

READ ABOUT **HANDFORTH AS A DETECTIVE** THIS WEEK!

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The **REMOVE on the WARPATH!**

A rollicking long complete story of school life and adventure,
introducing the famous Boys of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 33.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

December 18th, 1926.



Handforth crashed the axe at the roulette wheel with all his strength. The startled gamblers saw the fragments of the shattered mechanism hurtle across the room. "That's done you—you rotters!" Handy gasped.

THE REMOVE ON THE WARPATH!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

*A Rousing Long Complete Story of the Famous
Boys of St. Frank's.*

CHAPTER 1.

THE SEARCH-PARTY.

THE snow came driving down in blinding flurries, carried stingingly on the high wind. Indeed, on this particular December evening, the coast of Sussex was visited by a veritable blizzard.

And there, on the little-frequented lane between Bellton Village and the seaport of Caistowe, a curious crowd of snow-smothered figures stood in the lights of many bicycle lamps, to say nothing of the headlamps of two cars.

Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous Housemaster detective of St. Frank's, was talking.

"Now, boys, be off as quickly as you can," he said crisply. "It's close upon nine o'clock, and I don't want you out too late. But Fullwood must be found, and brought back. I wish you all success."

"We'll find him, sir!"

"Rather!"

"Trust us, Mr. Lee!"

The Removites chorused their eager assurances, and Handforth, the celebrated leader of Study D, looked round at the other fellows with disdain.

"You'd better remember that I'm in charge of this search-party," he said tartly. "I started out on it, and——"

"And found a dead rabbit, and thought Fully had been killed!" said Dick Hamilton sweetly. "We know all about it!"

Handforth flushed.

"Anybody's liable to make a bloomer, isn't he?" he asked indignantly. "That affair's over and done with, anyhow. Let's start."

"Hear, hear!"

The juniors were quite cheerful. In fact, the majority of them were feeling happy and lighthearted. Only a little time earlier they had been filled with apprehension, fearing that the fugitive schoolboy had been the victim of a tragedy.

Fullwood, of the Remove, had run away, and an organised search-party was attempting to find him and bring him back. The fact that it was snowing hard, and that a gale was blowing, only added to the general excitement. It provided a spice to the whole adventure. It was the first snow of the winter, and the St. Frank's boys were reveling in it.

"My suggestion, boys, is that you should get to Caistowe as quickly as possible, and then spread out," Nelson Lee continued. "Take various routes, and if you are unsuccessful during the first half-hour, scour the countryside, making as many inquiries as you can as you proceed."

"And what if we're still unable to find him, sir?" asked Dick Hamilton.

"In that case, Nipper, you had better return to the school," replied Lee. "All of you must work on the understanding that, whatever happens, you must be back at the school not later than midnight. I cannot

have you roaming about in this snowstorm during the small hours. If you fail in Caistowe, spread out as I have already said, and be prepared to get to St. Frank's by twelve o'clock."

"And then give up the hunt, sir?" asked Handforth rebelliously.

"Yes," said Lee. "The search must then be postponed until to-morrow."

"But supposing poor old Fully is dying in a snowdrift?" asked Handforth. "Or supposing he's lying in a ditch with a crooked ankle, or something, sir?"

"At the moment, Handforth, we are not supposing anything," replied Lee, with a frown. "And I have already warned you against jumping to melodramatic conclusions. It was owing to you that most of us are here now. You dashed to the school, reporting that Fullwood had been killed, and that——"

"Well, anybody might have thought so, sir," protested Handforth. "We found a bloodstain, and——"

"Exactly, but we needn't go over it again," interposed Lee. "It is a rough night, but I do not think there is any actual danger of Fullwood being in peril. Let us remain level-headed. He has run away from school, and we are naturally anxious to get him back. But he is not a child, and I hardly think he is the kind of boy to collapse in a snowdrift and perish."

"But he might be wandering about in despair, sir," put in Clive Russell quickly. "And a chap in that mood is liable to be reckless——"

"Whatever Fullwood's despair, it can only be of a mild type," said the Housemaster. "In all probability he will wander back to the school, even if you don't find him. He is not the first boy who has run away—and the majority of such rash youngsters generally return. Their folly does not last long. So, if you do not soon find him, remember my instructions."

Nelson Lee went to his car, started it up, and was soon on his way back to St. Frank's fully satisfied that he had left the search in capable hands. He wanted to get back to the school, in order to allay any fears that the Headmaster might be entertaining.

There was nothing very tragic in Fullwood's flight.

He had visited a disreputable boxing booth in Bannington—with quite good motives—on the previous Wednesday, and this escapade had reached the headmaster's ears. So he had sent for Fullwood, and had told him that he was writing to the boy's father, so that the latter could come down and take him away from the school.

It wasn't a case of expulsion,—but it was first cousin to it!

Fullwood, rather than face the wrath of his parent, had run away. Even now his Form fellows did not know where he was. But earlier, Handforth had followed a trail of footprints, and these had led towards

Caistowe. So Caistowe was the most promising hunting ground.

"Well, you heard what the guv'nor said," remarked Dick Hamilton, as the juniors prepared to get their bicycles ready. "There's no need for me to repeat it, but remember—keep in pairs as much as you can, and if anybody finds Fullwood, do your best to let the rest know."

Handforth was looking obstinate.

"It's all very well to treat this thing lightly, but I believe it's serious," he declared. "And if we don't locate the ass by midnight, do you think I could sleep. How could any of us go to bed, knowing that Fully is wandering about in the snowstorm? It's all very well for Mr. Lee to talk like that, but——"

"There's not one chance in a hundred that he'll be missing at the end of an hour's search," broke in Hamilton. "So let's get busy, and jabber a bit less. We'd better adopt a settled system."

"Go ahead, Dick—you're the chap for this sort of thing," cried one of the others.

"My idea is to get to Caistowe in a body, and then divide up," said Dick. "We'll go in different directions, as the guv'nor said, but all come back to the same place at the end of half an hour, and report. We needn't make any plans beyond that. Fresh ideas can be thought of, if necessary."

This was a businesslike suggestion, and everybody responded to it.

So a general move was made, and the cycles were mounted. Handforth and Church and McClure climbed into the former's Austin Seven, and it was Handforth's intention to be in Caistowe first. He wanted to be the fellow who told Fullwood the good news.

For the unfortunate Ralph Leslie was wandering about under the impression that he was no longer a St. Frank's boy. On the morrow, he would be taken away by his father. He didn't know that the headmaster had pardoned him, mainly owing to the influence of Dick Hamilton and Clive Russell and Handforth, and one or two other stalwarts.

So, in a way, there was a spice of comedy in the whole affair.

Fullwood was running away from the school when he had no reason to fear anything. As matters now stood, his father wouldn't know anything, and he was at liberty to return to the Ancient House, and no questions would be asked. And the Removites were frantically searching for him to tell him the news.

"This is what comes of the fathead running off the rails for an hour!" said Handforth, as he sat at the wheel of his little car, driving through the snow. "Anyhow, Fullwood's had a pretty rough time of it, and if he hasn't profited by his lesson, I'll eat my hat!"

"You mean that beastly night club affair?" asked Church.

"Of course I do," said Handforth, frowning. "It's time that giddy place was raided and smashed up. It was Forrest's fault, in the first place—the scheming cad! He trapped Fully into it, and Fully was fascinated by the roulette wheel."

"He was jolly weak," said McClure, shaking his head.

"Well, he admits it, and that's something," said Handforth. "He knows he was a fool, and he's told us so. You can't tread on a chap after he's confessed his wrongs, can you? He lost twenty pounds of Russell's money that night, and he's had nothing but trouble ever since."

"Yes, he was practically sacked because of that," agreed Church. "My stars! Doesn't it just show you what can happen through one little burst of doggishness? Nearly sacked, and now he's run away!"

"But he was sacked for appearing in that booth," objected McClure.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Handforth. "Why did he go in the booth? To earn some money, so that he could make up that lost cash! So it all boils down to the same thing—he's had endless trouble and misery ever since he skidded."

"There's one thing—it'll soon be over now," said McClure, with satisfaction. "I'll bet we shall find him wandering about in the square in Caistowe. He couldn't go anywhere by train, because the last one had gone before he could get there. Besides, if he had been going by train, he would have started from Bellton."

Handforth gave a sudden jump in his seat, and the car swerved.

"Look out!" said Church, in alarm.

"I've just thought of something!" shouted Handforth.

"Well, you'd better wait until the car's stopped before you think again!" growled Church. "You nearly had us into the ditch that time."

"Are you saying I can't drive?" roared his leader.

"Of course you can drive, but these roads are as slippery as glass," said Church. "Unless you're careful, we shall skid from here into Caistowe, and arrive in the town backwards! You shouldn't get such sudden thoughts."

"Listen!" said Handforth tensely. "Fullwood's come to Caistowe, hasn't he?"

"So we think——"

"Rats! It's a cert!" continued Handforth. "At any rate, we know that he made for Caistowe in the first place, and the chances are that he's there now."

"Well, what about it?"

"Caistowe," said Handforth, "is a seaport."

"Go hon!" jeered Church.

"There are ships in the harbour," said Handforth impressively.

"You're simply full of useful information!" said McClure, in wonder.

"Caistowe is a seaport," repeated Handforth, with a glare. "Therefore, it stands to reason that Fullwood has decided to run away to sea."

His chums weren't quite so mocking as usual.

"By Jupiter, though, there's something in that idea!" said McClure thoughtfully.

"Something in it!" retorted Handforth in triumph. "I've hit the nail on the head. So the first thing we shall do will be to scour the harbour. And here we are in the town. Good egg! Now for the search!"



CHAPTER 2.

FULLWOOD DECIDES.

None of the promenade shelters, to the leeward side, a figure was huddled. Overhead, the wind was roaring in from the sea, and away to the left the surf was thundering ceaselessly on the beach. But to the right was the harbour, on the other side of the breakwater. And here there were many fishing boats, tossing restlessly at their moorings.

The figure moved slightly and peered out along the promenade.

"My hat!" murmured a voice. "What a fearful night!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was by no means cheerful. In fact, to be quite blunt, he was in the last depths of misery and despair. And here he was, in Caistowe. The search-party was not making any mistake in going into the town.

Fullwood's position was unenviable.

He had run away from school, but it was an unfortunate fact that his pockets were empty. He did not possess a single penny. But this had not deterred him from setting forth. Anything to escape the ordeal of meeting his father, and explaining his follies, and being taken away from St. Frank's in disgrace.

The Head had told him that there would be no expulsion, and that he would simply go away with his father, as though nothing had happened. But Fullwood knew how different this would be in actual practice.

Long before the time of departure came, there would be rumours floating about, and when he left, in his father's company, there would be countless eyes upon him—the eyes of fellows who knew of his disgrace, who knew he was being removed from the school, virtually by order of the Head.

And Fullwood had shrunk from that ordeal.

In the old days, Fullwood had been a reckless "sport," of very much the same type as Bernard Forrest—who now held undisputed sway as the leader of the fast set. But more recently Fullwood had seen the error of his ways, and for some time he had been thoroughly decent.

He had become a genuine sportsman. The Remove had grown to respect him, and he had found that life was much sweeter now, with the good feeling of his Form fellows, than it had been before.

So it was natural that he should shrink from the public exposure. Rather than remain at St. Frank's, with the finger of scorn pointing at him from all directions, he had bolted. He knew that there were staunch friends in the Remove for him—his chum, Clive Russell, Handforth, Reggie Pitt, Dick Hamilton, and others. They wouldn't scorn him, and they wouldn't revile him. But there were plenty of others who would be only too ready to gloat over his downfall.

So, in running away, he had taken the easier road.

The easier? He wasn't so sure about it now that he had actually embarked upon the adventure. And as he crouched there, in that cold shelter on the Caistowe promenade, he pondered over his position. There was little fear of an interruption, for there wasn't a soul in sight. The nearest lamp-post was nearly a hundred yards away—for in the winter-time the promenade was not illuminated.

And there was nothing but snow everywhere—snow on the walks, snow driving down in whirling flurries. And with the thunder of the surf in his ears, added to the shrieking of the gale, Fullwood felt lonely indeed.

He had no thought of being searched for. Curiously enough, this aspect of his plight did not occur to him. Besides, it wasn't very late yet—and he was satisfied that nobody at St. Frank's knew of his move.

He recalled the recent events, as he sat closer into the corner, and attempted to warm his chilled hands by rubbing them. At six-thirty he had seen the headmaster, and had learned the dread edict. By seven o'clock he had bolted—without even seeing any of the juniors again. They didn't know where he was, or what his plans were. In all probability, nobody had given him a thought.

Yes, perhaps there was one—Clive Russell.

Clive was Fullwood's own chum, and they had been the closest friends ever since Ralph Leslie had mended his ways. It was largely owing to the Canadian boy's influence that Fullwood had become an honourable fellow. There was also the influence of Reggie Pitt's sister. Winnie had done him a lot of good. His eyes softened somewhat as he thought of her, and as he thought of Clive.

"Well, I haven't left poor old Clive in the dark," muttered Fullwood, with a little sigh of satisfaction. "Dear old chap! He'll be a bit worried, of course, but he'll know that it's for the best."

Just before leaving St. Frank's, Fullwood had given a scribbled note—sealed in an old envelope—to Cuttle, the school porter. And he had told Cuttle not to deliver that note into Clive Russell's hands until bed-time.

And it wasn't bed-time yet, by any means, so Clive was still ignorant. At least, this is what Fullwood assumed. He did not know that Cuttle had become rather alarmed, and had handed over the note shortly after seven—less than forty minutes after Fullwood's own departure. The big search-party was the result.

"It's a rotten night!" muttered Fullwood. "Perhaps it's the right kind of night for this job, though. What else do I deserve?"

His thoughts strayed back to St. Frank's. He pictured himself within the cosy walls of Study I, in the Ancient House. Clive was there now, probably, doing his prep. and wondering why Fullwood hadn't come in.

Then Fullwood shook himself and set his teeth.

"It's no good looking backwards!" he muttered fiercely. "St. Frank's is all over for me. The Head told me that I had forfeited all right to be there, and I expect he knows best. St. Frank's is in the past. I've got to look at my position. I've got to decide what I shall do."

He glanced out into the snowy waste.

"What can I do?" he went on rather helplessly. "I can't go to a hotel, I haven't got any money. I can't walk about all night in this storm, and if I stay here I shall freeze."

His position was a serious one. Certainly, he had a gold watch in his pocket. That might be useful, he decided. He could go to a hotel, stay the night, and then pawn his watch the next day. Out of the money he could pay the bill, and have enough left over for his fare to some other place. This thought cheered him up for a time, but he suddenly thought of a snag.

"It wouldn't do," he muttered. "What's going to happen if I go to a Caistowe hotel? They'll know I'm a St. Frank's chap, and they'll probably ring up the school. No, I've got to get on the move. It's the only way. I've got to get out of Caistowe and put as many miles between St. Frank's and myself as I can. Either that, or I can go back—"

But he didn't allow this thought to get hold of him.

Go back? Never! He wasn't a coward of that sort—he wasn't going to let them have the laugh over him. Only a weakling would crawl back, after setting out so boldly. Even Clive would despise him. Fullwood was so determined on this course that he resolved that he would run for his life if he even caught sight of a St. Frank's cap.

And, after all, what else did he deserve? He had brought all this on his own head, through his fantastic folly in giving way to the accursed temptation of the roulette table. He had made a terrible blunder then, and who was he to growl, now that he was paying the price?

And yet he rather felt that he had paid the price already. For he had been living

in a kind of nightmare for days—for weeks. Hadn't he suffered enough, to compensate for that single hour of rashness? But Fullwood was beginning to learn that a moment's weakness may result in endless suffering.

He had a fear that there would be a hue and cry, but not until the morrow. Or, at least, not until much later in the evening. Before then he would have to get away somewhere. The thought of recapture made him turn hot. To be dragged back to the school, so that he should suffer the ordeal of being expelled, was even worse than the prospect of going back voluntarily.

So he was anxious to get away somewhere, so that no trace of him could be found. Then, later—in a few weeks' time—he could communicate with Clive Russell, and let him know that he was safe and sound.

He had already thought of the harbour. If he could find a ship, he might be able to sneak on board somehow. But, as far as he could see, there was nothing in the shape of a ship—only these tossing fishing boats. And what would be the use of getting on to one of them? He would only be put ashore again. His hopes had dropped to zero when he had discovered that there were no ships alongside the quay.

Handforth's guesswork—his idea that Fullwood would attempt to get to sea—was pretty near the mark, after all. And yet it had not been such a long shot on Handforth's part. Fullwood wanted to get away—the very fact that he had flown proved that. And what more natural than to find a friendly soul, who would take him on board one of the ships, that were constantly coming into Caistowe?

Most of these vessels were just coasting ships, but that would be the best kind for Fullwood. Perhaps he could go on one of them as far as Southampton, or Portsmouth, or even right into the Thames. Or he might even go the other way—to Plymouth or Bristol. It didn't matter which, for he had no destination.

At last he came out of the shelter, and stood there, looking about him, a forlorn figure. It all seemed so hopeless. Everything was against him. The weather had conspired to make his plight ten times more difficult than it might have been.

How could he walk along the country roads in this blizzard? He was hungry, too—and cold. He was so cold that he could hardly feel his feet, and his hands were numbed and senseless.

He walked along the promenade, and came to the breakwater—which was a kind of pier, which ran right out. He stood there, staring. He was seeing something which had been invisible earlier. There was just a little lull in the fury of the storm now, and the snow had almost stopped.

And now he could see lights—big lights. What could they be? Surely they were the lights of a steamer of some kind?



CHAPTER 3.

THE STOWAWAY!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD'S heart gave a jump.

"It's a ship!" he muttered tensely. "I didn't notice it before—it must have been hidden by the driving snow. By Jove! I wonder

But he didn't allow himself to get any real hopes.

Of course, it would be impossible to persuade one of the officers, or a member of the crew, to take him on board. He couldn't sign on as cabin boy! That sort of thing wasn't done nowadays. And if he was seen hanging about, he would be quickly asked what his business was.

No, there was only one way.

If he was to leave Caistowe in that ship, he would have to go as a stowaway! The thought, in a sense, was rather thrilling. Fullwood had as much adventure in him as the average boy, and perhaps more. Now that he had something definite to concentrate his attention upon, a great deal of his misery left him. Here was a chance! A ship was lying in the harbour—not out where he couldn't reach it, but moored against the quay—with a gangway, probably, in a fixed position! At any rate, it was well worth looking into.

"If only I could get on board!" muttered Fullwood. "I might be able to steal over the gangway, and then creep below. And once I'm there, I shall be warm, at least. What a thought!"

He looked round him cautiously, but still there was not a soul in sight. At this time of the evening, the front was generally deserted, and on such a night as this, there was a ready explanation for the absence of any human beings. Nobody ventured forth unless business took them.

Fullwood's business was very important!

He walked down the breakwater, but was not troubled by any snow. Here, there was scarcely a speck to be seen, for the high wind was not allowing it to settle on the flat concrete. As fast as it came down it was whirled away, and piled up against every buttress and projection. But the quay itself was swept as clean as though a hundred men had been along it with brooms.

Fullwood's hopes proved to be justified.

There was a ship there—a big ship. At least, it was big to him, although it was only a comparatively small tramp steamer. She was a vessel who called at Caistowe as regularly as clockwork at different intervals throughout the year—engaged on a settled trade. At present, she was, apparently, deserted. There were lights showing, and other lights could be seen behind the ports; but on her decks there was no movement, and even the gangway was fixed, just as he had pictured.

He began to realise that the wildness of the night, instead of being a great handicap for him, was probably a very real benefit. Had the evening been calm, the look-out would probably have spotted him at once, and would not have allowed him to get near the gangway without shouting a challenge.

But to-night, with all this snow and cold, it was quite on the cards that the look-out was cosily taking shelter in the chart-room, or in some other snug place. At any rate, Fullwood could see nobody.

"Hang it, what's the good of being funky?" he asked. "The only way is to go boldly on board, and take a chance."

He smiled at himself for his former fears.

It would be easy. He would simply walk on board, and if nobody came forward, all would be well. He might be able to slip below unseen. But it wouldn't matter if anybody did accost him. He would just ask for "Captain Johnson." He would be told that he'd come to the wrong ship, and he could walk off again. This would be far better than sneaking on board like a would-be stow-away in a cheap film.

So, having come to this decision, Fullwood marched straight up as though he had every right in the world. He went over the gangway, arrived on deck, and looked about him. His heart was beating rapidly. So far he hadn't been spoken to. He walked along the deck, and found a sheltered place where there was a stairway leading downwards.

"It's—it's impossible!" he murmured.

He half hesitated before going below. He could smell oil, tar, and numerous other odours. The ship didn't strike him as being particularly clean. And down below there, everything was dark.

Fullwood made the mistake of assuming that the vessel's crew were on board. As a matter of fact, they were all ashore. The ship was simply in charge of a watchman, and there were possibly one or two others somewhere about. But on deck there was not a soul.

He ventured below, using the same methods as before. He walked boldly, and was prepared to ask for "Captain Johnson" if anybody came along and confronted him. But, perhaps because he was prepared, nobody came at all. This was easier than anything he had imagined.

Once below, he felt tremendously excited.

It was warm here—gratefully warm, after the coldness of the wind, and the cutting of the driven snowflakes. He couldn't quite tell where he was—he didn't know whether he was in a quarter that contained store-rooms, or cabins.

It didn't matter much, anyhow. The main thing was to hide somewhere—to conceal himself so that he would be on board when the ship left port. That was the scheme to work for.

So he felt his way along, still in the darkness, and his numbed fingers told him that he was in a corridor. And then, suddenly, he paused. Was it his imagination, or did he

hear voices? He stood listening, his heart nearly ceasing its beat in his anxiety.

Yes, sure enough—voices!

And not only voices, but stamping feet, too. They seemed to be coming nearer. He heard them approaching the stairway—they were coming down! That meant that he would be discovered at once, and thrown ashore.

Feeling his way frantically now, he suddenly came upon a door handle. He turned it, and the door opened. Fullwood pushed, and then he darted through. With a gasp, he closed the door.

And what a difference here! It was not merely warm, but stifling, after the coldness of the night outside. He looked round him, and tried to penetrate the intense blackness. But it was no good. He hadn't any idea where he was. He wondered if this was something to do with the engine-room—if, when he took a step forward, he would plunge down some unseen shaft.

"What a fool!" he breathed suddenly.

He remembered that he had some matches on him, and he fumbled for them, and at last found them. He struck one, and held it out.

"Well I'm blessed!" he whispered, not without apprehension.

For he was in a well-appointed cabin. There was an electric light overhead, and the little apartment was evidently heated by a radiator. Outside, in the corridor, he heard those voices again. They were drawing nearer.

"Here's a fine go!" muttered Fullwood breathlessly. "I've got on board all right, but I'll bet I've walked straight into the captain's cabin! And it's ten-to-one that this is the skipper himself coming! Oh, corks! What's to be done?"

A dozen alarming thoughts passed through his mind. Now that he was actually here, he marvelled at the ease of it. The door of the cabin hadn't even been locked! He hadn't seen anybody, and he had just walked down as though he had owned the place. And what would be the result if he was found?

The captain would probably mistake him for a pilferer—a thief! And it was on the cards that he would be not only pitched ashore, but hauled off to the police-station. Here was a fine situation!

And there was nowhere to hide.

The cabin wasn't big. The furniture, although cosy looking, was compact. There was a table, but a cat could scarcely have hidden under there. By this time Fullwood had struck another match, and the fresh light revealed something which he had previously missed.

On the farther side of the cabin there was a big locker—a wide affair, with cushions on the top. Fullwood judged, in a moment, that it would be big enough to accommodate him—providing it was empty. The chances were that it would be full to the top. Still, there was no harm in looking.

Only a few seconds had elapsed, but it seemed to the excited schoolboy that many



"Something moved inside here!" Captain Boom's voice thundered through the cabin, as he bent and raised the lid of the locker. "By Jamaica!" he ejaculated, as he beheld the crouching figure of Fullwood. "What's the meaning of this?"

minutes had passed. He hurried to the locker, and pulled at it. The top came up at once, and he held his match so that he could see in.

"My goodness!" he breathed thankfully.

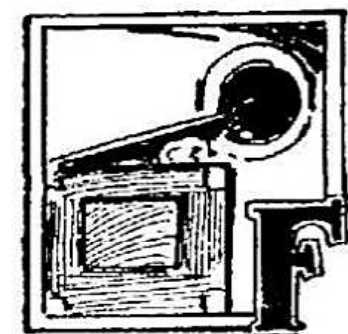
The locker was big enough to contain two people, only one end being filled with clothing.

"Infernal nuisance!" came a voice to his startled ears. "Where's that blamed Petersen? What's the good of leaving a man like that with any orders? No lights—nothing ready—"

"It's a bad night, Garson," said another voice, which struck Fullwood as being familiar. "By all the sharks! I've seen a few bad nights on this coast, but I'm glad enough to be in port!"

"You're always in port, ain't you?" said the other voice. "What about me? I've got to sail to-morrow—"

Fullwood heard the door handle turn, and he was galvanised into activity. He dropped into the locker, and allowed the cushioned lid to drop back into place.



CHAPTER 4.

A SIGNIFICANT COINCIDENCE

ULLWOOD crouched down, hardly daring to breathe.

To his relief, he found that he could stretch himself out with a fair amount

of comfort. And through the sides of the

locker he could see little chinks of light. There were cracks in the woodwork, evidently. And the two men who had just entered had switched on the electric light. They were now moving about noisily, and it seemed to Fullwood that they must discover him at any moment.

He knew that if he made the slightest sound he would be betrayed. The scraping of his foot against the side of the locker, a movement of his hand or arm—any little adjustment of his limbs would be sufficient to advertise his presence.

So he held himself rigid, and waited tensely.

"Yes, Phineas, you're one of the lucky ones," said the first voice. "Retired—soft job ashore, eh?"

"Avast with your ravin'!" said the other man. "A soft job, did ye say? There's many a time I feel I'd like to be aboard ship again, shoutin' orders from the bridge. It's not so soft, Cap'n Garson, bein' a butler."

"Butler?" murmured Fullwood. "By Jove!"

He knew now. The owner of that second voice was none other than Captain Phineas Boom, the old sea dog who was butler to Commander Rudd, R.N.—retired. Fullwood knew him quite well as, indeed, did all the other St. Frank's fellows.

For Captain Boom had once come to St. Frank's, and had attempted to quell a barring-out—only to find that his seafaring methods were quite useless in a big public

school. The Remove, in particular, had beaten him. But the old skipper bore no malice—he was on the best of terms with the boys of St. Frank's.

Fullwood had expected to hear another voice—that of Jiggs. Mr. Jiggs was Captain Boom's old mate, and he now worked in the same house, as valet. The pair had been together for more years than they cared to remember.

"I reckon you'll take a drop, eh, Phineas?" said Captain Garson, in a laughing voice. "I never expected to see you in Caistowe to-night."

"I wouldn't be here, you can be sure, if it wasn't for this snow!" said Captain Boom. "May I never cross the line again, but I'm blamed if the car didn't go wrong, and here am I stranded, with no chance of getting home."

"Well, I dare say you'll survive!" chuckled Garson—who was evidently the captain of the ship. "Haven't seen you for months, Phineas. You're getting fat and flabby, by the look of ye. There's nothing like the shore life for making a man get out of condition."

"By grog!" growled Captain Boom. "You ain't much of an Apollo yourself, Sam! You've been at sea for the last ten years, and you're more flabby than I am. Hold hard—hold hard! Avast, there! Great hurricanes! Do you want to fill the glass up with that pison?"

"The best drop o' rum along the south coast," declared Captain Garson, with pride. "Sit ye down, Phineas——"

"I'll use the locker," said Captain Boom.

Fullwood heard a heavy weight descend upon the seat overhead. Indeed, there was such a creaking that he half expected the whole thing to collapse. And after the first few moments of suspense, he was glad. For this continual creaking, whenever Captain Boom moved, made it possible for him to shift his position without any fear of detection.

He was getting hot, too. There was a certain amount of ventilation in that locker, owing to the numerous cracks—but he was hoping that these two old cronies would not sit too long over their grog.

"By all the Arctic blasts!" exclaimed the old captain. "Ye're right about this rum, Sam! Just the kind Jiggs would like, bust his sides! Not as he deserves any, the half-witted son of a sea mongrel!"

"Ay, I was wondering about Jiggs," said Garson. "Isn't he allus with you, Phineas? What's the matter with him—laid up?"

Captain Boom gave a loud roar—a roar which spoke powerfully of indignation and anger.

"Jiggs!" he thundered. "Sink my rum rations! I've seen a few fools in my time, Sam, but Jiggs is the biggest! A whole month's money he lost last week. Clean gone, mark ye, in a single evening!"

Captain Garson laughed.

"Nothing very unusual about that," he

chuckled. "Half my crew lose their money like that——"

"Ay, but Jiggs has been ashore for years now—and he's an officer, ain't he?" demanded Captain Boom. "My fust mate for years! A man like him ought to have more sense. But I've seen rabbits with more brain than Jiggs, sink him for a derelict!"

"It's no good getting angry——"

"I'm a man of fixed ideas, Sam," said Captain Boom soberly. "I don't hold with gamblin'. No, Sam—never did. And here's Jiggs, the slab-sided jellyfish, goin' to some night-club in Bannington, playin' roulette! Ay, ye can stare at me, Sam! By the heat of the tropics, I'm a-tellin' you the truth! Roulette, if ye please! Cards ain't good enough for Jiggs! It's roulette he must have—like as if he was at Monte Carlo!"

Fullwood nearly gave himself away by his sudden gasp.

A night club in Bannington! Roulette! By some strange coincidence, Captain Boom was talking about that very place where Fullwood had experienced his own hour of weakness! Fullwood was utterly amazed.

And yet, afterwards, when he came to think over the matter, he knew that it wasn't much of a coincidence. What could be more natural? There could not be two such night-clubs in the neighbourhood. And Fullwood knew that the promoters of the establishment had been getting clients from all sorts of surrounding places. Indeed, there was a man in Caistowe who acted as a tout for the club, especially among the seafaring men who were on leave, with all their money in their pockets.

And Jiggs being, perhaps, a bit of a gambler himself, had been induced to go to that club by this rascally tout. So it wasn't really a coincidence—it was only what one might expect.

"I didn't know as there was roulette to be had round here," said Captain Garson, with interest. "Maybe you'll tell me where——"

"Swab my sides!" roared the other. "So ye'd like to go along there, eh? Sam, I'm surprised at ye! A man of your experience! I've had enough trouble with Jiggs, poor fool! That man fair makes me boil, Sam! It don't matter what ye say to him, he don't learn! I warned him afore he went—I told him what he might expect, but it wasn't a bit of good. Howlin' typhoons! That man had an idea that he was going to win a hundred pounds—on a system!"

He gave a grunt of disgust, and Fullwood heard a gurgling sound. Evidently Captain Boom was resorting to the grog in order to restore his normal composure.

"And that's not all!" he went on, as a clink of glass sounded. "No, Sam! It ain't all, not by half! May I never see the Southern Cross again, but that roulette table is on the crook!"

"That's a serious thing to say, Phineas."

"Don't I know it?" growled Captain Boom. "But I've heard from more than one man—more like half a dozen—that the wheel

is worked. Yes, Sam—worked! An' you know what that means! The whole show's crooked, from start to finish: And here—within a few miles of Caistowe! Why, bust me, but it ain't no better than 'Frisco!"

Fullwood was trembling now.

He had forgotten his heat, he had forgotten the dangers of exposure. He had heard something that filled him with furious indignation. Captain Boom had said that the roulette wheel of that club was "worked"! It was a staggering thing to learn—although he knew that it was not a proven fact. But Captain Boom had said that he had heard it from several men.

And, after all, it only substantiated a vague, half-formed theory that Fullwood himself had had for weeks.

"If somebody was to prove what ye say, Phineas, the beggars who run that place could be gaoled," said Captain Garson. "Maybe they stand in a queer position already, but a thing like that would make it criminal. There wouldn't be no fine! Penal servitude, more like it!"

Captain Boom grunted.

"Ay, but what's the good?" he asked in his deep voice. "We can't prove anything—and I tell ye straight, Sam, I ain't keen on makin' any inquiries. The less I have to do with them places, the better. As I told ye afore, gambling don't appeal to me. And as for Jiggs——"

He broke off, and the other captain laughed.

"Steady, Phineas!" he said. "You don't need to get so hot. Try a little more of this grog——"

"By derelicts, so I will!" said the visitor. "The best glass I've tasted for many a day! You was allus a one to find the right stuff, wasn't ye, Sam?"

"Trust me!" said Garson laughingly.

"It was last week," went on Captain Boom. "Jiggs came to town, an' I'm busted if he didn't stay out all night! All night, mark ye, Sam! I guessed there was something wrong, because the flat-footed son of a whaler had gone out with his month's money in his pocket. He didn't turn up until breakfast-time the next morning, the swab! Ay, an' a fine-lookin' sight, too! I never saw a man so miserable."

"He lost the lot, eh?"

"Every shilling!" said the other. "Of course, it didn't take me ten minutes to get the whole story out of him——"

Thud!

Something sounded in the cabin, and Captain Boom stopped speaking. He glanced across the table at his host, and there was an inquiry in his eyes.

"Howlin' gales!" he grunted. "Do ye keep live stock in this locker, Sam?"

"Live stock?" repeated Garson, in surprise.

"I'm a sea-cook if something didn't move inside it!"

"It's the grog!" said Captain Garson, nodding. "It don't seem as you can take much

of it, Phineas. There's nothin' in that locker but clothes, and precious little of them, either. I've been havin' a refit."

Within the locker Fullwood had turned sick with apprehension. In his anxiety to catch every word that was being said, he had moved slightly, and one of his feet, which he had thought to be against something solid, had slipped. The bump, as it thudded against the end of the locker, sounded like a devastating crash to him.

"Well, anyway, somethin' moved!" said Captain Boom grimly.

He got up from the locker and lifted the lid.



CHAPTER 5.

A NEW PLAN OF ACTION!

Y all the rum in Jamaica!"

Captain Boom uttered that ejaculation as he stared into the locker.

And the next moment his host leapt up from his seat as Fullwood struggled out of his cramped position and appeared sheepishly into the open. He was hot and confused, and very bewildered.

"Avast, there!" said Captain Boom. "What did I tell ye, Sam?"

Captain Garson came across. Very angrily he stared at Fullwood.

"By hookey!" he snapped. "What's the meaning of this, boy? What are you doing in that locker? Who told you to come into this cabin? I'll have ye thrown ashore——"

"I'm sorry," said Fullwood quietly. "I expect that's all I deserve. But I've run away from school, and I saw this ship, so I walked on board. That's all. When I heard you coming, I dodged in here, and then you entered this very cabin. So I could only get into the locker."

"Well, there's something to be said for you," replied Captain Garson, his anger subsiding. "At least, you've told a straightforward story, and you don't seem to be a bad sort of youngster."

"Why, swill my scuppers!" said Captain Boom. "It's one o' them boys from St. Frank's! I know 'em, Sam! Fine boys, too! As good a set as ye'd find in a day's march. Ye've seen me, young man, haven't you?"

"Of course I have," said Fullwood. "You came to St. Frank's once, didn't you, Captain Boom? And we've met since, too. I'm awfully sorry that you should find me like this. I—I didn't mean to do anything wrong."

"Ye needn't tell me that," growled Captain Boom. "Don't you look so black, Sam, this boy's all right. As honest as the day—an' you needn't think he came here to monkey with your things."

"I'm quite satisfied," said the other, nodding. "But he wanted to stow himself away, didn't he? And that's a thing that I don't hold with. I'll go easy with you, young 'un."

You can go ashore if you like, and I'll say no more about it. It's a good thing we wasn't talking private, that's all I've got to say."

"If you had started speaking privately—something that I knew was really private, I mean—I would have revealed myself at once," said Fullwood quietly. "But you were only talking about that night club in Bannington."

"Hot grog!" ejaculated Captain Boom. "Do ye know about the place, then?"

"I've heard of it," replied Fullwood vaguely. "In fact, some of our chaps have been there."

"Ye see!" roared the old sea-dog. "Did ye hear that, Sam? They ain't satisfied with rabbit-brained mackerel like Jiggs! They get these schoolboys into their den!"

"It's their own fault, sir," said Fullwood. "They ought to keep away."

He spoke bitterly, as much against himself as the others.

"Ye're right, there, lad," agreed Boom. "But listen to me! Did I hear ye a-right just now? Sink my anchor! Did I hear ye say that ye're runnin' away from school?"

"Yes," muttered Fullwood miserably.

"Oh-ho!" said the old captain, taking Fullwood by the shoulders and looking into his face. "A fine-looking lad like you, too! What's the matter, youngster? What's wrong? Maybe I could help—"

"I'm sorry," muttered Fullwood, "but—but I don't think there's anything you could do, Captain Boom. I was in Bannington the other night, and I went into a low-down boxing booth and accepted a challenge. I didn't know the place was such a dirty hole until I got inside. The Head got to hear of it, and he told me that I've got to leave the school. So—so I thought I'd run away."

"That wasn't brave of ye, laddie," said Captain Boom gravely.

"I—I couldn't bear to stay there," said Fullwood, with a choke in his throat. "I—I'm not expelled, really. The headmaster has written to my father, and my father will come down to-morrow to take me away. And—and I couldn't face him; I'm afraid to! He's—he's always thought a lot of me, and it'll be a shock to him. I thought I'd better get out at once."

Captain Boom stroked his grizzled chin, and slowly shook his head.

"My lad, I ain't proud of ye!" he said solemnly. "By the key of Davey Jones' locker, I ain't proud of ye! That's not the spirit I saw when I was at St. Frank's, sink me! No, by the sharks! I saw a different spirit to this!"

Fullwood hung his head, ashamed.

"Steady, boy, don't take it to heart!" said the old mariner gently. "What's the trouble? Ye said that ye couldn't stay and face things, eh? Have you done such a bad thing, then?"

"I'm not ashamed of it," said Fullwood, holding up his head defiantly. "The Head's

made a mistake. I was guilty, but I didn't mean any wrong."

"Why, then, sink me for a derelict, what's the idea of running away?" roared the bluff old captain. "Go ye back, my lad! What's happened to your spirit? What's the matter with your honour?"

"I—I can't go back now!" said Fullwood desperately. "After I've run away, I've got to keep it up. They'd all laugh at me."

"Let them laugh!" snorted Captain Boom. "Is their laughter going to melt ye, like the sun on an iceberg? Sink me! You're not afraid, are ye? Aren't you a St. Frank's boy? Haven't you got the St. Frank's code? Go back, young 'un, and face the music like a man! Go back and tell your father the truth, and have done with this nonsense! It ain't my place to tell ye what to do, but, by sharks, an old man like me knows when to give advice! You're all right, boy; I can see it in your face. Now then—what's your answer?"

Ralph Leslie nearly choked.

"You're right, Captain Boom," he muttered. "I'm a funk—I'm a coward! And it was a miserable thing to run away like this. I'm in the wrong, and I'll go back!"

"Ye mean that?" bellowed the old skipper.

"Yes, sir—honour bright!"

"Good lad!" grinned Captain Boom. "What did I say, Sam? I tell ye, these boys are made of the right stuff! The real British backbone, by mackerel! Maybe ye'd like a bite before ye go?" he added thoughtfully.

"Thanks all the same, but—"

"Yes, youngster, you're welcome!" said the other mariner readily. "I've forgiven you, especially after what I've just heard. Stay here, and—"

"Please!" muttered Fullwood. "I—I'd rather go, if you don't mind. I came here like a tramp, and it's not right that I should take anything—"

"Another word, my lad, and back ye go in that locker!" roared Captain Boom aggressively. "Avast, there! Orders is orders! Sit ye down, and open up your hatches! You're taking cargo aboard!"

Fullwood had nothing to say, and he suddenly realised that he was, indeed, very hungry. He was feeling happy again, too, and excited over a thought that had come to him. But it was a thought that he did not mean to impart to his kindly old companions.

Captain Garson himself soon had a meal ready—a quick affair, procured from the cabin cupboard. Simply biscuits and cheese, but they seemed very appetising to Fullwood. He hurried over them, however, as he felt very self-conscious. He had always known Captain Boom as a good old sort, but now he appreciated him to the full. He had shown him the cowardly nature of his flight.

And so, twenty minutes later, Fullwood was allowed to depart, after shaking hands with them both. And now, when he stepped on to the quay, his stride was firm, and he was feeling eager. Somehow, he could face

the morrow's ordeal with comparative calmness. But there was something else to be done first.

There was work for this evening—grim work.

He remembered what he had heard while he had been in the locker. He remembered that talk about the roulette club. It wouldn't matter if he stayed away from St. Frank's for another hour or two.

"I'll go to that beastly club!" muttered Fullwood fiercely. "I won't go like I did before, and use that confounded wheel! No, I'll sneak in somehow! I'll find out whether the roulette wheel is really faked or not!"

It was a stirring thought.

There was not the slightest fear of him "falling" a second time. He had had such a bitter lesson that he would never forget it. Besides, if possible, he would not enter the gaming room at all. Perhaps there was some way in which he could get in—a cellar, possibly. This was an investigation that needed careful going.

His interest was more than a desire to serve the ends of justice. He remembered how he had lost twenty pounds at that very table himself. Clive's twenty pounds! Ever since then he had been suffering tortures, and it would make an enormous difference if he could prove that the wheel was worked! It would mean that the money had been stolen from him—just as certainly as if he had been held up at the point of a revolver and robbed on the highway.

It was a point he *must* settle before he returned to the school.



CHAPTER 6.

A LUCKY MEETING!

SOMEHOW, the storm didn't seem half so bad now.

Fullwood strode from the promenade, away from the quay, and made his way towards the middle of the town. It was several miles to Bannington, but this didn't worry him. The wind was still howling, and there were flurries of snow coming down continuously. But he had a stout heart now, and the weather didn't affect him.

He had an idea that the time was tremendously late—something after midnight. So it surprised him when he looked up at the Town Hall clock, and found that it was only a little before ten-thirty. This meant that he would be on the outskirts of Bannington, where that wretched club was situated, well before half-past eleven. Gaming would then be in full swing.

He could not plan to arrive at a better moment.

He was swinging along, his thoughts busy, when a group of three or four cyclists came in sight. He didn't take any notice of them, for it never occurred to him that there might

be any St. Frank's fellows about at such an hour as this, particularly in Caistowe.

Captain Boom had been right. There was only one course for him to pursue—and that was for him to go back to St. Frank's, and face the music on the morrow. Perhaps things wouldn't be so bad—perhaps, if he told his father everything, his father might persuade the Head—

But Fullwood didn't like to anticipate too much. But it might make a big difference if he could prove the crookedness of that club. A great deal would depend upon his actions to-night.

The cyclists were quite near to him now, and coming up in the rear. They had crossed from a side street, and had gained a clear view of him before turning into the same road.

"Great Scott!" he heard somebody shout. "It's Fully!"

"Well I'm jiggered!"

"Hi, Fully!"

"Grab him, the ass!"

Fullwood turned, staring. The cyclists were coming up, and they were practically upon him. For an instant Fullwood thought about running, but what would be the use? How could he hope to outpace these bicycles?

But that former resolve of his held good.

He wasn't going to let them drag him back to St. Frank's! He realised in a flash that Clive had spread the news of his flight, and that search-parties were out after him. And they would haul him back, too, if they only got the chance. Just when he had planned to go to that club and make his investigations! He wasn't going to put up with that sort of thing.

He was in the act of making a dash for it when he glanced round.

And he beheld something which made him pause. The juniors were right upon him, and they all applied their brakes together. And in their excitement at seeing Fullwood, they had overlooked the fact that the road was in a very treacherous condition. They didn't merely skid, but they slithered in every direction, crashed into one another, and came down in the most hopeless tangle.

"Great Scott!" gasped Fullwood.

He simply stared. All he could see was a tangled mass of legs, arms, bicycle wheels and heads. Various uncouth cries were arising from the wreckage.

"What a chance!" muttered Fullwood, his heart giving a leap. "Instead of walking —"

But he didn't wait to think any further. He ran up before any of the juniors could extricate themselves. One bicycle had slithered free from the others, and was lying on the ground, isolated. Even the lamp was still burning. In a flash, Fullwood yanked it up, and leapt into the saddle.

"Hi!" yelled De Valerie. "That's my jigger!"

"Thanks, Val!" sang out Fullwood. "Just what I needed!"

"Fullwood!" gasped De Valerie. "And

he's pinched my bike! Hi, Fully! We've been searching everywhere for you!"

"Come back, you ass!" shouted Somerton.

"We've got something to tell you!" panted Tommy Watson, sitting up with somebody else's handlebars round his neck. "Stop him, you fatheads! I can't get out! I'm all mixed up! Call him back, quick!"

"Fully!" thundered the others.

But Fullwood had already become swallowed up in the falling snowflakes.

It was rather a pity, in one way, for if he had remained for just a minute, he would have learned that he had been pardoned, and there was no reason for him to run away at all. To-morrow's ordeal, which he was now looking forward to bravely, was completely abandoned. When he went back to St. Frank's he would be able to resume his old place, and everything would be all right.

And the juniors had been within a yard of him, and had not been able to impart this glad news.

"We can't let him go like this!" shouted De Valerie. "All the other parties are searching, and they're all anxious, and here's the ass buzzing off somewhere on my bike! He must have gone off his rocker!"

"He didn't sound dotty," remarked Somerton. "I'm blessed if I can understand his game, though."

"Well, don't stand there, jabbering!" shouted De Valerie. "Let's give chase! I'll use your bike, Watson."

Tommy Watson had just extricated himself, and he groaned.

"You're welcome to it!" he said painfully. "If you can make this wheel go round, you'll be a magician!"

"Why, it's buckled!" said Val indignantly.

"Is that what you call buckled?" asked Tommy Watson. "It looks more like a figure eight to me!"

"I'll chase him!" said Somerton, picking his own machine up, and leaping into the saddle. "He can't have got far— Hi! What the—"

He broke off, aghast, for when he tried to pedal, his feet flew round at lightning speed. His chain had come off, and was jammed up with the back wheel.

There was another machine, but this was suffering from a bent pedal crank—so bent, in fact, that it wouldn't go round. It was somewhat ironical that Fullwood had taken the only rideable machine. He had gone, and it was impossible for the others to chase after him.

"Well, this is a nice go!" said De Valerie warmly. "The chap doesn't deserve all this trouble! We're losing our sleep—chasing him all over the place—and when we find him he pinches my jigger! Wouldn't even stop to listen! I'm fed-up with the whole business."

"Look out—there's a car coming!" said Watson, as he limped aside. "Better collect that machine out of the middle of the road."

The bicycle was hastily dragged aside. The motor-car came up, and the brakes were

applied. With a gentle skid, the automobile slowed round, and came to a stop.

"Any reports?" came Handforth's lusty voice.

"Something's happened here!" said Church, gazing at the wreckage. "How many killed and injured?"

Handforth got out of his Austin Seven, and looked at the disabled bicycles disdainfully.

"Haven't I warned you not to put your brakes on too quickly?" he said severely. "This is what comes of recklessness!"

"Listen to Mr. Cautious!" sneered De Valerie. "Anyhow, we've done better than you have, I'll wager! Have you found Fullwood?"

"No."

"Well, we've seen him," said De Valerie. "And that's something."

"You've seen him?" roared Handforth excitedly. "Where? When? How?"

"A minute ago," said Val. "Here—just where you're standing!"

"Then why didn't you keep him?" demanded Edward Oswald. "I don't believe you!" he added. "You haven't seen Fullwood at all! You needn't try to spoof me—"

"You clever fathead! He's pinched my bicycle!" snapped De Valerie. "We all spotted him at the same minute, and rode up, and when we put our brakes on, we crashed."

"And before we could get up, he'd grabbed one of the bicycles, and went off with it," said Tommy Watson indignantly.

"Didn't you tell him that he's been pardoned?"

"He didn't give us a chance."

"And didn't you chase him?"

"You try it!" said Watson, pointing to the bikes. "They're all crocked!"

Handforth took a deep breath, and gazed at the cyclists.

"Well, you're a fine lot!" he said fiercely. "It's a fat lot of good trusting you to help in a search-party! As soon as ever you spot your quarry, you pile yourselves into a heap, and kindly present him with one of your bikes! You all ought to get a diamond-studded medal for this!"

"How could we help it?" hooted Watson.

"Which way did he go, anyhow?" asked Handforth curtly. "The only thing I can do is to give chase myself. He needn't think he can whack me! My Austin Seven will beat any cyclist who ever turned a pedal! Come on, Church! Jump in, Mac! We're going!"

"We don't know the way yet," said Church.

"Straight ahead!" exclaimed De Valerie. "Look here, I'll come in that car with you—it's my bike, don't forget!"

"Right-ho—but don't talk!" said Handforth curtly. "I can't bear anybody talking when I'm driving."

"I've noticed that," said Church. "They interrupt you!"



Taking advantage of the general mix-up, Fullwood grabbed one of the bicycles, swung himself on the saddle and made off. "Hi!" yelled De Valerie. "He's pinched my jigger!" "Come back, you ass!" "We've been looking for you!" shouted the other juniors. But Fullwood was too excited to pay any heed to their cries.

But Handforth missed this sally, and a moment later he raced his engine and let in the clutch. The Austin slewed round giddily, headed for the hedge, and ended up facing the way from which it had just come.

"Great Scott!" said De Valerie, turning pale.

"That's nothing!" said Church, in a hollow voice. "We've been skidding round in circles for the last hour, and Mac and I have been making wagers as to whether we shall get home with broken legs or broken arms."

"I think it'll be broken necks!" said De Valerie. "Anyhow, I'm going to walk!"

He hopped out, and stood staring as the Austin careered off again. De Valerie had plenty of pluck, but he didn't quite fancy Handforth as a driver. Church and McClure, of course, were compelled to be with him—for they were morally certain that if they let him go alone, he would smash the car and himself to smithereens. They acted as a kind of human brake.

"Go easy, Handy!" said Church, after about a hundred yards. "The roads weren't so bad an hour ago, but they're freezing now, and it's as slippery as glass. There's no need to rush like this. We shall overtake him before long."

"I know we shall," agreed Handforth, as he bent over the wheel. "I can see his track in the snow, and this is the Bannington Road. What on earth is he going this way for?"

"I'm too tired to answer riddles!" said Church coldly. "Here, chuck it! Throttle down, you fathead! You ought to have chains!"

"Chains!" snapped Handforth. "This car isn't chain-driven—it's got a propeller shaft—"

"I'm not talking about the drive!" interrupted Church. "You ought to have chains on the wheels."

"You're mad!" said Handforth. "I've got tyres!"

"On the tyres, I mean!" hooted Church, exasperated.

"Oh, I can't be bothered with your delusions!" said Handforth curtly. "We've got to catch Fullwood, or die in the attempt!"

"Mac, shake!" said Church solemnly. "This is the end!"



CHAPTER 7.

JUST A LITTLE SKID!

ALTHOUGH Church spoke with a certain amount of facetiousness, both he and McClure really thought, soon afterwards, their last moment had come. The road stretched straight ahead of them—a white ribbon, straight and flat. And Handforth opened his throttle, and the Austin hummed serenely.

In the rear. Church could feel the car skidding slightly from side to side. She was quite safe so far, and under perfect control, but Church's heart nearly stopped beating when he thought of what might occur if they suddenly met another car, or a pedestrian.

"Chuck it, Handy!" he gasped. "You'll kill the lot of us!"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Handforth.

"Isn't it my business?" howled Church.

"Mine, too!" breathed McClure. "Oh, goodness! This is all very well on a safe road, but——"

He held his breath. There was a bend just ahead, and Handforth throttled down at the last moment, and applied his brake. The Austin, with a giddy, swaying sensation, slithered nicely round the curve, recovered herself, and Handforth trod on the throttle again.

"Easy!" he said disdainfully.

"Oh, help!" gurgled Church. "I—I thought it was all over!"

But Handforth was determined to overtake Fullwood within the quickest amount of time possible. It was more than ever evident that Ralph Leslie was making for Bannington. They had shot past several side roads, all of which meant a short cut towards St. Frank's. But the tracks left by Fullwood's machine still led straight on. And Handforth didn't want to lose his quarry in the town. It was easy enough to follow the tracks here, but it wouldn't be so easy later, where there would probably be a certain amount of traffic.

"Look out!" yelled Church suddenly.

A bend was just ahead, but Handforth had already seen it. His chums were half standing up, ready to leap for their lives at the first sign of peril. The Austin was quite open, without the hood or side curtains being in position.

This time Handforth slightly misjudged the corner.

He felt himself skidding towards the off-side ditch as he swung round. There was only one thing to do. He wrenched at the wheel, but it was too late. The faithful little car lurched round in a giddy circle, shot across the road like a rocket, and skidded violently into the ditch, where the snow was piled up in great masses.

"We're over!" gasped Church.

He couldn't say much more, because he plunged headlong into the snowdrift, and completely vanished. McClure went with him. Handforth, fortunately, remained where he was, at the wheel. He wasn't even bruised. The headlights had vanished, and for a moment he thought that the battery had gone wrong. But the nose of the car was right in the middle of the snow, and the lamps were buried.

"My only hat!" said Handforth, in dismay.

The Austin was half in the ditch and half out, and had a list to port of about forty-five

degrees. Overhead, there was a moon somewhere, although it could barely be seen. But it was diffusing sufficient light for Handforth to see his immediate surroundings.

"You chaps all right?" he asked, looking round. "Why, hallo! What the—— Great Scott! Where are they?" he gurgled. "Hi, you chaps!"

The snow heaved near by, and Church appeared.

"Well, of all the asses!" said Handforth. "What did you do that for?"

Church was too speechless to make any adequate answer. But he was quite unhurt, and there was only the question as to what had happened to McClure. McClure, it seemed, had gone for good.

But another heaving of the snow happened, and McClure came up.

"You there, Churchy?" he asked. "Where's Handy? We'd better dig him out of the ruins, and apply first aid! I expect the poor chap's half dead——"

"Then you'd better expect again!" said Handforth irritably. "I'm all right."

"My only hat!" breathed Mac. "By the way I dived into that snow, I thought you'd be cut to pieces. I thought you were thrown through the windscreen or something. Thank goodness we're all safe!"

"There's nothing to worry about," said Handforth, as he climbed out. "It doesn't do any harm to skid on these roads. Come along—don't be lazy. Help me to lift this car out, and put it on the road again."

"Lift it out!" yelled Church. "What do you think it is—a pram?"

Handforth's chums were feeling very indignant. He had hurled them out of his car, and they had escaped death by inches, and he hadn't even expressed any apologies! He took it all as a matter of course—and then expected them to lift the car out of the ditch.

Of course, it was quite impossible.

And, also of course, Handforth wouldn't admit it until he had made about ten unsuccessful attempts. Their united strength was insufficient to dislodge the sturdy little automobile. She was small, but she wasn't light enough for three juniors to grapple with. And at last Handforth stood back, and became really concerned.

"We can't do it!" he said blankly.

"Go hon!" jeered Church. "We could have told you that ten minutes ago! In fact, we did tell you, but it would have been better if we had spoken to that telegraph pole across the road!"

"My Austin!" said Handforth mournfully. "This means that I've got to leave her here until we can get help!"

"It means that you've got to leave her here until to-morrow," said McClure. "That's what it means! You can't expect people to come out here in the middle of the night to please a fathead who deliberately runs his car into the ditch! My only hat! What a mess! Miles from home—and we've got to walk!"

Handforth started.

"Home!" he repeated. "We're not going home, you chumps!"

His unfortunate chums looked at him in horror.

"Not—not going home?" asked McClure. "But—but you're not suggesting that we should stay here all night—just to look after your silly car!"

"I'm suggesting that we should go to Bannington," said Handforth coldly. "Have you forgotten that we were chasing Fullwood?"

"That's off now," said Church. "We can't go on foot, I suppose?"

"Yes we can—it's only another mile!" replied Handforth. "We've got to get Fullwood back before we return to the school. Come on. We'll leave the car here, and come back for her later."

His chums were too weak to make any reply. And as they didn't want to be left alone on the road, they followed their impulsive leader. And so they trudged through the snow—getting nearer and nearer to Bannington. But if Church and McClure were feeling tired, Handforth wasn't. He was fired up by the spirit of the chase, and he was determined to take Fullwood back with him. He had set his heart on it, and he wasn't going to be foiled.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Look at this! He turned off here, and went down this side lane."

He had halted, and was flashing the light of his electric torch down a little road which led off to the left—a branch lane, only half a mile from Bannington. The tracks of Fullwood's cycle were clearly visible, leading in that direction.

"That's rummy," said Handforth.

"Is it?" asked Church. "Well, you know best!"

"The rummiest thing that I know of, is how we escaped with our lives ten minutes ago," said McClure sombrely. "I've been puzzling over it ever since. Strictly speaking, we all ought to be dead——"

"If you're going to start talking about that skid again, I'll chuck you into that snowdrift!" said Handforth, with a frown. "Now, why did Fullwood go down this side lane, instead of carrying straight on? That's what I want to know!"

"This lane leads to the Bannington road," said Mac.

"But we're on the Bannington road, ass."

"Not *our* Bannington road," said McClure. "This is the main road from Caistowe to Bannington. But this lane leads into our ordinary road—the one we go on from Bell-ton."

"By George, so it does!" said Handforth, with a start. "That looks as though Fullwood has gone round, and back towards St. Frank's."

"Then he must be crazy," said Church. "Oh, I'm fed-up with the whole affair! And what about our promise to Mr. Lee? It must be long after midnight. We ought

to get straight back, Handy. It's not playing the game."

"We're right on Fullwood's trail here, and I'm not going to abandon it," declared Handforth, with an obstinate note in his voice. "There's something jolly rummy about Fullwood's actions, and I mean to find out what he's up to."

It was useless to attempt to dissuade him, and so they continued their way down the lane, and within five minutes they arrived on more familiar ground. They came upon another big road, and this was their ordinary one, that they used almost daily. But again there was a puzzle. The tracks of Fullwood's machine led towards Bannington again.

"Well I'm blessed!" said Handforth, staring. "If he wanted to go into Bannington, why didn't he keep straight on? Why go out of his way like this?"

Fortunately, there had been very little other traffic, and they had no difficulty in singling out the trail of Fullwood's bicycle from all the other marks. But presently the tracks ceased, and they could see where the machine had been wheeled across the pavement, and taken into the front garden of a house—which stood back from the road.

"Well, we've run him to earth anyhow," said Handforth, with satisfaction. "But why in the name of goodness did he come to this house?"

Church, who had been looking at the building rather curiously, suddenly caught his breath. He stared at Handforth in a queer way.

"I knew there was something familiar about this house!" he muttered. "I knew I'd seen it before! Don't you remember Mac?"

McClure stared, too.

"Yes!" he said queerly.

"What's the matter with you two?" demanded their leader.

"Nothing—but it seems to me that there's something the matter with Fullwood!" said Church. "This house is the one we came to some weeks ago, Handy. It's the house where they've got that confounded gambling den!"

"Yes!" breathed McClure. "And here's Fully's bike!"

He pointed through the hedge, and they could just see the machine, resting against the hedge, on the inner side.

"Fullwood!" said Handforth, his voice ominous. "So this is why he took the Bannington road—this is why he came down that little lane! He's back at his old tricks!"



CHAPTER 8.

HANDFORTH'S BOLD DECISION! HE chums of Study D were shocked.

The whole thing was as clear as daylight. Fullwood had come to this

club again—he was inside now. That was

absolutely obvious, or his bicycle wouldn't be here. And Handforth & Co. were aghast.

"The idiot!" said Handforth fiercely. "The hopeless rotter! After all our trouble, too! After the way we've chased him about for hours, to tell him that he's been pardoned."

"He doesn't deserve to be pardoned," said Church hotly.

"He ought to be sacked!" snapped McClure.

"I don't know about that," growled Handforth. "He's an idiot, of course—but perhaps we ought to make allowances. We mustn't forget that he's ignorant about that pardon, and he thinks he's sacked. Therefore he doesn't regard himself as a St. Frank's chap any more."

His chums stared.

"Yes, but that doesn't make it right for him to come here," said Church.

"Of course it doesn't—but the poor beggar is probably in a reckless mood," said Handforth, with rare tolerance. "It must be awful to be sacked, you know—to know that you're going away in disgrace. And it seems to me that Fully got a bit desperate, and came here. Perhaps he doesn't know any other place to go to. But you needn't think I'm going to leave him here!" he added ominously.

"What do you mean?"

"We're going to get him out!" said Handforth.

"Get him out?"

"That's what I said, my lad!"

"But we can't!" gasped Church. "How do you suppose we can go into this place, and drag him out by force? He wouldn't come—he'd fight. Besides, we should only get into trouble——"

"When you've quite done, Walter Church, I shall be obliged," said Handforth heavily. "I'm running this show, so I'll do all the talking, if you don't mind. One of you must go to the nearest telephone—and run all the way."

"There isn't one nearer than the post-office."

"That'll do," nodded Handforth. "By George, it's one of those new ones, isn't it? One of those concrete boxes stuck outside on the pavement, and open day and night? Good egg! The very thing!"

"But—but what do we want to use a telephone for?"

"Listen to me!" said Handforth. "Fullwood's in this beastly den, and we're going to get him out. What's more, we'll make the place look like a mass of wreckage before we've done with it! They'll think there's been an earthquake! The Remove, my sons, is going to raid this place!"

"Raid it!" gasped Mac.

"Raid it!" insisted his leader.

"But—but——"

"There aren't any buts! I've made up my mind, and there's an end of it!" snapped Handforth, with more than his usual aggressiveness. Fullwood's gone back to his old

games, and we've got to rescue him before he goes too far! That's what I say—and it's up to the Remove to put this beastly den out of commission! So hurry off to the telephone."

"Handy, old man, you're mad!" breathed Church, aghast. "You're absolutely mad! We're not in the Wild West! We can't take the law into our own hands like a lot of cowboy vigilantes——"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth, his eyes blazing. "We *are* Vigilantes! What about the St. Frank's Vigilance Committees? Under the Honour System, we've been compelled to form them, and it's the duty of the Vigilantes to look after the interests of the school, and——"

"But—but this place is nothing to do with the school!"

"It's trapping some of our chaps," said Handforth curtly.

"They needn't go there——"

"Another word, my lad, and I'll biff you!" said the exasperated Edward Oswald. "Don't you understand that we shall be on velvet? These dirty dogs can't do anything—they can't complain to the police. My idea is to go in, rescue Fullwood from their clutches, and smash up the roulette wheel and everything else that's connected with gambling. It may be high-handed, but we're justified. That's what I say."

His chums were beginning to see the big idea.

"But—but the Head might hear——" began Mac.

"And what if he does? Is the Head going to swish us for smashing up a gambling den?" asked Handforth. "No, my lads, he'll either give us a public vote of thanks, or wink his eye at the whole affair. But we shall need a strong force. Don't forget to impress that upon Dick Hamilton when you ring him up, Church!"

"What shall I say?" asked Church eagerly.

"Tell Nipper to get the Remove together, and to come in strong force——"

"But he may not be back yet——"

"Yes, he'll be back—it's after midnight," interrupted Handforth. "Get hold of him, and say that we've located Fullwood, but need a big crowd of fellows to raid that gambling place. He'll understand—and if he's the chap I believe him to be, he'll bite. So get some speed on!"

"Supposing he refuses?"

"He won't refuse—he'll bring the crowd," said Handforth confidently. "This isn't an ordinary business at all. Fullwood's just been pardoned, and he's caught in the net again. So it's up to us to smash this place up, and put it out of joint once and for all! So tell Nipper to get the West House chaps in the game, too—bring the whole Remove, if he likes."

"My stars!" ejaculated Church. "You're right, Handy—we *can* do it, and in a way it's our duty!"

Handforth had succeeded in getting his chums round to his own way of thinking, and

they were as keen as mustard to get the thing going. They were worried about Fullwood's second lapse, but it would certainly be a great thing to destroy this gaming club, so that it could do no more harm. It would not only do good for the nuts of St. Frank's, but also for the welfare of Bannington and district.

And there was a great deal of truth in Handforth's shrewd assertion that the proprietors could do nothing. They would not dare to complain to the police. For they could not very well lodge any grumble against the St. Frank's boys for destroying illegal gaming impedimenta.

Neither could the headmaster of St. Frank's disapprove, if he got to hear of the violence. For he could only give the boys credit for taking such strong action against a house which was undoubtedly a menace to the morals of the community.

"Go on, Church—off you buzz!" said Handforth briskly. "Mac and I will remain on guard here, and if Fullwood comes out, we'll collar him. But there's not much chance of that— Oh, I say," he added. "Tell Hamilton to hurry for all he's worth. I believe this place closes up at one o'clock, and we want to catch them before they finish."

"Right!" said Church crisply. "Let's hope that the telephone line is still whole. If that's down, we're dished!"

Handforth frowned.

"Don't make such silly suggestions!" he said coldly.

Almost at the very first try, he discovered a grating, which opened as soon as he exerted a little strength. It was not an ordinary cellar grating, but a higher one, set in the wall, as though it belonged to a store-room of some kind. It was fixed by means of an iron catch, and after a little working to and fro, the thing gave way. Fullwood gingerly pulled it back.

"Now for it!" he murmured.

He got in, closed the grating after him, and then cautiously felt his way forward. His only regret was that he did not possess an electric torch. It was just the thing he wanted here. But he had matches—nearly a full box—and these were better than nothing.

After a while, he ventured to strike one.

He found himself in a kind of wine cellar, for he was surrounded by numerous shelves, on which bottles were stacked. It was a narrow place, and at the end of it there was a small door. Very cautiously, he went towards it, and tried the handle. It turned, and the door silently opened.

He was perfectly cool—even more cool than when he had ventured on board that ship. If anybody accosted him, he would calmly say that he was one of the "customers," and that he had got out of his bearings. If they didn't like to believe him, they could do the other thing. And, at the very worst, they could only pitch him out. After all, this wasn't a nest of criminals or murderers.

So he had plenty of confidence as he proceeded with his investigations.

He was still safe after he had passed through the doorway. Everything was dark, and he judged that he was in a back passage. Faintly, he could just hear the sound of foot-falls, and gathered that these sounds came from the big gaming room. Now and again, too, by straining his ears, he could hear the dim, vague echo of voices.

"All right, so far!" he murmured contentedly.

He was just beginning to enjoy himself. Captain Boom's good advice had made him much more contented in mind, and he was ready to go back to St. Frank's, and stand any racket that was likely to happen. But he badly wanted to find out if this roulette table was really "worked." If so, it would make all the difference.

He struck another match, and now he saw that he was in an ordinary passage. It turned sharply at the end, and became wider. But quite near him there, was an ordinary-looking door with two bolts on the outside. It didn't have "Cellar" painted upon it, but Fullwood knew very well that he had struck oil. If he had never seen a cellar door in his life, he was looking at one now.

"This is too easy!" he told himself.

His match burnt out, but he had got his bearings. With extra caution, he felt for the bolts, and slid them back. Then, slowly, he tried the door. It opened outwards, and he struck another match as soon as he had

CHAPTER 9.

WHAT FULLWOOD DISCOVERED!



ALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD was on the downward path.

But it wasn't quite the same path that Handforth imagined. Fullwood, to tell the truth, was slowly descending the cellar steps of that gambling house. His heart was beating rapidly, and he was filled with the thrill of success.

He had done far better than he had hoped.

After arriving at the place, he had put his bicycle just behind the hedge, as though he were an ordinary frequenter of the club. But then, instead of going up to the front door, and seeking admittance, he had slipped round to the rear, and had done some scouting work.

He didn't worry about his footprints.

In the morning, of course, these would be seen, and the owners of the place might wonder who had been prowling about. But they couldn't prove anything, and, in any case, Fullwood wouldn't care a snap if they did. He had come here to put Captain Boom's theory to the test, and he wasn't going to give in until he had succeeded.

Luck was with him.

assured himself that there were no suspicious sounds.

"Eureka!" he murmured triumphantly.

And so, after pulling the door to, he took the downward path—into the cellar. A flight of steep steps led straight down into the blackness. Again, he wished that he had a torch on him. It was a bother, striking matches, and then feeling his way, foot by foot.

He waited until he reached the bottom, and then he had another look round. He wasn't in the slightest degree nervous. Penetrating the cellar of a strange house had no effect upon his nerves. He had come here for a purpose, and now, as he stood at the bottom of the steps, he tried to get his bearings.

But this was a rather difficult matter, for he had forgotten exactly where the gaming room was situated. Still, it wouldn't take long to examine every cellar, for they were all inter-connected.

Fullwood had a theory of his own.

He believed that he would find the evidence he required down here. If there was any fake about that roulette table, it must necessarily be out of sight. They would never dare to have anything in the actual room. Consequently, the only possible situation for it would be immediately underneath. And that meant the cellar.

He was now in a kind of stone passage, with openings leading away on both sides. He tried one, and, as he had half expected, it contained nothing but a miscellaneous collection of old lumber.

But the floor did not interest him. It was the ceiling he looked at with eager care. There was conviction upon him that, if he found anything at all, it would be near the ceiling. And after Captain Boom's words, he was beginning to feel, more and more, that the old sea dog had been right.

But in the first cellar he drew blank. There were the rafters overhead, but they were perfectly bare and innocent. There was no trace of anything mechanical. And that was what he was looking for—something mechanical.

He moved into the next cellar, and his heart gave a little jump. For this was much bigger. This was a really huge cellar—and corresponded, approximately, to about the size of that great gaming room. Yes, this was the one! If he found nothing here—

He struck a match.

"I knew it!" he breathed gloatingly. "By gad, I knew it! The rogues! The swindlers! The infernal thieves!"

His voice fairly quivered with anger. He had advanced towards the middle of the cellar, and there was no need for him to look twice at the rafters. For there, fixed to them, was an intricate apparatus of some kind. It was right in the middle—and the roulette table was in the middle of the gaming room.

Fullwood struck another match, and looked again. He could not name this

apparatus. That it was electrical, he could see, and no attempt whatever had been made to conceal its purpose, or its character. Now and again there was a faint, almost imperceptible whirring, followed by a little click. Then silence would come—only to be broken again by that whirring.

"An electric motor!" breathed Fullwood, as the match nearly burnt his fingers. "That's it, as sure as a gun! Somewhere near the croupier, there is an electric control—probably a press button under the carpet! And whenever he wants to make that rotten wheel stop at a certain place, he can do it! It's not a gamble at all—it's robbery!"

He bristled with indignation. It was bad enough for any idiot to risk his money on a straightforward roulette table—but on this faked apparatus, it was no better than throwing it into the gutter. Far worse, for it went into the pockets of these crooks—and money in the gutter sometimes finds its way into worthy hands.

"By gad!" he breathed again. "I've got them now!"

He wondered what he should do. For a moment it occurred to him to have ten minutes of real pleasure by going into the gaming room, and denouncing the rascals in front of all their clients. He could imagine what the result would be.

But he had a mind to try something first.

Another of his matches went, and this time he dragged a little box under that apparatus, and stood upon it. By reaching upwards, he could get hold of the wires, with which the apparatus was festooned. Acting upon a sudden impulse, he seized the nearest wire, and gave a sharp pull.

It came away, and there was a faint electrical spark.

Then the match went out, and Fullwood waited. Silence. No longer did that apparatus whirr. No longer did it emit any click.

"That's done them!" grinned Fullwood happily. "That roulette wheel is playing square now, even if it didn't before! They can't control it any longer!"

He pictured to himself the croupier's dismay at finding his precious press-button useless. Perhaps nothing would be noticed for a spin or two. But, sooner or later, the croupier would inevitably realise that something had gone wrong.

"Now, what's the next thing to be done?" murmured Fullwood. "Shall I go out again, or shall I wait for a bit? I think I'd better clear off—and think out a course of action later. Anyhow, I'm feeling a lot more content."

He had every reason to, for he now knew for certain that he had not lost his money that night by gambling, but by being robbed. For those poor fools who gathered round the roulette table were simply being plundered, without standing a chance of winning.

The croupier, no doubt, deliberately allowed his clients to win at certain times—

just to give them the necessary encouragement.

Fullwood started. That was what had happened to him! He remembered now! He had backed a certain number, and he had won a lot of money. Then, afterwards, he had consistently lost. He had lost until every cent of his cash had gone. The croupier always took the risk, no doubt, of the punter getting out of the game early, while he was in pocket. The rascal relied upon the fever of the gamble getting to the victim's blood.

"This place won't be open for business much longer!" Fullwood swore to himself.

He didn't know how near the mark he actually was!



CHAPTER 10.

AN UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT!

WITH a start, Fullwood became rigid.

A sound had come to his ears—a new sound. Somebody was at the cellar door—and actually coming down the steps! He was making no attempt to come quietly, and thus Fullwood had plenty of warning.

He acted swiftly.

He had already moved that box back, and he had noticed a pile of lumber up one of the corners. In fact, he had purposely fixed the position of these things in his mind, in order to be ready for some sudden emergency, such as this.

It took him a moment to dodge behind the lumber, and to crouch down.

Even if he was discovered, he wouldn't mind, for he would have the extreme pleasure of telling these swindlers what he thought of them. So he was in a happy position. While he preferred to remain concealed, he was quite prepared to be discovered.

From where he crouched, he could peep between an old packing-case and a heavy crate. And he could see the centre of the cellar, where the floor was clear. And into his line of vision came a small, dapper man in evening-dress, with an electric torch in his hand.

"The genial Mr. Snagg!" murmured Fullwood pleasantly.

He recognised Mr. Snagg at once. This was the gentleman who helped to entice victims into the gambling den. He was a kind of master of the ceremonies, too. Mr. Snagg was a refined-looking man, with a very genial expression. Actually, he was several kinds of a rogue—as Fullwood had always suspected.

He stood in the cellar now, with his torch placed upwards towards the ceiling.

He uttered a choice series of lurid curses.

"That's right—go it!" breathed Fullwood.

"But this is nothing to what you'll get later

on! You'll think this cellar is haunted, my bright lad!"

He watched Mr. Snagg with perfect complacency. He thought it quite likely that the cellar would be searched—for the man must have noticed that the door had been unbolted. And he had already discovered that a wire of the apparatus was disconnected.

But Mr. Snagg was so intent upon connecting up the loose wire again that he gave no attention to anything else. Apparently, he was having a good deal of difficulty in making that connection. Fullwood knew how thoroughly he had torn that wire down. It wasn't merely a loose wire, but a torn one. It was quite likely that something was seriously wrong.

"There's somebody been here, confound him!" Fullwood heard the man mutter. "How the devil could anybody——"

He broke off, and turned sharply.

"Who's that?" he asked, with a catch in his voice.

A new figure appeared in the cellar doorway.

"Only me, Snagg," said a voice which made Fullwood start. "I saw you hurry down here, so I came along——"

"Get out of here!" shouted Mr. Snagg violently.

"Forrest!" breathed Ralph Leslie, pursing his lips. "The one and only Bernard! Of course, I'm not surprised to find him here, but this seems to be getting interesting."

"Get out of here, I tell you!" repeated Mr. Snagg harshly.

"Steady on!" protested Forrest, as he started back. "You needn't talk to me like that, Snagg. I wanted to have a word to you in private. I was going to ask you about that tip for the three-thirty to-morrow afternoon. You promised me that you'd give me one. And when you came out, I thought it would be a good chance. Pretty big cellars down here. What's the matter—something wrong with the electric light meter?"

"Yes!" panted Mr. Snagg feverishly. "I—I just came down to have a look at it. It's all right now—we'll go upstairs again."

Very incautiously, he had kept his electric torch switched on, and although the light was directed against the opposite wall, plenty of reflected light revealed that apparatus on the ceiling. And Forrest was staring at it with a sudden light of suspicion in his eyes.

He had rather wondered at Mr. Snagg's violence when he had ordered him out—a violence which had been mingled with panic. It had seemed so needless. Why should the man be alarmed just because Forrest had followed him down into the cellar? There was nothing very wrong in an electric light meter.

And Forrest's wits had commenced working.

A glance at the ceiling had helped him a lot. And now, in a flash, he knew the truth. He understood Snagg's panic. They stood



"All together!" roared Handforth. An instant later the three ringleaders of the night club wilted under a hail of snowballs; they were tied to the railings and could not escape the fusillade. In a little while they were blotted out by the snow. The juniors did their work well—and they enjoyed doing it!

facing one another for a moment, glaring. And Fullwood, from his place of concealment, was able to think calmly.

Of course, Snagg had been a fool, Fullwood decided. Just a plain, idiotic dunderhead. If he had possessed an ounce of brain power, he would have greeted Forrest cordially, would have made some casual remark about the meter, and would have gone out. And Forrest would have suspected nothing. As it was, Forrest not only suspected, but he knew.

"You crooks!" gasped the junior thickly.

"What!"

"So *this* is the way you play the game!" roared Forrest. "No wonder I've lost my money, night after night! By gad! And I never suspected it! I came down here just to ask you about that tip——"

"You don't know what you're talking about!" broke in Snagg harshly. "What's the idea of calling me a crook? What do you mean about playing the game? I don't know what on earth——"

"Trying to bluff, eh?" panted Forrest.

"Bluff!" snarled Mr. Snagg. "Why should I try to bluff? There's nothing down here to hide from you, or anybody else! What do you think this is—a coiners' den?"

"If it isn't a coiners' den, it's a thieves' kitchen!" retorted Forrest, with blazing eyes.

"You libellous young hound!"

"Wait a minute, Mr. Snagg!" rapped out Forrest. "Up till now we've been pretty friendly, haven't we? I've been fooled. What's that thing on the ceiling? An electric light meter?" he sneered. "Or is it a tricky apparatus to wangle the roulette wheel?"

Mr. Snagg nearly exploded.

"All right!" he said thickly. "You've seen it—so we'll make a bargain with you. You've got to keep your tongue still—understand? We'll pay you back everything you've lost at that table——"

"Yes, and you'll pay me a hundred pounds into the bargain!" said Forrest, seizing his overwhelming advantage. "By gad, two hundred pounds! If you don't, I'll go upstairs and tell every living person what I've seen!"

Mr. Snagg was appalled.

"You young fool!" he panted. "What do you mean—two hundred pounds?"

"I mean what I say—two hundred pounds!"

"You're out of your mind!" said the man. "We won't pay you ten, or twenty! You'll be lucky to get your own losses back. Do you think we're going to be blackmailed by a snivelling schoolboy?"

Snagg paused. He was thinking hard. He knew well enough that this situation was critical. Forrest was looking dangerous, and if he went upstairs in this mood, and breathed a word about that apparatus, there might be murder done. It was nearly one o'clock, anyhow. Snagg knew that he couldn't risk anything. It was necessary to take swift action.

And Fullwood watched and listened with sheer enjoyment. The fact that this was his doing only made him more content. For it certainly was his doing. Snagg wouldn't



"All together!" roared Handforth. An i
a hail of snowballs; they were tied to the
were blotted out by the snow. The

have come down if that wire had not been disconnected, and Forrest wouldn't have followed him.

"Two hundred pounds!" said Forrest gloatingly. "I'll accept that, provided you pay me to-night. And I'll keep it a secret. I won't breathe a word——"

"You won't!" agreed Snagg harshly.

Crash!

He didn't give Forrest the slightest warning. With terrific force, he landed a terrific left-hander which caught the unprepared schoolboy between the eyes. Forrest crashed over backwards, and lay moaning. Fullwood was nearly on the point of rushing out, and punishing Snagg for that cowardly blow. But he checked himself. It was too late to help Forrest now, anyway. Besides, if it came to the point, the young rascal had deserved it. Fullwood boiled over at the thought of a St. Frank's fellow sinking so low as to try and blackmail these crooks.

"Good heavens!" muttered Snagg, aghast. He wasn't a violent man, and he had acted



the ringleaders of the night club wilted under it escape the fusillade. In a little while they work well—and they enjoyed doing it!

on impulse and, partly, in a panic. He looked down at Forrest with real alarm. But then he pulled himself together, and flashed the torch round. A door was illuminated by that beam—the door of an inner cellar. It was provided with bolts, like the main one at the top of the stairs.

Snagg strode across, flung the bolts back, and opened the door. He flashed his torch within.

"Yes, this'll do," he muttered shakily.

He went back, bent over Forrest, and took him by the shoulders. Then he dragged him across the floor towards the inner cellar. Forrest was beginning to recover, and he struggled wildly. But Snagg managed to bring him to the doorway, and he slammed the door and shot the bolts.

"We'll deal with you later!" he panted. "You can hammer all you like, but nobody will hear you."

He turned on his heel, and hurried out, little dreaming that Bernard Forrest would be able to escape very easily indeed!



CHAPTER 11.

THE GATHERING OF THE VIGILANTES!

HANDFORTH started out from the shelter of the hedge as he saw a figure approaching at the double. And a moment later Church came up, panting breathlessly.

"Everything the same?" he asked.

"Yes—nothing's happened here," replied Handforth. "No sign of Fullwood, or anything. What about the Remove? Did you get through on the 'phone all right?"

"Yes—the line happened to be clear."

"Good man! Did you speak to Nipper?"

"Got hold of him at once," said Church eagerly. "I told him everything—I explained about our accident in the Austin—"

"Fathead!" snapped Handforth. "That wasn't necessary."

"Well, I told him, anyhow—I had to," said Church. "I was explaining what had happened to us after we took up Fullwood's trail. I told him where it led to, and I suggested your idea—about raiding the place."

"Well?"

"He's coming!"

"I knew it, of course," said Edward Oswald confidently. "He couldn't do anything else. He's coming with a whole crowd, eh?"

"Every fellow he can get hold of in the Remove," replied Church. "He said he couldn't understand how you came to think of the stunt."

"Oh, did he?"

"Rather!" said Church. "He praised you up to the skies."

"Of course, that's better——"

"Said your ideas were usually hare-brained and dotty," went on Church. "He thought that either Mac or I had suggested this one, and I had an awful job to convince him. After that he praised you no end. Said that the age of miracles hadn't passed, and that you were evidently sent to serve some purpose in the world, after all!"

Handforth did not appear to be very flattered.

"Oh, he said all that, did he? He told you——"

"Oh, he said lots more," replied Church briskly.

"In the same strain?"

"Yes! He said that your brain——"

"I don't want to hear it!" growled Handforth aggressively. "When I meet that chap, I'll give him a piece of my mind! This is all the thanks I get when I come out with a really brilliant suggestion——"

"But he praised you tremendously," urged Church.

"I don't want that sort of praise—all that talk of me being sent into the world to serve some good purpose!" snorted Handforth. "Well, what's happened? When did he say he'd be along?"

"Almost as soon as I got here, he reckoned," replied Church. "You see, I've had

to walk and he's bringing the Vigilantes on bikes. And they're hurrying, too."

"I say, this is ripping," put in McClure eagerly. "It's not a quarter to one yet, so if they're here within five minutes, we shall be able to make our raid with plenty of time to spare. Let's hope they're here soon."

Handforth & Co., feeling very pleased with themselves, went down the road a few dozen yards, in order to look round a slight bend. The snow had nearly stopped now, and the wind had dropped considerably, too. It was probably only a lull, but it was a very welcome one.

In the meantime, the good people who lived in the roadside cottages between Bellton and Bannington might have been surprised, if they had been awake at this unearthly hour, to see a large body of cyclists humming past over the snow-covered road.

Practically the entire Remove had rallied to the call, whether they were Vigilantes or not. That fact mattered nothing in an emergency of this kind. Men were needed, and all and sundry had been pressed into service.

The leaders were Dick Hamilton and Reggie Pitt, and they were riding in advance of the rank and file. Everybody was feeling excited, and there was a general atmosphere of tension. Something big was going to happen.

Needless to say, no permission had been asked. Under the Honour System, it wasn't necessary. The juniors could go out just when they liked, and come back when they liked—although a wholesale exodus of this sort was well calculated to bring the Honour System to a swift finish.

However, it was an exceptional case. Dick Hamilton felt that they were fully justified in going out. They were looking for Fullwood, in any case, and here was a chance of smashing up a dangerous gang of professional gamblers.

"I can't understand how Handy got the idea," Dick was saying. "If it comes to that, why didn't we think of it weeks ago? Of course, they've trapped Fullwood again, and that makes this drastic step necessary. We'll soon make mincemeat of them, once we get busy on the raid."

"Suppose the police come in the middle of it?" asked Pitt.

"What shall we care?"

"Well, you know, they might want to know things," said Reggie. "We can't effect a raid like that without making a bit of a shindy—"

"The police can't take any action unless the occupants of that house make a complaint against us," interrupted Dick. "I don't think they'll be rash enough to do that, so we've nothing to fear. And if the whole thing

comes out in the local newspapers, so much the better."

"The Head would have a fit!"

"Don't you believe it," chuckled Dick. "Imagine the headlines—'St. Frank's Boys Raid Gambling Den'—'Schoolboys Put an End to Bannington Blot.' Would the Head have a fit if he saw those? My dear chap, it would enhance the prestige of St. Frank's tremendously."

"Well, I think we're pretty safe on this stunt, anyhow," admitted Reggie. "But, I say, that's pretty bad news about Fullwood. I thought he was absolutely square again. How on earth could the ass be mad enough to start these gambling tactics?"

"We don't know that he has," replied Dick.

"But they traced his bicycle to the place."

"That proves one thing, Reggie, old man. It proves that Fullwood went there. But it doesn't prove anything else at all. I'm not Handforth, and I don't jump to conclusions. But this raiding stunt is a good one, so we'll go ahead with it. I'm not making any conjectures about Fullwood."

"Well, I believe the chap's all right," said Pitt stoutly. "He must have had some special reason."

Among the other juniors, Clive Russell was talking to De Valerie as they rode along.

"The whole thing's a mystery, I guess," the Canadian junior was saying. "What a pity you didn't get hold of him in Caistowe. If only you had told him about the pardon, he might have changed his plans—"

"We didn't have a chance," interrupted De Valerie. "Personally, I'm disappointed in him, Russell. Even if he does think he's sacked, that's no excuse for acting like this. It's sheer weakness. Just because he's miserable, he goes to that club! It's as bad as a man taking to drink because he's anxious to drown his sorrows."

Clive didn't reply. He was very puzzled over the whole affair. And he wanted this raid to be over, so that he could drag Fullwood out and have a quiet talk with him. There were so many things that needed to be explained—his presence in the night club, most of all.

At last they arrived near the scene of action, and Handforth came hurrying up to meet them.

"Not too close—not too close!" he said urgently. "We don't want to give them any preliminary warning. Better jump off here, and put your bicycles against the hedge. Then we'll rush up in a body."

The raiders dismounted, lamps were extinguished, and all preparations were made. Handforth looked at Dick Hamilton rather coldly.

"Now, my lad, what was that message you gave to Church?" he asked. "What have you been saying about my brains?"

Dick grinned.

"Only my fun, old man," he chuckled. "This is a brilliant idea of yours, and you deserve all praise. Let's hope the raid is a big success."

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"Well, we shall soon know," said Handforth, somewhat mollified. "I'm jolly worried about Fullwood, though. We found his bike there, so it's as clear as daylight that he's in the place. And two and two make four, don't they?"

"Always, without exception," agreed Dick. "So don't make half a dozen out of them, or eight! We only know that Fullwood is in that place, but we don't know why he's there. Everything all ready now? The sooner we start the business, the better."

"Yes, rather—let's make a start."

The others were eager enough, and the raiders advanced on the house like a horde. Those swindlers had no inkling of the storm that was on the verge of breaking!



CHAPTER 12.

A HEART-TO-HEART TALK!

AND while these events had been taking place, other, but less sensational, happenings were occurring in the cellar of that club.

Fullwood, as soon as Mr. Snagg left the cellar, came out of his place of concealment. He was feeling rather grim now. He couldn't very well stick to his original plan, and leave the premises. He would, at least, be compelled to rescue Forrest, and take him out, too.

And he had a very satisfactory thought.

"Well, there's one thing as sure as the sunshine!" he told himself. "These crooks will shut this place up, and clear out of Bannington as though it were a plague-spot. When they find that Forrest has got away, they'll get thinking. In fact, they'll know that two of us must have been down here. And they'll bolt like hares."

This was probably true. Fullwood didn't know that the crooked gentlemen would scarcely have the chance of bolting. But, raid or no raid, there was no doubt regarding the fate of the night-club. With a St. Frank's schoolboy knowing the secret of that roulette wheel, it would be madness to carry on.

So Fullwood had the satisfaction of knowing that he had performed excellent service by proxy—for he had taken no actual hand in the affair himself, except for pulling that wire off. That simple little movement had caused the downfall of the entire establishment. It was a rather serious thought.

"Well, now for Forrest," muttered Fullwood.

He went to the inner cellar, and unbolted the door.

"You murderous crook!" came Forrest's voice. "I'll make you suffer for that filthy blow! You didn't give me a chance——"

"Steady!" murmured Fullwood. "Not so loud!"

There came a gasp from within.

"Who's that?" breathed Forrest tensely.

"Don't you recognise my charming baritone voice?"

"Fullwood!" exclaimed the cad of the Remove, in a tone of alarm and amazement. "Is that you, Fullwood?"

"Yes, it is—and here I am, back again in the haunt of the wicked!" said Fullwood drily. "But this time I've got a bit more sense. You won't trick me again, my lad! How's your face? That was a pretty nasty knock that Snagg tipped you."

"You—you saw it, then?"

"I was in the orchestra stalls!" said Fullwood calmly.

"You—you rotter!" growled Forrest. "Why didn't you interfere? Why didn't you stop the brute? There was nothing fair about that punch!"

"Of course, you're a wonderful judge of fairness, aren't you?" asked Fullwood, his manner changing. "What about your precious roulette club now? There's only one thing I'm hoping—and that is that you've lost every cent of your money!"

"I have!" snarled Forrest savagely.

"Splendid!"

"Confound you——"

"Life is full of hard knocks, but there are always these little compensations," went on Ralph Leslie, in quite his old form. "It's no good, Forrest—you've been several kinds of a fool. And as for that money of Russell's, I suppose you'll admit that I was robbed of it?"

"Everybody's being robbed!" snarled Forrest. "I never dreamed of it, you know! I thought that table was on the level!"

"This is what comes of resorting with rogues and vagabonds," said Fullwood severely. "I don't suppose for a moment that you'll learn your lesson, but I'm pleased to think that this club is finished with. Its number's up."

They were still in the dark, for Fullwood did not see any reason to keep on striking matches. He heard Forrest give a snort.

"Its number's up unless they shell out——"

"Yes, that reminds me," interrupted Fullwood grimly. "You're a pretty contemptible sort of cad, Forrest. You're worse than a cad—you're a blackguard!"

"Look here, you insulting——"

"Insulting be hanged!" snapped Fullwood. "What kind of a fellow do you call yourself? When you find out that this club is absolutely crooked, you don't threaten to give it away to the police, but you attempt blackmail! Blackmail, the dirtiest, rottenest crime on the face of the earth! If I thought for a moment that you realised the nature of your dirtiness, I'd give you a smash that would make Snagg's punch look like a flick."

"Don't they deserve to be punished?" demanded Forrest fiercely. "Who the dickens are you, anyhow? You've got no right to set yourself up in judgment——"

"I've got the right to call you a damned rogue," interrupted Fullwood curtly. "And now that we're having a heart-to-heart talk,

"I'll just tell you something, Forrest. You're coming away with me now, and you're going to finish with this place for good."

"Oh, am I?"

"Yes, you are."

"Who says so?"

"I do—you've just heard me," said Fullwood. "By to-morrow, the birds will have flown. That's as certain as that you're a cad. They wouldn't dare to stay in the town another six hours after they find you gone. If it came out about this worked table, they'd be in danger of their lives. They fear their own dupes a lot more than they fear the police."

"I want my money back——"

"Well, you won't get it—at least, not if I can help it," interrupted Fullwood. "You deserve to lose it for your own crookedness. You're no better than they are—in fact, a lot worse. You're at a big public school, and you ought to know a decent code of honour."

Forrest sneered.

"Rather a case of the pot calling the kettle black, isn't it?" he asked sourly.

"The kettle's black enough—but the pot's been polished up a bit," retorted Fullwood.

"You tarnished it the other week, but it's going to be kept clean in future. You're coming with me, and you're not going to see these crooks again. I won't have any blackmailing, I can tell you. Will you come quietly, or do you want me to drag you out by your back hair?"

"Don't be a fool!" growled Bernard Forrest. "I want to get out. I don't fancy meeting those brutes again, anyhow—there's no telling what they'll do, after the way Snagg locked me in that cellar. Oh, that reminds me—thanks for letting me out."

"Don't mention it," said Fullwood. "If you'll hold me a light, I'll perform a little job before I go. I'm going to smash up that instrument—and this time I'll do it properly."

But Fullwood changed his mind almost immediately afterwards. Perhaps it would be better to leave the apparatus intact. The evidence would be all the stronger, if it was necessary to expose the rascals in their true colours. So the two juniors silently left the cellar and went up the stairs. But here they met an unexpected check.

Mr. Snagg had bolted the door on the other side.

"I hadn't thought of this," confessed Fullwood. "Rather awkward. Still, there may be another way out. It won't take us long to see. There's bound to be a coal-shoot, or something."

He was right. In one of the rear cellars—quite a small one—there was a flat grating, similar to the one that Fullwood had opened earlier. But it was very small, and, even after they had forced it open, it was doubtful whether they could squeeze through. Piles of snow fell down, and Fullwood understood why he had not seen the grating during his first round of inspection. It had been buried under a drift.

By squeezing and pushing, and wriggling and pulling, they managed to get themselves out. Forrest had neither overcoat nor cap, but he did not feel inclined to go to the front door and ask for them. In any case, he had no chance. For the pair had hardly moved a dozen yards round the angle of the house before a number of dim forms halted in their tracks.

"Police!" gasped Forrest. "It's a raid!"

"Great Scott!" muttered Fullwood, aghast.

He remembered that other raid—when his name had been taken at the boxing-

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booth. It would be far more serious if he was discovered in a place like this. But he recovered himself in a moment.

"There's nothing to fear, confound you!" he said. "We're not inside. The police can't do anything to us for being out here."

A moment later the dim forms leapt upon them, and they proved to be rather unusual police. For, indeed, they were Remove juniors. And in the first second they recognised the pair.

"Fullwood!" exclaimed De Valerie fiercely. "By Jove! You rotter! We've caught you nicely—sneaking out of this rotten place! Forrest, too! If this isn't red-handed, what is it?"

"Well, it looks black, but it isn't," said Ralph Leslie quietly.

"Don't try to deny it, you giddy hypocrite!" snapped one of the other juniors. "We've found you with Forrest, and you've both left this hole! I never thought you were such a two-faced cad, Fullwood!"

"Let's take them to Hamilton."

"Grab them!"

"You needn't grab—we'll go without being forced," said Fullwood.

And, less than a minute later, they were round in front of the house, where the main raiding-party was making its final preparations for the onslaught.

"Ralph!" ejaculated Clive Russell, as he recognised his chum.

"Hallo, Clive," said Fullwood. "Sorry if I've worried you, but so many things have happened to-night that I've rather lost count of them. But I've decided not to run away at all, and I'm coming back to St. Frank's with you—and to face the music to-morrow."

"That's more like you, Ralph," said Clive eagerly. "But haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"About the Head——"

"Wait a minute, Russell," put in Dick Hamilton quietly. "We're not judging you, Fullwood, but this looks pretty bad, you know. How is it we find you coming out of here with Forrest? Haven't you always professed to have a contempt for that fellow?"

"I think he's a toad," replied Fullwood promptly. "And that, of course, with my sincere apologies to all self-respecting toads."

"You fool!" said Forrest angrily.

"What's the delay here?" demanded Handforth, striding up. "I thought you were going to give the signal, Hamilton?"

"Sorry—just a little hitch," replied Dick. "Fullwood is out, and as we were going to raid the place to rescue him, there's no need for the raid at all now."



CHAPTER 13.

HANDFORTH IS DETERMINED!
EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH glared.

"No raid?" he snapped.

"You fathead! If you think I'm going to be dished out of a first-class scrap— Oh, so

here you are?" he added, looking at Fullwood. "I suppose you know that I followed you to this place, and found your bike behind the hedge?"

"Good old Trackett Grim!" said Fullwood, nodding. "But it's not my bike—it's De Valerie's. I borrowed it without permission, and I've got to apologise to him for the liberty. Val, old man, pray accept——"

"I don't want any apologies from you, Fullwood!" interrupted De Valerie contemptuously. "I can see that we were mistaken in you. And this time we've bowled you out fairly and squarely. Just after we've been spending hours, searching the countryside, so that we could tell you the good news."

"Good news?" said Fullwood. "I didn't know there was any good news—I've got so accustomed to the bad, you know."

"Ralph, everything's O.K. at St. Frank's," said Russell quickly. "The Head's pardoned you for that boxing-booth business."

"He's—pardoned me?" repeated Fullwood, turning pale.

"Yes," exclaimed Clive. "You're going to get that twenty pounds back, and Mr. Lee has made everything all right."

Fullwood's brain was in a whirl.

"But—but the Head wrote to my pater!" he muttered.

"He tore up the letter," said Dick Hamilton. "We've been trying to find you for hours. Fullwood—to tell you this. Russell explained that you had run away, and we wanted to get you back."

Fullwood was rather stunned.

"Pardoned!" he breathed dazedly. "It—it seems too wonderful for—I say, is this true?" he asked tensely. "You're not just fooling me?"

"Of course not, Ralph," said Russell quickly.

"Oh, thank goodness!" breathed Fullwood. "Then—then everything's fine! I never dreamed of anything like this—I couldn't even hope for it. By gad! I'm glad I decided to come back, instead of being told first!"

It seemed to him that all his dark clouds were rolling away. He had forced himself to be light-hearted before, before he felt that he was doing the right thing to go back and face the music. But now he could hardly keep his heart from thumping with joy.

His father wouldn't know anything—and the Head had pardoned him, and he could pay that money back to the fellows——

"Yes, he's pardoned," De Valerie was saying. "But, in my opinion, that sentence ought to stand! What's he got to say about this business? We caught him with the goods—coming out of this place with Forrest!"

Fullwood turned.

"I forgive you, Val, because I expect it looks pretty suspicious," he said quietly. "But I've done nothing to be ashamed of. I heard that this gambling place was more crooked than we believed—that the roulette wheel was unfairly controlled. So I came here to make some investigations. I've only

been down the cellar, having a look round."

Handforth jumped.

"Oh, so that's why you came here?" he asked, rather gladly. "You didn't mean to do any more gambling, or anything?"

"Don't you think I've had enough?" asked Fullwood pointedly.

"By George, yes," agreed Handforth. "But—but it looked a bit rummy, you know. Especially as you came out with Forrest——"

"Forrest will tell you that I forced him out," interrupted Fullwood. "We'll go into all the details later—but you can take my word for it that Forrest and I are just about as friendly as a wild cat and a bulldog."

Dick Hamilton was looking keen.

"You came here to have a look at the cellars?" he repeated. "Did you find anything?"

"Yes—an electrical apparatus fixed underneath the roulette wheel table," said Fullwood angrily. "This place isn't a night-club at all—it's the headquarters of highway robbers!"

De Valerie could see his mistake.

"Sorry, Fullwood," he said awkwardly. "I was pretty rotten to you just now, but I didn't imagine——"

"That's all right," smiled Ralph Leslie, who was feeling in such a mood that he could forgive anything. "This den has done sufficient harm, without doing any more. I fancy it'll be shut up to-morrow——"

"You fancy it, do you?" interrupted Handforth. "I know it!"

"You seem certain."

"I'm certain, because we're going to raid the place, and smash that roulette wheel to smithereens," retorted Handforth angrily. "It's more than ever necessary to start the raid now, you chaps! Have you heard what Fullwood's been saying? They're a crowd of crooks! A gang of robbers! And they've been dragging St. Frank's fellows into their dirty net! It's time we smashed it."

"Hear, hear!"

"We've got to take action."

"Just because Fully turns out to be true blue, and there's no need to rescue him, that's no reason why we should give up our raid!" continued Handforth. "It's our duty to smash this place up!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Let's start something!"

"We've got to take the law into our own hands," continued Handforth aggressively. "These rotters'll never dare to complain to the police. It's our chance to wipe out the gang, once and for all! In fact, we'll show the Bannington police how to put this gang out of business!"

"But they'll bolt to-morrow, anyhow," said Fullwood. "They think Forrest is still locked in that cellar, and as soon as they find that he's gone, they'll get the wind up——"

"They'll get the wind up before then," interrupted Handforth. "They'll get it up in about two minutes! Why should we let them escape without having a little satisfaction? You're with me, Nipper, aren't you?"

"Absolutely, old man," replied Dick Hamilton. "There's been enough talking—but I'm glad we've had these matters put straight first. Good old Fully! We're all relieved!"

"Not half so much as I am," said Fullwood fervently.

But now it was time for action. And it was rather surprising that the raiders should take the occupants of that house by surprise. It was only the wild night which made it possible. On any ordinary night the voices of the juniors would have been heard, and those within the house would have received a warning.

As it was, the raid started, and came as a complete shock.

Handforth and a crowd of others went to the front door. At first, Handforth had decided to hammer it fiercely, and to ring the bell for all he was worth. But Dick Hamilton persuaded him to adopt different tactics. So he merely tapped lightly upon the glass top of the door, and waited.

It was opened almost at once, and a man stood there, looking out curiously. He was the butler of the house—really the door-keeper, who would admit nobody unless he knew them by sight. He had been wondering who this late arrival could be, for the club was on the point of finishing for the night. He didn't wonder long.

"Thanks!" said Handforth briskly.

He thrust the door open with a crash, and the man started back with a cry of alarm. But he could give no warning—he was simply overwhelmed. A flood of schoolboys swarmed into the hall, and Fullwood, who was in the lead, went straight round, and directed the raiders towards the big gaming room. This was the objective. There was no intention of doing wilful damage to furniture or decorations. In spite of the general excitement, the schoolboy raiders were determined to keep their heads.

They burst into the gaming room, and there were many shouts.

Mr. Snagg, turning, allowed his jaw to gape open.

"What's this?" he gasped. "Schoolboys! Good heavens! What on earth——"

"That's one of them!" roared Handforth. "Collar him!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the swindlers!"

"Come on, the Remove!"

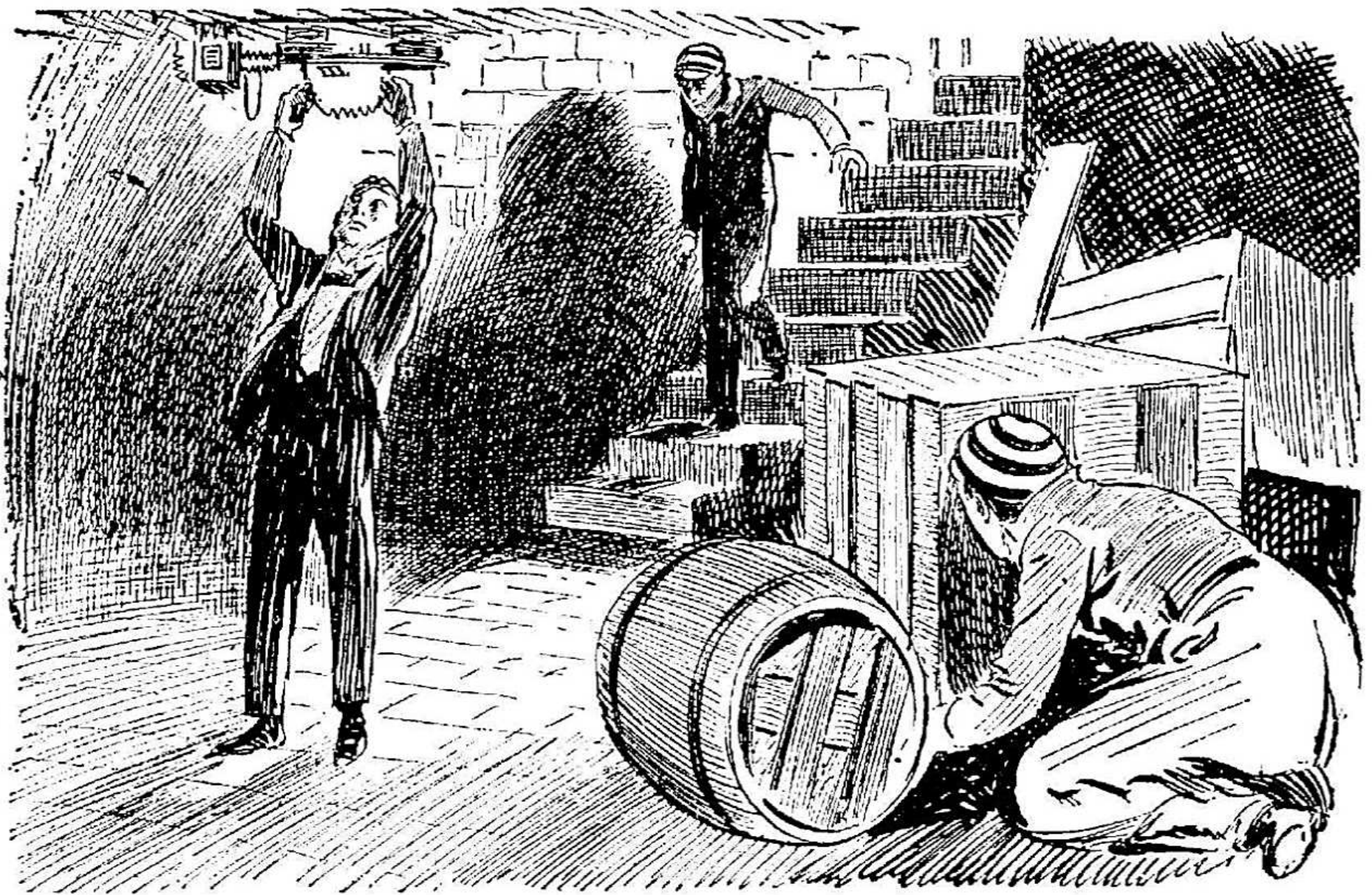
"Smash them!"

"Grab the croupier—and hold him!"

The utmost confusion reigned. The clients of the place were thrown into a state of excitement and apprehension. The majority of them escaped, unmolested. The juniors were only making war against the men who ran this club, and the actual gaming tables.

The croupier tried to get away, but it was impossible. He, like Mr. Snagg, was seized and held. And a third man was also collared. A definite plan of action was put into operation.

The three crooks—and these comprised the entire little gang—were bound and flung into



The rascally Mr. Snagg was so intent upon repairing the broken wire which controlled the roulette wheel that he did not notice an intruder coming down the cellar stairs. "Forrest!" breathed Fullwood from behind his place of concealment. "What's he want down here?"

a corner. The doorkeeper had already been placed there.

"Now then, everybody—the sooner you get outside the safer you'll be!" shouted Dick Hamilton. "We're just giving you the tip! Clear off now, and you won't come to any harm."

"Who are you, anyhow?" shouted one of the gamblers—a man who had just been winning. "Who told you to butt in?"

"This place is going to be wrecked?" roared Handforth. "And if you don't want to be wrecked, too, you'd better buzz off! Come on, you chaps—we'll take the roulette table first. Where's the hatchet?"

"You idiot!" shouted Handforth, striding up to him and glaring in his face. "You'll have us arrested, will you? And what are you going to say to the police about this illegal club? What are you going to say about the crooked roulette wheel? Why, you daren't say a thing, and you're shivering in your shoes even now, in case the police should look in!"

"Here's the hatchet, Handy!" said Church excitedly.

"That table cost over a hundred pounds!" gasped Snagg. "If you dare to damage it —"

"Damage it!" laughed Handforth. "What an idea! I just thought about giving it a little dent—like this!"

He raised the hatchet, and everybody in his vicinity simply fled. Handforth with a hatchet was a rather dangerous personage. This weapon had been specially brought from St. Frank's, according to Edward Oswald's instructions. He had foreseen the necessity for one.

He swung it aloft, and brought it down with a terrific swipe in the middle of the delicately constructed roulette wheel.

Crash!

That single blow ruined the apparatus beyond hope.

"That's done you—you rotters!" Handy gasped.

"Good heavens, you've—you've smashed it!" choked Mr. Snagg.

"It hasn't damaged it a bit!" said Handforth cheerfully, as he turned and grinned



CHAPTER 14.

OUT OF BUSINESS.

MR. SNAGG, who appeared to be the chief robber, was wild with excitement. Fullwood had always thought that he was merely a kind of tout. But his attitude now proved that he would be the main loser if the wreckage actually happened. The croupier and the other man were angry and alarmed, but not to the same extent.

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Snagg. "What are you going to do?"

"You'll see!" yelled a dozen voices.

"If you smash that table I'll have you arrested for—"

at Mr. Snagg. "You surely don't call that much of a dent?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Handy!"

The expression on Mr. Snagg's face was such that the juniors shouted with laughter. They had no sympathy whatever with this swindling rogue. He had been probably right in saying that the roulette table had cost over a hundred pounds. It was not one of the best, but it was an astonishingly expensive article.

Crash!

"That's another little chip!" said Handforth breathlessly.

Crash!

"And another!" he went on. "But you needn't look worried, Mr. Snagg. We're going to start on the other things pretty soon."

"You—you destructive young demons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

By this time the last of the clients had fled, feeling that they had been lucky, indeed, to get out of the place safely. The St. Frank's raiding party had the house entirely in its own hands.

The roulette wheel was now a mass of splintered wreckage. Incidentally, this wholesale destruction revealed a number of electric wires, and it was conclusively proved that Fullwood's discovery was an accurate one.

Not only the roulette table, but everything else connected with gambling was reduced to matchwood. The juniors had spread themselves all over the house, invading every apartment. But there was nothing wild about this raid. The Remove Vigilantes did not allow themselves to forget the true nature of their mission.

They had not come here to do wanton destruction, but to close this gambling den, once and for all. So far, they had scarcely started their operations. The reducing of the gambling impedimenta to wreckage was the mere beginning.

"Well, I think that's all for the moment," said Dick Hamilton, after he had made a quick tour of inspection. "There'll be no more playing in these rooms—until they get new stuff in, at any rate."

"Let 'em get it in!" yelled Handforth. "We'll smash it up again if they do!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's carry everything out and make a bonfire!"

"Hurrah!"

"Now then, you excited idiots!" shouted Hamilton. "We're not going to make any bonfires, or cause any commotion outside. This is a private raid, and nothing to do with anybody else."

Mr. Snagg and his companions were glad, at least, to hear this. They were not exactly anxious to invite attention—especially from the police. But Dick Hamilton had another reason for putting his foot down on the idea of a fire. If they burnt up the wreckage of the gaming tables, they would burn the evi-

ence. And that would be defeating their own ends.

But there was very little chance of the proprietors starting any more business in Bannington! With the whole of the St. Frank's Remove at war against them, it was a foregone conclusion that they would transfer their activities elsewhere. Bannington had lost this blight for good.

"Now we'll carry on with the next step," said Handforth briskly as he strode over to the helpless trio. "I think you're the boss, aren't you, Snagg?"

"I'd like to kill you!" muttered Snagg venomously.

"I dare say you would, but you haven't got the pluck to kill a caterpillar!" retorted Handforth. "We want some money off you!"

"You—you mad young fool!" panted Snagg. "Not content with wrecking my property, you're suggesting that you should rob me——"

"Rob you!" roared Handforth. "I want the money that you've swindled Fullwood out of! Forrest, too!"

"Gulliver and Bell have lost five pounds between them," said Forrest quickly.

"All right, that'll be another fiver," nodded Handforth. "What's the extent of your complete loss, Forrest?"

"Something like fifteen or eighteen pounds," admitted Forrest.

"Serves you right!" said Handforth.

"Hear, hear!"

"Let him lose it, Handy!"

"Oughtn't we to do something to Forrest?"

"Not now," put in Dick Hamilton. "We'll leave Forrest until later. Come along, Mr. Snagg, you'd better pay up——"

"Who's doing this?" asked Handforth coldly.

"It doesn't matter which, but get ahead with it!" said the Remove skipper. "You seem to have taken this affair in hand, so perhaps you'd better finish it, old man. It was your idea, anyhow."

"Thanks," said Handforth tartly. "Now, Mr. Snagg, what about that cash? Twenty pounds of Fullwood's, another twenty of Forrest's—we might as well say a round figure—and five each for those other two cads. That's fifty pounds altogether. Are you going to hand it over cheerfully, or must we use a little gentle persuasion?"

"Don't pay him, Snagg!" panted the croupier.

"I think I shall!" said Mr. Snagg, with an evil glint in his eye. "If they take this money they'll place themselves in my hands! This is nothing else but robbery, and I shall have a case against them."

A few of the surrounding juniors looked rather anxious, but neither Dick Hamilton nor Handforth were affected.

"Go ahead, Handy," said Dick. "That's only bluff."

"Do you think I don't know it?" replied Handforth with a sniff. "They can't fool

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me with their tommy rot! Fifty pounds, Snagg, and we can call it square. Square, that is, regarding the money. But there'll be another little account to settle afterwards. Don't forget it's nearly half-past one, and we're in a hurry. If we release your hands, will you fork out the fifty?"

"I'll see you hanged first!" snarled Snagg.

"That's done it!" Handforth roared. "We won't have any more arguments with you, you blackguard! If you don't like to hand that fifty pounds over, we'll take it."

And Handforth thrust his fist into Mr. Snagg's jacket, and soon produced a wallet. It was fairly bulging with notes, and the man nearly foamed at the mouth as he saw ten fivers being counted out.

"I—I think I lost more than twenty!" said Forrest eagerly.

"Too late, my lad—"

"And Gulliver and I are down at least a tenner each," put in Bell. "I think we ought to have our money returned—"

"Anything more from you, my sons, and I'll smash you!" growled Handforth. "I don't believe you've lost half the amount I've taken; but it doesn't matter. Five

pounds for you two, and twenty for Forrest."

"Five pounds each, you mean?" asked Bell quickly.

"Yes; blow you, and that ought to be enough to put things straight," said Handforth. "Here's your wallet back, Mr. Snagg, and thanks for paying up the fifty so readily."

"We appreciate these little courtesies," chuckled Hamilton.

"I'll get even for this!" panted Snagg. "This is robbery! Those boys didn't lose half that amount! Not that they are entitled to a penny of it back! They came here and risked their money, didn't they? They stood a chance of winning, and if they are sportsmen, they'd—"

"They didn't stand any chance of winning!" interrupted a dozen angry voices.

"How could they win against a faked wheel?" demanded Hamilton. "No, Mr. Snagg, that sort of thing won't do. You've been robbing all your clients, and these three, at least, you're paying back."

The wretched partners had really nothing to say. It was beyond their control. They knew that they were beaten, and their only

hope now was that they would be allowed to escape in safety.



CHAPTER 15.

THE END OF A PERFECT NIGHT.

BERNARD FORREST was gloating.

"Steady, you chaps—don't be in such a hurry!" he muttered. "Hand-

forth's got the money, and we can trust him with it."

"A fiver each, by gad!" breathed Gulliver. "I don't think I lost more than about two, as a matter of fact——"

"Shut up, you fool!" said Bell. "Somebody might hear you!"

"Oh, we're safe—there's so much noise!" said Gulliver with a grin. "And what about your twenty, Forrest? You didn't lose more than ten or eleven. I must say that Handforth is a sportsman!"

"I never gave him credit for it," admitted Forrest.

Gulliver and Bell had been inside the club at the time of the raid, and they had been taken completely by surprise. They had been horrified, too, at the sudden invasion of the Remove, and they had feared that this raid was directed at themselves. But now they knew differently. They and Forrest were not merely ignored, but Handforth was forcing Snagg to hand over all their losses!

Edward Oswald came over to them, with a number of others.

"Just a minute, Forrest," said Handforth briskly. "Twenty of this is yours, isn't it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Forrest quickly.

"And five each for you two rotters?"

"Yes!" said Gulliver and Bell in one voice, forgiving the insult.

"All right, I'll put your names down," said Handforth calmly. "Twenty quid Fullwood, twenty quid Forrest, and five quid each Gulliver and Bell. The Bannington Cottage Hospital will be doing pretty well out of St. Frank's this week."

Forrest stared.

"The hospital!" he gasped. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that this money is going to the hospital funds," replied Handforth.

"But it's ours!"

"What about my fiver?" howled Bell.

"You miserable cads!" snorted Handforth. "So you thought I was getting that money back so that you could gamble with it again, did you? Well, you're wrong! As soon as we heard that you had been robbed of that money, we decided that we should make Snagg pay up. But we're not going to give it back to you. You were fools enough to lose it in this den, and there's an end of it. But if it's a question of charity, the money's O.K."

"Hear, hear!"

"It'll be doing some good."

"Besides, everybody will be satisfied," ended Handforth.

"Oh, will they?" roared Forrest. "I'm not satisfied!"

"I said everybody!" retorted Handforth coldly. "You're not anybody, so you can't be included in 'everybody'! That stands to reason. As for these two worms, we're going to deal with them later."

The cads of Study A were not looking quite so happy. In fact, they were decidedly miserable, to say nothing of being alarmed. If they had not been so completely fascinated by the thought of getting that money back, they would have known that there was a catch in it somewhere.

By presenting the entire fifty pounds to charity, the raiders were doing the right thing. For even if they had forced Snagg to pay more than the actual amount, it was still all right, as the cash was being sent to charity. There was no sense in going into close figures—and fifty was a nice round sum.

"To-morrow," said Handforth, "Forrest & Co. are going to be frog-marched three times round the Triangle, and then they'll be sent to Coventry for the rest of the term."

"It's a pity we're not at the beginning of term, then," said De Valerie.

"Is it, by Jove?" grinned Reggie Pitt. "It's nearly time for the Christmas holidays, my lads, and——"

"Never mind Christmas now," interrupted Handforth. "There's another duty to perform. We've smashed up the gaming tables, we've squared the money affair, and now we've got to convince these three insects that we never want to see their faces in Bannington again."

"Out with 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll show them whether they can beat the Remove!"

Mr. Snagg and his partners, much to their dismay, were seized by eager hands and carried roughly out of the house. There seemed to be no end to their misery. They had fondly believed that the affair was over, and that they were now to receive their liberty.

But no. The most interesting part of the programme was to come.

At least, the Remove thought it interesting. Snagg & Co. were not quite so enthusiastic about it. And the most galling part of the whole business was that they were utterly powerless. They dare not call for the police, so that they could have the ringleaders of these raiders arrested for assault; they dare not take any action whatsoever. The evidence in that house, once the police looked at it, was enough to send them to prison. All they wanted was to escape—so that they could flee from the town altogether.

But there was no escape yet.

The luckless rascals were propped up against their own front railings, and secured there. And then the Remove gathered on the other side of the road and made heaps of snowballs. The idea was to score as many bull's-eyes as possible.

"Now, then—all together!" yelled Handforth.

Whizz! Whizz!

A perfect fusillade of snowballs went hurtling across the road, and Snagg & Co. vanished. They literally disappeared. And in their places were three heaps of snow.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let 'em have some more!"

"Bravo!"

"Let 'em know that the Remove is on the job!"

The rascals, however, needed no reminder of this fact. They had long since come to the conclusion that, henceforth, this part of the country was decidedly unhealthy and bad for their constitutions. If only they could escape now, it was a moral certainty that they would never bother the town with their presence again. They would probably flee, sacrificing any of their property that remained.

Dick Hamilton and all the others were of the opinion that it was far more satisfactory to take matters into their own hands. If they informed the police, it would only mean a lot of unpleasant inquiries and a great deal of unnecessary publicity.

This way, the Remove was satisfied, the gambling-house was closed down, and there would be no official inquiries or legal red tape. It was over and done with in the single night, which was just what the Remove desired.

Again and again the unhappy trio were pelted with snowballs. But, at last, they were cut free and released from their bonds. They were very sorry-looking specimens of humanity now.

"Well, we've done with you," said Handforth calmly. "You can have the roulette table, if you like, and now we'll say good-night. Good-night, Mr. Snagg."

"You—you infernal young hound——"

"That won't do!" said Handforth sternly. "You've got to say 'Good-night, boys, and thanks for letting us off so lightly.' Come along—say it!"

"I'll see you——"

"He's just going to swear!" roared Handforth. "Where are those ropes? Let's tie them up again and give them another pelt-ing! Either that, or you'll bid us good-night in the way I suggested."

Snagg cursed under his breath.

"Good-night!" he said thickly.

"Don't forget the rest——"

"I won't say another word!" roared the man. "You—you infernal—— All right!" he gasped hastily. "Good-night, boys, and thanks for letting us off so lightly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth beamed.

"There's a good, obedient Snaggy!" he said kindly. "I'm blessed if you don't deserve a bone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors turned away, satisfied at last. And Mr. Snagg and his scared partners ran off up the road as hard as they could pelt—as ignominious an exit as one could imagine.

"Well, thank goodness that's all over!" exclaimed Fullwood happily. "We've seen the last of this gambling den and the last of the crooks who opened it! Now we can go back to St. Frank's and sleep peacefully."

"Yes, rather!" said Russell. "It'll be nearly breakfast-time when we tumble in!"

"Who cares?" said Fullwood. "Clive, old man, I was an idiot to bunk, but how was I to know that you fellows would rally round me so well? Everything's over now—and I can feel that we're starting on a clean sheet. No more temptations for me! My hat! I've had a tough time of it!"

"But there's some satisfaction in seeing the place wrecked!" said Clive. "It was a jolly good idea of Handy's to take the law into our own hands."

"About that twenty quid——"

"Gee, cut it out!" interrupted the Canadian boy fiercely. "I don't want to hear another word about that money! I'm sick of it! Haven't I told you the whole affair's finished?"

"All right," smiled Fullwood. "I'm sick of it, too."



CHAPTER 16.

HONOUR WINS!

THE Remove, as a whole, felt that they had merely accomplished a feat which left their honour intact. That gambling club had tainted one or two of its members, but the stain was now wiped out.

So everybody returned to St. Frank's happy.

But not before a dozen of the cyclists had made a detour along the Caistowe road, and had helped Handforth & Co. to lift the Austin out of the ditch. The little car seemed to bear a charmed existence, for she had come to no harm at all. In this particular case it was not surprising, for she had merely tipped into a snowdrift. A couple of dozen strong arms soon had her on the road again.

And the chums of Study D purred home contentedly.

When St. Frank's was reached, it was found that Dr. Stafford was waiting up, and he was looking very anxious and concerned. It was after two a.m., and for the whole Remove to be absent like this was a startling state of affairs. And on such a night, too! It only made matters worse.

The Head was relieved, however, when he saw the juniors coming back in such numbers. He was not satisfied until he had received a report that all of them were in. And then he sent for Dick Hamilton.

But not only Dick Hamilton went, but Handforth, Fullwood, De Valerie, and one or two others. They felt that it was up to them to support the skipper in this trial.

The Head was in Mr. Nelson Lee's study,

and when the juniors trooped in, he gazed at them very coldly.

"I only sent for Hamilton!" he said sternly.

"We came along to support him, sir," said Handforth.

"I am very pleased to learn that you are aware of the serious nature of the situation," replied Dr. Stafford. "No doubt Hamilton will need all your support. He is the captain of this Form, and I think an explanation is necessary. Hamilton, your entire Form has been out to-night—at this unearthly hour—and I have been told that you sanctioned the extraordinary escapade. I am waiting for your explanation."

"We didn't think one would be necessary, sir," replied Dick quietly.

"Not necessary!"

"Under the Honour System, sir——"

"The Honour System is no longer in force!" rapped out the Head grimly.

The juniors were staggered.

"No longer in force, sir?" gasped Dick.

"But—but we didn't know! We thought we could go out without asking permission——"

"From to-day onwards, the school will resume its former status," declared the Head.

"Perhaps you can be forgiven for falling into an error, for the notices will not be posted up until breakfast-time. But the fact remains that the Honour System died at midnight, and this is now a new day."

"Oh, that's not fair, sir——"

"Naturally, I am perfectly satisfied to admit that you acted in good faith," continued the Head. "At the same time, I have come to the conclusion that it is highly necessary to resume the old status. Upon the whole, the school has conducted itself very honourably, and I think we can call it a win for the school. But these remarkable escapades must be ended. Although I am not in a position to punish you for what you have done to-night, although I cannot even force you to give me an explanation, I am hoping that you will satisfy my very natural curiosity."

The Head spoke with a touch of irony, and Dick thought it best to be quite frank.

"It was only a small affair, sir," he said.

"We had learned that there was a disreputable gambling house in Bannington, and that one or two of our fellows were in danger of being influenced by it. So we raided the place, sir."

"Upon my soul! You raided it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is—is this a joke, Hamilton?"

"Not at all, sir——"

"It was my idea, sir," broke in Handforth stoutly. "We located the beastly den, and then, at the right moment, we forced our way in, chopped up the roulette table, and everything else connected with gambling, and then we took out the rotters who ran the place, and pelted them with snowballs. We just made them understand, sir, that we don't want their sort in our neighbourhood."

The Head was startled, and he glanced

rather helplessly at Nelson Lee, who was also in the room.

"Ahem!" said Dr. Stafford, at length. "So—so, as I understand it, you absented yourselves after lights-out for the purpose of breaking up a gambling house?"

"Yes, sir," said Dick Hamilton. "We didn't want to leave it to the police—they take too long. Besides, it wouldn't have been effective."

"Not effective!" ejaculated the Head.

"No, sir. The rascals would probably have opened another place, of just the same kind, in a different part of the town—after being fined," explained Dick. "But I don't think they'll open another of their gambling dens anywhere within fifty miles of us. We wanted to get rid of the whole crew, sir, and as it was a big job we went in force, and did it thoroughly."

The Head lost his frown, but still looked amazed.

"In effect, then, your idea was to rid St. Frank's of a possible menace?" he asked.

"For the honour of the school, sir," chorussed the juniors.

"Boys, I think you had better go to bed," said Dr. Stafford, with rare tact. "Under the circumstances, I will not press my inquiries. We shall consider the matter closed, and henceforth any breaking of bounds will be punished in the ordinary way. From now onwards, the school authority is in charge. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

"And—thank you, boys."

The juniors went out, and were feeling contented. The Head had understood—and had wisely decided to say as little as possible. How, indeed, could he condemn them when he knew perfectly well that they had been engaged on such a creditable mission? It was certainly a case to be ignored.

"Still, it's the last time we can do anything of that sort," said Dick Hamilton. "We're not on our honour now, and if we break a rule, we shall get lines, or a swishing."

"Thank goodness!" said Handforth fervently. "By George! What a relief! I can be late for calling-over without feeling that I'm dishonourable—and take fifty lines with a grin. Who cares? Blow these American cranks! I hope Professor Hudson goes away!"

"He's gone," said Dick, smiling. "He went yesterday, I believe. But he was perfectly satisfied. The Honour System has been a success. But the Head naturally considers that it was a bit too strenuous. For, when you come to weigh it all up, the scheme was only a success because of the Vigilance Committees. In other words, the honourable chaps of every Form had to keep the cads and the weaklings toeing the line."

"Exactly," said De Valerie. "And that's the school's job—and not ours. Our duties as Vigilantes were pretty trying, when you

(Continued on page 40.)

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SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!



By

ROGER FOWEY

BRITAIN AT BAY!

JACK BENNETT and his two chums, TOM LEE and BUSTER KIRK, fall into the thick of the fighting around Cliff House School when Germany invades England in a War of Revenge. The enemy makes many landings on the south and east coast, and the chums acquit themselves so well that they are sent to Chillen Quarry to destroy some enemy guns which spies have placed in position. With the assistance of a young lieutenant and some retreating British soldiers, the chums accomplish this, but not before the lieutenant is wounded. The Germans drop gas bombs, and the chums retire from the

(Now read this week's exciting long instalment.)

quarry. Tom and Buster go ahead, carrying the wounded lieutenant, and Jack follows with a wounded artilleryman who has set a fuse to some shells in a dug-out in the quarry. As the little party retire, the enemy attack again, and the boys are cut off from the rest of the British. Buster and Tom set the officer down and shoot to keep off the attacking Germans. Jack is a hundred yards behind them, and, like his companions, is unarmed. "They've got us now," the gunner says to Jack. "Good-bye mate!" and his hand closes about Jack's fist in a last grip. They are at the mercy of the enemy!

Overwhelming Odds!

JACK could hear the snapping reports of the rifles with which Tom and Buster were armed; he got a glimpse of the wounded officer lying on his side and emptying his revolver into the score of Huns who were charging down on them.

The Germans still wore their gas-masks, and they looked hideous in the bright morning sunshine as they came lumbering over the coarse grass and broken ground. Their bayonets caught the sun with a cruel, steely glint—and back of the charging group were more and still more of the grey-clad shapes.

The artillery man whipped off his own gas-mask.

"If I've got to rub out, I'll do it without this!" he growled, as he tucked the thing into the box-container on his chest. "Phew! You can still smell the stuff, though!"

The air was pungent with the reek of gas that had been poured into the quarry, as Jack found when he wrenched off the German mask that he wore and thrust it into a pocket of his

tunic. For all the reek of the gas, it was a relief to feel cool air in his face.

It was as he removed the thing that he spotted the three Germans who had formed the crew of the captured gun he and the officer had gained a little while before. The Huns lay sprawling in a hollow near the edge of the quarry—and Jack saw that they all had revolvers.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "We'll go out fighting, after all!" and with a bound he jumped at one of the still forms. He snapped a buckle and wrenched the belt away with the revolver in its holster. On the belt were two small pouches carrying ammunition, and he buckled the thing about his waist, then tore off another belt and swathed it about his companion as the man came up.

"Is the revolver loaded—it is? Good!" exclaimed the gunner. "I can't load the thing 'cause of my bad arm. Six shots in it—that's six Germans to go west before I finish, anyway!" he said grimly. "Hallo, your mates have stopped 'em!"

He was right. Buster and Tom had checked the rush of the Germans. The grey shapes had

dropped to shelter in the broken ground—and many of them would never move again.

"Best thing we can do," said Jack, as the two crouched in the hollow, "is to try an' creep down to them. If we could all get a bit lower down the hill, we might join up with the officer's men. For two pins I'd try an' get back to the car, and—"

"Couldn't do it!" his companion told him, and he nodded to where Huns were beginning to drop down on the far side of the quarry. The little armoured car showed drab and battered in the sunlight, and forty or fifty Germans were blazing ineffectual bullets at its silent and untenanted shape—afraid to advance further until they were certain that the car was harmless.

"Anyway, we—" and then whatever else Jack was going to say was lost in a terrific explosion from one end of the row of shattered guns under the low cliff opposite them.

The cliff seemed to split in a fount of flame and gouting smoke. Earth and rocks and shale flung high. Mighty masses loomed outwards through the rolling smoke and smashed down. Jack and his companion were smothered in earth that dropped heavily all about them. A mighty chunk of shale that must have weighed half a ton slammed, with a thud that shook the ground, just beyond the hollow—then everything was blotted out as smoke whipped over and beyond them.

"Them—shells—gone up!"

The man's voice came jerkily to Jack's ears, half unheard in the roll of continuous explosions from the other side of the quarry.

Smoke heaved in a thick and stifling cloud above their heads, sinking to fill the hollow—and in it, Jack saw their salvation.

"Quick—we can get away through this!" he gasped; he tucked his left arm about his companion's waist and half lifted him out of the hollow.

It was plain that the explosion must have occurred almost in the midst of the ranks of the enemy. From the swift way in which the smoke had blotted everything out, Jack guessed that the cloud would be fairly extensive.

It smothered everything in a thick and choking fog. Both coughed from the acrid reek of it, as they went stumbling blindly down the slope, making for the spot where they had last seen Buster and the others.

"If we—see 'em—they'll shoot!" the artilleryman gasped as they staggered along. "If we—miss 'em we might—run into those Germans! What—a game!"

Every step that he took jarred his wounded shoulder, yet he did not lose his normal cheerfulness. It was due to him that the dug-out full of shells had gone up at all, and that they had been given even this remote chance of winning clear.

When he judged that they must be near the others, Jack went more cautiously. Abruptly, a figure with a rifle loomed through the smoke ahead. Jack saw the weapon go up, then he yelled madly:

"All right—it's me!"

It was Tom—and Jack's shout evoked the smothered crack of enemy rifles from somewhere close at hand, as the enemy heard his voice. Bullets whistled in a woolly sort of way above their heads, then Tom was at the other side of the wounded man and helping him on.

"We've got the officer here!" he gasped to Jack. "If we're quick, we may get away in this smoke!"

They found Buster kneeling by the side of the lieutenant. The officer's face was drawn and white with agony; but no sound came through his gritted teeth when Tom and Buster raised him as gently as they could.

With his revolver in his sound hand, the artilleryman went ahead, staggering and swaying as he walked, but mastering the hurt of his own wound. Jack brought up the rear, with his loaded weapon ready.

Through the Smoke Cloud!

BLINDLY, the little party plunged down the slope—to swerve abruptly to the right as the gunner's revolver roared, and roared again. Jack raced to aid him and saw three Germans bulking mistily in front. He saw the yellowish flash of a rifle, then he himself was firing as fast as he could press the trigger.

The Huns disappeared, and they went on, no longer straight down to the Wye valley, but across the slope. If Germans were lower down than themselves, it meant that they must have surrounded the quarry almost completely, but so long as the chums kept in the smoke, they still had a chance.

They moved, now, without any sense of direction, but it seemed a long while before—very suddenly—the smoke thinned, and, next instant, they found themselves standing in the clear sunshine.

Back of them, smoke was rolling in a mighty cloud from the quarry. To their left was Wye Valley, with the River Stour clear and cool; they saw the dusty road, on which British soldiers showed, and the railway with the sun glinting in silvery streaks on the lines.

A little to their right was a rocky sort of cliff, with its base partly screened by thick gorse bushes and brambles. Between that and the smoke cloud, and still some distance off, was a party of Germans, halted and staring into the smoke.

"Make for the bushes—quick!" Jack exclaimed. "Gimme your rifle, Buster—that's it! Now, hurry!"

With as much speed as they could make, Buster and Tom strode forward. The gunner fell back to Jack's side.

"If we can get to those bushes before those Germans see us, we might make a stand!" he exclaimed. "But I bet you they— Ah!"

He vented the exclamation as one of the enemy sighted them. Instantly, Jack lifted his rifle and let fly. Standing there, he emptied the magazine into the Huns, and the whole of them dropped to the ground as his bullets plugged amongst them.

"Tom—Buster! Drop—drag him the rest of the way!" Jack shouted, and the two obeyed just as the Germans began to fire.

Hugged close to earth, Tom and Buster crawled through the grass, dragging the officer by his shoulders. Tom left his rifle on the ground for Jack; he picked it up, and began to blaze in answer to the bullets from above. He fired until the magazine was empty; by that time, the others were in the bushes. Jack and the gunner followed them; once amidst the gorse they were sheltered by a corner of the cliff.

"Right up to the rock!" Jack yelled. "Get to those alder bushes at the back, the cliff overhangs there!"

They plunged forward. At the spot Jack indicated, they would be sheltered from above, while buttresses of rock on either side reduced the points from which the enemy could blaze at them. It was a spot which they might be able to defend for a long while.

"Ought to clear some o' these bushes away!" the gunner grunted. "If we don't, they'll be able to creep close up without us seein' 'em, and we—"

"Jack, there's a hole here!" Tom yelled the words as he gently set the officer down, and he pointed to a dark cavity just beyond the thick alders. It was a hole about four feet square, screened by lank growths.

"Looks like a little cave," Buster said, as he stooped before it. "By gosh, I believe—"

He dropped flat, and began to wriggle forward. His head and shoulders disappeared, then he paused as he fished for a matchbox. There came the faint flicker of flame and a muffled shout.

"It's a cave—a big 'un! Come on!"

Buster disappeared, and Tom went in after him. He yelled confirmation of the fat junior's discovery, and then reappeared to assist Jack in passing the wounded officer in to safety. The gunner went in, then Jack followed—heels first. He stopped to see what happened to the Germans who had been firing at them.

From well back in the hole, screened by the alders, Jack saw them come questing along the open ground in front. Some beat through the bushes, and it was plain that they thought the lads had got away on the far side.

Jack could hear them exclaiming gutturally, and then they all disappeared. He watched until the last had gone, before he hauled himself after the others into safety.

The Battle of Wye Valley!

FROM what Jack could see at first glance, the cave went back some little distance. But as they had only Buster's matches they could not discover much. The first thing was to ease the wounded officer's pain.

Jack crawled out again, and cautiously stripped as many alder branches as he dared, and, dragging them into the cave, made a soft couch for the lieutenant's leg. They cut away the cloth from the wound on his right thigh, then dressed it as well as they were able with field dressings. So far as Jack could make out, the wound was a bad flesh one, but the bone had not been touched.

"You're good lads to take all—this trouble!" the officer gasped. "You could have got clear if you—hadn't—stopped for me!"

"We'll get clear yet!" Buster assured him cheerfully. "Wish we'd got a candle, or something so that we could see where we are! I suppose nobody's got any grub, by any chance?"

Both the officer and the artillery man had iron rations—small, hard biscuits and a tin of bully beef. They shared some of this between them, eating by the faint and flickering light of a pile of dry sticks which Buster raked together. After that, Jack and Tom lay side by side looking out of the small entrance to the cave.

They were at a considerable height, and overlooking the Wye Valley. Right opposite, they could make out the red roofs of Challock Lees on the crest of the downs, just discernible through the trees.

To their left was the quarry from which they had escaped. The place was full of Germans when they saw it, and above the small, moving shapes of the men the two could get a glimpse of the wrecked guns.

Even at that distance, the frayed muzzles were plain enough, with the sun gleaming on riven metal. Two of them appeared to have been flung down by the explosion, and the cliff behind barely existed—there was only a gaping cavity from which a thin haze of smoke still lifted on the slow breeze.

Down below them Germans were stringing out, and along the line of railway and river, British troops kept up a ceaseless clatter of rifle-fire. From somewhere near Kennington, British

guns were blazing, and the two saw a battery gallop madly out of Boughton Lees, and then swerve wildly into the shelter of trees at Biltling. Bare seconds later, and it was getting into action, crashing shrapnel from out of the leafy depths of the wood.

More grey-clad troops went trotting in open order down the slopes before the chums, moving in long lines and with quick rushes, piling up behind the men who were already close to the bank of the river.

Fascinated the two watched. They saw shells bursting in founts of brown earth amidst the enemy ranks, and they watched an incessant plaster of explosions along the railway line, against which the British were making a stand. A goods train stood on the line, on the Chilham side of Wye station. The engine lay on its side, half off the embankment, with three trucks overturned behind it.

They saw two shells get the line of trucks fairly and squarely, scattering a debris of shattered wood and broken metal and leaving a brown, smoking gash where the trucks had been.

Almost ere the explosion had died and some of the smoke had wafted away, khaki figures were dropping into the shell crater, and the chums saw the licking flick of a machine gun as its crew fired over the rim of the hole.

A German battery of field guns came tearing down the narrow lane from Sole Street, on the right. The enemy had evidently brought horses with the guns, and the drivers were lashing the animals with all their strength. There were six guns in the battery, and at the moment that the chums sighted them, the British weapons in the wood by Biltling stopped firing.

Thirty seconds later, and the British guns blazed at point blank range at the racing German battery. A shell smashed fifty yards in front of the leading horses. The next hit the gun-carriage—and what followed was blotted out by smoke, explosions and founting earth. For two minutes the British guns pounded the battery, then they ceased fire. When the smoke had blown away, all the chums could see was a long, brown gash—the hedges had gone, and all that was discernible was the sunshine on what had been guns and ammunition limbers.

"Stopped them, anyway!" grunted Tom. "They — Look!"

He pointed below. Peering through the screen of alders before the mouth of the cave, the chums saw the enemy hordes sweep up in a solid wave. At the same moment, German guns dropped a vicious barrage along the railway line; the British guns replied and their shells fell on the German side of the river—so that the bottom of the valley became nothing but lifting smoke, and red splashes of flame with occasional glimpses of moving men.

Here and there, the chums saw Germans plunging into the river and forging across. They got momentary, smoke-misted pictures of hand to hand fighting on the railway line.

More and more enemy troops came charging down the slope to the valley, moving at the double and joining in the fight. They saw guns come leaping and lurching across the rough ground, some drawn by horses and others by what looked like small tanks—armoured tractors. They were.

"It's—it's a real battle!" Tom gasped, as they watched.

"Yes, and if the Germans win it, they'll move up the valley to Canterbury and join with the troops that have landed up there around Herne Bay!" Jack told him. "That's why General Marlow wanted the guns in the quarry destroyed. He knew this was coming off!"

The smoke below began to clear as the artillery ceased firing for fear of hitting their own men.

When the chums could see again, they made out that the Germans were across the river, and here and there, they were forging beyond the railway.

Some had got through below Bilting, and were charging at the cottages. Four times they were repulsed, then they held off, and the glaring flash of a heliograph showed that enemy signallers were sending a message back. The answer came in a little while—a smashing smother of shells that plastered down on the tiny village for long minutes, and at last lifted as abruptly as it had begun.

The grey, ugly figures charged anew while smoke still hung over the wrecked buildings. Somewhere, Britishers were dying valiantly, for the enemy did not capture the village with their first assault. But they won it at last—and then some went on to clear the wood beyond, while others swung along the Ashford Road and took in the rear the British who were still fighting fiercely on the now shattered defence of the railway line.

But, gradually, the enemy won the length of line, though they paid dearly as they swarmed on up the slopes beyond. Jack and Tom watched the grey figures dropping—but more and more waded the river or raced over by the bridges which enemy engineers hastily flung across the water.

Boughton Lees was captured, then Challock and tiny Eastwell, and after that the fighting disappeared amidst the woods. But the watching pair got glimpses of it as it went on. They saw shell-fire in Challock Lees, and a little while later the turmoil of fighting died somewhat as the battle went on over the brow of the downs.

Wye Valley was captured. The enemy army that had landed between Hythe and Dungeness was free to link up with that which had gained a footing between Whitstable and Margate. This meant that Dover was completely cut off from London, and that all the troops concentrated there were virtually prisoners.

In a little while, it seemed, the grey hordes would be hammering at the very gates of London!

The Lone Airman!

ALL afternoon, the chums saw German troops marching solidly along the road in the Wye Valley, on the way to Chilham and Canterbury. From the direction of the ancient city came the shock and crash of guns, intensified as dusk began to settle over the slow-moving figures of ambulance men working down in the valley.

"Well, I don't know how the dickens we're going to get away from here," Jack said, when once again they were sharing a dry meal of bully beef and hard biscuits.

"Have to make a shift soon," Buster grunted.

"I'm feelin' jolly hungry—I couldn't half do with a good tuck in. Mind you, this beef stuff isn't too bad an' I'm not grumbling, but the sooner I get near a square meal, the better I shall like it. We've had practically nothing since we left Whitfall somewhere about midnight!"

Tom grinned as he eyed the chubby junior.

"If we're here in the morning, you'll be able to go out an' gather some mushrooms," he said. "This cliff is the very place for 'em!"

"More likely to pick a lot of toad-stools an' poison myself!"

"Look here, boys," the officer cut in. "There's no sense in all of us being penned up here. You clear off and—"

"When we go, we take you with us, sir," Buster told him. "But it doesn't look as though any of us are going to go. Lively outlook, isn't it—stuck here for the rest of the

war, and not even a candle to see what sort of place we're in!"

He had, as a matter of fact, looked around the cave that afternoon, with the aid of lighted sticks of wood. He had found nothing. There were various roughly-chipped inscriptions on the walls, left by people who had discovered the cave, but there was no way out other than through the hole by which they had entered.

Given food and light, their refuge was safe enough, and they might have stopped there for weeks. But they had neither food nor light.

"Tom an' I might go out and scout for some grub," Jack suggested. "I bet we could get enough to last us a while. But that isn't the point. We want to get away, and—"

"Think there's any chance of wangling through the German lines—like we did from Denge village?" asked Tom.

Even as he spoke, he knew that it was hopeless. The three juniors might have managed it; they might have done it even handicapped by the wounded gunner. But with the officer, who could not walk, the thing was impossible.

They talked the situation over, then Tom and Jack crawled out to the entrance once more to see what was going on and to plan a foraging expedition when darkness had settled. Dusk was falling fast now, and the sky was taking on a lightish blue, while clouds caught the ruddy rays of the setting sun.

Far ahead, on the top of the downs, they made out the woolly bursts of shrapnel shells, marking the line of advancing enemy infantry.

"They must be right over Faversham way," Tom commented.

"They've advanced a lot," Jack agreed.

They saw an enemy tank, squat and ugly and evil, waddling cumbersomely far away down the slope, and Jack went on:

"What we want is something like that! We could put the officer in it, and just go straight ahead until we got back to our own people!"

"Some hopes o' getting one!" Tom grunted. "It's a—"

He broke off, and craned his head to stare upwards. Five hundred feet above them, a scouting biplane was wheeling drunkenly in the sky, with the glare of the setting sun tinting the polished fabric of its wings.

The machine was British, and the engine kept "blip—blip—blipping!" in a half-hearted sort of way, as the machine surged lower and lower in wide sweeps. From the valley came the crack and rattle of rifle-fire. Over on the right, and out of sight of the chums, they heard the steady clatter of an enemy machine-gun.

"Must have winged him—he's coming down near here!" Jack exclaimed. "He—look at that!"

The machine was before the cave when he spoke. It tipped forward in a wild dive, and dropped like a plummet towards the earth.

Twenty feet from the rough grass, it flattened out and started to glide upwards again, then it wheeled like a kite, stalled and dropped—wheeled again, then caught one wing-tip on the earth, in a shower of torn grass-roots, and smashed down barely fifty yards from the bushes in front of the cliff.

"He's down!" Tom exclaimed. "Wonder if—!" He broke off as a little party of Germans suddenly came into view. There were three of them, and one carried the machine-gun which the chums had heard a few moments before. They saw the gunners slither to earth and push their weapon ahead of them.

Jack wriggled back to the cave, followed by Tom. They grabbed the two rifles, then dived back to the cave opening again, just as the German machine-gun began to spray the wrecked British plane with a hail of bullets.

Without a word, Jack cuddled his chin down to the cold wooden stock of his rifle, rested the short barrel in a notch of the alder bush in front, sighted for the gunner, and pressed the trigger.

The German Aerodrome!

JACK had been the best shot in the Cliff House Cadets, and, even in the half-light, he did not miss. The guns ceased firing abruptly, then Tom picked off a man. Jack fired twice more, and where the machine-gun crew had been there was now only a misshapen heap of grey, with the smoking muzzle of the gun canted to the sky.

Both looked to the wrecked scouting 'plane. They saw a leather-clad figure standing against the smashed fuselage and wrenching frantically at what looked like a Lewis gun.

"Let's go out and fetch him in!" Tom exclaimed, and he was off with the words, Jack at his heels.

They doubled out of the bushes, half checked when they saw a party of German infantrymen against the skyline some distance behind the silent crew of the machine-gun, then went on. The airman wheeled round when he heard their feet thudding on the turf behind him, one hand dropping to the revolver at his hip.

"Who—Hullo! I thought I—"

"Some of us are in a cave over there!" Jack exclaimed. "You come with us, and—"

"What's that? Got a cave—over by that cliff?" asked the airman. He was tall and lithe and lean, and he continued to wrench at the Lewis gun as he jerked out the words. "Not likely, lad—those Huns over there would see where we went and that would give the show away. Better to hold 'em off until dark, and then make a break for it. If I can get this confounded gun out of—Ah, got it!"

The gun came away as he spoke. Tom dived round to the other side of the machine, and a couple of seconds later he was pitching heavy, double-drums of ammunition out of the cockpit to where the airman had dropped prostrate to the grass.

In the forward cockpit Tom saw a huddled brown figure. It was the observer, and he had been shot through the forehead. Tom reached the drums of ammunition at his side without disturbing the man who had given his life for his country, then he ran round to the other two.

The airman put the advancing Germans down to the grass with a burst of fierce firing, then he glanced about him.

"There's a bit of a hollow over there—let's get into it. This machine will be a mark for them. Crawl for it!"

Shoving the drums of ammunition before them, they made for the hollow that showed barely a dozen yards away. It was deep enough just to conceal them. When they gained it, the airman let the enemy have another half-drum from his gun.

"Just for luck!" he said cheerfully. "We can hold them easily from here. I got into a lot of dirt from a battery of Archies, and one shell burst right under my tail, put my elevator out of gear. Then, when we began to drop, we came in for some machine-gun fire, and my observer got it—poor chap. I was just beginning to think about something to eat at Stag Lane when I caught it!"

Stag Lane was the aerodrome from which he had flown; there was poor enough chance of his ever getting back to it now.

"We've been thinking about some grub for a long while," Jack told him.

"Well, there's chocolate and ham sandwiches

in the pouch by the side of my seat," the airman told him. "If you care to chance it and get 'em, you—Get down, you rotters!" Once again his gun spat a hail of lead, and Tom took the opportunity, as the Germans ducked, to streak for the 'plane. He came crawling back with his pockets stuffed with grub.

"This'll make Buster smile," he chuckled, as he dropped beside them.

As they lay there, Jack told the airman—they learned that his name was Warren—something of how they came to be in the cave.

"Pity my machine's busted," he said, "although I don't know that I could have piled you all into it, still I could have taken that wounded officer and the gunner for you. I might tell you that, from what I've seen, our only chance of getting away will be by air. The enemy's on a line that runs from Hastings up to Biddenden, an' then across to just outside Faversham. There's the very deuce of a scrap going on at Hastings, and another round Canterbury; but everything's so mixed up that it's hard to tell what's happening! I—Hullo, they want some more!"

The machine-gun blared angrily through the deepening dusk, and they could just see other Germans running to join those who had come up at first. Yet another party appeared behind them, and these Jack and Tom tackled with their rifles, taking the necessary ammunition out of one of the drums of cartridges.

As darkness dropped, the Germans began to steal closer, but they did not venture too near, and the way to the cliff was still clear when at last the airman decided that they might venture a rush for the shelter of the cave.

He emptied three drums of ammunition, first on one side and then on the other, then he dismantled the gun, and bolted with the chums for the bushes. They gained them in safety, and, nearing the cave, glimpsed Buster's white, anxious face in the opening.

He made way for them, and they dived through; then came anxious minutes while they waited to discover if they had been observed.

They had not. The Germans continued to shoot at the 'plane for a long time, then a sudden glare showed that they had set fire to it. After that, and when the machine was nothing but a mass of glowing embers, silence dropped in the darkness immediately in front of the cave.

Warren was not a great deal older than the chums, so far as they could see. He shared his sandwiches and chocolate with them, and then discussed the possibilities of getting away.

"There's one chance," he said, presently. "If I can't take you in my machine, I might manage to get another. Just before my 'bus was hit, I spotted what looked like a Jerry aerodrome up the back here. There's a sort of flat plateau, and I saw two machines standing on it. There were some men rigging up what look like ground lights, so they may be expecting 'planes to land here from Germany to-night. I wouldn't be sure—but it might be worth going to have a look. I bet I could manage one of their machines if I got my hands on the joy-stick!"

"An aerodrome!" Jack exclaimed.

Warren nodded.

"I don't want to stop here any more than you do," he said. "Tell you what, s'pose you an' me go and have a little scout round and see what's what? If that really is a field 'drome, and there's a chance of bagging a 'plane, we could shift your pals who're hurt up there, collar a 'bus—and off we go!"

Jack was game. Buster and Tom wanted to accompany them, but the airman pointed out that there was less risk with only two. Within five minutes of his making the proposal, he and

Jack were stealing cautiously through the bushes, each with loaded revolver ready to hand.

They rounded the end of the cliff and climbed the steep, grassy slope which showed there. Lying flat at the top, they made a survey of the ground ahead. They saw cross-roads, with the black bulk of a wood looming darkly beyond.

"I think the Jerry 'drome lies beyond that," the airman whispered. "We could bolt across that road without much trouble, and we're not likely to meet any Germans on this rough ground. They'll stick to the roads now, because it's easier going. Come on!"

They moved forward, both bent and walking slowly. A group of soldiers marched along the road before them, their heavy feet thudding rhythmically on the dusty surface, and to the ears of the pair floated the guttural notes of a marching song.

They got across the road without trouble, and they found that the wood beyond was thin and narrow. There was no sign of enemy movement in it, and they scouted through the trees to the far side. Some open ground, and then a line of bushes followed. They passed through the bushes, then halted abruptly on the far side, as both heard the drone of powerful aero-engines above them.

Against the purple sky, a ball of green fire suddenly jerked into being, and came fading slowly as it dropped down.

"Signal light," the airman muttered. "Somebody up there and coming down. Ah—there's the lights!"

Four searchlights abruptly flooded the level space before them, their beams focused so that there was no upward glare. The engines of the unseen craft dropped to silence; the two heard a fierce whistling, a rushing in the air above them—and then a giant enemy bomber sailed to the grass, hopped and bumped on the earth as it slid along with tilting wings, and then came to a stop in the full rays of a searchlight.

It was an enormous craft, with staring iron-crosses painted on the wings, while between the landing wheels and the long tail-skid, Jack could see row upon row of bombs.

Watching, they saw doors on either side of the closed fuselage open, and the crew of six climbed to the grass, stamping their feet as they shielded their eyes from the searchlight's glare.

A German officer stepped into the white rays, and strode towards the bomber's crew, who stiffened to attention as he approached. The officer saluted, then the whole group moved out of the light to the darkness beyond it.

A score of Germans who looked like mechanics suddenly appeared; three of the searchlights snapped off, leaving only the one nearest the machine blazing. Its glare followed the craft as the mechanics pushed it away. Jack and the British airman saw the long, heavy tail swung round, then the craft was backed until it stood in line with five other machines.

The enemy bombers looked grotesque and ugly in the strong light and deep shadows. Terribly strong and efficient they seemed, with their cargoes of bombs. The mechanics parked the great craft, then faded away into the darkness and the searchlight was snuffed out.

"Six of 'em—and more to come, I bet!" Warren grunted. "Well, when they start to count 'em up, there'll be only five!"

"Only five!" exclaimed Jack. "What do—" He gasped a little, as he realised what Warren was driving at.

"We're going to claim one of those," he said, and he chuckled a little. "I've seen that type before—I can handle 'em! We'll give that wounded gunner and the officer a nice, comfortable passage back to London. We'll pinch one of those bombers—and I think we'll have the one that's just come in!"

(Can Jack and the airman get away with one of the enemy 'planes? It is their only chance of winning clear with their wounded. Order your copy of the "Nelson Lee Library" in advance and make SURE of reading next Wednesday's thrilling instalment of this great war yarn!)



(Continued from page 34.)

come to think of it. I shall be glad to go back to the old rules, I can tell you."

Handforth grinned.

"Bother the rules!" he said. "We break up for Christmas in a few days, and who wants to think of any mouldy regulations? Christmas, my sons! Oh, and by the way, I want a lot of you fellows to come down to my uncle's place, in Norfolk."

"Is this a genuine invitation, Handy?" smiled Dick Hamilton.

"Of course it is," said Edward Oswald. "Still, we'll talk about it to-morrow. It's time we were all in bed—and as for the Honour System, and gambling dens, and

Christmas holidays, they can all go to the dickens!"

He yawned, and went off with Church and McClure into his own bed-room.

"Is that a fact about Christmas?" asked Church, with interest.

"You bet it is!" said Handforth. "My uncle's a sport, and he's got a whacking great place on the Norfolk coast. I'm taking a whole crowd."

And, on the following day, Handforth rather surprised the fellows by announcing that his invitation was genuine. Christmas was certainly close at hand, and the whole school was thinking of nothing else but the coming holidays.

And Edward Oswald Handforth made out his list of guests, the invitations were confirmed by his pater, and there was every prospect of a jolly time. But none of the members of Handforth's party could foresee precisely what they had let themselves in for!

THE END.

(Look out next week for our Special Christmas Number. Mr. Brooks is giving you a real Christmas yarn of ghosts and thrills that will keep you enthralled throughout. It is called "THE SPECTRE OF HANDFORTH TOWERS!")

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.

HERE WE ARE AGAIN!

I AM sure you will all be delighted to find that the League is once more represented by the Correspondents Wanted below, and the League Form overleaf. With regard to the silver medals, full particulars of this award will be given after the Christmas holidays. In the meantime, I would advise every bronze medallist and every member to qualify this week for the higher grade decoration. Twelve introductions altogether will be required, but Bronze Medallists will only need an additional six introductions provided they return their Bronze Medals for exchange.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Stan. Gregory, 12, Ebenezer Street, Luton, Beds, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

Dom. Ferri, 3, Wilton Street, St. Anne Street, Liverpool, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere on boxing.

Leonard Angus, 83, Alabama Street, Plumstead, Kent, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

John H. Roberts, 5, Victor Road, Colwyn Bay, wishes to correspond with members interested in pigeon flying.

J. H. Wellan, 38, Edgbaston Park Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, wishes to hear from members in his district who will join his club.

J. L. Simpson, 6, Rustic Cottages, Calinton, Midlothian, Scotland, wishes to correspond with a member overseas, but not India.

S. Prusin, 52, Evering Road, Stoke New-

ington, London, N.16, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere overseas. All letters answered.

Lewan Phillips, 48, Packington Street, Islington, London, N.1, wishes to correspond with a reader in New Zealand.

Ernest Franklin, 63, Packington Street, Islington, London, N.1, wishes to hear from a reader in Africa.

Ido Serracino Inglott, 20a, Sda San Michele, nr. the Rope Walk, Citta Invitta, Isola de la Sengle, Senglea, Valletta, Malta, wishes to correspond with readers in India and London about such hobbies as football, photography and fishing.

R. Underhill, 119, High Street, Amblecote, Stourbridge, wishes to correspond with readers in Africa, West Indies, or Gibraltar; interested in stamps.

Cyril Danks, 8, Lilleshall Street, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, wishes to hear from a reader in Malaya or Borneo who is working on a rubber or coco-nut growing estate.

Jim Anderson, "Carnegie," 57, Town Hall Avenue, Preston, Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from readers in England and India.

Alex Maule, Railway P.O., Whenuakura, North Island, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; all letters replied to.

Tom Owen, 10, Dane Street, Merthyr Tydvil, South Wales, wishes to correspond with a reader in London.

Laurence A. Miles, 24, Scmerford Grove, Stoke Newington, London, wishes to correspond with readers at home or abroad who are keen on natural history.

STIRRING STORIES AND POPULAR HOBBIES.

If there is one thing you *must* have this Christmas, it is a copy of one of the new 1927 Annuals. If you like school stories, then the HOLIDAY ANNUAL is the book you want. Boys of St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and Rookwood Schools figure in its pages. Their exploits are exciting and amusing to a degree. Those who prefer thrilling adventure yarns will like the CHAMPION ANNUAL—the finest adventure story book on the market.

An Annual which is published for the first time this year, and which should delight every boy, is the HOBBY ANNUAL. This book is full of interesting articles on Wireless, Photography, Model Aeroplanes, Model Boats, Camping-out, Model Railways, Autograph Collecting, Mechanics, Stamp Collecting, Pets, and almost every hobby you can think of. It contains three novel loose-leaf supplements dealing with Radio, Fretwork and Woodwork.

All these Annuals are strongly bound, have superb coloured covers, and are illustrated throughout. They are now on sale at all newsagents and booksellers at 6s. each.

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 58.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

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(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of

the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for 1d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow-members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

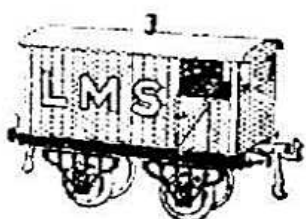


**BRITISH AND
GUARANTEED**

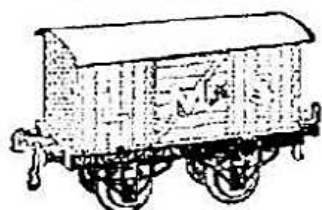
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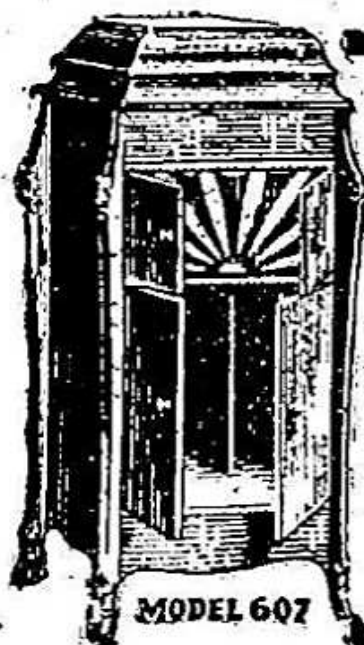
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