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It was Claver-
ing stealthily
approaching
the Priory
ruins!

Fullwood's
Uphill Fight

You must not miss reading this
week's great story of the re-
form of a one-time cad of
ST. FRANK'S.

No. 540.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

October 10, 1925.



He sank down and held his throbbing head in his hand. And Clavering looked on wonderingly. At last he placed a hand on Fullwood's shoulder.

FULLWOOD'S UPHILL FIGHT!



The story of Fullwood's struggle against the evil reputation of his past is poignantly told in this week's narrative. His rascally cousin, Eustace Carey, under the name of Clavering, is still at St. Frank's, while the real Clavering is a prisoner in the Priory dungeon. Added to the constant fear of exposure by the discovery that he is shielding his cousin from justice are the gibes and plots against him by his former associates, whom he now despises. Introduces an exciting football match in which Fullwood distinguishes himself.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

A TALE OF INK AND WOE.

CONROY MINIMUS, of the Third, stared with dumb horror.

The great pool of ink sank slowly into the plush of the red table cover, forming a huge, uneven blotch in the centre of the table. Here was one of life's minor tragedies in a nutshell.

"Great jumping corks!" said Conroy minimus huskily.

He didn't know how it had happened. He never did know how these things happened. He had simply been throwing a shoe across the room into the corner, and the big inkpot had overturned. But he hadn't aimed at the inkpot at all. That was the queer part of it.

At least, it was queer to Conroy minimus. It wouldn't have been queer to anybody else. Throughout the Third Form at St. Frank's his aim was known to be a perilous, unknown quantity.

"I shall have to do something!" panted Conroy minimus. "It's no good standing here and looking at it! It won't take me two ticks to get that stain out! Thank goodness, I know the way to do it!"

He was glad that he had the study to himself. It wasn't his own study—therein lay the tragedy. It was Stanley Clavering's study, and was in the Sixth Form passage of the East House. To be exact, Conroy minimus was fagging for Clavering at the moment.

As a general rule, Conroy minimus escaped the arduous duties of a fag. He was too well known in the Sixth. Tannings had absolutely no effect. Lectures were a waste of breath. Conroy minimus had destroyed more property than all the other fags of St. Frank's put together. Hence his freedom from duty.

But Clavering was a comparatively new fellow in the Sixth, and he hadn't learned of the perils which attended the employment of Conroy minimus. The fag didn't maliciously do these things. He just couldn't help them.

In his own person he was disreputable to such a degree that Mr. Suncliffe, the Third Form-master, had frequently been seen to grasp his hair in tufts, as though about to pull them out by the roots. The Third was weary of listening to Mr. Suncliffe's lectures on the subject of Conroy minimus' personal appearance.

He was such a small fag, too. He didn't look at all dangerous. Upon meeting him, one merely supposed that he had just been exploring a coal cellar, unaware that it was his normal appearance. He was always smudgy, he was always bespattered with ink-stains, and his untidiness was a by-word. It was quite a common thing to see Conroy minimus with odd shoes. On one famous occasion, he had horrified the school by wearing one brown and one black.

Indeed, Conroy minor, of the Fourth, only recognised his younger brother under protest. And Conroy major, of the Sixth, ignored him utterly. Once, in showing visitors round the school, Conroy major had been shamed for ever by the sudden appearance of his youngest brother in all his usual grime, blatantly proclaiming his relationship. That experience had shaken Conroy major to the core, and he had never really got over it.

In addition to the other defects of Conroy minimus, his brain capacity appeared to be nil. He was at the bottom of his Form, and he remained there grimly and tenaciously, in spite of all Mr. Suncliffe's efforts. Even in such small matters as cleaning ink-stains, he was sadly lacking in enterprise. Perhaps this was because he never troubled about such trifles.

Somehow, he felt that Clavering would. Beastly silly, of course. If anything, the tablecloth looked better now than it had before. A plain red plush was too monotonous. It was far more attractive with an uneven blob of blue in the centre.

But Conroy minimus shook his head, and decided that Clavering wouldn't quite approve. And Clavering had been very precise in his instructions. The study was to be cleaned up and made tidy by a certain fixed time. The fag still had seven minutes left.

He deserted all his other work in favour of the tablecloth, never realising that this was one of those instances where he could only do more harm than good. He had an idea that that tablecloth was valuable. It was thick and rich, and was new, too. In fact, Clavering had told him to be particularly careful.

"It's all right—he'll never know a thing!" said Conroy minimus crisply. "I'll have that stain out in no time!"

He dashed out, and returned in less than a minute with a big bowl of water. At least, it was a big bowl, but it was only half full of water. The other half was out in the passage, in various puddles. It was a well-known fact that Conroy minimus couldn't raise a glass of water to his mouth without spilling some of it. But he had never been known to spill ginger-pop.

Closing the study door with one hand, he swung round and decorated the floor with a neat little splash. Then he put the bowl on Clavering's best chair, and got to work.

It was only a trifle, of course, but he hadn't noticed that Clavering's silken scarf was on the chair, too.

His method of getting to work was unique.

Whipping the table-cover off, he seized the inky portion and wrung it out. The ink streamed over his hands, dripped over Clavering's beautiful scarf, and adorned the carpet in various new designs. Then Conroy minimus soaked the soiled part of the plush cloth in the water, and rubbed it vigorously. He again wrung it out, and shook it.

"Topping!" he said with delight. "He'll never notice a thing!"

The intense blue had disappeared certainly, but it had become more distributed, merging into the red delicately. The fag swung it on to the table, and smoothed it out. He again assured himself that no trace of the disaster could be detected.

In order to make assurance doubly sure, however, he carelessly placed a magazine on the wet portion, and two of Clavering's bound books close by, to conceal a suspected spot.

Then he dashed about, clearing up. There was only about half a minute left. His first move towards clearing up was fatal. He collided with the chair, and the bowl of inky water soared up triumphantly and deposited its contents on the floor. A great deal of it splashed Conroy minimus, but he didn't even notice it. He was accustomed to wallowing in such delights.

Then the door opened, and Stanley Clavering strode in.

The Sixth-Former came to a dead stop. His eyes started from his head, and a hoarse, strangled cry escaped him.

"Just finished, Clavering," said Conroy minimus brightly.

CHAPTER II.

THE HUMAN WRECK.



STANLEY CLAVERING found his voice. "Who's—who's been here?" he asked thickly.

"I have, please, Clavering."

"But who else?" thundered the Sixth-Former.

"Nobody, please, Clavering."

"Don't tell lies to me!" roared Clavering. "There's been an army here, by the look of it. Good gad! What's this?"

He gingerly picked up a limp, ghastly-looking rag from the chair, and Conroy minimus regarded it with mild interest. He hadn't noticed it before. In any case, it was of no importance.

"I don't know, please, Clavering," said Conroy minimus.

"It's my silk scarf!" shouted Clavering.
"I don't think much of the pattern, please, Clavering—"

"Don't keep saying that!" stormed the Sixth-Former furiously.

"Saying what, please, Clavering?"

"You—you— Look at this scarf!" hooted the owner of the study. "I bought it yesterday; it cost thirty-five shillings. Look at it now! You destructive young hound!"

Conroy minimus scented trouble. He hadn't the faintest idea why, but it seemed to him that Stanley Clavering was losing his temper. He wondered why seniors always lost their temper. It seemed to be a disease with them.

"And look at this!" breathed Clavering, with stark horror in his tone. "Look at this! Great Scott! That new tablecloth!"

Conroy minimus watched anxiously. It seemed that Clavering wasn't going to miss the stain, after all. Yet Conroy minimus could have sworn that it was now invisible.

"Look at this horrible blotch!" shouted the other. "Ink, by gad! Have you done this on purpose?"

"No, please, Clavering."

"And my books!" howled the senior. "These leather covers—they're ruined! The chairs—the carpets. Why, you've caused twenty pounds' worth of damage! I'll skin you for this!"

"That won't do the tablecloth any good, please, Clavering," said Conroy minimus earnestly. "I was only carrying out orders—"

"Carrying out orders!" snarled Clavering. "By the time you leave this study you'll be carrying a few bruises. I've never seen so much destruction in all my life. You ought to be horsewhipped."

"But I'm not a horse, please, Clavering."

Clavering breathed hard. He was coming to the conclusion that Conroy minimus wasn't exactly cheeky. He couldn't help it. He was one of those youths who appear to have come into the world with a sponge instead of a brain.

"Come here!" he said harshly.

Conroy minimus didn't quite like that "come here," but there was nothing else for it but to obey orders. He was so placed that he could reach neither the window nor the door without the senior intervening.

"Yes, please, Clavering," he said.

The Sixth-Former made one grab, seized Conroy minimus, and then the trouble started. Conroy minimus was flung across the chair, and Clavering whipped a walking-cane from the corner.

Slash, slash, slash!

"Ow! Please, Clavering!" howled Conroy minimus. "Oh, I say! Stop! Ow! You beast! You bully—"

Slash, slash, slash!

The cane descended again, and then Clavering flung it aside. He took hold of Conroy minimus, jammed his face downwards to the floor, and wiped the latter with the Third-Former's person. He used Conroy minimus as a mop.

By the time the ordeal was over Conroy minimus had ceased to take interest in the proceedings. His clothing was half torn from his back, he was smothered in grime and ink, and his hair was matted. Clavering flung him into a corner, and stood back, panting.

"Now take my orders!" he said hoarsely. "I'm going out—I'm going to Caistowe. Understand—Caistowe!"

Conroy minimus removed a mass of fluff from his mouth.

"Yes, Clavering," he mumbled mechanically.

"Don't forget—Caistowe!" repeated Clavering. "I shall be gone half the afternoon. If this study isn't thoroughly cleaned up by the time I come back, I'll flay you alive! Now, where am I going to?"

"Please, Clavering, you're going to Plaistowe!"

"Plaistowe be hanged!" roared Clavering. "I said Caistowe!"

"Yes, please, Clavering—Caistowe."

"And what am I going to do to you if you haven't cleaned this study up by the time I get back?"

"Please, Clavering, I don't know."

"I'm going to flay you alive!" said Clavering. "Now get on with it!"

He strode out of the room and slammed the door. Then he went up to his bedroom to get washed. No ordinary St. Frank's senior would have treated Conroy minimus so drastically. But Stanley Clavering wasn't an ordinary St. Frank's senior. To be exact, he wasn't Stanley Clavering.

His real name was Eustace Carey, and although he looked little more than seventeen he was over twenty-one, and until recently he had been an Oxford undergraduate. He was Ralph Fullwood's cousin, masquerading at St. Frank's in order to elude the police.

He was wanted on a charge of assault and robbery. His victim had died, but at the inquest it had been established that the unfortunate man had been the owner of a weak heart which might have stopped at the slightest shock. So Carey was only wanted for robbery.

At St. Frank's he was safe. None suspected him. And he had established himself so firmly, and things were going on so comfortably, that he was in no mood to depart. And the real Stanley Clavering was being held a prisoner, awaiting Eustace Carey's pleasure.

Such was the position of Fullwood's cousin at St. Frank's. And his violence towards Conroy minus could be accounted for by the fact that he was naturally a cur and a blackguard.

CHAPTER III.

WILLY HANDFORTH TAKES CHARGE.



"SEEN Fullwood?" asked Dick Hamilton briskly. "Several times," replied Reggie Pitt. "But not just recently, Nipper. He's probably on Little Side. He's a demon for footer this term."

"I'll go and look there," said Nipper. "It's the River House match to-morrow, you know, and I'm relying on Fullwood for the forward line."

It was a Tuesday, and the first real match of the season was due to take place on the following afternoon. There had been several Junior House matches, and the best players were known. The team to play against Hal Brewster and his stalwarts on the following afternoon promised to be a strong one.

The River House match ought to have taken place the previous Saturday, according to the fixture list, but there had been such a torrent of rain that a postponement had been necessary.

Nipper went off to Little Side, searching for Ralph Leslie Fullwood. The former leader of Study A was enormously changed. His petty villainies were no longer apparent. He was actually becoming decent, and one of the chief signs of this was his keen interest in football.

Handforth & Co. emerged from the Ancient House arm in arm. Apparently this was one of their peaceful moments. Sometimes they emerged on their necks, particularly Church and McClure. But now all was harmony.

They had scarcely appeared before a figure detached itself from one of the neighbouring elms, and marched briskly across. A shadow passed across Handforth's face. Just when he was feeling happy, his serenity was marred. He came to a halt so abruptly that Church and McClure nearly fell down the steps.

"Here, steady!" said Church, with a gasp.

Handforth said nothing. An anxious light was creeping into his eyes. There was something about that approaching figure which boded ill. It was the sprightly, neat figure of Handforth minor, of the Third.

His approach was purposeful. Handforth knew it well. There was something about that advance which chilled him.

Instinctively he dived a hand into his trousers pocket and clutched at his money. Willy used the well-known formula. It was famous at St. Frank's. Everybody knew it—Edward Oswald most of all. Willy came to a halt in front of his major, and extended a red, puffy palm.

"Five bob!" he said briefly.

"Eh?"

"Five bob!"

"Look here, you young fathead!" said Handforth violently. "Go away!"

"How can I look there if I go away?" asked Willy. "And don't argue, Ted; you always go mottled when you argue. Five bob!"

"Not a penny!" roared Handforth defiantly.

"I don't want a penny; I want five bob!"

"You had five shillings on Saturday," said Edward Oswald. "It's only Tuesday. What have you done with it?"

"Do you expect me to stay here half an hour giving you details of my expenditure?" asked Willy tartly. "Go to Mrs. Hake. Make inquiries of Mr. Binks. Have a chat with the greengrocer—"

"The greengrocer?"

"I've got to feed my pets," said Willy. "You'd be surprised if you knew how my greengrocery bill runs up. Come on, Ted, my arm's aching. Five bob. Another minute and I'll make it ten!"

Willy gained his ends by sheer persistence. He always wore his major down. Sometimes Handforth would succumb at once, and other times he would stick out for ten or twenty minutes. But Willy had never been known to fail.

"Oh, I suppose I've got to humour you!" growled Handforth gruffly. "I shan't get any peace unless I do. But remember, no crowing. No gloating afterwards. What's the matter with your hand?"

"Nothing."

"It's all puffed up," said Handforth, eyeing it disgustedly.

"Ask old Suncliffe," said Willy. "He's got a new cane!"

"Always in trouble," said his major severely. "When will you learn to be a good boy?"

Willy nearly fainted.

"A good boy?" he repeated, swaying. "Are you calling me names? In another minute I won't accept that five bob from you!"

"Oh, won't you?" roared Handforth. "If I say I'm going to give you five bob I'll give it. You'll take it, even if I have to ram it down your neck. Nerve! Threatening me!"

He took out two half-crowns, and dropped them gingerly into his minor's palm. Willy nodded, and grinned.

"Thanks, Ted," he said lightly. "So long!"

He turned on his heel, whistling one of the latest songs. Handforth & Co. thought he was suddenly stricken, but as he seemed to walk steadily enough they assumed that everything was all right.

Willy progressed half across the Triangle, then he came to a halt. From one of the windows of the East House a ghastly apparition was gazing at him. His whistle died away, and he stood there, frozen. He saw a creature attired in rags, with smudges instead of a face, and a tangled, matted mass of stuff which had once been hair.

It was quite all right. Conroy minimus was merely recovering. He had thought it rather a good idea to take a breath of air at the open window. And as Willy approached Conroy minimus waved a feeble hand.

"Oh, so it's you!" said Willy, with relief. "You gave me quite a start at first—I thought it was the spectre of the East House! You're looking unusually tidy to-day, young Conroy!"

"I've had some trouble," said Conroy minimus—a perfectly needless piece of information.

"You look it!" agreed Willy. "What's happened? And what are you doing in that room?" He went closer, and peered in. "Hallo! I thought you were in one of the senior studies. I didn't know they had lumber rooms on this floor."

"This is Clavering's study, you ass."

"Great pip! What's happened to it," asked Willy, startled.

"I've been clearing it up."

"Oh, yes, of course—I hadn't thought of that," said Willy, nodding. "I can see you've been busy, young Conroy. But you're more energetic than usual to-day, aren't you? What about that book-case?"

"What about it?"

"You haven't smashed it up yet—to match the other things," said Willy. "Don't be lazy—complete the job while you're at it! If I were you, I'd make a bonfire in there."

Conroy minimus frowned darkly.

"I'd like to!" he said, dropping his voice to a mysterious whisper. "And I'd like to shove Clavering in the middle of it! He half killed me ten minutes ago. He wiped up the floor with me—really, you know! Took hold of me, and used me as a mop!"

And Conroy minimus went into the sordid details. He even removed intimate articles of clothing—careless of the fact that he was standing at the open window—and exhibited the scars of battle. Willy was impressed.

"I say, that beast has marked you properly!" he said seriously. "The Third ought to do something about this. My hat! You're all over weals!"

"I feel as though wheels had been all over me!" said Conroy minimus, with a

rare flash of wit. "I don't know what I'm going to do," he went on sadly. "Clavering's told me to clear this up in two hours, while he's gone to Caistowe. But I've cleared it up once. There's nothing else to do!"

"Never mind that room," said Willy briskly. "Leave it just as it is. I'll see Clavering when he comes back. I've taken charge of the affair now. You go away and soak yourself in water for an hour!"

CHAPTER IV.

HOBBS, THE INVENTOR.



CONROY minimus looked surprised. "What for?" he asked.

"You wouldn't understand if I told you," replied Willy. "But go away and soak yourself all the same. And have the water hot. You say Clavering's gone to Caistowe?"

"Yes, he told me that about a hundred times."

"He evidently wanted to impress it upon you for some reason," said Willy. "And he'll be back in two hours? All right, I'll deal with him when he arrives. This room isn't going to be touched. Clavering's a beast. In fact, there's something funny about him," added Willy keenly. "Something jolly funny!"

"He's not funny to me," said Conroy minimus sadly. "I can't understand him. He lost his temper over nothing. Absolutely nothing—"

"We needn't go into that again," interrupted Willy hastily. "It all depends upon the point of view. You buzz off and bury yourself in a bath—and don't come out until you look like a human being. And be careful to swill all the mud away after you come out of the bath."

Willy walked off, frowning. He was thinking about Stanley Clavering. He hadn't come into personal contact with the fellow much, but there was something about the new senior which aroused Willy's suspicion.

He didn't know why. Handforth minor was a shrewd youngster, and he was a keen judge of character. He instinctively felt that Clavering was no good. Of course, the senior's recent conduct could be forgiven. After what Conroy minimus had done to that study no human being could have remained normal. Willy was thinking more generally.

But Clavering was dismissed from his mind a moment later. As he walked across the Triangle towards the School House he paused. A small group had just appeared through the West Arch, and Willy regarded it curiously.

First of all came Tommy Hobbs, and then Dicky Jones, with young Kerrigan bringing up the rear. They were all Third Formers, and they belonged to the West House. Willy was an Ancient House fag, but this made no difference. He was the supreme leader of all the St. Frank's Third Formers, and he decided that this was a moment for investigation.

The West House trio were struggling along under the weight of a weird looking article which closely resembled a roll of oilcloth. Indeed, a section of it was actually composed of highly flowered linoleum. There was a glass at the end, and numerous levers stood out at different angles.

"Hallo!" said Willy, walking up. "What's all this?"

The other fags halted.

"My new telescope," explained Hobbs briefly.

"Your which?"

"Telescope—one of those things you look through!"

"You young fathead, do you think I don't know what a telescope is?" snapped Willy.

"Not that this monstrosity is a telescope," he added, eyeing the affair with disdain.

"My only hat! Who made it?"

"I did!" said Tommy Hobbs proudly.

"And we helped him!" said Dicky Jones and Stanley Kerrigan.

Willy Handforth grinned. Hobbs was the inventor of the Third. He had a perfect mania for making things, and some of his contrivances were ingenious to a degree. Out of the most unpromising material, he constructed mechanical devices of every description. And, surprisingly enough, quite a number of them actually worked.

One would never believe that Hobbs was an intrepid pioneer in the field of scientific research. He was a quiet-looking junior, grave and studious. But he had been known to risk his life with perfect sangfroid in order to test his inventions.

"A telescope, eh?" grinned Willy. "Well I'm jiggered! You don't expect to see anything through that contraption, do you? It's only made of linoleum, and tin cans, and cricket stumps and other odds and ends——"

"Never mind what it's made of—it's the finest telescope St. Frank's has ever seen, anyhow," interrupted Hobbs defiantly. "You can't judge by appearances. This is better than anything Professor Tucker's got——"

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Just taking it out for a trial run," grinned Dicky Jones. "Hobbs made it so that we could all look at the moon, and we're going to invite Professor Tucker to join us to-night. We're just going to have a look at the surrounding scenery now."

"I wish you luck!" chuckled Willy. "But if you set that thing on the top of

the West House, and can see the time on the school clock through it, I'll eat my hat!"

Tommy Hobbs sniffed.

"The school clock!" he said disparagingly. "My dear chap, we shall be able to see the time on the Bannington Town Hall clock! We shall be able to spot the sea-gulls clinging round the top of the Shingle Rock lighthouse!"

"Optimist!" said Willy. "I'm afraid you're in for a shock, my lad."

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW RECRUIT.



"O H, good shot!"

Nipper made the remark involuntarily as the leather shot past Handforth, and nearly bored a hole through the net. That shot had been

delivered by Ralph Leslie Fullwood, and it had been a regular stinger.

Quite a number of fellows were practising on Little Side. Dinner was over, and the juniors were taking advantage of the spell before afternoon lessons. There was no actual game in progress, but plenty of kicking.

"I must have been a bit careless that time," said Handforth, as he collected the ball. "All the same, it was a good shot, Fully. You kick like that to-morrow, and you'll easily beat the River House goalie."

Fullwood grinned.

"I'm feeling in form to-day," he replied. "I wouldn't miss to-morrow's match for worlds, an' I'm livin' in the hope that I shall score the winnin' goal."

"Well, you'll stand a good chance," said Handforth. "You're playing inside-right, aren't you?"

Fullwood could hardly believe those words, although Handforth was stating nothing but the truth. He—Ralph Leslie Fullwood—was down on the list to play for the school against the River House. For the school! It was a different thing to figuring in a mere House match.

Only the picked men were chosen for a big school game. And Fullwood's name was down! It was almost more than he could believe. He was so grateful to Nipper that he was putting in every spare moment at practice—improving his form in the most astonishing manner.

It was just a case of determination. Fullwood had made up his mind to excel in football, and he had already revealed such form that Nipper was startled. There was no favouritism about his selection. He was given the position of inside-right because there was no other fellow equal to his present prowess.

Many of the other juniors couldn't see it. They felt that Nipper was favouring Fullwood in order to encourage him. But Nipper was doing nothing of the sort. As captain of the Junior Eleven, his quick eye had noted Fullwood's astonishing cleverness.

As recently as the previous term the Removite had been scorned by all the decent fellows. As the cad of Study A, he had taken delight in every form of despicable behaviour. Smoking, gambling, betting on horses—these were some of Fullwood's pet recreations.

But what a difference this term!

Fullwood had not only broken with Gulliver and Bell, but he had cleared out of Study A, and Gulliver and Bell now had a new leader in the person of Bernard Forrest. The latter was showing signs of equalling Fullwood's former caddishness, and easily beating it.

Fullwood himself had come back to school with a different spirit. His former friends had discovered it in no time, and they despised him. But it was evened up, for Fullwood despised them even more. He couldn't understand how he had ever chummed up with such arrant young rotters.

He found an interest in football, a game he had always scorned. He enjoyed the company of Nipper and Handforth and Pitt and the other juniors he had previously regarded as the "goody-goodies." Now, in the opinion of his old friends, he was "goody-goody" himself. And Ralph Leslie Fullwood was discovering that "goody-goody" was merely another term for decency.

He couldn't quite understand how the change had been brought about. At first he had rebelled against it. He had refused to admit that he was different. But now he had thrown aside that self-deception. He openly admitted that he was a changed individual. He had got to the stage when he gloried in it. He had thrown his former life completely overboard.

It had occurred to him—not without a shock—that one of the Moor View school-girls might have had something to do with his changing views. She was Reggie Pitt's sister, too. Then, of course, Fullwood had spent many weeks with Lord Dorrimore's holiday party, during the summer vac. And constant association with the healthy, robust fellows had altered his viewpoint.

But Fullwood instinctively felt that Winnie Pitt was more responsible than any of the others. He wasn't in love with her. He rejected that suggestion with an angry snort. The very idea was preposterous. But, somehow, he felt drawn towards her. No other girl had ever affected him in that way. He had always been rather contemptuous of the opposite sex.

There was only one shadow. His cousin, Eustace Carey, had caused him endless worry. Even now the shadow was hanging



"Ow! Please, Clavering!" howled Conroy minimus. "Oh, I say! Stop! Ow! You beast! You bully . . ."
Slash! Slash! Slash!

over him like a pall. He was dreading the immediate future. Expulsion and disgrace were constantly hovering over his head. And it was all the more galling because he was attempting to run straight. For the first time in his schoolboy existence he was playing the game. And he was liable to get the sack at any hour!

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was having an uphill fight. He was conquering himself splendidly. Most of his evil temper had been quelled by the sheer force of his will. His old habits were now thoroughly distasteful to him. And he was taking such a keen interest in football that he was already eligible for the Junior School Eleven.

But there could be no contentment for Fullwood while Eustace Carey remained under the roof of St. Frank's.

Carey was an impostor. It wouldn't have been so bad if the fellow was a victim of unfortunate circumstances. He was an utter young blackguard, and Fullwood detested him. After that disgraceful brawl at Oxford, Carey had fled, taking all his victim's money he could lay hands on.

And Fullwood had been obliged to help him in his contemptible deception. He

had feared the disgrace and publicity of Carey's arrest in the neighbourhood. His unscrupulous cousin had taken the place of Stanley Clavering, a new fellow for the Sixth. And Clavering was being kept a prisoner, detained during Carey's pleasure.

The scheme was simple. Carey merely wanted to wait until the hue and cry was over, so that he could quietly slip out of the country. But he had recently declared his intention of staying on at St. Frank's for at least a month. And Fullwood was helpless, and intensely worried.

All his thoughts were for Clavering, the innocent victim. But Fullwood couldn't act the informer, firstly, because it was against his new principles, and secondly, because he would involve himself in ruin. The Head would learn that Fullwood had helped in the rascally work, and expulsion could be the only punishment. The Head would not show leniency because Fullwood's hand had been forced.

So the latest recruit to the junior football was only happy when he was actually on the field. The great game made him forget his worries. But the slightest pause was sufficient to bring back the shadow. And it was hovering over him now, as he allowed his thoughts to stray from the practice.

CHAPTER VI.

AN INVITATION AND A REFUSAL.



"DAY-DREAMING?"

Fullwood started as Tommy Watson clapped him on the back. Nipper had just passed the ball to Fullwood, but the latter had allowed

it to roll by.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Fullwood hastily. "Yes, I was just thinkin'. Sorry. Time to go in yet?"

"Of course not, you ass!" replied Tommy. "I was just waking you up, that's all. You'll have to be more alert to-morrow, you know. You mustn't go to sleep in front of goal."

"No fear!" agreed Fullwood. "Come on, I'll race you."

The ball rolled towards the touchline, and Fullwood and Tommy Watson sprinted for it. Ralph Leslie easily outran the other junior. He was springy and active; his recent training had made his muscles supple. He reached the leather, dribbled cleverly, and defeated two good-natured opponents. Then he let fly at Handforth, who only just succeeded in smothering the shot.

"Begad! The chap's amazin', he is, really!" declared Sir Montie Tregellis-

West. "We ought to see some rippin' play to-morrow, Dick old boy."

"Unless I'm mistaken, we shall," agreed Nipper, nodding.

Just on the other side of the ropes a group of three juniors stood talking. They weren't interested in practice, and they had only come to Little Side in order to discuss something in private, where no listening ears could overhear. The trio were Bernard Forrest, Albert Gulliver, and George Bell.

"Did you see that?" asked Bell disgustedly.

"See what?" yawned Gulliver.

"Old Fully havin' a race with that cad Watson," said Bell. "He seems to have taken football up in earnest. Isn't it surprisin' how some fellows can sink lower an' lower in the course of a few weeks?"

Bell was slim and aristocratic, narrow-chested, and with supercilious features. There was something languid about him, something of the simpering dandy. One glance at his face was enough to assure an observer of the characterless nature.

"Hang Fullwood!" said Gulliver savagely. "What do we care about him now? Good riddance to him. We've got Forrest!"

"And I'm better company, aren't I?" asked Forrest drily.

"Rather!" said Gulliver, nodding. "Better than Fully any day. It was your idea to get up this celebration for to-night. Grayson wouldn't have thought of it himself, although it's his bally birthday. He was just goin' to have a little tea-party. But your idea is miles better."

Gulliver was enthusiastic. His unpleasant features were alight with eagerness. His long nose and thin lips, to say nothing of his weedy body and his skinny legs, indicated his character. The very thought of an illicit spree filled him with evil delight.

"Yes, what about to-night?" asked Bell. "I haven't heard all the details."

Gulliver's flat blue eyes gleamed. "Ask Forrest!" he said promptly. "He's planned everythin'."

Bernard Forrest stretched himself.

"Nothing to make a fuss about," he said languidly. "I've fixed it up with Grayson. It's his birthday, and we're going to have a supper-party in one of the empty studies."

"Why not in Grayson's own study?"

"Because it'll be safer," replied Forrest. "If we're surprised we can clear out, and there won't be any evidence. Not that there's much danger of being surprised. Old Goole sleeps like a log, and so does Pyecraft. They're the only two resident masters in the East House."

"A supper-party, eh?" said Bell. "That covers a lot. I hear there's goin' to be real champagne, an' cards, an' poker playin', an' nap—"

"Nothing so common as nap," interrupted Forrest disparagingly. "We're playing chemin-de-fer to-night, don't forget. I'm an expert, and Grayson's got pots of money. Why say more?"

"You're a deep bird," said Gulliver enviously. "What about Kenmore, too? There's a possibility that he might come, if he can forget his dignity."

"Chemin-de-fer makes everybody forget their dignity," retorted Bernard Forrest coolly. "Kenmore will be one of the gang, believe me."

Bell was looking over the playing-field.

"Why not Fully?" he said suddenly.

"Eh?"

"Why not invite old Fullwood?"

"Don't be a bigger ass than Nature made you!" retorted Forrest.

"I mean it!" insisted Bell. "Fully's all right at heart; he's only got a craze just now. I don't like to see him backslidin' in this way. It only needs a card-party, or somethin' like that to bring him back to his senses. He's fairly rollin' in money, too."

Forrest looked thoughtful.

"Can he play chemin-de-fer?" he asked.

"Don't think so; he's keen on poker."

"Then we might as well invite him," said Forrest calmly. "If he's got pots of money he becomes eligible. And, as you say, why not bring him back into the fold? I dislike this unpleasantness in the happy family."

Gulliver waved urgently as Fullwood approached. Fullwood kicked the ball back to the others and paused.

"Just a minute, Fully!" called Gulliver.

"Busy!" retorted Fullwood briefly.

"Shan't keep you a minute; it's urgent."

Fullwood went to the ropes and looked at the three young rascals rather suspiciously. There was nothing friendly in his attitude.

"Well?" he asked.

"We're havin' a party to-night in the East House—Grayson's birthday, you know," explained Gulliver eagerly. "I say, Fully, let's chuck this rot. Why not join in? You'll enjoy it—"

"I shall enjoy a good night's sleep a lot better," said Fullwood.

"Don't be an ass!" urged Bell. "Distinguished company, you know—Grayson, Kenmore, Claverin—"

"Claverin?" repeated Fullwood sharply.

"That new senior in our House," explained Gulliver. "He's promised to come along, I believe. The man's a sport by what I hear, an' he's got money to burn. Ain't you tempted?"

Fullwood looked at the trio contemptuously.

"You can go to the deuce!" he retorted. He turned on his heel and went back to the football.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE WEST TOWER.



WILLY HANDFORTH came to a dead halt in the Triangle, and caught his breath in.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated.

It took a great deal to startle Willy, but he was startled now. He stood in the Triangle, staring straight up at the top of the West Tower.

Three figures could be seen up there, perched precariously upon the granite parapet. And a long object projected perilously over the side of the tower, an object which jerked uncertainly to and fro.

In a word Hobbs & Co. were testing the new telescope.

And it was characteristic of Tommy Hobbs that he should select one of the most dangerous spots in the whole of St. Frank's for his experiments. The top of the tower was reached by a stairway inside, and it was strictly out of bounds. But what did Hobbs care for a trifle of that sort?

He had even lured Dicky Jones and Kerrigan to accompany him. And there they were, carelessly moving about at the top of the tower, as though no danger of any sort assailed them. But one slip and a tragedy might result.

Willy Handforth quivered with anger and indignation and alarm. Personally, he would have walked round the parapet of the West Tower with greasy shoes, and would have thought nothing of it. He would even have walked round on his hands with no thought of danger. But to see other fags merely on the tower top filled him with apprehension.

"The reckless young asses!" he snorted indignantly. "They're simply asking to be killed, that's all! I've never know such idiots in all my born days. If they're spotted they'll be scalped. Old Barry Stokes would give 'em a six-hander each for this!"

He went nearer, and craned his neck.

"Hi, Hobbs!" he yelled.

"Hallo!" shouted Tommy Hobbs, leaning so far over the parapet that Willy nearly had heart failure. "What's up?"

"You're up!" snorted Willy. "But unless you're careful you'll be down. Come off that tower at once, you young ass. Do you want to commit suicide?"

"Go away!" said Hobbs impatiently.

"We're busy!"

"I tell you—"

"This is nothing to do with you," interrupted Hobbs. "We're West House chaps, and you belong to that mouldy old place called the Ancient House. Go away, and mind your own giddy business!"

Willy breathed hard. This was nothing more nor less than rank rebellion. Hobbs was speaking boldly because he felt safe. But Willy ruled the Third with an iron hand, and unless his orders were carried out, he adopted drastic measures. Open defiance was a perilous proceeding.

"All right!" muttered Willy. "We'll see about this!"

He cast an anxious glance at the clock on the School House tower. It was getting near school-time, but Willy didn't care. He rushed into the West House, ran up the stairs, and found the communicating door which led into the tower. As he had suspected, it was unlocked. Doubtless Hobbs had utilised a key of his own manufacture. Hobbs was rather smart at that sort of thing. There was a similar door in the Ancient House, but it would be locked.

Willy ran up the stone steps three at a time, and at last he arrived at the narrow door which opened out upon the leads. He passed out into the open breathlessly, and Hobbs & Co. eyed him with alarm.

"Here, I say—" began Hobbs.

"I won't touch you now; I'll wait until we get down," said Willy grimly. "But I'm standing no mutiny—not likely!"

A great deal of his anger subsided. At close quarters he found that the three fags weren't taking many risks, after all. The parapet was fairly high, and the tower top was perfectly safe. The home-made telescope was standing on its own tripod—the latter having been constructed with cricket-stumps, and Dicky Jones was peering through the small end.

"It's marvellous!" he ejaculated. "You can see for miles!"

Willy sniffed.

"You can't kid me with that bluff!" he said tartly. "That thing's not a telescope at all; it's only a fake. Take it down—"

"A fake, is it?" roared Hobbs. "I can tell you the time by the Bannington Town Hall clock if you like. Come and squint through it yourself, you giddy scoffer. This is my greatest triumph!"

"Hub!" grunted Willy non-committally.

He didn't believe it for a moment, but he had a great idea of fairness. After all, he might as well take a look through the thing and convince himself that it was useless. He strode forward.

"Out of it, my lad!" he said briskly.

He shouldered Dicky Jones out of the way, and applied his eye to the telescope. Hobbs and his mechanics stood looking on eagerly. Secretly, they were anxious to hear Willy's opinion.

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Willy.

Tommy Hobbs was satisfied. That ejaculation was enough for him. As for Willy, he was frankly amazed. He had taken it

for granted that the telescope was of no more use than a length of stove-pipe.

But he found himself gazing upon the Shingle Rock lighthouse, and it seemed to be just on the other side of the Triangle. With the naked eye, the lighthouse was visible as an indistinct pinnacle far away. But through the telescope he could see everything. Even the railings of the top balcony stood out with astounding clearness and stereoscopic effect.

"Well?" asked Hobbs defiantly.

"By jingo, I've got to apologise!" said Willy, looking up. "How the dickens did you do it? This telescope is top-hole! You can see for miles!"

"Didn't I tell you so?" asked Hobbs proudly. "It doesn't look much, but you can't judge a cigar by the picture on the box!"

Willy applied his eye to the telescope again. To his surprise, it swivelled round smoothly on its tripod. He had expected it to jerk round in a series of perilous lurches. His opinion of Hobbs soared. The young ass wasn't such a hopeless duffer, after all!

He brought the telescope to rest, and gazed eagerly. He had just brought the ruins of Bellton Priory into range. The old ivy-covered pile stood out in sharp relief. Willy could distinguish the very tendrils of the creeper.

And then a figure came into view—cautiously and furtively.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE PRIORY.



HOBBS was bursting with eagerness to look through his telescope again. He could see that Willy had got the Priory into line, and he could also see that the hands of the school clock were moving onwards. The hands of the clock had an exasperating habit of this sort. And at any moment the bell for lessons was due to clang out.

"Buck up, old man!" said Hobbs impatiently.

"All right—just a minute," said Willy. "There's something here— Well, I'm blessed!"

He was watching that figure curiously. He would have thought nothing of the incident but for the fact that the figure moved furtively, as though evading attention. And why should he? The Priory ruins were practically public property, and anybody could go there with impunity.

There was something rather uncanny in watching the movements of this figure. He was so far away, and yet he could be seen distinctly. He seemed no farther away than

the East House. He turned, too, and looked straight across at Willy, and he proved to be Eustace Carey.

Naturally, he had no knowledge of the fact that he was being watched, and Willy had no intention of spying. He had caught sight of Carey by pure chance, but Willy was quick-witted.

"Clavering!" he muttered. "That's queer!"

"Queer?" said Dicky Jones. "What's queer? Let's have a look——"

"Wait until I've finished!" said Handforth minor.

He was very thoughtful as he watched Carey's movements. Fullwood's cousin almost crept across an open space, then he dodged down and took cover. After that he proceeded in a crouching attitude, finally disappearing down some crumbling steps.

"H'm! Something fishy about this!" decided Willy aloud.

"Something fishy about what?" demanded Hobbs. "Look here, Willy, you ass, why the dickens can't you explain——"

"All right—you can look now," said Willy. "But he's gone."

"Who's gone?"

"Clavering."

"What the——"

"I just spotted Clavering of the Sixth," explained Willy. "He was in the ruins, and you might have thought he was a hunted criminal, or something, by the way he was skulking. Jolly queer!"

"Only exploring the ruins, I expect," remarked Kerrigan.

"He seemed to know the ruins by heart," declared Willy. "But that's not all. He distinctly told young Conroy that he was going to Caistowe. And the Priory ruins are in the opposite direction to Caistowe. Why should he ferret about in the ruins?"

"Don't ask me!" said Hobbs. "If it comes to that, I don't care a brass button about the chap! This telescope—— Oh, rats!"

The first bell had clanged out, and a move was necessary. Hobbs and his fellow experimentalists took the telescope down, and a general move was made for the stone stairway. Willy was the first in the Triangle, and he came upon Nipper & Co. near the Ancient House steps. An impulse seized him.

"I say, Nipper, do you know anything about Clavering?" he asked.

The chums of Study C looked at Willy with interest.

"Clavering?" repeated Nipper. "I don't know much about him. I think he's a wrong 'un, though—although I don't want to tear his character to shreds without any cause. I'm just judging by appearances."

Willy explained what he had just seen.

"I thought I'd tell you because it seems fishy," he concluded. "Clavering particu-

larly impressed Conroy minimus with the fact that he was going to Caistowe. Yet he was at the ruins, prowling about like a burglar. Oughtn't we to do something?"

"It's not our business," said Watson bluntly. "He's in the East House."

"It's no good going to Armstrong about it," sniffed Willy. "If Clavering's up to anything shady, he ought to be exposed—that's all. You're the detective, Nipper, so it's up to you. Why not investigate?"

Nipper laughed.

"I'm not particularly interested in Clavering," he replied lightly. "At the same time, I don't like the fellow, and your yarn is suspicious. If we've got time after tea, we'll run over and have a look round."

"I'd go myself, only I'm booked," said Willy coolly. "I've got an appointment with old Sunny. He particularly wants to see me after tea, and we might be together for an hour."

"Detention?" asked Nipper sympathetically.

"Yes, worse luck!" grunted Willy. "I can't understand these Form-masters! Always dropping on a chap for nothing! I only kicked a football through his window, and he's going to detain me for two hours! But that's all rot—I shall get off in half that time!"

"Where did the football go, dear old boy?" asked Sir Montie politely.

"Well, as a matter of fact, it hit old Suncliffe in the face," replied Willy. "It was muddy, too. But surely he can't blame me for that?"

Willy walked off towards the School House, and Nipper & Co. followed, for the second bell was ringing.

"We might as well cycle to the Priory," said Nipper thoughtfully. "We can take the lane, and then go along the footpath. We're booked for the village, anyhow, so it won't take us much longer. And if Clavering's up to anything crooked, we can drop on him. Strictly speaking, it's not our affair, but the circumstances are exceptional."

They went in to afternoon school, and the matter was temporarily dismissed. They little realised how their lightly made plans were destined to bring further acute anguish upon the head of Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOW OF EXPOSURE.



"MORE footer practice this evening?" asked Clive Russell, as he helped himself to a cake. "No, not this evenin'," replied Fullwood. "Nipper thinks it'll be better if we give it a rest."

Don't want to get stale, you know. So we'll give it a miss until to-morrow.

They were in Study I in the Ancient House. This was Fullwood's room, and the Canadian boy was a guest for tea. Of late, Fullwood and Russell had been getting more and more friendly. Somehow, they seemed drawn to one another. During the holidays, Fullwood had saved Clive's life, and their friendship had dated from that day—although it had been very cool at first, for Fullwood had still retained a lot of his old spirit at that time.

But things were different now. He enjoyed Clive's company immensely. And the Canadian boy, for his part, found a great many good qualities in Ralph Leslie. This was Clive's first term at St. Frank's, so he had no earlier experiences of Fullwood to prejudice him.

"What about a walk?" suggested Fullwood, sipping his tea.

"Say, that's bad!" exclaimed Clive regretfully. "I'm out of luck, I guess, old man. I'd like a walk, but it can't be done. I've already arranged with Adams to spend an hour in the gym. I can get him to put it off—"

"Not likely!" interrupted Fullwood. "Plenty of time for a walk later on. It's lookin' dull, anyhow. I'll get my prep. done early, an' then have a read in the Common-room."

When tea was over, Clive took his departure. And Fullwood wandered out into the Triangle for a breath of fresh air before starting his prep. Besides, he wanted to find Nipper. There were one or two questions he wanted to ask regarding football practice on the morrow. He had called into study C, but the room had proved empty.

"I say, seen Nipper anywhere?" asked Fullwood.

Willy Handforth was walking briskly past, en route for Mr. Suncliffe's sanctum in the East House. Willy regarded it as a nerve that his Form-master should reside in the worst House at St. Frank's.

"Just gone out," replied Willy. "Watson and Tregellis-West were with him. They've gone on their bikes."

"Oh," said Fullwood. "All right, I'll wait until they come back—"

"They may be a long time," said Willy. "They've gone up to the Priory—"

Fullwood gave a violent start.

"The Priory?" he repeated huskily. "What for?"

"Exploring."

"Gad! Explorin'!" panted Fullwood.

Willy looked at him in a queer sort of way.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "You've gone all white, Fully! I say, do you know anything about this rummy business?"

"What rummy business?"

"About Claverin—"

"Claverin!" shouted Fullwood tensely.

"My hat! What the—"

"What do you mean—Claverin?" demanded Fullwood fiercely.

"We spotted him through a telescope just before lessons," said Willy. "Claverin was prowling about the Priory ruins, and Nipper and his pals have gone there to look round. I told them to do it—"

"You interferin' young bounder!" snarled Fullwood harshly.

He turned on his heel and strode off, leaving Willy startled. In that moment, Fullwood had revealed all his old temper. Obviously, some excessive agitation must have caused him to display that unexpected flash. But why should Fullwood be agitated on Claverin's account?

Willy gave it up, and decided to tell Nipper later on. In the meantime, Fullwood was running towards the bicycle-shed. His thoughts were elsewhere, but his direction was instinctive. Something would have to be done! This situation was fraught with utter peril.

For the real Stanley Claverin—Carey's victim—was concealed in a dungeon at Moat Hollow! Carey, in fact, had been visiting his prisoner when Willy had seen him. And there were many reasons for Carey's cautious movements.

The unfortunate Claverin was incarcerated in a dungeon. He certainly had comfort in the shape of warmth and good food. But nothing could alter the fact that he was imprisoned in a dungeon. For days Fullwood, had been worrying over this problem. He knew that Claverin was growing weaker. And his cousin was talking about staying at St. Frank's for the whole month!

But now, it seemed, a crisis had arisen.

Nipper & Co. were bent upon exploring the Priory, and that, of course, would mean exposure. Fullwood could see it all. This was no casual visit on the part of Nipper and his chums—but a deliberate exploration. Their suspicions had been aroused, and they would find Claverin within the first five minutes.

And what would follow?

Complete and absolute exposure. Claverin would tell everything to his rescuers, and Eustace Carey would be unmasked. Fullwood was not worrying about Carey. The unmasking of that rascal was the only feature that Fullwood regarded with pleasure. His own position was precarious.

He had helped Carey to look after Claverin. For Fullwood's task had been to visit the Priory after lights-out. He had gone every night, taking the precaution to wear a kind of mask, so that the prisoner could not know him. But it was a weak subterfuge, at the best.

Claverin would tell of this second gaoler, and Dr. Stafford could easily put two and two together. Fullwood would be on the

carpet, and the whole story would come out. It would mean disgrace and expulsion.

Just as he was making good, too!

The cruel irony of the situation was appalling. Often enough he had eluded the sack when he had thoroughly deserved it. But now that he didn't deserve it at all, he looked like getting it!

CHAPTER X.

FULLWOOD'S DESPERATE MOVE.



ALL these thoughts passed through Ralph Leslie's mind in a few seconds, and

there was only one possible conclusion. By hook or by crook, Nipper & Co. had to be prevented from exploring the Priory. Then, that night, Clavering could be removed to safer quarters.

Fullwood recalled that something of the same situation had arisen once before, but he wasn't surprised. While he and his cousin were sharing such a guilty secret, these shocks were bound to come.

He didn't ride straight off, but entered the Triangle, leapt off his machine, and sped into the East House. He went to Carey's study in the Sixth Form passage—only to find it empty. It was useless making a search. There were a hundred and one places where Eustace might be. And not a precious second could be lost.

He leapt on his machine again, and rode off. He took the lane towards Edgemore, leaving this presently in favour of a footpath which led across the meadows. It wasn't possible to cycle all the way to the Priory, but the greater part of the journey could be accomplished a wheel.

"By gad!" muttered Fullwood tensely.

The footpath was soft, and there were the distinct tracks of three bicycles on the surface. Nipper & Co.'s tracks! It seemed that Fullwood was too late, even now. He pedalled on feverishly. He hadn't got the faintest idea what to do. All he wanted was to overtake the explorers.

At last he got to the spot where the path ended. The three machines were standing here, against a hedge. The River Stowe flowed by, within a few yards. And the wooded hills rose, with the Priory ruins peeping through the branches in the distance.

Fullwood paused, breathless. Already he was beginning to lose all hope. It was useless now. Perhaps he'd better go back and tell Carey, and they could fly together. It would be better than facing the utter disgrace.

Then he caught sight of a figure moving near the ruins. There was another one immediately behind—and still another. With a little gasp, Fullwood could see that Nipper and Watson and Tregellis-West were only just entering the Priory. They had reached

their objective, but they hadn't commenced operations.

There was still a chance!

Fullwood looked round rather wildly. What could he do? To call for them would be no use. There would be a slight delay, perhaps, but such an action would only bring suspicion upon himself. Something very drastic was required here—something dramatic.

And Fullwood felt his heart leap.

A sudden thought had come to him, and he didn't wait to consider it. He grabbed his machine, leapt upon it, and sped as hard as he could go towards the river bank. Boy and bicycle plunged headlong into the swollen river.

"Help!"

Fullwood uttered that loud cry even before he struck the water. He came to the surface and yelled again. And his voice carried clearly on the evening air. Nipper & Co., making a preliminary survey of the ruins, gazed at one another with startled surprise.

"What the dickens was that?" asked Watson huskily.

"Dear old boy, it sounded like somebody callin' for assistance," said Sir Montie, in his mild way. "Begad! I believe—Yes, look there!"

He pointed. The bend of the river was within view from the higher ground, and for a moment Nipper & Co. caught sight of a form almost in mid-stream. It was struggling and splashing.

"Somebody in the river!" shouted Nipper crisply. "Come on!"

"Help! Help!"

The cry, much weaker, came to them as they raced down the slope. They arrived at the river bank in a condition of acute excitement. The back wheel of Fullwood's machine was just protruding above the surface, for the bicycle had stuck in the mud. In an instant, the whole story was told.

One of the fellows had ridden along the path—it sloped down rather steeply just there—and had lost control. Before he could stop himself, he had plunged into the river. But where was he?

"Poor chap, we're too late!" muttered Nipper huskily.

"No!" roared Watson. "There he goes!"

He pointed, and the others saw. Some distance down the stream, Fullwood's head had risen above the surface. An arm shot up. And then both vanished again. The chums of Study C raced like mad along the river bank.

The current was swift, for the Stowe was swollen owing to the heavy rains which had recently fallen. Nipper's idea was to get ahead of the drifting junior, and then plunge in to the rescue. It was, indeed, the only sensible course to adopt.

As for Fullwood, his condition was acute.

He had plunged in with the one thought of attracting attention. The idea seemed so simple. For Nipper & Co. would rush down, and would certainly accompany him back to

the school. Thus the exploration of Bellton Priory would probably be postponed until to-morrow.

But Fullwood had not counted upon that deadly current!

He had been all right during the first few moments. He had made no effort to save himself, but had pretended to be in difficulties. And it wasn't long before he found himself in real difficulties. The under-current was tugging at him, pulling him down.

And when at last he realised the nature of the situation, it was almost too late. He struggled in earnest now—madly, desperately. The water was icily cold, and a peculiar kind of cramp had attacked his right leg below the knee. He felt himself giving up the struggle.

And then he dimly saw two figures plunging into the water. He was aware of a great splashing. He felt hands grasping him. Then everything went blurred, and his next lucid thought was a peaceful one. His object had been attained. The crisis was over!

He opened his eyes and found himself on the bank, with Nipper & Co. rubbing his arms and doing their utmost to restore consciousness.

"Hallo!" muttered Fullwood weakly. "What—what's happened?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE CALIBRE OF EUSTACE CAREY.



NIPPER gave a heave. "That's right—haul him up!" he said briskly. "There's an east wind, and it's bitter. But as long as we keep moving we shall be

all right. You can explain everything later, Fully."

Fullwood was shivery and faint. He saw that Nipper and Tommy Watson were soaked, too. Only Sir Montie was dry, for Nipper had forbidden him to leap in. Two of them had been quite sufficient.

"Begad, rather!" said Tregellis-West. "I'm worried, dear old boys—I am, really. This soakin', you know—"

"I tell you there'll be no harm if we keep moving," interrupted Nipper. "We'll take Fullwood straight to Mrs. Poulter—"

"For the love of Mike, don't do that!" interrupted Fullwood quickly. "She'll only say I've got 'flu, or somethin', an' have me shoved in the sanny! What about to-morrow's game? I shall be all right, Nipper!

Let's sneak in, an' we'll change on the quiet!"

"We'll see," said Nipper grimly.

But they did sneak in. By a piece of luck, they managed to enter the Ancient House in the dusk without any master or prefect seeing. And half an hour later they were changed, and Nipper and Watson were none the worse. They felt no ill effects whatever.

"Let's go and see how Fullwood is," said Nipper. "We've come to no harm, of course—we were only in the water a bare minute. But Fullwood was struggling for nine or ten."

They entered Fullwood's bed-room after knocking. It was rather fortunate they knocked. A second earlier Ralph Leslie had been sitting on his bed, holding his burning face in his hands. His head was singing, and everything looked blurred to him. But as he heard that knock he sprang up and assumed a careless air.

"Oh, here you are!" he said cheerfully. "Feel O.K.?"

"Yes, rather!" said Nipper. "What about you?"

"I'm fine," said Fullwood untruthfully. "I believe that spell in the river did me good. I shall be toppin' by to-morrow."

Nipper looked at him suspiciously.

"That won't wash, my son!" he said gruffly. "I'm no fool, Fullwood! You're a bit feverish—"

"It's nothin'!" insisted Fullwood. "Please don't worry."

"All right, you ought to know best," agreed Nipper. "It's a good thing we got in without being questioned. But what happened? What on earth made you dive into the river on a cold day like this—and fully dressed?"

"I was goin' for a ride," explained Fullwood. "Don't know how it happened—the brake didn't work, or somethin'. Like a fool, I lost control, an' fell into the river. Gad! It was a lucky thing you chaps were near by."

"It was," agreed Nipper. "Well, see you later."

He could easily tell that Fullwood was rather uncomfortable. He didn't like being questioned. So Nipper & Co. took their departure, leaving Fullwood alone. Down in the lobby, they ran into Willy.

"Seen Fullwood?" asked Willy promptly.

"Begad, we've not only seen him, dear old boy, but we've had a most thrillin' experience," said Sir Montie.

"Let's hear it!" invited Willy. "I'm interested in Fullwood just now. When I told him that you'd gone to the Priory he went green all over, and came out in yellow spots."

"What do you mean?" asked Nipper curiously.

"The chap absolutely raved!" declared Willy. "For some reason or other, he was mad with anxiety when he heard about the

ANSWERS

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Priory—especially when he heard Clavering's name. He went off like a shot on his bike.

"Oh," said Nipper slowly. "Well, there's nothing much to tell, Willy. He had a side-slip, or his brake failed to act, or something, and he fell into the river. But don't breathe a word about it—this is in confidence. He's afraid of being pushed into the sanny."

Willy closed one eye.

"Trust me!" he said, placing a finger against his nose. "A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse. I'll keep as

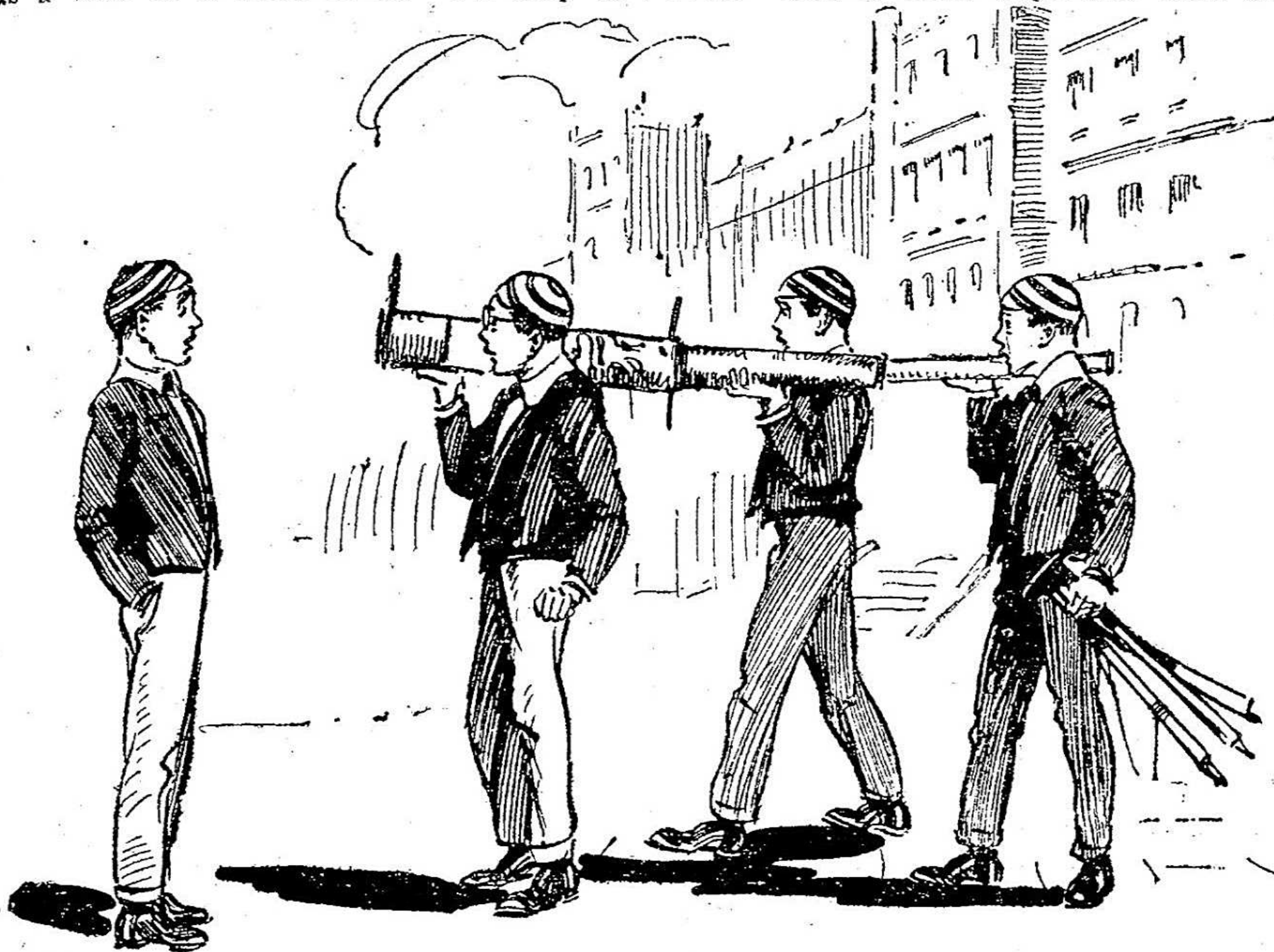
East House. He was looking grim. He went straight to Eustace Carey's study.

His cousin was in this time, and alone. He was lounging back in an easy-chair, reading a novel and smoking. Fullwood shut the door and advanced.

"I've got somethin' to tell you," he said gruffly.

"Don't bother now, young 'un," said Carey impatiently. "I've got to the most interesting chapter—"

"Hang your chapter!" interrupted Fullwood. "This is more important than that



The West House trio were struggling along under the weight of a weird-looking article which closely resembled a roll of oilcloth.

"Hallo!" said Willy, walking up. "What's all this?"

The other fags halted.

"My new telescope," explained Hobbs briefly.

mum as an oyster. All the same, it's more fishy than ever, in my opinion."

He went off, and Nipper pursed his lips.

"The kid's right!" he said slowly. "It is fishy! Fullwood knows something about Clavering, and he dived into the river on purpose. I'm pretty sure he stage-managed the whole affair so that we shouldn't explore the Priory."

"Begad!"

"We'll do nothing at the moment," went on Nipper. "But to-morrow—"

He broke off, as several juniors came in. And a few moments later Fullwood passed out into the Triangle, and crossed to the

infernal book! They're suspicious about the Priory."

Carey dropped his book with a crash.

"Suspicious?" he panted. "Who's suspicious?"

Fullwood explained the circumstances, and Eustace listened.

"You young fool, there's nothing to worry about there," he growled, at last.

"I don't suppose they were exploring at all. And what if they were? Clavering is down in that old dungeon, and we've put a whacking great lock on the door now. They can't get in—"

"But they can discover things," insisted Fullwood. "An' I'm not feelin' well to-night, Eustace. I took that dive into the river for your sake as much as my own, an' I nearly got drowned."

"Poor, weakly baby!" sneered his cousin.

"I'm booked for a football match to-morrow—an important one," went on Fullwood grimly. "I've got a bit of a temperature already, an' I'm goin' straight to bed. I need a full night's sleep."

"Well?"

"I want you to go to Claverin' to-night, in my place for once," said Fullwood. "It won't do me any good to go out in the night air. If I can get a full night's sleep, I shall probably wake up O.K. I'm goin' to dose myself with some lung mixture—"

"I can't help your infernal troubles!" interrupted Carey hotly. "The arrangement was for us to share and share alike. I attend to Claverin in the daytime, and you go after lights-out. Do your own work!"

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE HOUR OF MIDNIGHT.



RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD compressed his lips.

"Won't you go?" he asked steadily.

"No, I won't!"

"I tell you I'm not feelin' well," insisted the Removite. "Hang it all, Eustace, I've done enough for you, haven't I? I'm feverish, can't you go to the Priory this once?"

"It's impossible," growled Eustace. "I'm booked for Grayson's party."

"Grayson's party?"

"There's a special celebration on to-night," explained Carey coolly. "Champagne—chemin-de-fer—everything. It starts at eleven-thirty, and goes on until the small hours! Gad, I haven't had such a chance for weeks! Do you think I'm going to miss it because of your confounded cold?"

Fullwood fairly quivered.

"An' you put this rotten party before Claverin'?" he asked passionately. "That poor chap can't stand imprisonment much longer! He's got to be looked after, Eustace! If I'm too ill to go, what will happen?"

Eustace Carey laughed.

"I'm very much afraid the poor blighter will go without his usual nightly fodder!" he replied callously. "Don't make such a fuss over nothing. The man will be all right until to-morrow."

"But you took him short rations to-day—"

"Never mind that!" interrupted Carey. "If you're so keen about him, go yourself! You've got the grub, and you've got his

new candles and other supplies. Do your own dirty work!"

"Look here, Eustace, I'm fed up with you!" shouted Fullwood, his eyes glittering. "Any more of this, an' I'll tell the whole story to the Head—"

"An' get the sack?" jeered Carey.

Fullwood caught his breath in.

"You cur!" he muttered. "You know you've got me in a cleft stick, an' you take advantage of me! You miserable, crawlin' worm!"

"Steady!"

"I'll say what I like!" snapped Fullwood. "I didn't think any reptile could be so poisonous as you are, Eustace! If my own safety wasn't mixed up in your affairs, I'd peach on you this very minute! An' don't forget what I warned you of! Some of those chaps are suspicious about the Priory already. Claverin's got to be shifted to-night—"

"You can shift him if you want to," said Carey carelessly. "As far as I'm concerned, I feel quite safe. I'm not getting the wind up over nothing. Go to bed, my son—you're too excited!"

Fullwood went, unable to trust himself further. His cousin's attitude was characteristic of him. The fellow was utterly worthless—a rank outsider. His stubborn refusal to believe in any danger was also characteristic. What little brains he had, he refused to use.

When he had first arrived at St. Frank's his brains had been sharpened by his own peril. But since then they had returned to their normal dull condition. He felt safe and secure in Claverin's shoes. He was in no danger of being arrested for manslaughter or murder. That part of the case was abandoned, and the police weren't even looking for him.

So Eustace Carey was careless. While Fullwood could see the danger—while an intellect of the meanest order could see it—Eustace Carey saw nothing. The fact that a lock was fitted to the door of the dungeon was enough for him. He and Fullwood had duplicate keys, and they could get in whenever they wanted.

Ralph Leslie went away, boiling inwardly. His cousin was prepared to leave the prisoner neglected, and attend Grayson's rotten party! And Fullwood himself was feeling worse with every minute that passed.

He was afraid to go to the common-room. He instinctively knew that he was flushed, and that his eyes were unnaturally bright. So he went straight to bed, and lay between the sheets, alternately shivering with cold and perspiring with terrible heat. He knew the signs. A bad cold was already developing rapidly.

He had taken medicine, but he felt that it wouldn't do much good. The cold had gripped him too fiercely. If he had been

in and out of the river within a couple of minutes—the same as Nipper and Watson—no ill effects would have resulted. But he had been chilled to the very marrow before being rescued.

And now the natural consequences were showing themselves.

More than once he half decided to put his dressing-gown on, and go to Mrs. Poulter. What was the good of risking a dangerous illness for the sake of a game of football? He wouldn't be able to play, anyhow. But then he thought of Stanley Clavering, locked away in that dungeon.

If he didn't go to the Priory that night, nobody would. Eustace thought more of his own vicious pleasures. So, for Clavering's sake alone, Fullwood said nothing of his condition to anybody else.

Occasionally, he dozed, but he couldn't sleep properly. And as the school clock was chiming midnight he got out of bed. He told himself that he was feeling better. He wasn't so shaky now. His skin burned, but that awful sickly feeling had left him. He dressed rapidly.

Then, taking care to wear a thick muffler, he silently made his way down the passage and reached the lower quarters. He entered his study, and switched on an electric torch. Then he unlocked the door of his cupboard, and brought out a suitcase. It was all packed in readiness.

A moment later he had thrown open the window, and was off.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRISONER OF THE PRIORY.



THE east wind was bitter.

Fortunately, it wasn't excessively strong, but there was a bite in it which seemed to grip Ralph Leslie Fullwood's very vitals as he made his way across the meadows on foot towards the old Priory.

He kept his mouth closed, and the muffler round his face. But even these precautions were inadequate under such circumstances. The junior had a high temperature now, and this night exposure was dangerous. His action in thus leaving his bed was wholly commendable. There was no necessity for him to go—as far as he was personally concerned.

But Clavering would be waiting—eagerly expecting this nightly visit. As Fullwood had tossed about in bed, he had imagined the prisoner's despair if nobody came. The poor fellow had been suffering intensely—he must have been suffering. He had been imprisoned for over a week now, and during all that time he had only seen Carey and his other unknown gaoler. It would be

the extremity of cruelty to neglect him. Carey could do a thing like that, but Fullwood couldn't.

So Fullwood's action was rather noble. At the risk of all his own hopes, he was determined to visit Stanley Clavering. There was a stubborn spirit in him now, and he was wondering if it wouldn't be better to come out boldly with the whole story. His latest experience of Eustace Carey had disgusted him to an untold degree. And Fullwood's own will was not at its normal strength.

He reached the Priory, and made his way down the crumbling stone stairs without a fault. He was accustomed to this descent in the dark by now. But once in the dank passage, he switched on his electric torch, and brought out his key. But before entering the dungeon, he pulled a kind of bag over his head—a black affair with an elastic fastening. It entirely enclosed his head, leaving only eye holes and a space for breathing.

He unlocked the door, and shot the bolts back.

Then he entered the dungeon. A light was burning, and the air was stuffy and warm. Two candles were stuck on a stone, and one was guttering its final moments of life out. There was an odour of stale coffee in the air, and on a kind of bench stood the remains of the prisoner's supper.

Clavering himself was in his blankets, and quite motionless.

Fullwood approached, a sudden alarm gripping him. But when he looked down at the captive he could see that he was breathing regularly. Clavering was sound asleep. Fullwood glanced round pityingly. And he was angry and disgusted with himself for being a party to this atrocity.

Clavering had never been accustomed to any kind of hardship. He was an only son—he had spent most of his life in the South of France—he had been schooled by an English tutor. Never had he been to a big college. His parents were in India, and he had come to St. Frank's to make the school his home until his people returned.

This was why Eustace Carey had taken Clavering's place—because there were none to discover the trick. Certainly, Mr. Barnaby Goole, the Housemaster of the East House, had detected Carey's deception, but he had been afraid to speak, for Carey knew something to his discredit. In justice to Mr. Goole, however, it must be stated that the Housemaster knew nothing of Clavering's imprisonment. He believed that Clavering was a party to the deception—instead of being a victim.

Fullwood proceeded to unpack his bag. And while he was doing so, Clavering stirred, and sat up.

"Oh, you've come?" he muttered dully. "I didn't hear you open the door."

Fullwood made no reply. In his own interests he had made a habit of keeping silent during these visits. When Carey actually went, Clavering would come to St. Frank's, and Fullwood didn't want to give him the slightest atom of proof.

"Sorry, I forgot," said Clavering. "You're dumb, aren't you?"

Fullwood gritted his teeth. He was genuinely sorry for this fellow. He was a sport. He knew he could do nothing, so he took his gruel with a good grace. And it seemed such a cowardly, currish trick to deny him even the pleasure of a little conversation.

Fullwood finished his unpacking, thinking deeply all the time. Inwardly, he was alarmed. He had forgotten his own indisposition, and was thinking about the prisoner. Clavering was different to-night. His cheeks were pale, and there was something strange about his eyes. The solitude had begun to tell upon him. When he rose to his feet, he swayed. The man was ill.

"Hang it!" snapped Fullwood suddenly. "HANG it!"

He ripped off his head covering, and flung it down. The movement was an impulsive one, and it was too late to change his mind now. Ralph Leslie was just in that condition when he didn't care what happened to him. He was far more concerned about the comfort of this unfortunate senior. He was disgusted and sickened by his own conduct.

"I say!" said Clavering. "What on earth— Why, I thought you were a lot older— Are you one of the St. Frank's fellows?"

Clavering was looking at him with open curiosity.

"I'm Carey's cousin," said Fullwood bluntly. "My name's Fullwood—I'm in the Remove—Ancient House."

Clavering looked more surprised than ever.

"Only a junior?" he asked. "Well, don't you feel a bit ashamed of yourself? When is this business going to end? Haven't you kept me here long enough? I'm not the kind of fellow to make a fuss—"

"That's just it!" interrupted Fullwood fiercely. "You take everythin' so calmly! If you'd only rave an' curse it would be different. Gad, am I ashamed of myself? Don't talk about it—don't talk about it!"

He sank down, and held his throbbing head in his hand. And Clavering looked on wonderingly. At last he placed a hand on Fullwood's shoulder.

"You're unwell, aren't you?" he asked.

"Only a cold comin' on!" growled Fullwood. "It's nothin'. What about yourself? I nearly had a fit when I saw you. This imprisonment is tellin' on you, Claverin'. It's got to come to an end. I tell you, it's got to come to an end. I can't stand it any longer."

"You don't sound much like a bold, bad conspirator," said Clavering, who was taking everything very calmly. "I'm no fool, young 'un. I'll bet your cousin has forced you to do this, hasn't he?"

And then, of course, the whole story came out. Fullwood felt that he was bursting. He couldn't keep the thing any longer. He told Stanley Clavering everything—his first encounter with Carey, and all the events which had followed. And Clavering listened with intent interest.

"Poor kid!" he said at length. "Don't look so miserable. It's not your fault; I don't blame you at all. With the sack looming over you like that you had to do it. Carey's the snake!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COMPACT.



STANLEY CLAVERING'S attitude affected Fullwood deeply.

He had expected something so different. He had expected scorn, contempt, bitter accusations. Instead, Clavering was full of sympathy. It was such an unexpected event that Fullwood felt a choking sensation in his throat.

"I'm sorry!" he muttered. "You're—you're awfully decent, Claverin'. I don't deserve any sympathy from you, you know. I'm a young beast; I'm not worth touchin' with a barge-pole. Why can't you rave at me as you should? Why can't you kick me?"

Clavering laughed softly.

"Because I happen to be human, that's all," he replied. "It's not your fault, Fullwood, I can see that clearly enough. In the same circumstances, I dare say I should have done the same. So you wore that mask thing so that I shouldn't give you away when the climax came? My dear kid, you needn't be afraid; I shan't breathe a word to the Head."

Fullwood swallowed something.

"It's not fair!" he muttered. "I ought to be sacked—"

"Rubbish!" interrupted the other. "There's only one fellow who deserves horsewhipping in this affair, and that's your beautiful cousin. But the position's a bit difficult. I want to get out of this dungeon, and you want to see me out—"

"I do—honestly I do!" said Fullwood fiercely.

"But, young 'un, we mustn't do anything rash," went on Clavering. "If I go to the Head now and tell him that I've been kept a prisoner there'll be the very dickens of a dust-up. The whole school will know

everything, and you'll be connected with the scandal. That won't do you any good, will it?"

"Even if I'm not sacked, I shall be drummed out by the fellows," replied Fullwood. "I shouldn't be surprised if they took matters in their own hands."

Clavering nodded.

"Just as I thought," he replied. "Well, there's only one thing to be done. I shall have to stay here."

"Stay here?" repeated Fullwood, staring. "Of your own accord?"

"For your sake," said Clavering quietly.

"But—but—" Fullwood couldn't find his words. "But it's not right!" he blurted out. "I've only done you harm, Clavering. You're makin' me feel a worse cad than ever."

"You're a bit unstrung, Fullwood," said Clavering softly. "You'd better go straight back to bed, and wrap yourself up well. Haven't I told you that I can sympathise with you? You're not to blame at all; I saw that in the first flash. I'll stay here."

"But why?" asked Fullwood breathlessly.

"I'll stay here, and you'll have to tell your lovely cousin that the game's up," explained the prisoner. "You can do that, surely? Tell him you've unmasked yourself to me, and that he's got to clear—with-in twelve hours."

"Yes?" said Fullwood. "An' then?"

"Give him the order of the boot, and as soon as he's gone come and tell me," went on Clavering. "Then I'll go to the Head, explain the facts—without mentioning your name—and ask the Head to keep it hushed up. We can easily think of some yarn to tell the school. It isn't fair that you should be involved in any scandal. I can see you're straight, young 'un."

"I'm not!" muttered Fullwood. "I don't deserve it. Clavering, you're a brick; you're too good for me. Why can't you clear out to-night, an' go to a hotel? I've got money—"

"I can't go to a hotel at this hour of the night," interrupted Clavering. "And everything's pretty comfortable here," he added drily. "It's only until to-morrow, so I might as well stick it. Now go back to the school—"

"When shall I come to-morrow?" asked Fullwood. "I'm booked for football in the afternoon. But I'll give that up, of course," he added quickly. "Sorry! I was awfully selfish to think about football—"

"Nothing of the sort!" interrupted Clavering. "I've never been in a school team, but I can guess what it's like. If you're well enough, you play. There's only one thing I ask—leave the door open when you go. You can trust me not to butt in at an awkward moment. I'll stay here until you come—"

"Trust you?" interrupted Fullwood huskily. "Do you think I'd go away an' leave the door locked again? I'm not a dirty dog like that!"

"I knew you weren't," replied Clavering. "Sorry for mentioning the matter at all. But I do feel I'd like a breath of fresh air in the morning. I won't show myself to anybody. I'll just wait until you bring me the news. If you can't come until the evening I shan't worry."

He extended his hand, and Fullwood gripped it tightly. He couldn't express his feelings at the moment. Clavering was a splendid fellow. With rare broad-mindedness he had seen the true position.

Five minutes later Fullwood left, supremely happy. He forgot his temperature, and he felt practically well. An enormous load was off his mind. And he fairly gloated over his coming interview with Eustace. Now he could tell Eustace to clear out, and he would have to go. For the first time Fullwood held the trump cards. Previously he had been unable to speak because of the shadow of expulsion. But Clavering was a gentleman, and would say nothing. He was even giving Carey a chance to get clear away.

But not for Carey's sake. Clavering had made it quite clear that he was only permitting the rascal to get away so that Fullwood shouldn't be associated with the conspiracy.

Ralph Leslie was walking on air during his journey back to the school. But as he approached St. Frank's, Nature asserted herself once again, and his limbs felt weary and heavy. Every muscle ached. He only wanted to get into bed.

He was just moving cautiously round the angle of the East Square, intent upon crossing to the Ancient House, when he paused. He could hear voices. And the voices were distinct and audible.

"I am certain, Mr. Goole—quite certain," came one of the voices. "Please get up at once, and accompany me!"

Fullwood glanced up. The voice was coming from an upper window, which stood open. It was the window of Mr. Barnaby Goole's bed-room, and Mr. Barnaby Goole, in addition to being a vegetarian, was a fresh air fiend. He always slept with his bed-room windows wide open.

"It is preposterous, Mr. Pycraft!" came the Housemaster's voice. "Do you realise that it is nearly two o'clock in the morning? There can't be any boys up at this hour. My dear sir, you have been dreaming!"

"Very well, Mr. Goole!" snapped the master of the Fourth. "I must go to the headmaster himself. I tell you there is something strange happening downstairs. I

distinctly heard; I have listened. I came to you because——"

"Oh, very well—very well!" came Mr. Goole's voice. "I'll come!"

CHAPTER XV.

FULLWOOD'S WARNING.



FULLWOOD stood there, quivering.

He was feeling shaky and hot. The fever was coming over him again, but he never gave a thought to it. By a sheer accident he had stumbled upon something of paramount importance. It seemed that he was destined to suffer these shocks, one on top of the other.

The ill-tempered Mr. Pycraft had discovered something. Fullwood had no difficulty in guessing what. He remembered that party in celebration of Grayson's birthday. Without doubt, the revellers had become noisy under the influence of champagne. And now they were about to be caught red-handed.

Fullwood clenched his teeth, and decided that it was none of his business. It would serve the fools right. They would all be expelled—and good riddance. Then his thoughts came to a stop with a jar.

His cousin was there. Carey would be hauled before the Head with the others. And Carey might reveal his true identity under the stress of circumstances. And in that way the school would know the truth in spite of Claverin's decency. Besides, Fullwood remembered that he had taken part in many orgies of a similar character. Who was he to condemn these fellows? His duty was to warn them.

So without another thought he dashed round the building. He reckoned that Mr. Goole would be some minutes in donning his dressing-gown and slippers. He might be in time to allow the revellers to get to their own room. And after all, there was something rather nice in the thought of dishing Mr. Pycraft.

Fullwood didn't exactly know which study was being used for the celebration. But luck was with him. As he ran he heard a sound of muffled laughter. He halted, and looked at a closed window near by. He had passed it without a thought, for it was completely dark.

But now, upon closer examination, he could see that a thick curtain was secured to the inside of the window, perhaps a blanket or two, in addition, so that all light was confined to the room itself. Listening, he again heard the muffled sounds. He had found the party.

He rapped urgently upon the glass.

There were a number of quick exclamations, then dead silence. Fullwood could picture the sudden alarm within the study. But this was nothing to the shock which was coming unless the revellers dispersed.

He rapped again, and put his face close to the window.

"Open, quick!" he exclaimed urgently. "It's me—Fullwood!"

There came another exclamation, and a moment later something moved within the room and the window was opened. No lights had been revealed. Obviously they had been switched off at the first alarm.

"Who's that?" came a shaky voice.

"It's me, I tell you—Fullwood!"

"You—you infernal young idiot!" hissed the voice of Grayson. "Who told you to come here at this time of night? We thought we were collared——"

"Don't kid yourself!" interrupted Fullwood harshly. "Lemme come in—quick! There's danger. They're on the track!"

He leapt through the opening, and the window was closed. Fullwood found himself pushed about, then he started coughing. He wasn't feeling at all well, and the thick atmosphere in the apartment was enough to choke him. The air was heavy and suffocating with tobacco fumes and stagnation.

The light came on, and he blinked. The air was blue. The revellers were standing about, flushed and alarmed. They included Kenmore of the Sixth, Eustace Carey, and Forrest & Co. of the Ancient House. Carey seized his cousin's arm fiercely.

"What's all this tommy-rot?" he asked curtly.

"Confound you, Claverin', let go!" said Fullwood, remembering his cousin's false name. "Haven't you got any sense, any of you? Mr. Goole's comin' here, an' old Pycraft, too!"

"Coming here?" repeated Grayson, with a gasp.

"Rubbish!"

"Rot!"

"All right, you can believe what you like!" retorted Fullwood. "But I distinctly heard Pycraft rousin' the House-master. They'll be here any minute. You must have been makin' a lot of noise, or somethin', an——"

"Gad, we'd better bunk while we've got the chance!" exclaimed Gulliver.

"Yes, let's quit!"

There was a panic in a moment. The door was wrenched open, and half the revellers flooded out into the passage. Forrest & Co. made for one of the neighbouring studies, intent upon dashing out of the window, and fleeing to their own House. The others all resided in the East House itself, and the problem was to get upstairs without meeting the prowling masters.

Fullwood hadn't received a word of thanks. He wasn't surprised at this, for he expected none. In any case, the panic had been so acute that nobody had thought of wasting any words.

Fullwood was left in the deserted study. He had come over dizzy—the effect, no doubt, of the stuffy atmosphere after the cool air of the night. He felt that his brain was reeling, and his face was flushed. “Thank goodness!” he muttered. “I did it, anyhow!”

He turned mechanically to the window. It wasn't safe to remain here. He fumbled

by the two masters as they turned into the senior passage—and the rest, of course, was a mere matter of seconds.

The night birds had managed to disperse without being seen. The two masters arrived without having encountered a soul. Two or three of the young rascals were hiding in other studies—awaiting their chance to bolt.

“Good heavens!” ejaculated Mr. Goole, aghast.

“Disgraceful—shocking!” said Mr. Pycraft. “Why, what— Fullwood! Is that you, Fullwood?”



Fullwood sped as hard as he could towards the river bank. Boy and bicycle plunged headlong into the swollen river.

with the thick coverings, but at last he managed to wrench them aside.

“Stop—stop this instant!”

The voice was cold and commanding, and Fullwood felt his heart leap.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRAPPED IN THE NET.



MR. BARNABY GOOLE strode into the study, with Mr. Horace Pycraft at his heels. One of the fools who had last left had neglected to completely close the door. A streak of light had been seen

Fullwood had turned, and he swayed as he clutched at the heavy curtain.

“Yes, sir,” he muttered thickly.

“Fullwood!” ejaculated the Housemaster. “My boy—my boy! What does this mean? What are you doing in this House? And what is the matter with you?”

Mr. Pycraft laughed triumphantly.

“Did I not tell you, Mr. Goole?” he demanded. “Now, sir, who was right? And why need you ask this wretched boy if there is anything the matter with him? Surely, it is obvious that he is drunk?”

“Good heavens!” said Mr. Goole huskily.

“It's not true, sir!” panted Fullwood, swaying forward. “I haven't touched a

drop—I haven't been here more than two minutes!"

His very words sounded hollow and absurd. He had been discovered in this room where the orgy had just taken place. Obviously, he was a member of the party who had been too bemused to make his escape. The thing was as clear as daylight.

Mr. Goole's gaze took in the champagne bottles, the glasses, and Fullwood's very appearance was significant. He was flushed, he was unsteady, and his eyes were dull. He was obviously the worse for drink. Neither of the masters dreamed for a moment that his condition was solely due to illness.

"Oh!" said Mr. Pycraft. "So you have only been here two minutes, Fullwood—very interesting, but very unconvincing. I presume you are aware that this will mean expulsion——"

"Please, Mr. Pycraft!" interrupted the Housemaster tartly. "Forgive me, but I fancy it is my duty to question this misguided youth."

"Oh, very well, sir!" snapped Mr. Pycraft nastily.

"I've only just come in, sir," insisted Fullwood. "I don't expect you to believe me—but you can smell my breath, if you like!"

"How disgusting!" muttered Mr. Pycraft, with a shudder.

"It may be disgusting, but it'll prove that I've got no drink in me!" retorted Fullwood hotly. "I'm not feelin' well, sir—a bit of a cold comin' on. An' this stuffy atmosphere made me dizzy, too."

Mr. Goole looked at him closely.

"If you have only just come in, Fullwood, where did you come from?" he asked.

"I can't tell you, sir," replied Fullwood steadily.

"I'm afraid it is only too obvious that you are lying," went on Mr. Goole. "In any case, your very presence in this room proves that you were ready to join in this—this disgusting revelry. I am amazed that any of my boys could indulge in such appalling debauchery!"

Fullwood was silent.

"Unhappily, we were just too late to catch your companions in evil," went on the Housemaster. "You will supply me with the names, Fullwood."

"I'm sorry, sir, I can't tell you who they were."

"I have commanded you to give me the names."

"An' I can't do it, sir."

Fullwood's voice was firm, but dreary. He couldn't see the two masters distinctly—his head was throbbing, and he felt really bad. All he wanted was to get back to bed. He didn't much care what happened to him. But he was longing to be lying down somewhere.

"This is outrageous!" broke in Mr. Pycraft. "Are you going to allow the boy to

defy you in this way, Mr. Goole? I have never heard of such impertinence in all my life——"

"I beg of you to let me deal with this matter, sir!" snapped Mr. Goole. "The boy is obviously unable to answer my questions lucidly. His condition is disgusting. I shall take him back to the house and put him to bed."

"Thank you, sir," muttered Fullwood.

"But if you are indeed guilty of taking part in this orgy, there can be only one punishment for you," said Mr. Goole sternly. "I shall make a full inquiry on the morrow—and then, you may be sure, I shall get to the bottom of the whole affair. Come with me, Fullwood."

"But would it not be better to force the boy——" began Mr. Pycraft.

"Thank you, Mr. Pycraft, but I know best," cut in the Housemaster.

And, to Mr. Pycraft's mortification, he questioned Fullwood no further, but escorted him to the Ancient House. And ten minutes later Ralph Leslie was in bed but not asleep.

Under the influence of some strong cough mixture he was feeling a little better. His brain was clearer, and he could see nothing but blackness ahead. This, indeed, was the end of things for him.

The football match now seemed a mere dream. A trifle, of course—a small incident in the every day life of the great school. But to Fullwood it had been a red-letter occasion. His first appearance in the Junior School Eleven! And now even that was to be wrested from him!

Instead of playing in that game, he would be expelled—sent from the school in disgrace before even the match started. And it was the very irony of fate that his downfall would be brought about by something entirely unconnected with Stanley Clavering. A low supper-party! A disgraceful celebration in which he had taken no part whatever!

It was the very dregs of bitterness.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VOICE OF RUMOUR.



"**H** EARD the latest?" said Teddy Long eagerly.

He rushed up to Handforth & Co. as they were emerging from the Ancient House lobby before breakfast.

Edward Oswald Handforth came to a halt, and fixed Teddy with a grim eye.

"Get out of here!" he hooted, in a violent voice.

"But I've got some news——"

"Go and choke yourself with it!" roared Handforth. "I don't want to hear any of your rotten scandal! By George! I've a good mind to scalp you——"

"Yah, rotter!" yelled Teddy Long, dodging away. "There was a bust up in the East House last night—all sorts of chaps suspected! Champagne and card-playing. Fullwood was there, too!"

Handforth made a rush, but Teddy was already in flight.

"Don't chase him, you ass," said Church. "It looks undignified."

Handforth, in the act of pursuit, pulled himself up with a jerk.

"Who was going to chase him?" he asked tartly. "I'll trouble you to use more sense, Walter Church! Do you think I'd demean myself by running after that young tittle-tattler?"

"You look like it——"

"What's all this about Fullwood?" asked Reggie Pitt, striding up from the West House. "A yarn, I suppose? Personally, I don't believe it. Fullwood's chucked up that sort of thing nowadays."

Handforth & Co. started.

"What sort of thing?" asked McClure.

"Haven't you heard?" said Pitt. "Lots of our chaps are saying that there was a wild supper-party in the East House last night. Fullwood was collared by old Goole, and marched across the Triangle. He was seen by some East House chaps from the windows. They'd been aroused by the noise."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "Can't be true."

But the whole school was buzzing with the rumour. Nobody knew exactly how the story had got about—the culprits themselves wouldn't breathe a word, naturally—but there were plenty of ways. It was quite possible that some of the East House fellows had seen Mr. Goole leading Fullwood across the Triangle. And the rest was a matter of putting two and two together.

And when Fullwood himself appeared—late—his appearance was consistent with the voice of rumour. He looked heavy, flushed, and dull-eyed. He was showing every indication of having spent a "thick" night.

"You're looking seedy, Fullwood," said Nipper, going straight to the point.

"I'm all right," said Fullwood, smiling.

"That's not true—you're far from all right," replied Nipper. "You haven't forgotten the game this afternoon, I suppose?"

"Of course I haven't."

"Feel fit to play?"

"Yes, I shall turn out, thanks."

"Look here, Fullwood, there are some pretty ugly rumours going the rounds," went on Nipper grimly. "I'm not going to question you—it's not my business. But you know my views, and if anything funny happened last night you're not in a fit condition to play in the match this afternoon. You don't look yourself, either."

"That's nothing," said Fullwood impatiently. "What do you mean—rumours? What are the chaps sayin' now? Somethin' rotten, I'll bet!"

"You boulder, you got drunk last night!" shouted somebody.

"Of course he did!"

"Anybody can see it in his face!"

There were quite a number of fellows in the lobby, and Fullwood regarded them with startled eyes. So the story had already got about. And they assumed that he had been intoxicated!

"You can think what you like!" he said defiantly.

He pushed through the crowd, and walked out into the Triangle. He was feeling stubborn and angry. Without the slightest evidence, they were accusing him of being drunk. He didn't quite realise that it was the sort of thing he would have done himself not so many weeks earlier.

All his former happiness had gone. He was relieved in mind about Stanley Clavering, but he was dreading the coming interview with the headmaster. For it was obvious that such an interview was inevitable. Mr. Goole had probably made his report already, and the inquiry would follow.

It was absolutely rotten luck.

But Fullwood put the matter out of his mind for the time being, and went to the East House. It was imperative that he should see Eustace Carey. He had to tell his cousin the blunt truth about Clavering.

"Oh, here you are!" said Carey, as Fullwood entered. "You infernal young fool! If you breathe a word about last night——"

"What are you talkin' about?" asked Fullwood quietly.

"I hear that you were idiot enough to get yourself caught last night!" went on Eustace furiously. "I can tell you Grayson and the others are pretty mad about it. They'll skin you alive if you give their names!"

Fullwood looked at his cousin contemptuously.

"I've come here about somethin' more important than that!" he retorted. "I went to Claverin' last night, Eustace. I was ill, an' I'm not much better now—but I went, all the same."

"Well?"

"I told him who I was, an' gave him the full details," went on Fullwood deliberately. "The man's a brick. He promised——"

"You—you told Clavering everything?" interrupted Eustace, aghast.

"Yes, I did."

"You mad young lunatic——"

"I couldn't help it—there was nothin' else for it," growled Fullwood. "He was so thoroughly decent that I had no other course. An' for my sake he'll keep mum. He'll tell the Head, of course, but the school won't know anythin' about you bein' here as an impostor."

"You're drivelling!" said Eustace contemptuously.

"Of course, the school will know that somebody came here in Claverin's name, but they won't know that he was my cousin," went on Fullwood. "That's the kind of man you've wronged! He's as straight as a die! He's even waitin' in that dungeon until I give him the all-clear signal."



"Oh!" said Eustace, staring.

"You've got to get out to-day—this mornin'!" exclaimed Fullwood grimly. "It's the only chance you've got, Eustace—an' you'd better take it! You're safe from the police, an' you'd better go."

Carey rose to his feet.

"Are you giving me the order of the boot?" he asked.

"Oh, don't be funny——"

"It may interest you to know that I'm staying where I am," went on Eustace. "Clavering can't do me any harm—and you daren't release him! I'm staying here—understand? Now get out of this study!"

— —

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.



FULLWOOD felt helpless. Somehow, he knew that it was utterly useless to argue with his worthless cousin. Eustace Carey had made up his mind to stay, and his limited brains failed to warn him that the game had become risky. He had been immune from danger so long that he felt himself secure.

So Fullwood left the East House and wandered out into the lane. He wanted to think things over, but his brain was in a whirl. What could he do now? Eustace refused to go! Like a fool, he shut his eyes to the danger-signal, and was determined to remain.

It was an amazing chance for him—a chance to get away from St. Frank's without the police knowing anything, and without even the school being told of his true identity. And he was throwing the chance away!

What could Fullwood do now?

Fortunately, Clavering had promised to wait until the evening. By that time Eustace might change his mind, and see the wisdom of going away. So there was no immediate hurry.

But what if Eustace still refused? In that event, Fullwood decided, he would advise Clavering to come to the school. Then, and not until then, would Carey realise his position. He would probably bolt helter-skelter if he was brought face to face with his victim.

Fullwood had almost ceased to worry on the point now. It had dwindled into insignificance. He had his own affairs to worry him. He was feeling very seedy, and he had a horror of making a mess of things in the game that afternoon.

It was the chance he had been longing for ever since he had taken up football. And now, it seemed, he was to lose it.

Apart from his ill condition, there was that other affair. He felt sure that he wouldn't get through morning lessons with-

out a summons from the Head. He would refuse to answer all questions, of course. He wasn't going to play the informer. And this, no doubt, would result in his receiving the brunt of the punishment. Naturally, it would mean expulsion.

At this point in his musings he became aware that a group of trim figures were walking towards him. He started, and sought for some means of evading them. But it was too late. Irene & Co. were already waving.

There were five of the Moor View girls in the group—Irene Manners, Doris Berkeley, Marjorie Temple, Winnie Pitt, and Tessa Love. They came up, and greeted Fullwood cordially. The girls were fully aware of Fullwood's change, and they were different in their attitude towards him now.

"You're in the game this afternoon, aren't you?" asked Irene, after the greetings were over.

"Yes, I think so," said Fullwood.

"You think so?"

"Well, my name's on the list."

"Isn't that good enough?" asked Doris.

"By jingo, we shall have to go along and see that match, you girls! It ought to be interesting. I met Hal Brewster yesterday, and he told me that he's never had such a strong team."

"Yes, I've heard they're hot this season," agreed Fullwood.

"All right, we'll be pushing on," said Irene, nodding. "There's not any too much time before lessons."

"I'll catch you up soon," said Winnie, flushing slightly.

The other girls laughed.

"Oh, all right—don't be long," smiled Tessa.

They continued down the lane, but Winnie Pitt remained behind. Fullwood was feeling rather uncomfortable. The thing was so obvious. Winnie had deliberately stayed so that she could talk to him alone. It made him feel extremely self-conscious.

"Now, Ralph, out with it!" said Winnie briskly.

"Eh? Out with what?" he asked.

"The other girls were too polite to ask you point-blank—but I'm different," said Winnie. "You're looking a bit queer this morning. Your face is flushed, and your eyes are puffy. What's wrong?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said Fullwood. "I'm a bit off colour—a cold comin' on, I think. Please don't worry, Winnie——"

"We've heard rumours, too," said the girl quietly.

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Fullwood. "Do you mean to tell me that beastly story has got to the Moor View School? Who, in the name of goodness, took it there?"

"I don't know—but I think one or two of the East House boys met two or three of the girls half an hour ago," explained Winnie. "You know how these unpleasant tales get about. They say you took part in a big

spree last night. Champagne, card-playing, smoking. And they say that you were taken back to your own House in a dazed condition."

Fullwood looked at her sharply. "An' do you believe those yarns?" he asked.

She laughed. "Of course I don't," she replied promptly; "not a word!"

"Thanks awfully, Winnie!" said Fullwood gratefully. "I shouldn't like you to think those things about me—now. Last term——"

"We're not talking about last term," interrupted Winnie. "I told the girls it was all a fib, but some of them wouldn't believe it. And they'll say that your flushed face is a sign of guilt!"

"Lots of our chaps have said that already," exclaimed Fullwood bitterly. "I can't have an ordinary cold without bein' accused of gettin' drunk! That's the worst of havin' a bad reputation!"

"You're living it down wonderfully," said Winnie. "I wonder how those ridiculous stories get about?" she went on. "If you weren't out last night——"

"I was out," interrupted Fullwood bluntly. "Dash it, I can't keep it from you, Winnie, after you've shown such faith in me. I was out, but I didn't join in that confounded party."

He went into a few explanations, but mentioned nothing about his cousin. He told her how he had overheard Mr. Goole and Mr. Pycraft, and how he had taken the warning to the revellers.

"I can't tell you why I was out—but I give you my honest word I had a good reason—a decent reason," he said quietly. "Some day, perhaps, I'll be able to tell you—but please don't ask me now."

"I believe you," said Winnie. "As for those cads, you've got nothing to fear. Surely they won't stand by and see you expelled? If it comes to the pinch, they'll own up and explain that you weren't in the party——"

Fullwood could not refrain from laughing. "They're not that sort!" he broke in. "They wouldn't breathe a word—they'd see me flogged an' sacked with sheer delight!"

CHAPTER XIX.

NIPPER IN A DIFFICULTY.



WINNIE PITT was startled.

"You can't mean that!" she exclaimed. "If you refuse to give their names, and you get all the punishment, they'll own up. If they don't, they won't be worth calling human beings!"

"Well, anyway, I shall just have to wait and see what happens," said Fullwood. "Perhaps Mr. Goole will spot one of the rotters, an' question him. If it's Grayson,

he may split on the others. There's Shaw, too—Grayson's pal. Shaw's an arrant coward, an' he'd blab in a minute if he was questioned. If anythin' like that happens, I shall be safe. They're bound to admit that I wasn't there."

"Well, you can rely on me, Ralph," said Winnie. "And you can rely on my brother, too. I'm sure Reggie's got plenty of faith in you. He was telling me some wonderful things about your football yesterday. Do you remember that affair last week, when you were accused of fouling?"

"Don't talk about it, please," muttered Fullwood.

"They're ready to accuse you of anything," said Winnie indignantly. "They pounce on you for fouling, without any evidence, and now they're doing the same thing—although you were proved to be in the right. Haven't they got any sense of fairness? Surely you're not pronounced guilty until there's been an inquiry, and until you've been punished?"

Fullwood shook his head.

"You know better than that, Winnie," he said. "Girls aren't much different to boys, are they? Don't these things happen at your school?"

"I'm afraid they do," admitted the girl. "It's funny how everybody is ready to condemn unheard. But don't worry—you're innocent, and you can't come to any harm. I shall watch the game this afternoon, remember."

"You'll really be there?" asked Fullwood eagerly.

"You bet I shall! Wouldn't miss it for worlds!"

They parted soon afterwards, for the breakfast-bell was ringing. And when Fullwood went into the Ancient House dining-room he noticed that all eyes were upon him. Other eyes were upon Forrest & Co.—for the young rascals of Study A were showing obvious signs of seediness.

"Hypocrite!" muttered somebody. "Pretends to be turning over a new leaf, an' he's just as bad as ever, in secret!"

"He ought to be sent to Coventry!"

"Hear, hear!"

Fullwood heard these whispered comments and knew how the wind was blowing. After breakfast, the comments were no longer whispered, but spoken loudly. Everywhere he went he was looked at with scornful eyes. The juniors were ready enough to judge him on rumour alone.

And Fullwood wasn't feeling strong enough to stand up for himself. He was intensely worried. His limbs ached, and he was still flushed and feverish. The cold was developing on him—and developing fast. He could feel congestion in his chest, and his nose was stuffy and hot. The signs were too obvious to be ignored. But he strove with might and main to conceal them from the others.

His sullen attitude was taken to be an admission of guilt. And before lessons started

Nipper found himself in a bit of a fix. Study C was besieged by a crowd of fellows. Not only Ancient House juniors, but Fourth-Formers from the other side, and a few Removites from the West House.

"What's all this?" asked Nipper, as they swarmed in.

"We're a deputation!" said Buster Boots grimly.

"A deputation?" repeated Nipper. "You've come along in force, haven't you? What's all the excitement about?"

"We want Fullwood's name scratched off the list for this afternoon's match!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You've got to do it, Nipper!"

"We won't play with that cad!"

Nipper frowned.

"Who's captain of the Junior Eleven?" he asked angrily.

"You are," retorted Boots; "but I'm skipper of the Fourth, and I've got a right to speak. This isn't an ordinary House match—the whole school's represented, and we don't want any half-drunken——"

"Stop that!" interrupted Nipper hotly.

"I won't stop it!" retorted John Busterfield Boots. "You know the facts as well as I do. Fullwood was caught red-handed at that jazz party last night, or whatever it was. He was brought over to the Ancient House by Mr. Goole—and the rotter couldn't even walk straight! I'm not a particular sort of chap, but I draw a line somewhere!"

"I didn't expect this sort of thing from you, Boots," said Nipper quietly. "I thought you were more decent. Where's your sense of fairness? Fullwood hasn't been punished for anything—he hasn't even been taken before the Head. Can't you wait until his guilt's proved?"

Boots looked rather uncomfortable.

"That's all tommy-rot!" he growled. "It'll only be a matter of time before he's sacked. They won't let him stay here after last night's affair. And I don't see why we should have him in the team this afternoon!"

"He's a disgrace to the Remove!"

"Hear, hear!"

"His face is enough to convict him!"

"I should think so!" yelled Hubbard. "It's all blotchy, and his eyes are puffed. Anybody can see he was boozed last night!"

Nipper looked at the crowd more grimly than ever.

"You can all go!" he exclaimed. "I'll think about this, and let you know my decision in ten minutes. Wait in the Triangle, and I'll join you there. Is that fair enough?"

"Yes, rather!"

They crowded away down the passage excitedly, discussing Nipper's surrender—for it was taken for granted that he would substitute another player for Fullwood. Nipper, however, was not quite so weak.

CHAPTER XX.

A STRAIGHT TALK.



"BEGAD!" ejaculated Sir Montie Trengellis-West. "This looks rather frightful, old boy. The chaps are a bit unreasonable—they are, really. It isn't as though Fullwood had been sentenced."

"All the same, it's pretty clear, isn't it?" said Tommy Watson.

"Is it?" asked Nipper. "I'm surprised at you, Tommy! Haven't you learned that in nine cases out of ten, rumour is a liar? Some of the fellows saw Fullwood being taken across the Triangle by Mr. Goole. Other fellows know that there was a wild party in the East House last night. But there's not an atom of direct evidence that Fullwood got half-drunk."

"No, I suppose not," admitted Tommy. "Sorry!"

"These idiots are only too ready to jump on anybody at the first breath of suspicion," went on Nipper angrily. "Fullwood's completely changed. I found him thoroughly decent during this last week. And there's no doubt that he's a born forward. But I'm a bit worried about him this morning—he doesn't look himself."

"They say it's because of that orgy," said Watson. "What are you going to do? You promised to go outside in ten minutes and give your decision. If you play Fullwood this afternoon, there'll be the very dickens of a commotion. Those chaps will kick up the dust——"

"Let them!" snapped Nipper. "I'm not going to be intimidated by that sort of thing. I'll see Fullwood at once, and put it to him straight. No, don't come—I'd rather see him alone."

Nipper strode out with a set jaw. He was inclined to believe that Fullwood was unfit for play. Nipper guessed at once that it was a result of that soaking in the river the previous evening. The other fellows knew nothing of that incident, since it had been kept quiet. Hence they attributed Fullwood's flushed appearance to going on the razzle.

Nipper wasn't worried so much about the demand for Fullwood's exclusion, as Fullwood's condition. He badly wanted him in the team—but he wouldn't let him play if he was unfit. Nipper, in fact, was in a bit of a dilemma. If Fullwood was sickening for a bad cold he would have to be dropped—and then the crowd would say that Nipper had surrendered.

Nipper entered Study I, and found Fullwood alone. In fact, Ralph Leslie was in the act of swallowing three aspirin tablets. His head was throbbing badly, and he was ready to take anything.

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Nipper.
 "You needn't worry—it's not cocaine!"
 replied Fullwood drily.

"Aspirin—that's all. I've got the deuce
 of a headache."

"Aspirins are bad for you!" said Nipper
 warningly. "They're all right if you only
 take them now and again, but you mustn't
 make it a habit. I want to speak to you
 quietly, Fully."

"Go ahead!"

"Lots of the fellows are saying that you
 ought to be dropped."

"That's nothin' new," said Fullwood, sit-
 ting on the edge of the table. "They're
 callin' me a blackguard an' a hypocrite. I
 don't blame them. Those rumours are a bit
 black. If you want to drop me out of the
 team, Nipper, it's up to you," he added
 quietly. "I'm willin' to accept your
 decision."

As a matter of fact, he had practically
 made up his mind that there would be no
 football for him that afternoon. He was
 no fool, and he had heard the commotion in
 the passage.

"Before I decide anything, I want to ask
 you a few questions," said Nipper. "Don't
 misunderstand me, Fullwood. Last term you
 weren't above joining in a card party, but
 I've got every reason to believe that you've
 chucked that sort of foolery up for good?"

"Thanks awfully," said Fullwood
 cynically.

"Don't get touchy, you ass," snapped
 Nipper. "Did you, or did you not, join that
 party last night? That's all I want to
 know."

"I didn't. Is that good enough?"

"You didn't have any drink of any kind?"

"Gad, no!" said Fullwood. "I wasn't in
 the party."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" said Fullwood. "Not
 that I expect you to believe me—"

"I do believe you," interrupted Nipper,
 extending his hand. "There's something
 on your mind beyond all this, Fullwood—I
 can see it. You were out last night for
 some reason, but it wasn't a shady reason.
 If you don't like to confide in me—that's
 your affair. I don't ask you to, and I don't
 expect it. I'm quite satisfied that you're
 straight."

Fullwood looked at him gratefully.

"Thanks awfully," he said, looking away.

"And now for something else," went on
 Nipper. "How do you feel? Beyond the
 headache, I mean?"

"Pretty bad, but I'll be all right."

"It was that ducking you had yesterday,"
 said Nipper. "I was fearing something of
 this sort. Look here, Fullwood, if you're
 unfit to play, say so. It isn't fair to the
 team to appear in that match if you don't
 think you'll make good. It isn't fair to
 yourself."



Fullwood was flushed, he was un-
 steady, and his eyes were dull. He
 was obviously the worse for drink.
 Neither of the masters dreamed for a
 moment that his condition was solely
 due to illness.

"I'm dyin' to play!" said Fullwood
 earnestly. "I'll be all right, Nipper—
 honestly! I'm feelin' rotten now, but I
 swear I'll be all right by this afternoon.
 Hang it, I'm not goin' to knuckle under
 because of a bit of a cold! That won't
 affect my form. You can rely on me to
 play the game, and do the best I can for
 the school."

Nipper gave him one look, and was con-
 vinced.

"Thank goodness that's settled, then,"
 he said promptly. "Your name stands!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SENSATION.



"HERE he is!"

Quite a big crowd
 gathered in the Tri-
 angle, and a shout
 went up as Nipper appeared.
 Everybody was confidently
 expecting him to give way to
 popular demand. Feeling against Fullwood
 was running very high. It was concluded
 that his guilt was beyond question. And
 his crime was doubly contemptible because

he had been pretending that he was turning over a new leaf.

"Sorry to disappoint you," shouted Nipper, "but Fullwood remains in the team."

"What!"

"You can't mean that!" roared Boots indignantly.

"I do mean it."

There was a wild chorus of yells and shouts. The crowd surged round the Ancient House steps, and Nipper found himself surrounded. All the faces were flushed with excitement and indignation.

"Hear, hear!"

"Do you mean that, Doyle?" asked Nipper grimly.

"Yes, I do."

"All right—I shan't want you this afternoon," said Nipper. "McClure, you're the reserve man. Will you play against the River House this afternoon?"

McClure leapt at the chance.

"Rather!" he replied. "If you think Fullwood's good enough to play, I'm with you. You're skipper, and that's enough for me! Thanks awfully."

"Good man!" roared Handforth approvingly.

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"You're really letting Fullwood play?" asked De Valerie.

"Yes."

"After that rotten affair of last night?"

"Don't keep repeating that rumour!" said Nipper impatiently. "Fullwood has given me his word of honour that he wasn't at that party, and I believe him. He's assured me that he's fit for the match, and I see no reason why I should drop him. I'm junior skipper, and that's my decision."

"We won't stand it!"

"Not likely!"

"You've got to give in, Nipper! You can't ride the high horse like this!" shouted Doyle. "We won't play with the cad! I'm one of the backs, and I refuse to play!"

ingly. "Look here, Church, if you refuse to play——"

"Don't be an ass!" said Church. "I'm one of the lucky ones—I'm in the team. Do you think I'm fool enough to throw my chances away? If Nipper wants to play Fullwood, he can play him! What's more, I'll bet Fullwood will give a good showing."

"Of course he will!" snorted Handforth. "If any chap here wants to fight, I'll take him on! It won't take me two ticks——"

"We're not fighting, old man," said Nipper. "Don't start anything of that sort, for goodness' sake. Well, is it settled? This sort of commotion isn't doing any good, you know. We shall have some masters here——"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Boots.
 "Do you mean that about Doyle?"
 "McClure's playing left back," replied Nipper.

Doyle was looking pretty sick, and he had nothing to say.

"I call it a rotten shame!" roared Boots.
 "Doyle was quite justified in refusing to play. What's more, I back him up! If you can do without Doyle, you can do without me!"

"Good old Buster!" roared the Modern House fellows.

"And without me, too!" said De Valerie hotly.

"Any more?" asked Nipper. "Shall I have to select a new team altogether? What about you, Reggie?"

Pitt grinned.

"Don't include me in this argument!" he said, horrified. "Of course I'm playing. These fellows ought to be boiled. The skipper is the only man who can make these decisions—and your word's all I need. I shall be jolly glad to play on the right wing with Fullwood as a partner."

Cecil De Valerie pushed himself forward.

"All the same, you can't carry on without us!" he said defiantly. "Three of your best men have gone against you, Nipper—Boots and Doyle and myself. How many others will join us?" he added, turning round.

But the other members of the Junior Eleven were faithful to Nipper.

"You can't ride the high horse like this!" yelled Boots. "This is the first big fixture, Nipper, and you've got to put your best team into the field. Who are you going to sacrifice—that cad Fullwood, or three of your best men?"

Nipper made no reply. He turned on his heel, and entered the lobby. The list of players was on the notice board, and he looked at it for a moment. The list stood thus: Handforth, goalkeeper; Doyle, Burton, backs; Kahn, De Valerie, Church, half-backs; Grey, Boots, Nipper, Fullwood, Pitt, forwards.

This team represented the best talent among the junior footballers, according to present form. Nipper had selected the players with care, being quite impartial in his choice. He had put each man in his position because he deserved it. But Nipper wasn't the kind of skipper to be dictated to.

He thought for a moment, and crossed Doyle's name out. He wrote "McClure" over the top. Then he crossed out De Valerie's name, and substituted that of Nicodemus Trotwood. Finally, he drew a pencil through John Busterfield Boots, and inserted Tregellis-West.

Just as he had finished the crowd came surging in.

"My only hat! He means it!" yelled Boots. "My name's off!"

"Mine, too!" panted De Valerie.

"What does that matter?" asked Nicodemus Trotwood. "Mine's put down, so everything's all right. Good old Nipper. There's nothing I like better in a skipper than firmness!"

There was a terrific uproar, but it died down as Mr. Crowell came pushing through the crowd. The Remove master was a keen man, and he knew exactly what all the fuss was about.

"I am astonished!" he said severely. "Have you boys no sense of justice and fairness? You are condemning Fullwood even before he has been tried. Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, Mr. Goole has not even called upon the boy to attend the inquiry!"

The crowd was silenced.

"Let me hear no more of this!" declared Mr. Crowell. "I am ashamed of you. Until Fullwood is proved to be guilty of the misdemeanour you accuse him of, you have utterly no right to judge him."

Mr. Crowell turned on his heel, and Boots and De Valerie and Doyle looked rather green. In front of everybody Mr. Crowell had thoroughly justified Nipper's action. And now it was too late to get their places back.

CHAPTER XXII.

ST. FRANK'S VERSUS RIVER HOUSE.



LITTLE SIDE was crowded, and Little Side was looking serious. The match was well on its way; indeed, the whistle for half-time was nearly due. And things had

been going very bad for St. Frank's.

The score stood 3-1. And it was Hal Brewster and his stalwarts who had scored the three. The awful truth, in fact, was that St. Frank's were two clear goals down, and it was nearly half-time.

The match had been swift and exciting from the very kick-off. And Brewster & Co. proved themselves to be a dangerous team. Twice they had scored through sheer brilliancy, and the third goal had come by luck. But nothing could alter the fact that St. Frank's had only scored once. Tregellis-West had sent in a first-timer which the River House goalie had been unable to touch.

But bad luck had dogged the Saints otherwise.

Reggie Pitt was at the top of his form, and the crowd had been delighted with his many glorious runs down the touchline. But to their mortification, all his brilliant work had been for nothing. His beautifully-placed centres had resulted in nothing.

And the forwards couldn't be blamed, either. Nipper led his line superbly, and

his two inside men had worked like trojans. Both Tregellis-West and Fullwood had sent in many shots, but the goalie had proved unbeatable, except in that one instance.

When the whistle blew for half-time Fullwood was thankful indeed. He felt dizzy and weak. The gruelling play had affected him far more than he had realised; but nobody could accuse him of failing his side. He had played cleanly, and he had played with every ounce of skill that was in him. And no fellow could have done more. And during that strenuous forty-five minutes Fullwood's condition had changed alarmingly for the worse.

The east wind was blowing harder, and it was bitterly cold. On more than one occasion Fullwood had been obliged to hang about the field inactive. And to a fellow in his state it was dangerous.

He could feel his heart throbbing, and he knew that his face was more flushed than ever. While running he was all right; he forgot everything else. But as soon as he came to a standstill he felt shivery, in spite of the heat that surged through his veins. He knew well enough that he was in no fit condition to play, and he accused himself bitterly of selfishness. He ought to have confessed himself unfit, and allowed Bob Christine to take his place.

The other fellows, however, were not so hard.

"Well, they can't say much about Fullwood now!" exclaimed Handforth, during the interval. "He played like a good 'un. It was rough luck when he failed to score just after the kick-off. He beat both the backs, and then hit the crossbar."

"Nobody could have saved that shot if it had been an inch lower," declared Church.

"I could have saved it, of course," said Handforth. "I'm used to shots like that; but—"

"Hallo! There goes the whistle!" interrupted Reggie Pitt. "Not much of a spell, but I'm glad. It doesn't do us any good, standing about in this cold wind. We look like losing our first game, though."

"Our defence is all right!" growled Handforth. "We've got to attack!"

"You're a fine chap to talk about the defence being all right!" snorted Church. "You've let the leather get past you three times already. I thought you weren't going to allow the River House chaps to score at all?"

There was no time to argue, rather to Handforth's relief. This was one of those occasions when there wasn't much to say. But nobody could justly accuse Handforth of weakness. More experienced goalies than he would have been beaten by those shots.

The game restarted with a rousing cheer from the River House spectators. Brewster

& Co. had brought a large crowd of supporters with them, and they were already crowing over their victory. It was an achievement indeed to beat St. Frank's on their own ground.

For a moment Fullwood thought that he would have to leave the field. Immediately after the restart he saw nothing. Everything became blurred and indistinct, and his head felt as though it would fall off. The sudden activity, coming on top of the rest spell, brought about a minor reaction.

With a grim effort he controlled himself. To leave the field now would be fatal, not so much for the team, but for himself. He could imagine what the school would say afterwards. And with only ten men what chance had the Saints of improving their position?

Nipper was feeling desperate as the game developed in favour of the visitors. They swept down the field in fine style, the forwards passing and repassing the leather with beautiful precision. The defence was utterly at a loss against this determined attack.

Brewster himself broke through and defeated McClure. He steadied himself, and shot hard and true. Handforth made a dive, and saved. But he was only able to punch the ball straight to Brewster again. And in a second there was a goal. Handforth didn't even see the leather enter the net.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Poor old St. Frank's!"

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Tommy Watson. "It's all over now; they'll never do it. They can't score four goals. They can't even force a draw. What horrible luck!"

The River House players were looking decidedly pleased with themselves as they lined up. They were convinced of their victory. And yet they were no better than the St. Frank's side. It was just a matter of luck. From the very start they had had all of it.

From the first blow of the whistle Nipper encouraged his forwards not to lose heart. There was still a chance.

But victory seemed as remote as the moon itself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENS.



"CENTRE, centre!"
"Pass, pass man!"

A wave of excitement swept the St. Frank's onlookers. In one of those breathless changes which every football onlooker has seen, the whole

aspect of the game altered. The River House players were on the defensive. And Reggie Pitt, having beaten man after man, centred with superb accuracy.

The visiting back was just too far away, but Nipper was on the spot. He was onside, too, and he didn't waste a second. Instead of shooting, he ran in, the ball at his feet. And then from an acute angle he delivered the best shot of the match as yet. The leather skimmed under the cross-bar, just out of reach of the goalie's hand.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, Nipper!"

That goal made all the difference in the world. 4-2. It was still bad, but the Saints had got fresh heart. And something else had happened, too, although only one fellow knew about it. Something extraordinary had happened.

In some strange way Fullwood recovered his full strength. He didn't know why, and he hadn't the faintest idea what it meant. He only knew that his limbs seemed supple, his brain was clear, and his eye acute. Perhaps his eye was a little too acute; it had an unnatural glint in it. He was one living mass of excited nerves.

And he provided the onlookers with a sensation.

That goal of Nipper's was not three minutes old before Fullwood was away. From midfield he streaked for goal. It was one of the most spectacular runs St. Frank's had ever seen. He seemed inspired.

With supreme ease he got the better of the two half-backs, and continued on his way without a pause. The River House left-back was practically on him, and everybody expected to see his dash brought to an end.

"Go it, Fully!"

"Oh, good man!"

The excitement grew, and swept over the ground like a storm. There was something about Fullwood's attitude that absolutely took the onlookers off their feet. Fullwood was performing miracles.

The River House back was tricked coolly and cunningly. But even now there was danger, for the other back was rushing up to clear. Fullwood paused, side-kicked, and stepped nimbly after the leather. Before the back could know what was happening the forward was on his way again.

"Shoot, shoot!"

Fullwood needed no urging. In fact, he heard nothing. He saw the goal in front of him and the dancing custodian. And he knew that he was going to score. He couldn't help himself. He kicked, and such was the force of his shot that he went spinning over.

But the leather hissed into the net with such speed that half the onlookers didn't

see it. But a yell went up from the nearest spectators which told its own story.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Well played, Fully!" panted Nipper, rushing up and grabbing Fullwood's hand. "Splendid, old man! That was worth its weight in gold!"

"Did—did I score?" asked Fullwood dazedly.

He needn't have asked. His name was being shouted from every side of the field. The fellows who had demanded his expulsion from the team were feeling pretty sick, but they had the decency to cheer as loudly as the others.

"Only another goal to draw," said Pitt tensely. "Can we do it, Nipper? Twenty minutes left yet—"

"We'll try," said Nipper.

And the River House fellows found it necessary to be on their mettle now. They had no further opportunities of attacking. They were hemmed in their own half continuously, and the Saints developed onslaught after onslaught. The River House goalie was fairly bombarded, and he played a magnificent game.

At last Tregellis-West forced a corner. There was a hush as Jack Grey took the kick, and a veritable hurricane of cheering when Nicodemus Trotwood dashed in with his head and tipped the ball under the bar.

"We've done it—we've done it!" yelled Handforth. "Four—four! We've drawn level, you chaps. Only another goal, and we've whacked 'em. Never lose heart, that's the motto!"

"Why don't you have a shot?" grinned somebody behind the goal.

"If those giddy forwards don't buck up I will!" retorted Handforth.

Both teams were now at the highest pitch of their tension. Brewster & Co. could see their victory being snatched from them, and they were desperate. The St. Frank's fellows were just as desperate in their determination to obtain that winning goal.

Fullwood was mechanical now. He only knew that he was playing well, and doing everything that could be expected of him. But his brain seemed to be dulled to everything beyond the game. He saw nothing but the field. He felt strangely hot and uncomfortable. The bitter wind didn't worry him at all. He hardly knew that it existed.

Matters were crucial. There were only two more minutes to go, and the winning goal seemed as far off as ever. Twice Nipper broke through, and twice he was beaten at the last second. Pitt was like one possessed, doing superb work on the wing. He was fed constantly, for his fellow-players relied upon him to snatch the match out of the fire.

One more minute only! And then, once again, Fullwood achieved an apparent miracle. One of the River House fellows

had mis-kicked, and the ball came to Fullwood by chance. Nine players out of ten would neglect that opportunity, but Fullwood was on it with such speed that scarcely anybody realised his intentions.

His duty was to pass the ball to the centre-forward, who was well placed. But Fullwood didn't even see Nipper, and he had no knowledge of the urgent shout. He saw one thing—the goal. His own position was apparently hopeless for there were three men in the way.

But he made the attempt.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A NEAR THING.



"O H!"

A gasp went up from everybody when Fullwood's intention was seen. He was looked upon as an idiot—a madman—to throw that

chance away. Why hadn't he passed to Nipper?

But Fullwood fairly made rings round his opponents. He went on, and he bore a charmed existence. Once he was nearly tripped, but he recovered as though by magic. Then he sent in a long shot, for it was impossible to defeat the two backs who were rushing upon him. The leather evaded the pair, and sped on—low and wicked. The goalie made one desperate dive, but his fingers only just succeeded in touching it. The next second the ball was over the line.

"Goal!"

"Good old Fullwood!"

The excitement was so tremendous that half the juniors flung their caps into the air, and cared not where they went. Hal Brewster smote his thigh, and gave a grunt of disgust.

"Whacked!" he groaned. "Whacked—after being three up! But, by jingo, these chaps have got to thank Fullwood for this game! He not only scored two of the goals, but he inspired all the others."

As for Fullwood himself, he was lying prone on the ground. He had not been charged, and his kick had been a clean one. Yet he had sunk down, and was now motionless. The juniors who ran up to congratulate him were startled.

"Hallo! What's wrong with him?" asked Pitt sharply.

He bent down and raised Fullwood's head. But Ralph Leslie gave no sign. His face was ashen, and his eyes were half-open. Even while the juniors looked two bright spots appeared in his pale cheeks.

"Poor chap, he's done!" panted Nipper. "Quick—carry him off! There's something funny about this! He was playing like somebody possessed during those last few minutes! He's used up all his energy."

They didn't know that Fullwood was suffering acute reaction. He knew that he

had scored the winning goal, and after that everything had become black. He was lifted and carried off the field. There were only another few seconds to play, and the result was a foregone conclusion.

As Fullwood was brought to the ropes, Winnie Pitt and one or two of the other Moor View Girls came round. Winnie was looking flushed and concerned. She had taken extreme delight in watching Fullwood's play, but now she was alarmed.

"What's happened to him?" she asked breathlessly.

"Let me have a look!" said a deep voice. "Stand away, boys!"

Dr. Brett bent over Fullwood. It was fortunate that the doctor was present. He had dropped in quite casually, and had become interested. But now he was purely professional in his manner.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated, after a brief examination. "The boy's temperature is appalling. Some coats—quick! Overcoats, some of you!"

"Is—is he ill, sir?" asked Clive Russell, pushing up.

"Ill?" repeated the doctor. "He never ought to have played! Unless we are very careful, it'll result in pneumonia! He's got a dreadful cold, and ought to have been in bed the whole day. This exposure may have fatal results! No wonder he collapsed!"

There was a sensation when the truth got out. So Fullwood had been playing this wonderful football when he should have been in bed—when his temperature was soaring into dangerous regions!

"The man's a marvel!" declared Handforth. "I've said all sorts of rotten things about Fullwood, but he's true blue! This day's work alone has wiped out the past!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Fullwood!"

"I hope to goodness he doesn't peg out!"

Within an hour after the match the first bulletin was issued. Fullwood had recovered consciousness, but was in a dangerous condition. He was being constantly watched by a nurse, and Dr. Brett was in attendance. Grave complications were possible.

On the top of all this Mr. Goole issued a report on the previous night's orgy. He demanded the names of all participants, giving them twenty-four hours in which to own up. And Mr. Goole added that he was perfectly satisfied that Fullwood had taken no part in the affair. In fact, Fullwood was completely exonerated.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Goole had been convinced by Dr. Brett—who had declared that the junior's dazed condition had been solely due to a high temperature.

And then, later, came the news that there would be no crisis. Owing to prompt measures, Fullwood would soon recover. But Ralph Leslie himself was torn with anxiety as he lay in bed. What of Stanley Clavering? What of Eustace Carey?



Mr EDWY SEARLES BROOKS CHATS TO HIS READERS

(NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. Every letter acknowledged below has been personally read by me, and I thank each writer most heartily. But although all letters afford me an equal amount of pleasure, I am reluctantly compelled to confine my individual replies to those of general interest.—E.S.B.)

Look out for something special next month!

Here are a few acknowledgments: W. Holmes (Glasgow), Andrew Haynes (Johannesburg), L. J. Fielding (Walton), H. V. Bryant (Sheringham), H. Higgs (Hanwell), Gumsucker (Melbourne), J. E. Tweed (Park Crossing, Australia), A. M. (Camberwell), H. G. Payne (Liverpool), William A. Harper (San Francisco, U.S.A.), Reg Rose (Melbourne), Glesca A. Keely (Sydney), Uxtonian (Kettering), John Gibbons (Bolton).

You can send one of your little stories along if you like, W. Holmes, but, as I have mentioned before, please don't send anything that hasn't been read and approved by competent judges. It's only a waste of postage and time if readers send me mere amateur efforts. Why shouldn't you address me as "Dear" Mr. Brooks? It isn't inappropriate, because the "dear" in such a case is merely a matter of form. Besides, what else could you put? Not "Hateful Mr. Brooks," or "Fatheaded Mr. Brooks," or anything like that. — It's got to be "dear," and there you are.

It may interest you to know, L. J. Fielding, that the Editor of the "School-boys' Own Library" has one of my long yarns in hand now, but I can't guarantee when it'll be published—it may not be until next summer. But don't blame me; I've done my bit. It's up to him now.

Look out for a big event next month!

Lots of readers want back-numbers, and the latest applicant is H. Higgs, of Hanwell.

I'm afraid you'll have to be patient, Higgy, old man. When the League gets going there'll be special facilities for selling and buying back-numbers. You readers have only got yourselves to blame for the delay in the League. Don't forget what the Chief Officer told you. The League's got to have a certain number of members before it will justify any big launching out. So it seems that all you impatient Leagueites must wait until the necessary numbers join up.

Thanks awfully for your list of Australian slang, and also for your nice long letter, Gumsucker. My word! That's a funny name, isn't it? I've heard of people chewing gum, but I didn't know it was sucked. I'm sorry there'll be no St. Frank's Annual THIS year, but—

Wait for next month and see what you'll get!

(My hat! Isn't he exasperating! No, it's not an Annual—haven't I just told Gumsucker so? It's something— If I go on at this rate I shall let the secret out. As a matter of fact, I can't keep a secret for nuts.)

Thanks for your nice letter, A.M. No, there are none of my stories appearing in any other publications at present; but next month— There I go again! It was nearly out that time, dash it! Yes, I try to recall past incidents in my yarns when dealing with certain localities and places. I think it helps you readers to see everything more clearly, and it helps me in my writing, too. Sorry I made that bloomer in the Goola Kahn series, but we're all liable to err. In the first yarn I meant Fullwood to do all sorts of things, but in the second yarn the plot developed in an unexpected way, and Fullwood was left out of it. Ah, me! These St. Frank's chaps are always doing things that upset my plans.

Now for that Big Secret concerning next month. It's no good, I can't keep it in— Hallo! No more space! Dash it all, I can't let you all into the "know" even now! But take my advice and—Look out!

E.S.B.

THE STAMP COLLECTOR

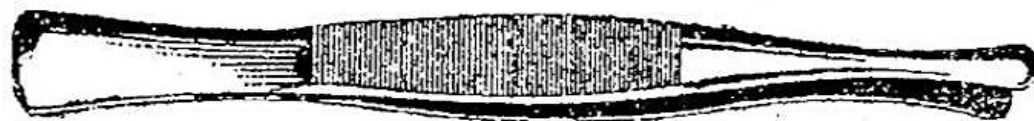
By FRED. J. MELVILLE.



Stamp-collecting is a great game, and it is as a game well worth playing that I want my friends of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY to regard it. Like other good games, it is full of sporting chances, and affords plenty of scope for individual talents. It can be played well or badly. The better you can play the more it will be worth your while.

Most of you have had some opportunity of collecting stamps, gifts of albums and stamps being among the favourite presents of generous uncles and aunts, but a great many boys who get started on a stamp collection by such gifts do not take the trouble to discover that there is something more in stamp-collecting than just sticking stamps into little squares in a book.

That is why I want you to think of stamps as a game, something to study and work at, something to strive to be good at, and even to be better than the other fellow. Although we have no set rules



as in cricket and football, there are nevertheless general principles which all collectors must understand if they want to be good at the game and enjoy it to the full.

Stamp-collecting, as now pursued by millions of collectors in all countries, is chiefly concerned with postage stamps, and the new collector will do well to keep his album free from stamps, or labels in the semblance of stamps, which have no connection with postage.

There are two main divisions of postage stamps. (1) Adhesive stamps, which are usually printed in sheets, from which units are separated and affixed to the letter by means of gum, and (2) Impressed stamps, which are those printed direct on to the postcard, envelope, or wrapper.

We are mainly interested in the first kind—adhesive postage stamps, and most of the printed albums provide spaces for these, but not for the impressed stamps.

Now the game is not merely to get the largest number of different stamps, but rather to get the most interesting selection, which need not be extensive. The interest will lie more in the class of stamps you

collect and the quality of the specimens.

It is of primary importance that the stamps shall be in good condition. Nothing detracts more from the interest and charm of a collection than to find every here and there a dirty, grubby, or torn stamp. A single black sheep will spoil the appearance of a whole page of good stamps.

Stamps are tiny and delicate things, and won't stand much handling. As the Irishman said, the best way to handle stamps is not to handle them; use tweezers. Tweezers are cheap enough, and there is probably a pair in your home you can have the use of. Use them on all occasions for lifting specimens, for putting them in the album, or taking them out, and use them when showing stamps to other boys.

The next point to consider is that all adhesive postage stamps, provided they are nice clean copies, are going to be of use in collecting. Don't despise stamps that are very familiar to you as "common" stamps. The common ones are as necessary to the collection as rarer ones; but you will be able to use your judgment, and gain experience in selecting the best specimens of the common stamps.

You will often find that what you consider common stamps are not so common in nice condition. Out of a hundred ten centimes French stamps, probably not ten are quite "nice" enough for collection.

In starting a collection of stamps little is needed in the way of an outfit. Any money spent on the hobby to begin with is best expended on getting stamps; an album is not absolutely necessary to begin with, for you can arrange the beginnings of a collection in an exercise-book.

If I were starting afresh at the beginning to-day, and had, say, four to five hundred stamps collected from friends and relations, I should expend a shilling on,

Packet of 1,000 "mounts" ... 6d.

Pair of tweezers ... 6d.

My first evening with my 500 different stamps would be spent in sorting them into countries, using the tweezers to turn them over, and having a good look at them.

Some of them will be familiar, as French, German, or Belgians; others inscribed in strange alphabets you may not easily recognise. But in future chats I will help you to know these stamps at a glance.



THE CITY OF MASKS; *or, The Case of the Boy King!*

A Gripping New Tale of Detective
Adventure, introducing **SEXTON
BLAKE and TINKER.**

FOR NEW READERS.

Tinker visits his former school chums at Calcroft, and on his return is attacked and captured by three men in a motor-car. Evidently, he is mistaken for somebody else, for soon after, his captors set him free. Next morning Tinker receives a visitor, who turns out to be King Peter of Carlovía, and late of Calcroft. He is returning urgently to his unruly kingdom, and Sexton Blake, as Mr. James Brown, tutor, and Tinker, as Peter's school chum, agree to accompany the king on a dangerous mission. They arrive in due course in the mountainous and wild state of Carlovía, and have reached Livnar when this instalment begins.

(Now begin reading this rattling new yarn.)

"I COULD have told you we were going to Shalvola, Peter," said Celia. "There must be a state entry, and I do wish you'd be a little more thoughtful. The Prime Minister is quite right in this, for if you came secretly you have plenty of enemies who would say that you had come sneaking back to Kamfak like a coward because you were afraid to face the people."

"Jupiter! I never thought of it in that way!" said Peter. "All I hate is the fuss of it and the silly showman part, uniform, white ponies, gilded carriage, and all that game. All serene, we'll go to Shalvola; but, for the sake of Mike, wake up that inn-keeper with the grub."

While they were at lunch the luggage was taken from the cars, strapped on the backs of mules, and sent on ahead, for the castle was perched high up the mountain beyond the reach of cars. The Prime Minister returned to Kamfak, and Celia disappeared, and returned dressed for horseback and very dainty she looked in her riding costume, long boots of soft, russet-coloured leather,

and a hat decorated with a feather from an eagle's wing.

"Hallo!" said Tinker, as he saw the saddled hill ponies that were waiting for them. "Don't you use stirrups in this country?"

"Not going to Shalvola, and you'll know why presently, old son," said Peter. "Don't stare at the thing, but get astride it. You're a tidy weight, but that little beggar could carry you twice over. Keep close behind the guide, Mr. Brown, and you give Tinker a lead, Celia."

The guide was as bare-legged, as shaggy-looking as the pony he rode. For half an hour they climbed steadily over naked hill-paths and through woods of stunted pine-trees, till at last Shalvola appeared above them, a castle with four towers perched like an eagle's nest on a lofty crag.

"You'll soon know why we ride without stirrups, Billy," said Celia, as the boy shouted a warning. "I hope your nerves are good. The ponies are very sure-footed, but accidents have happened. If yours should tread on a loose stone or slip, throw yourself off to the right."

The path had been cut out of the living rock, and was barely four feet wide, and was unfenced. It formed a curve, and the tail of Blimp's pony vanished round the curve. Tinker could not see to what unknown depths the precipice fell away, for his pony kept close to the granite wall. The clatter of a falling stone made Tinker glance upwards. High above him on the ledge of the cliff a man was standing. Tinker saw him level a rifle, pointing the weapon forward and downwards, not at himself or Celia, but at someone who had gone on ahead.

There was grim mischief here, and seldom in his life had Tinker thought so rapidly.

His hand went to his pocket for his automatic pistol. It was a long and doubtful

shot for such a weapon, and the report of it might startle the ponies, and one slip or stumble might hurl himself, the young princess, and the two animals to swift but terrible death in the ravine below.

If he missed, the unknown sniper would probably turn his rifle upon them, and they would be an easy prey. Even at that tense moment he remembered that Peter had told him that the Carlovians were wretched marksmen; but the thought did not give him much comfort. He had reined in his pony, but Celia had gone on. Her voice came back to him, mingled with the echo of the shot from above.

"Come along, Billy!" cried the girl. "What an old slowcoach you are!"

The sniper was scrambling higher, either to get into position for another shot or to see the result of the first one. His foot dislodged a heavy boulder. Tinker saw the boulder hurtling down sheer and straight. He rolled off the pony and scrambled back. He carried no whip, but before the boulder could snap the pony's spine like a rotten stick, he pressed the trigger of the automatic pistol, and the startling sound made the animal plunge away.

With a terrific crash the boulder struck the edge of the path, carrying some of it away, and went bounding into space. The sniper looked down, and Tinker saw his outline clearly silhouetted against the clear sky. As he lifted the rifle to his shoulder Tinker took aim and emptied the clip of cartridges, the five reports rattling out rapidly and noisily.

The man dropped out of sight, but if he was hit he did not fall, but his rifle fell stock foremost a yard or two in front of Tinker and followed the boulder over the cliff edge.

Dreading a calamity, for his frightened pony could not have passed Celia's without colliding with it, Tinker ran round the curve, and then, to his intense relief, he saw the princess standing in a little recess holding both ponies.

"It was a sniper," said Tinker.

Celia nodded. She looked very white, but she had not lost her nerve.

"Squeeze in here, Billy," she said, "where we can't be hit from above. Unless you got him, he may try another shot."

"I may have winged the beast; but as he's lost his rifle he won't pot at us again," said Tinker. "Any idea who it was, Celia?"

"Probably Rivastoff, the brigand and smuggler. They were talking about it at the inn. The soldiers captured his lieutenant yesterday, and no doubt they have hanged and shot him, and Rivastoff wants his revenge. He has plenty of spies, and as he knew Sarjo had come to meet you, he guessed you were people of importance, and worth killing."

"Phew! This is a merry sort of country," said Tinker, "and I'm getting to like it. I wonder——"

Tinker had reloaded his automatic. His quick ears heard a sound, and sheltering himself behind his pony, he levelled the weapon under the animal's neck. Round the edge of the rock a human hand and arm appeared, the hand holding a weapon similar to Tinker's. Then very cautiously the spectacled face of Mr. James Brown, M.A. came into view.

"All serene, guv'nor," said Tinker, who had told Blake that Celia knew the truth. "All safe here. What about your end?"

"Only a dead pony," answered the supposed tutor. "Blimp's. Blimp had elected to walk, and that may have saved him, for the fellow is a good target. I heard your automatic banging. Any luck?"

"His rifle came down, but the sniper didn't, guv'nor. Celia thinks the chap was Rivastoff, a brigand johnny. It was his man the troops at the blockhouse had captured and wanted us to see hanged. Rivastoff wanted to get a bit of his own back, and thought he'd bag one or two of us, the skunk. What had we done, anyhow?"

"He didn't fire at you, did he?"

"I'm not sure that he had the chance with his gun, but he banged down a chunk of rock big enough to flatten out a village. As he may have some pals up there, I'd like to get out of this quick. Have we very much farther to go now, Celia?"

"Not very far, and though the path is steep it isn't so dangerous. Shalvola is a kind of tower of refuge in times of trouble, and there has been a lot of trouble in Carlovian. If the garrison could always be trusted the place would be impregnable."

"I reckon an aeroplane could give the old rookery a bad dusting," said Tinker. "Castles on rocks aren't much use since they invented those flying bombers. Let's get there, for I hate being sniped at."

Peter, Blimp, and the boy guide were waiting for them.

"What about it, Billy?" cried his Majesty cheerfully. "Didn't I tell you the shooting would soon start?"

"I believe you did mention something of the kind," said Tinker. "I wish you'd catch and hang your giddy brigands. This is almost as bad as being a rabbit, for the minute you pop out of your hole you risk getting bowled over by some idiot with a gun. Gee-whiz! If I had your job as king, my lad, I'd tame 'em! I'd teach 'em to play at brigands, and I'm hoping I've taught that johnny something already!"

They climbed slowly but safely up to the castle of Shalvola. They had been seen long before, and an iron drawbridge was lowered. In the courtyard the officer in command had lined up the garrison, twenty

men in faded blue uniforms with faded gold facings. They looked considerably smarter and cleaner than the soldiers at the frontier fort, but that was not saying much. Led by the officer, they gave Peter and Celia the salute, such a clumsy one that Blimp grinned pityingly.

"Glad to meet you, lieutenant," said Peter. "Have you made any preparations for us?"

"Every possible preparation at such brief notice, sire. We trust your Majesty will overlook any little shortcomings, as the news of your welcome arrival only reached us this morning. Carlovla and Shalvola are honoured."

"We don't want any fuss yet," said Peter. "Send half a dozen men up the peak. We've been sniped at and had a pony shot. My friend, Mr. Billy Jones, thinks he may have wounded the beast. See if you can find him."

Inside they found the lonely mountain castle quite modern and comfortable. It was Peter's first visit since he was quite a youngster, but Celia knew it well. There was a charming garden and a small barrack-square, but Peter was not pleased.

"A rotten hole," he grumbled. "There's plenty of life in Kamfak, but this ghastly rookery is as quiet as a graveyard."

"But lovely views," said Tinker, grinning, "and it's so easy to get away from. I've only got to open my bed-room window and step out, and I'd never stop travelling till I bumped. Say, Peter, which of your regiments do these chaps in blue and yellow belong to?"

"To the Royal Guard. They run six hundred strong."

"Not such a bad-looking sample," said Tinker. "If you handed 'em over to Blimp to drill, and put 'em in new uniforms, you might do a bit of good with them. Couldn't you fetch the lot up? This is not my idea,



If he missed, the unknown sniper would probably turn his rifle upon them, and they would be an easy prey.

but the gov'nor's, and he asked me to mention it."

"It's a rattling good idea, if Sarjo will let them come," said Peter; "a top-hole notion. Where's a pen and some giddy paper? How do you write a giddy royal order, Billy?"

"Easy enough! Write to the officer in command: 'The Royal Guard will be brought to my castle of Shalvola without delay. Issue instructions at once for new uniforms and equipment to be provided.' Just sign it 'Peter.' Drop another screed to Sarjo, ordering the old boy to hurry things up. You told us down at the inn that you were boss of the show, and master of life and death, so what the thump has Sarjo got to do with it? You can bet, old bean, that my gov'nor knows what he's playing at?"

The orders were written, and Peter added the royal signature and summoned the lieutenant.

"These are for Kamfak on the royal service, lieutenant," said Peter. "A messenger post-haste, and an answer post-haste."

"As the king wills," said the lieutenant. "There is no car to be hired nearer than Orlatz, sire, but the Mayor of Sablar has a private one."

"Take any man's car and any man's chauffeur," said Peter. "The king needs them and the king pays."

Two minutes later a messenger galloped across the drawbridge, on a pony, and almost immediately as Celia and Sexton Blake came in from the garden, the major-domo of the castle, or chief butler, entered. He was a fat little man, and, when he bowed, all his buttons were in danger of flying off.

"His Highness Prince Darro craves the high honour of being received by your Majesty," he said.

Princess Celia gave her pretty shoulders an impatient shrug, and both Tinker and Sexton Blake noticed it. Peter nodded, and a pale young man, with sleek, black hair appeared. He seemed very shy and nervous when he saw two strangers present.

"Hallo, Cousin Darry!" cried Peter, holding out his hand. "Glad to see you again! The ceremonial business hasn't started yet, so you can feel at home. My tutor, Mr. Brown, and my chum, Billy Jones. Come up to Shalvola all alone, then?"

"All alone, cousin," answered Prince Darro, in a lazy, drawling voice. "I am delighted to meet your friends. And how you have grown, Peter! And what a hideous journey from Kamfak! I am engaged on a new poem; but the moment I heard the glad news, I tore myself away from my desk and my thoughts. For a person like myself, Mr. Brown," he added, turning to Blake—"a poor student, and a poorer poet, who loves books, flowers, birds, and peace, and all things beautiful—Carlovia, though beautiful enough in itself, is not too happy a place to live in."

"From brief experience of it, I should imagine so, prince," said Sexton Blake. "Some bandit fired at us as we came along."

"Monstrous, monstrous! Rivastoff, no doubt. He has sworn to take ten lives for the life of one of his men, and I believe one of the band has just been captured and shot."

"I'll boil that guy in oil," said Peter. "Blimp, step out here! Get a gun and go bandit-chasing. Tell the lieutenant to give you three of his best men who know the mountains. Get that Rivastoff for me, dead or alive, sergeant, and I'll make a captain of you."

"Right, king!" grunted Blimp. "Gawsh! Let me get at him and I'll eat him!"

Blimp went off on his dangerous mission as unconcerned as if his Majesty had sent him out to shoot rabbits. After further talk with Prince Darro, who struck Tinker as

being a bit of an ass, Sexton Blake's assistant heard the strains of a piano, and found Celia in an adjoining apartment seated at the instrument.

"What's your opinion of Prince Darro, Billy?" she asked, still continuing to play.

"Well, as he's your cousin, and a royalty, I don't like to be rude, Celia. A bit of a juggins, isn't he?"

"I can't quite decide, Billy," said Celia, frowning. "Sometimes I think so, sometimes I think quite the other way. Now, I'll tell you why I dislike Sarjo. He and my cousin are very friendly, and Sarjo wants me to marry Darro. It may be because he feels that he can influence Darro and make him do anything he wishes. You have a very quick mind, Billy, and you can guess how it would be if they forced me into this marriage and anything happened to Peter."

"You'd be queen, of course, and Sarjo is kidding himself that Darro wouldn't count, and that, except in name, he'd be the real king."

"Billy, you're quite a clever boy!" said Celia. "That's just it. I feel that you and Mr. Brown are going to be my true friends, for I've been talking to Mr. Brown. I am very, very fond of my brother, but if he is badgered enough he will consent to anything. I want you to keep him from consenting to this horrid marriage. This is not England, where a girl, even a princess, is free to do as she likes."

"I'll watch it, Celia," said Tinker. "If Peter starts any of that donkey work, he'll get the finest thick ear ever seen on a royal personage, even if he slices my head off for it! Say the word, and I'll push Darro over the cliff and make him bump beautifully."

Celia laughed.

"I believe you would, Billy; but I don't want you to do anything like that," she answered; "but it's good to have found two staunch friends."

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH.

IT was the custom in Carlovia to dine early and to sup late. The king, Sexton Blake, Tinker, and the poetical Prince Darro sat at a round table beneath beautiful cut-glass candelabra filled with clusters of lighted candles. The major-domo had provided a supper fit for a king, and though Carlovia was a poor country, cups and dishes of gold sparkled on the royal table. Celia had gone to her room. At the door the lieutenant stood on guard, with his hand on his sword-hilt.

There was a gentle knock, and the lieutenant went out. He returned with a surprised look on his face, and waited for the young man to speak.

"What is it, lieutenant?" asked Peter, busy with peaches and cream.

"Your English servant has returned, sir, and wishes to speak with your Majesty."

"Oh, old Blimp," said Peter. "I sent him brigand chasing. He may have something to report, so let him in."

Ex-sergeant Coggs did not come alone. He brought another man with him, whom he held by the nape of the neck, a slim, dark-faced man, round whose left wrist a blood-stained bandage was wrapped.

"Got him, King!" growled Blimp. "Here's your bandit! This is him!"

"Good egg, Blimp!" said Peter. "If you've got the right guy I appoint you captain of the Royal Guard, and I'll sign your commission myself. What's happened to his arm? Did you shoot him?"

"No; Mr. Jones done that, King," said Blimp. "I see the rat scuttling into a cave, and fetched him out. Gawsh! He's Riv right enough, King!"

"Undoubtedly he's the man, sir," put in the lieutenant. "Several people here know him, and will swear to him."

"Take him outside and have him shot, Blimp," said Peter, helping himself to more peaches and cream.

"Come along, Riv, my lad, your number's up!" said Blimp. "Quite a nice night for it, too, with the moon shining."

Tinker's eyes rounded as he glanced from the King to Sexton Blake. Blake shook his head, warning him to be silent and not to interfere. In every land a brigand is an outlaw, and only a few hours before he had attempted to snipe and murder them, and he deserved to be shot.

"I did not know it was the King," said the prisoner, in slow but good English. "If I must die, let me first drink the King's health."

"Give him a cup of wine," said Peter. The brigand chief took the brimming gold cup in his uninjured hand, bowed to the king, and drank the wine to the last drop. It may have been pure fancy that some

sign passed between Rivastoff and Prince Darro.

"Oh, this is a beastly business, sire," said the prince. "I detest bloodshed, and I shall lie awake all night thinking about it. As an enormous favour to me, I beg your Majesty to defer the execution until to-morrow, when I return to Kamfak."

"You seem to forget, cousin," said Peter, who was beginning to assert himself, "that you will not return to Kamfak to-morrow unless I wish it. Give the fellow another cup of wine, Captain Coggs, and then shoot him."

The brigand drank the second cup of wine, bowed again, and then walked out between Captain Coggs and the lieutenant with head erect, and the major domo, magnificent in a laced coat of purple velvet and white silk breeches and stockings, brought coffee in little shell-like cups, and placed cigarettes on the table.

"Gentlemen," said Peter calmly, "you may smoke."

Blake lighted a cigarette, and Darro also took one with a hand that was not too steady. As he listened for the rattle of the rifles Tinker began to think that Carlovina was not such a comic opera country, after all, but a tragic one. It seemed strange that a mere schoolboy like Peter could send a man to his death at a word without trial, even such an outlaw as Rivastoff, the mountain brigand.

Evidently there was some hitch, for the fatal volley did not ring out. The moon was high and clear, and Celia had parted her curtains to look out. She heard the tramp of feet in the paved barrack square, and saw a man being led forward, his eyes bandaged, followed by the firing-party, with rifles. The lieutenant put a cigarette between the doomed man's lips and lighted it for him.

(To be continued next week.)

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THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

(Please quote your membership number in all communications to the League, which should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, London, E.C.4.

My dear Leagueites and Readers,

This week I promised to tell you all about the wonderful FREE GIFTS we are providing with every copy of the October 24, October 31, November 7, and November 14 issues of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. What we are giving away is something quite novel in the form of free gifts. As far as I know, the idea has never been done before, and what is more to the point, it knocks every other kind of free gift into a cocked hat.

When you open your "N.L.L." the week after next, you will find tucked between its leaves a PACKET OF ASSORTED FOREIGN POSTAGE STAMPS, any one of which may be a rare stamp highly prized by collectors. These packets of stamps will be so varied that no two packets from any two copies, even from the same issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, will be exactly alike. Then by the time you have received your fourth packet with the November 14 issue, you will have the beginnings of a collection. You will have learned also from the authoritative pen of Mr. Melville (the well-known philatelist who is writing a special series of articles for the "N.L.L.") what a fascinating, instructive and romantic hobby is stamp collecting.

Perhaps you will be wanting to know what all this has got to do with the League. It has a very great deal to do with the League, being the means, I hope, of encouraging many readers to join the movement. For instance, I am giving only to Members of the League facilities in the "N.L.L." for exchanging their stamps. This will take the form of a Stamp Exchange and Mart. Another advantage to members will be that when they are striving to qualify for medal awards, the extra copies they might buy to introduce to their friends will also help them to add many new stamps to their collection.

If you would, therefore, derive the full

benefits of our coming FREE GIFTS, as well as other benefits coming later on, make sure of enlisting as a Member of the League as soon as possible. And don't forget that there is going to be a big rush for these free gift numbers, and unless you place an order for them with your news-agent well in advance, you may find every copy gone.

Another O.O. writes to complain that his chums regard the League as a catch to get new readers, and as this idea seems to be fairly general with many readers who have not yet joined, I will try to explain how far off the mark it is. Were this true, the conditions of becoming a member or of winning any of the medal awards would be different from what they are at present. These conditions do not ask you to get new readers. They merely require you to INTRODUCE the paper to one LIKELY new reader to become a member, and to make six additional introductions to six likely new readers to win a bronze medal. We are quite confident that the stories will do the rest. That is why Mr. Brooks is devoting all his energy and time in the production of really first-rate stories. I want every reader to bear in mind that first and foremost come the stories. The League is really a Fellowship of Readers, who have one common bond of understanding in their appreciation of the art of Mr. Brooks and the living characters he has created in the pages of the "N.L.L." He is undoubtedly a benefactor to the thousands whom he entertains by his stories every week, and it is to add a little more to the happiness of these folk that the League is being formed.

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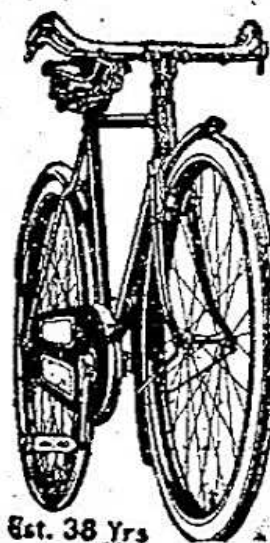
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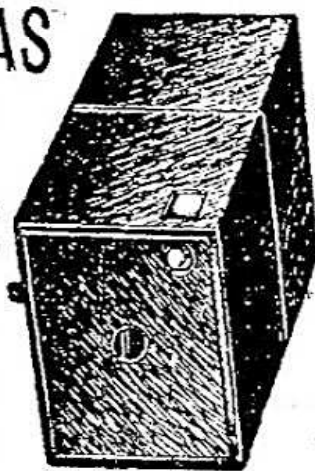


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