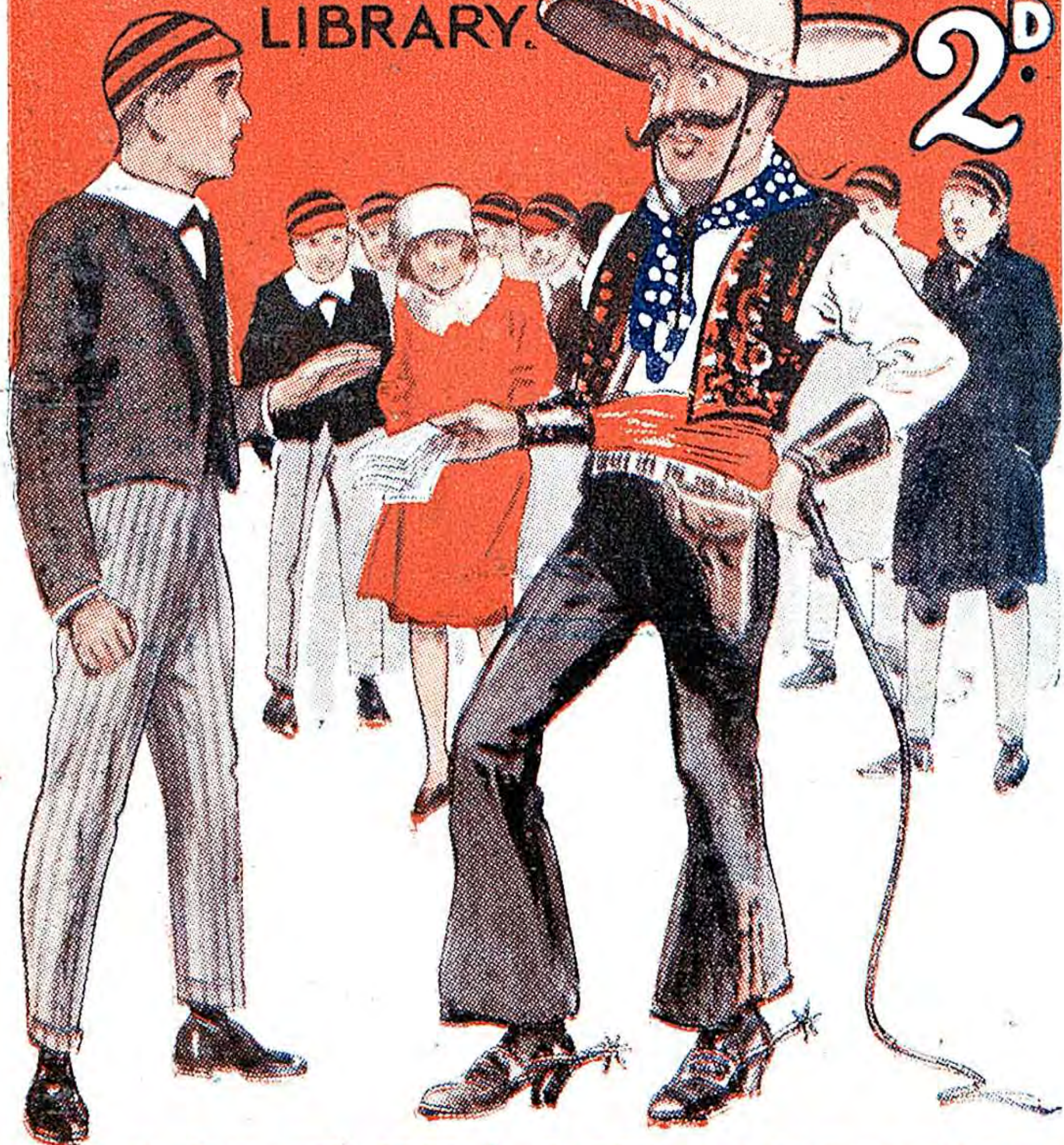


HANDFORTH IS FUNNIER THAN EVER THIS WEEK!

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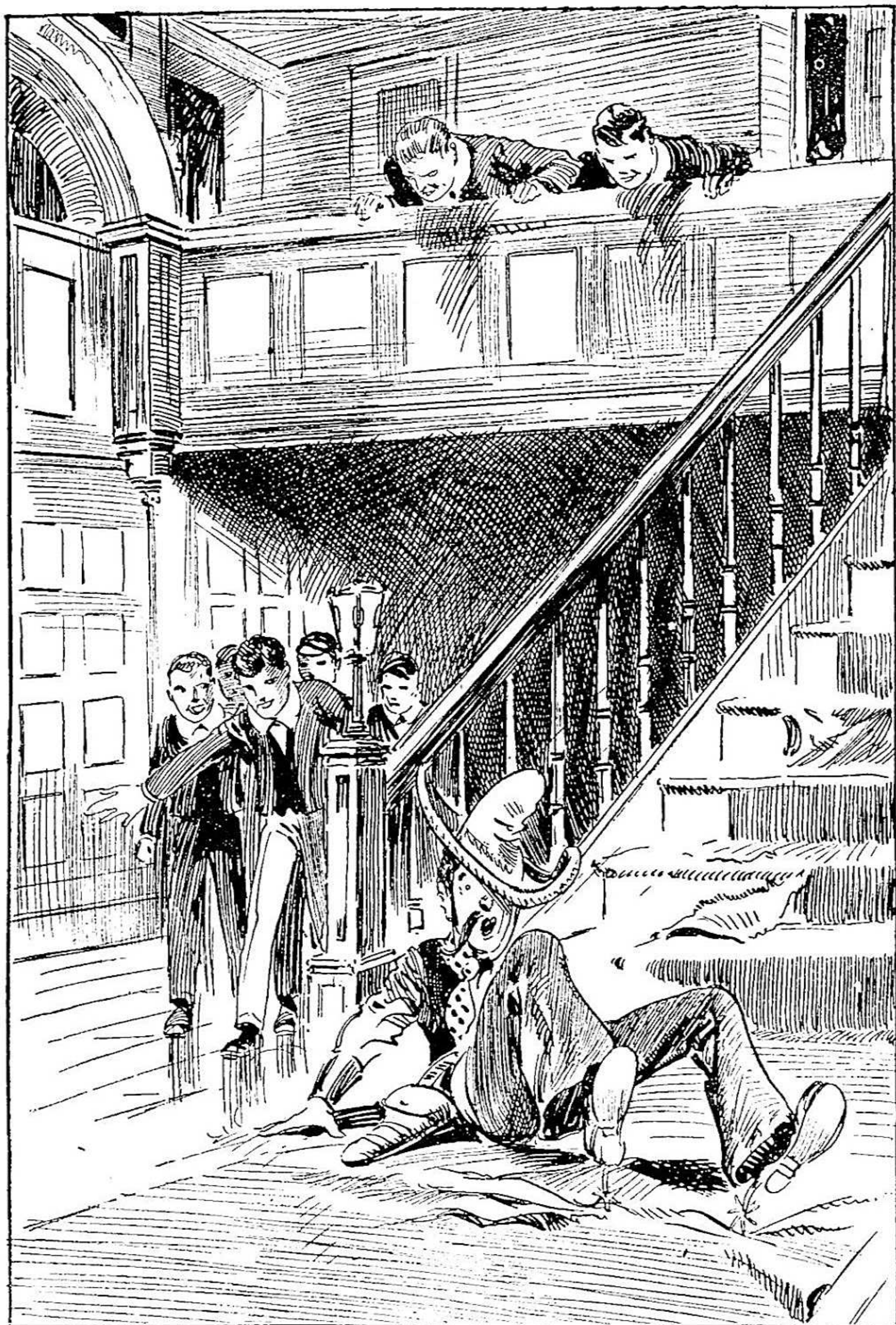
UNCLE HANDFORTH!

A Rollicking Long Complete Story of the Boys of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 32.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

December 11th, 1926.



Uncle Julian had certainly arrived, but rather quicker than he expected. One of his spurs had caught in the top stair and, after turning a few cartwheels, he landed at the bottom with a crash, minus one of his moustachios. "Who pushed me?" he moaned.



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

*Handforth as "Uncle Julian" is too funny for words.
Read all about it in this week's stunning long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's.*

CHAPTER I.

HANDFORTH THE COMFORTER.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD gave a violent start. "What's that?" he gasped fearfully.

"Only me, you touchy chump!" said Handforth, with a stare. "What's the matter with you? What's the idea of leaping a yard into the air as soon as I tap you on the shoulder?"

Fullwood was standing in the lobby of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, and he had been so deep in thought that he had not noticed the approach of Edward Oswald Handforth. And this was a remarkable indication of his day-dreaming condition, for the leader of Study D was no fairy.

"You—you startled me," said Fullwood, with relief.

"Startled you?" repeated Handforth, staring. "And why the dickens should I startle you? If it comes to that, why should I startle anybody? I'm not an ogre, am I?"

"Not exactly," said Fullwood.

"What do you mean—not exactly?" Handforth growled. "That implies that I am a bit of an ogre—"

"Oh, my hat!" growled Fullwood. "Don't you love to argue, old man? If you can't find a ready-made subject, you invent one. But—but when you put your hand on my shoulder like that, you—you— Well, you startled me."

"Did you think it was a policeman's hand, or something?"

"As a matter of fact, I was thinking about that affair that happened in Bannington the other night," said Fullwood soberly. "The police took my name then, you know, and I've been on the jump ever since. I've got a horrible feeling that something is going to happen."

Handforth looked at him pityingly.

"Well, you're about right," he said. "Something's going to happen all right if you don't drop all this pessimistic rot. You're going to be scattered all over this floor—and my fist is going to do it!"

"Oh, chuck it—"

"I'm your friend!" insisted Handforth. "I helped you then, and I'll help you again, but I don't want to hear any of this rubbish about police and getting into trouble. You're as safe as houses, you ass! There isn't a thing for you to worry about, and

the sooner you recover your old smile, the better."

Ralph Leslie frowned.

"I've almost forgotten how to smile!" he confessed, in a sombre voice.

"Then you'd better jog your memory!" snapped Handforth curtly. "Do you know that you've given me the pip all day? Do you know that I've been as miserable as the dickens? Every time I've looked at your face I've felt a cold shiver go down my back!"

"I'm sorry——"

"Every time you've spoken to me I've had visions of people going to the scaffold!" went on Handforth accusingly. "Anybody might think you were on the verge of being led to the scaffold to have your head chopped off!"

"But if I went to the scaffold, I should be hanged," said Fullwood drily.

"Oh, so you're going to quibble, are you?" roared Handforth. "Do you know what happens to a chap who quibbles with me?"

"Yes—he gets scattered all over the floor!"

"That's where you're wrong!" snapped Handforth. "He gets knocked into the middle of next week! But I'm not anxious to bash you about, Fully. I don't want to spoil the look of your face. In fact, I've made up my mind to cheer you up. I'm going to comfort you."

"That will be nice," said Fullwood, without enthusiasm.

"Come along to the study, and we'll have a quiet jaw," went on Handforth. "We'll have a heart-to-heart talk, and by the time I've done you'll be so happy that you'll sing, instead of doing your prep."

"Really, old man, you needn't trouble——"

"No trouble at all!" said Edward Oswald promptly.

Fullwood wasn't looking at it from that point of view—he was thinking of the trouble to himself. But when Handforth commenced on a move of this sort, it was better to give him his head. So Fullwood allowed himself to be dragged down the Remove corridor.

The door of Study D opened, and Church put his head out.

"Oh, there you are, Handy," he said. "Tea."

"Tea?" repeated Handforth.

"Yes—it's ready," said Church. "Tea, you know. The stuff you drown with boiling water——"

"Don't bother me about tea now," interrupted Handforth coldly. "I'm comforting Fullwood. I'm going to take him into his study, and cheer him up."

"But the scones are all toasted——"

"Bother the scones!"

"And Mac's opening the sardines," urged Church. "Besides, we've got some special tongue this evening. It's yours, so it ought to be good."

"My tongue?" repeated Handforth, pausing.

"Yes; Mac's just going to slice it up——"

"Going to slice up my tongue!" gasped Edward Oswald. "Why, the murderous——"

"No, you fathead; I'm talking about that tinned tongue you bought in the village," grinned Church. "Still, that idea of yours isn't a bad one. I'll see what Mac says about it. Think of the relief we should have if you were obliged to go about with your tongue in splints for a week!"

Handforth merely snorted, and walked on. He hadn't the time to deal with Church and McClure as they deserved. For McClure was obviously the greater sinner, since a loud cackle had proceeded from Study D at Church's sally.

"I'll deal with those two fatheads later," said Handforth, as he opened the door of Study I, and propelled Fullwood through the opening. "Now, we'll have a quiet chat—— Hallo! Who the dickens are you?"

He stared coldly at Clive Russell, who was cutting bread and butter.

"Me?" said the Canadian boy. "My name's Russell——"

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth. "I know who you are! But what are you doing in here?"

"Getting tea ready," grinned Clive. "I'm awfully sorry you don't approve of it, Handy, but this happens to be my study. I'm always willing to learn these lessons in good manners. Sit down—make yourself at home! I like people who barge in, and order me about!"

Handforth started.

"None of your rot!" he growled. "I'd forgotten, for the moment, that you shared this study with Fullwood. Well, you can stay if you like——"

"Thanks awfully!" said Russell gratefully.

"But I don't want any interruptions," continued Handforth. "I've brought Fully here to cheer him up, and I'm not going out until I see him grinning from ear to ear."

"I wish you luck!" said Clive. "I've been trying that game for a couple of days, but it doesn't work. Ralph is one of those chaps who worries himself sick over nothing. I've told him that everything will be all right, but I guess he isn't convinced."

Fullwood was beginning to get weary.

"And if you were in my place, you wouldn't be convinced, either," he said gravely. "And that applies to you, Handy, too. It's all very well for you to talk about being cheerful, and grinning from ear to ear, but I don't forget that I was in that rotten boxing booth the other evening, and that the police took my name when the show was raided."

"I was there, wasn't I?" retorted Handforth. "And I'm not worrying!"

"It's different with you, old man," replied Fullwood quietly. "You were there—but you were outside the booth. The police didn't take your name—the Head can't jump on you for being in the open street!"

Handforth sat on a corner of the table, and glared at the unhappy Fullwood. He had thoughtlessly sat on a plate of bread-and-butter; but neither he nor the others noticed this detail.

"I want to ask you a question," said Edward Oswald grimly. "Are we living under the Honour System, or not?"

"Of course we are——"

"Then don't talk out of your hat any more," growled Handforth. "Everybody at St. Frank's is on his honour to obey the rules and regulations. Punishments are abolished. So even if the Head does get to know, you're still safe."

"That's what Clive tells me, but I'm not certain of it."

"Then the sooner you *are* certain, the better," continued the leader of Study D. "To any casual observer, it might seem that you had done something dishonourable. But we know better. We know that you went into that boxing booth with the best intentions in the world. So there wasn't anything dishonourable in it, and therefore there's nothing to worry about. I'm fed up with your pessimism!"

He shifted his position, and there was an ominous crack.

"Hallo!" he gasped. "What the dickens—— Hi! What's all this sticking to me? By George! Bread-and-butter! My bags are ruined!"

He gazed round, nearly twisting himself into a knot. Slices of bread-and-butter were adhering to him stickily.

"My trousers!" he howled. "Ruined!"

"Never mind about your trousers!" snapped Clive. "What about our bread-and-butter? Do you think we can eat it after you've been sitting on it? You careless ass! Why can't you look where you're sitting? What are the chairs for?"

Handforth peeled off the bread-and-butter.

"It's the last time I'll come here!" he said thickly. "It's a nice thing when I come to your study, and you spoil my bags! Why can't you put your beastly bread-and-butter in a safe place?"

"You didn't give us a chance," said Fullwood dryly. "There's a safe place for all good bread-and-butter, but not after you've sat on it."

"We'll be ready next time, Handy!" said Clive Russell, with heavy sarcasm. "We'll lock up the bread-and-butter in a safe, or suspend it near the ceiling——"

"I don't want any attempts to be funny!" interrupted Handforth coldly, as he proceeded to wipe his trousers with a corner of the tablecloth. "Now then, about this boxing-booth affair. We'll go into all details, and I'll prove to you that you're perfectly safe."

"Great Scott!" said Clive. "You're not going over——"

"Let him!" interrupted Fullwood, sitting down resignedly. "It'll be quicker in the long run."



CHAPTER 2.

THE CHOPPER!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH gave Fullwood a cold look.

"I'm not so dense!" he said frigidly. "I know you don't want me to go over the facts——"

"Well, I thought you were here to comfort me," said Fullwood gruffly. "I shan't get much comfort out of a recital of all the beastly circumstances which led up to this business."

"You'll get so much comfort that you'll dance for joy," said Handforth confidently. "And what do you mean by talking about a recital? I haven't come here to recite, you ass!"

"Providence still watches over us!" murmured Clive Russell.

"Eh?" said Handforth, without heeding. "Now, about your affairs, Fully."

"I hope you won't go into them too deeply," said Fullwood fervently.

"That's just where you're mistaken my lad," replied Edward Oswald. "My whole idea is to tick off your worries, one by one, and then prove to you, in the end, that they're not worth bothering your head about. I said I was going to comfort you, and I will. First of all, then, you got into some trouble in that rotten night club, and gambled twenty quid of Russell's money away. That's right, isn't it?"

"You needn't put it so bluntly," said Clive indignantly. "If that's the way you're going to comfort the poor chap, you'd better dry up! You know as well as I do that Forrest trapped him into that den, the cad!"

"It was my own fault," muttered Fullwood. "I was as weak as a rabbit!"

Handforth waved his hand.

"Well, never mind about that," he said, in a fatherly way. "We're always ready to overlook a chap's faults when he admits 'em. It's when a chap does something wrong, and then sticks out that he hasn't, that the chaps despise him."

"There seem to be a lot of chaps about," remarked Clive dryly. "And that reminds me, I've got some on my wrists."

"Chaps—on your wrists!" repeated Handforth, staring.

"It's freezing outside," explained Clive.

"You—you funny idiot!" roared Handforth. "I'm not talking about those sort of chaps."

"I know, but you reminded me," said Clive. "I shall have to get some vaseline."

"You'll need something stronger than vaseline if you interrupt me like this!" said Handforth threateningly. "Horse oils will be nearer the mark! Where was I?"

"Nearly sitting in the sugar basin," said Fullwood.

Handforth, who had been on the point of sitting on the corner of the table again, started up, and glared. It was beginning to strike him that the chums of Study I were

treating him as a joke. They didn't appreciate the gravity of the situation, and the fact that he was in deadly earnest.

"Look here, my sons," he said curtly. "I didn't come here to hear your feeble brand of humour! I'm here to comfort and soothe."

"We haven't noticed it yet," said Clive wearily.

"You got into trouble at that night club, Fullwood, and you lost twenty quid of Russell's money," said Handforth desperately, plunging straight into his work again. "It wasn't your fault—you didn't break your honour really. You just bent it a bit. Well, you were jolly sorry for what you did, and you wanted to redeem yourself. You wanted to be able to hold up your head again."

"Chuck it!" said Clive uncomfortably.

As an example of tact, Handforth's methods were scarcely to be recommended. Poor Fullwood was flushing with self-consciousness at this blunt statement of his follies. But Handforth wasn't even aware of it.

"I'll chuck it when I've done," he retorted. "Now, Fully, what was the position? Only a few chaps in the Remove knew about your affair, and we all agreed to forget it. We were ready to let it drop, and to take you to our bosoms again. But you, like a chump, refused."

"Of course I refused!" burst out Fullwood bitterly. "I acted like a cad, and I deserved to be punished. All you fellows were so jolly decent that I was— Well, I had it on my conscience. Particularly about that money. You clubbed together and paid Clive back money that I had lost in gambling. How do you suppose I could sleep peacefully with that on my mind?"

"Oh, for goodness sake, chuck it!" said Russell impatiently.

"I can't now," replied Fullwood. "Handforth has started this—"

"Oh, yes, and I'm going to finish it!" interrupted Handforth calmly. "If you want to know the truth, Fully, we all admire you for your determination to earn that twenty quid, and pay Russell back."

"That may be true, but I don't admire you for this exhibition of tactlessness!" said Clive warmly. "Ralph's paid the money, and the whole thing's over. Why can't you forget it, instead of raking up—"

"Why, you rotter, I'm doing it to comfort the chap!" roared Handforth.

"Yes, and look at him!" snorted Clive. "You've made him ten times more miserable! Gee, some comforter!"

Handforth took a deep breath.

"Can't you wait until I've finished?" he demanded. "I haven't come to the comforting part yet."

"Help!" said Clive feebly.

"On Wednesday, Fullwood and I were in Bannington," said Handforth, with emphasis. "I found him half dead with misery, and nearly on the point of running away from school. And all because of that miserable twenty quid. Isn't that right, Fully?"

"Oh, I wish you'd dry up!" said Fullwood.

"You wanted to earn that money, so that you could feel that everything was square," continued Handforth. "Well, I admire you. I should have been just the same. And I helped you to earn the cash, didn't I?"

"Like a brick," admitted Fullwood. "In fact, I can hardly realise how we got it. What with that coco-nut shy, and the other stunts at the fair, we raised ten quid in a marvellously short time—"

"But ten quid wasn't twenty!" interrupted Handforth. "So you went in for a boxing contest at that rotten booth. Ten pounds to anybody who could stand up to Smiler Hogan for three rounds."

"Yes, and I was a fool to enter for the thing," muttered Fullwood. "I shall probably get the sack because of it. I'm expecting to be shoved on the carpet any minute! I can't understand why I'm still safe."

"There you go again—worrying like the dickens!" said Handforth grimly. "You got the money, didn't you?"

"Yes, but in what a way?" said Fullwood, taking a deep breath. "You didn't go in that booth, Handy. Honestly, it was the rottenest place I've ever been in! Everybody there was a crook, by the look of him! And the boxing! Ye gods, what a farce! And then the police raided the whole show, and Inspector Jameson saw me in the ring, and took my name, and said that he would report me to the Head."

"Well, nothing's happened, so you're safe," declared Handforth. "The proprietor of that dirty booth wouldn't pay the prize money, although you won it, so we jumped on him and took it by force. Dick Hamilton has got it all ready to send to the Bannington Hospital Fund. We're not touching any of that rotten money."

"I feel that I still owe you the ten," said Fullwood unhappily. "You've all had half of the sums you whacked out for Clive—"

"Yes, and we're sending the ten to charity!" interrupted Handforth. "You paid us back every cent, and we're not going to ask your permission before we can give money to the hospital, so dry up! That's enough about the money! The point's settled, and now it can be forgotten. I'm trying to show you that there's nothing to worry about. We're on our honour, and there aren't any punishments. So even if the police did report you, the Head can't take any action. So, Fully, be a sensible chap, and let it all drop. We want to see you smiling again," he added earnestly. "Let's regard that incident as never having happened. Nobody thinks any the worse of you, and we want you to be your old self."

Fullwood could appreciate Handforth's blunt sincerity.

"You're a good chap, Handy," he said quietly. "You may do things in a rummy way, but we all know you, and your heart's all right. Thanks awfully for trying to comfort me like this, but you mustn't fool yourself. I've got an awful feeling that the

chopper's hovering overhead. I'm expecting it to come down any minute!"

"You mean the Head will sack you, or something?"

"Not—or *something!*" said Fullwood pointedly.

"You're all wrong!" declared Handforth. "There's absolutely no chance of you being sacked. Dash it, you went into that booth in order to win back your honour! So how on earth can the Head call it dishonourable, and expel you? Don't be so dotty!"

"That sounds very fine, Handy, but it'll be a different thing if the Head questions me," said Fullwood, shaking his head. "I can't explain to him— Who's that? Come in!"

A tap had sounded, and now the door had opened. Tubbs, the page-boy of the Ancient House, stood in the doorway looking apologetic.

"Awful sorry, Master Fullwood," he said, "I 'opes it won't be too bad, but the 'Ead says as you're to go to 'im at once!"



CHAPTER 3.

ON THE CARPET!

HE chopper!

Fullwood turned slightly pale as he heard the dread summons, and Clive Russell and Handforth

exchanged rapid glances. After the latter's "comforting campaign," the arrival of this summons was particularly tragic.

"Tubbs, my lad, you're dotty!" said Handforth gruffly. "You've made a mistake. Did the Head tell you this himself?"

"The 'Ead sent for me, Master 'Andforth," replied Tubbs, nodding. "He looks at me, an' he says: 'Go to Master Fullwood, an' tell 'im as 'ow I want him at once,' he says. 'If Master Fullwood isn't in the Ancient House,' he says, 'look for 'im until you finds him.' That's what the 'Ead says, Master 'Andforth, so it seems as though it might be serious."

"All right, Tubbs—thanks," said Fullwood quietly. "I'll go."

The page-boy withdrew, and Fullwood looked at his companions, but said nothing. It seemed to him that words were unnecessary. Handforth was not of the same mind. He gave a careless, boisterous laugh, which was, however, utterly unconvincing.

"Nothing to worry about," he said lightly. "I expect the Head wants to have a chat with you about—about football, or something. You never know with these masters. They're always getting cranky ideas."

Fullwood tried to smile.

"Thanks for trying to cheer me up, Handy, but I don't happen to be quite blind," he said. "This means the chopper, and it's coming down hard. The surprising thing is that it didn't descend earlier."

"Then it's a dirty trick!" roared Handforth indignantly. "If the Head meant to

take action, why couldn't he do it yesterday? What's the idea of keeping you in suspense? I've a good mind to go and see him——"

"Thanks all the same, Handy, but I can deal with him," said Fullwood hastily, as he jumped up. "Let's hope he'll be reasonable. I'm not ashamed of going into that booth, and I've got nothing on my conscience now. In a way, I'm feeling glad."

"Glad!" said Handforth, staring.

"Yes, because the suspense is over," replied Fullwood, with genuine relief in his eyes. "Now I shall know where I am."

He went out, and briskly walked down the corridor and out into the Triangle. It was growing dark, and a high wind was blowing up from the sea, bringing stinging snowflakes on it. It was real winter now, and most of the fellows had been holding excited discussions as to the possibilities of snow.

The glass had been falling all day, and the papers predicted that heavy falls of snow were almost a certainty in the South of England. And now the first flakes were falling, true to the prediction. There was every indication of a blizzard coming up.

But Fullwood had no thought for the weather as he hurried through Big Arch, and made his way across the Inner Court to the Head's residence. In the life of a junior schoolboy it was a very big event indeed to be summoned like this. Visiting the Headmaster was the most dreaded ordeal of all. And Ralph Leslie Fullwood had not exaggerated when he had declared that he was relieved.

He felt that he had wiped out that dishonourable episode now, and it was cheerful to know that the fellows were on his side. He was not ashamed of fighting in that disreputable booth, for his object had been good. But he was afraid that Dr. Stafford would be very dissatisfied with a truthful explanation. For if Fullwood told the truth, he would be out of the frying-pan into the fire.

He arrived at the Head's door, knocked, and was soon ushered into Dr. Stafford's private sanctum. He found the Head looking very grave, but there was no trace of nervousness in Fullwood's manner. Indeed, he was cool and calm, and thorough master of himself.

"I am glad you have come so promptly, Fullwood," said the Headmaster, as he looked at the junior with a quick, searching eye. "Since it is not my object to worry you unnecessarily, I will get to the point at once. I have heard a very disturbing report from the Bannington police. It is one, indeed, that I cannot credit, and I have sent for you so that you may refute the suggestions."

"Thank you, sir," said Fullwood quietly.

"The police have informed me that a St. Frank's schoolboy, named Fullwood, entered the prize ring in a disreputable booth, in the lower part of Bannington, on Wednesday evening last," continued the Headmaster. "The police also believe, although there is

no confirmation of this, that the same boy made money by hiring a coco-nut shy in the fair grounds. I should like you to tell me, Fullwood, that you are not the young person concerned."

The Head, it seemed, had made up his mind that the police were misinformed. He had merely sent for Fullwood to endorse his opinion, and for a moment the junior was the prey of a great temptation. Why not deny it? Just a simple sentence, and the Head would probably send him away. And then, in another moment, Fullwood cast aside the unworthy thought. He had had enough of deception, and his conscience was perfectly clear. It was his duty to face the music. Besides, the Head's eyes were on him in a grave, but kindly manner.

"Well, Fullwood?" he asked quietly.

"I am sorry, sir, but the police were right."

The Head sat back, and removed his glasses.

"You admit, then, that you were actually in this booth?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you fight with that wretched—er—bruiser?"

"Yes, sir."

"For prize-money?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was the amount?"

"Ten pounds, sir."

The Head nodded, and his manner had become very cold. But he still remained as dignified and as grave as ever. For some moments he sat back in his chair, idly tapping his glasses on his thumb-nail. When he looked at Fullwood again he was wearing a troubled expression.

"Why did you do this, Fullwood?" he asked quietly. "I need hardly tell you that I am greatly shocked. Do you realise the utter gravity of your offence? Did it occur to you that your appearance in that disgraceful ring might reflect serious discredit upon the name of our school?"

"No, sir," said Fullwood, in a low voice.

"There is no man more whole-heartedly in favour of boxing than I am," continued the Head. "It is a noble sport, and here, at St. Frank's, we encourage it. But you cannot pretend, Fullwood, that there was any boxing in that Bannington booth. The police have informed me that the place was the most vicious hotbed of hooliganism that the town has ever had to deal with. I will grant that some of these travelling booths can be run honestly and cleanly. But we are now dealing with one particular one, and you must be aware of the fact, Fullwood, that it was a plague spot, and a disgrace to boxing."

"Yes, sir," admitted Fullwood huskily.

"You agree with my description of this loathsome place?"

"It—it was worse than you even think, sir," said Fullwood. "Oh, it was terrible! And it wasn't boxing at all; it was just brutal savagery."

"You, nevertheless, fought in that ring?"

"Yes, sir," said Fullwood. "But—but that blackguard, Hogan, didn't beat me, sir. I just used ordinary boxing, and I whacked him!"

For a moment the Head's eyes lit up.

"I am sure, Fullwood, that you would do nothing to disgrace the noble art," he said sternly. "But your very presence in that booth was a disgrace. A disgrace to yourself, and a disgrace to the school. There is one question I want to ask you, and I shall expect a perfectly frank reply. Did you fight this ruffian for the one and only purpose of winning the prize-money?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Fullwood.

"I am very sorry to hear you say that," replied the Head regretfully. "I was hoping that your explanation might be different—that you might have been impelled by some boyish impulse, only to regret your mistake when it was too late. But when you tell me that it was your intention to win the money, I am indeed grieved. I thought better of my boys. Why did you do this, Fullwood?"

Ralph Leslie felt a lump in his throat. After all, the Head was doing the very utmost he could to help him, and he was compelled to make things worse. His very silence now would seem bad. But how could he explain?

How could he tell the Head that he wanted the money to make good his losses at gambling in a night club? That would finish him, once and for all! And Fullwood was determined to tell no lies. Therefore his only course was to remain silent.

"I am sorry, sir—I can't explain," he said.

"Does that mean that you will not explain?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

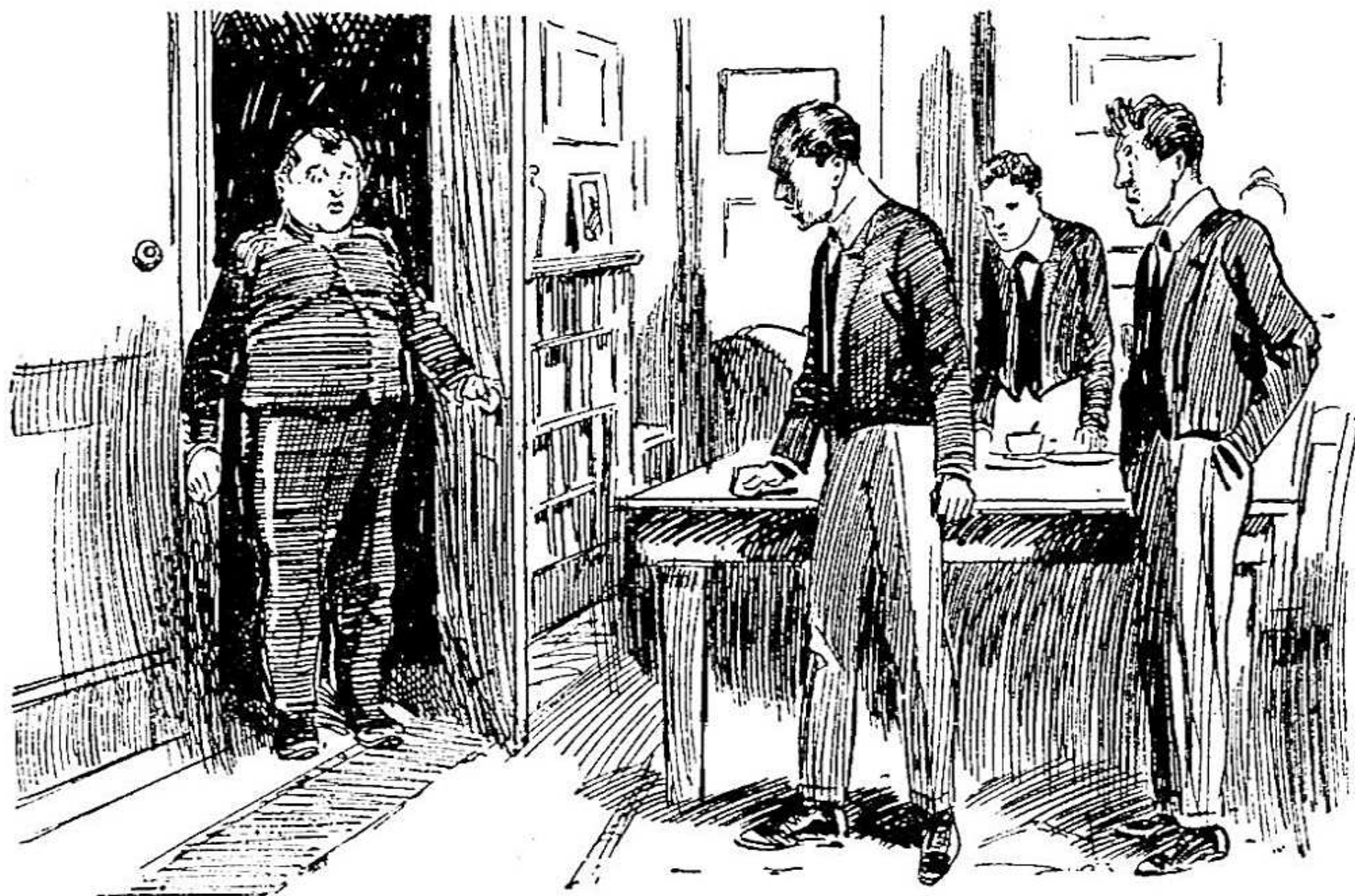
"So you went there in order to gain this cash. You entered that vile place with a mercenary object!" said the Head grimly. "I may tell you, Fullwood, that I am very shocked. What of this other affair? The business of the coco-nut shy? That, I know, is far less serious, but still serious enough. Were you the boy that the police speak of?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have been told that you made a laughing stock of yourself," continued the Head. "You used bananas, oranges, and even vegetables in place of coconuts, and the public supported you. It is even hinted that you acted as a kind of human Aunt Sally. And all this while you wore the colours of your House. I find it difficult to believe, Fullwood. Do you admit everything?"

"Yes, sir," said Fullwood wretchedly.

But even in that painful moment there was one little balm to his wretchedness. Apparently the Head had not been told that there were two St. Frank's fellows involved in the coconut-shy affair. Edward Oswald Handforth had been the other, and Fullwood was happy to think that Handy would not be dragged in. For, after all, the large-hearted leader of Study D had done it all for his—Fullwood's sake.



"The 'Ead wants to see you at once, Master Fullwood," said Tubbs. Fullwood turned pale. The dread summons had come. The Head would soon know all—and that would mean the sack!

"How much money did you make?" asked the Head.

"Ten pounds, sir."

"Upon my word!" said Dr. Stafford, with a start. "Ten pounds! Then, with that other money, you finished up that disgraceful evening with twenty pounds in your pocket?"

"Yes, sir—that was the sum I wanted," replied Fullwood quietly.

"And this money—where is it?" asked Dr. Stafford sternly. "Have you spent any of it? Have you squandered—"

"It's still intact, sir," interrupted Fullwood quickly.

This was true. He had paid it over to those Remove fellows who had helped him earlier—those juniors who had clubbed together to pay Clive the twenty pounds. Ten of it was set aside for the hospital, and the other ten was still unspent.

"I am glad, at least, to hear this," said the Head. "You will go at once, Fullwood, and fetch that money—and I will hold it until I have made full investigations."

CHAPTER 4.

THE FATEFUL TWENTY POUNDS!



FULLWOOD bit his lip.

This was a serious blow to him. After all the trouble he had had, getting that money! It was the money that had, in his own opinion, saved

his honour. And now it was to be seized by the headmaster! That meant that he would still be in the debt of all those fellows!

"You must realise, Fullwood, that I am very grieved at all this," continued the Head. "I cannot allow any St. Frank's boy to disgrace the school in such a fashion. I might, perhaps, forgive the fair-ground escapade. But the other, no! That disgraceful booth has now been shifted, thank Heaven! It was the resort of a race gang—ruffians of the most depraved type—and other undesirables. Your appearance there—actually in the ring—has harmed the school's prestige. The whole of Bannington has been talking of the incident, and I have been very worried. Now that I know the truth from your own lips, I must consider what course I shall adopt. Later on, perhaps, I will give you my decision. But for the moment you had better go and fetch that money. Under no circumstances can I allow you to keep it in your possession."

"Yes, sir," said Fullwood dully.

For a moment an impulse came over him to blurt out the whole story—the reason for his series of actions. Then he checked himself. What would be the use? Besides, he would only implicate others. The less said, the better.

He went out, and found that the snow was now coming down as though it meant it. Inner Court was rapidly being clothed in a white mantle, and the Triangle was assuming the same wintry garb. Fullwood had no overcoat, and he was feeling chilly when he opened

the heavy door of the Ancient House, and went in.

"Hallo! Been out to have a look at the snow?" asked De Valerie eagerly. "If we have any luck, there'll be two or three inches of it by to-morrow."

"And then for some sport," said Duncan cheerily.

"Sport?" repeated Fullwood, with a rather twisted smile. "Oh, rather!"

He walked on, leaving the pair staring after him. He wondered how they could exercise their minds over such a triviality as snow. His own worries were so numerous that the weather was of utterly no importance. There had been no mistaking the headmaster's tone.

He was going to consider the case—and then decide!

"It'll mean the sack!" muttered Fullwood. "After all the Head said—about disgracing the school—there can't be any other—"

"What's the matter, Ralph?" asked Clive Russell, as he came out and found his study mate in the passage. "What did the Head say?" he added anxiously. "Did he want to see you about that rotten boxing affair?"

"Let's get into the study," said Fullwood quietly.

They went in, and Clive was very concerned. He listened with something very akin to alarm as Fullwood related what had happened.

"So I've got to take him that money at once," concluded Ralph Leslie. "He's seized it, you know."

Clive sighed.

"It's getting a joke about that twenty quid!" he said wearily. "I wish the chaps had never contributed it—I wish you had just left it owing to me, Ralph, and settled up some time in the future—"

"No, that was impossible," said Fullwood, shaking his head. "I lost your money, Clive, and I didn't know anything about that little plot, when Handy and the rest clubbed together for me. But I know now, and we're back in the same position. I've got to get that tenner from Hamilton—"

"But that's booked for the hospital!"

"I know."

"Didn't you tell the Head that?"

"What was the use?" asked Fullwood. "It would have sounded so jolly queer—so queer, in fact, that he wouldn't have believed me. Think of it! Going to that awful booth, winning ten pounds, and then sending it to the Cottage Hospital! The Head wouldn't have credited that yarn!"

"But it's the truth!" insisted Clive. "And it's the chaps' money—not yours! They agreed to send it to the hospital. Besides, they'll all be willing to prove—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Fullwood. "But it wouldn't be playing the game, Clive. I got that money in the way I told the Head, and he's commandeered it. Therefore, I go back to where I stood before. I'm not going to tell him anything—I don't mean to drag in any other names. It's my funeral, old

man, and it's only right that I should stand the racket."

Clive couldn't do anything else but admit the logic of his chum's remarks. So, as it was necessary to deliver the money into the Head's hands as soon as possible, the chums of Study I went straight to Dick Hamilton.

The Remove skipper understood as soon as he heard the facts.

"Well, of course, you've got to hand it over," he said. "It's rather a good thing we didn't send it to the hospital—"

"A bad thing, you mean," interrupted Clive Russell. "Why should a charity be dished out of ten pounds? The Head's got no right to that money. He didn't make it. Ralph won it fairly and squarely."

"It all depends upon the point of view," said Dick. "We know that Fully played the game all right, and that booth proprietor tried to swindle him. In fact, we had to knock him over, and get the money by force—and that's the main reason why it's going to charity."

"But it isn't going," said Clive, staring.

"My dear chap, the Head won't stick to it," said Dick Hamilton. "He's only commandeering it for the time being—until he's made an investigation. So there's no need for Fullwood to worry himself. Come on, we'd better get the other ten."

This had to be collected from various juniors, and Fullwood felt his position more and more keenly, for this was the whole wretched business over again. Collecting money to make good the sum that he had gambled away in that hour of folly! That was the way he looked at it.

And it was impressed upon him, bitterly and harshly, how serious that slip of his had been. Twenty pounds was a fairly large sum, and ever since that hateful night, Fullwood had had no rest. His life had been a misery to him. But after earning that cash on the Wednesday, he had certainly assumed that his financial troubles were over. And now they were starting all over again!

For Fullwood didn't believe that the Head would hand it back. He would probably return it to the police, deeming that Fullwood had no right to it.

"It's as good as gone!" said Ralph Leslie unhappily. "As soon as I have handed it over to the Head, I shall be back in the old place—just where I started. It's pretty rough luck, after I'd kidded myself that everything was square. Still, I deserve it. I've only got myself to blame—"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth warmly. "I helped you to get the money, my lad. Not the ten quid from the boxing booth, but the other money. Didn't you tell the Head that I helped?"

"No, of course not," said Fullwood. "He didn't seem to know anything about you, so there was no sense in saying anything."

"Well, it's a dirty trick!" growled Handforth. "I've never heard of such a thing! Besides, you didn't do anything dishonourable—"

"I did," retorted Fullwood. "At the time, I didn't realise it—but after what the Head's told me, I'm beginning to think it was pretty rotten."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Handforth grimly. "I suppose you remember that I advised you to try for that prize money in the booth? I suppose you remember that I wanted to fight that bruiser myself?"

"Yes, and it was for my sake," replied Fullwood. "I'm jolly glad you didn't, Handy," he added. "At least, I've got the consolation of knowing that I haven't dragged anybody else into this miserable business."

Fullwood didn't wait to hear any more—he thought it advisable to get off. And five minutes later he was back in the Head's study. Dr. Stafford took the money, counted it, and put it in a drawer.

"If there is one thankful feature about this unfortunate affair, Fullwood, it is the fact that you kept the money whole," he said quietly. "I have nothing further to say to you at the moment. As I told you before, you have lowered the prestige of St. Frank's by your conduct, and I must consider the whole question. I shall attempt to do so in a calm, just spirit."

"Thank you, sir," said Fullwood quietly. "I—I suppose it means expulsion, sir?"

The Head frowned.

"It is not my intention to discuss the matter, Fullwood," he replied. "What is the time now? Just after five, is it not? Come back to me at six-thirty, and I will let you know my decision."

Fullwood went—certain, in his own mind, as to what that decision would be.



CHAPTER 5.

HANDFORTH SEES THE HEAD!

IN the meantime, Handforth was waxing exceedingly wrath.

In Study D, Church and McClure were trying to calm him down, by making him partake of tea—a meal which had already been dragged out until the toast was cold, and the tea stewy. Handforth's chums had not cared to start until their leader was on the spot.

"Look here, Handy, old man. You don't expect us to wait all the evening, do you?" demanded Church rebelliously. "We've been messing about for half an hour, and we're fed-up—"

"Yes," said Handforth grimly. "I'll go!"

"Go? Go where?"

"I'll see the Head, and—"

"You idiot!" gasped McClure. "If you go to the Head, and interfere in that Fullwood business, you'll only make things a lot worse. The poor chap's got enough troubles, without you adding to them."

But Handforth was looking flushed, and his eyes were gleaming.

"I've never heard of such highway robbery!" he said fiercely. "I didn't think the Head was capable of it! That money isn't his, so why has he bagged it? I'm going to see the Head, and tell him the straight truth!"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, talk sensibly!" said Church. "Fullwood's told him the truth already. Didn't we hear Fully's account of the interview? He explained all the facts to the Head—"

"Except that I was with him that night," interrupted Handforth.

"But you didn't do anything dishonourable—"

"Well, I was with him, and I'm just as much to blame as he was," declared the impulsive Handy. "But when it comes to that, there's no question of blame. That money was made fairly and squarely—and honestly. By George! I'll show the Head whether he can ride roughshod over us!"

There was such an air of determination about him that Church and McClure became alarmed—especially when he made a move for the door. They suddenly realised that he really meant it!

"Quick!" gasped Church.

He dashed up, grabbed Handforth, and swung him back. Then he barred the door, and McClure joined him.

"Cool down, fathead!" urged Church. "You mustn't go to the Head!"

"You'll only get yourself into hot-water if you do!" added McClure. "This is Fullwood's affair. And, if you ask me, he's exaggerating it. Haven't we all told him he can pay that money back when he likes? We know he's true blue, and—"

"He has paid that money back!" broke in Handforth. "And the Head's pinched it. So I'm going to the Head, to get it back. And while I'm there, my lads, the Head will have a piece of my mind."

"You—you don't mean it?" gasped Church, aghast.

"Yes I do!"

"But you'll be slaughtered on the spot!"

"I'm going in a just cause, and with right on my side!" replied Handforth curtly. "So stand away from that door, and let me get out."

"But tea's waiting—"

"Never mind about tea—"

"Everything's cold—"

"Are you going to get away from that door, or shall I smash the pair of you?" demanded Handforth wrathfully. "Poor old Fullwood's in trouble, and I mean to get him out of it. As soon as the Head and I have had a heart-to-heart talk, everything will be smoothed over."

"He means it!" breathed McClure. "My only hat, he thinks he can do it! The chap's as mad as a hatter!"

Handforth took no notice of his chums, but pushed them aside, and laid his hand on the door-knob. He had made up his mind. He was going straight to the Head, to tick him off! There was no pretence about it—ho

meant it. And Church and McClure were appalled.

"Grab him!" said Church desperately. They grabbed him, and Handforth was so surprised at this unexpected check that he blundered backwards into the table, and nearly sent it flying. Even as it was, a couple of plates and a cup and saucer crashed to the floor.

"You—you traitors!" he roared. "Lemme go! By George! What's this—mutiny? I'll give you five seconds to chuck up this nonsense, and stand out of the way."

But Church and McClure, who knew to what lengths their reckless leader could go, hung on like grim death. And then Study D became more home-like. The table went flying in earnest this time, the air was filled with thuds and gasps. And in the end, Handforth wrenched the door open, and strode out.

He left Church on the floor, with most of the tea-things on top of him. Sardine oil was trickling down the unhappy junior's neck, and slices of bread-and-butter were adhering to his hair. McClure, on the other side of the room, was sitting up with a dazed expression on his face. One eye was looking angry and swollen.

"I'll teach you to play that game!" said Handforth, from the doorway.

He went out, slammed the door, and marched towards the lobby. He hadn't walked five paces before he ran into Dick Hamilton and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. They were both looking serious.

"A shockin' blow, Dick, old boy," Sir Montie was saying. "I'm frightfully afraid that Fullwood is goin' to get into a lot of trouble——"

"You can set your mind at rest!" interrupted Handforth, with a glare. "I'm just going to the Head, and I mean to tell him what I think of the whole affair! It's like his nerve to pinch that money!"

"Here, steady!" said Dick, seizing Handforth's arm. "If it's a question of nerve, what about yours? You can't go to the Head——"

"If it's all the same to you, Nipper, I'll do as I jolly well like!" interrupted Handforth hotly. "I'll trouble you to mind your own giddy business!"

"I'm captain of the Remove——"

"I don't care if you're captain of the *Mauretania*!" roared Handforth. "This isn't a Form affair at all! Fully has been shoved on the carpet, he's had that money taken away from him, and I'm the only other chap involved. I was with him that night, so I'm going to tell the Head something that'll make his hair stand on end! He needn't think he can mess about with me!"

"You howling idiot, you'll get sacked——"

"And for two pins I'll knock you half-way down the passage!" thundered Handforth, now thoroughly aroused. "Great Scott! To think that poor old Fully is in all this trouble, and you don't lift a finger to help him! Thank goodness I'm made of different stuff!"

He rushed off, raced across the lobby, and flung open the outer door. He had forgotten all about the snow, and he went out hatless. In fact, he was in such a hurry that his feet shot from under him as he trod on the first snow-covered step, and he went down the rest on the small of his back, landing in a disordered heap at the bottom.

"Great pip!" he gurgled dazedly.

He sat up, and looked about him. He hadn't any idea that it was snowing like this. He was smothered. The steps were piled thick with the snow, for it was drifting round the Ancient House in whirling masses. The wind was bringing more and more snow, and the Triangle was already completely white.

"I'm half dead, but I'm not going to be dished!" groaned Handforth, as he picked himself up. "Oh, my hat! My back's broken! I believe I've sprained an ankle, and my left wrist is absolutely crocked."

But his spirit was as grim as ever. Without waiting to fetch an overcoat or cap, he dashed across Inner Court, taking remarkably agile strides for a fellow with a broken back and a sprained ankle.

He hammered upon the door of the Head's house, and waited. Plenty of other fellows would have found their determination oozing away now that the interview was close at hand. But Edward Oswald was different. He felt that his cause was a just one, and with every second that passed, he became more excited.

Matters were not improved now, for he was left standing in the snow for nearly a minute. Then, as he was hammering again, the door opened. Phipps stood there. Phipps was really Archie Glenthorne's valet, but for certain hours every day he performed his duties as the Head's second butler.

"About time!" roared Handforth. "I'm frozen! Here I've been standing, freezing to an icicle for twenty solid minutes! Where's the Head?"

Phipps looked at Handforth keenly.

"If you'll take my advice, Master Handforth, you won't interrupt the Head just now," said Phipps. "As a matter of fact, he's engaged with Mr. Goole, of the East House. And in your present mood, sir——"

"Never you mind my mood!" interrupted Handforth fiercely. "So the Head's in? Good! That's all I wanted to know!"

He pushed past the astonished Phipps, reached the door of the Head's study, and brought his fist with a crash against one of the upper panels. Then he barged in like a cyclone, without waiting for any invitation.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Dr. Stafford, starting to his feet. "Is anything the matter?"

There was every reason for his startled surprise. Handforth was smothered in snow, his collar was crumpled and unfastened at one button, and there was an ominous rent in his sleeve. In addition to this, his nose had been bleeding slightly—a trace of the recent scrap with his study-mates. The Head

naturally assumed that some catastrophe must have happened.

"What is it, Handforth?" he asked with concern.

"About Fullwood, sir!" roared Handforth. "I want to know what you mean by pinching his money?"

"Fullwood!" gasped the Head. "Pinching his money! Ahem! I mean---- Good gracious, Handforth, are you insane? Have you burst into my study like--like a tornado to question me about my recent interview with Fullwood?"

"I feel that it's my duty to explain!" said Handforth aggressively. "No offence, sir. You probably think you've done the right thing, but that's just where you're wrong. As a matter of fact, you've made an awful bloomer!"

"A--a bloomer?" breathed Dr. Stafford dazedly.

"You've come a cropper, sir," snapped Handforth. "Fullwood's as innocent as I am. He went into that booth all right, but there was nothing dishonourable----"

"Silence!" thundered Dr. Stafford.

By this time he had recovered himself. Scarcely twenty seconds had elapsed since Handforth's dramatic entry, and the Head was just arriving at the conclusion that there was nothing whatever to be alarmed about. He had experienced some of Handforth's impulsiveness on other occasions.

"I'll tell you everything in two minutes, sir----"

"Leave my presence, sir!" shouted the Headmaster. "No, not another word! Go!"

"Yes, but look here----"

"Go!" thundered Dr. Stafford.

Handforth started back, amazed.

"But aren't you going to listen to me?" he demanded wrathfully. "Don't you understand that I've come here to explain that Fullwood----"

"Handforth, unless you go this very instant, I will have you thrown out!" interrupted the Head, remaining calm with difficulty. "To-morrow I will send for you, and hear what you have to say. But while you are in this condition of hysterical excitement, I will not listen to a word. Go!"

Handforth gave a gulp, but at last he realised that he had used the wrong tactics. There was something about the Head's manner which awed him, for all his bluster, and for all his confidence.

He crawled out and closed the door.

him to his fate. After what he had done to them, they were not only fed-up, but utterly callous as to what happened to him. And after a hasty clean-up, which included their own persons, they were sitting down to the eatable part of the meal. Much of it had been on the floor, and was open to question.

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Church, as the door opened. "He's here again--and I haven't eaten a mouthful!"

"And I haven't even had a sip of tea!" said McClure hopelessly.

They had already made up their minds that they wouldn't evince the slightest interest in their leader's mission to the Head; but there was something so subdued in his manner that their resolution weakened. Handforth was quiet, humble, and meek. Compared to his appearance of ten minutes earlier, he was a mere ghost.

"What's the good of expecting justice?" he asked resentfully, as he sat down at the table.

"I go to the Head, and what happens?"

"Surely he didn't refuse to see you?" asked Church, shocked.

"You don't mean to say he turned you away?" gasped McClure.

Handforth failed to note the deep sarcasm in their voices.

"He not only turned me away, but he wouldn't let me say a word!" he exclaimed thickly. "Not a word, mark you! I just walked in, told him that I was going to have a straight talk with him, and I'm blowed if he didn't order me out!"

"Disgraceful!" said Church hotly.

"I merely told him that he pinched Fullwood's money----"

"That was a bit incautious," put in McClure, shaking his head. "You ought to have said confiscated. It's a better word than pinched. Besides, the Head is apt to be short-tempered if a chap uses slang----"

"Short-tempered!" interrupted Handforth darkly. "His temper was so short that he never gave himself a chance to lose it! It left him in a flash--and out he came with a thundering order for me to buzz off! Before I'd said half a dozen words, mark you! I pointed out that he was making a bloomer----"

"That's the worst of these masters," said Church sadly. "They've got the upper hand, and they treat us all like slaves! Poor old Handy! You'll never get what you deserve in this world!"

"No such luck!" murmured McClure.

But Handforth was so preoccupied that he did not notice the veiled mockery of his chums' remarks. They were rather surprised to see him back at all, for they had had an idea that the Head would either lock him up in the punishment-room, or bind him and gag him, and ring up the nearest asylum.

But Handforth's chums were not vindictive. Once a scrap was over, it was over. And they felt a certain satisfaction in seeing their leader so meek and subdued. There



CHAPTER 6.

A GREAT IDEA.

CHURCH and McClure were just sitting down to tea when Handforth came back.

They had lost all interest in him. They were prepared to leave

was some prospect of peace for the rest of the evening.

After all, Fullwood's troubles weren't half so bad as he made out. Church and McClure did not take the same view as Handforth. For the latter was thinking of nothing else but Ralph Leslie's unfortunate position. Handforth was always trying to help somebody. And here was a chance for him to shine—if only he could get hold of a helpful idea.

"That's what we've got to decide," he muttered, frowning. "If only Fully can get hold of twenty quid, he'll be happy again. I'd lend it to him, but I haven't got—"

"It would be all the same if you had a hundred and twenty—he wouldn't accept it," said Church impatiently. "Why the dickens can't you let the thing rest?"

"Of course he wouldn't accept it," agreed Handforth. "That's the point. He wouldn't accept it from me, or from anybody else in the Remove. If so, he wouldn't mind owing the money to Russell. Besides, didn't he go and earn it in Bannington, so that he could square things up? And now the Head's bagged it!"

"Only temporarily——"

"Don't you believe it," interrupted Handforth. "Don't you spoof yourself that Fully will ever see that cash again. No, we've got to think of some plan. Hallo! What the—— By George!"

He took something from his mouth and glared at it.

"Coal!" he said indignantly. "Where the dickens did you buy these sardines, Mac? It's a bit thick when they put lumps of coal——"

"You ass!" gasped Church. "Have you been eating those sardines? Why, Mac, he's scoffed over half of 'em! I thought I told you to chuck 'em in the fire?"

"I forgot to," said McClure, looking alarmed.

Handforth gazed at his plate ominously.

"What's the matter with 'em, anyhow?" he asked grimly.

"They were all right originally, but they fell on the floor," explained Church.

"Fell on the floor!"

"Yes," said Church. "They all came out of the tin, and Mac got them up with the shovel. I expect that explains the coal. Some of 'em were in my hair, too," he added indignantly. "You should look what you're eating, instead of——"

"You—you rotters!" gasped Handforth, pushing his plate away from him. "So that's what you do, is it? Try to poison me!"

"We didn't ask you to eat the sardines!" roared Church, exasperated. "Oh, crikey! Why doesn't somebody come and take Fullwood away?" he added despairingly. "I'm sorry for the chap, but we don't seem to get any peace nowadays! I wish his pater would come down, and take him off—or one of the uncles——"

"Uncles!" interrupted Handforth, with a

sudden leap. "By George, that reminds me!"

"Reminds you of what?"

"About a fortnight ago we were talking about one of Fully's uncles," said Handforth, a keen light coming into his eye. "Fully was telling me—— My only aunt! It's an idea! In fact, a brain-wave!"

All his subdued bearing left him. In a moment he was his old self—aggressive, excited, and eager. His eyes were glittering, and a deep flush had come over his face. He paced up and down the study, more and more eager.

"Yes, it's the idea!" he breathed, totally unaware of his chums' presence. "It'll be as easy as winking! What's more, I can do it now!"

He turned on his heel and rushed to the door.

"Half a tick, Handy!" shouted Church. "What's this wonderful——"

But Handforth had gone, and a second later he burst into Study I. Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Clive Russell were there, finishing their own belated tea. Fullwood was wearing an expression of quiet resignation. He had not told Clive of the Head's order that he should return at six-thirty. There was no reason why the Canadian boy should be unduly worried. He believed that the Head had shelved the whole subject, pending further investigations.

"Good!" said Handforth, as he looked in. "Just a minute, Russell!"

"All right," said Clive. "Two, if you like."

"But I want to speak to you, you ass."

"Go ahead, then—shoot!" invited Clive.

"How the dickens can I speak to you here, with Fullwood listening?"

"Why, is it a secret?"

"It's not a secret, but Fully mustn't know anything about it," replied Handforth incautiously. "I want you in my study, Russell. I might as well tell you it's important."

"Go ahead, old man," said Fullwood to Russell, with a faint smile. "We'll never get rid of him unless you humour him."

Handforth looked at Fullwood coldly.

"And that's all the gratitude I get," he said. "I get a ripping idea to get you out of your troubles—— I mean, the fact is—— Come on, Russell!" he added hastily. "I shall say too much unless I'm careful."

Clive fancied that he had said too much already, for, unless Fullwood was an absolute idiot, he would surely have seen that Handforth was preparing some sort of schema. But it would be better to hear it.

They went to Study D, passed in, and Handforth closed the door.

"Well?" said Russell.

"That twenty quid," exclaimed Handforth eagerly. "Have you still got it?"

"You mean the twenty that you fellows raked together, so that Fully could pay up?"



There was a loud crash. The door flew open and Handforth rushed in, his clothing rumpled and torn. "Fullwood's money!" he roared, as he confronted the Head. "What do you mean by pinching it?"

asked Clive. "After the Head's action, Ralph reckons that he still owes it to you——"

"Never mind about that—we can wait," broke in Handforth. "Have you got that money? You were going to buy a camera with it, weren't you?"

"Yes, and I wish I'd never seen the giddy thing!" growled Clive. "If we trace this affair back to its source, it was my fault for ever suggesting that film camera to my father."

"Blow you!" roared Handforth. "Where's the money?"

"In my pocket——"

"Well, would you like to lend it to me for half an hour?" asked Handforth. "I'll let Fully have it so that he thinks it's another twenty quid altogether. Then he'll give it to me and Dick Hamilton and the others, and we'll pass it back to you without him knowing it. See?"

Clive scratched his head.

"It's getting too thick for me," he confessed. "I saw that film outfit in a window, paid a deposit on it, and——"

"Never mind about that—you didn't complete the purchase, and you've still got the twenty!" said Handforth. "Would you like to help me to get Fully out of his troubles? If he thinks that money's paid, he'll be as happy as a lark."

Clive nodded.

"Yes, that'll put a different complexion on things, I'll admit," he said slowly. "You can have the money with pleasure, Handy."

But how are you going to perform this miracle?"

"Never mind that—hand over the cash!"

Handforth took it gleefully, and stuffed it into his pocket.

"That was quick, anyhow," said Clive, nodding. "But I'd just like to have an inkling of your programme, old man. I'm not suggesting that I don't trust you, but——"

Handforth laughed.

"Listen!" he said happily. "I'll tell you the wheeze!"



CHAPTER 7.

A VERY FIERY GENTLEMAN.

LIVE RUSSELL placed his hand on Edward Oswald's sleeve.

"Wait a minute," he said. "If you borrowed that money from me, just so that you could lend it to Ralph, it won't work. There'll be nothing doing. Hasn't he proved to you that he won't accept loans? Haven't I urged him until I'm tired to let the whole thing drop? I don't care a toss about that camera outfit now. I only wish he would let me settle this business in a simple way——"

"I'll settle it in a simpler," interrupted Handforth serenely. "Has he ever told you about his Uncle Julian?"

"Weren't we talking about him the other

day?" asked Clive. "His Uncle Julian is the one who lives in South America, isn't he? Yes, that's right—in the Argentine. Ralph hasn't seen him for years—not since Ralph was a baby."

"Exactly," said Handforth, nodding.

"What do you mean—exactly?"

"If Uncle Julian suddenly arrived at St. Frank's, from the Argentine, Fully wouldn't know him from Adam, would he?"

"I don't suppose so," replied Clive. "As far as I know, this particular uncle was a wild sort of chap, and went out on a ranch. They haven't had a letter from him for years—"

"That's exactly what I thought," grinned Handforth. "Well, supposing Uncle Julian turned up to-night—within half an hour? And supposing he saw Fully, and tipped him twenty quid?"

"Supposing you talk sense?" asked Clive tartly.

"That's exactly what I am doing."

"You're talking gibberish!" snapped the Canadian junior. "Why the dickens should Uncle Julian turn up to-night—just exactly when he's wanted—and tip Ralph the exact sum of twenty quid?"

"Because I'm going to dress up as Uncle Julian!" explained Handforth blandly.

Clive gently subsided into the arms of Church and McClure. But as they were on the point of fainting, too, it was only by a miracle that they saved themselves from a general collapse.

"Wait a minute!" gasped Church. "Let's get this straight! You're going to dress yourself up as Fully's uncle from the Argentine, Handy?"

"Yes."

"And try to pass yourself off—"

"I'm not going to try anything," interrupted Handforth, with a cold stare. "I shall do it! Naturally, he'll be pleased to see me, we'll chat about the Argentine for a bit, and then I'll say that I've got to catch the last train, spring out a twenty quid tip, and buzz off. He'll be as happy as a lark, and will never suspect a thing."

And the extraordinary part about it was—Handforth meant it! The other juniors looked at him with a kind of stupefied awe. Even his own chums were staggered. He was such an optimist, that he actually believed that he could pull off this impossible feat. A trained actor, with sterling ability, might have found it difficult to convince Fullwood, but Handforth took it for granted that he could do it entirely off his own bat. He wasn't merely an optimist—he was a lunatic.

"Handy—Handy!" murmured Clive gently. "The best thing you can do is to give me that twenty quid back, and forget all about it. After that, you can go to Dr. Brett, and get him to examine your brains. Naturally, he'll need a microscope to find 'em—"

"You funny ass!" said Handforth coldly.

"Do you think I can't work it?"

"My poor old mutt, it's impossible."

"I'll make you apologise for that later on," said Handforth grimly. "This is the idea that's going to spoof Fully completely. It'll be easy! We've got heaps of props upstairs—in the store-room. I can soon disguise myself as Uncle Julian from the Argentine, and before you can say 'Jack Robinson,' poor old Fully's troubles will be over."

"Just a minute," said Clive, becoming grim. "It's all very easy to talk about impersonating Ralph's uncle, and to go to him and tip him twenty pounds, but what about the snags?"

"Snags?"

"Well, where does Fullwood come in?" demanded Clive. "Do you think he doesn't know what his uncle looks like?"

"He doesn't know him from Adam!" said Handforth.

"But he might have seen a photograph—"

"Ah, that's just where I score!" broke in Handforth triumphantly. "When I was speaking to Fullwood the other day, he particularly told me that Uncle Julian had never sent a photograph over. See? The chap buzzed off to South America about twelve years ago, and the family has hardly had a word from him since—except for an occasional letter to say that he's hard-up, or something."

"And yet he's coming here, rolling in cash?" asked Church tartly.

Handforth started.

"That's nothing!" he said, after a moment. "Couldn't he have struck it rich? By George, that's the idea! This Uncle Julian, I understand, has been a bit of a ne'er-do-well. Thanks, Churchy, for that reminder. It's given me the right line to go on. Uncle Julian has struck oil in the Argentine, and he's come back to see the family!"

"My only hat!" murmured McClure blankly. "Look here, Handy, the idea may be possible—mind you, I'm not saying it is, but there's about one chance in twenty million of it coming off. But not if you do the impersonation."

"What?"

"We ought to leave it to Dick Hamilton, or Reggie Pitt," urged McClure. "Or—I'll tell you what," he added eagerly. "How about Stevens, of the Fifth?"

"Stevens?" said Handforth coldly. "Of the Fifth?"

"My dear old son, he's the very man!" said Mac. "Didn't he make a sensation as an actor—"

"You can dry up!" snapped Handforth. "This is my idea, and I'm going to do all the acting. Why, you cheeky rotter, are you suggesting that I'll make a mess of it?"

"It isn't a suggestion—it's a statement!" said McClure promptly.

But Handforth was too excited to attack him. His mind was set on this plot, and he was determined to push it through. And while he was talking to his chums, Clive Russell rushed out and told Dick Hamilton

about it. In less than a minute Dick was aware of the scheme, and Cecil de Valerie, Tommy Watson, Archie Glen-thorne, and a few others were "in the know."

"It's my personal opinion that we ought to suppress him," said Russell breathlessly. "We can't let this chap carry out the idea! He's—he's a danger to the Ancient House! He's a peril to the community! Over in Canada we'd lynch him, as a public nuisance, for half this!"

Dick Hamilton grinned.

"Sorry to disagree with you, Russell, old man, but I think it's a fine idea," he said calmly.

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Clive blankly.

"In fact, a corker," said Dick.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie Glen-thorne. "I mean to say, odds surprises and shocks! You don't absolutely mean to say, laddie, that you approve of this priceless slice of imbecility?"

"Chuck it, Nipper!" growled Tommy Watson. "You know what a chump Hand-forth is. He'll only mess it up."

"Exactly," agreed Dick Hamilton. "I'm not suggesting that Handy will pull it off, but think of the possibilities! Handy as Uncle Julian from the Argentine! Poor old Fullwood is down in the dumps, and it's no good going to him with soothing words. But he needs something to cheer him up—something to make him grin! Do you think he can still be miserable after Uncle Julian arrives?"

"By Jove, that's true enough!" agreed De Valerie.

And so, although the juniors regarded Handforth's great idea as an impossible dream, it was allowed to go forward. Ralph Leslie Fullwood wouldn't get the twenty pounds, but he would certainly get some laughs! Naturally, he would refuse "Uncle Julian's" tip, but, unless he was made of stone, or hopelessly paralysed, he would be compelled to grin slightly.

when they come to England. You need an ordinary lounge suit, and just a wig——"

"When you've done talking piffle, I'll be obliged if you'll lend a hand with these bags!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "They're just about the right length, but they were made for some silly ass twice my size. There's room for two! Who's got some pins?"

It was small wonder that his chums were weak from the effects of suppressed mirth. With great courage, they pretended to be serious. They gave up all idea of influencing him. After all, perhaps it was better to let him have his own way; it would certainly be easier. And there was not the slightest doubt that the result would be funnier.

His trousers were approximately the right length, but it was quite certain that they had never been made for any members of the Junior Dramatic Society. A very stout man must have worn them, and they hung round Handforth in voluminous folds. He stood there, while Church manipulated some safety-pins.

"They're a bit tight under the arms!" said McClure solemnly.

"Rats!" snapped Handforth. "By the time I've got the sash on, I shall look all right. By the way, where's the sash? If I'm going to look like an Argentine, I've got to have a sash."

"But Uncle Julian's an Englishman!"

"What the dickens does that matter?" roared Handforth. "You know as well as I do that when people go out to the tropics they become just like the natives."

"After only twelve years?"

"Yes, you ass!"

"Then my aunt ought to be a negress!" said Church. "She's lived for over fifteen years in East Africa. And the last time I saw her—just at the beginning of term—she was as white as I am. Besides, you can't call the Argentine tropical. They have snow down there——"

"I brought you chaps up here to help me, not to jabber!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "When I leave this room I've got to be Uncle Julian, and as he's lived for all these years in the Argentine, he's got to look the part. How can we spoof Fullwood otherwise?"

"Go ahead, then," said Church. "Perhaps you're right."

Handforth seemed to have it fixed in his head that gentlemen from the Argentine must necessarily look like freaks. For if his costume was peculiar, his make-up was too extraordinary for words.

He sat in front of the mirror, and compelled his chums to hang round with every kind of grease-paint available. First of all he applied his "complexion"—a deep, bronzed hue which made him look more like a Red Indian than anything else. Then, with deep lines under his eyes, and imitation wrinkles in his chin, he sat back and surveyed himself.



CHAPTER 8.

UNCLE HANDFORTH!

"HELP!" murmured Church, feebly beating the air.

"Shush, you ass!" hissed McClure. "Bravo, Handy!" he added aloud.

"By Jupiter, that's the stuff! Marvellous!"

They were upstairs, in the little wardrobe-room of the Junior Dramatic Society. Handforth had allowed nobody else to assist him in his dressing, and Church and McClure were on the verge of collapse.

For Handforth had seized upon a kind of Mexican outfit. In vain Church and McClure had argued with him.

"It won't do, Handy!" insisted Church. "People in the Argentine don't wear som-breros and bell-bottomed trousers, and silken sashes! At least, they don't wear such things

"Fine!" he declared. "Now for the whiskers!"

"Not whiskers!" said Church. "You need moustachios!"

"I tell you—H'm! Perhaps you're right," admitted Handy. "That's what those South American chaps go in for, isn't it? Fierce moustachios, eh? By George! I'll look the real thing!"

Church had only made his suggestion in sarcasm, and was about to say so, but McClure pinched him and kept him silent. So, five minutes later, Handforth's make-up was complete.

He stood back, and his chums surveyed him.

From head to foot, Handforth was an absolute scream. He wore riding boots with jangling spurs, his trousers were gathered round him in folds, and a brilliant red scarf served as a sash. The upper part of his body was clothed in a velvet jacket with gold braid all over it, and upon his head rested an enormous sombrero. But his face was the best of all. First and foremost, he was Edward Oswald Handforth—nothing could disguise that aggressive jaw. He looked as though he were about to go on the stage as a comic relief.

And yet he fully believed that he was a fair representation of Fullwood's uncle from the Argentine! Church and McClure scanned him up and down, and nodded gravely.

"Marvellous!" said Church.

"Fully will have a fit when he sees you, Handy," declared McClure.

"What do you mean—have a fit?"

"Well, I mean—when you sail in as Uncle Julian," said Mac hastily. "How can he ever guess? Let's go down now—the time's getting on, and the quicker this is done, the better."

Handforth strode out, and his chums gave one another pitying glances.

"It's a shame!" muttered Church. "I mean, we oughtn't to allow it! What's going to happen to the poor chump if he meets a prefect or a master?"

"Goodness only knows!"

"He looks just like one of those cheap imitations of a faked Mexican in a dud American film comedy!" continued Church. "How on earth can the chap expect to spool Fully in that get-up?"

"Handy isn't human—he's beyond our powers of understanding," replied McClure solemnly. "Well, let's get down, or he may start the ball rolling before we're there to see. It wouldn't make any difference if Fullwood was blind—he'd still know the truth. Handy can't even alter his voice, let alone his appearance!"

There was something rather valiant about the attitude of Church and McClure. Although they wanted to yell with laughter, they kept their faces straight; but this, of course, was an art they had acquired from long practice.

Handforth, in the meantime, was going downstairs.

His idea was to get down quickly, in case Fullwood happened to come across him, since, as Uncle Julian, he was supposed to have just arrived. And Handy's idea of getting down quickly was a good one. He got downstairs far more quickly than he usually did.

As a matter of fact, he forgot all about his spurs, and caught one of them on the top stair as he was preparing to descend. He tripped, attempted to recover himself, and caught his other spur.

After that it was, of course, a mere matter of seconds.

A series of ominous bumps sounded, and Church and McClure, rushing to the head of the stairs, were just in time to see the unfortunate Handforth turning cartwheels at the bottom of the stairs. He landed in a disordered heap, with one moustachio missing, and with his sash round his neck.

"What—what happened?" he murmured dully. "Who pushed me?"

A crowd of juniors had been waiting, ready to welcome him as he came down. But Dick Hamilton pressed them back. This was hardly an auspicious moment. It would be better to let Handforth get on his feet first.

"Are you hurt, Handy?" asked McClure anxiously, from the top of the stairs.

"Not a bit!" roared Handforth. "I did that on purpose—I always come down stairs like a catherine-wheel!"

"You needn't be sarcastic, Handy——"

"Don't call me Handy!" snapped the leader of Study D. "Do you want to give the game away at the very start? No, don't come down—stay up there! You'll only betray me if you come with me."

Painfully he picked himself up, adjusted his loose sash, fixed the moustachios, and found that he wasn't particularly hurt. Crashes that would put any ordinary fellow in hospital for a month had little or no effect upon Handforth.

He sauntered down the lobby with an exaggerated stride, a kind of swaying swagger which only served to accentuate the comic nature of his make-up. Before he could reach the Remove corridor, however, Dick Hamilton and Tommy Watson came along, both talking animatedly about the snow. They paused, and looked at Handforth with polite surprise.

"Looking for somebody, sir?" asked Dick, raising his cap.

"You ass—I—I mean——" Handforth paused, and pulled himself together with a jerk. "As a matter of fact, yes," he went on, making his voice into a deep growl. "I have just arrived."

The two juniors eyed him with ordinary courtesy, as though he were a complete stranger to them. And Handforth gloated. He had wanted to put his disguise to a test, but he hadn't anticipated any such luck as this. Even Dick Hamilton, the one and only Nipper, assistant of Mr. Nelson Lee, had failed to spot him!

"Nasty night, sir," said Dick gravely. "I suppose you've just come here to look round the school? I suppose you find our English schools different to the ones in the Argentine, sir?"

Handforth started. He didn't know that Clive had told anybody else about the scheme, and his only conclusion was obvious.

"Then—then you can see I'm from the Argentine all right?" he asked eagerly. "By George! I mean, carramba! How the dickens did you know?"

Dick Hamilton shrugged his shoulders.

"How could I be mistaken, sir?" he asked, giving Handforth a glance up and down. "I've never been to the Argentine, sir, but —"

He left the rest of his sentence unfinished, and Handforth gloated afresh. He hadn't had any doubts regarding his impersonation, but it was good to hear these unqualified confirmations of his own opinion.

"Perhaps you know of a boy named Fullwood here?" he asked pompously. "If so, he has doubtless told you of his Uncle Julian? Well, I've come along to cheer him up a bit, you know."

"A splendid idea, sir," said Tommy Watson. "He needs it."

"Of course he needs it!" said Handforth. "Do you think I don't know—— I mean—— That is—— Where's Fullwood?" he demanded grimly. "I can't be bothered with you kids! I've come here to see my nephew!"

By this time a few other juniors had appeared—all primed in readiness. They gathered round, dying to laugh, but looking politely interested.



CHAPTER 9.

NOTHING DOING!

HANDFORTH was more and more satisfied.

If none of these fellows could spot him, it was quite clear that Fullwood would be equally deceived. He could see his little scheme working out to a satisfactory conclusion already.

"Not a word, you chaps!" he said suddenly.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" asked Dick Hamilton.

"Don't you know me?" asked Handforth, speaking in his ordinary voice. "I only spoofed you, just to give my disguise a test. But there's no reason why you shouldn't know who I am."

The Removites looked puzzled.

"But we do know who you are, sir," said De Valerie. "You're Fullwood's uncle."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie Glenthorne. "The priceless laddie from the wide, open spaces, what? Uncle Julian from the good old ranch!"

Handforth grinned.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he said. "Even

when I use my ordinary voice, you can't spot me! You fatheads, I'm Handforth!"

Dick Hamilton started back with exaggerated amazement.

"Handforth!" he gasped.

"Odds miracles and marvels!" gurgled Archie. "Not—not really? I mean to say, how absolutely absolute! Good gad! This is too much, laddies! I refuse to believe that this——"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Handforth impatiently. "I'm Handforth, I tell you!"

"We—we can hardly believe it, sir!" murmured Watson.

"How can you prove it?" asked Dick.

"Yes—prove it!" chorused the others.

Handforth was immensely flattered at this reluctance on the part of the juniors to recognise him. To him, it was a plain proof of his masterly powers of impersonation. He was rather impatient, however, at this sustained obstinacy.

"Don't be such asses!" he said tartly. "Can't you recognise my voice? Where's Russell? He knows all about this plan of mine——"

Russell came bustling up from the rear, as though he had just arrived.

"Who's this chap?" he asked, staring. "Oh, it can't be—— Gee! Uncle Julian from the Argentine! I guess you've done wonders, Handy!"

"I've done nothing yet," retorted Handforth. "I got dressed up like this to spoof Fullwood—not these other chaps. They won't believe that I'm myself, so you tell them, Russell!"

And Russell solemnly assured the group of the truth.

"Well, it's marvellous!" said Dick in an awed voice. "You'd better go along to Fullwood, and tip him that twenty quid as quickly as you can. A master might come along, and then, before you know it, you'll probably be invited to stay a week with the Head!"

In spite of themselves the juniors chuckled, and it was only by a miracle that they didn't burst into a roar of laughter. They wanted to get rid of Handforth, so that they could give free play to their hilarity.

"It's all right; I shall know how to deal with a master if I see one," said Handforth eagerly. "Let's go along to Study I. You'd better come with me, Russell. It'll look all the better. You can make out that you found me in the lobby, inquiring for my nephew Fully."

"Hadn't you better call him Ralph?" asked Clive.

"By George—yes," agreed Handforth with a start. "It might look a bit funny if I called him Fully, mightn't it?"

And so they went off to Study I. In that little apartment, Ralph Leslie Fullwood was making a feeble pretence at doing his prep. He had been told what to expect by Clive, and he had pretended to fall into the spirit of the joke. He didn't want Clive to know how heavy his heart actually was.

For Clive wasn't aware of that appointment with the Head at six-thirty. And it was ten past six already! Only twenty minutes before he knew his fate! Not that Fullwood had any illusion on the point. He was convinced, in his own mind, that he was face to face with expulsion.

The door opened, and Uncle Julian strode in.

"Great guns!" gasped Fullwood, sitting back aghast.

Although he had been told what to expect, he was dumbfounded. He gazed at the new arrival with so much attention that all his worries vanished. First and foremost he saw Handforth, disguised in a grotesque and fantastic get-up, but there wasn't the slightest chance of missing the newcomer's identity.

"Ralph!" roared Handforth enthusiastically as he strode in with jingling spurs and reached his hand across the table. "Shake, young 'un! Gee whizz! I guess this is jolly good! The little kid I used to know before I went out West!"

"Uncle Julian!" gasped Fullwood.

Clive clutched at Handforth's sleeve.

"Not out West—the Argentine!" he hissed.

"Well, isn't the Argentine out West?" roared Handforth. "If you'll mind your own business, Clive Russell, you ass, I shall be obliged!"

"By Jove, you've soon got to know my chum's name, uncle," said Fullwood hastily. "Well, how's everything in the Argentine?"

Handforth sat down on the table, and upset the ink.

"I've struck it rich, boy!" he said with enthusiasm. "So as soon as I blew into England I decided to come and have a look at you. Carramba! You've grown into a fine lad!"

Fullwood nearly collapsed. He had been prepared to carry on with this jape, just to please Clive. He had felt no more like smiling than a wooden doll, and he had mentally decided to put up with Handforth's rot, just to humour Clive. But now that the actual interview had come, he was nearly convulsed. Handforth had driven all the cares out of his mind.

"We haven't heard much about you, uncle," he said, deciding to help things along to the best of his ability. "It was too bad of you not to write more often. How's Juanita?"

"How's who?" asked Handforth with a start.

"Juanita."

"How should I know?"

"But your own wife, uncle!" protested Fullwood. "I'm awfully sorry—I should have said Aunt Juanita—"

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "I—I didn't know—" He turned to Clive. "Why the dickens didn't you tell me I was supposed to be married?" he demanded in a whisper. "Here's a fine mess!"

Fullwood pretended not to hear.

"And how about little Philip?" he asked

interestedly. "And Cousin Marcella? And the baby, and the twins—"

"Great pip!" gurgled Handforth. "I—I mean, they're fine!" he said desperately. "I—I've left 'em at home on the ranch. Of course, this is only just a short trip home, you know. Oh, and I say! I shan't be able to stop long; I'm going back by the last train."

"That's a pity, uncle," said Fullwood regretfully. "You're going back by the last train—to the Argentine?"

"Yes, I'm sorry, but I can only make a flying visit this time," said Handforth. "But you can be proud of the fact that Mr. Julian Fullwood—your own Uncle Julian—has been to see you."

Fullwood stared.

"But aren't you wrong, uncle?" he asked mildly. "I've always been told that my Uncle Julian was my mother's brother."

"Eh? Well, so I am—"

"Yes, but your name's Rawlinson—not Fullwood."

"I—I liked Fullwood better!" said Handforth desperately. "Well, I'll be going!" he added. "I've seen you, and that's what I came for. Gee whizz! I nearly forgot! Just a little tip, young 'un! Something to remember me by!"

He had come to the conclusion that this impersonation business was not all that it was cracked up to be. There were too many pitfalls, and, if he stayed much longer, Fullwood might begin to smell a rat. So he pulled out a big wallet, and threw Clive's twenty pounds on the table.

"Oh, look here—" began Fullwood with a quick glance at Russell.

"Not a word!" said Handforth boisterously. "Just a little memento, Fully, old man! I should say, Ralph, my lad! Well, I'll buzz off now, and catch that train."

"Back to the Argentine?" asked Fullwood.

"Yes, rather!"

"Wouldn't it be a better idea to take a boat?" asked Ralph Leslie dryly.

He gave a quick frown at Clive, however. His chum had told him that Handforth was getting up a jape, but there had been no mention of money. Fullwood hadn't been informed of this aspect. And he picked up the cash and held it towards Handforth.

"Sorry, Handy, nothing doing!" he said quickly.

"Yes, but—but— Eh?" breathed Handforth. "You—you know who I am?"

"Sorry, but the little scheme hasn't worked," replied Fullwood. "I appreciate your intentions, and I think you're a brick, but, honestly, I can't take it. Do me a favour, Handy, and buzz off."

Handforth took a deep breath.

"Who told you?" he demanded fiercely. "Who told you that I was coming here, disguised as Uncle Julian? There's a traitor somewhere!" he added, turning his gaze upon Clive.

"You ass, can't you realise that you wouldn't spoof a blind donkey?" said Russell.

"But you would have your own way——"

"In any case, I've got to get off now," said Fullwood, as he noted that the time was six-twenty-five. "I expect this is your money, Clive? I thought so! Well, for goodness' sake, let's finish with it! I'm sick and tired of the whole beastly business! No offence, Handy, but I can't fall in with your little plot."

He pushed past and went out, leaving Handforth flabbergasted.

CHAPTER 10.

THE HEADMASTER'S DECISION!



"T'S a swindle!" said the dismayed leader of Study D. "Just when everything was settled, too. Russell, you rotter, I'll bet you told

Fullwood that I was coming."

Clive, who was looking out into the passage, glanced back.

"I didn't need to tell him," he retorted. "Do you think he would have mistaken you for his uncle? He might have taken you for a scarecrow, or an escaped lunatic, but that's about all! It's about time you realised, Handy, that you're several kinds of asses!"

He strode out, and Handforth followed. Just out in the passage he ran into his minor, Willy. And the leader of the Third paused in his tracks and stared. He had heard nothing of his major's escapade, and he was taken completely by surprise.

"What's the idea, Ted?" he asked blankly. "It's getting on towards Christmas-time—the Fifth of November was over weeks and weeks ago!"

"What do you mean—the Fifth of November?"

"Aren't you dressed up as a guy?" asked Willy.

Handforth seized him.

"Look here," he said thickly, "did you know anything about this?"

"Not a word!" said Willy. "It hit me like a blow!"

"Is that true?"

"Honest Injun!" said Willy simply.

"And—and yet you recognise me at the first glance?" gasped his major.

"Awfully sorry!" said Willy. "Wasn't I supposed to?"

"No, you weren't!" roared Handforth. "I'm disguised!"

"My mistake!" grinned Willy. "I thought you were playing charades!"

"You—you young idiot!" hooted Handforth. "I'm impersonating Fullwood's Uncle Julian! And the fathead knew it was me all the time!"

"Well, it's your own fault," said Willy. "You ought to have told Fully straight away that you were his uncle, and that you didn't want him to recognise you. He's a good chap—and he might have played up.

But you can't expect people to seriously mistake you for an uncle, or any other relative. I don't like to say these things, Ted, but you remind me of a nasty accident!"

"You insulting little bounder!" gasped Edward Oswald. "An accident, am I?"

"Well, if not an accident, a mistake!" said Willy. "I'm not telling you anything fresh there, Ted. The pater's often said that you're one of life's blunders! What are you supposed to represent, anyhow? A Mexican cowboy from Southern Spain?"

Handforth refused to be drawn into any argument. And as a group of Removites gathered round at the moment, he was not in a position to punish Willy as he deserved. And this time the Removites were not indulging in any pretence. They were grinning from ear to ear.

"Just our luck!" said De Valerie, with regret. "We wanted to see you in Fullwood's study, but——"

"Look here!" said Handforth. "Did you fellows recognise me when you first saw me?"

"Of course we did!" chuckled Tommy Watson. "My dear ass, we were only pulling your leg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!"

The leader of Study D swallowed hard and strode away. In the lobby he ran into Mr. Crowell. And he was perfectly satisfied that the Remove master had not been a party to the jape, so this was a real test!

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Crowell, with a violent start. "Who—who are you?" "What are you doing——"

"It's all right, sir—nothing wrong!" said Handforth stiffly.

He was gloating. Mr. Crowell hadn't recognised him! So it was as plain as daylight that some traitor had given his plans away——

"You had better realise, Handforth, that I disapprove of these absurd tricks!" said Mr. Crowell, shattering Handy's delusion. "Amateur theatricals are all very well in their way, but I do not like you to hold them up to ridicule by these comic escapades!"

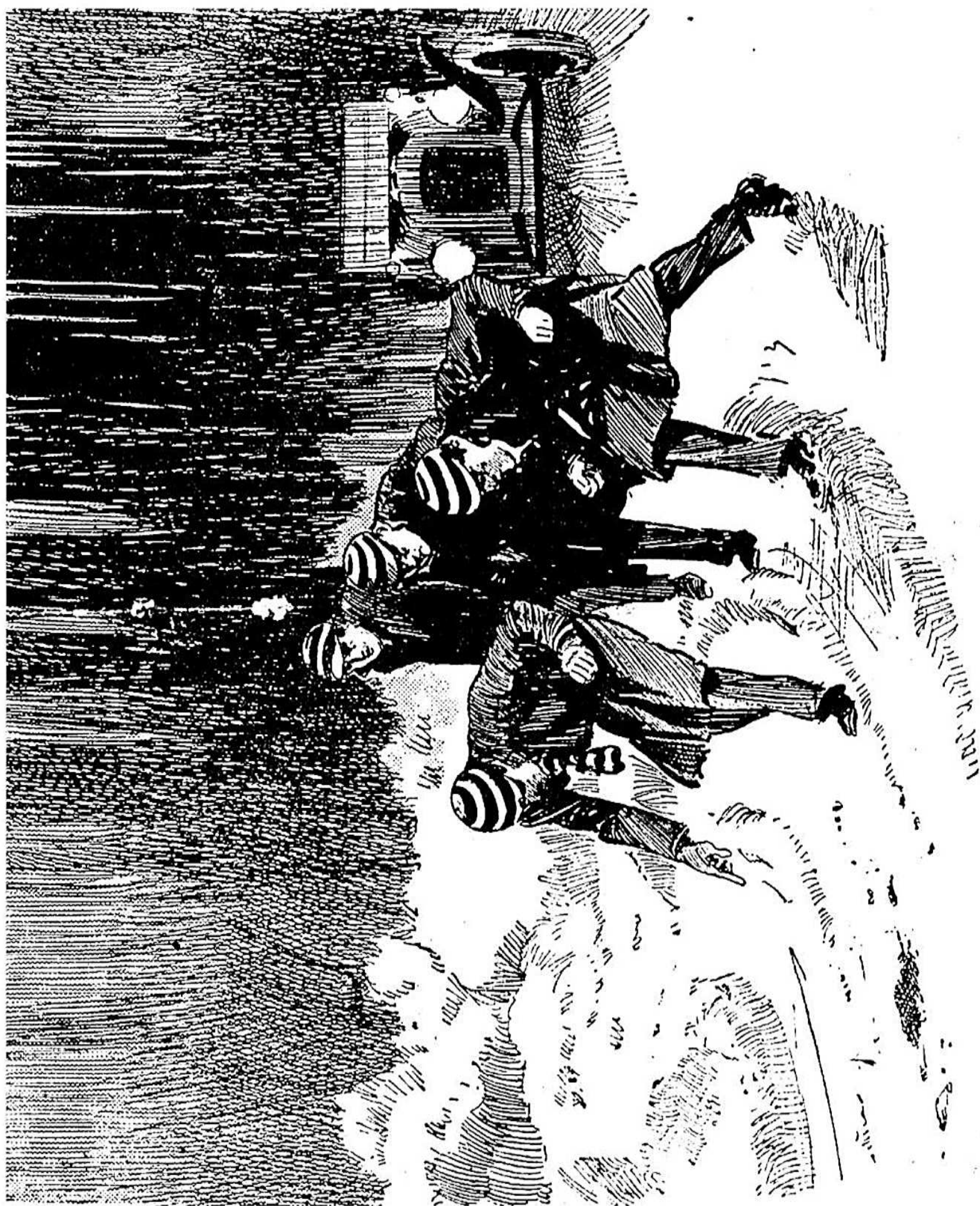
"Comic escapades!" gasped Handforth indignantly. "But—but I'm made up as Fullwood's uncle from the Argentine!"

Mr. Crowell, however, refused to believe it, and Handforth was obliged to crawl upstairs with the conviction that he had failed. He had done his best, but fate had been against him. He didn't blame his own powers as an actor. It never occurred to him that his make-up had been at fault. It was just his luck!

And, in the meantime, Fullwood was standing before the Head.

The unhappy junior had forgotten his recent laughter, and there was something about the Head's expression which made him fear the worst.

"Have you anything further to say, Fullwood?" asked Dr. Stafford.



With a quivering finger Handforth pointed to the dull, ominous crimson patch in the snow. "Blood!" he gasped. The other juniors stared in horrified amazement. "I know what's happened," said Handforth. "Poor old Fuly's met with a terrible accident!"

"No, sir."

"You do not wish to give any explanation of your disgraceful conduct?" went on the Head. "I should like, if possible, to find out exactly why you required this precise sum of twenty pounds. Is there no way in which you can help your own cause, my boy?"

"I wanted the money, sir, and I thought I was getting it honourably," replied Fullwood quietly. "I'd no idea there was anything wrong in the coco-nut shy affair, and when I went into that booth, I believed that it was on the square. That's all I can say, sir. Honestly, sir, I didn't mean to do anything to harm the school's prestige," he added earnestly.

The Head compressed his lips.

"While I shall do my best to believe that, I cannot overlook the fact that you are older than a mere child," he said sternly. "Your intelligence is not that of a simpleton, Fullwood. And you must have known that the booth was quite beneath the contempt of any clean youth. Therefore, I can do nothing but censure your action in the most vigorous terms."

"Yes, sir."

"The fact that the police raided the booth makes it necessary for me to take action," continued the Head. "This wretched affair has been reported in the newspapers, and I have already received inquiries from many parents, and even from the school governors. That kind of publicity, Fullwood, is damaging to the school's good name."

"I—I didn't mean—"

"I readily understand that you did not do this thing with the deliberate intention of harming our prestige," interrupted the Head. "But that, after all, does not alter the fact. You were in the place, Fullwood; you were found by the police, and I am very much afraid that you have forfeited your right to remain in the school."

Fullwood turned paler than ever.

"Then—then you're going to expel me, sir?" he muttered miserably.

"No, I cannot do that," said the Head.

"I'm not going to be sacked?" breathed Fullwood, his heart giving a leap.

"No, no! Don't raise your hopes, my poor boy!" said the Head quickly, pained by the sudden eager light that had leapt into the junior's eyes. "I am sorry if I misled you. As you know, we are at present working under the Honour System. And that, as you also know, means that there can be no punishments. You, in addition to the other boys, have been placed on your honour to obey the rules and regulations. And you have chosen to act dishonourably—"

"I didn't mean to, sir," burst out Fullwood. "I didn't think—"

"To-night, Fullwood, I shall write to your father," interrupted Dr. Stafford sternly. "I shall tell him the full circumstances, as I know them, and I shall request him to journey to St. Frank's to-morrow in order that he may take you away."



With a quivering finger Handforth pointed he gasped. The other juniors stared in horror. "Poor old Fully"

The junior stood there, half-stunned.

"Then it is the sack, sir?" he asked wretchedly.

"No, certainly not," replied the Head. "There will be no public disgrace. When a boy is expelled from such a big school as this, his name receives a black mark, and he will not be admitted into any other great college. You will not suffer that fate, Fullwood. You will not even be sent away from St. Frank's. I shall leave the decision with your father, although I shall make it quite clear that it is my desire that he should voluntarily transfer you to another school. I have no doubt that your father will see the wisdom of that course."

Fullwood was nearly frantic.

"Can't—can't you give me another chance?" he begged. "Oh, I didn't mean"



a crimson patch in the snow. "Blood!"
I know what's happened," said Handforth.
the accident!"

to displease you, sir, or to drag the name of St. Frank's into disrepute. I was thoughtless, sir—I acted without considering things. If you'll give me another chance, sir, I'll be as straight as a die. On my honour, I'm sorry for what I did, and it's taught me a lesson——"

"You are making it very difficult for me, Fullwood," said the Head painfully. "I wish I could heed your pleas, but I am afraid the matter is altogether too serious."

"I went into that booth honourably, sir!" declared Fullwood fiercely. "In fact, I went into it to redeem myself. I'd done something wrong, and I wanted to put it right."

"What, exactly, do you mean?" asked the Head curiously.

"I—I can't explain, sir."

"If you can give me an adequate reason——"

"I'm sorry, sir—I can't explain anything more," muttered Fullwood. "I only repeat that I didn't mean anything wrong, and I hope you won't ask my father to take me away. That's all, sir."

For a few moments the Head sat in deep thought. Then he rose to his feet, went round the desk, and put his hands on Fullwood's shoulders.

"We will say no more at the moment," he said quietly. "I cannot help feeling that there is something behind all this, and I am inclined to give you another chance, Fullwood."

"Oh, sir!" choked the junior.

"Yes, I shall write to your father, and request him to be here to-morrow," continued the Head, his words falling like a knell of doom upon Fullwood's ears. "I will explain the full facts, and will leave the decision to him."



CHAPTER 11.

THE ONLY COURSE.

JUST for a moment Fullwood had believed that he was to be permitted to remain at St. Frank's. But for the second time he had misunderstood the headmaster's words.

Now, with a deadly heaviness, he knew the truth.

The decision was to be left to his father! That was the sole extent of the Head's concession. Dr. Stafford would state all the facts, and would leave it to Fullwood senior to decide. What would be the inevitable result?

Ralph Leslie knew already.

His father was a stern man, and he would force the full truth out of him, whether he wanted to give voice to it or not. And all in the Head's presence! Fullwood knew his father—and he had no illusions.

All the truth would come out! Not merely the story of that booth, but everything else—the original visit to that gambling club, the loss of Clive Russell's twenty pounds at the roulette table—everything! Fullwood knew that his father had a way of getting at such facts. And, having learned them, what would the result be?

The Head would be more than ever determined to send him away! He would leave St. Frank's—if not in disgrace, at least under a cloud. To all intents and purposes he had just received the sentence of expulsion.

He seemed to hear the Head's voice, indistinct and blurred.

"So, Fullwood, you may go back to your House, and, if you take my advice, you will say nothing to any of your schoolfellows," Dr. Stafford was saying. "I have already told you that you will suffer no public dis-

grace. If you are unable to satisfy your father to-morrow, he will simply take you away. There will be no blot on your character. So, I suggest that you should keep your own counsel. I want to be merciful with you, my boy——"

"It's—it's all right, sir," muttered Fullwood. "The pater will know what to do."

He hardly remembered taking his leave of the Head, and going out. It wasn't until he was crossing Inner Court that his brain cleared, and that he knew the full extent of this calamity. And the very realisation of it drove him into a panic.

What a price to pay for an hour of folly!

For that was what it amounted to. Everything was a direct result of that madness in the night club. He had gambled with Clive Russell's money, had lost it, and ever since that fatal moment he had been living in a nightmare of torture. Who could he blame but himself?

Bernard Forrest, perhaps. Hadn't Forrest engineered the whole despicable business? But Fullwood thrust the suggestion aside. If he hadn't been a weak nincompoop, with no sense of honour, he would never have fallen into that trap. It was his own fault—his own fault, from first to last.

And so it was only right that he should receive the punishment.

He took no notice of the snow which whirled about him in confusing masses. The evening had become as dark as pitch, and the wind was now a gale. A blizzard was raging. Snow was being piled up against the school buildings. The howling of the wind filled Fullwood's ears as he paused in the meagre shelter of Big Arch. He could hear the whistling and shouting of the wind as it swept round St. Frank's.

But it was all dim and indistinct to him. His thoughts were far away. He was trying to take a peep into the immediate future.

What would happen on the morrow?

His father would come to St. Frank's. There would be an interview with the Head. And Fullwood, on the carpet, would be compelled to tell everything. His father was a kindly enough man under normal circumstances, but he could also be terribly stern. Fullwood quailed at the thought of meeting him under such circumstances. There was no doubt as to the issue. His father would take him away—at once, without an hour's waste of time.

And after that—Fullwood couldn't think what would happen after that! Perhaps his father would send him to another school. But, before doing so, he would probably whip him and lecture him, and make his life an even worse misery——

"I can't face him!" muttered Fullwood desperately. "Why should I? There's only one possible outcome, anyhow. I'm as good as sacked, and the pater will shove me into an office, or some rotten school that'll be worse than torture. Why should I stay here and face him? I can't! I won't!"

And then and there, in his panic-stricken state of mind, he decided that there was only one way out of his morass of trouble. And that was to run away!

He wouldn't leave it until to-morrow. He would go now—this evening! The fellows believed that he was with the Head, and nobody would think anything because he didn't return. He would go straight off, just as he was.

Then he paused in his thoughts. He was chilled to the marrow, and he hadn't any overcoat or muffler. And there was Clive, too. He needn't say anything to the others; but what about Clive? He ought to tell his chum what his plans were. It would only be fair.

But he hesitated at the thought. Clive would try to persuade him to give up the idea. Clive would urge him to remain at St. Frank's, and wait until his father came. But Clive didn't know his father!

No, he couldn't risk meeting Clive again.

"The only thing I can do is to bunk now!" Fullwood told himself fiercely. "I shall be miles away before anybody knows, or guesses. And then, when the pater comes, it'll be too late. I can't face him—I can't tell him about that night club! He would never forgive me!"

It wasn't the thought of the booth affair that drove Fullwood into a panic. He had nothing on his conscience regarding that episode. He was afraid of what would come out, once his father started making inquiries. And the only way to make certain that his secret would remain intact, was to run away from school.

It was a drastic remedy, and under any ordinary conditions Fullwood would never have considered it. For he was level-headed, and not inclined to give way to sudden foolish impulses.

But this evening he was not himself. His troubles had overwhelmed him, and he was in a state of utter panic. All he wanted to do was to get away—to leave St. Frank's before he fell into any further quagmires. He was hooked for expulsion, anyhow, so what did it matter if he went a few hours in advance?

With these thoughts crowding through his fevered mind, he went silently across the snow in the triangle, and opened the door of the Ancient House. He peeped in, and to his relief he found that the lobby was empty. In a moment he was in the cloak-room, and it only took him another moment to seize his overcoat and muffler, and to steal out again. He closed the door with a breath of relief. Now he could walk straight off—he could go! Which way didn't matter.

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But there was Clive. Fullwood paused as he made for the gates. A feeling of remorse came over him, and he went suddenly hot with shame. He couldn't go without letting Clive know— But then an idea came to him. Why not scrawl a note? Yes, by Jove! That would be simple. He could write a few words, and give the letter to old Cuttle, the porter. He could tell Cuttle not to deliver it till nearly bed-time. And then it would be too late for Clive to take any action, although he would know the truth.

It wasn't even seven o'clock yet, and the evening was young.

And Fullwood, having come to this resolve, went off into the East Square, and found a sheltered spot behind one of the great buttresses, where the gleam from the lobby window gave him sufficient light to write by.

He had a blank piece of paper in his pocket, and an old envelope, and the gum on it was still usable. It was just the thing he needed.

He didn't write much—merely a few lines.

Then he sealed up the envelope and went towards the gateway. He tapped upon the door of the porter's little lodge, and after a few moments it was opened. Josh Cuttle stood there, with the snowflakes whirling into his cosy parlour.

"It was a wild night!" growled Mr. Cuttle. "And there was worse to come. Why was there worse to come? Ask me!"

"Just a minute, Cuttle—"

"Because the glass was tumblin' as I never seed afore!" declared the porter. "It was Master Fullwood, wasn't it?" he added, peering at the form on his doorstep. "Come in, young gent—"

"No, I don't want to come in, thanks," interrupted Fullwood quickly. "There's a little note here, Cuttle. Do you mind giving it to Russell, of the Remove, later on this evening—just before bed-time? I—I'm going out."

The porter looked surprised.

"You was going out—in this storm?" he asked.

"Oh, it's nothing much—"

"It was bad now, and it was likely to get wus!" declared Mr. Cuttle. "Queer goings on, or my name wasn't Josh! Why was you sendin' notes, when the Ancient House wasn't twenty yards away?"

"I—I've got a special reason," replied Fullwood, between his teeth. "Don't ask me questions, Cuttle. Will you promise me that you'll give that note to Russell at about bed-time?"

"I'll give it to him, young gent," said the porter. "I was a good-hearted man, an' it was my aim to be obligin'. I'll take—"

"Thanks awfully, Cuttle," said Fullwood gratefully.

He felt in his pocket for a tip, and then started when he realised that he was absolutely broke. He didn't possess a penny!

"Thanks awfully, Cuttle!" he repeated weakly. "Ask—ask Russell to give you a tip for me, will you? He'll understand."

And without waiting for the puzzled porter to question him any further, he turned aside and was lost in the snow and the gloom. He went out into the lane, and turned mechanically towards the village. It didn't matter which direction he took—but perhaps this unconscious decision of his was a wise one. For if he had gone the other way he would have found himself on the wide expanse of the moor. And in such a blizzard as this, that course might have been fatal.

As it was, he set his face towards the village. He had no money, and he had made no plans. It was, without doubt, the wildest night that this part of the country had experienced during the year.

It was no weather for such a flight as Fullwood contemplated. But he had made up his mind now, and he did not falter. The die was cast.



CHAPTER 12.

THE ALARM.

"EEN Fullwood anywhere?"

Clive Russell asked that question as he looked into the Junior Common-room in the Ancient House. It was half-past seven, and the Canadian junior was wondering what had happened to his unhappy study mate. Fullwood had been gone for exactly an hour. And Clive was naturally worried.

"He's not here," said De Valerie, looking up from a book beside the fire. "Perhaps he's gone into one of the other Houses—to escape Handy!"

"That's about the size of it," agreed Watson, nodding.

Clive went out again, and wandered off towards the lobby. Handforth was just coming downstairs, and he was looking himself again. He was a bit peeved, but his appearance was an improvement upon the Argentine uncle.

"Is Fullwood upstairs?" asked Clive quickly.

"I don't know where Fullwood is, and I don't care," replied Handforth, with cold disdain. "I went to a lot of trouble for him, and he merely scorned my efforts. I've finished with him! He's a good chap, but you're welcome to him."

"Don't be an ass, Handy," growled Clive. "Ralph went out just after you finished with that foolery of yours—"

"After I'd finished with *what*?"

"Well, he went out!" said Clive. "And I haven't seen him since—and that was an hour ago."

"He went out?" repeated Edward Oswald. "Outside?"

"I mean he went out of the study," replied Clive. "But, by Jove, I wonder if he did go

outside? I've searched all over the house, and he doesn't seem to be here."

"Don't be dotty!" said Handforth curtly. "This isn't a night for a dog to be out in. I wouldn't go out in it myself! If Fullwood's anywhere, he's gone to one of the other Houses. Worrying about what the Head told him, I expect," added Handforth thoughtfully. "It's a bit thick of the Head to keep him in suspense like this, poor chap! I feel pretty rotten about it, I can tell you."

Clive smiled for a moment. He knew how much to believe of Handforth's former assertion that he didn't care what happened to Fullwood.

"Well, I'll just pop over to the West House, and make a few inquiries," he said.

"I'll come with you," offered Handforth. "And if we find Fully over there, mooning about, we'll drag him back. Tell him he can come and listen to my wireless. I hear there's a good programme on this evening."

"But aren't your valves busted?"

"By George, so they are!" said Handforth, with a start. "Mac's fault, the silly ass! Just like him to take them out of the set, and put them in the cupboard. How was I to know? I thought they were empty boxes, and chucked them into the fire."

But Clive Russell wasn't listening. He went into the cloakroom for his overcoat and cap, and then started. Handforth was there on the same errand as himself.

"Look at this!" said Clive, pointing.

"Look at what?"

"It's an empty peg, isn't it?" asked Clive anxiously.

"Nothing very startling——"

"You ass, it means that Fullwood has taken his overcoat," interrupted Clive. "And his muffler and his cap, too! Surely he wouldn't need his muffler just to dodge across to the West House? I say, I don't like the look of it! I guess there's something wrong."

They hurried out, full of vague uneasiness. But, as it happened, luck was with them. For as soon as they got outside, they beheld a figure crossing from Big Arch towards the porter's lodge. He was almost opposite them. They recognised the bow-legged Josh Cuttle—just returning from his locking-up rounds.

"By George!" said Handforth, as he looked round him. "The snow's coming down thicker than ever! There'll be piles of it to-morrow. What about a challenge to those West House chaps? We'll have a fight——"

"Never mind about that now," interrupted Clive. "Hi, Josh! Seen anything of Fullwood?"

It was only as an afterthought that Clive had put this question to the porter. He would never have gone to the lodge with such a query. But, as it happened, he could not have asked anybody better!

"Beg pardon, young gents," said the porter, turning.

Clive ran up.

"I don't suppose you'll know anything, but I was wondering if you'd seen Fullwood,

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that's all," he said. "He'll probably be in the West House—"

"There wasn't no use you a-lookin' for him there," interrupted the porter, gloomily shaking his head. "Master Fullwood was gone hout."

"Hout?" said Handforth, staring. "I mean—out?"

"Down to the willage, maybe!" nodded Mr. Cuttle.

"But why the dickens should he go to the village?" said Handforth, with a start. "And this weather, too! How do you know, Cuttle? I might as well tell you that Fullwood isn't quite himself this evening. We're worried about him."

Josh Cuttle regarded the two juniors thoughtfully. The snow was whirling round them, but he could see the anxious expressions on their faces by the reflected light from the Ancient House windows. Although the night was pitchy dark, the snow-covered gravel was throwing back the gleam from the various windows. And Mr. Cuttle slowly scratched his beard.

He had been thinking about Fullwood more than once during the last half-hour. He didn't quite like the way in which Fullwood had gone off. And Cuttle had wondered about that letter, too. It was such an unusual thing for a junior to give him such a task. And the porter remembered that he had not given any promise as to when he would deliver it.

"Well?" asked Clive anxiously. "You say that Fullwood went to the village? When?"

"That was just afore seven," replied Mr. Cuttle. "And I didn't say as he went to the willage. Master Fullwood went hout, an' that was all I know. But there was something mysterious, young gents. Why was there? Ask me! Because Master Fullwood gave me this 'ere note, an' told me not to 'and it over until bed-time."

He pulled out the note, and Clive took it with very real alarm.

"He told you not to give me this till bed-time?" he panted. "And he's gone out! You did right to 'and it over now, Cuttle! Thanks awfully! Quick, Handforth—let's go back into the lobby, where we can read it."

They rushed off, and the porter was relieved. He didn't quite like that responsibility, and now it was off his mind. In the lobby, Russell and Handforth examined the letter. Clive tore it open, and read the words that were written on the scrap of soiled paper.

Handforth stood by, without attempting to look over his companion's shoulder. Handforth had strict ideas concerning privacy—especially when it concerned another fellow's letters.

"Oh, the madman!" groaned Clive, looking up. "The hopeless chump!" Then his eyes softened. "Poor old Ralph!" he muttered. "Poor old scout!"

"Anything important?" asked Handforth carelessly.

"Read this!"

Handforth took it, and his startled eyes saw Fullwood's hastily scrawled words:

"Dear old Clive,

"No time for details. Am running away—but don't worry about me. Saw Head at six-thirty—didn't tell you I had the appointment. All up. Head writing to my pater to-night, and telling him to come down to-morrow. Practically the sack. It means the end of everything, so I might as well bolt. Sorry, old son. Wish me luck, won't you? Don't tell the others.

"Your pal,

"RALPH."

Handforth was startled.

"He's bolted!" he gasped. "He's run away! But—but look here! He's told you not to tell anybody else—"

"And do you think I'll keep quiet about a thing like this?" interrupted Clive frantically. "We've got to fetch him back! Oh, why didn't he tell us that he was going to see the Head at half-past six? And why didn't he see me before he ran away?"

"Because he was afraid you'd persuade him to stop," replied Handforth grimly. "By George, I've been afraid of something like this for days! Don't you remember how he nearly ran away on Wednesday?"

"Yes—and he promised Winnie Pitt that he wouldn't!" said Clive, with acute worry. "It's not like Ralph to break his word—"

"He hasn't broken his word," interrupted Handforth gruffly. "He promised Winnie that he wouldn't bolt on Wednesday—and he didn't. The circumstances are altogether different now. His pater's coming down, and he's practically got the sack. It's enough to make any chap bunk! The Head's mad!"

Handforth felt like making another dash into Dr. Stafford's presence—but the memory of his first failure came back to him in time. And for once he acted with sound common sense.

"There's only one thing to be done!" he said briskly. "Let's go to Nipper, and put everything before him. He's the chap for a job like this."

"By Jove, you're right!" agreed Clive eagerly.

They ran to Study C, and found that Dick Hamilton and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were at home. They were both at prep.

"If it's all the same to you, Handy—" began Dick.

"Read this!" shouted Handforth, planking Fullwood's letter on the table.

Dick read it, and looked up.

"Poor chap!" he said slowly. "So he's bolted, has he? Of course, he's all wrong, and we shall have to get him back. But there's something else to be done first. We've got to stop that letter going to his father—we've got to get the Head's pardon."

"But Dr. Stafford has told him—"

"It doesn't matter what the Head has told him, Russell," interrupted Dick, in that decisive way of his. "We all know that Full-

wood is true blue—that he went into that booth with an honourable intention. He doesn't deserve to be removed from St. Frank's, and we've got to save him."

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "Do you think there's a chance?"

"There's more than a chance," replied Dick Hamilton. "If Fullwood had told us everything instead of running off like this, it would have been all right. Just like the impulsive ass! What exactly do you know, Russell?"

"Nothing beyond the fact that the Head confiscated the twenty pounds, and told Ralph that he would let him know his decision later," replied Clive. "But it seems that Ralph went to him at half-past six—without telling us anything about it."

"And the Head told him that he was going to write to his pater, and have him removed from the school," said the Remove captain. "Of course, that was as good as getting the sack, and Fully bolted. What's the time now?" He glanced at his watch. "Twenty to eight! He couldn't have been gone long—not more than forty minutes, anyhow. We can follow his footprints in the snow, if we're lucky."

"I say, that's a wonderful idea," said Clive eagerly.

"But first of all we've got to go and see Mr. Lee," continued Dick, jumping to his feet. "The gov'nor's a man of action, and I want to start away from here, within ten minutes, with the news that Fullwood is pardoned. That'll make him come back with us, won't it?"



CHAPTER 13.

NELSON LEE DOES THE TRICK!

LIVE RUSSELL was looking excited and tense.

"Do—do you think we can wangle it?" he asked breathlessly.

"We don't want to waste any time in talking," replied Dick. "Every minute is of value—particularly as it's snowing hard. It doesn't take long for footprints to get obliterated—"

"How about going in my Austin Seven?" asked Handforth brilliantly. "It's got strong headlights, you know, and they'll show up the snow as plain as daylight. And we can be a lot quicker, too, and overtake him—"

"That's a good idea, Handy," said Dick Hamilton, with a nod. "You can get the car out while the gov'nor is having an interview with the Head. But the first thing to be done is to see Mr. Lee."

They rushed away to the Housemaster's study, and burst in without the preliminary formality of knocking. Nelson Lee looked up from his desk, and saw at once that there was something very special about this invasion.

"Sorry to barge in like this, sir, but it's urgent," exclaimed Dick. "Fullwood's run away, and we want you to—"

"Run away!" interrupted Lee sharply. "On a night like this!"

"That's why we want you to help us, sir—so that we can dash after him," said Dick. "He hasn't been gone an hour yet, and we want to follow his footprints, if we can. The Head has hauled him over the coals for that affair of last Wednesday, when he fought that bruiser, Hogan, in the booth."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, I understand that Dr. Stafford was gravely concerned over the matter," he said. "Fullwood is very foolish to run away—"

"The Head's told him that he's writing to his pater to-night, sir," broke in Handforth. "It practically means the sack. And Fullwood is innocent, sir! He hasn't done anything wrong at all—at least, he was honourable enough when he went into that booth. He only took the fight on to square things up."

"I must confess that I am puzzled," said Nelson Lee quietly. "And this is not the moment to discuss—"

"But it is, sir," insisted Dick. "We don't want you to press us with too many questions, but we can give you our word that Fullwood entered that booth honourably, in order to redeem a slip. We all vouch for him, and promise you that he was doing nothing whatever discreditable."

"You referred to a slip—"

"That happened long before, sir—a week or two ago," replied Dick. "As a matter of fact, Fullwood did something rather questionable—and he was thoroughly ashamed of it. I hope you won't press us, sir, because we naturally can't give any details—but you can be perfectly satisfied that he learned his lesson, and showed honest desires to make amends. Can't you trust us, sir?"

"Yes, my boys, I can—I do," replied Lee.

"Then we promise you, sir, that Fullwood only went into that booth to redeem that slip of his—to get the money he felt that he had to earn," continued Dick. "There was nothing wrong in it—he didn't mean any harm. And when he entered the place he didn't know what it actually was."

"Get yourselves ready to go out," said Lee crisply. "Fullwood must be brought back at once. I will go to the headmaster, and put these facts before him. I presume you desire to overtake Fullwood, and tell him the good news that he will not be forced to leave the school?"

"Yes, sir—it'll make him come back."

"You are quite right," agreed the Housemaster-detective. "Very well, boys—expect me in less than ten minutes. I do not think I shall have much difficulty in convincing Dr. Stafford."

He hurried off, and the juniors crowded out, and made preparations for the chase.

"By George, what a brick!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"That's why I went to him," said Dick, with a smile. "He knows we wouldn't stand up for Fully if there was anything really bad against him. That roulette affair is over and



"Good-afternoon, sir," began Dick, politely raising his cap. "Having a look round? We always welcome visitors to St. Frank's." "You silly ass—I mean—I am from the Argentine," growled Hamilton, trying to disguise his voice, "and I am looking for my nephew, Fullwood."

forgotten—Fullwood repented of it, and it would be a dirty trick to make him suffer like this after he's made good."

In the meantime, Mr. Nelson Lee was ushered into the Head's presence. Dr. Stafford was pleased—as he was always pleased when Lee went to him.

"Wild night, Mr. Lee," said the Head. "I'm afraid a very heavy storm is blowing up—"

"I hope you will forgive me for interrupting, Dr. Stafford, but I have come here to discuss something more important than the weather," said Lee quietly. "Not long ago you had Fullwood before you, did you not?"

The Head frowned, and looked rather pained.

"A most regrettable business, Mr. Lee," he said. "Fullwood is one of your own boys, I believe? You know that affair of the boxing booth? I was compelled to tell Fullwood that I should write to his father."

"Have you done so?"

"Well, yes—"

"But the letter is not posted?" asked Lee sharply.

"Not yet, no—"

"Then, Dr. Stafford, let me urge you to reconsider your decision," said Lee. "You

may be influenced when I inform you that Fullwood, in his wretchedness, has run away from the school."

The Head started up, shocked.

"He has run away!" he ejaculated. "In—in this weather!"

"He has run away, but there may still be plenty of time to get him back—if a start can be made at once," said Lee. "And I want the boy to know that he can come back, pardoned."

"Pardoned! Certainly not, Mr. Lee!" said the Head. "Good heavens! I cannot possibly understand why you should make such an extraordinary request! The boy's guilt was undeniable—he admitted it himself—"

"Yes, but did he not also assure you that he went to that booth, unaware of the fact that he was committing any serious breach?" asked Lee. "Did he not tell you that his motive, at least, was a good one?"

"Why, yes, he certainly did," confessed the Head, with a start.

"I have the positive assurance of Nipper—I should say, Hamilton—and several other boys, that Fullwood is guilty of nothing dishonourable," continued Lee. "They have vouched for his good conduct. It is my opinion, Dr. Stafford, that this is one of

those cases which had better not be inquired into too closely."

"But, my dear sir——"

"I do not mean to imply that the facts will not bear an investigation," continued Lee. "Certainly not. I am merely of the opinion that Fullwood had a very excellent reason for requiring that sum of twenty pounds. He did not mean any harm by going into the booth—the offer was open to everybody, and it was not until too late, perhaps, that he realised the true nature of the place."

"Then you really think that he should be forgiven?"

"I do," declared Lee. "But for the assurance of these boys—boys I know to be truthful and honourable—I should not, perhaps, be so definite. But you have told Fullwood he is to be removed from the school, and the poor boy is distracted. The fact that he is not morally guilty is only adding to his agony."

The Head considered for a few moments.

"I have learned to rely a great deal upon your judgment, Mr. Lee," he said quietly. "I am exceedingly sorry now that I did not consult you before coming to my decision. The boy must be brought back immediately."

Lee nodded.

"It will be a comparatively easy matter if he can be assured that his little escapade is forgotten and forgiven," he remarked. "I have reason to believe that Fullwood went slightly astray a week or two ago—nothing serious, of course, but nevertheless astray. He has repented of it, and has been fighting his hardest to make amends. He wanted that money, I believe, to square himself. You have confiscated it, and have virtually told him that he is expelled. What will be the natural result?"

"Surely you do not anticipate anything tragic?" panted the Head.

"Well, not tragic," said Lee, "although, in a way, it may be. The unfortunate boy has already run away, and in his present frame of mind he may very quickly take the downward path. I am his Housemaster, and I am satisfied that he is deserving of mercy."

The Head compressed his lips.

"Very well, Mr. Lee, I will do as you say," he said firmly. "Here is the letter to the boy's father that I had prepared for the post."

He tore it into shreds and tossed it into the fire.

"Let Fullwood be fetched back at once," he continued. "He can be told that he is pardoned, and that no more will be said on the subject."

Fullwood is worthy of your clemency and trust. I will do my best to bring him back at once."

"Please do, Mr. Lee—please do!" urged the Head. "The knowledge that he has run away worries me exceedingly. And this weather! The foulest night we have had in the year! I fervently hope that no harm has come to the unfortunate lad!"

Lee hurried off, and found a group of six juniors waiting in the Triangle, well wrapped up and eager to be off. They were gathered round Handforth's little Austin Seven, the engine of which was purring musically. The car was open, and Handforth was already at the wheel.

"Well, sir?" asked Dick Hamilton eagerly.

"It is all right—Fullwood is pardoned——"

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, I knew you'd do the trick, guv'nor," said Dick gratefully.

"I have convinced the headmaster that this is the better course—relying solely on the assurance of you boys that Fullwood is deserving of the grace," continued Lee. "Be off at once——"

"Aren't you coming, sir?"

"I do not think my presence will be necessary—or welcome," replied the Housemaster drily. "When you tell Fullwood the good news it will be better for you to be alone with him. And I do not anticipate any difficulty in finding him. I have not allowed myself to become alarmed."

"I think you're quite right, sir," nodded Dick. "It's only just eight now, so he hasn't been gone for more than an hour. His footprints are still clearly defined, and we can overtake him pretty quickly, I should think."

"Then go ahead," smiled Lee. "Be careful, Handforth—you will need to drive cautiously in this snow."

"Trust me, sir," said Handforth promptly.

Nelson Lee waved his hand, and went indoors. He didn't regard Fullwood's flight as anything serious. The boy had obviously felt very wretched, and had wandered away in his misery. It was more than likely that he would be in the village, at the confectioner's, or trudging disconsolately through the snow towards Bannington. Lee had no fear that Fullwood would do anything drastic, or that he would be beyond the range of the search party.

So he thought it better to leave the affair to the boys.

The half-dozen were Handforth & Co., Clive Russell, Dick Hamilton, and Tregellis-West.

"Can't take you all!" said Handforth dubiously. "This is only a four-seater, you know, and we've got to have room for Fullwood, when we bring him back. You'd better come, Russell—and you, too, Dick. You other three can stay behind."

"Thanks awfully," said Church, with a glare.

But, after all, Handforth's suggestion was quite sensible—although the three had no intention of remaining behind. Sir Montie was



CHAPTER 14.

THE SEARCH PARTY!

NELSON LEE shook Dr. Stafford's hand warmly.

"I knew you would be generous, sir," he said.

"I do not think you will regret this decision, for I am convinced that

NEXT WEDNESDAY!**"THE REMOVE ON THE WARPATH!"****Sacked!**

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persuaded by Dick Hamilton to give it up, but Church and McClure wouldn't listen to it. They always felt that they were necessary to look after their reckless leader.

"We'll buzz behind on our bikes," said Church.

"You'll stand a fat chance!" sneered Handforth. "Do you think you can keep up with my Austin?"

Church and McClure thought they could, although they didn't say so. This was no time for arguments. And, as a matter of fact, they were right.

For this was no ordinary journey.

The snow, for one thing, rendered any speed both dangerous and rash. A skid was highly probable if the driver took a sudden swerve. And there was another reason for moderate driving, too.

Fullwood's footprints were clearly impressed in the snow—but the flakes were still falling, and slowly but surely the impressions were being filled in and obliterated. At any speed over twelve miles an hour they became almost invisible. So Church and McClure were easily

able to keep up with the party. Handforth drove, and Dick Hamilton sat beside him. Clive Russell had the back to himself, the vacant space being ready for Fullwood, after he was found.

It was indeed a wild night.

To call the storm a blizzard was no exaggeration. The wind was raging and howling across the Downs, and piling the snow against the hedges of the lane. One side was nearly a foot deep in feathery snow already, whilst the other was almost blown clean by the wind. In the more exposed places, drifts were forming with surprising rapidity.

But the search party gave little thought to the weather—although, under happier circumstances, they would have revelled at the prospects of sport. Just now their thoughts were centred upon finding Fullwood, and telling him the glad news.

They had reason enough to congratulate themselves.

Without revealing any part of Ralph Leslie's guilty secret, they had secured his pardon. And this meant, as a matter of course, that

his twenty pounds would be returned. And so to-night would mark the end of all his worries and troubles. So this mission was a happy one.

But it was anxious, too—for the juniors did not share Nelson Lee's view that Fullwood would be easy to find. It was not an error of judgment on Lee's part—it was simply that he did not know Fullwood so well as the boys did. They feared that he would make all haste away from St. Frank's, but they were gladdened by the thought that he had only secured an hour's start. And he was on foot, whilst they were riding.

In the village they met with a check.

There had been a good deal of foot traffic up and down the little High Street, and the line of footprints was no longer visible. Fullwood's, of course, had been crossed and recrossed by others, and nothing could be made of the tangle. Nobody was about, either. All the shops were closed, and the village seemed deserted.

"Well, what's to be done now?" asked Handforth, as he peered forward. "I can't make head or tail—"

"Better take the Bannington road," said Dick. "That's the most likely way. And if he went straight through the village, we shall pick up his tracks again on the open road."

"But we may mistake somebody else's for Fullwood's," protested Handforth.

"That's not probable," said Clive. "Besides, the only people who are likely to be about are farm labourers, going home from the inn, or the policeman. We can't make any bloomer about Fullwood's stride."

This was true enough, and Handforth put on speed. The Austin purred out of the village, and took the Bannington road, with Church and McClure pedalling hard in the rear. The snow continued to drive fiercely against the wind-screen, and Dick found it necessary to lean out, shading his face with his hand, so that he could watch the road closely.

"Ease up, Handy," he said abruptly. "No footprints here."

Handforth throttled down, and applied the brakes. The Austin slowed round, skidding giddily, but Handforth corrected it.

"Whoa!" he gasped. "I shall have to go easy!"

"Well, Mr. Lee warned you," said Dick, as he jumped out. "No harm done. H'm!" he added, as he surveyed the road ahead. "There's been nothing here at all during the past hour. Look at the snow—perfectly plain and undisturbed."

"Then he must be in the village!" said Clive eagerly. "Gee, Mr. Lee was right—"

"I don't believe he's in the village," interrupted Dick. "We'd better try the lane to Caistowe—"

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth. "That's more like it! Caistowe's a seaport, and I'll bet my boots that Fully has decided to get a job as a cabin-boy on a ship! I once

read a story about a chap running away from school—"

"Never mind about your stories just now, old son," interrupted Dick gently. "Turn the car round, and let's do something."

And a minute later the Austin was going back over her own tracks. At the end of the village, Handforth steered round the fork, and took the little road which led to Caistowe. And the car hadn't been progressing for more than twenty yards along this road before Dick gave a shout.

"Pull up!" he sang out. "We've got on the right track, I think—but it'll be just as well to make sure."

He jumped out again, and this time there could be no mistake. The nearly obliterated tracks of a pedestrian were clearly visible in the middle of the lane—going towards Caistowe. And the juniors could see at a glance that they were the footprints of Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

They were still on the trail.



CHAPTER 15.

AN ALARMING DISCOVERY!

COULD Fullwood have gone to Caistowe? Handforth was quite sure about it.

"Come on!" he said eagerly. "We'll overtake the beggar before he gets to Caistowe. There's been a car along this road, too, blow it!"

He frowned as he saw the tracks of a recently driven motor-car.

"Like the chap's nerve—driving up this road, just when we want to use it," he went on indignantly. "Perhaps it was going the same way as Fully, and perhaps the driver offered him a lift—"

"And perhaps the car was coming this way," interrupted Dick. "In any case, this is no time for theories. The car evidently went at about the same time as Fullwood, because the tracks are filled by the fresh snow to the same degree. Still, that doesn't prove anything."

"Let's go!" said Clive impatiently.

They were soon off again, but they were not destined to go far before another check arrived. The wind was driving straight down the lane, sending the snow into great drifts, and wiping away every trace of traffic on the surface of the road. The further they went, the worse it became.

"Well, we might as well go on," said Handforth. "He must have gone straight on—there aren't any side roads. We can't do better than go straight into Caistowe, and make inquiries."

Before long they came to a dip, where the road turned sharply, and where there were high hedges. And in this sheltered spot the snow was undisturbed on the ground. Faintly the tracks of the previous car could be seen, but there were no footprints visible. Dick

Hamilton wasn't surprised. The wind was playing such tricks that it was impossible to form any real opinion. It was quite likely that Fullwood had been walking at the side of the road, where the snow had blown clear.

A halt was called, and Dick came to a decision.

"Look here," he said crisply. "I'll take your bike, Church, and you can get in the car."

"That's a ripping idea," said Church promptly.

"As a matter of fact, I want to run back to St. Frank's," went on Dick. "I don't believe this is going to be such an easy job as we thought. I'm going to get the gov'nor to come along in his own car, and then we can scour Caistowe from end to end. In the meantime, Handy, you go straight ahead, and do the best you can."

Clive Russell looked at him gratefully.

"That's jolly decent of you, Nipper," he said. "I shall feel a lot better if Mr. Lee's on the job."

"I've thought so all the time," growled Dick. "Besides, there's something else that's struck me. If necessary, we'll get the police out in Caistowe, and scour the whole town thoroughly. None of us could get the police to move—but the gov'nor could do it in a tick."

The Remove captain prepared to mount, and McClure looked eager.

"I say, if I come back with you, can I come in the car afterwards?" he asked.

"Of course you can," said Dick. "Come along!"

They set off back—a ride of only seven or eight minutes, since they were only a comparatively short distance from the village. Dick thought it advisable to take these steps promptly, before, perhaps, it became too late. And Handforth was pleased, too. He looked at Russell and Church with gleaming eyes.

"I've got nothing against Hamilton, but I'm glad he's gone!" he said firmly. "We're going to have the honour of finding Fully and bringing him back! By the time Mr. Lee arrives we shall have him in the car!"

"Let's hope so!" said Clive.

They started off again, Handforth full of enthusiasm. For about a mile they proceeded without incident. In the meantime, the storm was gathering in intensity, and although there was no increase in the snowfall, the wind was getting higher. It fairly shrieked over the hedges, and sometimes Handforth had to wrench at the wheel of the Austin in order to keep her on the road.

"Hold on!" said Clive, who was now sitting in the front seat. "Pull up, Handy!"

"What for?" demanded Handforth.

"Look at that snow piled up there," said Clive, pointing ahead. "That's not an ordinary drift! I can't think— Wait a minute, though! I've got it! That car!"

"What about it?"

"It must have skidded badly," said Clive, jumping out before the Austin had stopped. "Here you are! Can't you see the way it's

pushed all the snow against this hedge? Phew! It must have been a terrific skid, too!"

Handforth and Church leapt out, and stared at the spot, which was fully illuminated by the Austin's headlamps. There could be no doubt that Russell was right. The freshly fallen snow had covered everything slightly, but the traces were unmistakable. That previous car had skidded completely across the road at this spot, causing great furrows, and piling the snow in heaps against one hedge.

"Well, there's no need for us to stop here," said Handforth, after a glance. "The fathead must have shoved his brakes on too quickly. And, anyhow, he didn't overturn, or anything, or the car would be here. Let's get on."

He was about to move back into his driving seat when he caught sight of something, and checked. Then he leapt two or three steps forward, and bent down.

"What's this?" he asked hoarsely.

His tone was so acute that the other two juniors ran to his side.

"What's what?" asked Clive.

"Look here!" muttered Handforth.

Gingerly he touched the snow with his finger. At this particular spot it was curiously discoloured, and as soon as he disturbed the freshly fallen layer, the discoloration became more apparent. It was a dull, ominous crimson.

"Blood!" gasped Clive Russell, horrified.

"That's—that's what I thought!" muttered Handforth, turning pale. "Blood! I caught sight of it, and— Look here! Another patch! Good heavens!"

"You—you don't think—"

Clive paused, too startled to frame his words.

"Think!" shouted Handforth. "There's nothing to think about! It's as clear as daylight! There was an awful accident here—and poor old Fully was the victim."

"But—but we can't be sure!" said Church hoarsely.

"Haven't you got any brains?" said Handforth, his voice harsh with the tension. "We've only seen two tracks on this road—Fullwood's footprints and the wheel marks of that car! Can't you see what happened? Poor old Fully was trudging along in the middle of the road, blinded by the snowflakes, and deafened by the wind, and that rotten car came up behind him!"

"Oh, it's—it's too awful!" muttered Clive, with a gulp.

"I expect the car was an old crock without any proper lights," went on Handforth. "The driver tried to pull up, and that's why he skidded. He must have seen Fullwood when it was too late. The car ran over him, and—and— Well, look at this blood! The poor old scout must have lost pints!"

"But—but what can we do?" shouted Clive frantically.

"I don't know!" said Edward Oswald, looking round in desperation. "The car isn't here, so it couldn't have been disabled. They

probably picked Fully up, and took him to the hospital. He might be dead by this time—"

"Don't!" pleaded Clive. "Quick, Handy, turn the car round, and we'll dash back to St. Frank's. It's the only thing to do!"

"Rats! We'll go on to the hospital—"

"But which hospital?" panted Russell. "I believe there are two or three in Caistowe—but if we get back to the school, the Head can ring up, and Mr. Lee can ring up, and so can some others! We've got eight or nine lines at St. Frank's, and we can ring up all the local hospitals at once. It'll be a lot quicker than—"

"You're right!" rapped out Handorth. "Come on!"

Shaky with apprehension, they managed to reverse the car, and then they sped back to St. Frank's. This was a tragic outcome of Fullwood's attempt to run away from school! The three juniors were almost stunned by the horror of it.

When they got back to St. Frank's, they nearly ran into Nelson Lee's racing car, as it was about to drive through the gateway. The Austin spun in, and Lee only just managed to swerve in time to avoid striking it.

"Have you got him?" yelled Dick Hamilton.

Handorth applied his brakes, and the Austin skidded round giddily. Dr. Stafford, who was standing on the Ancient House steps—having been watching Lee's departure—came hurrying up.

"There's been an accident, sir!" shouted Handorth, leaping out.

"An accident? To whom?"

"Fullwood, sir. I believe he's been killed!"

Handorth was obviously in earnest. His face was pale, his expression was haggard, and Dr. Stafford looked at him, aghast. Nelson Lee and Nipper ran up, having heard his ominous words.

"Ring up all the hospitals, sir!" went on Handorth. "We found bloodstains in the snow! A car had skidded, and must have hit Fullwood—"

"Quickly, Handorth, give me the details!" rapped out Lee.

Handorth gave them, and the Head was frantic.

"Heaven forgive me for precipitating this tragedy!" he panted. "I feel that I am to blame, Mr. Lee! The poor boy! What can we do? What steps can we take to find out—"

"Leave this to me, sir," interrupted the Housemaster. "Handorth, get in your car again, and lead the way to this spot."

"But I thought it would be better to ring up the hospitals, sir—"

"It is almost a certainty that Fullwood, if badly injured, was taken to a hospital in Caistowe," interrupted Lee. "Therefore we shall be losing no time if we take the Caistowe Road, and investigate the scene of the accident on the way. You have forgotten that there is a blizzard raging. Many

telephone wires are down, and the whole service is disorganised."

"By George!" gasped Handorth. "That's true enough, sir."

And so, without another moment's delay, they set off.



CHAPTER 16.

THE MYSTERY OF FULLWOOD

R. STAFFORD did not take any notice of Nelson Lee's reference to the telephone disorganisation. He rushed at once to his study, and attempted to ring up all the local hospitals. But Lee had been right. Although some lines were clear, others were out of action, and the Head was informed that he could be connected, but only after long delays. And so he waited, pacing his study with feverish anxiety, listening for the telephone-bell, and for the return of the search-party.

In the meantime, the two cars sped along the Caistowe road.

Soon after starting, Lee had regretted his order to Handorth. He told himself that he should have taken Handorth into his own car, and left the Austin behind. But he now had no reason to regret his decision, for Edward Oswald was speeding so thoroughly that Lee was travelling quite fast enough over the snow-covered road to be consistent with safety.

And, straggling behind, came half the Remove.

The rumour had spread like lightning, and the juniors had got their bicycles out, and were intent upon rushing to the scene. It was not morbid curiosity which compelled them, but anxiety concerning Fullwood.

This was one of the benefits of the Honour System! They could go out without asking permission, and without fearing any punishment. And they felt that they were doing no wrong.

At last, Handorth brought his Austin to a standstill at the fatal spot, and a moment later Lee's own car pulled up in the rear. The Housemaster and the boys piled out, and gathered round the bloodstains. They were now less obvious, but Lee knelt in the snow, and made a close examination.

"By jingo, it's blood, sir!" said Dick Hamilton breathlessly.

"Yes, it's blood," admitted Lee.

"Didn't I tell you it was?" asked Handorth impatiently.

"I know, old man, but you're always inclined to exaggerate," said Dick. "I was hoping that you had exaggerated in this case. Hadn't we better go straight on to Caistowe, sir?"

"One moment," said Nelson Lee, as he took a handful of the ominously-stained snow into his hand. "H'm! This certainly looks very bad. This is blood—freshly-spilt

(Continued on page 42.)

England Invaded!Powerful New War Serial!

SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!



By

ROGER FOWEY

HOW THE WAR BEGAN.

When Germany invades England at the commencement of a War of Revenge, TOM LEE, JACK BENNETT and BUSTER KIRK—Fourth-Formers at Cliff House School—fall into the thick of the fighting and discover that the enemy is being guided to English shores by a man named STUTZ. The chums acquit themselves well in the fierce fighting which wages between Hastings and Folkestone, and are sent to London with papers which they have got from Stutz. General Marlow requests the chums to go to Chillen Quarry, near Hastings and destroy some big enemy guns. On their way in an armoured car, the trio fall in with a dozen

schoolfellows, who insist on giving a hand. They reach Chillen Quarry just as the Germans are driving back the British forces. Jack signals up some soldiers under the command of a young lieutenant. It is essential that the Germans should be held until Jack and the rest can destroy the big guns in the quarry; just as the lieutenant hurries off to rally the defenders again after an attack, an enemy 'plane swoops low over the place, and Jack distinctly sees a bomb dropping from the fuselage. They are being attacked on three sides, as well as from the air; how can the little force hope to accomplish its task?

(Now get busy on this week's thrills!)

Gassed!

JACK held his breath as he gazed upwards. The early morning sunlight glimmered on the smooth fabric of the enemy 'plane, and the rose-red rays just caught the smooth, rounded shape of the dropping bomb and the tapering fins.

In the moment that he saw it, it seemed to Jack that the bomb was dropping full at him from the machine above. With a shout, he plunged flat to the earth. The rough edges of the cold, damp shale bit into his hands, his nostrils were full of a dank, earthy smell as he held his breath and waited for the explosion.

In the fraction of time that he hugged close against the ground, his straining ears caught clearly the sounds all around him. He heard the young officer's voice: "Get those machine-guns out of that car an' run them up to the trench—one each end. Hi, some of you fellows give a hand here—help with that ammunition!"

From the rim of the quarry came the snap and splutter of rifle-fire; Jack caught the whine of a bullet somewhere above, and saw the little splash of dust as it struck fifty feet from him. Then—

"Whoom-m-m-m-m!"

It was the explosion of the bomb—a shattering detonation that made the solid rock beneath him tremble and quiver. But the bomb had not burst in the quarry—it had exploded outside. The thing had been released when the 'plane was almost dead above the defenders, and the impetus which the bomb had received from the machine had carried the death-filled missile down, amongst the grey hordes skulking in the grass nearly a hundred yards beyond the edge of the quarry.

The bomb had dropped in a long slant. Jack realised it as he jerked, unhurt, to his feet. He saw brown and yellow smoke rolling skywards from the slope above the quarry—and then he glimpsed the enemy 'plane wheeling round. Coming back to drop another bomb!

Jack could see the game—the machine would drop a bomb in the quarry, and the enemy would rush before the disorganised and shaken defenders had time to recover. The audacious airman was flying low—an easy mark for a machine-gun. But the guns on the armoured car were being dismantled!

And then Jack remembered the captured Ger-

man machine-gun on the other side of the quarry!

He raced for it with all the speed he could muster, leaping over the uneven ground, and finally dropping to the natural pit in which the weapon had been placed. Close against it lay the three, grey-clad, huddled figures of the men who had once formed the gun's crew, but Jack gave them no heed.

He snatched out the empty belt that was in the gun, and whipped a fresh, ammunition-filled belt from the long box beside the weapon. He slipped in the metal-cased end of the webbing belt, pulled it through, jerked down the catch as he had seen the young lieutenant do, then he snuggled down behind the weapon and tipped it skyward.

He had to lie with his chin almost touching the sloping side of the pit. He wrapped his hands on the cold, metal grips at the back of the gun, and his thumbs dropped naturally over the trigger-buttons.

The German 'plane was sweeping down on the far side of the quarry. Jack glimpsed the rifles of one or two soldiers jerking up and spitting at the machine—then he laid the sights of his gun full on it.

The range was short—point-blank! He saw the wings of the machine quivering from the speed at which it was travelling. He swung his weapon to fire a little in advance of the whirling propeller, tightened his grip, and then—

The barrel licked out a spitting tongue of fire, the weapon shook and trembled in his hands, his ears were filled with the tearing roar of it as his grim, grey eyes squinted along the sights.

The machine dipped abruptly, heeling a little sideways—and Jack knew that he had hit it. The 'plane wheeled away from him; he had a glimpse of the smooth wings, the under-carriage and the bombs that hung there below the tapering fuselage.

Full at the body of the machine he fired now, and the 'plane swooped upwards, tilted, seemed to stagger in mid-air as his bullets got home, and then came swooping down in a twisting, steep dive that carried it in the direction of the crater that its bomb had made.

Watching, Jack saw little, hurrying figures of Germans rise out of the grass and run from the spot at which, it seemed, the machine must fall. He saw brown earth and the black splotches of upturned grass-roots streak high as one wing of the 'plane struck; the machine pivoted for an instant of time, then the nose smashed down—and all that was left was a crumpled, twisted mass of gleaming fabric.

Jack stared at it, and he saw that the grey, active shapes of the enemy soldiers near the machine had not ceased to rise from the grass and run. They were still moving against the sky-line, trying to get as far away as possible—he saw why in a few moments.

A little spiral of blue oil-smoke wreathed up towards the sky; it was followed by a tongue of flame—a tongue which spread with amazing rapidity until the whole of the debris was engulfed. From out the tangled wreckage, Jack saw two figures emerge, bent double and running in a stumbling fashion. That was the crew of the machine, and, somehow, Jack was glad to think they were unhurt.

They disappeared, hidden by the smoke that now arose—and then came the explosion of the first of the bombs.

Whoom-m-m-m!

It scattered the burning 'plane—and it scattered the other bombs that the craft had carried. There must have been fully a score of bombs on the machine, and they were flung in all directions, most of them exploding as they hit the ground.

They brought consternation and fear into the hidden ranks of the enemy. They broke from their hiding-places and ran blindly—while the young British officer took advantage of the confusion to carry on his job of strengthening the defences of the quarry.

He saw Jack getting up from behind the captured gun, and he waved his hand to the boy, then detailed four men to come and take over the weapon.

"It was you that brought that machine down, wasn't it?" one of them asked, and Jack saw from the man's spurs and the badge on his shoulder that he was an artilleryman—a driver, apparently. "Good work, young 'un! If that little lot had dropped on us we'd ha' known all about it! Come on, you blokes, shove this gun to the other side! Look, there's enough ammunition here to shoot all the Germans there are—stand by, an' I'll show you how the gun works. And for the love o' Mike keep your heads down. The officer told me he'd be very annoyed with anybody as gets killed!"

He grinned cheerfully, then Jack left them to the job as he dashed across the quarry once more. He remembered that he had yet to make an investigation of the place.

There were six of those big guns lined up below the low cliff which formed the back of the quarry. The canvas shroudings of the weapons were wet with the night's dew, but they did not hide the power and awful might of the big guns. At either end of the row of wide-spaced weapons was a dug-out, and Jack paused a moment at the entrance to the first. He remembered taking the electric torch they had collared when they captured Stutz and searched him. He felt the thing still in his pocket, and he whipped it out.

There was still plenty of light in the battery and its white circle pierced the darkness of the dug-out as Jack entered. He found a broad, twenty-foot tunnel which opened out into a low-roofed, cave-like space—packed with stores.

There were crates and boxes and cases—and the whole of one side of the broad space was stacked with great shells for the guns outside. They lay on their sides, row upon row of them and piled right up to the roof; each with a little fibre covering over the nose to protect the dials set there, and each with its copper rings at the base gleaming with ruddy light in the ray from the torch.

Jack had never seen so many shells before—and he realised only too well, how much capture of the quarry meant to the enemy, and what it would mean to England if it did fall into German hands!

Those guns and those shells would make all the difference to the German advance. The place was a veritable fortress!

When Jack looked more closely, he saw that there was a small truck at one side of the stack, and it was plainly meant to be used for wheeling shells out to the guns, for a narrow track of small lines ran out along the tunnel to the open.

Jack discovered tins of army biscuits and cans of food; there were rifles and bayonets—everything that could possibly be needed in the defence of the place. He discovered boxes of fuses and explosive for the big guns, and all by themselves, small boxes containing the delicate sighting instruments for the weapons.

In the next dug-out at the other side of the guns he found much the same material as he had discovered in the first. He returned to the young lieutenant and reported what he had found.

"Doing the job in style, aren't they!" the young fellow grinned cheerfully. "I don't understand a thing about big guns, anyway. The only way I can think of to put them out of

action is to blow the blessed things up. But there's an artillery man over there on that German gun we got hold of; he'll know the best way to—Hullo!"

He broke off and looked over the brow of the hill, where two German 'planes were streaking towards them.

"More of 'em, eh?" the lieutenant grunted. "Going to bomb us out of it! Can't say I blame 'em either, it's the easiest way of getting the place and saving men—but they don't bomb us out until we've busted up these big guns. We'd—I say, can't those machine's shift!"

"Look out—drop!" yelled Jack, and both pitched themselves to the ground as the two machines swooped low, travelling at almost incredible speed, obviously about to loose bombs.

Jack heard the thunderous roar of the 'planes above; he glimpsed them as they shot over the quarry, and he tensed against the shock of the bombs when they should explode. Out in the open space in front of the guns, he saw two broad founts of dust shoot up; from the heart of each came a tiny splash of red flame and the sound of a dull, harmless explosion. That was all.

"Couple of duds!" Jack exclaimed to the officer. "They didn't go off properly! They —"

He broke off as he glimpsed the lieutenant's face. On a sudden, he had gone patchy white, and his eyes were wide.

"Duds be darned!" he gasped. His voice was harsh, now, and strained. Those are gas-bombs—they're going to get us that way! Look, those two machines are swinging round to drop some more!"

He jumped to his feet, and ran towards the trench.

"Gas!" Jack heard him shouting hoarsely. "Gas! Get your masks on everybody—gas!"

Jack jerked upright, and he stared with starting eyes at the wheeling machines. To his nostrils came the evil, acrid tang of poison gas as it spread from the burst bombs—and he realised that neither himself nor any of the Remove fellows had gas-masks!

Stemming the Enemy Advance!

FOR long seconds, Jack stood staring at the dust and smoke which drifted slowly from the spots where the two gas-filled bombs had exploded. He saw the gleaming, roaring shapes of the two 'planes come sweeping back towards the quarry—and then the tingling, gripping, merciless nip of the gas seemed to clutch him at the throat.

He choked coughed, and then backed away.

Gas-masks! He must get them for the fellows up in the trench—for Buster and Tom and Smiler and the rest. They'd all die like rats in a cage if he didn't. He could see the soldiers whom the officer had brought donning their masks—and then Jack remembered the three dead Germans lying by the captured gun.

He saw Tom standing by the armoured car, staring helplessly round him.

"Tom!" Jack bawled. "Over by that gun—you'll find some masks on the Germans. Three of them—quick!"

Tom understood, and he went off at a tearing run, skirting wide the centre of the quarry and the gas-cloud that was steadily rising there.

"Masks!" Jack grunted to himself. "We've got to get 'em somehow. But there aren't—Gosh!" He remembered the equipment he had seen in the two dug-outs. If there was food there, and weapons, surely there would be some gas-masks! He dived into the nearest place,

still coughing a little from the effects of the gas-tainted air he had inhaled.

The white beam slicked round the place. He jumped at a pile of boxes near the rifles. The woodwork was covered with labels and stencilled German markings. He lifted one box and dashed it to the ground—ammunition pouches tumbled out as the wood broke. He flung half a dozen boxes bearing the same markings to one side, then reached at another stack.

Jack grunted when he found that they contained a kind of small biscuit—and then he saw a big crate. He kicked at the top desperately; the wood splintered, and he tore out a plank with his hands. The odour of rubber assailed his nostrils; he saw queer-looking canisters—mica goggles, greyish fabric straps. Gas-masks—scores of them!

He wrenched at the wooden top of the crate, heaving the slats aside, then he dug in his hands and hauled out an armful of the masks, running with them to the entrance to the dug-out—just as more bombs burst in the quarry.

He saw Tom on the far side with a German mask on, running with another one in either hand. Jack dropped his load, and donned a mask for himself. There was a small, rounded box at the front of it, which hung heavily, and two straps passed over his head to hold the mask in position. Jack discovered a clip, which he pinched about his nostrils, then slipped a vulcanite tube into his mouth, the tube communicated directly with the container at the front, which absorbed all the gas passing through it.

The mask was cumbersome and awkward, but it was safe protection. The big goggles lent everything an odd, yellowish tint, but Jack could see clearly enough.

He ran forward, to where the trench sloped down from the low cliff. He dived into it, and met Smiler Glee. The Fourth-Former was still looking cheerful, but there was relief in his eyes when he saw the masks.

"Good egg!" he exclaimed. "We shall need 'em in a bit. The gas hasn't got into the trench yet—but it will in a little while. How d'you shove 'em on, Jack?"

Jack showed him, handed over some of the masks, and then crawled along the trench helping other fellows to get theirs on. None of the Remove boys had suffered any hurt.

Up above the two aeroplanes were wheeling in spirals, dropping their bombs as fast as they could. The things were harmless so far as the explosion was concerned—unless they made a direct hit, and none did that. But they absolutely drenched the place with gas.

"They'll attack now!" Jack found the lieutenant at his side, and as he spoke each of the 'planes above fired green rockets.

That was a signal, and the enemy answered it.

From out the folds of the hill-side, Jack saw hooded figures rising and come forward. Strange and hideous they were in their masks, with the great round, starting eyes of the goggles, and the ugly, bulging containers.

They came to the attack, stumbling over the uneven ground—and they found that the little British force were well placed for defence. One of the three machine-guns from the armoured car had been placed at each corner of the quarry, and the captured German weapon commanded the fourth corner.

Each of the weapons poured out a withering, sustained fire which no troops could have withstood. The Germans were attacking from close range, but the very shortness of the distance they had to traverse added to the deadliness of the fire from the beleaguered force.

Jack saw the enemy come through the now golden sunlight of the morning—dark shapes

against the green of the grass and the brown of the war-scarred hill-side. Their bayonets glittered, and the sun limned clearly the ugly masks that they wore.

Heavy and awkward the Germans advanced—and all along the trench in which Jack stood, expressionless masks were bent behind kicking rifles that blazed a leaden hail as fast as the defenders could work the bolts.

The attackers had expected to find the British demoralised by the gas attack. Instead, they found them better positioned and unhurt.

The assault withered and faded away. The Huns dropped back to the folds in the rough ground—save for still shapes which would never move again.

"Any casualties?" roared the officer, his voice muffled by the mask.

A man had a rifle bullet through his mask and his cheek was cut. But his mate was holding his nose with one hand and trying to fit one of the new German masks on him and to stanch the flow of blood at the same time.

Jack came to his aid, and they soon fixed the man up. Then the boy went back into the quarry with the lieutenant. Talking in the masks was not too easy, but it was clear that there would not be another attack for some little time, so they made an examination of the big guns.

They stripped the coverings from the whole lot of them—and then the artilleryman from the captured German machine-gun came trotting slowly across the quarry—he could not run fast because of his mask.

"Can I give a hand wi' this, sir?" he asked the officer. "You want to shove 'em out of action, don't you? The best way is to bung a shell in the breach of each with an instantaneous timing—then let her go. That'll blow the blessed muzzle off, an' the guns won't be no good after that!"

"There's lots of shells inside those dug-outs!" Jack exclaimed.

They went in to look at them. The artilleryman knew his job, and he soon got the hang of the timing on the enemy shells.

Jack and the officer helped to get one of them on to one of the little trucks, and they ran it into the open. The truck was just the right height from which to slide the shell into the breach of the first gun; the artilleryman set the fuse in the nose first, then they rammed the shell home.

"We'll want a charge now," said the man. "I saw plenty inside. Look here, sir—you leave this to the boy an' me. We'll do it. I saw some enemy field-guns coming up on my side o' the quarry an' I reckon——"

"I'll take a look at them," said the officer, and there was alarm in his voice as he hurried off. If the Germans got a battery of guns into action, they would soon make a mess of the defenders.

"This place'll be too hot to hold us in about ten minutes," the gunner told Jack. "Better do what you want to do good an' lively!"

He put his back into the job, and in what seemed no time at all they had a shell in each of the guns. Jack helped the man to place charges behind them and to lock the breeches—and it was just as they finished this that the first shell from the German battery screeched home.

Whe-e-e-w w w— Cr-r-r-rash!

"Wallop!" said the gunner cheerfully. "That one was about fifty yards off the mark—bet it hit a couple o' the blighters outside. Now we— All ready, sir!" he exclaimed, as the lieutenant came running up.

"We're in for it—there are two batteries just under the brow of the hill, and they're in a depression there so that we can't possibly

touch them with rifle or machine-gun fire! They'll plaster us with light stuff that can't do any harm to these big guns, and then rush when——"

He broke off, as the enemy batteries got properly into action.

Whew-ew-ew-ew! Whe-e-ew!

It seemed to Jack that the whole of the centre of the quarry was smothered with bursting shells. Vision was cut off by flying earth, smoke and dust. He crouched low by the big guns, and he heard bits pattering all about him; falling earth dabbled him lightly on the back and arm; shell-splinters struck the low cliff above him, smothering the three of them with slivers of rock.

"Warm work this!" the officer growled from behind his mask. "Once they start hitting that trench of ours, we'll be done. It's time we got out of this now—we don't want to sacrifice our men. How about——"

"All you've got to do to finish up these guns is to pull the lanyards," the artilleryman informed him. "But pullin' 'em's dangerous, because the blessed gun will explode straight off. We might tie bits o' cord to the lanyards an' then jerk 'em from the dug-outs. That——"

"All right. I'll tell the boys to get out of the trenches and retire," said the officer. "You two fellows clear off, and I'll see that these guns are disabled before I leave the quarry."

"Scuse me, sir—but there's nothin' doin'!" the gunner said, in his mask-muffled voice. "You look after the men, an' I'll see to—— Ouch!"

He staggered suddenly, and Jack saw his right hand slash over to his left shoulder.

"I've got it!" the gunner gasped. "Gosh—it feels—queer!"

His legs gave beneath him, and he sat down abruptly. The officer bent over him, and with swift fingers he ripped open the man's tunic and shirt. Beneath, Jack saw that a fragment from a bursting shell had taken the man high on the left shoulder—there was just a blur of blood about the torn flesh.

"Fix him, boy—it's nothing very much!" the officer exclaimed. "I'll give the order to retire!"

He hurried away. Jack bent and ripped the artilleryman's field dressing from the tiny pocket in the man's tunic. He took off the fellow's tunic, then tore his shirt down the back. He placed the soft gauze over the wound, and wrapped the khaki bandage around shoulder and arm.

"Has it—come through to the—other side?" the man asked him jerkily.

"No—afraid not!" Jack answered, and his teeth were gritted on the mouthpiece of his mask. "Hope I'm not hurting you, and——"

"You're doin' fine, mate," the man told him. "Just my luck to git hit when I'm needed. Gimme a swig out o' my water-bottle, will you—it's made me feel sort of shaky!" He drank from the bottle when Jack held it out to him, then insisted on putting on his tunic again, though it hurt him badly.

"I can use me right arm, anyway," he said. "That's enough to pull one o' them lanyards. There's some cord inside that dug-out, by the shells—stuff what was round those charges. That'll do to tie on to the lanyards!"

Jack carried out the job, with the artilleryman aiding where he could. All about them, shells were bursting from the hidden enemy batteries. Fragments hummed and whistled through the air, while from the trench surrounding the quarry khaki figures began to dash along the side of the place, making for the gate by which they had entered.

The Wye Valley side was still open to them to retreat, but unless they did so swiftly, it

was probable that the next German attack would completely surround them.

Jack saw Buster and Tom come towards him, recognising them only by their gait. Behind them was the officer, trotting close against the low cliff.

"All right Jack?" Buster asked as he came up. "All the others are bunking now, what—"

"We're goin' to bunk too as soon as we've settled these guns," Jack told him. "We're —"

"While you're fixing them, I'll settle these dug-outs," the artilleryman cut in quickly. "It's just struck me that if I start those time-fuses in there, an' lay them to the gun charges, the whole blessed lot will go up. I'll have a shot at that!"

He hurried away, as the lieutenant came up. "All ready?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Only—look out!"

Jack half heard, half saw the shell-burst that came near them. It landed almost under the muzzle of the nearest gun, and it was the very bulk of the great weapon which saved himself and his chums. But the officer was exposed.

He was bowled over by the explosion, and when the smoke and murk had cleared away, Jack saw him lying on his side.

"My legs—I think," the officer said. "No feeling in them!" His voice was quiet; Jack saw blood on his right thigh. Something had caught the lieutenant there, but his left leg was unhurt. He tried to struggle up, but he could not stand.

"Just a minute, sir," said Jack, then he went over to Buster and Tom.

"Get him out of it," he said swiftly. "I'll settle these guns while you carry him away; just shove a field-dressing round his leg. You can carry him if you give him a sort of bandy-chair—but look lively!"

They could not leave the officer to his fate—and it needed two to get him away. Buster and Tom obeyed, and their gas-masked figures were soon bending above the officer, while Jack hurried off to the gun furthest away from them.

He grabbed the lanyard with the cord attached. He looked round to see that there was no one within range who could get hurt, then he dropped flat to the ground at the full extent of the cord, caught his breath, and then jerked the thing with all his strength.

Cut Off!

THERE followed the most stupendous explosion that Jack had ever heard. He was bowled over and over for yards, but he was not hurt.

When he staggered to his feet, he saw that a great hole had been gouged out of the cliff behind, while the muzzle of the gun was sprayed out like the frayed end of a wax-vesta!

Jack's head was ringing from the shock of the explosion, and he could hardly see for the dust that had been smashed on to the goggles of his mask—but he dared not remove the thing yet, for he knew that gas would have collected thickly in the hollow of the quarry.

He wiped the dust partially away with the back of his hand, then staggered towards the next gun. He dropped flat—pulled the cord at the end of the lanyard—and was half buried by the loosened earth and chunks of shale that were torn from the wall behind. Luckily, only the fringe of the fall caught him, and he managed to struggle clear.

When he got up, he saw that the second gun had gone like the first—completely wrecked.

He looked about him. Tom and Buster were hurrying to the gate with the wounded officer

between them. He got a glimpse of the dug-out at the far end, and he saw the artilleryman come hurrying out. He was swaying a little from the effects of his wound as he came up to Jack; they met by the third of the big battery of guns.

"You've done—two of 'em!" the man gasped. "Good lad—and I've fired the fuse in there. She'll blow up in about fifteen minutes. What about— Hey! Look at that!"

Germans on the right were advancing now. Some of the retreating British were shooting to hold them off—but the enemy had seen what Jack was doing! Some were standing up and shooting towards the boy and the gunner—bullets whipping viciously about the pair.

"Gosh! They've seen us!" Jack gasped.

"All right—let's get on wi' the job!" the gunner exclaimed. "There ain't time for me to do that other dug-out now, but never mind. I'll do the gun at the far end, you fix this one!"

He moved away. Jack waited until he was well clear, then he dropped—and he took care to get what shelter he could from the second gun, which had already been put out of action.

The massive bulk of the base of the weapon protected him from the results of the explosion when he pulled the cord—and the third gun went the same way as the others.

Jack was just making for the fourth in the line, when the artilleryman let the one at the far end go, and Jack got a good impression of exactly what forces they were trifling with.

The front of the gun seemed to melt into a gigantic mass of orange flame, from the fringes of which rolled mighty clouds of smoke.

Jack was blown head over heels, but he staggered up once more and made for the next weapon. He saw the artilleryman, lying on his face—apparently knocked out by the explosion, but Jack could not tend him then.

He set the fourth gun off, then took shelter by its wreckage as he pulled the lanyard of the last weapon. In the moment before the explosion, he saw that there were Germans on either side of the quarry now—fighting with a little knot of Britishers by the gate.

Then the scene was blotted out as he pulled the cord.

He dived through the rolling smoke to where he had last seen the artilleryman. The fellow was sitting up, and struggling to get to his feet when Jack staggered up to him.

"That you—mate?" the man gasped. "She blew me yards—hurt my shoulder, too. Better leave me—can't run wi'—"

"Lean on me!" Jack gasped, and he staggered as he took the man's weight, but he managed to brace himself against it. His head was ringing like a bell, and everything seemed to be blanked out by misty, swirling smoke.

With an arm round the other's waist, he plunged forward, making for the quarry gate—their job done! There was nothing left now but to escape.

He remembered that there was fighting going on round the gate, and that they would not be able to get through it, so he went sheer across the quarry, chancing the shells that still seemed to be falling in the place.

A low mound led up to the trench at this side of the quarry, and it was as Jack climbed it and helped the artilleryman up that he realised the full hopelessness of their position.

About a hundred yards away, Buster and Tom had set the officer down, and the pair were lying side by side, firing madly to keep off a group of about twenty Germans who were charging down on them. Nearly a quarter of a mile down the slope to the valley, the valiant little group of soldiers were fighting to win through the cordon which the enemy had been drawing round the quarry.

Behind Jack, the six shattered hulks of the mighty enemy guns showed—absolutely useless now, and reeking in their own smoke.

But from every side of the quarry showed the leaping forms of the enemy, some stopping to fire at Jack and his companion, others rushing forward, yelling as they came, and with their bayonets gleaming in the sunlight that struggled through the dust and smoke.

Jack was unarmed—and so was his companion. They were completely cut off—and the enemy would have no mercy on them after what they had done to the guns!

Shaken by the explosions—burdened by a wounded man—Jack could do nothing. Buster and Tom could give him no help—their own position was almost as perilous.

The artilleryman looked back and he, too, saw that there was no hope—no chance against the masked fiends who were racing down at them.

Jack felt the man grip his fist.

"They've got us now," he said. "Good-bye, mate!" and his fingers closed warm and strong about Jack's hand in a last grip.

(Is it the finish? Can't Jack and the rest get out of this perilous situation in some way or other? They are at the mercy of the enemy, escape is hopeless, but—More thrilling surprises in next Wednesday's smashing chapters. Order your "Nelson Lee Library" IN ADVANCE!)

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Any enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

LOST BADGES.

ACTUALLY I have lost count of the number of lost badges. Requests for new ones have poured in on me, and though in many instances I have sent duplicates, I should like to point out that for the future this can only be done on the understanding that a member brings in a fresh reader as a slight acknowledgment.

In the instances under notice, the badges seem to have jumped clean into space.

A GO-AHEAD CLUB.

Percy Young, 122a, Wavertree Road, Edge Hill, Liverpool, tells me that the St. Frank's League Edge Hill Club, of which he is president, has been making a lot of progress. This club is a really up-to-date affair, with a bagatelle table, and a comfortable club-room where lemon squash, ginger-beer, etc., can be obtained. At 2d. per glass there has been a 100 per cent profit. The club is in a first-rate financial condition. A magazine is in course of preparation.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

H. A. Jones, 1, Lime Grove, Hooie, Chester, wishes to hear from readers overseas interested in stamp collecting and sport. He intends to get up an S.F.L. football team. Intending players should write to him.

George Witcombe, 10, Upper Arcade, St. James, Bristol, wishes to correspond with a reader in America who is interested in scouting, model making and sport.

Miss Anna J. Dahl, Waterman's Tavern, Sunderland, Co. Durham, wishes to correspond with members.

Harold G. Dell, Field View, Parsonage Barn, Ringwood, Hants, wishes to communicate with members with view to their joining his hobby club; club magazine.

Mercia Yoxall Bubbers, 115, Mortlake Road, Ilford, Essex, wishes to correspond with members in Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

J. Fox, 22, Fox Street, Hollinwood, Oldham, Lancs., wishes to hear from all readers in his district.

F. Bartlett, Granville House, Oxford Road, Jersey, C. I., wishes to hear from a Leagueite in New Zealand; hobbies, stamp collecting and cycling.

Albert Underwood, 28, Plymouth Road, Canning Town, London, E. 16, wishes to hear from chums in Canada, Australia and New Zealand; interested in all sports; he also wants to hear from members in his district. He further asks Charles Hewson, Puriri, Thames Val., Auckland, N.Z., to write.

Deryek W. Rowlandson, 11, Sackville Road, Hove, Sussex, asks Cecil Knowland, late of Mortlake, to write.

A. McCulloch, 97, Drumoyne Road, South Govan, Glasgow, wishes to hear from members in his district so as to form a club.

Charles M. Smart, 7, Copeley Hill, Erdington, Birmingham, wishes to hear from members in his district.

W. J. Benton, 7, Prospect Road, Hythe, Kent, wishes to hear from a member in Harrow.

James F. Hards, 16, Royal Road, Kennington, London, S.E. 17, wishes to hear from members in his district, and also from readers in South Africa and South America.

Henry R. Dexter, 77, Seymour Road, East Ham, London, E. 6, wishes to correspond with a reader in Wales.

Percy Young, 122a, Wavertree Road, Edge Hill, Liverpool, wishes to hear from members and readers with a view to their joining his club.

Good News!



“Let’s see the colours!”

These boys are all aglow with excitement over The New Meccano in Colours. The Plates enamelled in red and the Braced Girders in green, in combination with the shining steel Strips and bright brass Gear and Pulley-Wheels give a wonderful appearance to Meccano Bridges, Towers, Cranes, and the hundreds of other real engineering models that only Meccano can build.

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The New Meccano Book tells you all about it—in colours.

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THE NEW MECCANO

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"UNCLE HANDFORTH!"

(Continued from page 34.)

blood, too. There has certainly been an accident on this spot. But we must not make the mistake of assuming that Fullwood is the victim."

"But it couldn't be anybody else, sir," urged Handforth.

"Indeed! And why not?"

"Because Fullwood's footprints were the only ones——"

"They were the only ones that you saw," corrected Lee. "Did you go past this spot?"

"No, sir."

"Then how do you know that the victim was not somebody who was walking from Caistowe?" asked Lee shrewdly. "In that case, Fullwood walked straight on, without knowing anything about this accident. I will admit that the possibilities are grave, but we must take nothing for granted."

"It might have been somebody else!" muttered Clive happily. "I hadn't thought of that before! Let's rush down the road, and see if we can see any trace of footprints. Nobody has gone past this spot yet——"

But Dick Hamilton was already hurrying forward, flashing his electric torch on the ground, and from side to side. In the meantime, Lee was closely examining the exact spot of the accident again, and he suddenly rose to his feet with a rather different expression on his face.

"The victim was not Fullwood," he said, with infinite relief.

"Not Fullwood, sir!" shouted Clive. "Oh, how do you know?"

Before Lee could answer a yell came from Dick, who was fifteen yards further down the lane.

"Here we are!" shouted the Remove captain, with a note of joy. "Here's the victim—a rabbit!"

"A rabbit!" howled Handforth.

He dashed up, and stared into the ditch, where Dick Hamilton was directing his torchlight. Sure enough, there was the unfortunate animal—a mere mangled mass, although the head was whole. Apparently the body had been flung there by the motorist after he had picked it up.

Nelson Lee was looking very amused.

"Obviously, our friend, the motorist, was a man of humanitarian leanings," he said. "I am afraid I should not have been so kindly, in similar circumstances. I see no reason to risk one's life to save that of a rabbit. The motorist obviously saw the wretched creature, and in attempting to avoid it, he experienced a bad skid. It was probably the skid which killed the rabbit."

Handforth was looking rather sheepish.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," he began.

"And so you ought to be, Handforth," said Lee severely. "If you want to know

the honest truth, I suspected something of this kind from the very first. I am only too well aware of your panicky methods."

"Oh, I say, sir!"

"You may well protest," frowned Lee. "Do you realise that the Headmaster is in a state of acute anxiety all this time? You must curb this tendency of yours, Handforth, to jump to melodramatic conclusions. I found a number of rabbit hairs in the blood just now, but Nipper discovered the body at the same moment. So there can be no question as to the truth of what happened."

"But what about Fullwood, sir?" asked Dick Hamilton.

"Fullwood, of course, was merely walking along the road, and is probably wandering about Caistowe at this very moment," replied Lee.

"Well, thank goodness there's been no tragedy," said Clive, with a deep breath.

"Hallo! There are some bikes coming down the lane——"

"The news of Fullwood's premature decease has spread, apparently," said Nelson Lee dryly. "I expect we shall have a whole crowd of boys here during the next five minutes."

Lee was right. Cyclists came up in twos and threes and in groups. And in the meantime Handforth was being severely ragged by Church and McClure, by Russell, and by Dick Hamilton.

"If I'd have had an ounce of sense, I should have known!" said Church indignantly. "You're a fine detective, Handy! Fancy jumping to conclusions, without making any investigations!"

"How was I to know?" demanded Handforth, in his own defence. "I saw that blood, and I naturally——"

"Well, we won't argue," put in Dick, with a grave expression on his face. "This little incident is cleared up, but nothing can alter the fact that Fullwood is still missing. And the sooner we organise this search, the better."

"You think it may be serious still?" asked Clive anxiously.

"I don't want to be a croaker, or anything like that," said Dick, "but Fullwood thinks he's going to be sacked—he doesn't know that he's been pardoned. And I don't think it'll be so easy to find him as some of you imagine."

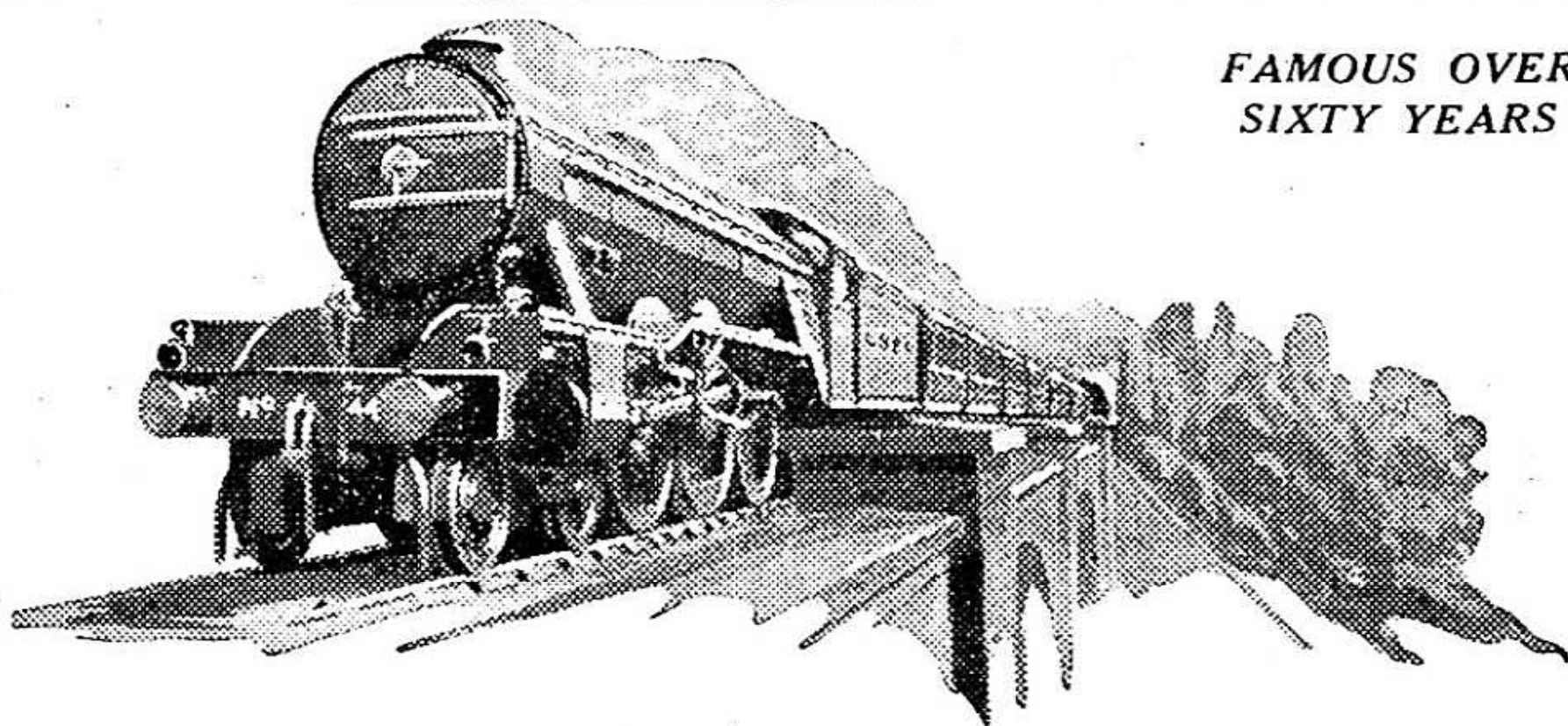
And there was plenty of wisdom in the Remove captain's statement.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was still missing, and although the clues led to the assumption that he was in Caistowe, there was no direct proof of this. Fullwood was running away from school, and he was lost.

Lost on the wildest night the juniors could remember!

THE END.

(What has happened to Fullwood? You will read all about it next week in "THE REMOVE ON THE WARPATH!" the grand, concluding story of the Honour series.)



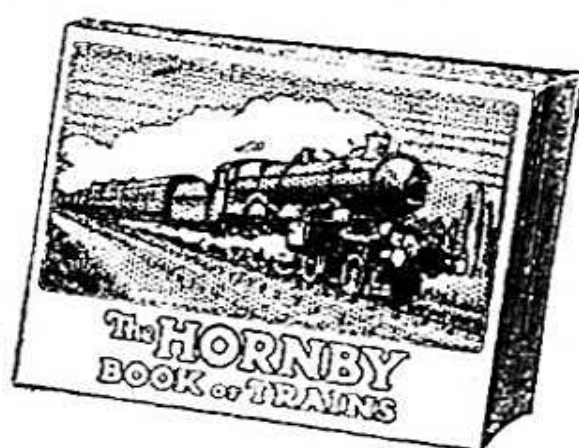
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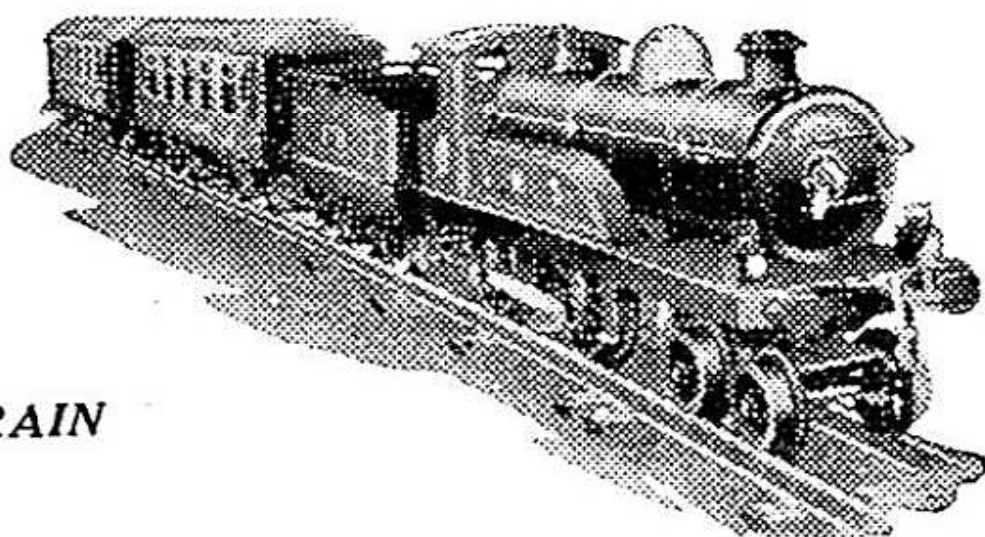
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