made up his mind to go straight to St. Frank's, to find Clive Russell, and to tell him everything bluntly.

It would be the better way.

As for the Remove, Fullwood knew what to expect from the Remove. Most of the fellows would treat him with contempt. He would be classed in the same category as Forrest by all the decent fellows. To think of running away was idiotic—cowardly. He had done this disgraceful thing, and it was only right that he should suffer the full consequences. As for the money, he would pay Clive back as quickly as he could honourably get the money.

With these bitter thoughts, Fullwood took his bicycle, and mounted it. When he cycled past the scene of the fight, Forrest & Co. were just picking themselves up, and in the fleeting moonlight, Fullwood caught a glimpse of them. That glimpse afforded him a momentary feeling of satisfaction.

The cads of Study A were an appalling sight.

They looked as though a mob had set upon them, rather than one enraged and righteously indignant junior.

A moment after he had passed them, he dismissed them from his mind. He cycled on mechanically. And as he grew nearer to St. Frank's, his sensations underwent another change. He became nervous. The terrible realisation of his offence came to him with greater force than ever. It was awful enough to know that he had dishonoured himself and the school. But it was worse than that—he had become a thief! He had taken Clive Russell's money, and he had squandered it in the worst possible way.

More than once he half decided to halt—to turn back, and cycle as far from St. Frank's as he could get. But he was always pulled up by the knowledge that such a course would be cowardly. Whatever his faults, whatever his shortcomings, he had never been a funk.

So he went on—knowing that it was too late to be sorry. He had had his night out, and the price was such that he trembled to contemplate it.

THE END.

(Look out for "Caught in the Meshes!" next week, and another magnificent stand-up figure—CHARLIE CHAPLIN! There's only one way to make certain of getting next week's issue—ORDER IN ADVANCE!)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 57.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. *The second form* is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of

the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for ½d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow-members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

THE FIRST ARMISTICE DAY



MONS, November, 1918.—A stirring picture of the British troops re-entering the historic village of Mons on the first Armistice Day, after four years' fighting. A really splendid presentation plate of this subject in **FULL COLOURS** is given **FREE** with every copy of this week's **UNION JACK**. Ask to see one at your newsagent's! Published on Thursday, price 2d.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

(ALL LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Lond., E.C.4.)

PEP AND PUSH.

IF I remember right, we talked last week of the hustle which has marked recent League doings. There has been a big move this time, and we have a right to feel a trifle jubilant over the tremendous success of the S.F.L.

In a week or two the Silver Badge will have become a fact to be reckoned with. I would have liked to deal with this matter at length, but the amazingly small bit of space I have this week puts that out of court. One special good detail concerns the triumph of our posh correspondence column, which is going great guns. These are more notices:—

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

F. Lay, 29, Stapleton Hall Road, Hornsey, London, N.4, wishes to correspond with a member in Egypt, for the exchange of stamps.

William R. Allsopp, Windmill Hotel, Stafford Street, Dudley, Worcestershire, wishes to hear from members in his district.

R. A. Perry, 25, Hazel Street, Aylestone Road, Leicester, wishes to hear from members in his district.

M. E. Giles, 62, Elgin Avenue, Maida Hill, London, W.9, wishes to correspond with members overseas.

Frank Strudwick, 33, Oaklands Grove, Shepherd's Bush, London, W.12, wishes to correspond with a reader in the Colonies.

M. J. Hickey, Junr., 105, Patrick Street, Kilkenny, Ireland, wishes to correspond with a member in London; he also asks members in his district to write to him.

Patrick Fefferman, 49, Portland Row, Dublin, wishes to hear from readers wishing to buy back numbers of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and "Union Jack."

Stanley L. Oliver, 46, Margaret Street, Everton, Liverpool, wants to hear from members in his district who will help him form a club. He also wishes to hear from readers of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY" in any part of the British Empire. Interested in stamps, exploring, etc.

Joseph Mackenzie, 46, Maguire Street, Vauxhall Road, Liverpool, wishes to hear from members in Scotland and Surrey to exchange hints on cycling and hiking.

Stephen Molyneux, 283, Wallgate, Wigan, Lancashire, wishes to hear from members in his district.

Miss Winifred Jones, "Montrose," 6, Longton Grove, Sydenham, London, S.E.26, wishes to hear from members in that district.

Cyril E. Swift, 116, Wadsley Street, Hillsborough, Sheffield, wishes to correspond with readers in India, Africa, South America, United States, and Spain. Interested in wireless, stamps, photography.

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