"Perhaps I can explain better than Pellin can," said Ronald hurriedly; "the fact is, I was dining at the Norridrums' yesterday, and they were wishing they had a swell cook like yours, just for today and tomorrow, while they've got some gourmet staying with them: their own cook is no earthly good -- well, you've seen what she turns out when she's at all flurried. So I thought it would be rather sporting to play them at baccarat for the loan of our cook against a money stake, and I lost, that's all. I have had rotten luck at baccarat all this year."

The remainder of his explanation, of how he had assured the cooks that the temporary transfer had his mother's sanction, and had smuggled the one out and the other in during the maternal absence, was drowned in the outcry of scandalised upbraiding.

"If I had sold the woman into slavery there couldn't have been a bigger fuss about it," he confided afterwards to Bertie Norridrum, "and Eleanor Saxelby raged and ramped the louder of the two. I tell you what, I'll bet you two of the

The Stake

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"Colonel Norridrum's cook, ma'am," said Pellin.

"The new cook!" screamed Mrs. Attray.

commenced Pellin by way of explanation. see to things properly, coming in so sudden --" "Well, ma'am, the new cook hadn't hardly time to

kitchen, Pellin?" she asked of the attendant maid. awfully sorry. Is anything the matter in the principally of red pepper and wet toast. I'm years," said her hostess; "that last dish tasted "My dear, it's the worst meal I've sat down to for

had flickered out with the savoury. house," said Eleanor at last, when her final hope "Not quite the best luncheon I've enjoyed in your

depression when he tasted the rognons Saltikoff. even the insouciant Ronald showed traces of outspoken denunciation would have been, and tears in her voice that was far more eloquent than said little, but when she spoke there was a hint of not redeemed by anything that followed. Eleanor over any meal that it had inaugurated, and it was soup alone would have sufficed to cast a gloom justly-treasured cook had built up for herself. The unworthy of the reputation which the made its tardy appearance, was distinctly As a matter of fact, the luncheon fare, when it

about the place; they were very accommodating I have to look to them for anything I want done offend them. After all, they are my landlords and "My dear," said Mrs. Attray, "I don't want to

Saxelby.

"Why do you let him go there?" asked Eleanor

mother's natural anxieties." for a crossing as expect them to bother about a might as well ask the Atlantic Ocean to keep quiet him play cards when he's over there, but you to stop it; I've asked the Norridrums not to let that he thinks about. Of course I've done my best and baccarat and poker-patience are positively all a waste of time, I think. But as to Ronnie, bridge and talk any day than play bridge; cards are such if she couldn't get me. I would much rather sit certain to ask that detestable Jenkinham woman that Edith always wants a fourth and would be hundred, and even that I shouldn't do if it wasn't afternoons in the winter, for three-pence a play -- a game of bridge on Wednesday never touched cards, and you know how little I don't know where he inherits it from; his father and already a confirmed gambler. I am sure I plaintively. "Only eighteen years old last February "Ronnie is a great trial to me," said Mrs. Attray



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The Stake Saki (H H Munro)

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about the new roof for the orchid house. And they lend me one of their cars when mine is out of order; you know how often it gets out of order."

"I don't know how often," said Eleanor, "but it must happen very frequently. Whenever I want you to take me anywhere in your car I am always told that there is something wrong with it, or else that the chauffeur has got neuralgia and you don't like to ask him to go out."

"He suffers quite a lot from neuralgia," said Mrs. Attray hastily. "Anyhow," she continued, "you can understand that I don't want to offend the Norridrums. Their household is the most rackety one in the county, and I believe no one ever knows to an hour or two when any particular meal will appear on the table or what it will consist of when it does appear."

Eleanor Saxelby shuddered. She liked her meals to be of regular occurrence and assured proportions.

"Still," pursued Mrs. Attray, "whatever their own home life may be, as landlords and neighbours they are considerate and obliging, so I don't want to quarrel with them. Besides, if Ronnie didn't play cards there he'd be playing somewhere else."

"Well, Ronnie did some preliminary endeavouring with it, on his own account, in connection with the Grand National. If it had come off, as he expressed it, he would have given the League twenty-five shillings and netted a comfortable commission for himself; as it was, that ten shillings was one of the things the League had to deny itself. Since then I've been careful not to let him have a penny piece in his hands."

"What did happen to it?" asked Eleanor.

"Firm? I am firm," exclaimed Mrs. Attray; "I am more than firm -- I am farseeing. I've done everything I can think of to prevent Ronnie from playing for money. I've stopped his allowance for the rest of the year, so he can't even gamble on credit, and I've subscribed a lump sum to the instalments of small silver to put in the bag on sinch offertory in his name instead of giving him instalments of small silver to put in the bag on for the hunt servants with, but sent it by postal to tip the hunt servants with, but sent it by postal or the hunt servants with, but sent it by postal or the hunt servants with, but sent it by postal order. He was furiously sulky about it, but I shillings that I gave him for the Young Men's shillings that I gave him for the Young Men's shillings that I gave him for the Young Men's

"Mot if you were firm with him," said Eleanor "I believe in being firm."

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This time he won his bet.

tournament. We're drawn together, you know." refuses to have me as a partner at the croquet Amherst pheasants to five shillings that she

"He'll get round that in some way," said Eleanor with quiet conviction; "he'll sell things."

"My dear, he's done all that is to be done in that direction already. He's got rid of his wrist-watch and his hunting flask and both his cigarette cases, and I shouldn't be surprised if he's wearing imitation-gold sleeve links instead of those his Aunt Rhoda gave him on his seventeenth birthday. He can't sell his clothes, of course, except his winter overcoat, and I've locked that up in the camphor cupboard on the pretext of preserving it from moth. I really don't see what else he can raise money on. I consider that I've been both firm and farseeing."

"Has he been at the Norridrums lately?" asked Eleanor.

"He was there yesterday afternoon and stayed to dinner," said Mrs. Attray. "I don't quite know when he came home, but I fancy it was late."

"Then depend on it he was gambling," said Eleanor, with the assured air of one who has few ideas and makes the most of them. "Late hours in the country always mean gambling."

"He can't gamble if he has no money and no chance of getting any," argued Mrs. Attray; "even

Attray's cook was worth waiting a few minutes Eleanor smiled forgivingly. A special effort by Mrs.

know."

the secret; I've been out all the morning, you unusually sumptuous in your honour. I am not in Mrs. Attray; "cook must be preparing something "Three minutes past the half-hour," exclaimed

so punctual in your establishment." mantel-piece for some little time; "lunch is usually had been straying restlessly towards the "Is that clock right?" asked Eleanor, whose eyes

as the card-table was concerned." himself with the role of onlooker last night, as far achievement, "I fancy that Ronnie had to content from a sense of painstaking and merited continued, with the quiet satisfaction that comes this morning and they're all there. No," she Attray; "and anyhow I went and counted them "Ronnie wouldn't do such a thing," said Mrs.

about ten or twelve shillings each, I daresay." chicks," suggested Eleanor; "they would fetch "He may have sold some of the Amherst pheasant

decent prospect of paying one's losses." if one plays for small stakes one must have a