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## THE ULTIMATUM.

"The Remove Form demands the return of Dr. Stafford and his entire staff of masters, and will continue the 'Barring Out' until this object is attained.

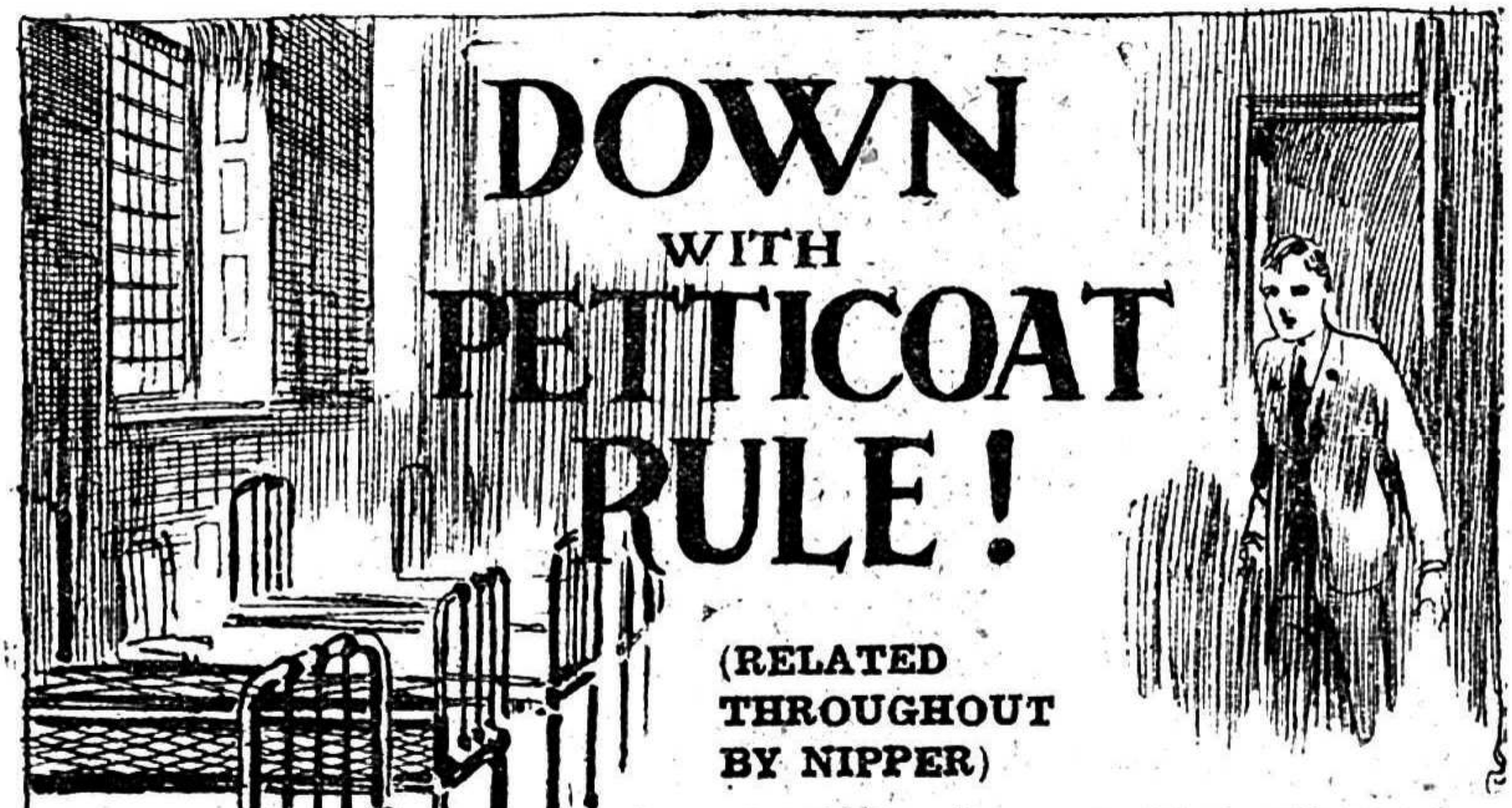
"(Signed) NIPPER.
"Captain of the Remove."

A Critical Moment from This Week's Stirring Narrative of St. Frank's:—

# DOWN WITH PETTICOAT RULE!

No. 402. EVERY WEDNESDAY. February 17th, 1923.

Within a few minutes the five Ancient House members of the Committee were lowered down one by one into the Triangle.



# DOWN WITH PETTICOAT RULE!

**(RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER)**

**A stirring account of how the Remove of St. Frank's start the great "Barring Out" against the new Lady Head and Form mistresses, whose unwelcome appearance at the school created such a strong feeling a few weeks ago. That this novel experiment was allowed to go as far as it has may be attributed to the humorous aspect of the situation from the boys' point of view. Everyone thought it would fizzle out in a week, and the masters would return. But Miss Trumble has remained obdurate and settled down to a regime of petty tyranny, which has goaded the boys into a determined rebellion. Under Nipper's leadership, the Remove have taken the initiative, and in the following story the first attempt is made to restore the wise tolerance and just rule of Dr. Malcolm Stafford.**

**THE EDITOR.**

## CHAPTER I.

### RIPE FOR REVOLT!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH looked round fiercely.

"Revolt!" he hissed. "Rebellion!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Liberty for ever!"

"Down with tyranny!"

"Down with petticoat rule!"

"Dry up, you asses, and let me speak!" snapped Handforth. "Are we going to stand it? Are we going to allow these—these women teachers to make our lives a misery?"

"Never!"

"We'll go on strike first!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Remove dormitory in the Ancient House at St. Frank's was the scene of much excitement and bustle. The time was just eight-fifteen in the evening, and the Remove was supposed to be in bed—according to the new regulations formed by Miss Jane Trumble, the Headmistress.

But not a single fellow was undressed, even.

The Remove had bunched itself in different groups, and each group was talking excitedly and indignantly. Such a din as this was most unusual in the junior quarters after bed-time.

Under ordinary circumstances, two or three prefects would have come along to see what the noise was about But the prefects were secretly in sympathy with the Remove. They detested Miss Trumble's administration as much as anybody else. And they were opposed to the principle of sending the

juniors to bed an hour and a half before their regular time.

Consequently, a considerable commotion went on nightly in the Remove dormitory, and they were not even disturbed. Fenton, of the Sixth—the school captain—thought it advisable to let the fellows blow off steam a bit. They received quite enough irritation from the lady teachers. They didn't want more from the prefects.

This evening matters were far worse than usual.

For Miss Trumble had gone the limit—she had taken steps which the juniors regarded as absolutely the last straw. And every fellow had decided that life could not go on in this same way.

Something had to be done—something drastic!

"It's all very well for Miss Trumble to think that she can tread on us—but she can't!" continued Handforth impressively. "By George, she can't! What are we? Doormats? Does she think that she can push us on the ground, and wipe her giddy feet on us?"

"That's it, Handy—that's the giddy stuff!"

"Does Miss Trumble think that we're worms?" demanded Handforth, warming to his work, and becoming more eloquent. "Does she think we'll crawl about at her commands? We're not galley slaves—we're not members of a blessed press-gang!"

"What's a press-gang?" asked Church.

"You—you ignorant ass!" sneered Handforth. "A press-gang's a lot of men who print a newspaper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Literally, you may be right, Handy," grinned Reginald Pitt. "I suppose a printing-press has to have a gang of men looking after it—but the kind of press-gang you implied was something to do with the Navy in the old days——"

"Who the dickens wants to talk about the Navy?" roared Handforth. "We've got something more important to discuss! If you chaps will listen, I'll explain the whole situation!"

"We know it!"

"There's no need to chew the rag, Handy!"

"It doesn't matter whether you know it or not, you ought to get the facts firmly impressed in your mind," shouted the leader of Study D. "First of all, this is a boys' school—one of the biggest in the country!"

"And one of the best!"

"Hear, hear!"

"St. Frank's is a fine old place!" went on Handforth. "And here we are—suffering the indignity of having women teachers! We've been humiliated, and every other school is cackling over us!"

"Shame!"

"Of course it's a shame!" snapped Handforth fiercely. "The fact is, we've been a set of blithering fatheads to stand it so long! If I had my way, Miss Trumble and her gang would have been pitched out long ago!"

"Rats!"

"The time wasn't ripe for action until now, Handy!"

"Well, we won't argue about that!" continued Handforth warmly. "Here we are—the finest school in the country—with a woman for a Head, two women instead of Housemasters, and women instead of Formmasters! Isn't it pretty ghastly? Isn't it too awful for words?"

"Hardly!" said Pitt.

"What!"

"Well, we're using a good few words, aren't we?" inquired Pitt blandly. "At least, you are!"

"If anyone tries to be funny, I'll punch his nose!" snorted Handforth aggressively. "This is no time for making dotty jokes! Mind you, if these women had behaved themselves, we shouldn't have had any excuse for rebelling. But Miss Trumble has turned things upside down!"

"Hear, hear!"

"First of all, she mesmerised the school Governors, and got herself elected chairman!" continued Handforth witheringly. "Then she came down here, and compelled the Head to resign——"

"Good old Dr. Stafford!"

"Hurrah!"

"Don't yell like that, you chumps!" roared Handforth, shouting four times as loud as anybody else. "Do you want the whole school to hear? This woman, I say, compelled the Head to resign. He couldn't do anything else after being treated like a little boy in front of all the chaps! Then all the other masters resigned in sympathy, and they thought, at the time, that this—this female battle-cruiser would throw up the sponge."

"She didn't!" groaned De Valerie. "She engaged a lot of women instead!"

"Shame!"

"Even that wouldn't have been so bad!" continued Handforth. "If these women had carried on in the same old way we couldn't have said much. We should have regarded the whole giddy thing as a joke! We did get some fun at first, but then Miss Trumble started her tricks!"

"Down with petticoat rule!"

"Rather!"

"Don't keep interrupting!" snorted Handforth. "First of all, Miss Trumble stopped football. Think of it!" Handforth drew a deep breath, and his face grew red with indignation. "Think of it, you chaps! She had the utter nerve to prohibit football!"

"Terrible!"

"Shame!"

"It was worse than a shame!" shouted Handforth. "It was an outrage! And then she makes it ten times as bad by starting net-ball instead! Net-ball, mind you! By George! A blessed girls' game!"

"Yes, but we've never played it!" said

Owen major. "She tried to get us on the job, but there was nothing doing."

"That makes no difference to her intentions!" said Handforth. "If she has her way, net-ball will be the college game at St. Frank's. But, of course she'll never succeed!"

"Rather not!"

"After banning football, she had the nerve to institute her famous bread-and-water punishment!" went on Handforth indignantly. "The hypocrite! She doesn't believe in being brutal—she doesn't believe in floggings! It's cruel to hit a chap! And yet she'll make him live on bread-and-water for a whole day—even two days!"

"It's—it's worse than the Spanish Inquisition!" said Fatty Little.

"Not satisfied with that, we're dished out of our supper and sent to bed at eight o'clock!" said Handforth witheringly. "That's an act of kindness, if you please. Great pip! Sent to bed at eight o'clock so that we can have more sleep—because sleep's good for the young!"

"Rot!"

"Piffle!"

"Of course, it's piffle!" sneered Handforth. "But is that all? No, it jolly well isn't! Nobody in the school must go out of the St. Frank's grounds without express permission—we're prisoners!"

"We'll never put up with it!"

"We're not slaves!"

"Yes, but Miss Trumble would like us to be!" declared Handforth. "Hasn't she cancelled every half-holiday for three weeks? Try and imagine what it'll be like, my sons! We mustn't go out, we mustn't play football, and we've got to work every day of the week—without even a half-holiday!"

"We'll never stand it!"

"Never!"

"It's more than flesh and blood can endure!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yes, and what about our studies?" shouted Armstrong.

"Ah!" roared Handforth impressively. "That's it! Now we've come to the biggest outrage of all! The last straw, my sons—the last giddy straw that broke the donkey's back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And all you can do is to laugh!" shouted Handforth witheringly. "You—you frothy-headed fatheads! Can't you be serious for once? Try to imagine what it'll be without any studies! Only about an hour ago Miss Trumble pitched us out of our studies, and gave the order that they weren't to be used any more!"

"All because of Fullwood!" growled Hubbard.

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Ralph Leslie Fullwood. "Do you think we could help the old cat coming into our study?"

"She found you and your pals smoking ——"

"There's no doubt that Fullwood was partly to blame," said Pitt. "But that doesn't provide any excuse for Miss Trumble's action. If she had any sense of justice, she would have locked up Study A, but none of the others!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Instead of that, she goes the whole hog!" went on Pitt. "She tars us all with the same brush! She comes along, and turns us out. In future, we're only to use the common-room!"

"I don't think!" sneered Handforth. "It's likely we're going to carry on in that way! The limit of endurance has been reached, and we're going on strike! We're going to start a revolt!"

"Hurrah!"

"A barring-out!" shouted Handforth.

"Hear, hear!"

"A red-hot revolution!" roared Handforth firmly. "That's what we're going to do, my sons. There's no spoof about it—and Nipper has given his word. I must say he's pretty quiet! Why doesn't he start something?"

I came forward from the other side of the dormitory.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was just letting you blow off steam first, Handy," I said calmly. "I knew you were overcharged, and I thought it would be just as well to let you get it thoroughly out of your system!"

Handforth glared.

"You—you funny fossil!" he gasped. "If you think——"

"That's just what I have been doing for the last ten minutes—thinking!" I broke in. "And a thing like this needs thought—not a lot of empty jaw! Be sensible, Handy. We can't start a barring-out without making any preparations. If we did, we should be doomed to failure."

"What preparations do we want?" asked Armstrong excitedly. "I reckon the best thing we can do is to shove some beds against the door, barricade the windows, and bar everybody out!"

"And what's the good of that?" I inquired quietly.

"What's the good of it?" demanded Handforth. "Every good! We'll refuse to budge until we receive a promise that the masters are coming back! We'll stick it for a week, if necessary!"

"Hurrah!"

"Let's start the barring-out now!"

"Grab the beds, you chaps——"

"Steady—steady!" I interrupted curtly. "I don't blame you—you're excited. But do show a bit of sense! Do you think we can possibly succeed by acting in that idiotic way?"

"You're too slow, Nipper——"

"It's better to be slow and sure than act in a hurry and make a mess of things!" I retorted. "If we barricade ourselves in here we shall make ourselves the laughing-stock of the school. We can keep Miss Trumble out all right, I dare say—but how are we going to live?"

"Live?"

"Handforth said something about sticking it for a week," I continued. "During that week we've got to starve, I suppose?"

"Great pancakes!" gasped Fatty Little, in alarm.

"Starve!" said Handforth. "Oh, well—— Come to think of it, we should want some grub, I suppose. I hadn't thought of that!"

"Which only proves that you're not very successful as a general!" exclaimed Pitt. "You hopeless duffers! Nipper's the captain of the Remove. So why can't you let him manage this affair in his own way?"

"I don't want to manage it," I said quietly. "Thanks for the compliment, but I'd rather not accept the responsibility. This rebellion has got to be thoroughly planned and settled by the Action Committee. The Action Committee is something like a Government—it's got to make all plans, and the rest of the Remove must obey."

"Yes, but when is this giddy committee going to get into action?" growled Armstrong.

"Now—at once!" I replied.

"Now?"

"That's what I said," I went on. "While you fellows have been so excited, I've made a few plans. For example, at nine o'clock—within a few minutes—the Action Committee will meet in the gymnasium. And the Committee will decide, then and there, what steps to take."

"Good old Nipper!"

"Better leave it to him, my sons!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Nipper's the chap with the ideas!"

"And what about me?" snorted Handforth. "Where do I come in?"

"You are a member of the Action Committee, Handy," I replied. "I shall want you, too, Armstrong. I've made one or two slight alterations in the formation of this committee. There'll be three College House fellows on it—and that's necessary, too."

"Rather!"

"Christine and Co. ought to be represented."

"I'm not going to tell you what plans I've got in mind, because I don't want to say anything until I'm certain," I continued. "Can't you chaps bottle up for a bit? Be patient; the committee won't let you down."

"I'll see to that!" declared Handforth.

"You can be quite certain that we won't stand Miss Trumble's rule any longer," I went on. "She thinks she's being kind, but it's a sort of tyranny. We've tried to reason with her, but she won't listen. So we'll show her that we've got some backbone!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the stuff, Nipper!"

There was a great deal of enthusiasm. The wild excitement had died down under the influence of my quietly spoken words. Of course, there was a lot of jealousy. Everybody wanted to be on the Action Committee.

But this was out of the question.

The committee consisted of Handforth, Reggie Pitt, Armstrong, De Valerie, and myself—and Christine, Oldfield, and Lawrence, of the College House. Before coming up to bed, I had arranged things with Christine.

"How are you going to meet those chaps in the gym.?" inquired Griffith.

"That'll be quite easy," I replied. "We'll knot some of these sheets together, and it'll only take two minutes for you fellows to lower us to the ground. We'd better start at once, too; it's nearly nine."

No time was lost.

Within a few minutes the five Ancient House members of the committee were crouching against the wall of the Triangle. We had been lowered down one by one—and the rest of the Remove had stated its intention of remaining fully awake until we returned.

Fortunately it was dark, with clouds obscuring the stars, and a chilly February breeze blowing. But we were not thinking of the weather conditions. We crept along the wall like shadows, and then saw three dim figures just at the rear of the gymnasium.

We joined forces.

"Good!" came Bob Christine's voice out of the gloom. "You late bounders! We've been here for five minutes!"

The school clock chimed out the hour.

"We're dead on time," I retorted. "You were early, my sons. But here we are, and now we'll slip into the Committee Chamber and get busy on the plans. This is a serious affair, and we can't waste time."

We turned, and just at that very moment two biggish forms turned the corner of the gym., and came face to face with us.

They were Fenton and Morrow, of the Sixth!

## CHAPTER II.

### THE COUNCIL OF WAR!

THE two prefects gazed at us in astonishment for a moment or two. There was an awkward kind of silence. This meeting was the last thing we had desired. It was something of a disaster.

"Very interesting!" exclaimed Fenton grimly.

"We—we—— That is, I—— Or, rather ——"

I came to a halt, finding it difficult to select my words.

"Quite so!" interrupted Fenton. "I think I understand, young 'un. Perhaps you'll be good enough to explain what you are doing out of your dormitory at this hour?"

"Dash it all, it's only nine o'clock!" I protested.

"You went to bed at eight," put in Morrow. "You ought to be asleep by now!"

Handforth snorted.

"Asleep!" he said, in a thick voice. "Asleep — after we've been kicked out of our studies, and sentenced to imprisonment for three weeks! Look here, Morrow, Miss Trumble's been going it a bit too thick——"

"That's nothing to do with the case," interrupted Fenton. "Strictly speaking, we ought to report you for this. But it's rather dark, and we can't see very plainly."

"Thanks awfully, Fenton!" I said, knowing what he meant.

"That's all right," said Fenton. "What are you kids up to?"

"I'll tell you!" I replied boldly. "If you don't like to accept the sensible view, I shall be very disappointed. We're fed up with Miss Trumble's system of rule—and we're the Action Committee of the Remove."

"Oh, are you?" said Fenton.

"We've come out here to plan something," I went on. "You can be quite certain that it's nothing disgraceful, and nothing against the honour of the school. Knowing all the circumstances, are you going to send us back to bed, Fenton? I've given it to you straight, and I want you to give it to us straight!"

Edgar Fenton stroked his chin thoughtfully. Then he turned, and looked at Morrow.

"I shouldn't be surprised if we get a little rain!" he observed. "Well, everything's all quiet out here, so we'll get indoors."

"That's the idea!" agreed Morrow promptly.

And the two prefects strolled away without replying to my question, and without even glancing at us. We gazed after them in the gloom, and our hearts warmed towards them.

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "What do you think of that?"

"They're a couple of bricks!" I replied. "I knew we could trust them to do the right thing—although I hardly expected anything so good."

**We turned, and just at that very moment two biggish forms turned the corner of the gym. and came face to face with us.**

"Fenton didn't even answer you!" murmured Armstrong.

"My dear chap, he answered fully," I declared. "Not in words, but by his action. Don't you understand, he didn't want to commit himself to anything. So he just pretended that everything was quiet and in order."

The attitude of Fenton and Morrow bucked us up wonderfully. We had never believed that the prefects would display such open sympathy with our cause. It was a plain indication of their own feelings regarding Miss Trumble.

Without wasting time, we crept round to the rear of the gym., and halted against a small window. The gymnasium, of course, was locked up; it was always closed by the school porter at eight o'clock. But I had taken care to slip in a little earlier than that, and I had left this near window unlatched. So we got in without difficulty.

And we found ourselves in a small dressing-room.

It was infrequently used, but was a comfortable little apartment, nevertheless, and quite large enough for the eight of us. Having got inside, we closed the window, and then fitted up a big rug—a thick one, which would exclude all light.

Then I went to the switch, and turned it on.

"Do you think it's safe?" asked Christine doubtfully.

"Safe as houses," I replied. "Not even a speck of light can get through that rug. And an Action Committee can't discuss matters properly in the dark. Sit down, you chaps, and we'll get to work."

The Committee made itself comfortable.

"Now, gentlemen, I have a few words to say," began Handforth.

"Is this allowable?" interrupted Pitt. "I thought Nipper was the chairman of this committee? It's up to him to do all the talking."

"Hear, hear!"

"Dry up, Handy; you're squashed!"

Edward Oswald glared.

"Rats!" he snorted. "I've got just as much right to jaw as anybody else! I mean to have my say! And the only way to deal with Miss Trumble is to get up a revolt at once—to-night! We don't want any delays!"

"Hear, hear!" said Armstrong and Oldfield.

I stood up.

"As chairman of the committee, I claim the right to make the opening speech," I exclaimed firmly. "When I've finished, any other member of the committee will have perfect liberty to state his views in full."

"Good enough," said Reggie Pitt. "Go ahead, O oracle!"

Handforth sat down, breathing hard with impatience.

"I'll give you five minutes!" he growled grudgingly.

"First of all, I want everybody to realise that this is not a picnic!" I exclaimed. "Some fellows may regard a revolt as a kind of entertainment, but it isn't. It's a jolly serious business, and we can't enter upon it without full preparation and forethought."

"It's not so serious as all that," put in Armstrong. "If these things are done quickly, they're all the more effective."

"Perhaps they are—at the moment," I agreed. "But a revolt engineered in a hurry is almost certain to collapse in a hurry. We've got a certain aim—the reinstatement of all the masters. Once we rebel against authority, we must stand out to the bitter end."

"That's right enough," agreed Bob Christine. "I'm with you every time, Nipper. We don't want to make a mess of things by acting too hurriedly. And it's rather a queer business fighting against women."

"That's just it," I pointed out. "We can't do it. We can't fight against these women. It wouldn't be playing the game."

"Can't fight them?" exclaimed Handforth blankly.

"No."

"Then what the dickens can we do?"

"Lots," I replied. "To begin with, this revolt's got to be a peaceful sort of affair—on our side. If Miss Trumble starts any fighting, it will be another thing. But we mustn't start it."

"That's all rot!" said Armstrong. "Why, we've got to fight at the very beginning, if we're to make this barring-out a success."

"Not at all," I said. "There's another way."

"Have you got an idea?"

"I have!" I replied. "Our first move must be to revive the St. Frank's Cadet Corps."

"To do what?"

"Revive the Remove Cadet Corps," I repeated. "It was started some time ago, but it sort of died out during the winter. Well, this is the time to get it going again, but on a bigger scale. We've got heaps of uniforms, and every ounce of equipment we could desire—enough to supply every fellow in the Remove. And every fellow in the Remove must join—must be a Cadet."

"But what's the idea?" asked Lawrence, of the College House.

"Well, although it's my own scheme, I think it's a pretty decent one," I replied. "At the same time, I'd be glad to know what you fellows think of it. The chief point about it is that Miss Trumble will be hoodwinked; she'll actually let us prepare the way for this revolt in the open daylight. And there'll be something rather rich about that—something that will be almost like poetic justice."

"Re-starting the Cadet Corps is a pretty good scheme," said Christine slowly. "It'll provide us with uniforms and equipment, and all the rest of it; but I think you're counting your chickens before they're hatched. Miss Trumble will put her foot down heavily on the scheme."

"Of course she will," declared Handforth. "She won't allow any Cadets."

"I'm not so sure about that," put in Pitt. "I've got an idea that Nipper is on the right path. But let him get on with the talking."

"Of course, I shall see Miss Trumble personally," I continued. "The great thing is to give her the impression that we're subdued. She mustn't have the slightest idea that we're thinking about revolt—that would put the lid on everything. So it's up to the Remove to bottle itself up—to keep its natural feelings of indignation in check."

"The fellows will need some priming!" said Pitt. "Most of 'em are pretty well roused, you know."

"It can't be done," I said. "I shall go to Miss Trumble, and tell her plainly that the chaps are feeling the new restrictions pretty keenly. They can't go out—they can't play football—they can't use their studies—and all the rest of it. Then I'll ask her if she objects to our putting in a certain amount of time at Cadet work. I'll crack it up, you know—good healthy exercise, harmless amusement, and all that kind of stuff. I'll let her know that the fellows want some kind of natural outlet for their

youthful spirits. Anyhow, leave it to me—I'm absolutely confident that I can get the old girl's permission. If I don't, you can look out for a new leader. If I make up my mind to a thing, I'm pretty hard to shake off."

"That's the talk!" said Christine nodding. "Don't worry, you fellows—Nipper will get that permission. After all, there's no reason why he shouldn't. Miss Trumble can't jib at everything—and the Cadet Corps is a fine institution. What I'm puzzled about is how it'll help us."

"It's all a lot of rot!" growled Handforth. "I thought this Committee was going to make plans for a barring-out! Instead of that——"

"Give me time, Handy—let me explain the idea before you criticise it," I interrupted. "Before I proceed with the scheme. I'd like to point out that we can't possibly fight this battle against petticoat rule in the school itself."

"Why can't we?"

"Because it wouldn't be right—you ought to be able to see that without me telling you," I exclaimed. "We can't set ourselves up against these women and scrap as though they were men. Any action on our part must take place outside the school. That's the first and foremost consideration. If we do that we shall be on safe ground."

"Oh, go on!" growled Handforth. "I'm blessed if I can understand."

"I think all you chaps know about the big barn in the corner of the meadow behind Little Side," I went on. "Those meadows are all the property of the school, and they're not used for anything. The barn itself, although in good condition, is never used for any purpose. That's going to be our headquarters."

The Committee began to look interested.

"Good idea!" said Armstrong. "That barn is a big old place, you know, with a whacking great loft and a thatched roof, and it's as dry as a bone. Room enough for half the school, too!"

"We mustn't forget that it's February, and we need some decent shelter," I continued. "We can't camp out in the fields as though it were May or June. Well, the barn makes the thing easy. Having got permission to run the Cadet Corps, we'll get busy on manœuvres."

"On which?"

"We'll start a kind of miniature warfare, including trench digging," I replied. "And trench digging will be fairly easy, because all the ground in the vicinity of that barn is sandy—a kind of clean, dry gravel. And if the whole Remove starts trench digging, there's going to be something done."

Pitt was beginning to look intensely interested.

"You—you mean, fortify the barn?" he asked eagerly.

"Exactly!" I replied. "We'll make a complete system of trenches round the barn itself—just like real warfare. There'll be

front line trenches, communication trenches, and last defence trenches. And there'll be dug-outs, too, packed with ammunition. And most of this work, mind you, will be done in daylight, and with Miss Trumble looking on! In other words, she'll absolutely watch us making ready for the rebellion!"

"My only hat!" breathed Bob Christine. "What a stunning, gorgeous wheeze! What a smack in the eye for the old Gorgon when she learns the truth! But don't you think she'll guess things?"

"Never!" I replied. "She'll never dream the actual truth. Of course, we shall work at night as well. In the daytime we shall only be doing the ordinary Cadet Corps business. But at night, in dead secret, we'll attend to a hundred and one details——"

"But how can we work at night, you ass?" demanded De Valerie.

"That's simply a matter of arrangement," I continued. "We all go to bed at eight—we can slip out at ten, say. Not all of us, but specially selected parties. In those meadows, behind Little Side, we shall never be seen or heard. And the working parties can go ahead for four solid hours—until two o'clock, say. A lot can be accomplished in that time, night after night. By the end of a week, we shall be ready."

"A week!" exclaimed Armstrong blankly. "Have we got to wait a week?"

"If this job's going to be done properly, we can't act sooner," I replied. "And don't forget, there's a lot to be done. During these night spells we shall have to make sure of a good water supply—we shall have to get piles of food stored away—we shall have to manufacture ammunition, and do dozens of other things. The siege might last a week or a fortnight—and we've got to be prepared. Once we start this barring-out, we've got to go on. We'll state plainly that we've dug ourselves in, and won't surrender until all the masters return. The longer we stick it, the more certain success will be. The thing will become a public scandal, and Miss Trumble will have to give in first. Once we start, we'll keep on—until we've won the day."

"Good!"

"It's a great scheme!"

"Rather!"

The Committee was unanimous.

"I'm jolly glad you like it," I said. "I've been thinking about it for some time, but I didn't want to say anything until a suitable opportunity arose."

"There's just one point," put in Oldfield. "Why bother about the Cadets at all? Why not do all this work at night?"

"My dear chap, do show a little common sense!" I protested. "Do you think we can dig trenches without them being seen? All sorts of inquiries would be made. The finding of trenches in the morning would give rise to curiosity, and we should never be able to proceed. But if Miss Trumble knows we're trench digging, it won't matter a dash. She'll never imagine that we're doing things at night, too."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," admitted Oldfield. "My hat! You've got to think of all these things, you know!"

"That's why we need a good general—and we've got one," said De Valerie. "Whenever it comes to something big, Nipper's all ready with the ideas. If we can only get permission about the Cadet Corps, the whole thing will go smoothly. In my opinion, it's a master stroke!"

"Rather!"

"The greatest idea for years!"

"Besides, nobody can accuse us of bad conduct!" exclaimed Pitt. "We shan't be starting a war on these women teachers. We shall simply stand up for our rights by leaving the school, digging ourselves in, and refusing to come out until the masters return."

"Exactly," I said. "If the women attack us, we shall defend ourselves—but we shan't start anything on our own account. On the other hand, if we held this barring-out in the school, we should be the aggressors. Don't forget that defence is the best form of attack. Our plan will be to complete our defences to the last detail—and we'll be safe."

"What about grub?" asked Armstrong excitedly.

"That'll be comparatively easy," I said. "The grub will be the last thing to think of—a couple of night raids on the store-rooms, and we'll have enough to last us for a long siege. It may be a week before this war begins, but it's far better to prepare well in advance."

"Hear, hear!"

"Nipper, you're a marvel!" declared Pitt. "The idea's a stunner—a complete plan, well thought out, and without the slightest possibility of failure. When you grow up you ought to be able to run a war on your own!"

I grinned.

"Well, that's not one of my pet ambitions," I replied. "But when it comes to a small affair like this, I might be able to manage it. Of course, everything depends upon Miss Trumble's attitude regarding the Cadet Corps—but, as I said before, we can look upon that as a certainty."

"Good!" said Pitt. "Well, now that you've finished, Nipper, there doesn't seem much else to say. As far as I can see, it's just about impossible to improve on your scheme."

"Rather!" agreed Bob Christine. "Of course, the chaps are hoping for something a bit more swift, but as soon as we explain they'll be all right. Even the most excitable will cool down and realise that patience is the best."

Handforth stood up.

"Well, of course, the scheme isn't so bad," he admitted grudgingly. "This plan occurred to me hours ago—at least, there

was a kind of dim glimmering of it in my mind. It would have taken shape all right after a bit. Strictly speaking, it's my suggestion, but I am willing to let Nipper take the credit."

"Thanks awfully!" I said, with gratitude.

"That's all right!" replied Handforth pleasantly. "I'm not the kind of chap to make a fuss Upon the whole, it would be just as well to do the job properly. But I think it would be a lot better if I saw Miss Trumble. I'd make her agree to the Cadet Corps stunt——"

"My dear old ass, you'd ruin the thing at the very beginning!" interrupted Pitt gently. "You're first-class when it comes to a scrap, but in all matters of diplomacy——"

Reggie paused abruptly. For, distinctly and clearly, came the sound of a key being fitted into the lock of the gymnasium door.

Somebody was entering!

## CHAPTER III.

### THE FIRST STEP.

"QUICK! Put the light out!" hissed De Valerie.

In a flash, I had my hand to the switch, and turned off the electric light. It was quite possible that Miss Trumble herself had entered the gym. And if she caught us here, all plotting together, between nine and ten at night, her suspicions would be aroused. It was distinctly a time for retreat.

But before we could even get to the window the door of the dressing-room opened, and the lights from the main body of the gymnasium flooded in upon us. A startled exclamation sounded.

"My heye!"

Standing in the doorway was Mr. Josh Cuttle, the bow-legged porter of St. Frank's. But there was nobody else behind him, and we felt slightly relieved. Cuttle stood there, regarding us mournfully. He soon got over his surprise. And we made no further attempts to escape.

"There was queer goings on hon!" exclaimed Mr. Cuttle, in an abstract kind of way. "There was boys where they oughtn't to be!"

"It's all right, Josh!" I exclaimed soothingly. "Just a little lark, you know. There's no need to report us for this, is there?"

Mr. Cuttle stroked his chin.

"There was times when a man hardly knowed what to do," he said. "Likewise, there was times when boys was up to tricks they hadn't ought to be! What was a man to do? Ask me! Anyways, it wasn't for no man to make reports to them women!"

"Then it's all serene?" asked Pitt. "You won't peach on us?'

"For once, I was feeling slightly 'appy," replied Mr. Cuttle, his eyes gleaming somewhat. "Why was I 'appy? Ask me! I was 'appy because you young gents was startin' something agin them as hadn't no right 'ere. But it was more safe in bed."

"Come on, you chaps—we'll slip off," I said. "Josh won't let the cat out of the bag—we can rely on him. In fact, he's on our side."

"Them words was true," declared Mr. Cuttle. "But it wasn't for the likes o' me to say 'em. Women was good in their right place. Women was good for makin' pastry an' lookin' arter the 'ouse. Women was good for washin' clothes. But was women good for doin' work what ought to be done by men? Ask me! Women was not!"

By the time Mr. Cuttle had finished his observations regarding the weaker sex, we had all slipped out of the window, leaving him to lock up and clear out. We didn't exactly know why he had come into the gymnasium, but that was a matter of small concern. By the very nature of his talk we knew that he would not report us. Mr. Cuttle detested the autocracy of Miss Jane Trumble as much as anybody else in the school.

In the gloom of the Triangle the Action Committee split up. Christine and Co. went over to the College House, and we slipped to the wall of the Ancient House, immediately beneath the dormitory window.

There was nobody to give any hail.

Church and McClure were on the watch, and in a few moments we were all hauled up, one by one. It said much for the excitement in the Remove when we found that everybody was fully awake—and fully dressed. The majority of the fellows seemed to believe that the barring-out was due to commence at once.

"Well?" asked Owen major eagerly.

"Have you fixed something up?" demanded Jack Grey.

"Out with it, you chaps!"

"Let's hear the plan!"

"We're ready any minute you like!"

The Remove was eager and full of excited anticipation.

"Listen here, you chaps," I explained quietly. "There's not going to be any action at once. We've finally decided upon a plan, but you mustn't be disappointed if we don't start the rebellion to-night."

And before any of the juniors could object I went into full details of the scheme. And as the fellows listened, they became more and more accustomed to the idea, and their enthusiasm grew.

Finally, without exception, everybody cordially approved of the whole plan. They could all see that it would be foolish to precipitate matters. We should be far more certain of success by going slowly at first. And, after all, there was something supremely attractive in hoodwinking Miss Trumble into helping our cause.

It remained to be seen whether Miss Trumble would put the stopper on the whole business

By the time all the fellows went to sleep I had them thoroughly coached regarding their attitude. There wasn't a grumble to be heard. The juniors accepted the new order of things tamely, and in a manner which indicated that they had lost all their spirit. At least, they appeared to do so.

And Miss Trumble did not fail to note this fact.

At breakfast-time she kept her eyes well open, and I could see that she gave several glances of scornful triumph in the direction of the Remove. She had quelled these young rascals! By taking strong action, she had put a stop to all nonsense.

Very soon after breakfast I made the first move.

I went straight along to Miss Trumble's study, tapped upon the door, and entered. As I had hoped, she was alone, but she looked at me rather suspiciously. However, my meek, innocent appearance seemed to please her.

"Well, my little man, what do you want?" she inquired. "If you have come to grumble, or to put any absurd petitions before me——"

"No, ma'am, it's not that at all," I interrupted. "The Remove is rather disappointed. Most of the fellows are restless, too. They don't quite like losing their studies, and they keenly feel the loss of their usual liberty. I'm the captain of the Remove, ma'am, and I thought I'd better come to you to tell you of this."

"The boys have only themselves to blame for the punishment I have inflicted," said Miss Trumble curtly. "It is quite useless for you to plead with me—I am firm. Under no circumstances will I change my mind!"

I smiled.

"Oh, I haven't come about that at all, ma'am," I said. "We can all see how firm you are. You've shown us that you mean to be obeyed. And nearly all boys have a big respect for those who can take strong, decisive command of a situation. There's nothing the Remove admires so much."

Miss Trumble condescended to smile. I was going to work in the right way. Just a little gentle flattery—uttered in a roundabout kind of way—would almost certainly have the desired effect.

"I am very pleased that the boys have realised the foolishness of their behaviour," exclaimed the Headmistress. "Of course, they are mere children, and so I can excuse a lot. It largely depends upon yourselves whether the restrictions shall remain in force or not. If I see that you are well-mannered and obedient, I may be inclined to allow you a little playtime on half-holidays."

"Oh, ma'am, that's awfully good of you!" I said with an air of intense gratitude. "You see, I'm the Form Captain, as I said a little while ago. The juniors are very restless, and I'm wondering if you would allow us to revive the Junior Cadet Corps? It would give the fellows a lot of good exercise, and it would keep them out of mischief, too."

"The Cadet Corps?" repeated Miss Trumble, frowning. "What is that?"

"Oh, a kind of Boy Scout movement, ma'am," I replied. "Of course, we're not exactly boy scouts, but cadets. Playing at soldiers, you know, Miss Trumble. Only fun, really, but it means plenty of fine healthy exercise and drilling. All the best schools have got Cadet Corps."

Miss Trumble looked thoughtful.

"Do I understand that a corps is actually in existence now?" she asked.

"Oh, we've had it for a long time," I replied. "We've got all the uniforms and equipment, and everything. We haven't done much in the winter time, because the weather hasn't been suitable. But it's getting finer now, and the spring's coming on."

"We are still in February, child!" said the Headmistress.

"Well, I know," I replied. "And we shouldn't have thought of any manœuvres until about another month. But as the half-holidays have been stopped, and other restrictions made, I had an idea that the Remove would rather like the cadets to get busy as soon as possible."

Miss Trumble shook her head.

"No, I cannot allow it," she said with decision.

"But you don't seem to understand, ma'am!" I persisted. "Just think of the exercise we shall do—drilling and trench-digging, and all that kind of thing! It'll keep the boys out of mischief—they won't have time to worry about other matters. It's a fine thing, if you'd only allow it. Of course, there's nothing rough about it—no fighting, or anything like that."

"You will not engage in any mock battles?"

I looked shocked.

"Battles!" I said with horror. "Whatever gave you that idea, Miss Trumble? The Cadet Corps is as peaceful as a Church Lads' Brigade! It's a half-holiday to-day, and I was wondering if you would allow us to spend the time at cadet work, instead of staying indoors. I'm afraid the boys might get very restless. And I wouldn't like anything to happen."

Miss Trumble was silent for several moments.

"Well, it is just possible that I might thaw," she replied. "I do not wish to be unduly harsh. My chief aim is to be just and fair in all things. And the idea of a Cadet Corps is distinctly appealing. I greatly admire the patriotic spirit which moves the boys."

"I thought it better to remain discreetly silent.

"You spoke of drilling and trench-digging," went on Miss Trumble. "Where would you propose to carry out such operations?"

"Oh, that's another point," I said, feeling that I was making excellent headway. "There are those disused meadows at the

back of Little Side—you know, ma'am, against that old barn. I thought it would be rather a good idea to make trenches 'round there. It couldn't do any harm, and the boys would be jumping for joy if they could play at soldiers."

"H'm!" said the Headmistress slowly. "Do you promise me, young man, that there will be no rough play or fighting?"

"I give you my word, ma'am, that the boys won't fight one another in the slightest way," I replied earnestly. "And think of the exercise—the open-air life! And they won't need to go out of the school grounds, either."

"Well, well!" said Miss Trumble in a reluctant kind of way. "Perhaps I should not be weakening if I agreed to this——"

"Weakening, ma'am!" I broke in. "Why, you would be showing your strength. It would prove to the boys how wonderfully kind and clever you are! Oh, you must let us do this, Miss Trumble!"

My words completed the thawing process.

"My greatest wish is to rule the school with tolerance and kindness," exclaimed the Headmistress. "As you have come to me in such a humble way I should be most ungracious if I refused your request. Very well, my boy. You may go back to your playmates and tell them that I have consented to their desire. I hope they will appreciate my generosity."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am!" I said gratefully.

I didn't wait for much else, but hurried off as soon as I could escape from the study.

"The blessed old hypocrite!" I muttered wrathfully. "She thinks she's being so jolly sweet! If she only knew what the Remove had in mind she wouldn't be quite so confident!"

When the juniors heard the result of my interview they could hardly believe it. There was rather more elation than I had wished for. Many of the fellows became very excited—and showed it, too. This was not desirable—for Miss Trumble was no fool, and we didn't want her to get any suspicions.

However, she probably set down the jubilation as an expression of joy at her generosity.

"Dash it all, you're a bit of a marvel!" declared Bob Christine, as we stood in the Triangle. "This is great, old man! So it's going forward?"

"You bet it is!"

"And we can start this afternoon?"

"Yes!"

"Right you are!" declared Bob. "I'll have my crowd all ready directly after dinner. There won't be a single absentee. Every fellow's as keen as mustard."

"Same on our side," I replied. "Why, even Fullwood and Co., and the other cads, are joining in. For about the first time in history, the Remove is absolutely solid. The St. Frank's Cadet Corps will be at greater strength than it's ever been before."

I was complimented by all sorts of fellows, who found it difficult to believe that I had succeeded in winning over the ogress. Miss Trumble was called worse things than this, by the way.

**The gravel parted, some hair appeared, immediately followed by a red face. Handforth looked out upon the world. Only his head was free, it is true, but this was quite enough to bring relief to the other cadets.**

Morning lessons were very tiresome.

All the juniors were thinking of the coming rebellion—the big stand against feminine authority. But the fellows acquitted themselves well. There was such a great lot at stake that none of the juniors forgot themselves. They went through the morning, and Miss Teezer—the Form-mistress—guessed nothing.

Directly after dinner activities commenced.

There was a rush upstairs to the dormitory. Cadet uniforms were routed out. Many of them were brand-new, for they had never been used. Only a section of the Remove had joined the Cadets when it had been inaugurated. But now every fellow in the Form was eager to join in.

The cadets were divided into two commands—the Ancient House command and the College House command. Christine was the colonel of his own corps, and I was the colonel of the Ancient House brigade—in addition to being commander-in-chief of the whole cadet army.

Less than half an hour after dinner we were all out in the Triangle, forming up for

drill. Fullwood and Co. were there, eager enough to fall into line with the other fellows. Fatty Little was absent, accompanied by five others—for Fatty was chief of the food department. There was no actual necessity for food this afternoon, but Fatty thought there was.

Under the circumstances, the cadets looked very smart and business-like as they formed up. We hadn't had any drill for months, so we did pretty well. Handforth was a sergeant—and he let everybody know it. He seemed to have an idea that he was the chief commander.

And while we were doing a little drill—mainly for the sake of appearances—Fenton, of the Sixth, came along. He stood on the Ancient House steps, looking at us in a curious kind of way. Then he came down and approached me.

"What's the idea?" he asked pointedly.

"Cadets." I said.

"I know that, you young ass," retorted Fenton. "But why so sudden. Is there anything behind this?"

"Ask no questions and you'll hear no lies!" I said sweetly.

The captain of St. Frank's looked at me rather grimly for a second or two; then he allowed a twinkle to enter his eyes.

"All right—carry on!" he said. "I'm not inquisitive!"

"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise!" I grinned. "No need to worry, Fenton. Trust me."

He walked off with a chuckle.

"Good man!" murmured Reggie Pitt. "I'm blessed if old Fenny isn't turning up trumps every time! He's letting us do just as we like—although he knows there's something in the wind."

"It's because he trusts us to do the thing properly," I replied. "He's just as much up against Miss Trumble as we are. He's quite keen enough to see that all this meekness is assumed—he knows the Remove isn't made of putty!"

Handforth came striding up.

"What's all this stoppage for?" he demanded, with an air of curt authority. "Aren't we going to do anything this afternoon?"

"Yes, Sergeant Handforth, we are!" I retorted. "And kindly use a little different tone to your commanding officer! Remember your rank, my lad! And get those stragglers rounded up!"

Handforth glared.

"Why, you silly ass——" he began, indignantly.

"Sharp, now!" I commanded. "No insolence, sergeant!"

Handforth swallowed hard.

"Wait—wait until we're off duty!" he hissed. "By George! Just because you're a giddy colonel——"

He paused abruptly, and pointed a finger at several cadets who were daring to stand at ease, chatting in a group.

"Shun!" he roared violently. "Get into line there, you bounders! Any signs of insubordination, and I'll call the corporals and place you under arrest! Who wants to be taken to the orderly-room?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth fairly danced.

"Any more laughter on parade, and the whole platoon will be court-martialled!" he thundered. "Private Griffith, don't stick your feet out! Private Marriott, put your hat on straight! By George! I'll make you asses sit up!"

Handforth stalked up and down the line, very important, and very noisy. This was just the kind of thing he loved.

And just when the cadets were all getting ready to march off, Miss Trumble appeared at the doorway of the Head's house. She stood looking on critically for a few moments, and then unbent to such a degree that she even allowed her angular face to break into a smile. At least, it was what she considered a smile. Church said it was enough to turn milk sour.

I thought it good policy to march over towards her.

Arriving, I drew smartly to attention, and saluted.

"Well, ma'am?" I asked. "How do you like the cadets?"

"I am pleased—greatly pleased!" replied the Headmistress, beaming and nearly making me sway as I stood. "I hardly expected the children to be so smart. I am delighted that I gave you permission. And now I imagine, you mean to run away and play?"

"That's the idea, ma'am," I replied. "Just a little harmless amusement—with plenty of healthy exercise. If you have a look out of your window in about half an hour, you'll see us all as busy as bees!"

I saluted again, and marched off.

Miss Trumble might look at us working, but she would certainly never guess what startling schemes filled the minds of every fellow in the Remove!

The situation was exquisite. Under her very eyes we should be making active preparations for the coming rebellion. She had even given us permission to do so.

And that, as Pitt remarked, was the cream of the whole joke.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### TRENCH DIGGING.

"WHAT ho! What-ho! It appears, dear old cans of fruit that you're all somewhat frightfully busy! I mean to say, digging, and so forth! Lugging out the old earth in large cascades, and all that kind of rot!"

Archie Glenthorne stood gazing at the scene of activity with an air of mild wonder. He was attired in all his usual ele-

gance, and looked round him, aided by his famous monocle.

"Lazy slacker!" exclaimed Handforth wrathfully. "Why aren't you in uniform, Private Glenthorne?"

Archie started.

"I mean to say, what?" he exclaimed. "Uniform? Oh, but really! That is, what priceless rot, don't you know! Dash it all, I simply couldn't get into those bally things, old lad! I mean, Phipps absolutely wouldn't allow it! He'd shove the old foot down with frightful force."

Archie shook his head firmly. He was not the only fellow in the Remove who had not donned the cadet's uniform, and he was not called upon to take any active part in the proceedings.

I had decided upon this at the very outset. Chiefly because Archie was a most helpless youth and he would be of far more use looking on. Nothing but trouble would follow if he became a cadet.

He continued to regard the scene with interest. There was certainly plenty of activity. The Cadet Corps was getting busy in earnest working with a will. If the circumstances had been quite ordinary, the fellows would never have displayed such energy.

But they were now toiling for a set, definite purpose. This trench-digging was the first step towards the rebellion. And all the juniors entered into the work with an ardour that could not be mistaken. They were filled with supreme enthusiasm.

There were three meadows behind Little Side, quite small, irregular shaped affairs, and of very little value as pasture land. Trees were dotted about here and there, and the ground itself was very uneven, all hills and dales, with the grass growing in patchy clumps.

The ground was very sandy, and during the fine weather these little meadows were a favourite playing ground for the fags. They indulged in all sorts of games here. On frequent occasions, during the summer term, Second-formers and Third-formers might be seen on a half-holiday gaudily attired as Red Indians, stalking one another through the grass or round the trees.

But now, in February, these meadows were deserted.

At least, they had been until to-day.

But now the activity was tremendous. For the whole Remove, with the solitary exception of Archie, was engaged in the fascinating labour of trench-digging. The fellows didn't have to be driven. They went at the work as though they were being paid for it.

Operations had just commenced, and the two chief commanders were standing near the old barn, inspecting the field of operations. The two chief commanders were Bob Christine and myself.

"Of course we can't stick to the usual rules and regulations of all well-conducted cadet corps," I remarked. "We shall have to give a hand presently, Bob—we've got to work just as hard as the other chaps. Harder, in fact, because it's up to us to set the example, and there's a tremendous lot to be done."

"Rather!" agreed Christine. "I must say, Nipper, that this wheeze of yours is the greatest stunt that ever happened! By Jove! What a magnificent setting for a siege! How did you get the idea at first, old son? What made you pick on this particular spot?"

"Because it's about the only spot that would suit our purpose," I replied. "Here we have the barn with these sandy meadows all round. My dear chap, it's about the only place in the whole district. Once we get these trenches properly made, and the barn itself fortified, I'll defy an army to get us out. Once we really start this war, we shall have to go on with it until we win. That's why we've got to plan everything out so completely."

Christine nodded.

"Yes, there's no sense in doing the job by halves," he agreed. "The deeper these trenches are the better, and we need a good many, too. We want to have a kind of last retreat, in case of emergencies."

We continued to look round the scene of operations.

The barn itself was a strong, substantial building. It was an old place, and at some remote period it had belonged to one of the local farms—probably before St. Frank's had expanded, and before the playing-fields had been developed. In any case, we were not particularly interested in the history of the place.

It was there, and that was all that mattered.

The barn was built of wood, mainly, although for five or six feet up from the ground the walls were composed of a mixture of flint and mortar—a curious kind of building material which is not used nowadays.

In spite of its age, the place was absolutely sound. The thick, thatched roof was in splendid repair, having been well looked after. And the upper part of the building was one huge loft—a great space with a hilly, uneven floor of great oaken beams.

I had already pointed out the advantage of this loft to the others.

When the time came for us to declare our war, this loft would serve splendidly as a big dormitory. All the fellows off duty would be able to sleep in peace and comfort, no matter what the weather conditions might be.

And the big floor-space downstairs would serve as adequate quarters, for Fatty Little, who with one or two assistants, was already making active plans up one corner,

which he intended to convert into a kitchen.

It was very helpful to us that the Cadet Corps, at its formation, had been provided with a full and complete equipment. There were spades, picks and shovels, for trench-digging purposes. And other tools of almost every description.

Our very first move had been to convey all these tools into the barn. They were there in readiness for us to use—at night time as well as in the day. It was necessary to have them handy.

And now, although the afternoon was still young, the cadets were working with might and main. It does not take boys long to get to work, particularly if they have a big interest in what they are doing.

Handforth, of course, was very much in evidence.

He had charge of a company, and he seemed to imagine that his sole duty as a sergeant was to string out continuous orders. The fact the cadets were working at full pressure made no difference to Edward Oswald. He was never satisfied.

"Now then, Private Hubbard!" rapped out Handforth. "Don't stand there looking up at the sun! Get on with that digging!"

"How the dickens can I work with a chunk of sand in my eye?" demanded Hubbard. "Be sensible, for goodness' sake!"

"That's not the way to talk to your sergeant!"

"Oh, isn't it?" growled Hubbard. "It strikes me things would be a lot better if you did some work on your own account!"

"Hear, hear!" said the company.

Handforth glared round him ferociously.

"This—this is rank insubordination," he roared. "It's my duty to see that you privates keep at your work! And if there's any slacking I'll soon have the offenders placed under arrest."

"Rats!" said Owen major. "I'm blessed if I can understand why Nipper made you a sergeant at all! We never get any peace!"

Handforth deliberately pushed up his sleeves.

"Private Owen, stand forward!" he commanded grimly.

"I'm too busy!" retorted Private Owen.

"Stand forward!" thundered Handforth. "I'm going to punch your nose! I'm going to punch you so hard that you'll fall into the trench!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better start!" growled Owen major "Since when did a sergeant have authority to lay hands on a private? That's a new regulation, isn't it? I never heard it before!"

"I don't take any notice of regulations ——"

"But you've got to when you're a sergeant," said Owen major calmly.

"You—you——"

"If I don't suit you, all you can do is to report me to the commanding-officer!" went on Owen. "If you punch my nose, I shall make a complaint, and the C.O. will tear your stripes off! So you can jolly well do what you like!"

Handforth stood there, rather helpless.

"This isn't an ordinary cadet corps!" he declared. "In fact, it's not a cadet corps at all! We're simply doing it as a blind! It's all spoof, just for Miss Trumble to see ——"

"She'll hear it, too, if you yell like that!" interrupted Armstrong.

Reginald Pitt came up, swinging a pick.

"Dry up, Handy; every minute's of importance!" he said seriously. "I know you like to air your authority, but there's no time to spare for that. Wouldn't it be a good idea to get busy? You're a strong, hefty chap, and here's a pick that wants somebody to look after it!"

Handforth glared.

"Do you suppose I'm going to work?" he demanded. "Me, the sergeant of this company?"

"Sergeants don't usually work, I'm aware!" replied Pitt. "I'm sorry! I'm disappointed! I thought better things!"

"What?"

"I had an idea that you'd give an example to all other sergeants!" went on Reggie. "I thought you'd show the fellows that hard work is a virtue. Of course I was mistaken. I can see now that you don't like work at all. It's a great pity."

Handforth grew redder and redder.

"Are you trying to make out I'm lazy?" he hooted.

"No!"

"Then, what the dickens——"

"There's no need for me to make it out!" said Pitt blandly. "We've been at work for a tremendous time, and you've done nothing but look on! Facts, my son, speak for themselves!"

De Valerie paused in his own labours.

"Oh, what's the good of talking to him?" he growled. "Even Nipper doesn't expect Handy to do any work. We must be thankful that he doesn't cause any trouble. Handforth isn't the kind of fellow to exert himself. In fact, he couldn't work if he tried!"

"Couldn't work!" snorted Handforth fiercely.

"Of course you couldn't!"

"By George!" roared Handy. "By George! I'll soon show you whether I can work! I'll have this giddy trench dug in next to no time! Gimme that pick!"

(*Continued on page 15.*)

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MR. JAMES ARTHUR inhabited a suite of rooms overlooking the river on the first floor of the Palatial Hotel; and since the Palatial Hotel charges its guests something like sixpence a breath, it will be evident that Mr. Arthur was a man of means. If one had been sufficiently curious, one might also have learned that he was a man of standing, for his intimates stretched right away into the topmost pinnacles of society. Still further, one might have learned that Mr. James Arthur had unimpeachable introductions from generals, from bishops, from the High Commissioner of a remote settlement, and from the President of a South American Republic.

Knowing all this, one would have been surprised to learn that Scotland Yard took an interest in Mr. James Arthur—so great an interest that, since he stepped ashore at Liverpool, he had been watched over with as much paternal care as if he had been of Royal blood. The attentions of the detectives had not been obtrusive, but Mr. James Arthur, alias Wolf Coyne, had felt worried by an observation which he divined rather than saw. It is so harassing to one's plans to be treated like a gold-brick man.

The essence of Mr Arthur's grievance was, that he was a gold-brick man. So he was classed in the archives of Mulberry Street along with sawdust men, green-goods men, and other crude practitioners who could as easily have sprouted wings as have attained to the eminence of the Palatial Hotel. Yet since a knowledge of human nature is the greatest asset of "con" men, whatever their degree, Mr. James Arthur was rightly classified. He had a genius for divining a man's (or a woman's) weak point, and a facility for using the knowledge to his own advantage.

It had been Detective-Inspector Ansell who had met Coyne at Euston and warned him that London was an unhealthy place for prolonged residence. Coyne, who had never been convicted in his life, though he had had some narrow escapes, smiled blandly, declared that the officer had made a gross mistake, and passed on.

He had some reason for his confidence, since those introductions were genuine. It is astonishing how far personality and nerve can carry one in the remote corners of the earth. Moreover, acquaintance with many detective bureaux, and the knowledge that the victim of a confidence-man—whether he has merely bought a "stolen" razor from a man in the street or a "gold" mine with a questionable title from an urbane City man—rarely has the courage to talk about his folly afterwards, had brought him to despise threats. England is a free country, and it is a delicate business to interfere with a person merely because he has a reputation.

Yet Coyne had not been long in London before he felt the influence of the machine.

There was no overt act to which he could take exception. If he had not known the quality of his own nerves he might have supposed that his imagination was betraying him. Somehow he was beset by an atmosphere of all-pervading watchfulness until all his plans threatened to go awry.

Now, in fact, there was nothing miraculous in Scotland Yard's arrangements for "covering" him—merely large resources and common sense. There were half a dozen men who did little else than glean details of his daily life—in the hotel smoking-room, among the servants, among his acquaintances. Coyne was too big a fish for Ansoll to take any risks, and the men he had put on to deal with the "con" man had been picked with care. It was not easy work this method of trying to follow the mobile fluctuations of a subtle man's brains. Yet in the end some hint of his intentions must inevitably materialise. Not till they had proof that he had committed some illegal act could they do anything else.

"All this simmered through the "con" man's brain as he sat moodily in his big sitting-room with an iced drink and a big cigar after his fruitless attempt to terrorise Ansoll. The kindly eyes were hard and his jaw was set. He was not, he told himself, going to be put out of the game—not if they turned a thousand bone-headed bulls to try and stack the deck against him. Once he had carried his plans through, he could laugh at them and his victims. The chief obstacle in his path was the man who was organising the opposition campaign—Ansoll. In which Wolf Coyne made an error of supposition, for Scotland Yard is never dependant on any one man.

He touched the bell.

"I'll get him," he muttered viciously, "I'll get him." On the soft-footed valet who answered his summons he turned abruptly.

"Get me a telegraph form," he ordered.

. . . . . .

Within an hour afterwards he had a visitor—an old young man who moved with stealthy alertness, and whose eyes were incessantly roving to and fro. He gripped a clean-shaven chin and nodded guardedly to the "con" man as he was ushered in, but not a word did he speak till the door had again closed behind the servant.

"Say, bo," he declared at last. "Is it really you? You certainly are making good, Wolf, since I saw you last. This is some luxury." His eyes wandered appreciatively about the chamber.

"How are you, Freddie?" said the other genially. "Sit down. You got my wire all right?" He rose, crossed the room, and turned the key in the door.

"I got your wire," agreed Freddie, picking up the cigar-case which lay on a table and helping himself. "I guess there's something moving." He crossed his legs and struck a match. "Well, you know I've always admired your talents, Wolf, though if you'll forgive me saying so, you're a little too inclined to play a lone hand. You need a partner to balance you like—to help with the heavy work. I'm somewhere around it, eh?"

"Don't pull any of that dope on me," said Coyne sharply. "What I want you for is no partnership gag. You'll get paid for what you do, and it won't take you a couple of hours. It's worth just a hundred to me and no more. That'll perhaps save argument."

"You always was harsh, Wolf," said Freddie in hurt remonstrance. "What are you going to pull out of it? What's the stunt, anyway?"

"I'm going to pull out of it just what I can make," snapped Coyne. "You'll get a hundred—and easy money at that—or you'll get nix. Now listen. Been on the boards lately?"

"The stage," lamented Freddie, "is infested with knights. There's no chanst in the legitimate, and demean myself to vaudeville——"

"Cut it out," advised Coyne. "Do you know Ansoll—the boss bull of the 14th Division?"

"Do I know you?" retorted Freddie. "Why, Ansoll is the friend of my youth, my long-lost uncle. Hasn't he pulled me twice, once because I stood outside a bank wondering what I would do if I had all the money that was in the safe, and once—— But say, if he's on to you count me out of the game."

"You're yellow," sneered Coyne. "I thought you had some nerve, Freddie. But if you can afford to throw away a hundred jimmies. . . ." He crossed over and laid a hand on the locked door

"Don't be hasty," urged Freddie. "Tell me what it is and I'll consider."

Coyne resumed his seat.

"It's simple enough. There's not a ha'porth of risk in it for you. All I want you to do is this. . . ."

Freddie's solemn face expanded in a grin as he listened He nodded his head in delighted appreciation.

"You're sure a top-liner, Wolf!" he exclaimed. "It's the nuttiest move I've heard for a long time. You put him in bad and you have your swell witnesses, an'—lor' lummie, I'd like to see his face when you open out on him."

"That's all right then. You'll be on hand seven-forty-five to the minute. And mind, Freddie, no soaking. Here's a fiver. Get down to it."

. . . . . .

Luck is a great handmaid to the detective—though he invariably has her on a lead. She must not be confused with coincidence, for example. It was no blind luck that had caused the clerk at the desk to scratch his head when a visitor applied for Mr. Arthur. That was due to the persuasions of a couple of very ordinary-looking young men who for many days past had spent much time loitering in the palm court of the Palatial Hotel.

Nor was it luck that they happened to be

there. That was a very simple precaution of Ansoll's. The only piece of luck in the whole business was that Wolf Coyne should have overlooked their possible presence. Thereafter everything became more or less inevitable.

For while Coyne and his satellite were planning the downfall of the inspector, a man in one of the telephone boxes below was talking over the wire to Ansoll. And when Flash Freddie, actor by profession, and what the United States calls "sneak" by vocation, stepped out of the lift and moved jauntily on to the rubber-paved courtyard.

**Dainton flung himself into the fray, and received a kick in the face that sent him half-stunned into the fireplace.**

he had no suspicion that the young fellow who looked like a bank clerk and brushed by him was at all interested in his mission.

He whistled cheerfully as he turned into the Strand and bent his steps westward. The young bank clerk dropped farther and farther behind, but an acute observer might have noticed that his relative position to Freddie was maintained by a heavy-jawed man who, if suddenly addressed, might have answered to the name Jimmie. And ten yards behind Jimmie Cotterill, smiling and bland, a red rose in his button-hole, strode Detective-Inspector Ansoll.

The procession maintained its order till Freddie turned down a street off Charing Cross Road. Then Ansoll closed up on Cotterill and the two moved up on Freddie. His foot was in a doorway when the inspector's hand dropped lightly on his shoulder. One glance he took, and then recoiled with every evidence of dismay and terror.

"Well, Freddie!" said Ansoll. In the quiet, gentle voice the other man read a menace that did not exist.

"Gawd, Mr. Ansoll!" he cried. "You scared me."

"Sorry," apologised Ansoll. "You don't mind a joke, old son?" He linked his arm lovingly with that of his quarry, and Cotterill ranged up on the other side.

Freddie made a half-hearted attempt to disengage his arm. This encounter was altogether too pat upon his interview with Wolf Coyne to be to his taste. He was almost superstitious about it. But the ruling gambit of the crook came automatically to his lips.

"There's nothing you've got up against me. You lemme go. You ain't no business to interfere with me."

"Freddie!" remonstrated the inspector. "You seem frightened of something. What's the matter with you? We only want

to buy you a drink. You never used to be as shy as this." His grip tightened.

"I'm not frightened," declared the other, raising his voice so that there should be no mistake. "What I got to be frightened about? Only I've got an appointment. You've got no right to hold me up like this. I'll report you."

"Report away," agreed Ansoll. "We like it. But come and have a drink all the same."

Somehow Freddie found himself impelled away from the costumier's. The prospect of the drink did not entice him. He was possessed by too wholesome a fear even for that. His restless eyes sought vainly for enlightenment in the inspector's face. It wore an air of beaming benevolence.

. . . . . .

In the cellar-like saloon of a near-by public-house Freddie found himself seated on a high stool with a detective on each side. Ansoll paid for drinks, and his unwilling guest found the taste of liqueur brandy grateful and comforting. Ansoll talked idly in general. When Cotterill insisted on a second round Freddie was a little less suspicious of their motives. With a brand-new five-pound note burning in his hip-pocket he was not to be outdone in hospitality, and again the barman replenished the glasses. Freddie began to see how he had misjudged his hospitable companions. By the fifth round he was calling Cotterill "Jimmie," and had dropped the "Mr." when he addressed Ansoll. It escaped his notice that since the second round they had confined themselves to temperance beverages.

Ansoll raised a lemonade and angostura to his lips and took a slow drink. Over Freddie's head he saw Cotterill deliberately close one eye. That was all the sign that either was vitally interested in Freddie's babble.

"H'm," commented the inspector. "Wolf's gunning for me, is he? Well, I wish him luck."

"He's a mean man. He thinks he's got it all under his own thatch—'stead of calling in those that's forgotten more of the game than he ever knew. Told me I was yellow, he did—me yellow." His half-fuddled wits were working a grievance against the "con-" man. "But you're a good f'llah. I'll show him whether I'm yellow—him and his swell snekers." He scowled at the fresh drink which had been placed in front of him.

Freddie laughed scornfully. "No. I don't fall for that sort of business. I'm nobody's fool to run my head into a rope. No, it's like this, Anse'. You're crowding Wolf, and he's a man that don't like to be crowded. So he fixed it with me to play a little game with you—something that'd keep you too busy thinking about yourself to interfere with him till he made a get-away. Now, Anse', you're a good f'llah. Wolf was going to give me a hundred of the best—what's it worth to you if I put you wise?"

Ansoll stiffened. He stood up, and his smiling familiarity vanished. "You're talking through the back of your head, Freddie," he sneered. "I thought you had more sense than to pitch me a cock-and-bull story like that. Say, honest now, have you ever met Wolf Coyne in your life? What do you think of him, Jimmie?"

Cotterill humped his shoulders scornfully. "What you take us for, Freddie? Just a couple of piecans? Want to make a fiver by telling us a tale? Try it on some one else, my lad."

Freddie gulped angrily. This change from good fellowship to rank incredulity had been well-timed. Too ready an eagerness would have made him anxious to extract terms, or, worse still, might have aroused his slumbering suspicions. But this attitude of the officers was nicely calculated to make a nearly drunken man blurt out all he knew. Freddie eyed them in fierce resentment.

"Telling the tale, am I? Don't know Wolf Coyne, don't I? You bulls think you're mighty smart—I don't think. Would you believe it if I was to tell you . . ."

Twenty minutes later he was being whirled in a taxi-cab towards King Street. To his protest both detectives listened with no trace of emotion.

"It's all right, old son," said Jimmie Cotteriil soothingly. "We're not going to hurt you. We're just going to hold you safe till you're feeling better. A nice, strong, hot cup of coffee is all you want—then a stiff soda-water. Now, you cheer up and you'll be as right as rain."

They put him in the detention room at King Street—"detained for inquiries" was the official explanation—and adjourned to the dingy little C.I.D. office on the second floor. There they sank into chairs facing each other, and the little wrinkles round the corner of Ansoll's eyes grew more intense. He gave a short cackle of laughter.

"Wolf Coyne is It?" He chuckled. "The one and only It: He meant having me. But I think the surprise packet he held for me will be nothing to his astonishment when he finds it go off in his hand. Now, Jimmie, we've got to get busy." He reached for the desk telephone. "Give me C.I.—— Ansoll speaking."

. . . . . .

With the dismissal of Flash Freddie, Coyne felt that the Ansoll problem was in a fair way of being settled. It had been a flash of inspiration—almost of genius—that had shown him the way out.

He chuckled to himself as he dressed for dinner. He had that touch of vanity in which most criminals, big and little, are alike—though, unlike smaller men, he was content with his own admiration of himself.

As his man brushed him down he gave a glance at himself in the glass, and with a satisfied nod moved to the private room he had ordered for dinner. He did credit to his tailor, and his tailor was worthy of him. His wanderings and a certain natural ability had given him an air. He was distinguished even without the three orders that dangled

on his lapel—a man of whom you might be sure at first glance as standing in the front rank of whatever profession or society he adorned.

He welcomed his guests—there were only three—with that charm of manner that had stood him in good stead in multifarious enterprises. If you had raked London you would not have found three persons less likely to be duped by an adventurer than those whom Coyne was entertaining. There was Lord Dalgaren, millionaire, owner of fifty thousand acres in Yorkshire and two hundred in London, and reputed one of the best business men in the House of Lords; Sir Henry Palton, builder of the big enterprise that shrieked at you from every hoarding "Palton's Preserves"; and young Rupert Dainton, M.P., who had been left £15,000 a year and a big political future.

It was over the coffee that business was introduced. Up till then Coyne had given no indication that this was any more than a matter of hospitality. He lit a cigar with dainty care.

"Well, Palton," he said, "I've had a cable to-day. You people have had plenty of time to make sure of my credentials. This ought to be fixed up now, or before we know it we'll be pushed aside. These American Republics are slippery folk to deal with. We don't want any one to get ahead of us."

Palton adjusted a pair of eyeglasses and looked gravely over their rims at his host. "It would have been better if you'd got the concession signed before we put up the money, Mr. Arthur. Of course, I can understand the difficulties of the position, but——"

Coyne drummed on the table absently. It was Dainton who struck in. "My dear Palton, we've been over that ground a dozen times among ourselves. It isn't as if it was a gamble. It's a perfectly reasonable proposition."

The "con" man interrupted. "I want to be clear with you gentlemen. You perfectly understand that I don't risk a penny of my own money. I would like you to be in on this, but, of course, if there is any difficulty about raising money, I can take the proposal elsewhere. If you had my experience of South America you would know you can't do these sort of things on hot air. You can get this concession to build a railway through one of the biggest South American republics if you are prepared to put up a hundred thousand as a guarantee that you really will build. It seems, as Mr. Dainton says, perfectly reasonable. If we were the only people on the market——"

"Put that point aside for a moment," said Dalgaren. "What I think, I tell you frankly, is that you are asking us too much. We're putting up the money, and the contract you want us to sign agrees that for services rendered you are to receive not less than one-fourth of the ordinary shares when we go to allotment."

"That's it," agreed Palton. "It's too much. You agree with us, don't you, Dainton?"

Coyne leaned back in his chair. He was too old a hand to make the mistake of lowering his terms. "I think we might perhaps drop the discussion," he said amiably. "You know how it stands. One hundred thousand to be paid to me here and the concession to be signed directly I cable that it's done. I take one-fourth of the ordinary shares or nothing."

"You're a hard man, Arthur," sighed Palton. "Have you got the contract?"

"I'm a business man—that's all. I've got four copies all made out, and we'll sign 'em presently. You can pay the money over to my bank in the morning."

. . . . . .

A waiter placed a card in front of him. He looked at it frowningly for a moment and then nodded. "Show him into my sitting-room in five minutes." He held the card in his hand as the servant left, and turned with a smile to his guests. "This happens rather opportunely. I don't suppose any of you can tell me the etiquette of the occasion. It's a little matter of blackmail."

"Some one ferreted out the black pages of your past, Arthur?" said Dalgaren. "Or is it a woman?"

"Neither," said Coyne. "It is a gentleman who apparently holds an official position here." He read from the card: "Detective-Inspector J. C. Ansoll, Criminal Investigation Department."

Dainton whistled. Palton readjusted his eye-glasses. "Do you really mean that this police officer is trying to blackmail you?"

The "con" man nodded. "He's got wind of this concession business somehow—just enough to make him believe there's something fishy. He came to see me this morning, and threatened to tell you all the horrid details, Palton. It was an awkward fix, because, though I didn't mind him going to you, I did not want the scheme talked about till everything was watertight. Publicity might have killed it. So I temporised—told him to come back some other time and we'd talk it over." He spoke with just the right air of amused irritability.

"I say, this is serious," said Dainton. "A detective officer levying blackmail. We'll have to do something, you know. The Home Secretary——"

"Do what you like after we've got the concession," said Coyne. "We can't do anything till then—though we might give him a scare—what? Look here, if you three conceal yourselves, it would be a good idea to have him in here. When he learns that there have been witnesses to his attempt——"

"We can shut him up till the deal goes through," said Dalgaren. "I think that's the right idea. What about those portières for you, Dainton? Palton, you might take the window—and the screen will do me."

"That's splendid," agreed Coyne. "I hadn't arranged this little entertainment for you folk, but it ought to amuse you.

Now, green lights. Enter the villain—or, rather, I'll go and fetch him."

No one of the three concealed gentlemen could have supposed that their host was filled with contemptuous amusement as he left the room. He chuckled as he received the waiting inspector.

"Gad, Freddie, you're a wonder. If I didn't know, I'd think you were the real thing. Come along."

Ansoll obeyed with docility. As they passed into the dining-room he straightened his shoulders. "You'll guess what I've come about," he said.

"I've a sort of idea," said Coyne imperturbably. "I think you've got the wrong man. However"—he thrust his hands in his trouser's pockets—"what's your price?"

There was nothing forced about Ansoll's grin. He had caught a movement beneath one of the portière curtains. "I fancy you are making a little mistake," he said pleasantly. "You can't buy me off. I am a police-officer, as you know, and it is my duty to tell you that unless you can give a satisfactory explanation of certain facts that have come to my knowledge, I shall take you into custody on a charge of attempted fraud. You understand that you are not obliged to answer any questions."

Three lines bit vertically into Coyne's forehead. He regretted there had not been a more complete rehearsal of the scene they were now playing. Somehow it was running off the lines.

"Fire ahead," he said.

"You claim to be able to obtain a concession to build a railway across certain districts of Chili, but that, prior to obtaining the necessary signatures, a deposit of £100,000 must be paid to you."

"That is right."

"You have practically induced three gentlemen to entrust you with that deposit?"

"Well?" Coyne meditatively surveyed a well-fitting dress shoe.

"I have to-day received information that it is not and never has been contemplated to grant a concession—that the Chilian authorities know nothing about it."

"I suppose," said Coyne, "that all this beating about the bush is for a purpose. You want me to pay to keep your mouth shut. Would you like me to write a cheque?"

"Not exactly," laughed Ansoll. "I would like you to prove to me that this is no fraud. Otherwise——"

"Otherwise?"

Ansoll stepped to the door. "Jimmie," he called softly. And then to Coyne: "I think, Wolf, if you tell these gentlemen who are so interested in our little conversation to come out, we can drop the curtain on this farce. You see, Freddie has let you down."

Not often in his career had Wolf Coyne been taken at a loss. It took him a full second to realise that it was Ansoll in reality and not Flash Freddie. He stared unbelievingly at the detective.

"Hell!" he muttered. "Hell!"

Then he was galvanised into action. With a couple of strides he cleared the room, jerked the amazed Palton from his hiding-place, and turned the handle of the inner door. But Jimmie Cotterill and Ansoll moved as quickly. They flung themselves upon him and pulled him back. Both were powerful men, but Coyne was no less no, and he was driven desperate. They surged, a tangled mass of humanity, over the soft carpet, the two officers in grim silence, the "con" man cursing fearfully.

Dainton flung himself into the fray, and received a kick in the face that sent him half-stunned into the fireplace. Ansoll spat out a tooth and took a fresh grip on the place where the collar of Coyne's dress-coat had been. Cotterill, with his knee momentarily on the "con" man's chest, succeeded in adjusting one cuff of the handcuffs. A second later the flying other end caught him in the mouth.

"Aw," he gurgled, and clenched a fist.

"None of that, Jimmie," ordered Ansoll sharply, and the sergeant, who had lost sight of the tradition of the Metropolitan Police, stayed his blow. Two minutes later he got the prisoner's wrists together and the handcuffs clicked again.

Ansoll stood up, breathing heavily. "I'm not so young as I was," he sighed. "In the old days I'd have enjoyed a scrap like that." He wiped the blood from his lip. "Now, gentlemen, if you'll follow us on to King Street police station I shall be grateful. You can reckon that this job has saved you at least £100,000."

* * * * *

To three disillusioned men Ansoll vouchsafed explanations in his office. "You gentlemen," he said, "don't think yourselves in the same class as a countryman who buys a pawn ticket for a gold watch outside Waterloo Station. Yet, except that it was a concession instead of a pawn ticket, it's just the same old game that this crook down below has played on you. They say it's better to be born lucky than rich.

"We had Wolf Coyne tipped off to us when he came across. Now, he's a free-born American citizen, and there's no law that we could use against him, though we were pretty sure he had something up his sleeve. He just laughed when I warned him off.

"Of course, we kept a pretty strict eye on him. We couldn't do anything till he overstepped the law, but we were just watching for a chance. The awkward thing was that we didn't know in just what direction his talents would break out. We could only wait and watch, and the longer we waited the more evident it was that it was a big thing.

"Now, though we could learn nothing of the stunt—all of you took pretty good care to keep that secret—we worried Wolf. He knew that we were right on his heels, and it got on his nerves. You see he was alarmed lest we should get a hint to put you wise

(*Continued on page* xii.)

# The Case of the RAVENCAR RUBY

## The Strange & Remarkable Exploits of CAFAX BAINES

CARFAX BAINES walked to the window and looked absently down into Villiers Street, where the usual double tides of pedestrians were hurrying to and from the District station. It was five o'clock of a sultry June afternoon, and the room was very close; the visitor's hand shook as he drew his handkerchief across his brow; his face was haggard with distress and anxiety.

"I am afraid there has been foul play!" he said hoarsely.

"This is a most remarkable story, Mr. Barwell," replied the detective, evading a direct answer. "If made public, it would create a sensation in London. I am not sure, however, that you are wise in keeping it from the press."

"The papers will get hold of it by to-night or to-morrow, for my father's absence from court to-day must arouse suspicion. This morning, you know, he was to have delivered his decision in regard to the Ravencar ruby."

"Yes, I remember the case," assented Baines. "Lord Ravencar, owing to pecuniary difficulties, applied for permission to sell the family ruby, a large and valuable stone. He had been offered ten thousand pounds for it by Mr. Einstein, of Hatton Garden. Well, Lord Ravencar must wait and have patience. But pardon me for drifting from the subject. I want to run over the facts again, and if I am wrong at any point, please correct me. Your father, Justice Sir James Barwell, was visiting a friend at Darton Hall, in the southern part of Derbyshire. You had gone with him, and your mother was in Paris with her sister. Last night yourself and Mr. Darton and family dined with a neighbour five miles away. Your father had been invited, but as he was feeling slightly indisposed, he remained at home. He was missing when you returned at midnight, and this was accounted for by a wire from Paris to the effect that Lady Barwell had been taken suddenly ill. Your father also left a brief note stating that he had just time to catch the 11.40 London train from Dalewood station, which was within half a mile of the Hall, and suggesting that you should follow him in the morning. He must have opened the door himself to the boy who brought the message, for the servants had gone to bed, and knew nothing of the matter. And he presumably walked to the station, because he would have missed the train had he waited to order a carriage."

"That covers the ground exactly," replied Mr. Barwell. "I had no suspicion at the time, and you may imagine how distressed I was to learn of my mother's illness. There was no train to town until nine o'clock the next morning, so I had to spend the night at Darton Hall. It was not until daybreak, when I rose, that the idea of foul play occurred to me. I remembered the man Lampson, the troublesome litigant, whose claim to a large estate was decided against him ten days ago, and who then wrote a threatening letter to my father, who tried the case. I knew that he had gone abroad to escape the consequences of that act, and that he was a revengeful man. Instead of taking the nine o'clock train to London—it was too late, anyway, for the morning boat to Calais—I cabled to Paris, and waited until the answer came. My mother was quite well, and she had sent no message. My suspicion was now a certainty. I made sure that the cablegram had come through the proper sources, and I ascertained at Dalewood station that several passengers had booked by the 11.40 train the previous night, one of whom answered to the description of my father. Then I travelled to town, laid the matter before Scotland Yard, and subsequently came to you. I was not satisfied to trust entirely to the police. I wanted better talent and skill.'

"I fear that you are disposed to overrate my abilities," said the detective. "Did you make inquiries at St. Pancras and the other stations?"

"Yes; but to no purpose. There can be no doubt, however, that my father is on his way to Paris. My mother will let me know at once whether or not he arrives at the Gare du Nord this evening. If not——"

"You did not cable to him at Calais?"

"No; I never thought of that. How stupid of me!"

"And you think that the man Lampson sent the bogus cablegram—that he was aware of your mother's presence in Paris, and knew of your father's address in Derbyshire?"

"What else can I believe under the circumstances?"

"True. The case looks black."

"As black as can be. God help my father if he has fallen into any trap laid for him by that scoundrel Lampson!"

Baines nodded gravely. He favoured his visitor's theory, and he was of opinion that by morning, before the police could do anything in the matter, the public would have disastrous news of the missing judge. Young Mr. Barwell was in great distress, but he finally cheered up a little and went away, promising to let the detective know directly he heard from Paris.

"This is a case for Scotland Yard," reflected Baines, "and I had better leave it to them. However, I will decide that after I hear from young Barwell. It is quite on the cards that his father will turn up at the Gare du Nord."

He lit his pipe, and had just settled himself in a big basket-chair, when another visitor was announced, this time a very pretty and stylishly dressed young woman. She did not give her name, but when she entered the room and lifted her veil, the detective recognised a face that had often looked at him from the pages of illustrated papers.

"Miss Violet Silverton?" he said.

"Then you know me!" the girl exclaimed. "Yes, I am Violet Silverton I am in great trouble, Mr. Baines. I did not know who else to come to. I dared not go to the police. Oh, do help me!" Her voice grew hysterical, half-sobbing; tears started to her eyes, and rolled down her suspiciously brilliant cheeks. "I have been robbed," she went on. "It was something of great value—I borrowed it from my friend Mr. Shadrach to wear at a dance. And when I lost it I wrote to him that I was going to Paris for a week, and he is over there now looking for me. He may return any day! What shall I do? I must have it before he comes back. And I can't find the other man—the one who took me to the dance. I am sure he is the thief. That is why I sent Mr. Shadrach away—to gain time. I was afraid to tell him the truth."

Miss Silverton sank breathlessly into a chair; she glanced appealingly at the detective through her tears.

"Which Mr. Shadrach do you refer to?" he asked.

"Mr. Lemuel Shadrach, the money-lender," was the reply.

"Ah, so that is the man! I want to know all about this matter, Miss Silverton. Compose yourself, and try to speak plainly and coherently."

The story that the girl told, and the subsequent cross-questioning and conversation, took up the best part of an hour. When she rose to go she was smiling sweetly and hopefully.

"You really think you can recover it?" she asked.

"I think I can find the man," the detective replied, "and there is little doubt that he is the thief. You are sure your companion was Jimmy Cope, and that he had a scar over one eye?"

"Yes, perfectly sure."

"Well, I know what to do, then. I will see you in the morning; don't forget the time and place. Good-evening, Miss Silverton."

Baines closed the door on his visitor, and listened to her little feet tripping down the stairs. He laughed softly, and there was a gleam of infinite satisfaction in her eyes.

"Was there ever so remarkable a coincidence?" he said to himself "I believe I have struck a big thing, thanks to Miss Violet Silverton, of the Hilarity Theatre. And now to fit the links together."

He took down a file of newspapers from a rack, and quickly found the three-days'-old paragraph that he was looking for. It ran as follows:

"Mr. Lemuel Shadrach, the money-lender, was violently assaulted at his house in Golden Square last night by a young man of gentlemanly appearance, who was taken in charge by the police. At Great Marlborough Street he gave the name of Smith, and was locked up. As Mr. Shadrach did not appear against him in the morning, he was liberated on payment of a fine."

"The name of Smith," reflected Baines, "often covers a multitude of sins."

He was likely to have a busy evening, and he prepared for it by going out and dining in the Strand. Then he took a cab and drove to Great Marlborough Street police-station, where he speedily satisfied himself of the identity of the mysterious Mr. Smith. It is not unusual for a prisoner's real name, although known, to be withheld from publication. The detective next paid a visit to the house of Mr. Shadrach, in Golden Square. A young man with a shrewd Jewish face cautiously opened the door to the extent of six inches.

"When do your master and his friend return from Paris?" Baines inquired.

"Can't tell you," was the reply, which involved a tacit admission that Mr. Shadrach had not travelled alone.

"Will you give me his address?"

"I—I don't know it. Who shall I say called, sir?"

"Mr. Smith," the detective answered humorously, as he turned away. "That young man has not had much practice in the art of lying," he added to himself. "He can be depended upon to communicate anything of importance to his master."

A hansom whirled Baines to Scotland Yard, where he was closeted for fifteen minutes, making inquiries concerning a certain Jimmy Cope, known by half a dozen other names, who was of such importance in his way that the police kept a secret supervision on his movements. The information was satisfactory, and Baines walked back to Villiers Street. The following tele-

gram from young Mr. Barwell was waiting for him:

Have just heard that my father did not arrive at the Gare du Nord. I am leaving for Dover, and may go on to Paris. Do all you can.

"I have done a good bit already," mused Baines, "and I don't think the finish is far off. But the outlook is very black for Sir James Barwell."

The detective had one more card to play that night. It was now between eleven and twelve o'clock. He rapidly changed his clothes and altered his features, then drove in a cab to a very quiet and secluded night club not far from Tottenham Court Road. He had no difficulty in persuading the custodian at the door to admit him—not many places in London were barred to him—and he was soon ushered into a scene of dancing and revelry, music and laughter, where corks were popping incessantly. He strolled amid the crowd of both sexes, keeping his eyes cocked, and finally he seated himself at one side of a small table. On the other side, with a big cigar in his mouth and a bottle of champagne before him, was a flashily dressed gentleman of handsome and sinister aspect; a heavy black moustache curled over his mouth, and a faint scar was visible above his left eye.

Baines leant across the table, and spoke a few words in a slow, well-modulated voice. The effect on the stranger was startling. His face turned a sickly grey, then reddened with anger. His eyes blazed ominously, and the cigar fell from his lips.

"I don't know anything about it," he muttered.

**Then he foolishly opened the door and jumped out, falling down an embankment and sustained severe injuries to his head.**

"Come, that won't do, Cope. I'll wager you have it on you.'

"I never saw it; the woman lies."

As he spoke, the man's right hand slipped behind him.

"None of that!" the detective said sharply. "Don't be a fool. Will you fork over, or do you prefer to go to Bow Street with me? You ought to be grateful for the chance."

The man swore bitterly under his breath.

"You are a bold one to come here," he snarled. "I have plenty of pals about."

"And I have two Scotland Yard men in the room, and a brace of pistols in my pockets," said Baines, with calm assurance. "The game is dead against you; make haste and decide."

Mr. James Cope yielded to the inevitable, but with a very bad grace.

"I'll remember you for this," he muttered, with a villainous scowl.

A small case, covered with green morocco, was slipped under the table and into the detective's hand. He lowered his eyes and opened it, then snapped the lid shut and rose.

"Take my advice, Jimmy, and don't fool with actresses," he said quietly, as he turned and strolled from the room.

Well content with what he had achieved, and with a grateful corner in his heart for the attractive young dancer of the Hilarity, Baines went home to bed. He did not sleep very soundly, and when he rose at six o'clock his first thought was of the matter that had disturbed his rest. He tore open his morning paper, and read a full and complete account of the mysterious disappearance of Sir James Barwell, which had been tardily divulged to the press. The fate of the missing judge was still unknown, and no certain trace of him had been discovered at any stage of his presumed journey from Derbyshire to Paris. The man Lampson was suspected, and the Continental police, as well as the Scotland Yard people, were searching for him.

Baines hurried through his breakfast, and at seven o'clock he met Violet Silverton by appointment in Charing Cross station. He gave her a glimpse of the green morocco case, and her face grew radiant with relief and happiness. For five minutes they conversed in whispers.

"You understand now," the detective concluded. "There is no time to lose. Take a cab to Golden Square, and tell Shadrach's clerk to wire immediately to his master that you are in London, and that all is well."

"I'll see that Ikey does it. And what about the——"

"I'll take care of that, my dear young woman," the detective interrupted. "Be content with my promise that you sha'n't come to any harm. You have been playing with fire, and you might have burnt yourself very badly."

Miss Silverton was aware of that fact, and she knew enough of the game and of its serious nature to be trusted to do as she was bid, regardless of the consequences to her money-lending friend. By eight o'clock Baines had sure knowledge that the cablegram had been sent to Mr. Lemuel Shadrach. The day was now before him, and the time dragged heavily. By seven o'clock in the evening there was no fresh news of the missing judge, and at that hour the detective and Inspector Flint, of Scotland Yard, drove to Victoria Station. The weather had turned chilly and foggy, and a persistent drizzle of rain was falling.

At half-past seven the two minions of the law stood on the long, dreary platform, and close by were two four-wheelers which they had especially engaged. The train from Dover was behind time, but at ten minutes to eight it rolled into the station. A moment's of anxious suspense, and then Mr. Lemuel Shadrach stepped out of a first-class carriage in company with a tall, good-looking young man, with a blonde moustache, whose patrician features were haggard and pale in the gaslight.

The double arrest was performed quickly and without attracting attention. Before the Jew could utter more than a word of protest, he was bundled into one of the four-wheelers by Inspector Flint. Baines tapped the younger man on the shoulder.

"I am a 'detective," he said. "You know what I want you for, Mr. Algernon Ravencar. I warn you not to incriminate yourself, but I think you had better confess what you have done with Sir James Barwell."

The Honourable Algernon Ravencar was speechless, as a man stunned by a heavy blow. He bit his lip hard as he reeled into the four-wheeler. Baines followed him, closing the door, and the vehicle rattled out of the station into the noisy streets.

"How much do you know?" the prisoner demanded hoarsely.

"Everything," replied Baines, "except the whereabouts of the judge."

He proved his assertion by a few cutting sentences.

"I'm done for!" groaned the Honourable Algernon. "But I never touched Sir James, never laid eyes on him, and that's gospel truth. I sent the wire, I admit, but I didn't watch for him at the Gare du Nord, because we were too busy hunting for the girl. I took it for granted that he arrived in Paris last night, and I never knew that he was missing till I read it in a paper coming up from Dover."

The detective's belief was shaken, and he was staggered by the prisoner's earnest protestations, mystified by the unexpected turn the affair had taken. He had not counted on this.

"I believe you are telling the truth," he said reluctantly; "but that doesn't mend matters if any disaster has happened to Sir James Barwell, for in that case you would still be responsible. You are in a bad scrape."

"I hope nothing has happened to him. I am ruined, under any circumstances. By heavens, what a fool I have been!"

Without any persuasion on the detective's part, Algernon Ravencar went on to make a full confession of his wrong-doing, and as he finished a newsboy's raucous shout rang from the pavement:

"Extry! Extry piper! Lost judge found!"

"By Jove, do you hear that?" cried the prisoner.

Baines stopped the cab and bought a paper. He examined it eagerly as the

vehicle drove on, and then read aloud the following paragraph, headed by a flaring announcement:

"Sir James Barwell, the missing judge, has been found at a cottage near Tordale Station, in Derbyshire, on the Midland line, where he has been lying unconscious for nearly twenty-four hours. He is reported to be not dangerously injured. The affair is as yet enveloped in mystery."

"That will need a bit of clearing up," muttered the detective, as he tossed the paper aside.

"Found in Derbyshire!" exclaimed the Honourable Algernon, in a bewildered tone. "Then he never started for Paris!"

Twenty minutes later the two prisoners occupied cells at Bow Street police-station, and Baines was on his way alone to the residence of Lord Ravencar, in Down Street, Piccadilly. He sent in his card, and was speedily conducted to the presence of his lordship and another man, whom he recognised as Mr. Einstein, the well-known jewel dealer of Hatton Garden. It was evident from their startled faces that something was amiss.

"Your visit is more than opportune," said Lord Ravencar, as he fingered the detective's card. "I am in great distress——"

"I think that I can guess the cause of it, my lord. Does it concern the Ravencar ruby?"

"It does. I have just discovered that the jewel has been stolen within the last three weeks, and a false stone put in its place."

"A wretched imitation!" added Mr. Einstein.

"Is this an imitation?" Baines asked coolly, as he drew the green morocco case from his pocket and snapped it open, displaying a glorious jewel that flashed a halo of crimson flame. His companions bent over it eagerly.

"It is the original ruby!" they cried together.

His lordship's countenance was a study of emotions.

"What am I to understand by this?" he exclaimed confusedly. "Are you a wizard, Mr. Baines? Who stole the jewel? How did you get possession of it?"

A slight shrug of the shoulders and a sidelong glance were not wasted on Lord Ravencar, and he led the detective promptly to an adjoining room.

"Now speak!" he commanded.

Baines did so. His was a painful duty, but he did not hesitate to perform it. He knew that it would be better to forestall the inevitable publicity of the press. Briefly and concisely, link by link, he told the sad story. The initial announcement that his brother was the guilty man gave Lord Ravencar a tremendous shock, and he had recourse to a glass of brandy.

"Your carelessness was partly to blame," the detective went on. "Instead of placing the family jewels at your bank, you kept them in a safe in your bedroom. Some of them your wife wore occasionally, but never the ruby. Your brother was aware of these facts, and he remembered them in his hour of temptation. He had apartments here in your house, and could come and go as he pleased. He was a young man of dissipated and extravagant habits, with an income that fell far short of his expenditure, though he had expectations from a great-aunt who had declared her intention of making him her heir. Plunged heavily in debt by losses incurred on the racecourse and at the gaming-table, Algernon forged your name to a bill and got the money for it from Lemuel Shadrach; his aunt was in poor health, and he expected to get her fortune at an early date. But Shadrach discovered the forgery, and threatened immediate exposure.

"Then your brother bethought himself of the ruby. He was in Paris at the time, and at the Palais Royal he bought an imitation stone that was likely to deceive anyone but an expert. He came home, opened your safe—he knew the combination—and substituted the false jewel for the real one. He took this to Shadrach, with some trumped-up story of getting it from his aunt. The Jew was credulous. He accepted the stone as security, destroyed the forged bill, and lent Algernon more money on his own signature. Algernon went off on a yachting trip, and returned to find that during his absence Mr. Einstein had appraised the ruby, that you had applied to the court for permission to sell it, and that Justice Barwell was to render a decision within a few days. What was to be done now? Any hour the theft might be discovered, and that would certainly happen as soon as the judge rendered an affirmative decision. Your brother went to Shadrach, confessed the whole thing, and vowed that unless the ruby was given back to him he would implicate the Jew in the crime. But the stone was no longer in Shadrach's possession, and that was the cause of the quarrel. On the previous day he had loaned it to an actress, with whose charms he was smitten, to wear at a dance at night. The woman—I won't mention her name—was robbed of the stone while going home with her escort. The next morning she wrote to Shadrach saying that she was just leaving for a week's trip to Paris, and that she would give him the ruby when she returned. Your brother and Shadrach went in pursuit of her, and it was while they were engaged in the search, and hopeful of finding her, that Algernon conceived the idea of delaying the legal decision. But I will come to that later. The woman, as you will have guessed, had not gone to Paris; that was merely a ruse to get Shadrach out of the way for a time."

The rest of the story need not be repeated, as it is familiar to the reader. Baines explained the decoy cablegram, by which the conspirators hoped to gain another day or two. He told how the actress had

come to him for assistance, and how he had recovered the ruby from the notorious criminal, whose identity he had suspected as soon as he heard that he passed by the name of Jimmy Cope. So the chain was completed, link by link, and Lord Ravencar listened to the bitter end.

"Poor Algernon!" he exclaimed. "Is there no way to save him—to avoid a public scandal and disgrace?"

"I fear not," the detective answered gravely. "Your brother must suffer the consequences of his folly. You have my sympathy, my lord. I bid you good-night."

He bowed and left the room.

The next day an account of Sir James Barwell's adventures appeared in the press. It seemed that he lost his way in the darkness when he left Darton Hall, crossed the railway several times, and finally reached the station at the wrong side, just as a north-bound train was pulling out. He hastily got into one of the carriages, and did not discover his mistake until he had been carried thirty or forty miles. Then he foolishly opened the door and jumped out, falling down an embankment and sustained severe injuries to his head. It was at a lonely spot, and he lay unconscious in some bushes until the following morning, when he was found by a labourer going to work, and removed to a cottage in the vicinity. Within two or three days he recovered sufficiently to be brought to London, and he was soon as well as ever.

The Honourable Algernon Ravencar was admitted to heavy bail, but he fled the country before the date fixed for his trial, and is now a lonely and wretched outcast somewhere in the colonies. Lemuel Shadrach was ultimately discharged from custody, as there was not sufficient evidence to convict him of sending the false cablegram. As for the ruby that was the cause of all the trouble, it is still in the possession of Lord Ravencar; for the great-aunt, having altered her will in favour of the elder brother, opportunely died and left him the sum of thirty thousand pounds, which relieved him of his pecuniary difficulties.

THE END.

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**"THE 'CON' MAN"**—*Cont. from p.* vi.

before he got his hooks on the money. He actually stood in Bond Street this morning and threatened me with a pistol. When he found that didn't work he tried something else.

"He sent for a man named Mullins—Flash Fred—who was an actor before he took to drink and went on the cross. That gave us our first hold. When Freddie left the hotel we followed him, caught him up after a while, and made him drunk. There was very little Sherlock Holmes work in this, I can tell you.

"Well, first we made him drunk and then we got his goat. It all came out like drawing a cork from a bottle. The scheme had all the marks of Coyne's genius. First of all, he wanted to increase your confidence in him. And secondly, lest I should get a line on him, he was to destroy your faith in me. Freddie was to make up to resemble me and then to put up a blackmail show with you three gentlemen in unimpeachable positions as witnesses. Clever, wasn't it? Supposing I'd found out afterwards, and come to you with a story that Coyne was cheating you, would you have believed me? To make the blackmail convincing, he had to entrust Freddie with rough points of the scheme, and that gave us enough to work on.

"We cabled the chief of police at Valparaiso, and got in touch with the Chilian Ministry here——"

"But," interrupted Dainton, "he told us that for reasons of secrecy this matter of the concesion was being conducted direct from headquarters. There was a matter of a—er—bonus."

"Bribery, in plain English. The old 'con' stuff. When you buy a brass ring you have to keep quiet because it's been stolen from Streeters. Anyway, that stopped you making inconvenient inquiries here. As I was saying, there was never any idea of a concession. A week after you'd made over your cheques you'd have looked in vain for your Mr. Arthur. He'd got a pal in Valparaiso who sent the cables that kept you keen, and his other papers are forgeries.

"Well, that's all. We rearranged things a little, and I took the principal part instead of Freddie."

"I wish, Mr. Ansoll," said Palton drily, "you had chosen some other method. For men in the public positions of ourselves it will be a little—ah—humiliating to have to confess how we were duped."

"Why," smiled Ansoll, "that's exactly why I did it. Wolf has had too long a run to escape again because—forgive me—three suckers hate to tell how close they came to being stung."

THE END.

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**BEGINNING NEXT WEEK IN THIS STORY SECTION**

## The Adventures of MERVYN HUME,

**Crime Reporter and Newspaper Sleuth of "The Daily Wire," in a Grand Opening Story:—**

## "THE MANIAC OF BROXHAM GARDENS!"

(*Continued from page* 14.)

Handforth flung off his tunic, tossed his cap away, and grasped the pick. He commenced work with enormous energy. Pitt winked at De Valerie, and De Valerie winked at Pitt. They had an idea that Handforth would get active once he had been diplomatically prodded.

He worked famously.

In fact, he laboured so hard that his own part of the trench grew deeper and deeper, while all the other fellows grinned as they went steadily on. But Handforth was not scientific.

His chief aim was to make the trench as deep as possible. And he quite overlooked the fact that it was necessary to dig straight down. He seemed to be making a kind of cavern, and after about twenty minutes he was toiling with his head only just above the surface. The gravelly soil was surprisingly easy to work. Once loosened with the pick it could be shovelled out without any difficulty.

But everything has its drawbacks.

The ground, being so soft and crumbly, it naturally required props of some kind in case of undermining. And that's what Handforth was doing, although he didn't seem to be aware of it.

But he was quite aware of it two minutes later.

There was a sudden crumbling of the earth on all sides. A good many juniors scuttled away, yelling out a warning. At the exact moment Handforth was bending down filling his shovel.

Handforth vanished.

The trench caved in, and sand and gravel descended upon Handforth in a great cascade. He had been there a second before, but he was not there now. That particular section of the trench was a wreck. And Handforth was buried in the debris.

The juniors were quite alarmed.

"Quick!" shouted Armstrong. "We shall have to dig him out! He'll suffocate! I knew the silly ass would get himself into trouble! We ought to have warned him——"

"He'll be all right; he's only just underneath!" said Pitt crisply. "Go easy, now. Handforth wouldn't be in a sweet temper if he got one of those shovels in his neck."

About a dozen cadets gathered round, excited and much concerned. Before they could commence the rescue work, however, there was a mighty disturbance of the gravel. It was like an earthquake—or, as Tommy Watson said, it reminded him of a mole coming to the surface.

The gravel parted, some hair appeared immediately followed by a red face. Handforth looked out upon the world. Only his head was free, it is true, but this was quite enough to bring relief to the other cadets.

"Great pip!" spluttered Handforth desperately. "I—I'm suffocated! I'm buried alive! Quick! Help me cut of this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cadets were so relieved that they could only laugh. There was something indescribably comic in the appearance of Handforth's head sticking out of the ground. The strength of his voice clearly proved that he wasn't hurt. But he was helpless.

"You—you callous rotters!" he gasped. "Standing there and laughing at me! Can't you see I'm dying? Another second and I should have pegged out! Gimme a hand out of this, you—you bounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that the way you dig a trench, Handy?" I inquired, as I came up.

"You—you rotter!" snorted Handforth. "You call yourself the commanding officer, and all you can do is to jeer! You can't even work! It's jolly nice to be a commander, and to strut about seeing others work!"

"Fat-head!" said Church. "Nipper's been doing more than anybody else!"

And then, just as we were about to get Handforth out, Archie Glenthorne strolled along. He paused, adjusted his monocle, and beamed.

"Well, dash it all!" he remarked. "I mean to say, a really priceless scheme! The last word in the good old health business—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean to say, having a bath in the old earth, and all that sort of thing!" went on Archie. "Rather a ripping improvement on the mud bath, laddies. Not so dashed dirty——"

"You—you brainless lunatic!" howled Handforth. "Do you think I did this on purpose?"

"Gadzooks!" exclaimed Archie. "Now, that's dashed queer, don't you know! A perfectly priceless mistake on my part—what? The fact is, old fruit, I had a bright idea that you were disporting yourself in the old gravel as a kind of recreation. Sorrow! It appears that Archie was mistaken. I gather that you fell in by accident. How baily ghastly! I mean to say, you appear to be in a somewhat poisonous predic.!"

"Absolutely!" grinned Pitt.

"Are you going to dig me out or not?" roared Handforth furiously. "Look here, I'll give you fair warning! As soon as you've got me out, I'll punch every one of you to pulp! I'll slaughter the lot!"

"You will?" said Bob Christine.

"Yes, I will!"

"Then I think we'd better leave you where you are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors turned away, careless of Handforth's fate.

"I—I say!" gasped Edward Oswald—"I—I didn't mean that! I won't punch your noses——"

"You promise to be a good boy if we release you?" asked Pitt. "Do you give us your word that you'll behave like a nice little child?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Before work on Handforth's rescue was started, he had to give all sorts of ridiculous promises. It was very seldom that the juniors found him in such a helpless position, and they took advantage of it.

But, at last, Handforth was dug out. Trench-digging was not quite such an easy matter as he had seemed to imagine, and by the time he was free he wasn't very keen on punching anybody. He felt rather used up.

But, quite apart from joking, the work went on apace.

Before the afternoon was out the Cadet Corps had made excellent progress. The inner trenches were all planned out, and marked, and certain sections of them were in the process of making.

I could see that after a few spells of work the whole defence line would begin to take definite shape. I kept the fellows hard at it until the gathering dusk forbade any further work.

I had a good reason for this.

I didn't want Miss Trumble—or anyone else—to see exactly how far we'd progressed. Because I should have a big gang at work during the night. I was pleased, therefore, that none of the mistresses came along to see how the trench-digging was progressing.

A big start had been made. The first big step had been taken, and before very long the rebellion itself would be a reality.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SECRET WORKERS!

"WONDERFUL!" Bob Christine spoke enthusiastically. There was a tone of admiration in his voice, too. He was standing close against the old barn behind Little Side, and several other cadets were with him, including myself.

It was evening, and the dusk was beginning to gather. Work was over for the afternoon; but this afternoon was a week following the day on which we had commenced operations.

Yes, a week had passed.

A strenuous, hard-working week such as the Remove had never previously known. Afterwards, the fellows hardly knew how they had got through that period.

For life had been well nigh intolerable.

During lesson times the Remove had suffered in silence, suffered at the hands of Miss Teezer, suffered at the hands of Miss Babbidge, suffered at the hands of Miss Trumble. In every petty way possible the schoolmistresses had interfered with the liberties of the juniors.

And the Remove had been meek—the Remove had taken everything lying down. I was proud of the fellows for the wonderful restraint they displayed. Any show of rebellion at this point would have been fatal, for it would have told Miss Trumble that we were not as docile and spiritless as we appeared to be. And once a suspicion crept into her mind, that suspicion would grow.

No, the Remove acted magnificently.

It accepted the insults, the indignities, and the humiliations without any outward sign of protest. Even Handforth, by a superhuman effort, made himself out to be a worm. The Remove, in fact, was composed of worms. The fellows crawled about, and allowed themselves to be walked on.

All the mistresses had the impression that we were cowed. Miss Trumble had an idea that she could do anything she liked, and the Remove would not have the spirit to object. And this, of course was just the very impression that we wanted her to have.

Without boasting, I think I can safely say that I was largely responsible for this satisfactory state of affairs. It was not until now that I realised how much work I had done. Without my constant presence the other fellows would never have stood the strain.

At every available opportunity I had told the fellows to keep it up—to hold out at all costs. Fifty times a day I had been obliged to remind them of what there was at stake. And I told them, too, that the reward was near at hand. To spoil it all now would be a calamity.

And so the Remove had heeded me—and the fellows had allowed the Headmistress and the Housemistress and the Formmistress to domineer to their hearts' content. Never before had the Remove realised the utter impossibility of petticoat rule, for these women took advantage of the Remove's humility.

Instead of being satisfied that we were tamed, they pressed their advantage at every opportunity. Seeing that we took things so meekly, they grew into the habit of humiliating the Remove at every possible opportunity. And the rest of the school looked on—wondering, and somewhat disgusted. But there were plenty of fellows who had suspicions, too. They knew the Remove—and they guessed that something was brewing.

And now, after this nightmare-like week, our preparations were nearly completed. That was why we felt so content as we stood by the old barn in the dusk, looking at the result of our handiwork.

And how we had worked! Not only on half-holidays, but every afternoon, immediately following lessons. The Cadet Corps had been a kind of craze—and Miss Trumble had suspected nothing. She little realised what all this activity meant. She was, in fact, pleased.

She considered our operations to be quite harmless, and we were kept nicely out of mischief.

"Yes, there's no doubt about it, it's wonderful!" declared Bob Christine again. "I didn't think we should be able to do as much as this in a week, you know."

"It's surprising what you can do once

you start?" remarked Reginald Pitt. "And don't forget that everybody was enthusiastic about this. Why, they never had a finer trench system on the battlefront during the war! It's complete in every detail."

I nodded.

"Yes, we only need a few finishing touches now," I said. "And we'll put those finishing touches on to-night. We've got to get some ammunition ready, too. In about three days from now we shall be ready for the big event."

"Can't we declare war before then?" asked De Valerie.

"Well, I hardly think so," I replied. "You see, there's a good lot to be done. We've got several good dugouts ready, but they've got to be filled up with ammunition and supplies. There's the water supply to think of, too—and the food."

"But we're going to fetch the food in to-morrow night.

"Yes, I know," I said. "Well, there's just a chance that we might be able to rush things. But that's just what we want to avoid. We've been patient so far, so we'd better be patient a bit longer."

"What about the water supply?" asked Pitt.

"It's very fortunate for us that the creek runs at the bottom of the meadow," I replied. "Out in that direction we've carried the trenches so far that the creek runs right through our system of defences. And the water's as pure as anybody could wish for—perfect spring water, crystal and clear. There's nothing to worry about in that direction. We've only got to make the defences a bit more secure at the bottom of the meadow."

"And the food?"

"I've got all my plans cut and dried."

"By jingo! You're a bit of a marvel, Nipper!" declared Bob Christine. "If it hadn't been for you, we could never have carried this scheme out. You've worked like a good 'un!"

"There's a good cause to work for," I replied. "This affair is going to be a kind of barring-out—and it'll be the best one we've ever had. There's something great about the whole thing."

"Rather!" agreed Pitt. "And before we've done, we'll have all the masters back. We'll fight for victory—we'll never surrender!"

"Never!" said Christine. "We know we've got a good cause, and that gives us all the more heart. I wonder where the masters are now? I wonder if they'll be ready to come back?"

"You bet they will," I replied. "They're taking a short holiday—they know they'll soon be required, and I don't suppose they're worrying a bit. The Head's in London, staying with some of his own relations."

"And what about Mr. Lee?" asked De Valerie.

"Oh, the guv'nor's busy on some detective case!" I grinned. "I had a letter from him this morning. I expect he thought he might as well make hay while the sun was shining. Mr. Lee's not the kind of man to sit down and do nothing, you know. But let's get indoors—we don't want to cause any comment by standing here too long."

Going indoors was not as attractive as it had been at one time.

There were no cosy studies to lounge in—no cheery tea-tables to gather round. We had to partake of tea in Hall, and after that there was nothing else to do but congregate in the common-room.

Of course, prep. had to be done in the Form-room—cold, bare, and cheerless. There was no comfort for the juniors nowadays.

We were only living for the Day.

And it would come almost at once—long before the end of the week. Our nights were made more interesting because many of us were active. Unknown to Miss Trumble and her colleagues, half the Remove had been active every night during the week which had just passed.

Batches of fellows had got up at ten. They had crept outside, making their way to the old barn. And there, in the moonlight, they had worked with a will at the trench-making. Not until two o'clock in the morning did these fellows stop—to go back to bed, tired out, but happy.

Fortune had been good to us.

We had had fine weather on every night except one. On this particular night a fine drizzle had been falling, but we had not stopped work on account of that. And just now there was a full moon. And this, of course, helped us to a very great extent.

Night working by moonlight was practically as good as labouring in the day. As soon as our eyes grew accustomed to the semi-gloom, we were able to get on with the job just as well.

To-night the Remove went to bed feeling particularly elated.

For at least thirty of us were to get up and put the finishing touches on the week's work.

Everything would then be ready.

There would be no more waiting.

The period of intolerable life would be over. We should be able to snap our fingers at Miss Trumble, and tell her to do her worst.

And we should have freedom—glorious freedom!

This was the thought which bucked all the fellows up more than anything else. There was no desire to call off. The Remove was solid. And the events of the week had made the barring-out more certain than ever before. To continue life at St. Frank's under the existing conditions was quite out of the question.

There was very little talk in the dormitory.

The juniors got to sleep as quickly as possible. For they could have two hours' rest before any work commenced.

Nobody would be ready to wake up—that

was certain. Left to themselves, the juniors would have slumbered peacefully and with no care for the labours that had to be done.

Everybody relied on me. I was regarded as a kind of alarm-clock And, sure enough, I could always go to sleep and wake up at ten almost to the minute. I never had any difficulty about that. It was one of the things that Nelson Lee had taught me. And, as the school clock was striking ten on this occasion, I sat up in bed, brisk and alert.

The dormitory was sound asleep.

Two minutes later it was very wide awake. I roused Pitt and De Valerie and Levi and Handforth, and they, in their turn, went from bed to bed rousing the others.

For any ordinary jape, or something of that nature, the juniors would have been reluctant to leave their beds—particularly in the middle of February. But now they all jumped out, eager and alert.

For their interest was keen upon this project. They were in it, heart and soul. And it was this which made me believe that success would certainly come. For determination is a great thing. It is half the battle.

"It's a lovely night, you chaps," I said softly. "Practically a full moon, and not a cloud. There's a touch of frost, too—and that'll make work all the brisker. Hustle up!"

"What's the programme for to-night?" asked Armstrong.

"We've got to finish the defences at the creek, and manufacture ammunition, and put the finishing touches to the inner defence line," I replied. "Then we shall be ready for the grub."

"Can't we get that in to-night, too?"

"Yes—if we're prepared to work until dawn," I replied "And then it would be a terrific rush. I don't think we'd better risk it. Let's be patient, and wait till to-morrow night for the final step."

"Nipper's right," said Pitt. "It's no good you fellows being impatient. Take the C.O.'s advice, and we'll be all serene."

"Hear, hear!"

The cadets were soon dressed—fifteen of us. Those juniors who had worked on the previous night were entitled to a full sleep to-night. That was the way we worked it. But many of them were eager enough to accompany us, and would have done so if I had given permission.

We left the dormitory by the shortest possible route. We were lowered from the window by means of a thick, knotted rope which we had smuggled upstairs for the purpose—and which we kept on the top of one of the big cupboards.



In the Triangle we met the College House batch.

Bob Christine was there, with eleven of his men. They had been waiting two or three minutes for us. And it was necessary to go easy, too, for the moonlight was bright, and we had to stick to the shadows.

It would be fatal to be seen now.

If Miss Trumble discovered us out of the dormitory she would immediately suspect—and during the last hours of our planning this would be nothing short of a catastrophe.

Fate would never be so unkind.

The juniors needed no warning. They spoke only in the faintest of whispers, and crept along like shadows in the deep gloom where the moonlight did not penetrate.

It took us about ten minutes to get out into Little Side—but it was worth this brief delay. For, of course, the hour was only just after ten, and none of the mistresses had retired for the night. In fact, a good few of the seniors were still in their studies.

Once out on Little Side, however, we were past all danger.

The hedges and the trees screened us from the school.

And any little noise that we made could not be heard in any of the school buildings. All the cadets, naturally, refrained from talking loudly, and they had got into the habit of working in silence.

By moonlight, the trench system looked very warlike.

The trenches themselves were not very wide, but they were deep enough for all purposes—well-cut, clean and tidy. There was practically no mud—although there would probably be some if any large amount of rain fell.

Not that mud would worry us in the least degree.

And having arrived on the field of operations, we wasted no time. Picks and shovels and other tools were got out of the barn, and the cadets started to work. There was something thrilling in this secret task.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SURPRISE!

ELEVEN o'clock boomed out solemnly.

We had been at work for nearly an hour, and were just getting into the swing of it. An extra trench was being made beyond the creek—so that our water supply should not be in any danger. The main thing was to safeguard ourselves from any possible method of attack.

Here and there, quite hidden in the trenches, there were cunningly-made little dug-outs—cave-like places where the cadets on duty would be able to seek shelter during rough weather.

For, once the war really started, the trenches would have to be manned continuously. And relaxation of vigilance might

mean disaster for us. And there would be many lulls in the storm—many quiet spells. These dug-outs would come in useful.

It was no good thinking of them afterwards. The only way was to prepare things well in advance.

All sorts of plans had to be made in connection with the barn, too. Fatty Little was quite busy with his own department. For days past he had been smuggling all sorts of pots and pans into the barn—so that they would be there in readiness when the time came. But Fatty's heart was made glad by the fact that Archie Glenthorne had helped in a wonderful way.

He was not much good when it came to trench digging, or anything equally strenuous. But Archie was blessed with a large supply of money that he didn't exactly know what to do with.

And a day or two ago he had sent an order into Bannington for numerous oil stoves, plates, dishes, knives and forks, and countless other necessary articles—to say nothing of numerous sets of saucepans and kettles and frying-pans. He had paid for these in advance.

And they were to be delivered secretly in the boat-house—fairly late on the following evening. It was not the shopkeeper's business to ask why this arrangement had been made. He certainly didn't care. He had got his money, and that was good enough for him. He didn't have orders like that every day.

As far as we could see, every possible thing had been done. There could be no hitch at the last moment.

And so, as we worked, we were all feeling particularly pleased with ourselves. One always has a sense of satisfaction when one is on the last lap—and a certain winner.

We felt that we were certain winners now.

And, of course, just then the disaster happened.

Disasters generally do happen like this. Just when a fellow is kidding himself that everything is smooth and bright, trouble comes along in considerable chunks, as Archie Glenthorne would put it.

Two chunks came along now—at eleven o'clock.

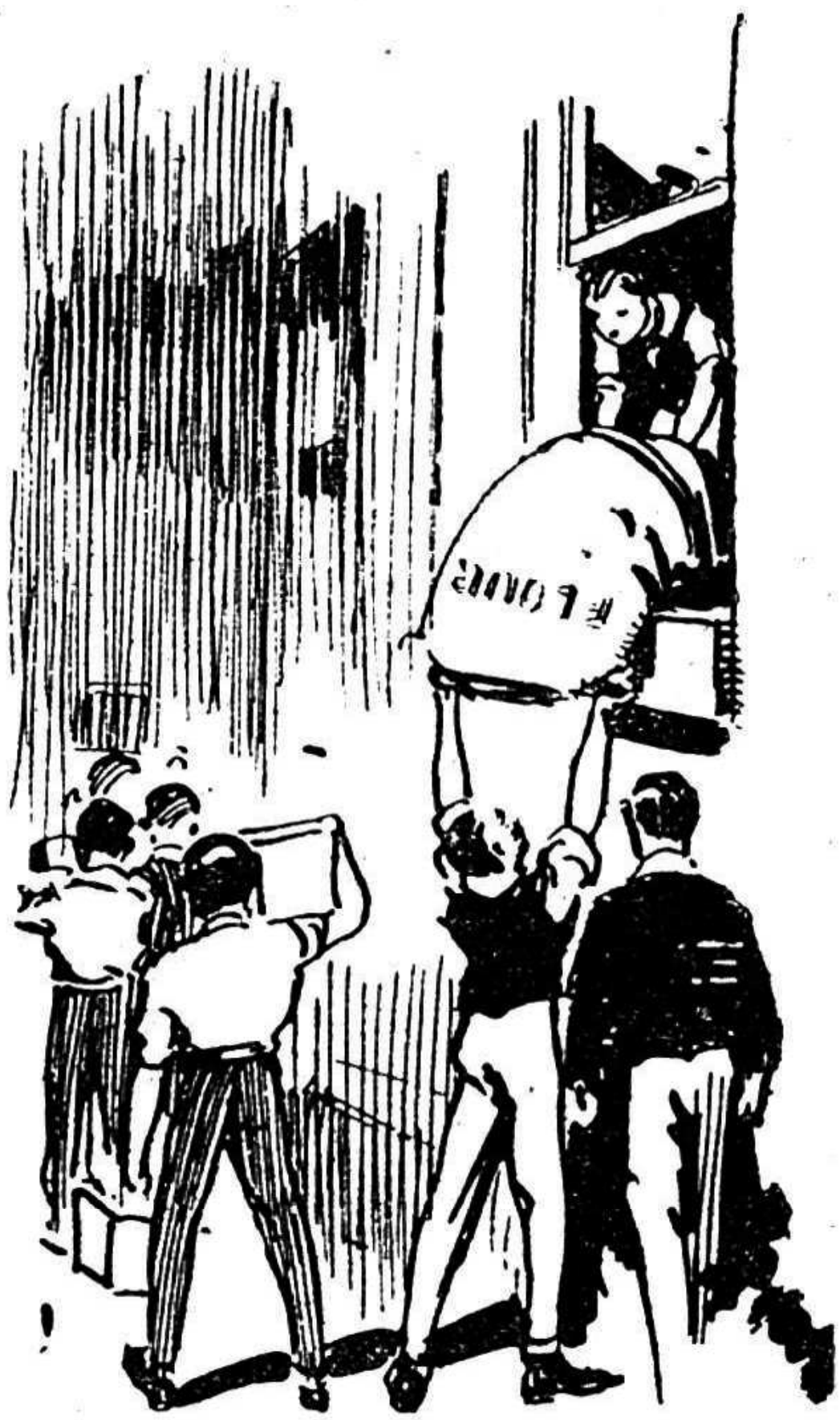
They turned out to be feminine chunks—to be absolutely exact, Miss Jane Trumble, the Headmistress, and her shadow, Miss Babbidge.

Bob Christine was the first to sight the enemy.

He was at work in one of the outer trenches, with half a dozen juniors. They were just putting the finishing touches on a little raised embankment. And Bob had got things to his satisfaction when he happened to look up, towards Little Side. He could see two black shapes looming in the moonlight.

"My hat!" he breathed. "There's somebody coming!"

"Only one of the chaps, I expect," said



**Before three o'clock a long string of juniors passed continuously up and down, conveying provisions to the barn.**

Lawrence. "I expect one of Nipper's lot has been——"

"There are two!" interrupted Bob tensely. "Why, Great Scott! They're women! It's—it's Miss Trumble!"

"What?"

The other fellows were staggered.

And, without any delay, they hurried along the trenches, giving a warning as they went. But it was a rather difficult task. Many of the juniors would not credit the story, and there were delays. Several precious minutes had elapsed by the time we all gathered together in the barn.

"The only thing is to slip round to the back, and get to the school by a roundabout route," I said quickly. "We must never be caught here! Come on—every second is of value!"

"Pity there's no back way out!" whispered Pitt.

"Yes—we ought to have made one," I said. "But we can't think of everything at once."

The cadets were excited and gravely con-

cerned. But they were confident that they would be able to slip off without being seen—for this side of the barn lay in dense shadow.

Even now, some of the juniors did not actually believe that Miss Trumble was really coming to the barn. It seemed impossible that she should be out in these meadows at eleven o'clock at night. And just as we were getting ready to leave, two figures appeared in the doorway. My heart sank like a stone.

We were too late! The enemy had arrived.

Miss Trumble stood there, accompanied by Miss Babbidge. Both the women were attired in their ordinary clothing, with shawls wrapped round their shoulders. They stood gazing at us for some moments.

"What is the meaning of this?"

It was Miss Trumble who spoke, and her voice was like the rasp of a file. I had never heard it quite so sharp before, and I could tell that she was fairly beside herself with rage.

None of the fellows spoke—they were too dumbfounded.

"Children, I command you to speak!" exclaimed Miss Trumble angrily. "What are you doing here, at this unearthly hour of the night? It is outrageous—monstrous! How dare you?"

"You wicked, wicked children!" put in Miss Babbidge.

"Please, Miss Babbidge—please!" rasped Miss Trumble. "I will deal with these disgraceful young rascals myself! I command you to speak! Why are you not in your dormitories?"

I stepped forward.

"There's nothing to be angry about, ma'am," I said calmly.

"Nothing to be angry about!" she repeated, in a shrill voice. Boy, are you insane? I am out with Miss Babbidge, taking a stroll, when I hear sounds coming from this direction. I come here, and find a large number of my children at work—playing at this ridiculous game of warfare! Have you all taken leave of your senses? I demand an explanation at once!"

"If you'll only listen, ma'am, you'll soon find that there's nothing in it at all," I said, still calm and cool. "The fact is, all the fellows were so keen on this Cadet Corps work that they couldn't resist this fine moonlight night. It was just the same with me, ma'am. It's a glorious night, you know, and we thought we'd take advantage of it."

"Perfectly preposterous!" snapped Miss Trumble. "I have never heard of anything so absurd! Such an excuse is quite purposeless. I think you must have all taken leave of your senses. How did you get out of your dormitory?"

"Oh—we—we—just got out, you know," I replied vaguely.

"You just got out?"

"That's all, ma'am," put in Pitt. "I say, don't be hard on us, you know. No harm done at all. Simply a bit of a lark, Miss Trumble. We'll all go back to bed, if you like."

"If I like!" repeated Miss Trumble sourly. "That is very kind of you, young man! You shall all go back to bed at once—do you hear me? At once! I can see that I have been too lenient!"

"Much too lenient!" put in Miss Babbidge. "The boys have undoubtedly taken advantage of your kindheartedness. That is the one great fault with boys—they are incapable of appreciating kindness and generosity!"

"You are quite right, Miss Babbidge," said the Headmistress. "This has taught me a lesson that I shall not forget. Yes, the boys have taken a mean, unfair advantage of my leniency. I greatly regret that I ever allowed this Cadet Corps to be started. Needless to say, it shall not continue for another hour."

"Oh!" exclaimed the cadets, in dismay.

"It is of no avail for you to make that protest!" snapped Miss Trumble. "In the morning, these absurd trenches will be filled in by workmen."

"What!"

"Filled in—destroyed completely!" rapped out Miss Trumble, taking relish in the fact that she was causing dismay. "I shall instruct the head gardener before breakfast—I shall tell him to get every gardener and every groom on the work at the earliest possible moment."

"But—but you can't do that, Miss Trumble!" I broke in quickly.

"Oh, indeed!"

"We've taken days and days to make those trenches!" I went on. "We've got all sorts of plans—and we're going to hold manœuvres——"

"You will do nothing of the kind!" declared the Headmistress. "And don't you dare to argue, child! My word is law—and I must be obeyed! When I have given a decision, that decision will stand!"

"But——"

"Enough!" interrupted Miss Trumble. "The trenches will be filled in, and the Cadet Corps is prohibited from now onwards! If you dare to argue with me, I shall immediately impose special punishment."

"It's not fair, ma'am!" shouted Armstrong. "We've done nothing—at least, there's no reason why you should ban the Cadet Corps——"

"How dare you?" shouted the Headmistress fiercely. "After what I have just said, how dare you question my decision? What is your name, boy?"

"Armstrong!" growled that youth.

"You shall be punished in a fitting manner!" said Miss Trumble. "And every boy here will have nothing but bread and water for the period of two days. I intend you to remember this night!"

There was nearly a rebellion on the spot.

"Very well, ma'am," I said quietly. "We've got to give in, I suppose."

"Indeed, you have!" said Miss Trumble

curtly. "You will all form into line and march indoors."

And the cadets, with dismay in their hearts, formed up into line. Just at the moment of success, disaster had come.

It was too awful for words.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ONLY COURSE!

EXCITEMENT ran high. Half an hour had elapsed, and all the cadets were back in the Remove dormitory and the truth was out. The terrible sentence was known to everybody. The Cadet Corps was dead—and the trenches were to be filled in on the morrow.

"It's terrible!" ejaculated Owen major. "Can't we do something, Nipper? Can't we dish the old ogress in some way?"

"We've got to!" declared Singleton. "By jingo! We can't allow her to ruin everything like this—just when we're on the last lap! I'd rather risk a barring-out straight off!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's begin it at once!"

"There's no sense in messing about now!" declared Handforth aggressively. "Think what'll happen to-morrow! Those trenches will be filled in while we're at lessons! We shan't be able to do a thing, and at dinner-time it'll be too late! The best thing is to have a barring-out now."

"Good!"

"That's the style!"

"We're with you, Handy!"

A number of excited juniors gathered round, shouting their approval. Nobody thought of sleeping. Of course, it was close upon midnight, but that made no difference.

The terrible sentence was too much for the Remove. All their schemes and plans were for nothing. And it struck most of the fellows that the only salvation was to strike now, while they were in the mood.

I stepped forward, rather grim.

"Don't get so excited, you chaps," I exclaimed. "There's absolutely no excuse in talking rot like that. How the dickens can you have a barring-out here? What can you do——"

"We're fed up with waiting!"

"Rather!"

"Do you think we're going to live on bread and water again?"

"Never!" shouted several others.

I held up both my hands.

"For goodness' sake be quiet!" I exclaimed tensely. "You'll ruin everything! If Miss Trumble gets an idea that we're in this mood she'll keep on the alert. You've got to quieten down; we've got to make her believe that we're subdued."

"We're not subdued!"

"Of course we're not," I agreed. "But we can easily make Miss Trumble think that she's cowed us——"

"Rather not!" shouted Handforth. "The only thing we can do is to come out in our true colours. We'll hold this barring-out at once. We'll barricade the dormitories, and defy everybody. We can't use the trenches now——"

"We can!" I broke in sharply.

"We can?"

"Yes!"

"But——"

"If you fellows will be quiet, and let me talk, I'll try and make you understand!" I snapped. "I thought you had more sense than to get excited like this! You've made me your leader, and yet you all want to lead yourselves! Can't you trust me at all?"

"Yes, rather!" said Pitt. "Let Nipper speak!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Dry up, you fat-heads!"

There was a semi-silence, the juniors holding themselves in check with difficulty.

"Look here, it's taken us over a week to build those trenches and to make all our fortifications," I exclaimed. "In the morning, they will be filled in within a few hours. Do you think we're going to allow that?"

"What else can we do?"

"Before Miss Trumble gives her orders for those trenches to be filled in we shall be in occupation!" I replied grimly.

"What?"

"This barring-out starts to-night—before the dawn!"

There was an excited hush.

"You—you mean that?" gasped Armstrong.

"If I didn't mean it I shouldn't say it!" I replied grimly. "We'll declare war straight off—it's the only course. We've got one chance left—and that is to act on the spur of the moment."

"But—but——"

"Let me speak!" I went on. "The first thing to be done is to get to bed—all of you! It's ten to one that Miss Trumble is prowling about, and when she hears that everything's all quiet she'll settle down. There's no need for us to act until about two o'clock."

"Two o'clock!" echoed Griffith. "What can we do then?"

"We shall do to-morrow night's work," I replied. "It doesn't matter much about sleep to-night. We can easily do without it for once. When the clock strikes two we shall get up. Then we'll go down and meet Christine and the others. They're getting up at the same time—I whispered a word to him as we were coming in."

"Good old Nipper!"

"He's the chap who thinks of things!"

"Yes, and all that you other fatheads can do is to get excited and talk about taking action independently!" exclaimed Pitt. "You ought to be boiled! What's the good of a leader if you don't allow him to lead?"

"Never mind," I said. "It's only to be

expected that the chaps would get excited. As long as they fall in now, and do exactly as I suggest, everything will be O.K."

"Good!"

Ten minutes later the Remove had undressed and was in bed. And this precaution was highly necessary, as events turned out. For Miss Trumble arrived, accompanied by Fenton of the Sixth. To all intents and purposes the Remove was sound asleep.

"There you are, Miss Trumble, it's all right!" growled Fenton. "I knew you were mistaken."

"I distinctly heard the boys shouting," declared Miss Trumble sourly. "Well, well! I am glad to see that they have had sense enough to go to sleep. I was half afraid they are thinking of some rash act of insubordination."

Fenton laughed.

"You needn't be afraid of that," he said. "I've been looking at the Remove during the past week, and, judging by appearances, you've tamed them pretty thoroughly. I've never seen such a meek set of kids."

"Yes, I think I have quelled their unruly spirit!" said Miss Trumble.

"And now, perhaps, I can go back to bed?' asked Fenton sarcastically. "It doesn't seem much good staying here, does it?"

The Captain of the School was obviously in no mood for nonsense. Moreover, he was very anxious to get out of the dormitory as quickly as possible. Fenton knew more about the juniors than Miss Trumble did.

One look round had been quite sufficient to tell Fenton that half the fellows were wide awake. They certainly seemed asleep, but the deep breathing, and the suspicious snores from several beds, told Fenton all that he wanted to know. Miss Trumble was not conversant with the wiles of the Remove.

They went out after a moment or two.

Fenton was inwardly chuckling. All his sympathies were with the Remove. Being a senior—and the head prefect, too—it was quite impossible for him to rebel. But he was all in sympathy with the juniors. He had to keep this to himself.

"There you are!" whispered De Valerie, when all was quiet. "Where would you chaps have been if Nipper hadn't butted in? It was jolly good advice of his, you know."

"Rather!"

"If we hadn't got into bed like this, goodness knows what Miss Trumble would have done," said Pitt. "She suspected us of some kind of rebellion. Now she'll go to bed in peace, and when she wakes up it'll be too late."

"That's the idea!"

"And when do we start, general?" asked Jack Grey.

"Not until the clock strikes two!" I replied. "We must give Miss Trumble a chance to settle down and go off into a sound sleep. We shall have about four hours—the best four hours of the night, too."

"And what shall we do?"

"The main thing is to raid the food supply," I answered grimly. "None of the servants are down before six, and so we shall have a clear field. I've got everything planned, and so you needn't worry. Leave it to me!"

I half expected the juniors to go off to sleep at once. But they did not do so. In fact, a soft murmur of conversation went on continuously; and one o'clock arrived to find the Remove still wide awake.

There was such a lot at stake that the fellows could not sleep. In their excited state of mind they had no desire whatever to slumber. But between one and two a good few dozed off.

I was very glad when two o'clock boomed out.

The school was quiet and completely enshrouded in darkness. The moon had gone down, leaving the night pitchy black. A few clouds had come up, obscuring the stars.

And when I went to the window to look out, I found a sharp, keen nip in the air. It was, indeed, quite frosty. But even frost was not sufficient to deter the fellows now.

They were all enthusiastic about this barring-out.

If snow had been falling in myriads of flakes they would have turned out. By a quarter past two the Ancient Houee section of the Cadet Corps was all ready. Never had the juniors dressed so quietly.

They seemed to realise the tremendous importance of secrecy. Even Handforth refrained from indulging in any of his usual whispers. He didn't speak a word, but he was very much awake.

"Look here, you chaps, the best thing we can do is to make some plans now," I said softly. "Sergeant Handforth, I want you to take ten men for some special work."

"Good enough!" breathed Handforth. "I'm ready!"

"The rest of us are going straight off to

meet Christine," I continued. "But you and your party will remain here."

"What for?" asked Handy.

"Your job will be to wrap the bed-clothes up into bundles, and lower them one by one to the ground," I said crisply. "As soon as you've done that, they'll be carried out to the barn and placed in the loft. Then you'll come back and fetch the mattresses."

"Oh, good idea!"

"We can't sleep on bare boards," I went on. "These sleeping comforts are here, and we might just as well take them with us. Christine will set some of his own men to work on the other side."

Everything was soon arranged.

Leaving Handforth and a number of others in the dormitory, the remainder of us slithered quietly down the knotted rope. There was very little danger of us being seen now, for the Triangle was so black that we could hardly distinguish one another in the gloom.

While the bulk of the juniors joined Christine and Co. near the gym., Pitt and Levi and De Valerie went round on a little scouting expedition. They returned after ten minutes to report that everything was quiet and still.

Not a light was showing in the whole school.

Everybody was sound asleep and unsuspicious.

Under normal circumstances, we should have left all this work until the following night. But in face of Miss Trumble's decision our only course was to act now.

We had some difficulty with the storerooms.

If I had been allowed to carry out my original plan, the food question would have been an easy one. For I should have taken care to have the storeroom windows unlatched.

Now, of course, they were all locked.

Our only course was to force the windows; in fact, to make a burglarious entry. But it was not such a hard task. I succeeded in breaking the window of the first storeroom with hardly a sound. Five minutes later the latch was undone and the storeroom was swarming with fellows.

We had no compunction in taking this food.

After all, it belonged to us. Our fees at the school included grub, and it was only right that we should have grub during our barring-out. The school storeroom was handy, and so we raided it. Raids of this kind were quite permissible and in perfect order.

There was another storeroom at the back of the College House, and this was entered just as effectively. And then commenced the tedious task of carrying the supplies to our headquarters.

Before three o'clock a long string of juniors passed continuously up and down. Flour, biscuits, rice, oatmeal, jam, pickles, tinned foods of all descriptions, and scores of other things were conveyed to the barn.

The most difficult job we had was with the flour. The sacks were enormously heavy, and it took seven or eight fellows to hoist them out. But we managed somehow. And now I was beginning to feel much easier.

In fact, all apprehension left me. Success was within our grasp; there was no need for any further worry. In spite of Miss Trumble's threats, we should be victorious.

For we had an ample supply of food. We had an everlasting supply of water. And Handforth and Co. had already carried the bedding and the mattresses into the barn.

Some College House juniors had done the same thing with their own sleeping things. Even if we were surprised now, it wouldn't matter. We could afford to snap our fingers at Miss Trumble.

For we should be able to take up our positions, and start our rebellion, at any moment we pleased. But four o'clock came, and still the school remained silent and peaceful.

Nobody knew of these big preparations. The mistresses were all sleeping soundly, sublimely unconscious of the gathering storm. And, like shadows in the night, the Remove continued its work.

We were rather doubtful about cooking arrangements for the day. The supply of oil-stoves, etc., from Bannington would not be delivered until the evening. And there was always the possibility of a hitch.

So Fatty Little made doubly sure by taking a dozen fellows on a raiding expedition to the kitchen quarters. They collected all the pots and pans they could lay fingers on.

And so the time went on.

At five o'clock we were ready; our plans were complete in every detail. Tired, but triumphant, we gathered together in the barn and looked round. So far as we could see, everything had been done. Everything was in a state of hopeless muddle—but that was only to be expected.

Food supplies had been dumped down in every possible corner. They could be sorted out as soon as daylight came. The main thing was to be in readiness. And so complete were our arrangements that we had no fear of being driven out of our stronghold.

The beauty of the whole thing was that there was no necessity for us to start any fighting. We had seized the barn, and we had dug ourselves in. And now we should simply inform Miss Trumble that we should not surrender until the masters were brought back.

If the Headmistress started any scrap, we should be ready; but the cadets would do nothing until they were attacked. So far as we were concerned, the whole affair was to be peaceful.

But, somehow, I had an idea that it wouldn't be. If I knew anything of Miss Trumble, she wouldn't take this kind of thing lying down. And I was intensely

curious to find out what steps she would take.

"Well, you chaps, you've done well," I said approvingly. "Considering that it's been rush work, we've got very good reason to congratulate ourselves. We're ready for Miss Trumble at any minute. In fact, the barring-out has already started."

"Good egg!"

"That's the stuff!"

"There's only one thing more—ammunition!" I went on. "We haven't got adequate supplies. Although we're all tired, I think we'd better get busy at once for an hour."

"Hear, hear!" said Pitt.

"What we've got to do is to manufacture a number of bombs!" I continued. "There's a huge pile of sifted sand down by the east defence works. And yesterday I brought piles and piles of paper into the barn. Just as a kind of temporary measure, we can make little bags of sand. If we have to defend ourselves, they'll come in handy."

"Don't you think they'll do a lot of harm?"

"No," I replied. "The bags will burst in no time, and they couldn't possibly hurt anybody. But we must have something in readiness in addition to the pea-shooters."

Every cadet was armed with a particularly powerful pea-shooter. I had seen this instrument advertised in one of the magazines. It was an elaborate affair, very similar to an air-gun in appearance. It contained a magazine large enough to hold a couple of hundred peas. And these shooters had a repeater action. We could send out a perfect fusilade of peas—little pellets which would cause sharp stings of pain, but no damage. It would be necessary to display great determination to face such fire.

There was very little sleep for the Remove.

Some of the fellows snatched a nap, but the majority got busy on the manufacture of "bombs." And then, at length, the dawn came. It would only be a short time now before the whole of St. Frank's knew the truth.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DECLARATION OF WAR!

CLANG—clang—clang!

The rising bell rang with its usual unpleasant insistence. And St. Frank's awoke into a state of activity. Another day had begun. Seniors and juniors turned out with reluctance.

When Morrow came downstairs he was rather struck by the fact that no Remove fellows were to be seen. There were fags in plenty, to say nothing of numerous Fifth-Formers. But Morrow couldn't find a single Removite.

This was peculiar. Morrow had meant to have a word with some of the juniors, for he had heard rumours concerning the affair of the night, and the prefect wanted to know all about it.

"Lazy young scamps!" he murmured, frowning. "They are not down yet."

He hurried upstairs to the Remove dormitory, firmly determined to rout the juniors out with no uncertain voice. He was rather sorry that he hadn't got his cane with him.

And then Morrow got a shock.

He strode into the Remove dormitory, and came to an abrupt halt, utterly startled. The great apartment had an air of desolation and barren emptiness. It was still and silent.

Not a junior was there. The windows were wide open, and every bedstead was bare. The mattresses and the bedclothing had all vanished. It was quite obvious that the Remove had done something drastic.

"Well I'm hanged!" said Morrow blankly.

He hurried out, inwardly excited. Before going downstairs he thought of Archie Glenthorne, and looked into that junior's separate bedroom. The apartment was bare, and there was no bedding and no mattress. So Archie had cleared out, too! It was amazing!

Morrow hardly knew what to do. His chief idea was to find Fenton, and seek the Skipper's advice.

As it happened, he ran into Fenton in the lobby, and Fenton was talking seriously with Carlile of the College House.

"I say Fenton—just a minute!" exclaimed Morrow urgently. "The Remove kids are up to some deep game, by the look of it. They've vanished out of their dormitory, and taken the bed-clothes with them."

Fenton nodded.

"Yes, I expected you to say that," he said calmly.

"How on earth did you know?" demanded Morrow.

"Carlile tells me that the juniors have disappeared from the College House," said Fenton. "So, of course, I naturally assumed that our crowd had gone, too. The young bounders!"

"But—but——"

"My dear fellow, there's nothing to be puzzled about," said Fenton. "We've got a complete explanation of the Remove's activity near the old barn. Don't you understand? They've dug themselves in! They're fed up with Miss Trumble's rule, and they evidently mean to make a stand against it."

"Great Scott!" said Morrow. "What—what can we do?"

Fenton chuckled.

"I rather think it's for Miss Trumble to

decide," he exclaimed. "Of course, we're prefects, and we can't give an opinion. Let's go and report."

Fenton and Carlile went straight to Miss Trumble's study. Morrow was not particularly keen on it. The other two prefects rather relished the idea. They were curious to see what Miss Trumble would do when she heard the appalling news.

The affair was serious—deadly serious. For a whole Form to defy authority was a terrible thing. But, in their hearts, Fenton and Carlile were glad. They had an idea that the Remove's bold step would be all for the good of the school. Life had certainly been growing very unbearable of late.

Miss Trumble was in her study, and she looked at the two seniors sharply as they entered, after knocking.

"I am glad you have come, my boys!" she said sharply. "I wish to give you some orders in connection with the Remove children. They have been naughty indeed, and I intend to give them a lesson——"

"Sorry, Miss Trumble, but the Remove has gone!" said Fenton.

"The Remove has gone?" repeated the Headmistress quickly. "What do you mean? Gone? Gone where?"

"We can only say that the Remove is no longer in the school, Miss Trumble," said Fenton. "All the boys of that Form have vanished. They have taken bedding and mattresses——"

"What!" shouted Miss Trumble thickly.

She listened, pale with absolute fury, as Fenton and Carlile related the facts. And Miss Trumble was dismayed, too. She had never dreamed that the Remove would dare to take such strong action as this.

And then, in the middle of her consternation, Mrs. Poulter arrived. And the Housedame, in a state of considerable agitation, revealed the dreadful fact that the storeroom had been raided, and practically cleared. Food of every description had been taken away.

And while Miss Trumble was wrestling with these problems the rebels were making active preparations for the big moment. The trenches were already lined. The cadets were at their posts.

From a distance those little meadows looked quite deserted. But the trenches were swarming with fellows, ready and determined to beat off any attack, should an attack be made.

And at Headquarters—to be exact, in the barn—I was conferring with my lieutenants. An ultimatum had been drawn up. It was quite short, but very much to the point. I folded it up, sealed it with an important-looking red disc, and handed it to Pitt.

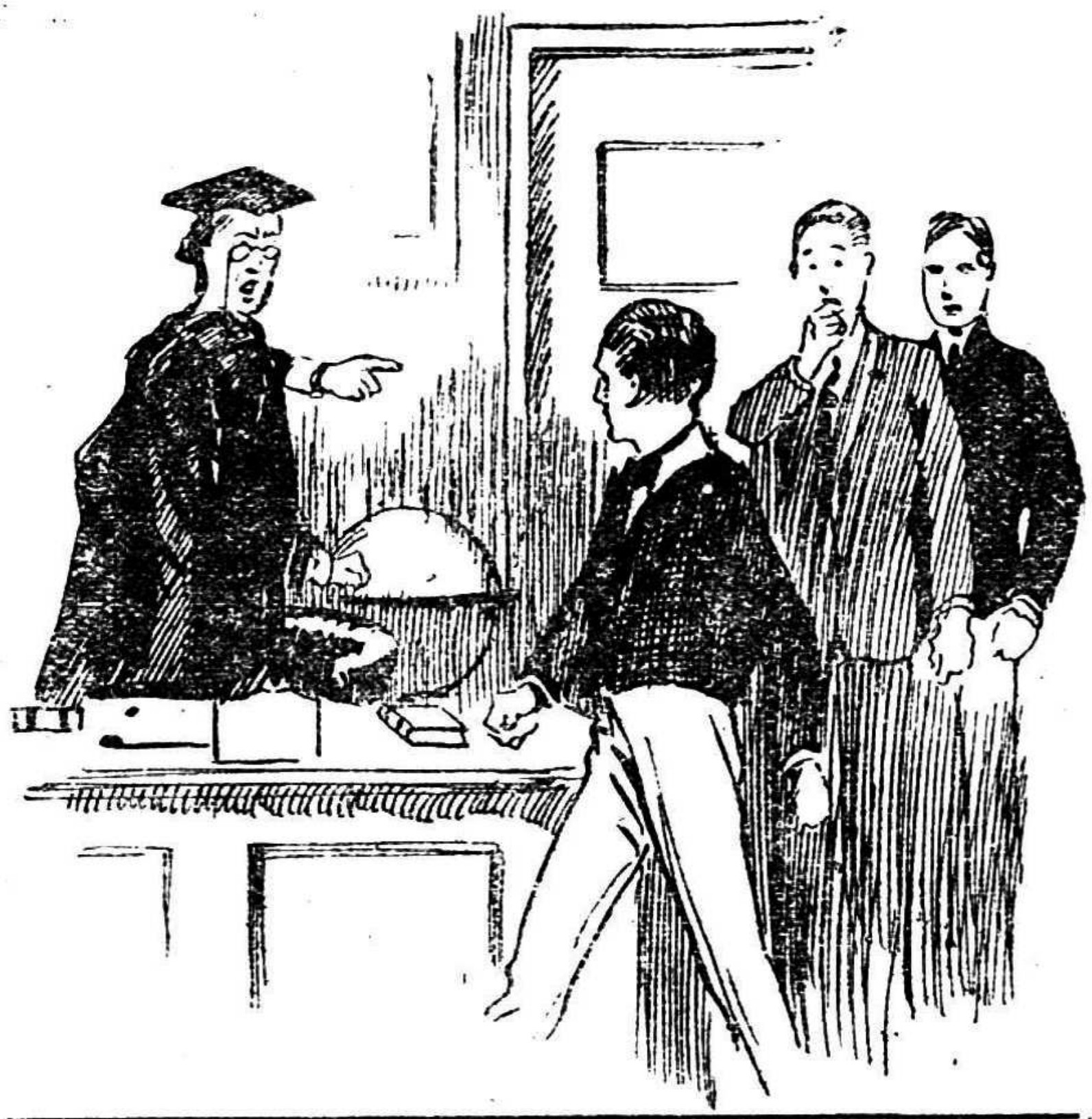
"Deliver this to Miss Trumble at once," I said.

"Right you are!" said Pitt promptly. "I'm off."

"Hadn't he better have an escort?" asked Bob Christine. "I think a dozen chaps ought to go with him in case Miss Trumble tries to hold him back——"

"Not likely!" interrupted Pitt. "You can trust me to come back all right. Miss Trumble will be so staggered that she won't have time to grab me."

He went off without any further talk,



**"Seize that boy at once!" shouted Miss Trumble suddenly, screwing up the ultimatum and throwing it into the fire.**

strode across the meadows boldly, made his way over Little Side, and then entered the Triangle. He was at once surrounded by numbers of fags and Fifth-formers, who plied him with questions.

The school was already seething with rumours. It was known that the Remove was missing. But nobody knew the absolute truth.

Pitt gave the questioners no satisfaction. He forced his way through them, and finally arrived at the Head's door. He walked straight in, and arrived at Miss Trumble's study. He tapped, and entered.

He found Miss Trumble standing up, talking rapidly and excitedly to Fenton and Carlile. But she came to an abrupt halt as soon as she saw Reginald Pitt. The latter saluted, and handed over his dispatch.

"What—what is this?" snapped the Headmistress.

"An ultimatum from the rebels!" replied Pitt calmly.

"You—you impertinent young wretch!" exclaimed Miss Trumble shrilly.

She tore open the paper, and glared at it. And this is what she read:

"To Miss Jane Trumble, Headmistress of St. Frank's College.

"The Remove Form has decided that it can no longer submit to the indignities and humiliations of your administration. The Remove Form, therefore, has left the school in a body, and has taken up temporary quarters elsewhere.

"The Remove Form greatly regrets that this should be necessary, but there was no other course. It is possible to put matters in order at once, if you so desire.

"The Remove Form does not demand any unreasonable alterations. Its only decision is that the normal order of things shall be restored. In other words, the Remove Form demands the return of Dr. Stafford and his entire staff of masters.

"The Remove Form will not budge until this reversion to the ordinary routine has been effected.

"It is the desire of the Remove Form to cause as little trouble as possible. If you will send word back by our dispatch bearer that our demands will be met at once, we will return in orderly fashion without the delay of a moment.

"NIPPER (Captain)."

Miss Trumble's hand was quivering so much that she could hardly read the last few words. She was absolutely pale with anger.

"How dare you?" she broke out. "Oh! This is too much—this is dreadful! I've never heard of such sheer wickedness!"

"May I see, madam?" asked Fenton politely.

She thrust the ultimatum into his hands, and both Fenton and Carlile rapidly read the words.

"I'm afraid there's going to be some unpleasantness, Miss Trumble," said Fenton quietly. "These juniors are evidently very determined, and, as far as I can see, there's only one course to adopt. It will be far better to give in to the boys, and bring the masters back."

Miss Trumble positively shook.

"You—you foolish boy!" she screamed. "Do you think for one moment that I will submit to this—this dictation? Never! Never! I'm amazed that you could be so insane!"

"I am thinking of the school, Miss Trumble," said Fenton quietly. "It would not be pleasant for this story to be talked about all over the country. Indeed, it will reflect upon yourself——"

"It will no nothing of the kind!" shouted Miss Trumble. "These boys must be fetched back at once—on the instant! Do you hear me? I will teach them manners! They will not be able to defy me just as they please!"

The two prefects were silent.

"Seize that boy at once!" shouted Miss Trumble suddenly, screwing up the ultimatum, and throwing it into the fire. "Seize him and take him straight to the punishment room!"

"Thanks all the same, but there's nothing doing!" said Pitt crisply.

He dodged towards the door.

"Hold him!" shrieked Miss Trumble wildly.

Fenton and Carlile glanced at one another, and then grasped hold of Reginald Pitt. The junior was rather surprised—he had thought better things of Fenton, at least.

But then he got another surprise.

He struggled with all his strength, and found that he was able to get away with extraordinary ease. Although the prefects were big fellows, they seemed to find it impossible to hold the junior. He slipped out of their fingers, tore the door open, and whizzed away.

"You idiots—you clumsy idiots!" shouted Miss Trumble angrily. "Don't let him get away! Run after him at once!"

"We'll get him, Miss Trumble!" panted Carlile. "The little bounder! Wriggling away like that!"

He and Fenton hurried outside, and ran down the passage. By the time they got to the open front door Pitt was speeding across the Triangle. Fenton and Carlile dashed off in pursuit

But, for some strange reason, Fenton stumbled—apparently over nothing—and came heavily to earth. Carlile tripped over him, and went sprawling. They were just picking themselves up when Miss Trumble appeared in the open doorway. Pitt was vanishing.

"Great Scott!" gasped Fenton. "It's too late now!"

"Of course it is!" said Carlile. "What made you fall over?"

"I think I must have slipped!"

Miss Trumble looked on, hardly able to contain herself.

"It seems that you have deliberately allowed the child to escape you!" she said harshly. "Very well. It does not matter so much. I intend to deal with this matter promptly and drastically. Never will I allow these insubordinate children to dictate to me."

She went back indoors, with a snap of her jaws, and Fenton and Carlile picked themselves up, to be at once surrounded by large numbers of Fifth-formers and fags.

In the meantime, Reginald Pitt arrived at Headquarters.

He was admitted through the system of defences, and all sorts of inquiries were made as he hurried towards the barn.

But Pitt said nothing until he met me.

"Just as we expected—she has refused!" he announced breathlessly. "She screwed our ultimatum up, and threw it into the fire."

"Then it means war!" I said grimly.

"Judging by the look on Miss Trumble's face, it does!" said Pitt.

He described what had happened.

"Fenton and Carlile are a couple of real good 'uns!" he concluded warmly. "They could have held me as easy as winking if they'd liked. But they deliberately let me go. Although they can't openly admit it, they're with us."

I went outside, and found all the rebels eager.

"Well, there's no more secrecy now!" I shouted. "Miss Trumble has refused to listen to us, and war is declared!"

"Hurrah!"

"It's got to be a fight to the finish!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with petticoat rule!"

"The Remove for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors were thoroughly excited. They had been longing for the Headmistress to refuse their demands. For now it meant warfare—and the Remove was prepared for any steps that Miss Trumble might take!

The immediate future promised to be exciting!

THE END.

# Editorial Announcement.

MY Dear Readers,—The ultimatum sent to Miss Trumble by Nipper on behalf of the Remove, warning her of the Juniors' intentions to continue the "Barring Out" until Dr. Stafford and the old staff of masters are reinstated, has not had any effect on the Lady Head beyond making her very angry, and more determined than ever to have her own way. Such a state of affairs must inevitably lead to war, since the Remove is equally determined to resist the authority of Miss Trumble. Preparations for the forthcoming struggle have been carried out in grim earnest for some days, and the Juniors are anxiously awaiting Miss Trumble's next move. This will be described in Next Week's story, "THE WAR AT ST. FRANK'S!"

## NEXT WEEK'S NEW DETECTIVE SERIES.

Last week I made mention of a new detective series in Our Detective Story Section, to follow the Scotland Yard series, which concludes with this week's story, "THE 'CON' MAN!" The adventures of Mervyn Hume, the famous newspaper sleuth, will start in our next issue with a capital story of thrills and surprises—"THE MANIAC OF BROXHAM GARDENS!" Mervyn Hume is not only an expert in making the best use of the publicity offered him in the columns of "The Daily Wire," but he has an uncanny knack—some people call it intuition—of getting information of the most carefully guarded plots made against society by the professional cracksman and crook.

## FOR THE HANDY BOY.

There is a new book coming out in fortnightly parts, which I strongly recommend you all to get, as it is extremely valuable to the boy who would be handy in the home, and who would like to know how to make models of engines, aeroplanes, boats, or wireless installations. It is called "HARMSWORTH'S HOUSEHOLD ENCYCLOPEDIA," the First Part of which is now on sale. Each part will only cost you 1s. 3d., or approximately a penny a day. In it you will learn how to do all kinds of odd jobs, repairs, etc., which will save your father's money, and thus pay for the book many times over. Ask your parents, my lads, to get you this book, and I am sure they will not begrudge the penny a day, if it will be the means of making a handy man of you.

THE EDITOR.

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