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Author: Burt L. Standish

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK MERRIWELL'S CRUISE ***

FRANK MERRIWELL'S CRUISE

BY BURT L. STANDISH

AUTHOR OF

"Frank Merriwell's Schooldays," "Frank Merriwell's Chums,"
"Frank Merriwell's Foes," "Frank Merriwell's
Trip West," etc.

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Frank Merriwell's Cruise

FRANK MERRIWELL'S CRUISE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEETING IN BOSTON.

"Mr. JOHN DIAMOND, Lexington, Pa.: If you wish cruise in down East waters, join me Monday next at American Hotel, Boston. Have purchased yacht. Hodge and Browning will be in party. Great sport anticipated.

"MERRIWELL."

Jack Diamond was reclining in a hammock suspended in the shade of an artificial arbor when this message from Frank Merriwell was handed to him by a boy. He tore open the envelope and read it, his eyes beginning to sparkle and a flush coming to his handsome, aristocratic face.

"Just like him!" exclaimed Jack. "Before leaving Fardale he aroused our curiosity about that part of the country, and now he proposes taking us down there in his own yacht. Will I go? Will I? I wouldn't miss it for the world!"

It had not taken him a minute to decide.

A cab rattled up to the front of the American Hotel, on Hanover Street, Boston, and stopped. The door flew open, and out stepped a smartly dressed young man, wearing russet shoes, a light-colored box coat and a brown Alpine hat. He carried a handsome alligator-skin traveling bag in his hand.

Paying cabbie without speaking a word, this youth turned and walked into the hotel. As he entered, a colored boy hastened forward and relieved him of his traveling bag. He stepped up to the clerk's desk and said:

"I am Jack Diamond, of Virginia, and I wish to see Mr. Frank Merriwell, who is stopping here."

"Yes, sir," said the clerk, politely. "Mr. Merriwell left orders that you be shown up immediately on your arrival. Twenty-three, show Mr. Diamond to Mr. Merriwell's rooms."

"Right this way, sah," said the colored boy.

Jack followed the uniformed bell boy, who paused at the elevator shaft and pressed a button. In a moment the elevator came gliding noiselessly down, the door slid open, a lady and a gentleman stepped out and Diamond stepped in.

"Third," said the bell boy, and then he turned and disappeared, while the elevator man closed the door and sent the car gliding upward. He stopped at the third floor, and, to Jack's surprise, the bell boy with the grip was there, calmly awaiting his arrival.

Jack followed him to the door of a room at the front of the house. As the boy lifted his hand to knock at the door, there was a burst of laughter within, plainly heard, as the transom was open, and Frank Merriwell's voice cried:

"Hans, if you could tell that story on the stage just as you told it then you would make your fortune."

"Vot vos der madder mit me?" exclaimed the voice of Hans Dunnerwust, Frank's German friend. "Dot nefer vos a funny stories! You don'd seen vot I larft ad! Dot peen a bathetic sdory. I oxbected you vould took mein handkersheft oudt und cried id indo, but you sed roundt und laugh ad dot bathetic sdory like I vos a lot of monkeys. You don't like dot as vell as I might!"

Then there was another burst of laughter, and the knock of the bell boy was not heard.

"Never mind," said Diamond, taking his traveling bag and giving the boy a dime; "I'll go right in."

He opened the door and stepped into the room.

Hodge, Browning, Merriwell and Dunnerwust were there. Bart was tilted back in a chair, with his feet on the table, while lazy Bruce was half sitting and half reclining on a sofa. Frank sat astride a chair, looking over the back of it at Hans, who had stood in the middle of the room as he told his "bathetic sdory."

"Hello, fellows!" cried the lad from Virginia, heartily.

There was a shout of welcome. Frank sprang forward quickly and grasped Diamond's hand.

"Delighted, old man!" laughed Merry. "I was afraid you wouldn't come till I received your telegram stating that you would be on hand. Any trouble in persuading the mother?"

"Not much, though she said it did seem that I might remain at home a while longer, and she told me to tell you that she is beginning to get jealous of you, as I spend so much of my time during vacations with you."

"How you vos, Shack?" said Hans, getting hold of Diamond's free hand, the latter having dropped his traveling bag. "I vos a sight vor sore eyes, ain'd you! You don'd knew how dickled you vos to seen me."

Hodge came forward and shook hands, expressing his pleasure, and, with sundry grunts, Browning succeeded in getting upon his feet, saying as he rose:

"Suppose I'll have to stand to shake, or you'll challenge me. You Southerners are so confoundedly particular about courtesy and all that."

Jack smiled.

"I know you too well to resent it if you lay on your back and offered to shake hands with me. In fact, it surprises me to discover you hadn't rather fight a duel after you were obliged to get up than to get up when not absolutely forced to do so."

"What baggage did you bring?" asked Merry.

"A trunk. It will be brought to the hotel here."

"There is no room for trunks on board the *White Wings*," said Frank. "You'll have to store your trunk and such stuff as you do not absolutely need till we get back here."

"The *White Wings*? Is that the name of your yacht?"

"Yes."

"Good name. How did you happen to buy a yacht?"

"Got a bargain of her. I came on to Boston with Miss Burrage, whose aunt was waiting here for her. I met Jack Benjamin. You remember him?"

"Harvard man?"

"Yes."

"Plays football?"

"Yes."

"I remember him. His sister is a stunningly handsome girl."

"Huah!" grunted Browning. "That explains how you happen to remember him."

"Well," Frank went on. "Benjamin turned out to be a fine fellow. Invited me over to his house, treated me beautifully. He knows a lot of sporty chaps. Among them was Walter Pringle, who owned this yacht. Pringle took a party of us out for a cruise down the bay, and we had a grand time. Went to Nantasket. Coming back Pringle said he had planned to cruise down to the eastward this summer with a party of friends, but something had come up that knocked out the arrangement. Then it was that I thought of a talk we once had while at Fardale about making a cruise down along the Maine coast, and I spoke of it. Said I'd like to own his yacht. Saw Pringle looked a little queer. He stared at me a few moments, and then asked what I would give for the *White Wings*. I questioned him some about her, and then made an offer. He didn't take me up, but the next day he came and told me the yacht was mine. I was astonished, for I didn't offer much more than one-half what she is really worth. But he said he must have the money without delay, as he was going to get out of Boston in a hurry. I dispatched Prof. Scotch, and he wired me the amount. I bought the boat, and now I hear Pringle has left for Seattle, on his way to Alaska. His father is hot over it, for he didn't want his son to go. Pringle had the fever, and he sold the yacht in a hurry to raise money to go with. I have a bargain. We can make our cruise, and then, when it is over, by looking about, I'll be able to get rid of the *White Wings* for more than I paid for her."

"Are you sure the transaction is all right?" asked Diamond.

"All right? How do you mean?"

"Why, strictly on the level. Pringle is not a minor?"

"No," grunted Browning; "but he has gone to be a miner."

"Here! here!" cried Frank, quickly; "that won't do. It's prohibited."

"It may be when we get on board the *White Wings*, but we're ashore now, and you are not Capt. Merriwell yet."

"Pringle is twenty-one," said Frank, answering Diamond's question. "He is all right."

"And he was sole owner of the yacht? He had the right to sell her?"

"Of course. Benjamin told me Pringle was strictly on the level."

"Well, you're always lucky!" exclaimed the lad from Virginia. "Now you will get the fun of this cruise, and, when it is over, you'll be likely to sell the yacht for enough so that you will come out ahead on the whole deal, expenses included."

"I hope to," acknowledged Frank, laughing. "I considered it a snap, but that was not why I wanted the boat. I wanted to make the cruise with my friends. Here are five of us, and that is all the *White Wings* will carry with absolute comfort. There is plenty of room for us. We'll make a jolly cruise of it, fellows, and I don't believe we'll ever regret going. I have the boat stocked with provisions, and some Jew tailors up by Scollay Square are at work on uniforms for four of us. We'll go out right away, Jack, and you shall be measured for yours. Come on."

CHAPTER II.

INZA AND PAULA.

Frank and Jack left the American House and turned toward Scollay Square.

"These tailors are rushers," said Merry. "They have made a reputation by turning out work in short order. That is why we ordered the suits of them. You know we sail to-morrow morning."

"What? Not to-morrow?"

"Sure."

"Well, they will not have time to make up a suit for me."

"Oh, yes, they will."

"Impossible."

"Not at all, old man. They will get the work out in a hurry, as I shall pay them to do it."

"But I never heard of such a thing."

"Possibly not. You are in Boston now. In Virginia they require more time to accomplish anything. Down in this part of the country things move."

Diamond could hardly believe that he could obtain a suit to order in such a short time.

They came to Scollay Square, into which trolley cars were pouring from various sections, and soon they reached the store of the Jew tailors. It was a large store, and at least a dozen customers were looking over samples, striking bargains or being measured. However, the boys were not forced to wait, for one of the proprietors came forward, greeted Frank by name, and said:

"Your order will be ready for you on time, Mr. Merriwell."

"We sail at nine o'clock to-morrow morning," said Frank. "Here is a friend of mine who will require a suit like the others."

"That is crowding us somewhat, sir," smiled the tailor. "I hardly think we can——"

"I will pay five dollars extra if the suit is delivered at the American House at six o'clock in the morning," said Frank, quietly.

"Very well, sir. I think that will cover the extra expense of rushing it through. If the gentleman will step back this way, his measure will be taken."

So Jack was measured, and, ten minutes after entering the store, the boys left it.

"He didn't even ask a deposit of you, Merry," said Jack, in surprise.

"No. Benjamin vouched for me, and that was all that was necessary. No deposit was required under such circumstances."

"What if he fails to get the suits round on time?"

"He won't. He wouldn't want them left on his hands."

Frank's confidence reassured Jack, and they strolled over toward Tremont Street and finally came out at the Common.

"I'd like to have a little time to look Boston over?" said Jack.

"You can do that when we come back. If you were to stop long enough to take in all the interesting sights, we wouldn't get down into Maine this summer. I want to spend a little more time in Boston, although I have seen Faneuil Hall, the new Public Library Building, the Old South Church, Bunker Hill Monument and a hundred other interesting things. The business portion of Boston is not particularly attractive, but the suburbs and the aristocratic dwelling sections are beautiful."

They walked across the Common to the Public Gardens, then turned round and strolled back. From Tremont Row they went down Temple Street to Washington, and just as they reached Jordan, Marsh & Co.'s store, two girls stepped out upon the sidewalk and came face to face with them.

"Miss Burrage!" exclaimed Diamond, lifting his hat.

"Inza!" cried Frank, also lifting his hat. "Miss Benjamin, too! This is an unexpected pleasure. Miss Benjamin, permit me to present a particular friend of mine, Mr. Jack Diamond, of Virginia."

Paula Benjamin was a pretty girl. Her eyes met Jack's, and she showed her pearly teeth in a most bewitching smile as she bowed, saying:

"I have heard of Mr. Diamond."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Jack. "I was not aware I was quite as famous."

"Yes. My brother mentioned you. Perhaps you know something of him—his name is Jack. He plays on the Harvard eleven."

"And he spoke of me? That is surprising. Don't see what he could have said about me."

"I don't believe I will tell," laughed the girl, and her manner aroused all of the Virginian's curiosity.

"Please tell," he urged, smiling.

"Well," hesitated Paula, still laughing, "before the game on Jarvis Field, he said you were fool enough to think Frank Merriwell could beat the whole Harvard eleven. After the game he said you weren't half the fool he took you for."

This caused them all to laugh, and, as the street was crowded, they strolled on together.

"Oh, Frank!" exclaimed Inza; "you can't guess what we are going to do!"

"Then I will give it up without trying. What is it?"

"Paula and I are going to Bar Harbor."

"What?"

"It's true."

"I am astonished!"

"I knew you would be. We've been talking about it, you know—saying we'd like to go. Yesterday Paula had a letter from her cousin, who is spending the summer down there. Her cousin urged her to come. Paula's mother said it was impossible, as two girls like us should not be traveling about alone. Then Aunt Abigail said she'd like to spend a week or two in Bar Harbor herself, and she volunteered to chaperone us. After a while, Paula obtained her mother's consent, and we take the Bangor boat for Rockland to-morrow night."

"By Jove, this is interesting! We'll have to run in to Bar Harbor and see you on our cruise. I didn't suppose we would see much of each other after leaving Fardale."

"I didn't know as you would care about that," said Inza, carelessly.

"Care!" exclaimed Frank. "You should know I would care. How can you say anything like that! What made you imagine I wouldn't care?"

"Oh, something!"

"Something! What was it? Tell me, Inza."

"Sometime—perhaps."

"Tell me now," urged Frank, in his masterful way. "During the last of my stay in Fardale I noticed a change in your treatment of me, Inza."

"Did you?" she murmured, lifting her eyebrows.

"Yes. You were cold toward me, and you seemed to shun me. If I tried to be friendly, as in the old days, you would not give me the opportunity. I did not understand it."

"That is singular. The reason was plain enough."

"If so, I must have been thick-witted."

"Elsie Bellwood was there."

"Yes."

"I read your secret. You made your choice between us."

Frank was astounded.

"Choice? What can you mean, Inza? I did not make any choice."

"Oh, but you did!"

"If you say so—but I—really——"

"You made your choice that time when the boat upset, and we were struggling in the water, Elsie and I. You plunged in to her rescue. I was quite as near to you as was Elsie—nearer, if anything."

Frank caught his breath, beginning to realize what she meant. Inza went on:

"You swam to Elsie's rescue—you saved her. That was the test. I brought it about, for I upset the boat intentionally to settle the point. I wanted to know which one of us you cared the most for—and I found out!"

It was like her, Frank realized that. He knew she was telling the truth when she said she upset the boat intentionally.

"But you—you could swim some, Inza. I knew it."

"Did you know Elsie could not swim?"

"N—no."

"She is the daughter of a sea captain, and she has been with him on many voyages. There was every reason to suppose that she could swim quite as well as I—or better. No, Frank, you made your choice between us that day. It's all right," and she forced a laugh that was not very musical. "I don't deny that, at one time, I did think more of you than any other fellow. There was every reason why I should. You saved me from a mad dog, saved me from death beneath a railroad engine, saved me from drowning. But I am not a fool, if I am a girl! I have not been taking stock in all the passionate love stories I have read. I got out of the way. I remained Elsie's friend, for she is the sweetest girl I know. I don't blame you for thinking more of her than you do of me."

"Inza!"

Frank uttered the word in protest; it was all he could say.

"You can't deny it, so don't try," came almost harshly from the girl. "It's all right. We're still

friends. We'll always be friends—nothing more. Sometime I'll be bridesmaid at the wedding, and —"

But Frank had heard enough, and he stopped her.

"I am not likely to marry anyone very soon," he said. "Elsie knows that. Let's talk about something else. How did it happen we met you?"

Inza seemed willing enough to permit the conversation to be turned into another channel.

"We were out shopping, you know—making our last purchases before starting for Bar Harbor. You must take us out on your yacht after we all get down there."

"I'll do it. Your aunt—"

"Oh, she will not object. You know she thinks you the finest fellow in all the world. She will come along."

At last the boys were forced to part from the girls, but Jack had made such progress with Paula that she offered him her hand at parting, saying laughingly:

"Next fall you will not pick the winner if you pick Yale, even if Mr. Merriwell is on that eleven. If you want to keep your record for wisdom, be careful."

"Jove!" exclaimed Jack, after they had seen the girls on board a car. "She's a way-upper, Merry!"

"She's a good sample of the Boston girl."

"Eh? Where's her glasses?"

"You have been reading the comic papers."

"She didn't mention Emerson or Browning."

"And that surprised you?"

"Why, I didn't suppose the genuine Boston girl could talk ten minutes without doing so."

"Boston girls are very much like other nice girls, old man. They are well educated, refined and all that, but they are not always quoting Emerson and Browning, they do not all wear glasses, they are not all cold and freezing and they are handsome."

They came to Cornhill. A car was coming down from Scollay Square, and they paused close to it to let it swing out upon Washington Street.

Just as the front of the car approached, Frank Merriwell received a push from behind that sent him flat upon the track directly in front of the car wheels!

That particular car did not have a fender, and it seemed that Frank must be mangled beneath the wheels. The motorman saw the lad go down and put on the brake hard, but he could not stop the car in time.

Frank realized that he had been pushed upon the track by some one whose deliberate purpose it was to maim or murder him, but he could not save himself. He struck the paving, and the iron wheels seemed right upon him.

But Jack Diamond moved with marvelous quickness. He made a grasp at Frank as the latter fell, almost caught him, then stooped, grasped his coat and yanked Merry from the track.

The car brushed Frank as it passed, but he was not injured.

"Thank you, old man," said Merriwell, as he quickly rose to his feet. "You saved me that time. But who pushed me?"

They looked about. A small crowd had witnessed Frank's peril and gathered. In the crowd was a person slipping away. With a bound Frank was after him, caught him by the shoulder, swung him to get a look at his face.

"Get out!"

The fellow snarled the words and struck at Frank's face with his clinched hand.

Frank dodged.

"Wat Snell!" he cried, astounded.

"Yes, Wat Snell!" grated the other, who was a boy well known to him—a boy who had been his enemy years before at Fardale Academy, when they both went to school.

"You pushed me!" accused Frank.

"You lie! I did not touch you! You fell."

"I felt you push me, you miserable dog!"

"Don't dare talk like that to me!" hissed Snell. "I'll have you—"

"What! You don't dare do anything that is cowardly and treacherous! You did push me!"

"That's right!" exclaimed a boy. "I seen him do it!"

There was a murmur from the crowd that began to gather about. Black looks were directed toward Snell.

"He ought to be lynched!" blustered a little old man.

Then there were threats, and Snell grew pale, looking around for some means of escape. He saw accusing and angry faces on all sides, and he quailed and trembled.

"It was an accident," he whined, humbly. "I ran against you by accident. I'll swear I didn't recognize you, and I didn't mean you any harm."

"Call an officer!" cried the little old man. "It was an attempt at murder! Have him taken care of!"

With a gasp, Snell plunged through the crowd and took to his heels. Some tried to stop him, but he ran like a deer up Cornhill. There was a short pursuit, but the fellow doubled and dodged, escaping his pursuers.

"Let him go," said Frank. "I wouldn't make a charge against him, for it would detain me, and we must get away in the morning, wind and weather permitting."

"He ought to be punished," said Diamond. "He tried to kill you."

"It isn't the first time he has tried to do something to me. We are old, old foes."

"Why, I supposed him in Fardale."

"So did I."

"It's singular he's here in Boston."

"Rather."

"What is the meaning of it?"

"I can't tell. Don't ask me. He bobs up anywhere. Anyhow, we're not liable to see him again for some time after we leave here to-morrow."

They returned to the hotel and told the others of their adventures. All the boys were astonished to learn that Wat Snell was in the city.

CHAPTER III.

A HOODOOED YACHT.

Promptly at six o'clock the following morning the uniforms were delivered at the American House. Without delay the boys put them on, and they proved satisfactory in every way, so Frank paid the bill and the messenger who brought them departed satisfied.

The boys ate an early breakfast, and all had good appetites. The American House dining room is rather somber, but they joked and laughed in the best of spirits.

After breakfast final arrangements for the care of their baggage were made, then a cab was ordered, and they all piled in and were rattled away toward Atlantic Avenue.

Jack had not seen Frank's yacht, and he was curious, concerning her appearance.

Not far from the pier of the Bangor boat lay the *White Wings*, guarded by a watchman, who saluted Merriwell as the boys went aboard.

The *White Wings* was a sloop yacht with club and jib topsails. She was not large, and it did not strike Diamond that she would prove to be fast, but she looked comfortable, and comfort was what they sought. They were not thinking of racing.

Frank paid the watchman for his services, and gave him something extra, whereupon the man departed greatly satisfied.

"Come, fellows," called Merry; "we'll go below and see how she looks down there."

They descended into the cabin, which was locked, Merry having the key. Jack was astonished when they entered the cabin, for it was far more roomy than he had supposed possible. A glimpse at the curtained berths showed there was plenty of sleeping room for all of them. There was a folding table, an oil stove, comfortable seats on the lockers, and everything looked inviting. Four handsome repeating shotguns and a magazine rifle hung above the lockers.

"How does she look down here, fellows?" asked Frank.

"She looks all right," grunted Browning, as he lazily rolled into one of the bunks. "Excuse me. I

want to see what kind of a place I'll be stowed in when I am seasick."

"What do you think you'll do with those guns, Frank?" asked Jack.

"Can't tell," smiled Frank. "Remember, we are going down into Maine."

"Yes, but you told us Maine was a civilized State. From your talk when we discussed the matter I didn't suppose guns would be needed down there."

"Is Virginia civilized?"

"Well, rather."

"Ever find anything to shoot up in the mountain region?"

"Oh, yes; but——"

"That's all. New York is civilized, but there are bears and deer in the Adirondacks."

"Well, I didn't know we were going anywhere near a portion of Maine where there was game."

"Can't tell where we may go."

"Besides, if they have game laws down there, it must be close time for hunting."

"It is, but, all the same, it will be a good scheme to have these guns along. We're going to rough it a great deal, and we may need them. I have brought all sorts of rigs for fishing, and I have two tents on board. My idea, gentlemen, is to make this a regular outing trip, and, when we are not on board the *White Wings*, we do not want to spend our time in hotels."

"Not much," nodded Hodge.

"Say, Merriwell," cried Diamond, in admiration, "you are a dandy. You have planned all our outings for the past two years, and we have had sport galore; but what makes me sore is the fact that you pay all the bills."

A truck team came rumbling down onto the wharf, and Hodge looked around.

"Baggage," he called.

A truckman had arrived with their luggage from the hotel. The boys, excepting Browning, went on deck and brought the stuff aboard.

As Frank was settling with the truckman, the latter said:

"I wish you good luck, young man, but I doubt if you'll have it taking a cruise in that craft."

"Why is that?" asked Merry. "What is the matter with that craft?"

"Well, sir, they do say as how she is hoodooed."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. Everybody as has owned her in the last two years has had hard luck."

"This is interesting."

"I hauled her first load of provisions, and I have known her a long time. On her trial cruise she capsized before she got out of the harbor."

"Is that all?"

"Hardly. Her first owner committed suicide on board of her—cut his throat down below. They say she has been haunted by his spook ever since."

Merry laughed.

"This is decidedly interesting. I'd have given more for her if I had known she owned a spook. I am very fond of spooks. They are interesting."

"Boo!" shivered the truckman. "Don't want none in mine."

"Have you told me all the unlucky things that have happened to the *White Wings*?"

"No. Next fellow that owned her ran down a rowboat and drowned a boy. Then he put her on top of a ledge, but got her off without doing her much damage. He sold her for a song."

"What happened next?"

"Next fellow as owned her went crazy and is in an asylum. They say he saw the spook go through the suicide act in the cabin, and that was what crazed him."

"The interest increases. The horrors are piling up. Anything more?"

"Benjamin owned her next."

"Anything happen to him?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"He got the Klondike fever."

"That all?"

"Ain't that enough? He's run away to Alaska, and his father's rich as mud. He didn't have no need to go up there into that infernally cold region and freeze and starve. His old man's so mad he threatens to cut him off."

"Well," laughed Frank, "the *White Wings* is mine now, and I don't fancy all the spooks of the infernal regions could scare me away from her. In fact, I'd rather enjoy having a call from a few spooks."

"You'll have some kind of bad luck," declared the truckman, as he prepared to go. "I don't like to tell you that, but I think you oughter be looking out."

A young man with a small, curly, black mustache came hurrying onto the pier. He was well dressed and carried a cane. He came straight up to Frank and the truckman.

"Where is the person known as Frank Merriwell?" he asked.

"I am Frank Merriwell," Merry answered. "What can I do for you?"

"You are the chap I want to see," said the stranger. "I understand you bought the *White Wings* of Jack Benjamin?"

"I did, sir."

"And he sold it to you as clear and free of encumbrance?"

"He did."

"He beat you."

"How is that?"

"I hold a bill of sale of that yacht, and I am here to claim it as my property!" was the answer.

Frank was surprised.

The truckman slapped his hand against his hip and muttered:

"I told him! The thing is hoodooed! Anybody as has anything to do with it is bound to buck against hard luck."

"This is rather surprising information," said Frank Merriwell, speaking with the utmost calmness, while he studied the face of the stranger with piercing eyes. "I hardly understand it. I believe Jack Benjamin has the reputation in Boston of being on the level, and so I hardly understand a piece of business like this."

"Perhaps Benjamin was stuck, found it out, and got out of the hole the best way he could."

"How do you mean?"

"Perhaps at the time he bought the boat, he didn't know I held the bill of sale of her."

Frank started.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "Then Benjamin did not give you the bill of sale?"

"No. Chap that owned her before that did. His name is Fearson."

"Fearson? Is he the one who went crazy?"

"The very same," put in the truckman.

"When did he give you this bill of sale?"

"Don't remember the exact date."

"The bill will show."

"Sure. Why do you want to know?"

"I want to find out if he gave it to you before a certain time. That's all."

The strange claimant of the yacht was suspicious.

"I don't see the point," he said. "I hold the bill, and I claim the yacht. Just found out what Benjamin had done, and I came down in a hurry, after getting track of the boat, to warn you not to try to move her. I won't have it."

It began to look like a scrape, but Frank was not flustered in the least. He kept his head, saying:

"Have you the bill of sale with you, sir?"

"Yes."

"Will you be kind enough to permit me to look at it?"

The stranger started to do so, but seemed to change his mind of a sudden, and said:

"No, I won't bother. I tell you not to move her. If you do, I'll make you pay a big sum for damages, so look out."

Frank smiled sweetly.

"That is a very silly threat," he murmured. "If you do not show me the document I shall not believe it exists."

"That doesn't make any difference to——"

"It makes this difference: It is now twenty minutes to nine. At nine I shall cast off from the pier. Wind and tide being right, it will not take me long to get out of the harbor."

"You wouldn't dare!"

"What is there to dare? I fail to see anything."

"Why, confound you! I'd make you smart for it!"

"You couldn't. You have made a lot of bluffing talk about holding a bill of sale, but I do not take any stock in that till you produce the document. I have purchased this yacht, and, as long as I believe myself her rightful owner, I shall do with her as I see fit. At nine o'clock she sails."

The fellow hesitated, and then snapped out:

"Oh, I can prove to you that I am not lying. I will prove it. Here is the bill—see for yourself."

He took a number of papers from his pocket, and selected one among them, which he opened and held before Frank. Merriwell looked the document over carefully. It was a bill of sale of the yacht *White Wings* from Fergus Fearson to Parker Flynn.

"Is your name Parker Flynn?" asked Frank.

"It is."

"And you bought the yacht of Fearson?"

"You bet!" nodded the claimant, triumphantly. "I rather think this document settles it."

"It does," nodded Frank, quietly. Then he turned to the truckman, and asked:

"When was Mr. Fearson committed to the asylum?"

"The latter part of May."

"And this bill is dated May 21st. The fellow must have been deranged then."

"Oh, you can't make that go!" cried Flynn, quickly. "It's no use for you to try to crawl out of a little hole like that."

"Why have you not claimed the yacht before? Holding this bill, why didn't you claim it while it was in Benjamin's possession? Answer that question!"

"I was away—out of the city," faltered Flynn.

"All the time?"

"Most of the time."

"Very well. Here is your bill. I advise you to destroy it without delay, or it may get you into serious trouble."

"What?" cried the man, angrily. "Destroy it? I'll have that yacht. This bill gives me the right to it."

"That bill gives you the right to nothing!" came clearly and distinctly from Merriwell's lips.

"Either you have been badly fooled or you are a rascal trying to obtain property that you have not the slightest claim upon. It looks as if the latter were the real condition of affairs. Fergus Fearson is confined in a madhouse, and so he cannot deny that he ever gave you a bill of sale of this yacht."

"Deny it? Here is his signature!"

"And that may be forgery! I tell you to be careful!"

"It is not forgery! It is genuine! Your bluff will not go, sir! The yacht is mine, and I will have her."

"Even if the signature is genuine, the bill is not worth the paper it's written on!" declared Merriwell, with the utmost coolness.

"More bluffing! You are crazy! Why isn't it good?"

"Because it is dated May 21st."

"What of that?"

"The date is exactly four days after John Benjamin purchased and paid for this yacht, as I can prove by documents in existence. If Fergus Fearson sold you the *White Wings* on May 21st, he sold you property that did not belong to him. That's all, Mr. Flynn."

The claimant of the yacht turned pale and stared at the bill and then at Frank, who was standing there so coolly before him.

On the deck of the yacht were three boys who had heard the most of the conversation. Now Hodge exultantly exclaimed:

"That was a body blow! Merry has floored him!"

"That's right," nodded Diamond. "Frank has the best of it, but it did seem that we were in a scrape."

Flynn gasped for breath.

"I don't believe it!" he cried. "The boat is mine, so don't dare cast off from this pier."

"The *White Wings* sails at nine o'clock," said Frank, turning away.

Flynn's face, that had been so pale, flushed and turned purple with anger. All at once, he lifted his walking stick to bring it down on Merry's head.

A cry from the boys on the yacht warned Merriwell, who ducked and dodged—just in time.

Whizz!—the cane cut through the air, but Merry was not touched.

Quick as thought, Frank turned and grappled with Parker Flynn. He wrenched away the cane, and, with a quick motion, broke it across his knee. Then, as he coolly tossed it into the water, he said:

"If you try any more funny business, sir, you'll follow your cane."

"Oh, I'll fix you!" Flynn almost screamed. "I'll get a warrant for you! I'll be back in a hurry! Don't dare leave before I return!"

He dashed away on the run.

"I told you you would have bad luck," said the truckman. "It's begun."

"Oh, I don't know!" laughed Frank. "If Flynn paid money for the yacht, he is the one in hard luck."

At nine o'clock the *White Wings* cast off from the pier. Her sails were hoisted, and, aided by the out-running tide, she soon got away enough to catch a breeze.

And Parker Flynn had not returned.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE FOG.

"It's no use, fellows, we can't go any further in this fog to-night," said Frank Merriwell on the fourth day after leaving Boston.

"We must go farther!" exclaimed Diamond. "There is no anchorage here."

"How do you know? We haven't tried for it."

"But we are not in a harbor."

"No. We are somewhere near the Whitehead Islands, near the mouth of Penobscot Bay."

"Well, let's keep on as long as there is a breath of wind. I don't fancy anchoring here. We might be run down in the night."

"And, if we keep on, the chances are two to one that we'll run onto a reef or pile up on an island. I had much rather take the chances of anchoring here and being run down. The wind is dying out, and this fog is shutting down thicker and thicker."

"Well," said Jack, in a dissatisfied way, "this is your boat and you are in command. You can do as you like."

"I'll do as the majority believes best."

"Then anchor," grunted Browning. "I don't fancy this prowling about in the fog."

Hodge was in favor of anchoring, and Hans agreed with them, so Jack was the only one who felt like going on. He gave up in disgust.

While they were talking the last faint breeze had fallen swiftly, and, by the time it was definitely decided, the *White Wings* lay becalmed, rolling helplessly on the swells that came in from the

open sea.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" groaned Hans. "I don't like dot roll up und drop away motions. Id makes me feel sick to your stomach."

"You will get enough of that as long as we remain anchored out here," said Diamond, unpleasantly.

Frank gave the orders, and down came the sails. A sounding showed they could anchor without trouble, and then the anchor was cast. The sails were not reefed, for it was not known when they might be required. Arrangements were made for raising them on short notice.

Night came down swiftly. Lights were set, but the boys felt that a light was poor protection for them in that darkness and fog.

"If we are in the course of the steamers we'll be run down," grumbled Jack.

"There'll have to be a regular watch to-night," declared Frank; "and the fog horn must be used."

Browning had managed to crawl on deck, and he looked disconsolate and disgusted.

"This is what they call a life on the ocean wave," he grunted. "Oh, it is more fun than a minstrel show!"

"We'll have to put up with some discomforts," said Merriwell.

"We made a mistake in coming further east than Portland," put in Jack. "That was a good place to stop."

"Wait till the sun comes out to-morrow and we run into Rockland Harbor," laughed the owner of the *White Wings*. "You will change your tune."

"Well, I hope so."

Hans was given the first watch, and he remained on deck while the others went below and had supper. At intervals he blew a blast on the horn, which sounded like some lost animal bellowing in the fog.

Frank laughed and joked, and he succeeded in putting the others in better spirits after a time. It was comfortable in the cabin, despite the fog outside.

Hodge made coffee, and the smell of it as it bubbled over the blaze of the oil stove gave all of them a ravenous feeling of hunger. The little folding table was let down and spread, and the sight of the food and smell of the coffee took their minds off the unpleasantness of their situation.

"It was a foolhardy thing running down here without somebody who knew the coast," said Jack.

"My dear fellow," smiled Frank, "we have our chart and compass, and I know a little something about navigation. Quit your worrying. I'll land you in Rockland to-morrow all right."

"You were going to land us there to-day."

"And so I would had the wind held right and this fog kept off."

"I believe there is a fog factory down this way somewhere," said Browning.

Hodge announced that supper was ready, and they gathered about the table. The *White Wings* was riding on a steady, regular swell, so they were not shaken up down there, and they found they could eat without discomfort. Browning was hungry as a bear, and he "pitched into the spread."

"Well, I don't know as this is too bad after all," he confessed, taking a third slice of tongue. "We've been in worse places."

"That's right," nodded Hodge. "Pass the sugar. I want a little of this coffee myself. I made it."

"The coffee is good," acknowledged Jack. "It warms a fellow up. A little grog wouldn't go bad in a case like this."

"There is no grog on this boat and will not be as long as I own her," declared Merriwell. "It's a foolish thing for a lot of fellows on a cruise like this to think that they must have grog."

"Oh, I didn't suppose you had any on board, Merriwell," said Diamond. "I know your temperance principles too well to look for anything like that."

By the time they finished eating all were in much better spirits. No one but Hans had been troubled with seasickness thus far on the cruise, and the Dutch boy had not been very sick.

Hans was called down to eat, and Bart took his place while he was below.

"Uf I can haf some of dot coffee id vill done you goot," said the Dutch lad. "I don'd pelief I vant to ead much. Mein stomach felt like id don'd been able to held much uf a loadt. Yaw!"

So Hans drank some coffee and ate a little hard bread, after which he returned to his duties on deck, having donned a suit of oil clothes.

Frank got out his guitar and put it in tune.

"That's right, Merry," grunted Browning, rolling into his bunk. "Give us a song to cheer us up."

"What shall I sing?"

"Some of the old college songs."

"They'll make me homesick," said Diamond.

"It's a pleasant thing to feel homesick for Old Yale," murmured Frank. "Dear Old Yale!"

"Give us 'Stars of the Summer Night,'" urged Hodge.

So Frank sang the song that has sounded beneath the elms at Yale so many times. It was a beautiful song, and it awakened in the memories of the listening lads thoughts of the gay times at college, the moonlight nights, the roistering lads, the lighted windows of the Quad and the groups gathered at the Fence.

Jack brushed his eyes.

"Don't sing anything more like that," he urged. "Make it something lively—'Solomon Levi,' or any old thing."

So "Solomon Levi" followed, and they all joined in on the chorus. Other lively songs were sung, and, by the time Frank put aside the guitar all were in fairly good spirits.

Merriwell arranged the program of standing watch. Hans was relieved before they turned in.

All through the night they took turns at standing watch and blowing away at intervals on the fog horn. And the night passed quickly enough without event.

When morning came, however, the fog still hung on the surface of the water. They ate a light breakfast, and Frank fell to walking the deck impatiently.

"If there was a breeze, this fog would be liable to lift," he said. "It is disgusting."

After a little a light breeze rose, but it did not clear away the fog entirely. However, the coming of the sun had some effect on it, and it was not long before Merry decided to get up anchor and run up the sails.

The anchor was hoisted and the sails set. Frank took the wheel.

During the night the old swell had run out. Frank had studied his chart till he believed he knew about where they lay, and he set his course by the compass.

Not ten minutes after getting under way they found they were headed straight for an island. In their vicinity the fog was not heavy, but out beyond the island lay a bank of it.

Immediately on sighting the island, Frank changed the course of the yacht, bringing her almost about. Then he ran out past the island, headed for the fog bank.

All at once there was a strange sound, a roaring swish of water. Not one of them was certain which direction the sound came from.

"Vot dot vos?" exclaimed Hans, in alarm.

"Keep still!" ordered Frank.

The sounds grew louder.

Then, all at once, Hans flung up his hands and shouted:

"Reef your rudder, Vrankie! You vos running a sdeampoat ofer us!"

Out of the fog bank, just ahead, came a large side-wheel steamer, headed straight toward them!

Frank sighted the steamer at the same moment Hans saw it, and he realized their peril. It was the Boston boat, *City of Bangor*, on its course up the bay.

In the twinkling of an eye, Merriwell threw the wheel over and over, the *White Wings* swung to port, but headed straight across the course of the great steamer.

Hoo-oo-oot! hoo-oo-oot! hoo-oo-oot! sounded the hoarse warning whistle from the steamer.

"If you had been whistling through that fog bank all would have been right," muttered Merriwell, through his set teeth. "Now, if you run me down, you'll pay for this yacht!"

There was a jangling sound of a bell on board the steamer, and the pilot in the pilot house was seen to send his wheel spinning over with frantic haste at the same moment that the headway of the steamer grew less.

"Will she clear us?" cried Hodge.

"She is bound to cut us in two!" shouted Diamond. "There isn't breeze enough for us to get out of her way!"

"Vere vos der life breserfers?" squawked Hans. "I want to got me onto a life-breserfer a hurry in!"

The Dutch lad made a headlong leap for the companion way. At the head of the steps he stubbed his toe and down he went head first.

It happened that Bruce Browning had heard the commotion on deck, and, strange to relate, it had aroused him so that he was coming up.

Bruce had just started to go above when Hans came flying through the air like a huge toad, struck him full and fair, and both went down in a heap on the cabin floor.

"Dot seddles id!" yelled the frightened Dutch lad. "Der yocht vos sunkin' und I vos a goner!"

"You blundering Dutch chump!" gasped Bruce, when he could catch his breath. "What is the matter?"

"Didn't you toldt me der yocht vos sunkin'?" shrieked Hans. "Id haf run ofer a pig sdeampoat! Uf you kept myseluf drownting from I vill haf to got oudt und valk ashore!"

Browning managed to get himself together and rise to his feet. Then he hurried up the companion way and reached the deck just in time to see the huge white hull of a steamboat looming above the yacht.

But Merriwell's prompt action and steady nerve had saved the *White Wings*, for the steamer, with motionless paddlewheels, was slipping past, the yacht having cut square across her course.

It was a close shave, and a few white faces looked over the forward starboard rail of the huge steamer.

"If you chaps knew your business you would be at anchor instead of cruising round in this fog," called a hoarse voice from the steamer.

"If you knew your business you would blow your fog whistle while running through a fog bank," returned Frank Merriwell, promptly.

"That's the stuff, Merry!" grated Hodge, whose face was still pale. "How do you suppose they happened to do such a thing?"

"Probably that bank of fog is narrow, and they only ran into it a few minutes ago. Perhaps they did not strike heavy fog till just before they broke through and came into view."

"Well, it was a piece of reprehensible carelessness, and it's lucky the *White Wings* was not cut in two."

As the huge steamer slipped past, the boys saw not many persons were astir on her. She had made an all-night run from Boston, and the passengers were still sleeping in their staterooms, with a few exceptions.

Near the stern of the steamer were two persons in mackintoshes. They seemed to regard the yacht with interest, not to say excitement, and their movements attracted the attention of the boys.

One of the passengers clutched the other by the arm and pointed out the *White Wings*, then both leaned over the rail.

Jack Diamond leaped to Merriwell's side, grasped Merry by the shoulder, and cried in his ear:

"Look, Merriwell—look!"

"Where?"

"On the steamer there! The two fellows astern!"

"I see them."

"Know them?"

"By Jove! I believe I do!"

"One of them is——"

"Wat Snell!"

"Sure! And the other is——"

"The chap who claimed this yacht—Parker Flynn!"

"Exactly."

"Great Scott! What are they doing on that boat?"

"Following us!"

"Perhaps they are."

"Perhaps! There is no perhaps about it! Of course they are!"

"But Snell and Flynn together—how does that happen?"

"I can't tell that, but they are together, and they are following us—that's sure. You are not done with Flynn, it seems."

"He will get into trouble if he bothers me any more. I shall not stand any nonsense from him. As for Wat Snell, all I want is a good chance to square up with him. I will make him sorry he ever heard of me!"

"That's the talk, Frank!" exclaimed Diamond, approvingly. "Snell will be easier to dispose of than the other chap, for it is probable that Flynn believes he can take this boat away from you because he has a right to it, or he would not be following us."

"He has no right to it, and he will not be able to take it."

"See, Frank! What is the fellow going to—— Look out!"

On the steamer Flynn had been seen to hastily unbutton his mackintosh, jerk something bright out of his hip pocket and point it toward the yacht.

It was a revolver.

Jack Diamond realized the desperate fellow's purpose, and he caught hold of Frank Merriwell and gave him a push that threw him to the deck beside the wheel.

There was a flash of fire from the revolver, a puff of smoke, and then a bullet whistled over the yacht, striking the water beyond.

"Well, of all the foolhardy, cowardly tricks, I believe that takes the premium!" said Frank, as he arose and grasped the wheel again. "That man is drunk or crazy!"

The moment Flynn fired, Snell took to his heels and scudded out of sight, disappearing on the other side of the steamer. Flynn hastily put up his revolver, shook his fist toward the yacht, and then followed Snell, both of them getting out of the way before anyone, attracted by the sound of the shot, came aft to investigate.

The big paddlewheels of the steamer were in motion again, and she was forging on her course, as if nothing had happened.

Frank brought the *White Wings* round and set his course to follow as closely as the wind would allow. In a short time the steamer was almost out of sight in the thin mist that hung over the water where there was no fog.

Then, at last, Hans Dunnerwust came puffing and stumbling on deck, fairly loaded down with life-preservers. He fell at the head of the companion way, and the life-preservers flew all over the deck.

"Put me onto them kvick!" he squealed. "Uf I don'd haf a life breserfer on ven der yocht sinks you vos a goner!"

The boys laughed at his ludicrous appearance, and he sat up on the deck, staring around blankly.

"Vere dot sdeampoat vos?" he asked, in astonishment.

"Why, the steamer is a mile away by this time," said Hodge.

"If she had run into us, we'd been at the bottom long before this," laughed Frank. "You are too slow, Hans."

"Vale, I done your duty, anyhow," sturdily declared the Dutch boy. "You don'd got me to makin' no mistake in dot."

Then he was set to gathering up the life preservers and carrying them below again.

The encounter with the steamer and the desperate action of Parker Flynn furnished food for conversation on board the yacht. The boys talked it over and over, and it was the general opinion that the presence of Flynn and Snell in company on the steamer was not an accident.

"We'll see more of those fellows before long," prophesied Diamond. "And it strikes me that Flynn is more dangerous than Snell, for he is a desperate fellow. If he had shot anybody on this boat there was no way of making it seem an accident. When Snell pushed you in front of the car he could have sworn it was an accident if the car had killed you. Look out for Parker Flynn."

"I will," said Merriwell.

It was nearly nine o'clock before they rounded Owl's Head and pointed into Rockland harbor. The mist still hung on the water, and the outlines of the city were hidden. Frank, however, felt confident that he was all right.

"We'll take dinner ashore if you say so, fellows," he said.

"Oh, I don't know," said Jack. "I don't believe these natives down in this country know how to cook anything fit to eat."

Frank smiled.

"I fancy you have a few notions that will be knocked out of your head after you have been down this way a short time. You still seem to fancy you are going into a howling wilderness where there are only savages and half-civilized white people."

"Perhaps we are," said Jack, by way of being odd. "You don't know yourself, for this is your first visit down here."

Out through the mist came a tiny steam launch. All at once it was headed straight toward the *White Wings*.

"She acts as if she is coming for us," said Hodge, scowling.

As the launch came nearer five persons were seen in her. The interest of the boys increased rapidly, for everything seemed to indicate that she was making straight for the yacht.

All at once Diamond uttered a cry, turned to Frank and said:

"I knew it! I told you we'd see more of him! See the fellow in the bow of that launch? It's Parker Flynn!"

CHAPTER V.

A BOARDING PARTY.

"Sure as shooting!" nodded Frank. "He is in a hurry to see me—that's plain."

"Yes, he couldn't wait till we got into the harbor."

"It's probable he thought we might not come into Rockland after seeing him on the steamer, and so, as soon as he could get ashore, he hired the launch to run out and head us off."

"Snell is with him," said Hodge. "Oh, I'd like to get a crack at that fellow!"

"You may have a chance," smiled Merriwell, coolly.

"How?"

"I don't propose to let those chaps come aboard my yacht unless they show that they have a right to do so."

"Good for you!" cried Bart, his face growing stern. "I am with you, Merry!"

"And I!" exclaimed Diamond.

"Vale, I don'd knew but I vos re'dy vor a liddle schrap," observed Hans.

"Then we will stand by to repel boarders if they try the trick," said Frank. "Call Browning on deck."

So the big Yale man was called, and he came up in his shirt sleeves. He was interested immediately the situation was explained to him, and he seemed well pleased when Frank expressed his intention of preventing the strangers from boarding without authority.

"This promises to be a real warm morning," he said, with a lazy smile. "I'm rather glad I'm here."

By this time the launch was close at hand.

"Ahoy the yacht!" called a voice.

"Ay! ay!" called back Merriwell, in true nautical style. "On board the launch, what's wanted?"

"Lay to. We have business with you."

"Keep off. We haven't time to bother with you."

"Don't act foolish!" was the angry exclamation. "If you do, you will be sorry!"

"If you bother us without a legal right you will be sorry," flung back Frank. "We are not to be trifled with this morning."

The launch made a circle and swung round so that she was heading in the same direction as the yacht.

"If you don't lay to," said the spokesman on board the launch, "we'll run alongside and board you."

"Try it. You will find the warmest job you ever struck!"

"Why, you will not resist officers of the law?"

"Not if we know the officers have authority."

"Well, we have the authority, so head up into the wind."

"You say you have authority, but I do not even know you are an officer. In fact, judging by the company you are in, I should take you for anything else."

There were muttered words on the launch, savage, suppressed oaths and a stir that was significant.

"They do mean to run alongside and board!" exclaimed Diamond. "Are you still in for keeping them off, Merry?"

"You bet!" nodded Frank, grimly. "If I decide otherwise, I will give you the word in time."

Bruce Browning began to roll up his sleeves, baring his brawny arms. There was a flush on his face and an eager look in his eyes.

"Some of those gentlemen will take a bath this morning," he said.

Both Diamond and Hodge flung aside their coats.

The men on the launch saw these significant movements and could not misunderstand them. They were surprised by the attitude of the crew of the *White Wings*.

"You fools!" cried the spokesman of the party, who had a full black beard. "You will get yourselves jailed if you make any resistance. I am Sheriff Ulmer, of Rockland!"

"Where is your badge?" demanded Frank. "Show that."

The man who claimed to be the sheriff hesitated.

"He can't do it!" muttered Hodge, triumphantly.

"I have papers to serve on you," said the black-bearded man.

"You can serve them when I come ashore," returned Frank. "I am going into the harbor, and I shall be ashore in thirty minutes after dropping anchor."

"But you are on a stolen yacht, and I am here to take possession of it."

"I am not on a stolen yacht, and I do not mean that you shall take possession of it unless you have the right to do so. This yacht belongs to me. I bought it and paid for it with good money, and I mean to hold it. If you really are Sheriff Ulmer, which I am inclined to doubt, you have been deceived by that rascal in the bow of the launch. He holds a worthless bill of sale of this boat, which, if it is not a forgery, was made out by a crazy man who did not own the boat at the time."

"It's a lie!" snarled Flynn. "The bill of sale is all right, and we're going to take that yacht!"

"You will have to fight for her, if you do!"

"If you fight, you fool, you will go to jail. There is a first-class jail in Rockland, too."

"I'll take my chances of going to jail. Keep off! This is a fair warning."

By this time the launch was close to the yacht, and the faces of all the persons in the small boat could be seen and studied. Wat Snell was pale, and it was plain he did not relish his position. With the fellow who claimed to be sheriff was a hang-dog looking chap who looked like a fighter. The man who was running the launch acted as if he had no intention of taking any part in the fight, if one should occur. It was plain he had been hired to set the others on board the *White Wings*, and he did not mean to do anything more than that.

"Hans!" called Frank, "take the wheel and hold her steady as she is. You will get out of the scrimmage, and I want to have a hand in that."

Hans took the wheel, and Frank prepared to take a hand in the repulse if the enemy tried to board.

The man in the launch who had claimed to be sheriff stood up and waved his clinched fist above his head.

"In the name of the law, I command you to surrender!" he shouted.

"Show your authority," calmly returned Merriwell.

"Here it is—the bill of sale of that yacht."

"That is no authority. Do you think you can bluff us because we are young? You will find you have made a big mistake."

"Board them!" cried Flynn. "Take the yacht! That is the only way to do it!"

"You will find that is a mighty hard way to do it!" grated Bart Hodge. "Come on, Snell! I want to get at you!"

The launch ran alongside the yacht, and the man with the fellow who claimed to be the sheriff caught the rail of the *White Wings* with a boat hook.

"Come on!" roared the black-whiskered chap.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" rang out Frank's clear voice.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE YACHT.

The big man with the whiskers was the first to make an attempt to reach the deck of the yacht. He gave a leap that landed him on the rail. Then Bruce Browning picked him up and tossed him back into the launch.

The man was surprised, but he made another rush to get onto the *White Wings*.

In the meantime Parker Flynn had tried to get aboard, but had been struck on the jaw by Merriwell's hard fist and knocked back into the launch.

Snell started to climb over the rail of the yacht, but tumbled back of his own accord when Hodge made a rush for him.

The hang-dog-appearing chap was the spryest man on the launch. With a catlike leap, he cleared the rail of the *White Wings* and reached the deck. He found himself face to face with Jack Diamond, and a second later they clinched.

"You are not wanted here!" exclaimed Jack.

"But I'm going to stay here!" said the other.

Diamond was strong and smart, but he found his hands full. Had he not taken the chap at a slight disadvantage in getting the first hold, the stranger would have been his master. As it was, they slipped and staggered about the deck, the stranger struggling to break Jack's hold.

In his excitement, Hans failed to hold the yacht steadily on her course, as Frank had directed, and suddenly she swung, so the main boom swept across the deck. It struck Diamond's antagonist on the back of the head and stunned him for a moment. That moment was long enough for Jack to lift him and drop him over into the launch.

Hans sent over the wheel and brought the yacht back, so the boom swung out of the way, but his negligence had aided Diamond to a large extent.

On falling back into the boat, Snell had scrambled up and stood snarling at Hodge, who was urging him to come within reach.

"Oh, I do want to get my hands on you!" said Bart. "I'll give you something to remember me by, you sneaking cur!"

"You are a sneak yourself!" cried Snell, "or you would not be hanging around with Frank Merriwell after he licked you and got the best of you in everything you did!"

"It is a compliment to be called a sneak by you, you coward! Come up here! Let me give you a black eye!"

But Snell kept just out of reach, although he made several bluff attempts to board the *White Wings*.

Probably the most astonished man was the big fellow with the black whiskers. He realized that Browning had handled him easily and carelessly, but still it did not seem possible that the rather fleshy, smooth-faced chap could have much strength, large as he was.

"Better stay down there," advised Bruce. "Next time I shall throw you farther."

"Next time you won't throw me at all!" came from the professed sheriff, as he made another spring for the yacht.

It seemed that Bruce caught him on the fly. Now the big fellow was fully aroused, and he swung the stranger over his head and gave him a terrific heave.

The man whirled through the air, passed clean over the launch, struck the water beyond and disappeared from view.

At that very moment Frank Merriwell got another crack at Parker Flynn, who had not learned his lesson by his first experience, and again tried to board.

Smack!—the blow sounded, and, with a groan, Flynn dropped down into the launch.

The man who was running the launch seemed satisfied, for he suddenly let go with the boat hook, and the yacht swung away from her foe.

The self-styled sheriff came to the surface and was pulled aboard the launch. The ducking seemed to have taken the spirit out of him. He glared at the yacht, but all his eagerness to board her seemed gone. Parker Flynn sat up and swore, holding onto his aching jaw. He had not realized that there was a set of fighters on board the *White Wings*, although Wat Snell had

warned him to that effect. Now he realized that the yacht could not easily be captured in the manner in which he had attempted to accomplish the feat.

The meeting of Flynn and Snell came about in this way. Snell, on finding Frank and his friends were in Boston, had played the spy on the party. He followed them to the pier the morning they went aboard the *White Wings*, and he saw the encounter between Frank and Flynn. When Flynn left the pier, Snell followed and spoke to him. After that it did not take Wat long to work into the good graces of Flynn.

Infuriated by his failure to obtain possession of the yacht, Flynn proceeded to get drunk and stay so. On the second day of his spree, he determined to pursue Merriwell and take the yacht by force, if it could not be obtained in any other manner. Then he hunted up Snell, and it was not hard to induce Wat to accompany him.

Flynn knew the "poker gang" in Rockland, and he knew there were a few desperate fellows among those who made up the gang. He had "dropped his roll" in Rockland once when he struck the town with an idea in his head that he was "getting against a lot of jays," and on that occasion he became friendly with Peter McSwatt and Hunk Gardman. Gardman did not belong in Rockland, but he came in frequently from an adjoining town to play poker. He was a crook and a sneak, and he showed it in his face. McSwatt was not quite as "smooth" as Gardman; he could not "handle the cards" as well, but he could sit in a game with Gardman and play what his crooked pal dealt him, so that, after every game, there was usually an ill-gotten pot to be divided. If there was any trouble, McSwatt did the fighting.

Flynn telephoned McSwatt and told him when he would be in Rockland, asking to be met at the boat by McSwatt and a good man who would stand by in a scrap. He ended by saying there was good money in it, and his offered inducements led McSwatt and Gardman to be on hand at the time set.

Flynn was still under the influence of liquor. Had it been otherwise, he would not have fired at the *White Wings* from the deck of the *City of Bangor*.

On arriving in Rockland, he found his chosen tools waiting for him, and he explained that the yacht *White Wings* had been stolen from him. To convince McSwatt and Gardman, he showed the bill of sale which he held. He explained that he could not afford the time to recover the boat by regular process of law, and said that it would be an easy thing to take it from the boys who were on board. He showed money and paid his tools something in advance. A few drinks of liquor put them in the mood for almost anything, and then the steam launch was hired to go out in search of the *White Wings*, as Flynn feared the yacht might not come into Rockland at all.

The owner of the launch was convinced that Flynn really owned the yacht, and had a right to take her by force if necessary, but he did not agree to have anything to do with the seizing of the boat further than putting the party alongside.

Snell had warned Flynn that the party on the *White Wings* was made up of fighters, but the man sneered at them as a lot of boys. It was not believed that there would be any real difficulty in obtaining possession of the yacht, but it was thought best that McSwatt should claim to be an officer.

Thus it came about that the *White Wings* was met by the steam launch as she headed into Rockland harbor. But the crew on board the launch met with the surprise of their lives, and they were thoroughly disgusted when they were beaten off without much difficulty.

The two cracks Frank had given Flynn knocked some of the conceit and bravado out of him, and for some time after the yacht and the launch swung apart he sat still and swore.

McSwatt was not in a pleasant mood as he wrung the water out of his clothes. He glared at Flynn and snarled:

"Thought you said they were a lot of boys who could be scared out of their skins! Boys! Why, they are young devils! The fellow I went against is a regular Samson!"

"They're in a bad scrape now," said Flynn, with an attempt at fierceness. "They have resisted the rightful owner of that yacht, and they shall smart for it."

"That's all right, but they might have been fooled in a different way. Here they are running right into the harbor, and they will stop there. We might have watched till the most of them went ashore, and then we could have taken her easily."

"How did I know they would run in here? They might have kept on up the bay. And I didn't suppose a lot of beardless chaps could put up such a scrap."

"Well, we have done all you asked of us, and we want our pay."

"Done! You haven't done anything! I hired you to help me take the yacht."

"And misrepresented the case to us. You will pay me, or I'll chuck you overboard!"

There was a glare in McSwatt's eyes that cowed Flynn.

"Oh, we mustn't quarrel," he quickly said. "Of course, I will pay you, as I agreed."

"I thought so."

"And I will double the sum if you stand by me a while longer. I tell you I can't fool with those chaps—I can't waste time. I must get possession of my boat at once."

"Well, if you are thinking of attempting to board her again, you'll have to get somebody in my place. I have had enough of that kind of work."

Flynn saw that McSwatt meant it.

"All right," he growled. "We'll stay out and keep watch of her till she drops anchor. I want to be sure they mean to stop here."

So the launch cruised about, keeping in sight of the *White Wings* till the yacht ran slowly into the harbor and let fall her anchor in the vicinity of half a dozen other pleasure yachts laying near together.

CHAPTER VII.

ARRESTED IN ROCKLAND.

There were some indignant lads on board the *White Wings*.

"A regular case of piracy!" declared Diamond. "If we had not been too much for that gang, they would have seized the boat."

"Sure," nodded Hodge, whose eyes were gleaming, while his breast, across which his arms were folded, rose and fell with excitement.

"We handled them too easy," grunted Browning. "It would have served them right if we had split the skull of every man who tried to come over our rail."

"Der pig poom come britty near sblitting der skull uf one," grinned Hans. "You pet dot chap half a swelt head on me."

Frank had returned to the wheel. He did not say much, but his cheeks were flushed with excitement and his lips were pressed together.

"Remember what the truckman told you, Merry?" questioned Diamond.

"What was that?"

"Why, about this boat being hoodooed."

"Yes."

"It begins to look as if he was right."

"Oh, I don't know."

"Well, if this hasn't been a hoodoo cruise from Boston, I don't know a thing!"

"It has been rather eventful," admitted Frank, his face relaxing somewhat.

"Uf you vos lookin' oxcitement for, we haf found him," put in Hans.

"Those chaps are keeping watch of us now," said Frank. "I suppose they think of trying the trick again."

"Don't believe they will," said Hodge. "We'll be in the harbor pretty soon, and they won't dare make another attempt like that."

As they ran in the mist lifted and vanished, and they saw the city stretched before them. To the north was the breakwater that protects the harbor, and away in the distance loomed some mountains.

"What are those hills there?" asked Diamond.

"Those are the famous Camden mountains," answered Frank. "The town lies at the foot of those mountains, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson says the scenery in the vicinity of Camden is the most varied and beautiful to be found anywhere in the world."

"Are we going to stop at Camden?"

"Well, that is on the program. We'll run up there to-morrow."

They anchored near the other yachts and vessels, purposely running into the very midst of them.

"As long as one of us stays on board, those chaps will not attempt to seize the yacht by force while we remain here," said Merriwell.

"Don't be too sure of that," warned Hodge. "They are desperate characters, and there is no telling

what they will try."

They watched the launch run into a wharf and saw the party leave her. Not one of the baffled boarders remained in the vicinity, but all quickly disappeared.

"I believe they are afraid of the consequences now," said Merry. "They are getting out of the way in a hurry."

It was not long before the others were of the same opinion. However, Frank was not certain but this movement on the part of the enemy was a ruse to lull their suspicions.

"Three of us will remain on the yacht," he said. "Jack and I are going ashore."

"How?" asked Diamond. "We have no boat, and we are anchored off here in the bay."

"I am going to buy a boat here. I think we can get one of the boats from some of these vessels to set us ashore."

The nearest vessel was hailed, and it did not take long to get a sailor with a boat to come over to the yacht and take Frank and Jack off. He rowed them to the steamboat wharf, and would not take a cent for doing so.

"All right, mates," he said, in a hearty way. "I'll want a turn sometime, perhaps." Then, after telling them that, if they did not get a boat, they could whistle him up and he would bring them off to their yacht, he rowed away.

There were a number of truck teams about the wharf, loading with the freight left there that morning by the steamer. Frank inquired of one of the truckmen where to find a man who would sell them a first-class rowboat, and the truckman directed him to a man who had boats to let and to sell.

This man the boys sought without delay, but he was not at his shop. They were told that he had gone uptown, and so they walked up Sea Street into the heart of the city.

As they came out on Main Street, Diamond halted with an exclamation of astonishment.

"Great Scott!" burst from his lips. "Is this real?"

"Is what real?" asked Frank.

"Do I really see a trolley car running along the street here, or am I dreaming?"

"Oh, come along!" laughed Frank. "They have trolley cars down in this country, and I don't think it looks quite as wild and uncivilized as you expected."

They entered the Thorndike Hotel together, and, just as they passed through the door, Frank suddenly clutched his friend's arm, giving a gasp of astonishment himself.

Jack saw Merry was staring toward the flight of stairs. He looked up, and there on the stairs, descending toward them, were two girls, Inza Burrage and Paula Benjamin!

Merriwell recovered his composure immediately and stepped forward to meet the girls at the foot of the stairs, accompanied by Diamond. The boys lifted their hats, and Frank said:

"Another unexpected pleasure! We didn't dream of this. Supposed you were in Bar Harbor."

The girls shook hands with them, and both seemed to show confusion.

"It is a pleasure," declared Inza. "We are stopping here in Rockland a few days."

Frank longed to ask questions, but he knew it would be an act of rudeness, and he refrained. However, Paula seemed to think that Inza's explanation was not sufficient, and she added:

"Yes, we decided to stop off here a day, and we are so interested with the city and the surrounding country that we will remain a little longer."

"That will be pleasant," said Frank. "We've just got in, and are rather salty now, but we mean to brace up and get some of the brine out of us. Perhaps we may have the pleasure of seeing you often while we remain here."

"I hope we may," put in Jack, quickly, looking earnestly at Paula, who let her eyes droop before his gaze.

"I am sure it will be agreeable to us," smiled Inza. "Tell us something about your voyage. Did you have a nice time?"

"Nice isn't any name for it," laughed Frank.

"That's right," nodded Jack; "it isn't."

"We have encountered excitements galore."

"Such as fogs and storms and steamboats and pirates."

"Mercy! Pirates!"

"Well, they attempted to board us and seize the yacht."

"What did you do?"

"We gave them a jolly good welcome."

A uniformed policeman entered the hotel and stepped up to the boys.

"Which one of you is Frank Merriwell?" he asked.

"I am, sir," said Frank.

"Then," said the officer, "I shall have to take you."

"Take me?" cried Frank. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are under arrest."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STIR IN LIMEROCK CITY.

Both girls uttered a little cry of amazement and alarm, and Paula shrank close to Inza, clasping her about the waist.

"Under arrest?" repeated Frank, slowly. "For what?"

"Stealing a yacht and resisting the real owner when he attempted to regain possession of it."

Merry laughed heartily.

"This is a joke!" he exclaimed.

The officer seemed puzzled, but he frowned at Frank, saying:

"You are not likely to find it a joke, young man. It is a serious offense, and, if you have not some rich folks who will settle handsomely for your little lark, you will go to jail."

"My dear sir," said Merriwell, with perfect coolness, "you are taking too much for granted. You are standing on the ground that the charge against me is true. It will be the easiest thing in the world to prove that it is not."

"You will have to prove that to the judge," said the officer, with his hand on Frank's shoulder. "Just now you'll have to accompany me. If you resist or make any trouble, it will be worse for you."

He produced handcuffs.

"What do you mean to do?" hoarsely demanded Diamond, his eyes bulging. "You're not going to handcuff him?"

"It is necessary. I am not taking any chances. A chap who will steal a yacht is liable to be pretty desperate."

"I will go along with you quietly," said Frank, paling a bit at the thought of being led shackled through the streets. "I give you my word on that."

"It's an outrage!" cried Diamond.

"I advise you to keep still," said the officer, sternly. "You may be arrested as an accomplice."

"I don't care if I am!" came fiercely from Jack's lips. "I say it is an outrage, and I will stand by it. Mr. Merriwell purchased the yacht and paid his money for it, as he can prove. He is the rightful owner of the boat."

"I am not going to discuss that."

The officer was about to put the irons on Frank, when Jack cut in with:

"Have a little decency about this, Mr. Officer. If you believe this young man such a desperate fellow, call an assistant. Surely two of you ought to be able to take him to the lockup without handcuffing him."

The policeman was angry, and Frank saw that what Jack was saying was not making things any better, so he asked his friend to be quiet. Then he said something in a low tone to the officer. The latter hesitated.

"Put yourself in my place," said Frank. "You are not sure this charge is true. Think how you would feel to be dragged along the street with irons on your wrists when you had not been guilty of committing a crime."

"And he tells you the truth, sir, when he says he bought the yacht," broke in Inza, fearlessly. "I

know it! He purchased it of my friend's brother."

"That is true," spoke up Paula, with sudden braveness. "My brother sold him the yacht. He never stole it! Why, he is Frank Merriwell, of Yale, and everybody knows Frank Merriwell would not steal anything."

She was startled by her own boldness, but her words brought about a good result.

Of course, the arrest of Frank had attracted the attention of all who were in the office of the hotel, among whom were several commercial men. One of the latter stepped forward quickly.

"Frank Merriwell, of Yale?" he exclaimed. "Is this the famous Yale pitcher? By Jove, it is! I have seen him pitch several games, but I didn't know him in this yachting suit. Mr. Merriwell, I am glad to see you, but sorry you are in trouble. However, if I can aid you in any way, you may count on me."

"Thank you," said Frank. "It's pleasant to know I am not quite unknown and friendless down here."

"Unknown!" exclaimed another man. "If you are Frank Merriwell, we all know about you. We have read about you in the papers. You are the best known college man in this country. Officer, I don't believe this young gentleman is either a thief or a desperado. If he says he will go along with you, I'll vouch for him."

"If you say so, Mr. Franch——"

"I do. I will be responsible for him."

The officer put his handcuffs out of sight.

"All right," he said. "Come along, young man."

By this time the report had gone abroad that there had been an arrest in the Thorndike, and a crowd was gathering outside the door. In the crowd were a number of excited small boys, for they had heard that the person arrested was the famous Yale football and baseball player, Frank Merriwell.

One of the boys in the crowd saw a friend on the opposite side of the street, and yelled:

"Hey, Charley, get a wiggle on an' come over here! W'at yer t'ink! Ther cop has nabbed that feller we've been readin' about—Frank Merriwell!"

"Aw! w'at yer givin' us!" flung back the other.

"This ain't no fust of April!"

"It's dead straight, Charley! Frank Merriwell is right here in ther Thorndike, an' Old Briggs has pinched him. Don't yer want ter see him?"

"Don't I?" gasped the one across the street, as he bolted from the sidewalk. "I'd rudder see Frank Merriwell than have a season ticket to der ball games!"

And he could not get over quick enough.

By the time the officer was ready to bring Frank out of the hotel, all the men and boys outside knew who had been arrested, and the excitement was great. The crowd grew swiftly, and everybody was eager to get a look at the Yale athlete of whom they had heard such wonderful stories.

The young men of the town were no less excited than the boys. There was scarcely one of them who did not know something about Frank Merriwell and his record, and, even before they could find out why he had been arrested, they denounced the arrest as an outrage.

Another policeman came along and attempted to clear the sidewalk in front of the hotel, but the crowd did not want to disperse.

The officer who had arrested Frank came out with Merriwell at his side, a hand on his arm.

"There he is!" was the cry that went up. "That is Frank Merriwell!"

Jack Diamond, who walked beside Frank, was amazed at the crowd and to hear them call Frank's name.

"They know you, Merriwell," he said.

"It seems so," said Frank, with a faint smile.

"It's a shame!" cried one of the young men. "What's he arrested for?"

"Don't know," admitted another; "but I'll bet my clothes he is all right! Frank Merriwell is on the level!"

"That's so!" shouted twenty voices.

The crowd followed the officer and his prisoner. Somebody proposed a cheer for Frank Merriwell, and it seemed that every human being in that following crowd cheered as loudly as he could.

Then somebody proposed three groans for Old Briggs, the officer, and the crowd groaned in a most dismal manner.

Some of the small boys grew so excited that they kept yelling at Briggs to let Frank go. But they were scarcely less excited than the lads of eighteen or twenty. A dozen of them got together and actually talked of taking Briggs' prisoner from him. In their enthusiasm they might have tried it, but for the coolness of one or two among them.

"It's a blamed shame to have this thing happen in Rockland!" declared one fellow. "What will Merriwell think of us? He will be dead sore on this town."

"He isn't a fool," said a cooler head. "If he is all right, it isn't likely that any harm will come to him. He can't blame Briggs for doing his duty if there is a warrant for his arrest."

So Frank was marched away to the lockup, but his arrest had created more excitement in the city than any other event since the opening game of baseball in the Knox County League, July Fourth.

Frank was locked in a cell. Jack did not leave him till the door had closed on his friend.

The boys had found out that the warrant for Frank's arrest was sworn out by Parker Flynn.

"He shall pay dearly for this piece of business!" muttered the young Virginian, as he left the lockup.

The crowd that still lingered in front of the building stared at Jack. They had seen him with Merriwell, and they knew he must be one of Frank's particular friends. The small boys envied him for that very reason.

Diamond had learned that Merriwell would have a hearing before a local judge at two o'clock that afternoon, and he resolved to do whatever he could for his friend before that time.

But Diamond had not left Frank thirty minutes before there were two visitors to see the prisoner. They were admitted by the guard, and Merriwell was staggered when he saw the face of one of them.

"Jack Benjamin?" he cried. "It can't be!"

"But it is," declared the little fellow, as he grasped Merry's hand and shook it warmly.

"But—but—"

"You're astonished—exactly. I don't wonder. Folks at home think me on the way to Alaska. The governor thinks so. As long as he thinks that, he won't interfere with my little outing down this way."

"But the deception—I don't understand it."

"Expect I'd better make a clean breast to you," said Benjamin, blushing in a remarkable manner. "You see, it's this way: Last year at Newport I met a young lady on whom I got badly smashed. She's a star, Merriwell—she's the only one for me! But the old man—excuse me—the governor objected, said I was too young to know my mind, and all that rot. He found out the girl's folks were not very rich, and then he set about raising the high dinkey-dink with everything. Well, the result was that he did smash things for a time. This summer, when I wanted to spend my vacation down in Maine, he sat down on it hard. You see, he did so because the young lady lives here in Rockland. I was forced to give up the idea—apparently. But I began to talk about Alaska. Then I sold you the *White Wings* to get enough money for my summer outing, left word that I was off for Alaska, and came down here. That's the whole of it. Here I am."

"Then I understand how it happens your sister and Inza are stopping in Rockland. She knows you are here."

"Sure. Sis is all right. She sticks by me."

Thus far Frank had paid no attention to his second visitor, but now the fellow stepped forward, saying:

"Howdy-do, Merriwell. I suppose you know me?"

"What?" cried Frank, grasping the extended hand. "Is it Fred Moslof, of Dartmouth? What are you doing down here? I haven't seen you since our opening game last spring, when you spoiled two daisy hits for me by digging them out of the dirt down around third bag."

Moslof laughed.

"I am playing ball down here this summer," he said.

"Well, that is a surprise. Are you playing on the Rockland team?"

"No, I am manager of the Camdens. As soon as Benjamin told me you were here, we came right up. I played with Rockland last summer, and I know stacks of influential men in both Rockland and Camden. I'll fix this matter of bail for you and get you out of here in a hurry, if you like."

"Well, that is kind of you," smiled Frank, "and I appreciate it. I shall be glad to accept your offer, old man."

"Then it is settled," said Benjamin. "Moslof can do the trick. It may take an hour or two to fix it, but we'll see that it's done. Just make yourself easy."

When they departed, they left Frank in good spirits, for he knew he could easily refute the charge of stealing the yacht, for Benjamin was there in Rockland to substantiate his statements. Merriwell was resolved to settle that matter and then make it very warm for Mr. Parker Flynn.

It took something more than an hour for Moslof and Benjamin to fix things, but they finally returned to the lockup, accompanied by an officer with an order for Frank's release.

Merriwell told them all about Flynn's attempt to obtain possession of the yacht by force, and then he accompanied them to the office of a justice of the peace, where he swore out a warrant against Flynn and saw it placed in the hands of an officer to be served.

"We'll give that gentleman the surprise of his life," smiled Benjamin. "He won't expect to see me down here. If he had not thought me on my way to Alaska, he would not have dared attempt such a high-handed proceeding."

Moslof said that he must return to Camden. He had come down to confer with the Rockland and Thomaston managers about the schedule, and he had finished his business. At parting he said:

"Look here, Merriwell, can't you pitch one or two games for us, if no more. Camden has a better team than Rockland, but Rockland is stronger in the box. We started out with a lead the first of the season, but we've been dropping games to Rockland right along lately, and we won't be in it if the thing keeps on. I have telegraphed and telephoned all over the country for a strong pitcher, but I haven't got hold of the right man. You'd be just the man for us. Why, you would paralyze Rockland with that double-shoot of yours."

"Well, old man," said Frank, "I hate to refuse you anything after what you have done, but you know I want no part in professional baseball."

"This is only semi-professional. Part of our team are not under salary, and nearly all are college players."

"I might get myself into trouble if I pitched, Moslof. I can't promise."

"Well, promise me that you will pitch for Camden if you pitch at all in the Knox County League."

"I'll do that," smiled Merry; "but you must not expect me to pitch at all."

Moslof was forced to be satisfied with that. At least, he knew Rockland would not secure Merriwell, and that was some satisfaction, as he had heard rumors that the Rockland management meant to have the famous Yale twirler, if he was to be procured for love or money.

Frank accompanied Benjamin back to the Thorndike, where he was received with great delight by Inza, Paula and Inza's aunt, Miss Abigail Gale.

"I didn't dare tell you Jack was here when we first met," said Paula; "but when that horrid policeman took you away, I just hurried to let him know what had happened. He said he would have you out all right in a short time."

"Well, he kept his word, and now I am after the fellow who put this job up on me. I have sworn out a warrant for his arrest, and he will find himself in my place before night."

Frank remained at the hotel thirty minutes chatting with the girls and Miss Gale, and then he said that he must return to the yacht and let his friends know he was all right.

On his way to the wharf, Frank called at the shop of the boat builder again, and found the man in. He was pleased to learn that the man had two boats for sale, both of which were in the water.

After looking the boats over, Merry made a bargain for one of them and paid for it. Then he got into the boat, rowed out round the wharf and pulled away for the yacht.

As he approached the yacht, Hans came on deck, saw him and raised a shout that brought the others up in a hurry. All were astonished and delighted to see Frank. Jack had been there and told them what had happened; then he had hurried away to see if he could do anything for Merriwell.

Frank told them the story of his release, and, as it was midday, he stayed on board to eat a hearty meal. While they were eating, Jack returned, having been taken to the yacht by a boatman he had hired.

"Knew you must be here!" cried the Virginian. "I was making a hustle to get you out when I heard you were out already. Why, I never saw a place like this, Frank! Everybody in town has heard of you, and everybody was furious over your arrest. Why, this is a great country, boys! I'm stuck on it already. The people down here are all right!"

"Not quite such jays and hayseeds as you thought, eh?" smiled Frank.

"I tell you they are all right! They are not jays at all!"

After dinner the boys left Browning and Dunnerwust on the yacht to guard it and then went ashore. Barely had Frank appeared in the city before the manager of the Rockland baseball team

fell on him and offered him all sorts of inducements to pitch for his nine. But it was no use, for Merry had given Moslof his promise.

Frank expected to hear that Flynn had been arrested. Instead, he learned that neither Flynn nor Snell could be found, so the warrant had not been served.

It was supposed that Flynn would be on hand when court was called to order that afternoon, but he did not appear, and so the charge against Frank was dismissed, as there was no one to push it.

Later it was learned that in some way Flynn had learned that Jack Benjamin was in Rockland. As soon as he heard this, he made all haste to get out of the place, taking an electric car to Camden, where he had disappeared as completely as if wiped off the face of the earth.

"But I do not believe you have heard or seen the last of the fellow, Merriwell," said Hodge. "He will bother you again."

Bart's words were destined to come true.

CHAPTER IX.

ALONG THE COAST TO CAMDEN.

"Nellie was a sailor's lass—a sailor's lass was she,
(Heave ho, my lads, then heave away!)
Waiting for her sailor lad, who sailed the deep blue sea.
(Heave ho, my lads, then heave away!)"

Three lads were getting up the anchor on board the *White Wings*, which lay in Rockland harbor, on the coast of Maine, and they sang a nautical song as they pulled at the cable. They were Bart Hodge, Jack Diamond and Hans Dunnerwust. Frank Merriwell was busy making other preparations for the run up to Camden that glorious summer morning, while Bruce Browning was doing something below, no one knew what.

"Holdt on a vile till you spit on my handts," exclaimed the Dutch lad, breathing heavily. "I vant to got a petter holdt mit my feet to kept from slipping der rail ofer und der varter indo. I vas glad you don'd af to bull ub anchors to make me a lifings."

"Keep at it, Hans," ordered Hodge.

"You remind me of the Irishman who caught his friend by the heels just as the friend was falling headlong into a well," said Diamond, as he continued to pull away.

"How vas dot?" asked Hans.

"He held on as long as he could," said Jack, "and then he called down to his friend, 'Jist wait a minute where yez are, Mike, till Oi let go an' get a better hold.' Then he let go."

"Yaw," said Hans, soberly; "but I don'd seen der boint der story of."

"His friend couldn't wait," explained Jack.

Frank Merriwell laughed. Never before had he heard the Virginian tell a humorous anecdote, and he was not a little surprised as well as pleased, for it showed that Jack, who had grumbled a great deal during the unlucky and unpleasant cruise down the coast, was in better spirits now they were at last in the waters of Penobscot Bay.

The anchor broke water and was soon secured in place. Already the jib had been raised, and Frank was at the wheel to bring the yacht round as soon as she felt the breeze after the anchor was atrip. Every indication was that there was just breeze enough outside the harbor to give them a pleasant sail to their destination.

Under Frank's orders the boys set sail, hoisting both the jib topsails and club topsails; in fact, cracking on every stitch. Hans grew weary again before the mainsail was up.

"Get hold of the halyards and get into gear, Dunnerwust," ordered Bart, sharply. "You are getting to be as bad as Browning, and he is no earthly use on the water."

"Hey?" grunted the big fellow, his head appearing as he came up from below. "Well, what's the use of being any earthly use on the water? What's the matter with you, Hodge?"

"The matter with you is that you need something for that tired feeling," returned Bart, like a flash. "If you would get out and make a bluff at pulling on a line now and then, it would seem rather more decent."

"I never make any bluffs. Everything is on the level with me. I'm not much of a sailor, but I'm pretty good at repelling boarders, ducking bogus sheriffs and such things. Don't worry about me. Just go ahead getting under way. I'll be with you."

Then he calmly watched them get all the sails set, as if he did not consider it necessary for him to

lend a hand, and as if he had no idea of doing so on any condition if he could avoid it.

Browning was lazy, and he knew it. He made no attempt to conceal the fact; really, he almost seemed to glory in it. At college he was familiarly called, "the Laziest Man on Earth," and it pleased rather than disturbed him.

Ordinarily a lazy man is despised by his companions, but such was not the case with Browning. Genial, big-hearted, strong as a giant, yet gentle as a baby, he made hosts of friends and very few enemies. At one time he had been really ambitious, but that was before the coming of Frank Merriwell to Yale. Browning had been dropped to Merriwell's class and, as there could be but one real leader in the class, he lost his ambition when Merriwell showed his superiority.

But no man had proved a truer friend to Merriwell than the once famous "King of the Sophomores." Browning was not particularly demonstrative in his affection, but he could be depended on in any case of emergency, as Frank had learned, and the big fellow was a good man to have for a backer.

Browning could not be driven to do anything, nor could he be jollied into it, a fact that irritated Hodge more or less.

"There is one thing we do not possess that we should have," said Merry, as Jack came aft and stood near the wheel.

"What's that?"

"A gun."

"Why, you have four or five below."

"I don't mean that kind. We need a small cannon to fire when we anchor and when we get under way. We are not doing the thing properly unless we have one."

"I never thought of that."

"I did not think of it till it was too late to get one in Boston. We'll have to get along for the present without it."

They ran past the end of the breakwater and were opposite the Bay Point Hotel, a handsome summer hotel near the city of Rockland. Outside the harbor they found a breeze that made the *White Wings* heel over and take a bone in her teeth.

Although the sloop was not in the racing class, Frank was well satisfied with her, for he had discovered that she possessed many good qualities. She could be held pretty near to the wind without yawing and she was not at all cranky, nor did she require much weather helm. Of course, she could not run as near to the wind as a cutter-rigged yacht of the racing class, but she could do better than the ordinary cutter.

The wind was off shore and favorable, so the *White Wings* seemed to fly that morning. The boys found comfortable positions and enjoyed the sail and the scenery.

Soon Rockland was left behind, disappearing from view behind the point on which the hotel sat. And then the Camden mountains began to loom higher and higher to the northwest.

"We met a warm reception in Rockland," said Frank. "I wonder how it will be in Camden."

The sunshine was bright on the blue bay. The distant islands looked inviting, and there was something about the cool greenness of the woods along the shore that was soothing to the eye.

It was not long before Rockport lighthouse came into view. Beyond the lighthouse they saw the narrow harbor and the village, with the houses seeming to cling to the heights that surrounded the harbor. From the limekilns rose black smoke that added to the picturesque charm of the scene.

But Rockport was quickly passed and Negro Island, at the mouth of Camden harbor, was before them. There was a lighthouse on the island, standing there like an old woman in a white dress and black cap.

Now the mountains, seeming to rise from the very sea, were near at hand and strikingly beautiful, clothed in their summer garments of green. On the top of the nearest mountain stood a hotel with a high observation tower.

"Boys," cried Diamond, "I am going up there and stop a week!"

"I wonder how anybody ever gets up there," grunted Browning. "I shall not go if I have to climb."

"No need to tell us that," said Hodge. "We knew it."

As they came abreast Negro Island, two girls came down on the rocks and waved handkerchiefs to them. The boys returned the salute, and Hans Dunnerwust cried:

"Vale, uf I ain'd got a mash you vos a liar! Uf id vasn't for gettin' my feets vet, I would walk ashore righd away kveek alretty. Yaw!"

Then he waved his cap to the girls, kissed his hands, bowed low with his hand on his heart, and

nearly fell overboard as Merry suddenly brought the yacht up closer into the wind.

"Oxcuse me uf I stayed righd in Camden der rest uf your life," said Hans, as he gathered himself up. "Dalk apout peaches! Vale, vot peen der madder mit dose!"

The others smiled at his enthusiasm.

Passing the island, they came in full view of the harbor and town. Several vessels and yachts lay in the harbor. Amid the trees the tastily painted, red-roofed cottages were to be seen. Far up at the head of the harbor rose handsome brick buildings. Church spires could be seen here and there. From the flagstaff of a hotel on the heights floated the American flag. On the black rocks under the shadow of the trees that stood far above the shore was a picnic party, the blue smoke of their fire rising from their midst. To the south of the town lay a beautiful cove with a sandy beach. Summer cottages could be seen on the point beyond the cove. To the north of the town was another cove and a heavily wooded point. In an opening of the trees on this point stood white tents.

And over all hung the mountains, the village seeming to have clambered up the side of the nearest one as far as it could go.

It was a most beautiful and captivating scene that glorious summer morning, and it is not strange that stoical Bart Hodge uttered an exclamation of admiration, while Frank Merriwell cried:

"Hurrah, fellows! Here we are, and from the looks of things we'll stay a while. There looms old Mount Megunticook, and here in the harbor, under its shadow, we will anchor. Boys, aren't you glad you came?"

"You bet?" cried every one of them.

CHAPTER X.

TOO WELL KNOWN.

Taking care not to strike one of the line of ledges that almost closes the mouth of Camden harbor, they ran in and dropped anchor. From the rocks the picnickers waved white handkerchiefs and called to them. They responded in a similar manner, with a strange lightness and exultant feeling in their hearts. Even Bruce Browning showed enthusiasm, for he could not help imbibing some of the spirit of the occasion.

The sails came down with a rattle and were properly and carefully taken care of, a task that consumed time. Then every line was coiled and put in its proper place, and nothing was neglected, so that when Frank's orders had been obeyed, everything about the yacht was ship-shape and in order.

Not till he had seen things in order did Frank think of leaving the sloop. Then he asked who would stay on board and who wished to go ashore. Diamond and Hodge were eager to go ashore. Browning and Dunnerwust expressed a willingness to go later, so three of the crew entered the small boat and pulled away up toward the distant wharves at the head of the harbor.

They rowed up to a float beside a wharf. Twenty other boats floated about the platform, and a boy was watching them.

"May we land here?" asked Frank.

"Well, I dunno," said the boy, doubtfully. "Ye see, these bo'ts are to let. Might let youn if some folks come along an' wanted it."

The boy grinned as he finished speaking.

"We might come back and want our boat only to find it gone," said Hodge. "Let's not leave it here, Merriwell."

The boy gave a jump.

"What's your name?" he almost shouted, looking straight at Frank.

"It's Frank Merriwell," was the reply.

"Frank Merriwell!" yelled the boy, dancing up and down. "Whoop! I heard you was in Rockland! My goodness! won't the fellers be tickled to see you in this town! There ain't a chap here that don't know all about ye! Jest you let me have yer painter! I'll take care of that bo't, an' there don't nobody touch it, you bet!"

"Thank you," laughed Frank. "I will pay you for your trouble."

"Not by a jugful! Think I'd take any pay of you? No, sir-ee! I'd set right here on this float an' watch your bo't for a week 'thout eatin' or sleepin', an' never charge you a cent! I never 'spected to live to see Frank Merriwell! Oh, Jingoos! won't the fellers be glad to see ye!"

The boy took charge of the boat. Just then another boy came onto the wharf, and the boat boy saw him.

"Hey, there, Bennie!" he yelled. "What d'yer know? You can't guess it in a year! He's come!"

"Who's come?"

"Frank Merriwell! Here he is!"

The jaw of the boy on the wharf dropped, and he stood staring, open-mouthed at Frank. For some moments he seemed awe stricken, and then, of a sudden, he turned and ran as if for his life, quickly scudding out of sight.

"He acted as if he were scared of you, Merry," said Diamond.

"He's gone to tell t'other fellers in town," explained the boat boy.

"Say," laughed Frank, "this is getting altogether too interesting! I'd rather not be so well known."

"Well, you can't help it," said Hodge. "They've all heard of you down this way."

"And I had an idea they never heard of anything away down here!" exclaimed Jack. "My ideas of this part of the country are completely upset."

"Let's hurry into town," urged Frank. "If we wait, it's ten to one we'll be escorted by a gang of my admirers. I haven't forgotten Rockland."

So they left the wharf and hastily walked up Bay View Street. Just as they reached the bank building at the public square they saw a dozen small boys coming down Elm Street on the run, headed by the one who had disappeared so suddenly from the wharf.

The moment the running boys saw Merriwell and his companions, they halted and huddled around the leader, who pointed at the three strangers in the place, yelling:

"There he is, fellers!"

Frank laughed outright, and Hodge and Diamond smiled. The excitement of the boys had attracted more or less notice, and the people on the streets looked at the three young yachtsmen with interest.

It was the height of the season at Camden, and the town was literally gorged with summer visitors from every part of the country, so the streets presented a lively appearance. The handsome turnouts of Philadelphia and New York millionaires could be seen, street cars were running, bicycles darting hither and thither, and the pedestrians on the streets nearly all wore clothes suitable for summer outing.

After coming up Bay View Street, which, in the neighborhood of the wharves, did not present a very attractive appearance, the young yachtsmen were surprised and pleased to come out to the square, where they could look around and see handsome brick blocks and buildings of which a city might be proud.

But the crowd of excited small boys attracted attention for the time. They came a little nearer, and the leader cried:

"Let's give three cheers for Frank Merriwell! Ready, now! Yell, fellers, yell!"

They did! They threw up their hands, tossed their caps into the air, and yelled as loudly as they could.

"Great Scott!" gasped Frank. "See what they have done! Why, everybody on the street is staring at us!"

It was true. The spectators had been attracted by the shrill cheers of the small boys, and they were looking toward the three embarrassed lads on the corner by the bank.

A man who was passing stopped and asked one of the boys why they were cheering so loudly.

"See that handsome feller there with the lace on his suit?" asked the boy, pointing Frank out.

"Yes, I see him."

"That's Frank Merriwell," declared the boy, excitedly and proudly.

"Frank Merriwell?" repeated the man, doubtfully. "Who is he?"

"W'at?" yelled the boy, voice and face expressing the greatest amazement and scorn. "Didn't ye never hear of Frank Merriwell? Wat's ther matter with yer? Why don't you go die!"

His contempt was crushing and humiliating, and the man passed on, wondering who in the world Frank Merriwell could be that he was so well known and famous.

But there were plenty of men and youths who had heard of Merriwell, and the report that the great Yale pitcher was in town flew like wildfire. Only the small boys stared at Frank with absolute rudeness, however. Those older looked at him with interest, but were careful not to make their attentions embarrassing.

Merry and his friends walked up into the village, going toward the post office. There were pretty girls on the street, and some of them flashed a brief, admiring glance at the trio of handsome lads in yachting suits.

The small boys trooped along behind, talking excitedly among themselves. Their chatter was amusing to hear.

"Look here, Jimmy," cried one, in fierce contradiction of a statement made by another, "that ain't so, an' you oughter know it! Harvard never got fourteen hits offen Frank Merriwell in one game!"

"Fourteen hits!" yelled another, in derision. "W'at yer givin' us, Jimmy! They never got ten hits offen him in one game! You better go read up about him! You're woozy, that's w'at's ther matter with you!"

"That double-shoot of his is w'at paralyzes 'em," put in another. "He can make ther ball cut all kinds of riggers in the air."

"That's all right," said Jimmy, sullenly. "Slatridge sez ther ain't no such thing as a double-shoot. He says that 'riginated in ther mind of some of them newspaper fellers w'at's writin' up stories 'bout Frank Merriwell."

Then there was a howl of scorn from all the others, and one shook a finger under Jimmy's nose, shouting:

"Slatridge knows it all—in his mind! That feller's too tired to play baseball. He can pitch sometimes, but he don't git woke up only when he thinks he's likely to lose his job. Don't you take stock in ev'rything he says."

"Fellers," said a tall, solemn-looking boy, out at knees and elbows, "I'd give a hundred thousan' dollars to see Frank Merriwell pitch against Rockland an' use his double-shoot on 'em."

"I'd give more'n that to see it, if I jest had the price of admission ter git inter ther game," declared a barefooted boy.

"Why don't Moslof nail him?" fiercely demanded a freckle-faced youngster. "If I was manager of the Camdens, I wouldn't let Frank Merriwell go away alive if he wouldn't play ball for me! I bet Rockland will have him if Moslof don't git him."

"If Rockland gits him, Camden might jest as well crawl right into the smallest hole she can find, and pull the hole in after her. She won't never win another game."

The most of this talk could be distinctly heard by Frank and his friends, and it proved very amusing.

In the window of the drug store near the post office hung a printed poster announcing a game of ball in Camden that afternoon between Rockland and Camden. The bill also stated that Rockland and Camden were tied for first place in the Knox County League, so that the result of one game would put one or the other team at the head.

"We'll have to see that game, fellows," said Frank. "It is evident that there is plenty of baseball excitement down in this part of the country."

At this moment two young men came down from the rooms of the Business Men's Association in the Opera House building, and Frank uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"There are two Dartmouth men, boys," he said; "Moslof and McDornick. Moslof is managing the Camdens and playing third. Let's go over and see them."

They walked over to meet the Dartmouth men.

CHAPTER XI.

FALSE REPORTS.

Moslof seized Frank's hand and shook it heartily.

"That Rockland affair didn't amount to anything, after all, did it?" he asked.

"No," said Merry; "the chap who caused my arrest skipped out when he learned that Jack Benjamin, the man I bought the yacht of, was in Rockland. He didn't stay to press the complaint of theft. He thought Benjamin had gone to Alaska. It must have been a frightful shock to him. You've met Diamond? Yes. Let me introduce Bart Hodge."

"Hodge!" cried Moslof. "You caught for Merriwell this season? Jove! but you made a record for a freshman! I am glad to know you, Hodge."

They shook hands, and Moslof said:

"Here is McDornick, our left fielder, the biggest little crank on earth and the best base runner in

the Knox County League, if I do say so! We need more of them, too."

McDornick shook hands all round, spluttered a little about the "beastly luck" the Camdens had been having, and ended by swearing that Camden would "wipe up the earth" with Rockland before the season was over. He was very vehement in his expressions.

"We've been awfully weak in the box," said Moslof. "Bascomb, of the University of Maine, is a good little man, but he has had poor luck against the Rocklands. That's the trouble with our pitchers. They are all right against Thomaston, but they do not work to advantage against Rockland, and I'll swear that Thomaston has the heaviest batting team."

"If often works that way," said Frank.

"But the worst of it is," Moslof went on, "Rockland has a pitcher who is a hoodoo for Camden. He is pie for Thomaston, but he makes monkeys of our men."

"Who is he?"

"Dayguild, late of the New England League. Rockland has found out that he can play thunder with Camden, and they hold him back for us all the time. They don't care about Thomaston; it's Camden they want to beat."

"How is it with Camden?"

"Well," laughed Moslof, "to tell the truth, the feeling is just as strong up there. We'd give our boots to down Rockland, and we don't care so much about Thomaston. I played with Rockland last year. They used me well down there, but said I couldn't bat any. That made me mad. This year for the first two weeks of our season I led the league in batting. I am falling off a little, but still I am ahead of the average. They are beginning to change their mind down there about my batting."

"Well," said Merry, "we are going to see your game this afternoon. I suppose it will be pretty hot?"

"Hot! You bet! I expect Woods and Makune, of the disbanded Portlands, here by noon. We have Williamson, of the Lewistons, but he has been ill and is not in the best form. We're going to do our best to take the lead again to-day. Woods is a dandy little pitcher and a fine fellow."

"But if we had you, Merriwell, we'd be all right," said McDornick. "Say, old man, won't you pitch for us this afternoon? Makune will cover second, and we can put Woods anywhere. With you in the box, we can paralyze Rockland."

Frank shook his head.

"It's no use," he said. "I can't play with you."

"I hope the stories that fellow has been telling about you are not true," said Moslof, slowly.

"What stories?"

"Why, he's been saying that Rockland had secured you sure—that you came down into Maine on purpose to pitch for Rockland. When I told him you had given me your word to pitch for Camden if you pitched at all, he laughed in my face, and said I was easily fooled. He swore that he knew for an absolute fact that you had signed with Rockland."

As Frank listened to this, he flushed and then turned pale. There came a dangerous fire into his eyes, and he laughed in a manner that was a danger signal for those who knew him best.

"Moslof," he said, "you must know these reports are lies. You must know I can't sign a contract, as that would bar me from college baseball."

"I didn't believe it," said the manager of the Camdens; "but there are plenty who did, and the men who are backing the club here are sore on me for letting you get away after helping you out of that scrape in Rockland. If Rockland got you now, I'd jump this town in a hurry."

"Don't let that worry you a bit, old man. I said I would pitch for Camden if I pitched at all, and I rather think I am known as a man of my word."

Moslof seemed relieved.

"Oh, say!" exclaimed McDornick, impulsively, "just pitch this game for us this afternoon! We'll sink the knife deep into Rockland!"

"I hate to refuse," said Frank; "but I must. What I want to know is, who this fellow is who has been telling that Rockland had me."

"Oh, he is a fly chap who is stopping at the Bay View—a summer boarder."

"What does he look like?"

"He's a loud dresser—wears plaids, pink shirts, lots of rings, loud neckties, and so forth."

"What's he look like in the face? How old is he?"

"He may be nineteen. His eyes are set near together, and he is freckled and foxy looking."

"He's a sneak!" broke out McDornick, in his impulsive way. "I knew it the first time I saw him."

"Where is the Bay View?" asked Merriwell.

"Right there," answered Moslof, motioning toward a large building sitting back on the opposite side of the street.

"This fellow is stopping there?"

"Yes."

"What is his name?"

"Don't know."

"Let's go over. I want to see that gentleman. I hope we may find him around the hotel."

"If you'll punch him, I'll pay your fine!" said the hot-headed McDornick, as they crossed the street.

While they had been talking in front of the opera house, a small boy was standing near them, his hands clasped and an ecstatic look of happiness on his face, while his eyes were not taken off Frank Merriwell for a moment. When Frank had started to cross the street with the others, the boy heaved a sigh.

A gentleman who was passing stopped and looked at the boy in surprise.

"Well, my little man," said the gentleman, "what is the trouble? You look as if you had seen a vision."

"I've jest seen somebody I never thought I'd see," said the boy. "Oh, I'd like to grow up and be famous like him! It must be fine to be famous."

"My boy," said the gentleman, encouragingly, "if you live you may be a great man some day."

"I can't never be like the feller I've just seen."

"Why, who could this wonderful person have been? I didn't know there was such a famous man stopping in Camden at present. Was it the governor of the State?"

"Naw! Somebody bigger'n him!"

"A United States Senator, perhaps?"

"Senators ain't in it with this feller!"

"Really! You surprise and interest me. It could not have been the President of the United States?"

"Bigger feller than the Prince of Wales! Oh, if I could grow up to be like him!"

"Now I am astounded!" exclaimed the gentleman. "Who can this wonderful person be? Won't you tell me his name?"

"His name is Frank Merriwell, and he is a lollypoooser! He's the most wonderful feller living in the whole world."

"Frank Merriwell?" repeated the gentleman, in perplexity. "It's strange I never heard of him. What has he ever done?"

"Done?" cried the boy, excitedly and enthusiastically. "What ain't he done? He's traveled round the world, shot panthers and Greasers in South America, gorillas in Africa, tigers in India, elephants in Ceylon, and bears and other critters out West in this country. Done? Why, he made a bicycle trip across the country from New York to San Francisco, and he licked everybody that tried to bother him on the way. Done? Mister, he goes to Yale College, and he is the greatest football player in the world! He pitches on the Yale nine, and he wiped up the earth with Harvard and Princeton this spring. Done? If there's a thing that feller ain't done an' can't do, I want ter know it!"

The gentleman was gasping for breath.

"Really!" he said, "a most remarkable person! And you want to grow up and be like him?"

"If I thought I could—if I ever did, I'd die happy!"

"Strange I never heard of this person before. I don't believe he is very well known."

"Now, don't fool yourself, mister. He's known by every boy in the United States! We've all heard of him, and all the boys down in this town would give anything to be like him. I tell you he is a bird!"

"Where is he now?"

"He's just gone over to the Bay View with Moslof and some other fellers."

"Really, I believe I'll have to go over and see what this wonderful person looks like," and the gentleman crossed the street toward the hotel.

In the meantime Frank and his companions entered the hotel in search of the person who had been circulating the false reports about Merriwell.

The report that Merriwell was in town had reached the hotel, and no sooner had the boys entered the office than the landlord came forward and greeted them heartily. Moslof introduced Merry and his two friends.

The landlord proved to be a cordial, pleasant gentleman.

"Mr. Merriwell," he said, "you have caused me no end of trouble."

"I have?" exclaimed Frank, astonished.

"Yes."

"How is that?"

"Well, there isn't a table girl, a kitchen girl or any other girl in this house who does not know all about you. They read those yarns about you so much that they neglect their business. And, Mr. Merriwell," with sudden sternness, "I think you will have to settle with me for it."

"All right," smiled Frank. "What is the bill?"

"There is no bill. I mean you have to settle at this hotel and stay here while you are in town. There will be no bill. You shall have the best the house affords, and it shall not cost you a red cent."

Frank was surprised, but he thanked the genial landlord, saying:

"Really, sir, you are too kind, but we have everything comfortable on my yacht, and the fellows would not like it if I deserted them."

"Then bring them all here! I'm crowded, but I'll find room for you, if I have to give up a room myself."

He was in earnest, too.

Frank thanked him warmly once more, but exclaimed that such a thing would not do, as the *White Wings* might be stolen by the party who had attempted to seize her in the very mouth of Rockland harbor.

While they were talking, a very pretty, roguish-eyed girl came into the office, making an excuse that she was there on some sort of an errand. She cast sly glances at Frank, for really she was there to see him.

Of a sudden the landlord, laughing, caught her by the arm, and drew her round, saying:

"Here, Mr. Merriwell, is your greatest admirer in the house, Miss Phebe Macey. I heard her say once that she thought Frank Merriwell the finest fellow in the world, and she wondered why some of the Camden boys were not like him."

Frank was a little confused, but he lifted his cap and bowed, saying:

"Miss Macey, I am glad to know I have such an ardent admirer here."

Phebe was blushing crimson, but the roguish look was still in her eyes. Never in all her life had she looked prettier than in that moment of excitement and confusion. She lifted her hand and felt it grasped by Frank, and then, in dismay, she turned and fled, laughing to cover her agitation. She quickly disappeared, but her laugh rang in Merriwell's ears, for it was quite as bewitching as her roguish eyes.

The landlord seemed to enjoy the agitation he had caused the girl, and he laughed again. In fact, he was quite a man to laugh.

He urged Frank to remain to dinner, and Merry finally consented, although Jack and Bart, who were likewise invited, decided to return to the yacht.

While they were talking, Moslof suddenly grasped Merriwell's arm, saying in his ear:

"Here's the fellow you want to see."

He turned Frank toward a person who had just entered the office. In a moment Merry advanced toward that person, confronted him, and sternly said:

"So, sir, having failed to injure me in other ways, you have been lying about me! Well, it's quite like you, Snell!"

"Merriwell?" gasped the other, recoiling and turning pale. "The dickens!"

Frank and his old foe, Wat Snell, were again face to face.

CHAPTER XII.

SNELL IS FIRED.

"So it's that sneak who has been telling yarns!" grated Bart Hodge. "I hope Merriwell will smash him!"

"If he doesn't, I will!" muttered Jack Diamond. "I thought we had seen the last of him when we left Fardale."

"I hoped so," confessed Hodge.

"But I can't have a fight here," said the landlord, firmly. "It won't do."

He seemed on the point of interfering between Frank and Wat, but Hodge said:

"A word to Merriwell is enough, Mr. Drayben. He will be careful not to cause you any trouble."

Mr. Drayben saw that Merriwell was holding himself in reserve, and he felt a sudden curiosity to know what would pass between the enemies who had met there in his hotel, so he did not speak to Frank at once.

"Where is your fine friend, Mr. Parker Flynn, who you aided in your piratical attempt to seize my yacht?" asked Frank.

Snell swallowed down a lump in his throat and made an effort to recover his composure.

"The yacht belongs to Mr. Flynn," he said, huskily, his voice betraying his craven spirit.

"You know better than that! If so, why didn't Flynn remain in Rockland and push the case against me? Why did he suddenly take to his heels when he learned that Benjamin, from whom I bought the *White Wings*, was in Rockland?"

"Business called him back to Boston," faltered Snell.

"And business called you out of Rockland in a hurry, too. But you stopped too soon. It would have been better for you if you had kept on going."

Snell understood Merriwell's meaning and he quailed before the flashing eyes of the boy he had slandered.

"Oh, you can't scare me with your threats!" he declared, in a weak manner. "I'm not afraid of you, Mr. Frank Merriwell."

"If you had kept still about me," said Frank, "I should not have known you were in this town, but you tried to hurt me in a mean, contemptible manner, and I found you out."

"Never tried to hurt you in any manner."

"How about the lies you have been circulating concerning me?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do."

"I swear I do not."

"You have been telling that I have signed a contract with Rockland."

"Well, haven't you?"

"You know I have not! You know I would not do such a thing for any money, as it would disqualify me for the Yale team. But I fancy I see through your crooked game. You thought I might pitch for Rockland because you knew they would offer me more money than Camden possibly could. You judged me by yourself, and you knew you would sell yourself to do anything for money. You sought to turn the college men here against me, so they would carry back the report to their colleges that I had played for money under a signed contract. Then I would be debarred from the Yale team, and your revenge would be complete. Oh, I can read you, Snell—I know the workings of your evil mind! You are wholly crooked and wholly contemptible. What you deserve is a good coat of tar and feathers!"

Frank's plain words had drawn a crowd about them, and Drayben saw it would not do to interfere, as the talk could be heard in the parlors.

"This will have to stop," he said, firmly. "I can't have any more of it in my hotel."

"He is to blame for it all," whined Snell.

The landlord gave him a look of contempt.

"I do not blame him for anything," he declared. "I know you have told the stories he claims. My only wonder is that he did not knock you down on sight."

"I might have done so," said Frank, "but was ashamed to soil my hands on the fellow."

At this, thinking he was not in danger of immediate personal violence, Snell became suddenly bold.

"That is well enough to tell," he said; "but no one will believe it. You will find that you can't crowd me, Mr. Merriwell."

"I don't want to crowd you, but I want you to keep your mouth closed as far as I am concerned. If you try to circulate any more lies about me, I shall forget that you are a whining cur, without a spark of courage in your whole body, and I shall give you the drubbing you deserve."

"Bah!" cried Snell.

"As I have discovered the sort of a person you are," said Mr. Drayben, quietly but sternly, "I do not care to keep you in my hotel another hour."

"What?" gasped Snell. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are to pack up and get out at once."

"But you can't turn me out in that manner. This is a public house, and you have no right to turn me out like that!"

"I have the right to refuse to keep rascals and crooks in my house, sir. It is my duty to protect my guests by turning out such persons when their true character is discovered. You will get out as soon as you can."

"Do—do—do you dare call me a rascal and a crook?" gurgled Snell. "Take care, sir!" shaking his finger at the landlord. "My father is a rich man. He is at the head of the Yokohama and Manhattan Tea Company, Mr. Drayben, and he will make you regret it if you turn me out of your old hotel!"

"I don't care if your father is the Mikado of Japan or the Mayor of New York!" came from the landlord, who flushed with anger when Snell shook a finger at him; "you will get out of this house in a hurry, just the same."

"You can't turn me out till after dinner!"

"Can't I? We'll see about that!"

"But it's almost dinner time now."

"That makes no difference. You can't eat another meal here. Settle and git!"

It was a terrible humiliation for Snell, but he found there was no appeal, and he was forced to settle his bill, pack his traveling bag, and leave the hotel without his dinner.

"I have not liked the appearance of the fellow from the start," said Mr. Drayben. "He talked too much. If he stayed in the house another week, he would have driven away some of my best guests. You have done me a favor, Mr. Merriwell, by giving me an excuse for getting rid of him."

"He's a revengeful sneak," said Frank. "He'll try to get even with me some way."

Jack and Bart decided it was time for them to return to the yacht, and so they left Merriwell at the hotel, surrounded by several members of the Camden ball team, who had come in to see him.

Moslof introduced Frank to the members of the team as they appeared, and Merry shook hands with Slatridge and Putbury, the principal battery of the nine, two men who were red-headed, freckled, slow of movement, slow of speech, and who looked so much alike that in their uniforms one was often mistaken for the other. Cogern, the center fielder of the team, was another big fellow, who was said to be a terrific batter, being valuable for that very reason. Williamson proved to be tall and thin, but "Pop" had a reputation as a pitcher and a hitter. On account of his illness he had not been able to pitch since joining the Camdens, and so he was covering first base. Mower was a professional, and a good man when he attended to business. He played short. Bascomb, a little fellow, with a swagger and a grin that showed some very poor teeth, was change pitcher with Slatridge.

Frank looked the men over. They were a clean-looking set of ball players, and he was favorably impressed with them.

"Why, you seem to have a strong team here," he said to Moslof. "I fancied by what I heard down in Rockland that you had a lot of farmers."

"They know better than that!" exclaimed the manager of the Camdens, flushing. "We gave them a shock by winning from them in our opening game. They thought they had a snap. They have been hustling since then, but we held the lead for a long time. Now we are tied with them for first place, and this game to-day decides who holds the position. If Woods and Makune arrive on the twelve o'clock car, we'll try to give Rockland a surprise this afternoon."

"Woods is a pitcher, isn't he?"

"He is, and he's a good man, too, but his arm is not in the best condition. He hurt it a few weeks ago, and it hasn't got back yet. All the same, he says he will pitch for us this afternoon—telephoned me to that effect. He's on the level, and he wouldn't want to pitch if he didn't think he could win."

"Then I don't see why you want anything of me," smiled Frank.

"Woods can play any position," said Moslof, quickly. "With you in the box, we'd have the strongest nine ever seen in this State."

"You have started my baseball blood to boiling," laughed Merry; "but I think I'll keep my head cool and not play."

At this moment some one announced that the twelve o'clock car was coming, and all hurried out to see if Woods and Makune were on it.

They were. They were met by Moslof, who shook hands with them and then introduced them to Merriwell.

"What?" exclaimed Makune. "Frank Merriwell, the Yale man?"

"The same," confessed Frank.

"Why, Portland tried to get you two weeks ago, but couldn't get track of you. Moslof, you did a good trick when you nailed Merriwell."

"But I haven't nailed him," said the manager of the Camdens. "I've tried every way possible to get him. He is stopping here on his own yacht."

Woods did not seem to be much of a talker, but when he shook hands with Merry, many in the crowd noticed a strong resemblance between them. Merriwell was the taller and darker. Woods was very quiet in his manner, and he impressed the observer favorably at a glance. He had the air of a gentleman, even though he was a professional ball player.

That day Woods, Makune, Moslof and Merriwell dined together at the Bay View, and Frank told himself that never had he met a pleasanter set of fellows. There was something about Woods that drew Merry to him in a most remarkable manner. Frank had not known him an hour before he felt as if they were old friends.

"Do you think you can win from Rockland this afternoon, Walter?" asked Moslof.

"I can try," said Woods, quietly.

"Win!" exclaimed Makune. "Why, he is sure to win! If you have the team you say you have, we'll eat Rockland."

"How's your arm, Walter?" asked Moslof.

"I think it's all right," assured Woods.

"All right!" cried Makune. "Of course it's all right! Never was better. You didn't hurt it much, anyway, Walt."

"Yes, I did," declared Woods, truthfully. "I thought I had killed it, and I reckoned that my ball playing days were over. I didn't care much, either. If it hadn't been for you, Makune, I'd quit, anyway."

"Oh, you're too sensitive!" chuckled Makune. "You see, gentlemen, Walter doesn't drink a drop, doesn't smoke, chew or swear, won't play cards for money—in fact, hasn't a single vice. The fellows jolly him about it, and it makes him sore."

Frank's sympathy was with Woods at once.

After dinner Woods and Makune went to their rooms to change their clothes, and Merry went out to stroll through the town.

Frank found himself stared at in a manner that was rather embarrassing. In the candy store opposite the Bay View were a number of girls who seemed to be watching for him to appear. They did not try to flirt with him, but it was obvious that everyone of them was "just dying" for a fair look at him.

Frank walked down through town and strolled up onto High Street as far as the handsome stone mansion known as "Villa Norembega." Here he was at the very base of the mountains, and he could look out over the harbor and the bay. The view was the most beautiful his eyes had ever rested upon, and he stood there gazing upon it for a long time. Down in the harbor, amid the other yachts, the *White Wings* lay at anchor, and his keen eyes could detect figures moving about on her deck.

"Jingoes!" thought Merry. "This is a lovely spot. I wonder more people do not come here during summer. There can't be anything more beautiful at Bar Harbor."

He walked back into town, and, on the corner near Wiley's market, he met McDornick and Cogern, who were in their ball suits. He paused to chat with them a moment.

"We'll have a mob up from Rockland this afternoon," said Cogern. "They know we've got Woods and Makune."

"Perhaps they won't come for that very reason," said McDornick. "They may not want to see their team beaten. We'll give them fits to-day."

"Baseball is something you can't depend on," said Frank, warningly. "Don't be too sure of

winning. I have seen a strong team lose just because it was too confident."

"If we had you this afternoon we couldn't lose," declared Cogern.

"That is not certain," smiled Merry; "but I guess you are all right, anyway."

"Here comes the two o'clock car from Rockland," said McDornick. "Wonder if it brought up any rooters?"

The car was coming down around the curve, the motorman letting it run without power, as the grade was rather steep there.

Of a sudden, Cogern uttered a cry, and Frank heard a sound that caused him to whirl about instantly.

On the track directly in front of the oncoming car, a young girl had fallen from her bicycle. She seemed to be stunned, and the car was rushing upon her swiftly, although the frantic motorman was banging the gong and twisting away at the brake with all his strength.

Cries of horror went up from twenty persons who witnessed the downfall of the girl, for it looked as if the car must pass directly over her.

Quick as thought Frank Merriwell sprang to save the imperiled girl. Two panther-like bounds took him to the car track, and he stooped to lift her.

Again there were cries of horror, for it seemed that the car must knock him down, and that two lives instead of one would be crushed out beneath the wheels. Women on the street turned their heads away that they might not witness the awful tragedy.

It did not seem that Frank paused in his rush, although he stooped, caught hold of the girl, lifted her and bore her on. He snatched her up in a manner that utterly bewildered every person who witnessed the act, and then, as the car seemed sure to strike him, with one of those wonderful leaps, he cleared the track, holding the girl in his arms.

He felt the car brush his elbow, but that was all. He was not harmed, and the girl was safe in his arms, although her wheel was crushed beneath the wheels of the car.

People came rushing toward them from all directions, but Frank did not mind them at that moment. He looked down at the pale face of the panting girl.

"Miss Macey!" he exclaimed.

It was the pretty, roguish-eyed girl to whom he had been introduced by Landlord Drayben.

"You are not hurt, are you?" he asked.

"No," she faintly whispered, a bit of color coming back to her face; "but you saved me from being killed, Mr. Merriwell."

"Well," Frank was forced to confess, "I think I did get you away just in time."

"My bicycle——"

"Smashed."

"Oh, I'm so sorry! But I'd rather it would be that than myself. Thank you, Mr. Merriwell."

"I am happy to do so much for you. My only regret is that I was not able to save your wheel, too."

"You did all you could," she said, a bit of the roguish light coming back to her eyes. "I didn't suppose you would do so much for me, a stranger."

"I'm always ready to do anything in my power for a pretty girl," said Merry, softly, with laughing seriousness.

"Then pitch for the Camdens this afternoon," murmured Phebe. "Will you?"

Frank was thrown into consternation, for he saw he was trapped.

"It's too late now," he said. "Moslof has decided to pitch Woods. If asked again to pitch, I'll do it."

By this time they were surrounded by the crowd. A dozen men were asking Phebe if she were hurt, or were loudly praising Merriwell for his prompt action in going to her rescue.

"Let me escort you to the hotel," said Frank. "I will return and see about your broken wheel."

"If you will be so kind," she murmured.

Then, with her clinging to his arm, they walked toward the hotel. It seemed that two hundred persons knew what had happened. A score of girls saw Phebe Macey clinging to Frank's arm, and even though she had lost her bicycle beneath the wheels of the car, she was envied by them all.

CHAPTER XIII.

QUICK WORK.

A steady stream of men, women, boys and girls were pouring in at the entrance of the Camden ball ground, which lay in a most picturesque location directly at the foot of the mountains. It was plain that the greatest crowd of the season had turned out to witness the struggle which should place either Rockland or Camden at the head of the Knox County League.

The grand stand filled rapidly. It was a hot afternoon, but there was a draught through the grand stand, so that the upper seats were comfortable. Beyond the dusty diamond the green woods looked cool and inviting.

The ball ground was on an elevated spot, from which a view of the village and bay could be obtained. Winding through the distant line of woods the river might be seen. Away to the west loomed a range of purple mountains.

Dressed in their scarlet uniforms, the Camdens were on the field practicing. Although Bascomb was going to be on the bench that afternoon, he was warming up as if he expected to go into the box. He had cast aside cap and sweater, and was pitching all kinds of shoots to a young chap he had found willing to catch him. Woods was batting to the infield, but somebody was needed to give the outfield some work. Merriwell was called for by McDornick.

Frank was leaning on the rail down near the peanut stand, Diamond, Hodge, Browning and Dunnerwust being with him. The entire party had left the yacht to witness the game of ball, but the *White Wings* was being watched by a young man on another yacht that lay near her.

"Where's Frank Merriwell?" cried McDornick from the field. "Let him knock out some sky scrapers for us."

Moslof asked Merriwell to bat some to the outfield, and so Frank tossed aside his yachting jacket and advanced toward the plate.

There was a sudden burst of applause from the grand stand and it went all round the ground, bringing a hot flush to Merry's face.

"I wish they wouldn't do that!" he muttered.

Surely he was a handsome-looking fellow in his yachting suit. He selected a bat, and then, without any apparent effort, drove out a high liner for Cogern in deep center. He gave the fielders all the work they wanted.

"Here come the Rocklands!"

A great crowd was coming up the road, in the van of which could be seen the boys in gray from the Limerock City. The Rockland rooters had not been frightened away by the report that Woods and Makune would play with Camden. They were coming in a body to whoop and yell and growl for their team—yes, to fight for it, if necessary.

They poured into the ground. All the available standing room was taken, and the crowd overflowed so that it encroached upon the field. The Camdens came in and let their opponents have the field for practice.

"Fellows," smiled Frank, as he joined his friends, "this is going to be a hot afternoon."

"All of that," nodded Hodge. "It's plain there is an intense feeling of rivalry between these two towns."

"Say, fellows," put in Jack Diamond, "I haven't stopped wondering yet."

"What about?" asked Frank.

"This part of the country. You told me we would have sport down here, but I never expected anything like this. Why, there's rivers of sporting blood in this section! How do they get together such ball teams? Camden must pay Mower big money, or he would be in one of the big leagues. They must have coughed liberally to Woods and Makune, for either of those two fellows could get into a big league. Rockland has a full-salaried team, and they say she pays her men two hundred and fifty dollars a week all told. That's more money than the New England League pays."

"They don't go into anything halfway down here," smiled Merry. "I fancy the ball team is a good thing for Camden. It advertises the town, as all the games are reported in the Boston dailies, and it attracts summer visitors. A good percentage of the spectators here now are summer people."

The Rockland team began practice. They appeared more like professionals, taken as a whole, than the Camdens, nearly all of whom seemed college lads.

Practice was over in a short time, and then the home team prepared to go to bat first, and the umpire took his position and called "play."

Although the Rockland "rooters" were on hand to shout for their team, the fact that Camden had Woods and Makune made them cautious about offering bets. In fact, two of Rockland's principal "sports" were seeking to put money on Camden, but could not find takers without giving odds.

Dayguild, Rockland's champion pitcher, the man held in reserve for Camden, was sent into the

box. He had seemed to hoodoo Camden, and Rocklandites hoped he would keep up the good work.

Some Thomaston men who had come over to see the game stopped near Merriwell and his party and laughed over the "snap" Camden would have that day. One of them was telling the others how easy it was to rattle Dayguild and break his courage by hitting him hard and putting two rattling coachers on the line to keep him "up in the air." Frank did not miss a word of this talk.

"Pop" Williamson was the first man to go to bat for Camden. He stood up at the plate and looked at Dayguild. Dayguild laughed at him, saying:

"Pop, you're easy."

"Pop" laughed back, observing:

"I have to be easy with you, Gil, or I'd show you up, and you would lose your job."

"That's what I call wit!" exclaimed Merriwell, in appreciation. "Pop is all right. He'll get a hit."

He did. He cracked out Dayguild's first ball for an easy single, and laughed at the Rockland pitcher as he trotted down to first.

"Thought I wouldn't put it into the woods this time, Gil," he said.

"That's a good start to rattle Dayguild if they would get after him," said a Thomaston man.

But Camden made the mistake of splitting her coachers, putting one at third and one at first, and the men did not "open up" in a way to get the Rockland pitcher on the string.

Putbury, or "Old Put," followed Williamson. He was a left-hand hitter, and a good man, but Dayguild managed to give him the "evil eye" and struck him out.

"I'm afraid you won't get away from first, Pop," said Dayguild, winking at Williamson in a tantalizing manner.

"Oh, there's lots of time," returned the runner, calmly.

Cogern followed Putbury. He fanned twice, and then he cracked out a daisy cutter that looked like a safe hit, for it got past the pitcher and was going directly over second, with Smithers, the baseman, playing away off.

But Smithers was a little fellow who could cover ground wonderfully. How he ever reached second as soon as the ball and gathered it in was a marvel, but he did the trick with an ease that brought an exclamation of admiration from Merriwell.

As he picked the ball off the ground Smithers touched second and put Williamson out. Then he whirled like a cat and sent the ball whistling to first.

Rockland's first baseman smothered it with ease before Cogern could get much more than halfway down the line, and a double play had been made, which retired Camden with a whitewash as a starter.

What a wild howl of satisfaction went up from the throats of the Rockland rooters! How they hammered on the railing and yelled! Their satisfaction was unlimited, for they had not dreamed there could be such a happy termination of the Camden's half of the first inning.

"Sorry for you, Pop," grinned Dayguild.

"It's a good thing for you there was a man like Smithers on second," returned Williamson. "It was a clean case of luck."

At this Dayguild laughed derisively, walking in to the bench.

Camden took the field. Woods stripped off his sweater and went into the box. He was a clean, fine-looking fellow in his suit. He had warmed up a little, and now he tossed a few to Williamson, who was on first.

Smithers, the captain of the Rocklands, was the first man to go to the plate. He was known to be a most remarkable little hitter, without a weak point that any pitcher had been able to discover.

Woods looked Smithers over, and then sent in a swift one that the little man let pass.

The umpire called a ball.

"Whew!" exclaimed Diamond. "That's what I call speed."

"You don'd peen aple to seen dot pall ad all, eh?" cried Hans.

"Merry," said Bart, "Woods is the first fellow I ever saw who reminded me of you in the box."

Smithers went after the next ball, but fouled it over the fence, and a new ball was put into play. Again and again he fouled.

"You are finding him," cried the Rockland rooters.

At last Smithers hit it fairly on the trade mark, and sent it out into right field for a single.

The Rockland crowd was delighted.

"Why, Woods is easy!" they roared.

Woods was not ruffled in the least. When the ball was thrown in, he entered the box with it immediately, and then suddenly snapped his left foot out and shot the ball over to first.

Smithers saved himself by a hair's breadth. It was a close decision on the part of the umpire.

"Did you get onto that motion with his foot?" came eagerly from Hodge. "It's Merriwell exactly! Why, the fellow appears more and more like you, Frank!"

"That's so," grunted Browning.

Edwards, Rockland's shortstop, followed Smithers at bat. He was a large, stocky, red-headed fellow, inclined to swagger and make more or less unnecessary talk, but a good ball player and a hard hitter.

"Don't let him catch you, Smithers," he cried. "I'll land you on third."

Woods smiled. He was feeling first rate, and he did not believe Edwards could keep his word. While standing carelessly in the box, he gave a hitch at his pants with both hands, the right hand holding the ball, and then sent a scorcher over the plate so quickly that Edwards was not prepared and did not offer at it.

"One strike!" decided the umpire.

"That's the way to fool 'em on the first one," laughed Frank Merriwell, softly. "Woods is up to tricks. Boys, that fellow is a dandy, I believe."

Smithers tried to get a good start from first, but Woods kept him close to the base, much to the delight of the Camden crowd. All Camden was confident that Rockland was doomed to defeat that day.

The second ball was a coxer, but Edwards let it pass. Then came another swift one, and the batter went after it and missed it entirely.

The Camden crowd howled its delight.

"That's the stuff, Woodsie!" yelled a voice. "Leave Smithers on first, same as they left Williamson."

"He can't do it, you know!" sung back a Rockland rooter.

Woods was the essence of coolness. He teased Edwards with two out-drops, and then he seemed to gather himself for a speedy one. As the batting score stood three balls and two strikes, the batter felt that Woods would use a straight, swift ball and try to cut a corner of the plate.

Woods seemed to send the ball with all the strength he could command, but, strange to say, it lingered in the air, and, too late, Edwards saw it was a slow one.

The big shortstop bit at it. He smashed at it with all his strength, and he hit the ball with the tip of his bat. The coacher had sent Smithers for second on that ball when it left Woods' hand. It was too late to stop him when they saw the ball popped up into the air as an easy infield fly.

Makune called out that he would take it, and ran in under it. Edwards, who had a lame knee, ran as if sprinting for his life. The ball hung in the air a long time, while Makune stood under it, waiting for it to come down.

When it did come down it created one of the sensations of the day, for it dropped into Makune's hands and fell out. There was a roar of astonishment that this crack infielder of the New England League should drop a ball like that. Makune was the most astonished man within the inclosure of that ball ground, for he had not done anything like that before during the entire season.

Then there was a kick, as Moslof claimed that Makune dropped it purposely, and, as he had thrown the ball over to first on picking it up, Edwards was out on an infield fly, even though he had reached the base ahead of the ball.

The umpire knew his business, however, and did not get rattled. He knew that the rules declared a batter was out on an infield fly that could be handled, providing there was a runner on first; even though the fielder dropped the ball for the purpose of luring the man off first. But Smithers had left first before Edwards struck the ball and was well on his way to second, while Makune had not dropped the fly as a trick, but because he could not hold it. The umpire decided that Smithers had stolen second and Edwards was safe on first, which caused the Rockland crowd to go wild with satisfaction, while the Camdenites groaned in dismay, those who did not understand the point in the game declaring it was an outrage, and those who did feeling that the umpire understood it too well to be fooled.

Gulsiver, Rockland's center fielder, was the next batter. He went after the second ball and found it, knocking it straight at Mower. Mower was an erratic player, and, on this occasion, he stopped the ball, but he chased it around his feet long enough to permit Gulsiver to get first safely, and Smithers and Edwards moved up a base each.

The bags were full!

"That's a hard start for Camden," said Frank Merriwell, feeling his sympathy go out toward the boys in red.

"Dot Woods don'd seem to peen doin' a great deal mit der Rocklandt poys," observed Hans.

"It's not Woods' fault," declared Merry. "Smithers is the only man who has secured a hit off him."

If Woods was worried or disgusted, he did not betray it. He continued to pitch coolly and deliberately, for all the yelling of the Rockland crowd and chinning of the coachers.

He struck out the next man, and followed that up by causing Hammond, the fifth batter, to put up a low, infield fly, which Woods looked after himself and caught.

Then it was Camden's turn to howl again, for, although the bases were full, two men had been sent to the bench in a minute by the cool little pitcher in crimson.

"This looks better," said Merriwell, beginning to smile again. "I'll bet something Rockland does not score."

Shaddock was the next man at bat. Woods fooled him on a wide curve and a swift inshoot. Then Shaddock got mad and nearly broke his back hitting the ball.

The ball struck the ground near the home plate and rolled lazily down toward third. Smithers had started for home, and Woods started for the ball. As he passed the ball, Smithers tried to kick it aside, even though he was taking chances of being seen by the umpire in doing the trick. He failed to touch it, however, and, the next instant, Woods gathered it up with one hand, taking it as he ran directly from first base. Smithers was between him and the plate, and he could not see the catcher. He did not hesitate a fraction of a second, he did not even pause to straighten up, but, in a stooping position, he swung his arm low and sent the ball whistling to first. Spectators afterward declared that at no time was that ball more than two feet above the ground. It went straight to first, Williamson gathered it in, and the Rocklands were out without scoring.

Then such a roar went up to the heights of old Megunticook! The old mountain must have fancied that the Indian warriors of long, long years ago had returned and were holding a mighty powwow down there in its shadow.

Men and boys were frantic. They hammered each other on the back, they flung their hats into the air. Women screamed with joy and waved their handkerchiefs. And Woods—just then he was the hero of the moment. Scores of pretty girls were hugging each other and declaring that he was "just perfectly lovely." But he was as cool and unruffled as ever, seemingly utterly deaf to the roars of applause.

"I guess Camden is all right, after all," laughed Merriwell.

"Woods is a dandy," said Diamond.

"They do not need me to pitch for them to-day," declared Frank.

Dayguild grinned and chewed gum as he entered the box and faced little McDornick, champion base runner of the Camdens. McDornick was palpitating with eagerness to hit the ball. He hated to let the first one pass, although Dayguild sent in a wide teaser. He went for the second one, and hammered it out for two bags, although with an ordinary runner it would have been no more than a pretty single.

"Gil, you're pie," laughed Williamson, from the bench.

"You will find him hot pie before the game is over," said a Rockland man.

Moslof went to bat. He was eager, also—far too eager, for he struck at the first ball, although it was not within reach. But McDornick stole third on it, reaching the bag in advance of the ball by a beautiful lone slide.

Then Moslof batted one down to Edwards and was thrown out at first.

Mower came next. Sometimes he was a hitter. This was not one of the times. He fanned out, and still McDornick was shivering on third.

Makune faced Dayguild. It was not for the first time, as he had faced him many times before in the New England League. Although Makune was not a heavy hitter, he had done remarkable work for the first of the season, and Dayguild was afraid of him. With the ball under his arm, the Rockland pitcher turned to observe the positions of the men in the field. His back was toward McDornick.

There was a shout of warning from the crowd, and Dayguild whirled to see a figure in crimson shooting toward the plate like a streak of fire.

It was McDornick attempting to steal home!

The nerve of the act dazed Dayguild for a moment, and then he threw the ball to the catcher, thinking to put out the runner with ease.

The catcher dropped it!

McDornick made a headlong plunge for the plate, touched it, leaped up and dodged away before the catcher could pick up the ball.

Camden had scored!

Roar, roar, roar! The crowd went wild with joy. The black cliffs above flung back the burst of sound. It seemed enough to wake the dead in the distant cemetery tunder the slope of Battie. It was heard far down in the heart of the town, and it brought more spectators hurrying to the ball ground.

Williamson sat on the bench and laughed tauntingly at Dayguild, who was flustered and excited.

"Now, if they know how to do the trick, they can win the game in this inning," said a Thomaston man.

But Makune was not in good form, and he rolled one down to third, being thrown out at first, which retired Camden with one score.

But Woods pitched wonderful ball the next inning, and Rockland was given another whitewash.

By this time Dayguild had recovered his composure, and he pitched so well that Slatridge, Woods and Williamson went out in quick succession.

Then came a fatal half for Camden. Merriwell had seen Woods feeling of his elbow and working it as if it did not feel just right, and he was not surprised when Rockland fell to batting the new pitcher of the Camdens.

"Moslof ought to take Woods out," Frank said to Diamond. "He has hurt that lame arm already."

"You must be wrong, Merry," said the Virginian. "See the speed he is using. Why, I can hardly see the ball as it goes over the plate."

"Speed is all he is using," declared Merriwell, "and Rockland is eating speed. He can't use his curves, as it hurts his arm to do so."

Now the Rockland crowd had a chance to yell and laugh, and cheer, for, although Woods seemed to be pitching good ball, the "Limeburners" had donned their "batting clothes," and were hitting anything and everything. The fielders were kept busy, and Rockland players chased each other round the bases till six scores had come in.

"I said Moslof ought to take Woods out," said Merriwell, soberly. "The game is lost now."

"Woods can't be the pitcher we thought he was," said Diamond, in disappointment.

"Woods is all right if he doesn't spoil that arm," asserted Frank. "If he sticks to professional ball and takes care of his arm, he'll be in the National League before many years."¹

1 A prophecy that has come true, as Walter Woods was signed by Chicago several years ago. He can play any position on the diamond, and is one of the cleanest men in the business. Not long ago he pitched on the Camden team of the Knox County League, in the State of Maine. Sockalexis, the Indian player, who was with the Cleavelands last season, and who created a sensation wherever he appeared, also played in the Knox County League.—The Author.

At last Woods struck out the third man, and Rockland was retired, but not till she had secured a lead of five scores.

Dayguild laughed at Williamson as he went into the box.

"It's all over now," he declared. "Camden is buried."

"You can't tell about that," returned Williamson. "You have had your turn, ours will come."

But it did not come that day, although Woods pitched the game out and held Rockland down so that she obtained but one more score. The game finally ended seven to five in favor of Rockland.

A more delighted crowd than the rooters from the Limerock city could not be found. They guyed every Camdenite they knew. They declared that Camden was a snap for Rockland, and always would be a snap. They were insolent in their satisfaction and delight.

Down into town rushed the Rocklandites. They bought every tin horn they could find, and at least a dozen cow bells. They bought tin pans and drummed on them with sticks. They bought brooms and paraded with them to indicate that they had swept Camden clean. They made a frightful racket in the very heart of the village, and their scornful remarks about Camden and Camdenites in general were of a nature to arouse the anger of any inhabitant of the town at the foot of the mountains.

At last the cars from Rockland came, three of them being required to handle the crowd. They piled on and went out of Camden blowing horns, ringing bells, beating tin pans and howling derision.

Frank Merriwell stood on the corner near the opera house and heard all this. He could feel the blood within him getting warmer and warmer. He considered Moslof a fine fellow and he admired Woods. His sympathy was with Camden.

Moslof and Woods came down the street together and paused near Frank. Woods was making no excuses.

"They hit me out, that's all," he said. "I want to pitch against them again when this arm is rested."

Frank stepped forward.

"When do you play Rockland again, Moslof?" he asked.

"To-morrow," was the answer. "The schedule brings these two games together."

"Who will pitch?"

"I don't know. Woods can't, Williamson is not in shape, I am afraid to put Slatridge in, and Bascomb never was any good against Rockland, although he is a good man against any other team."

"You wanted me to pitch to-day," said Frank.

"Yes."

"I might not have done any better than Woods. He is a dandy, and he can monkey with Rockland when his arm is all right. I knew you ought to take him out at the beginning of the third, and I told Diamond so. I could see that his arm was keeping him working speed, and Rockland was eating speed."

"That's right," nodded Woods. "It was the best I could do that inning. No matter where I put them, they hit them out. I worked a change of pace, but that did not seem to bother them. After that inning, however, I kept them guessing."

"You pitched winning ball all through the game, with the exception of that fatal inning, and it is probable those fellows would have hammered anybody that inning. They had a batting streak, and they made the most of it."

Then he suddenly turned to Moslof, asking:

"Do you want me to pitch for you to-morrow?"

Moslof gave a jump.

"Do I want you?" he exclaimed. "I should guess yes! Will you do it?"

"I will."

Moslof seized Merry's hand.

"Old man, you have won my everlasting gratitude. To-morrow we'll put a team into the field that will paralyze Rockland. It will be such a team as Rockland or the State of Maine never saw before! Will we do 'em? Oh, say! We'll wipe 'em off the earth!"

"Oh, that's not certain," cautioned Frank. "You can't be sure of a victory till it is won. Camden thought she had a sure thing to-day."

"It will be different to-morrow," said Moslof. "If you pitch a winning game, the people of Camden will give you the whole town when we get back here!"

"Well, I shall do my best to pitch winning ball," assured Merry.

Directly after supper, which all the boys except Hans took at the Bay View, the Dutch lad being sent off aboard the *White Wings*, a buckboard with four wide seats came round for a party, and Merry was surprised to find that he was expected to be one of the party. Browning, Diamond and Hodge were included. The others were members of the Camden ball team.

When the buckboard was loaded the driver cracked his whip over the four handsome horses, and away they went through town, up over Harbor Hill and along the street that led toward the foot of the mountains.

Soon they were close under the cliffs of Battie. There were some splendid singers in the party, and they awoke the echoes with the old college songs.

In the cool shadows of twilight they rolled along the famous turnpike, with Battie behind them and the frowning heights of Megunticook rising directly over their heads. On Maiden Cliff, standing out against the sky, they saw the white cross that marks the spot where a beautiful girl fell to her death on the cruel rocks below. At times the winding road seemed to lead directly into the lake that they could see shimmering through the trees. It was one of the most beautiful drives Merriwell had ever taken.

They turned about finally and came back by the way of Lake City, a charming collection of cottages assembled at one of the most picturesque spots to be found around the island-dotted lake. The driver pointed out the spot where the famous Lake City Inn had stood before the fire that wiped out the beautiful summer hotel.

By this time night had fallen, but the full moon was high in the heavens, shedding a pure white light over all and giving the scene a glamour that it could not have by day. Indeed, it was so light that the cross on Maiden Cliff could be seen even better than they had seen it in the twilight.

"Now, fellows," said Moslof, "there is another place we had better visit to-night."

"Where is that?" asked several.

"The Summit House, on Mount Battie."

"Hurrah for the Summit House!" shouted the boys.

"We'll have to do some walking."

"We can walk up all right."

"I don't know about that," grunted Bruce Browning. "I came out to ride."

"It will do you good to walk."

But Bruce could not agree with Merriwell, and Moslof, laughing, said that Browning should not leave the buckboard till he was safely on the top of Battie. This relieved the big fellow's mind, and he grunted:

"All right. Go ahead."

Before they reached the foot of the mountain after leaving Lake City they turned off into a road that led back into the woods. Soon they came to the new road that had been constructed by the energy and determination of the shrewd owner of the hotel on the heights. This road proved to be even better than the boys had anticipated, but it was very steep in places, so that every man except Browning walked. As for Bruce, no amount of guying could induce him to get off and climb.

The moonlight sifted down through the trees, making white patches amid the black shadows. There was not much air, and the walking lads were perspiring freely before they were far from the foot of the ascent; but they stuck to it, and, at last, they were relieved to come out of the winding way and see the lights of the hotel before them.

With a cheer, they rushed forward toward the building.

Moslof led the way round the end, and then all stopped, uttering exclamations of admiration.

Below them in the white moonlight lay the village, the harbor, the bay, the great stretch of beautiful country. Hundreds of lights twinkled in the town, the electric street lamps showing white and clear and marking the limits of the village.

Away to the south was Rockport, her electric lamps paled by the clear moonlight. Miles beyond Rockport was Rockland, her location also plainly marked by lights. Between Rockport and Camden a lighted trolley car was flying along.

Jack Diamond drew a deep breath, and his hand fell on Frank's arm.

"Merriwell," he said, "I want to thank you for bringing me down into this country. It surely is a wonderful land at this season of the year, no matter what it may be in winter. This is the most beautiful view my eyes ever rested upon."

"Everybody says that," put in Moslof. "No matter where they have been, they say that."

"I have traveled a little over the world," said Merriwell, "and I must say this is the most entrancing view I have ever looked upon."

"I'm glad I took the trouble to come up," sighed Browning.

As they were standing there, gazing enraptured upon the scene, there was a burst of girlish laughter from the hotel. Then at least a dozen girls came out upon the veranda.

"What have we struck?" exclaimed Frank.

"It must be a party," said Moslof. "Let's go in."

Go in they did, the proprietor of the hotel meeting and welcoming them. It proved that Moslof was right, there was a party of girls up from the village, and Frank's sharp eyes found Phebe Macey was among them.

Not a few of the girls were known to the boys. Those who were not known were introduced.

"What a place for a dance!" thought Frank, as he looked the dining room over. "These tables could be cleared away, and then we——"

He caught sight of the proprietor, and, in another moment, he drew the man aside.

"If you want to dance, I'm willing," was the consent of the genial owner of the Summit House. "But where's your music? There's a fiddle here, but who can play it?"

"I'll find somebody!" cried Frank, and he rushed for Diamond.

But, before the dance could be started, it was found that the consent of the young lady chaperon who had accompanied the girls must be obtained. Frank approached her. At first she was not favorable, but Merriwell used diplomacy and finally won her over so that she consented to let the

girls remain and dance an hour.

Then there was a hustling to clear the dining room floor. The old violin was brought out and Diamond proceeded to tune up.

Frank sought Phebe and asked her to waltz with him.

"I don't think I will dance," she said, pretending to pout a bit.

"Why not?" asked Merry, in surprise. "You do dance, do you not?"

"Oh, sometimes."

"And you will refuse me?"

"You deserve to be refused."

"Why, pray?" asked Frank, surprised.

"I asked a favor of you to-day."

A light broke in on Frank.

"Oh, is that it? You wanted me to pitch for Camden?"

"Yes."

"And I didn't. Well, can't you pardon me this time?"

"Really, I do not think you deserve it."

"Perhaps not, but, if I promise to do better, will you——"

"It's too late now."

"How is that?"

"Camden lost."

"And might have lost just the same if I had pitched."

"No," she said, with confidence, "I know all about your pitching. You would have won the game."

"There is another game to-morrow."

"Oh, that's in Rockland, and the Rocklands always win on their own ground."

"Is that their reputation? Well, perhaps we may be able to break the spell and defeat them on their own ground once."

"We! What do you mean by that? It can't be that you will pitch for Camden to-morrow?"

"Will you waltz with me if I'll agree to do so?"

"Yes," was her instant answer.

"Done!" said Frank. "I'll pitch."

Then Diamond struck into a beautiful waltz, and Frank and Phebe were the first on the floor, his arm about her waist, her hand gently clasped in his.

CHAPTER XIV.

MERRIWELL'S DOUBLE SHOOT.

"Here come the Lobsters!"

The cry was uttered by a small boy as the Camden ball team entered the Rockland ball ground.

A great crowd had assembled in the "cigar box," as the ground was sometimes called because of its narrow limits. All Rockland had heard that Camden would have a new battery, and nearly all Rockland had heard of Merriwell and Hodge, for Frank had insisted that Bart should support him behind the plate. The fact that Rockland had won from Camden with Woods in the box made the rooters feel that their team was invincible—that it could not be defeated by Camden. They had turned out in a way to make the heart of the Rockland manager rejoice as the quarters came jingling into the cash box.

The car had been delayed and the Camden team was late. It was followed by such a swarm of Camden people as had never been seen on the Rockland ball ground. This band of rooters was marshaled by a Camden man, who had instructed them to hang together and who was to lead them in the cheering. They packed in upon the bleachers near first base, as they had bought a large reserved space there and it was held for them.

Rockland had finished practicing, and so the Camdens took the field. Everybody was asking where Frank Merriwell was, but no one seemed able to discover him.

"It was a false report," somebody said, and then the spectators, thinking they had been deceived, began to growl.

But Merriwell and Hodge had slipped into the ground in ordinary clothes and were getting into suits in the dressing room beneath the grand stand. As soon as they were dressed, they came out, and Frank began to warm up by throwing to Bart.

"Here they are!"

A boy uttered the cry, and then every eye seemed turned on the famous Yale battery.

Among those who had been watching for Merriwell's appearance was Wat Snell. The fellow ground his teeth with rage as he saw Frank come out in a baseball suit.

"He shall not win this game!" vowed Wat. "I have the stuff in my pocket that will fix him if I can get it into him."

Then Snell hastily sought some chaps who were grouped in a little bunch, talking in low tones among themselves.

"Mr. Bixton," said Wat, "I want to speak with you a moment."

He drew one of the young men aside and whispered in his ear. Bixton scowled and nodded, answering:

"I've got fifty dollars on this game."

Then Snell whispered some more, but Bixton shook his head and said aloud:

"They'd kill the feller they caught doin' it. French is a reg'lar fool! He wants to beat Camden, but he wouldn't win in a crooked way for a thousand dollars. He'd be the first to jump on a chap that was caught doin' up a Camden man."

"He needn't know it," said Snell, and then he whispered some more, but he couldn't seem to win Bixton over.

"All right," said Snell. "You'll be sorry when you lose your fifty plunks."

"I ain't lost 'em yet."

"You will if Frank Merriwell pitches the whole game."

Practice was over, the umpire took his place and called "play," the Camden team was in the field. Merriwell walked down into the box. He wore his Yale uniform, as he had been unable to obtain a Camden uniform that would fit him.

The Rockland crowd looked at Merriwell with curiosity, but all the applause he received came from the Camden rooters. At one side of the diamond were gathered twenty small boys. Usually these youngsters were full of taunts and jeers for Camden, but now they were strangely silent. One of them turned to the others and said:

"Fellers, Rockland eats dirt ter-day! We kin lick anything else on ther face of ther earth, but we can't do up that battery. I've read all about Frank Merriwell, an' there ain't nothin' walks on two legs what kin pitch ball with him!"

Strange to relate, he was not disputed in the assertion.

The umpire broke open a box and tossed a beautiful new "Spaulding" to Merry, who caught it and rubbed a handful of dirt over it.

Smithers advanced to the plate. Frank had heard that it was impossible to discover the little man's weak point, and he resolved to start right in by fooling him—if possible.

Hodge knew what was coming when Merry assumed a certain attitude. Then, without any flourish, Frank shot in what seemed at the start to be a straight, swift ball.

Smithers took it for an inshoot, and, in his judgment, it must be a fair ball. He swung for it, and then he dropped his bat and gasped.

The ball had reversed from an in to an out, causing Smithers to miss it by at least six inches!

It was Merriwell's wonderful double shoot!

Those in the grand stand who had seen the double curve of the ball uttered exclamations of amazement, and some of them would not believe their eyes had not deceived them.

Smithers picked up his bat, muttering:

"If I'd been drinking lately I wouldn't wonder at it!"

Hodge returned the ball, and in a moment Merry was ready to deliver again. Smithers fancied he had been deceived by his eyes, and so, when Frank pitched another ball that was exactly like the first, he smashed at it again.

And missed again!

There was a commotion in the grand stand. A loud voice was heard declaring the ball had curved in and out, and that Merriwell was a wizard. Another person was speaking soothingly to the excited individual.

Not a sound from the Camden rooters, for their leader was holding them in check. He had not given the signal for applause.

On all the ground there was no man half as amazed as Smithers. He fancied he had batted all kinds of pitching, but here was something new to him.

There was a hush as Frank again assumed position for delivery. Smithers assumed a look of determination and made ready. Then the Yale pitcher shot in another ball, this time changing his curves so the sphere started with an out and suddenly changed to an in.

Seeing it was an out at the start, Smithers instantly decided that it must go beyond his reach. When it changed to an in, and passed over the plate, it was too late to get his bat round, and so he stood with the "wagon tongue" poised, not even having offered at it.

"Three strikes—out!" called the umpire.

Then the Camden crowd could be held no longer. Never before had Smithers been struck out like that. But three balls had been pitched, and yet, the crack batter of the Rocklands, a man without a weak point, was retired. The men and boys from under Megunticook rose up and yelled like a thousand fiends. They felt that a man who could strike Smithers out like that would have a snap with the rest of the team, and the joy in their hearts knew no bounds.

For once the Rockland rooters were silent. They did not even have sufficient nerve left to gully the Camdenites. They stared and stared at the man who had struck out Smithers with three pitched balls, and their dismay and disgust knew no bounds.

"What's the matter that Rockland didn't get that feller?" growled one. "It was a fool trick to let Camden get him!"

Smithers walked to the bench and sat down in a dazed way, muttering:

"Well, I'll be blown!"

Edwards picked up a bat and advanced to the plate with his usual swagger.

"Just try that on me," he invited.

Instantly Frank decided to do so. Bart was ready, and Merry snapped in a swift one, giving it the double curve. Edwards let it pass.

"One strike!" cried the umpire.

A roar from the Camden crowd.

Bart sent back the ball. Edwards grinned and then scowled. He made ready. Frank reversed the curves and drove in a whistler that could scarcely be seen as it passed through the air.

This time Edwards struck, but he found only empty air.

"Two strikes!" from the umpire.

Another roar from the Camden crowd.

Edwards began to look doubtful.

"What are we up against?" he muttered to himself.

Merriwell took his time to pitch the third ball. All at once he seemed to send in one like the last. Edwards believed the double curve would cause it to cross over the plate, and he struck at it.

It proved to be a straight ball, and Edwards never touched it!

"Striker is out!" decided the umpire.

It is impossible to describe the tumult that followed. For once, at least, Camden was well represented on the Rockland ground, and the rooters for the boys in crimson could not make noise enough. Their hour of triumph had arrived, and they were making the most of it.

Edwards looked sour enough as he went to the bench.

"What's the matter?" asked Gulsiver, who was swinging two bats so that one would seem lighter to him when he came to strike.

"That Yale chap is the devil!" growled Edwards.

Gulsiver was a college man and a fine fellow. He had played with Camden the previous season, and Camden was sorry it did not have him that year. He looked anxious but determined to do his best as he went to the plate.

Frank had decided that he was using the double shoot altogether too much, for it would soon put

a kink in his elbow if he kept it up. He had used it on Edwards because the Rockland shortstop had challenged him to do so. Gulsiver was tried with a coaxer, but he let it pass. Then Frank gave him a rise, and he hit it.

The ball popped up into the air and fell into Merriwell's hands, retiring Rockland on eight pitched balls, without a single batter getting started toward first base.

The Camden crowd was happy, and the Rocklandites were disgusted. But Rockland had a pitcher who more than once proved a hoodoo for Camden. The redoubtable "Grandpa" Morse was to go into the box this day. There had been a time when Morse could scare the Camden players with his speed and fool them with his "southpaw" delivery. Rockland hoped that time had not passed, even though the rooters of the Limerock City were aware that Morse was not dealing with tenderfeet this day.

Moslof had placed Hodge at the head of the batting list at Merriwell's suggestion. Bart picked up a heavy stick and advanced to the plate, as Morse entered the box. The Rockland men were in their places on the field.

Morse was working his jaw over a chew of gum. He had a glove on his right hand, and with this he covered the ball so it could not be seen. At the very start Merriwell made a kick about this, and Morse was forced to show the ball in his hand. He grinned at Frank with an expression that seemed to say he would get even, and then, putting on all the steam at his command, he sent a high ball over the plate, thinking to daze Hodge with his speed.

Hodge swung at it, hit it fairly without much effort, and put it over the center field fence, trotting around the bases to the music of the cheers of the Camden crowd.

Then Morse was riled. Williamson came next, and "Grandpa" struck him out, giving the Rocklandites a chance to yell a little. Cogern followed, and made a hard try for the center field fence, but Gulsiver got back against the fence, reached up into the air and pulled the ball down, to the increased delight of the Rockland spectators. McDornick was too anxious, and he hit an easy roller to Edwards, who threw him out at first.

But the first inning had ended one to nothing in Camden's favor.

Then Merriwell went into the box again, but he did not attempt to work his double shoot till Rockland had filled the bases with a hit, a wild throw by Mower and a dropped fly by McDornick, followed by a poor throw to third.

Now Rockland thought her time had come. The coaches were doing their best to rattle Merriwell, aided by the yelling crowd, but Frank never was cooler in his life. He struck out the next man, and the next popped up a little fly to Makune. Then Merry took a hot liner from the next batter, and Rockland did not score.

Then Bixton hunted up Snell.

"I'll give you ten dollars to get that drug into Merriwell," he said.

"Furnish me with a boy to pass Merriwell the water and I'll do it," said Snell. "Merriwell would suspect me."

Bixton found the boy, and the plot to knock Frank out was laid. Snell called the boy aside and gave him full instructions.

"Here is a little vial," he explained. "All you have to do is stick by the water bucket at the end of the Camden bench. Keep this vial in your hand uncorked and ready. You can keep it out of sight. When Merriwell wants a drink, it will be easy for you to drop some of the stuff in the vial into the bucket. As soon as he drinks, upset the bucket, so nobody else will get any of the stuff. Here's ten dollars for you."

The boy took the vial and the ten dollars. Then, when Snell was not watching him, he looked around for French, the Rockland manager, found him and told him the whole plot.

French was furious.

"I wouldn't have that happen on this ground for a hundred dollars!" he declared. "Point out the fellow who hired you to do this, and I will have him arrested! We are winning no games in that way!"

The boy pointed Snell out, and, five minutes later, Wat turned pale as an officer tapped him on the shoulder and said:

"Come with me. Don't make any fuss, or the crowd will find out that you hired a boy to drug Frank Merriwell. You'll be lynched if they do find it out."

Snell could not say a word. With the officer's hand on his shoulder, he was marched off the ground, while the crowd wondered why he had been arrested. Bixton, the crooked sport, saw this, and it did not take him long to disappear.

So the plot to knock Merriwell out was frustrated, and Frank pitched the game through, giving Rockland just four hits. At the end of the eighth inning the score stood two to one in favor of Camden. With the beginning of the ninth a combination of bad plays placed a Rockland man on

third, with one man out. Then the next batter drove out a long fly to Cogern, and the man on third attempted to score on it. Cogern made the throw of his life, nailing the runner at the plate and spoiling Rockland's last chance.

The game was over, and Camden had won by a score of two to one. It had been a beautiful game, and once more Camden and Rockland were tied for first place in the Knox County League.

The Camden rooters were happy, while the Rockland spectators melted away and disappeared from view with amazing suddenness when the last man was out.

It was plain enough that the Rockland people expected the visitors to celebrate as Rockland had done in Camden, but nothing of the kind was permitted. Still it was a joyful crowd that loaded the two trolley cars and went through the main street of the city singing:

"Boom-ta-de-aye, boom-ta-de-aye,
De-boom-ta, de-boom-ta, de-boora-ta-de-aye;
We won to-day, we won to-day,
Oh, we won, oh, we won, oh, we won to-day."

As they passed the *Star* office the bulletin was out:

"Baseball To-day:
"Camden, 2; Rockland, 1."

The crowd on the cars cheered as they passed the bulletin, and they sang all the way to Camden.

But when those cars entered Camden what a reception awaited the victors! It seemed that half the town had turned out to meet them. Everybody had a horn. As the first car, carrying the ball players, approached the opera house there was a deafening blare of sound, and the explosion of cannon crackers, and cheer after cheer rent the air. The moment the car stopped Frank Merriwell was torn from his seat by admirers, was lifted to the shoulders of sturdy fellows and carried to the hotel without being allowed to touch his feet to the ground, while the throng surged around him and shouted.

An hour later, as he sat in the office of the hotel, surrounded by friends and admirers, he said:

"Fellows, I'd like to spend the rest of the summer right here in this town. It's all right! I'm glad I've found Camden, and you may be sure it's not the last time I shall stop here."

Then the mayor of the town, who happened to be present, said:

"Mr. Merriwell, Camden belongs to you. If there is anything here that you want, take it. If you don't see what you want, ask for it. I don't know that we can do any better by you than that."

That evening Landlord Drayben gave the baseball boys a dinner at the hotel, and there were speeches and toasts and cheers for Merriwell.

After the dinner the dining room was cleared, an orchestra appeared, and there was dancing. Again Frank was the first on the floor, with Phebe Macey as his partner. And Phebe was the happiest girl in Camden that night.

CHAPTER XV.

OFF FOR BAR HARBOR.

It was nearly midnight when a boat containing four lads pushed out from Fish Market Wharf and pulled down Camden harbor toward the fleet of yachts that lay anchored in Dillingham's Cove.

The moon had dropped down into the west, but it still shed its pure white light on the unrippled water of the harbor, and, despite the lateness of the hour, several boating parties were out. From away toward the Spindles came the sound of a song, in which four musical voices blended harmoniously. Nothing stirs the entire soul with a sense of the beautiful like the sound of a distant song floating over the silvered bosom of a peaceful bay or lake on a moonlight night in midsummer. Hodge and Diamond, who were rowing the boat, rested on their oars, and the four lads listened a long time.

"Beautiful!" murmured Merriwell, who was sitting in the stern of the boat, the rudder lines in his hands.

Browning grunted.

"The yelling of the Camden crowd on the Rockland ball ground to-day sounded better to me," he said.

Quoth Merriwell:

"The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,

Is fit for treasons, strategems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted."

"Huah!" said Bruce. "Talk about a 'concord of sweet sounds,' what could be sweeter than the howls of those baseball rooters when you worked your double shoot on the Rockland batters and kept them fanning the breeze? That was what I call music!"

"Fellows," sighed Frank, "this has been a lively day."

"It certainly has," nodded Hodge.

"Things move in a hurry down here at this season of the year," put in Diamond.

"It's rather too lively for me," confessed Merriwell. "I am stuck on Camden, but I must get out of it right away."

"Why?" asked the others, in a breath.

"The people here will not give me any rest. If I remain, it will be impossible for me to refuse to play ball with the Camden team, and I did not come down here for that. Why, I could have a hundred dollars a week if I would play with Camden. Money doesn't seem to be of value to the people here, now that they think I can beat Rockland every time I go into the box. They are ready to give up anything to beat Rockland. I haven't any grudge against Rockland. In fact, if what I hear about Wat Snell's attempt to drug me is true, I have every reason to be grateful toward Manager French, for he caused Snell's arrest, and it is likely that Wat is languishing in the Rockland lockup to-night."

"That fellow will land in prison all right," said Diamond. "He is the most vindictive creature I ever saw."

"If French pushes him, he may be shut up for a while down this way," observed Hodge.

"I was going to spend a week up there on the mountain," said Jack, looking toward the top of Battie, where the lights of the Summit House were still gleaming, despite the hour. "If we get out of here in a rush, I'll not get up there again."

"We were there last night," said Frank. "That was a jolly time, and no one expected it. After dancing on the mountain last night, pitching a game of ball to-day and then dancing at the Bay View to-night, I am ready to rest to-morrow."

Browning grunted again.

"I believe you are getting frightened," he yawned.

"Of what?"

"The girl with the roguish eyes."

"Phebe?"

"Sure."

"Why should I be frightened of her?"

"She has hypnotized you with those eyes. Notice how often he danced with her, fellows? Inza Burrage is down this way, and——"

"She is in Bar Harbor now."

"Well, that's not far. You are counting on getting away from Phebe before she weaves her spell about you so you can't break away."

"It's wonderful how you read a fellow," laughed Merriwell. "You should go into the mind-reading business. Anyhow, we'll get up anchor early, if there is a breeze, and leave Camden behind us."

"For good?" asked Diamond, anxiously.

"Oh, perhaps not for good. We may drop in here on our way back. Can't tell just what we will feel like doing."

A boat was gliding past them. It came near enough for its occupants to recognize the lads in the other boat. Somebody said:

"It's Merriwell and his party."

Then a feminine voice called:

"Hello, Frank Merriwell. You are a dandy!"

"Thank you," said Frank, laughing. "There are others."

"Not in your class," was the quick retort. "You are the only one of the kind."

"Who was that?" asked Diamond, as the boat passed on.

"Couldn't tell you, my boy," answered Frank.

"Why, that's strange! She spoke to you as if she knew you. Familiar for a stranger!"

"Evidently she is intoxicated—by the moonlight," grunted Browning.

"If we stay down this way long, I fancy we'll find there is considerable freedom at these summer resorts," said Merry. "People do not always wait for introductions down here. But the girl in that boat would not have spoken had it been in the daytime. She knew I could not recognize her, and that is how she ventured to do it."

"Well, let's get on board," urged Bruce. "I'm tired, and I want to turn in."

"Pull away," directed Frank, and the boys began rowing again.

They passed other rowboats, and the sound of voices and laughter came over the moon-burnished bosom of the harbor. On board one of the yachts not far from the *White Wings* a jolly party had gathered. Somebody was picking away at a guitar and softly humming the latest song. Others were chatting and laughing. The yacht was decorated with Chinese lanterns and was burning bright lights.

"Those lights would look better if there wasn't any moon," observed Diamond.

As they approached the *White Wings* a figure suddenly arose on the deck and leveled something at the boat, while a voice called:

"Stood still vere I vos und gafe der coundersign! Uf I don'd done dot you vill oben vire onto me!"

"Here, here, Hans!" exclaimed Merry. "What are you trying to do—shoot us? Be careful with that gun!"

"Vos dot you, Vrankie?" asked the faithful Dutch boy, lowering the gun. "Vale, I don'd vant to make no mistook, und so I peen careful not to led any vellers come apoard uf me vot I don'd vant to seen. I vos glad you haf came."

They ran up to the sloop and were soon on board. It was necessary to tell Hans what had happened that day, but he simply said:

"Oh, I knew how dot vould peen all der dime. Uf course Vrankie blayed marples mit Rocklandt."

That night they slept well in their berths, for a cool breeze sprang up about midnight, so the cabin of the yacht was not too warm, and there was the gentlest of rocking motions to lull their senses.

Frank was astir at daybreak, and it did not take him long to turn the others out when he discovered there was a land breeze.

"It's just what we want," he said. "We must get away in a hurry, fellows. We can take our breakfast after we get outside the harbor."

So the anchor was raised, the sails run up in a hurry, and the *White Wings*, with Frank at the wheel, headed for the Spindles. At sunrise she was outside the harbor's mouth, with her course set due east. Outside the harbor there was a strong, steady breeze, and it was not long before the twin mountains of Camden began to sink into the purple morning mists.

CHAPTER XVI.

DIAMOND'S PLANS.

The season at Bar Harbor was at its height, and the most famous resort on the coast of Maine was overflowing with rich, fashionable and famous people. Congressmen and their families were there, millionaires from various parts of the country were there, titled persons from abroad were there. Frenchman's Bay was almost crowded with yachts, and excursions were pouring into the town by the railroad and by steamboats. There were drives by day, excursions to various points about the bay, and by night there were hops at the hotels, strolls in the moonlight, and gay times on board the yachts that clustered in the harbor.

Two days at Bar Harbor made Frank and his friends long to get away.

"This isn't much like Camden, don't you know," yawned Browning, as he rolled into his berth on the afternoon of the second day. "We made a mistake in running away from that town in a hurry."

"You know why we did it," said Frank, quickly. "We were too well known there. Now, over here we have been discreet and kept our identity secret. That was not such a task, either, for I do not fancy one out of a thousand of these people ever heard anything about any of us, or would take the trouble to turn round to look after us if they had heard of us and knew who we were. By Jove! I find it rather agreeable, fellows!"

"Oh, that's all right," nodded Diamond. "I don't fancy notoriety any more than you do, Merry; but

there is something about the atmosphere here that I don't quite relish, although I can't tell what it is."

Frank laughed.

"I fancy I know what it is, old man."

"Then let me into the mystery."

"It is the air of commercial aristocracy these people wear. Now, by birth and breeding, Diamond, you are a true aristocrat, but with you blood is everything, and it rather galls you to witness the boorish air of superiority assumed by some of these millionaire pork packers with neither education nor refinement. I don't wonder. When you came to Yale you had some silly notions about aristocracy, but you have gotten over them to a certain extent, so that now you recognize a gentleman as a gentleman, even though his father was a day laborer; but you realize that no man is a gentleman simply because he is worth several million dollars and has a daughter he is trying to marry off to a foreigner with a title and a blasted reputation. We are getting nearer together in our ideas every day, Diamond, whether you realize it or not. These money-made aristocrats with their boorish manners and their inability to speak or spell the English language correctly are quite as repugnant to me as they are to you. There are plenty of such society people here, and they are making you tired, old man. I don't wonder. I am becoming a trifle fatigued myself."

"Yaw," grunted Hans, who had been listening with an owl-like look of wisdom on his full-moon face, "vot makes me dired vos dose beoble vot don'd knew how to speak der English language mitoudt a misdake makin' their spelling in."

"I can't say that I relish Bar Harbor so very much," said Hodge, speaking for the first time. "I think I have seen enough of it."

"Let's move," grunted Browning.

"Oh, you will trouble yourself a lot about moving!" laughed Frank.

"I'll move when the yacht does."

"And help get up the anchor?"

"Oh, say, I'll pay Hans to do my share of pulling on the anchor line! My heart is weak, and I am liable to strain it by overexertion."

"You are not at all liable to, for you will not overexert yourself."

"If we leave Bar Harbor, where shall we go, fellows?" asked Diamond.

"Oh, there are plenty of places," assured Frank.

"Mention some of them."

"As you know, Penobscot Bay is full of islands, and on some of those islands are villages. Now, it is my belief that some of those villages would be interesting places to visit."

"A good suggestion."

"We might run down to Green's Landing or Isle au Haut."

"Say!" exclaimed Diamond.

"Say it."

"I have an idea."

"Vos dot as pad as der rheumadisms?" asked Hans, innocently. "Vere did id hurt me most?"

"Let's invite the girls," said Jack.

"Inza and Paula?"

"Yes."

"Huah!" grunted Browning, from his berth. "Anybody might have known it! Think of John Diamond, of Virginia, getting soft on a Boston girl! Ha! ha! ha!"

The big fellow's words and laughter irritated Diamond, and he snapped:

"I don't see what there is so very funny about that!"

Then Browning laughed all the more, saying:

"You see, he doesn't deny it, fellows. I suspected it when they met in Rockland. It was a case of love at first sight."

"Paula Benjamin is a splendid girl," said Frank, "and you are stuck on her yourself, Browning. Jealousy is what ails you."

The big fellow flopped over in his berth with remarkable suddenness, his face becoming wonderfully red.

"Now, look here, Merriwell," he exclaimed, "that won't go down with this crowd. You all know I don't care a rap about girls, and——"

"Vot made you got so red aroundt der gills, Pruce?" chuckled Hans. "Dot peen a deadt gife away."

Jack was glad the tables were turned, and he joined in the general laugh.

"Oh, go to thunder, the whole of you!" roared Browning, as he again flopped over in his berth.

"What would we do with the girls?" asked Hodge. "We have not sufficient room on the boat to accommodate them here, and——"

"There must be some sort of a hotel at Green's Landing," said Diamond, quickly. "Of course, Miss Gale, Inza's aunt, would go along as chaperon."

"Well, it would be a change from Bar Harbor," said Frank. "This place is too much like all other fashionable seaside resorts to suit me, and still I do not feel like running away and leaving the girls. They would think it a mean trick if we were to do so soon."

"Perhaps they won't go," said Hodge, who did not seem much in favor of the project.

"Well, we can ask them," spoke up Diamond, quickly.

"I am to see Inza this evening, and I'll find out about it," said Frank. "If they can go, we want to get away bright and early to-morrow, providing there is a breeze."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN WHO SAW THE MONSTER.

The girls gladly welcomed the plan, for they felt there would be much pleasure in a cruise among the islands of the bay. At first, however, Miss Gale was opposed to it, but Frank won her over, as Inza felt certain he could.

So the next morning the girls appeared on the pier at an early hour, accompanied by the stern-faced but kind-hearted old maid, having been brought down from the hotel by a carriage.

The boys were on the watch for them, and a boat, containing Frank and Jack, pushed off from the *White Wings* immediately.

The girls, the chaperon, the baggage—all were taken into the boat and soon set aboard the yacht.

Half an hour later, with all sails set, the *White Wings* was running out to round the end of the breakwater.

With favorable wind and conditions, it is just a delightful half-day's cruise from Bar Harbor to Green's Landing. Off Southwest Harbor the wind proved something of a gale, as nothing in the shape of land lay between them and the open ocean, from which the wind swept in powerfully.

Although the yacht buried her starboard rail at times and fairly hissed through the water, Frank did not take a reef in a single sail, for there were no squalls, and, "corinthian" though he was, he was gaining confidence in his ability to handle the *White Wings*.

Paula was rather timid, but Inza enjoyed every moment of the sail. With a position near Frank, who was at the wheel, she chatted and laughed, not in the least affected by the motion or the heeling of the sloop.

Remarkable to state, Browning did not remain below and sleep in his bunk, as was his custom. He came on deck, looking remarkably wide awake, and he made himself agreeable to the girls and Miss Gale.

There was not swell enough to make anyone seasick, which added to the pleasures of the cruise.

Diamond was doing his best to make himself agreeable to Paula, and she seemed to find his company acceptable, but after a time she called Bruce to her, so that she was between them.

"Don't you think Mr. Merriwell very reckless, Mr. Browning?" she asked. "Mr. Diamond insists there is no danger, but just see how frightfully the yacht tips at times?"

"Of course, I wouldn't want to frighten you, Miss Benjamin," said Bruce, giving her a significant look and winking toward Jack; "but we all know Frank Merriwell's a veritable landlubber, and he hasn't any more judgment about running a boat like this than a four-year-old youngster."

Paula looked alarmed at this, and Diamond muttered something under his breath.

When Jack was not looking, Bruce gave the Boston girl a reassuring smile, whispering:

"Not the least danger in the world, Miss Benjamin."

She looked relieved, and then a mischievous expression flitted over her face, for she understood Browning's little game. Immediately she pretended to be both frightened and indignant with

Diamond.

"I knew it!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Diamond could not deceive me. I was sure there was great danger."

"Of course," said the big fellow, in his peculiar way, "we may reach Green's Landing in safety, but the chances are against it. However, if we are capsized, I shall not fail to assist you in getting to the mainland, Miss Benjamin."

"How thoughtful of you!" she murmured, nestling a bit nearer the big fellow, while Jack ground his teeth and looked as if he longed to murder somebody. "How far away is the mainland?"

"Only about five miles—a short walk. Hem! I mean a short swim."

Diamond sourly observed:

"Without doubt, you could walk it much easier than you could swim it, Mr. Browning."

"Oh, that is an easy swim," said Bruce, offhand. "I have often swam ten or fifteen miles. Without doubt, I could get Miss Benjamin safely ashore."

"It is nice to have such a wonderful swimmer near one—I feel so safe now," said Paula.

Under his breath the Virginian growled something that sounded like "confounded liar."

"Eh?" said Bruce. "What were you saying, sir?"

But Jack looked away, pretending to be interested in a distant island. He showed his anger so plainly that Paula was aroused to tease him still more, and she turned to chat confidentially with Bruce.

Jack could not stand that a great while. With a sudden assumption of having forgotten something, he politely excused himself and went below. He did not come on deck again till Green's Landing was in sight, although he missed the most captivating portion of the sail across the Eastern Bay.

As for Browning, he had started into the affair in jest, but he grew more and more interested in Paula as they talked during the sail. He found her remarkably bright and sensible and not at all "flighty." She talked to him of things in which he was interested, and he was astonished by the knowledge she displayed concerning some things of which he had not fancied she was posted in the least.

On the other hand, the Boston girl was astonished to find in Bruce, who had on first acquaintance seemed somewhat slow and dull, a fellow who was interesting in various ways, who did not talk nonsense to her the moment the opportunity offered to say something that she alone could hear, who had an air of dignity and was not at all self-conscious.

Never before in all his life had Bruce made a better appearance, and, long before Green's Landing was sighted, Paula had quite forgotten that Diamond had left them and had not returned.

There were other vessels and yachts in the harbor at Green's Landing, more of them than any of the party had expected to see there. In fact, there was an air of prosperity about the town built on the slope facing the harbor, although there were no large and attractive buildings, and the houses seemed scattered about in a helter-skelter manner.

The *White Wings* ran in amid the vessels and swung up her head to the wind, her anchor going over with a splash and her sails coming down as if the halyards were handled by veteran yachtsmen, instead of a lot of amateurs.

In fact, Merriwell had sailed the boat like one familiar with the Eastern Bay, seeming to fear no dangers from sunken ledges and shoals, and his air was that of a veteran yachtsman.

But he had spent hours over his chart, so that he was perfectly familiar with its appearance, and he could have drawn from memory a practically perfect chart, marking every ledge, every shoal and every island, and giving them their correct names. Having become thus familiar with the chart, it was not so strange that he had been able to sail across the Eastern Bay as if it were the open sea.

Having come to anchor, Paula was for going ashore at once, but Frank urged them to remain and take lunch on board the yacht, and Inza was pleased with the idea, so they stopped.

That was a jolly luncheon. There was plenty to eat, and plenty of light drinks, kept cool by the fresh supply of ice taken in at Bar Harbor. The sailors on board the vessels in the vicinity looked on with interest, envying the merry party.

Not all on the *White Wings* were merry. Jack Diamond was silent, and not once did a smile cross his face. Paula tried to cheer him up, but she did not succeed at all, and so she finally gave up in despair, again turning to Browning.

An hour after luncheon was over, Bruce and Frank set the girls and Miss Gale ashore, carrying their luggage up to the hotel, where accommodations were obtained.

"We will leave here to-morrow, if you get enough of the place in that time," said Frank, having

seen them to their rooms.

He went down into the office of the hotel, where several rough-looking men were listening to the yarn of a red-headed, red-bearded man in rubber boots. Bruce seemed to be listening to the story, and, when Frank said something about going out, he grunted:

"Wait a minute."

"Yes, sir," said the red-headed man, squirting a stream of tobacco juice at the stove, which was well plastered with it already, "I have seen the critter, and I know, by huck, it ain't no lie. He's right there on the island, and if he ain't the Old Devil hisself, he's clost relation to him."

"Now, I pull my traps right down past there every day," said an old lobster fisherman, "and I swanny I ain't never seen northing of this here pesky critter. Ef Jeb warn't sech a dinged liar," with a jerk of his thumb toward the red-headed man, "I'd jest go down there myself and spend some time a-huntin' this critter with horns an' hoofs an' glarin' eyes. I'd find out what sort of a critter it was."

"Oh, yes!" returned the one who had been derisively designated as a liar, "ef you wasn't sech a darn coward, you might do something of the kind, Sile; but you are the biggest coward this side of Long Islan', so the critter down on Devil Island won't git bothered by you none to mention."

This was said with the utmost calmness, the speaker not seeming in the least excited by being called a liar, nor did the man he had designated as a coward do anything more than grunt derisively and remark:

"That's all right, Jeb. Don't nobody take no stock in what you say, and, though this yarn about a critter on Devil Island has been goin' ababout a year, I don't know a mortal bein' whose word is wu'th a cod line that ever said he saw the varmint. Whut you're looking for is notyrietiveness, an' that's why ye're tellin' such stuff."

"I know whut I seen, an' I'll swan to man that I did see the Monster of Devil Island, as folks round here call him. I'd been down to York Island in my pinkey, and was tryin' to git back here before night, but the wind died out jest at dark, an' I made up my mind I might as well hang up in Bold Island harbor as to spend half the night gittin' to the landin', an' take a chance of straddlin' a ledge. I got inter the harbor all right, an' kinder thought I'd try ter root out a few clams on Bold Island beach. My old boat laid nearer to the back of Devil Island than it did to Bold Island. I rowed off to Bold Island in my dory, but the tide was comin' in, an' I didn't git no clams to speak of. It was plum dark when I pulled back to the pinkey. Jest as I run alongside, I heered a sound that riz my hair, by huck! It was kinder like a groan and a smothered screech, an' I swan to man if it didn't seem to come right out of my pinkey! Scart! Waal, it did give me something of a jump, an' that I won't deny. If Sile had a-bin there he'd kerwollopsed. I riz right up with an oar in my hand, ready to slam it over ther head uf any dad-bum thing that wiggled round the pinkey. Jest then I heard that sound ag'in, an' I made out it come from the point of rocks that makes off inter ther harber. I looked that way, an' jest then ther consarnedest varmint I ever sot eyes onto riz right up from behind some rocks——"

"There ye go!" cried Sile, triumphantly. "Why, you was jest tellin' it was so dark ye could scarst see to the island! How was you able to see this critter jump up from behind the rocks?"

"If you'll wait till I tell the story, mebbe you'll find out."

"Humph! Go ahead with yer yarn."

"Ez I said, up jumped this critter. His face was all burnin', like fire, and his eyes was just like two black holes. Fellers what have told how his eyes shined and flashed ain't never seen him, for I'll swan his eyes was jest two black holes in his head. He waved his hands in the air, an' them hands shone fiery same as his face. Then he let out a screech that might have been heard down to ther Spoon Islands, an' away he went up over the rocks and inter the woods. Say, I ain't easy skeered, but I will admit I was a bit shaky then. I jest got inter the pinkey, pulled ther anchor, then tumbled back inter ther dory an' took ther old pinkey in tow. I wasn't very long gittin' out of Bold Island harbor, neether. I wouldn't 'a' stayed there that night fer a hundred billion dollars! I towed the pinkey clean to the Landin', an' you don't git me round Devil Island ag'in arter dark, by huck!"

"What do you think of that yarn, Browning?" asked Frank, speaking softly into the big fellow's ear.

"Huah!" grunted Bruce. "I think Sile was all right in calling Jeb a liar."

"I have heard that these fishermen are remarkable at drawing the long bow."

"And Jeb is an artist."

Some of those who had listened to the fisherman's story did not accept it with such scorn as the lobster catcher had evinced. There was a sound of excited voices when Jeb had finished, and one young fellow with a hunchback and a cunning face jumped up, crying:

"It ain't no lie, an' I'll swan ter that! I've seen ther old critter on Devil Island myself, though I ain't bin tellin' much about it, fer I knowed every dern critter on Deer Island would call me a thunderin' liar."

"There, by huck!" cried Jeb. "Now whut do you think of that? You hear whut Put Wiley has to

say!"

"Oh, yes, we hear it," drawled Sile, who was calmly filling a black pipe. "But Put allwus was seein' queer things that nobody else could see. I s'pose he dreamed that he saw the demon of Devil Island."

"It weren't no dream," fiercely declared the hunchback. "I saw the critter when I was on the island—more'n that, the varmint chased me."

"Hey?" cried several, the excitement increasing.

"I'll swan to it!" declared Put, stanchly.

"When did all this take place?" asked one of the listeners.

"Last Sunday."

"And we never heard of it before? Say, Put, I never knowed you to tell anything crooked, but it's a big yarn you're givin' us now. If all this happened last Sunday, why ain't you told of it afore?"

"In the fust place, 'cause I was darn scart. In the second place, 'cause I knowed everybody'd think I was lyin'."

"How did you happen to be down there on Devil Island Sunday?"

"Last time Jerry Peg was in Bold Island harbor he said he saw a partridge fly up on the shore of Devil Island. He went ashore an' tried to shoot her. He didn't shoot her, but he said he scart up six or eight others in the thick woods. He come away without gittin' one of them. Sunday I didn't have northing to do, so I loaded up my old gun and rowed over to Devil Island. Didn't git there till three in the afternoon. Beached my dory an' hitched the painter to a tree. Wisht I hedn't hitched her arterward. Took out my old gun and went up inter ther spruces. Tramped round to ther old stone quarry one way, but didn't see northing. Turned and tramped clean roun' to t'other end of the island. Scart up two partridges and fired at 'em both. Knocked down the second one. Then I chased t'other, scarin' him up and scarin' him up, but never gittin' him, though I fired at him twict. I was mad. Said I'd stay right there an' hunt that dern partridge till ther Eastern Bay froze over, but I'd git the thing. Arter a while I couldn't fin' him at all, but I kept prowlin' round in the woods till it was beginnin' to git dark. I heard somethin' like a rustlin' under some cedars and saw somethin' move. Then I ups and fires. When I done that there was a yell that might have been heard clean down to ther Hosses. Out of them cedars came a critter that I swan was the old devil him own self! He had horns, an' he had a fiery face and hands, an' he had black holes fer eyes, jest as Jeb told it, and he had a red-hot spear of iron in his hand. He run at me to stick that spear inter me. I know he was goin' to spear me and then kerry me down below fer shootin' partridges Sunday. He weren't more'n six feet of me when I poked out my old gun an' fired the second barrel right inter his face and eyes. It never bothered him a bit. Run? Why, I flew! Never kivered ground so fast before, an' I never 'spect to ag'in. I bet sometimes I jumped as much as fifteen feet to a leap."

The speaker took out a dirty handkerchief and mopped the big drops of perspiration off his face. He was shaking with excitement, and his eyes gleamed. He showed every symptom of extreme terror as he related the story, and it seemed plain enough that he believed every word he was uttering.

"Go on!" cried several.

"I don't know how I ever got away," said the hunchback, huskily. "I do know that monster was chasin' me right through the woods, tryin' to ram his spear inter my back as if I was a flounder an' he was arter lobster bait. I managed to hold onter my old gun, though at the time I didn't know I was a-doin' of it. If I hed stopped ter think, I'd throwed the gun erway. When I came out ter ther bank nigh ter whar my dory was hitched, I made a jump that took me clean from ther top to ther bottom. It seems as if right when I was in ther air I thought how that bo't was tied with her painter, an' I rammied my hand inter my pocket fer my knife. When I got ter ther boat I had the knife in my hand. I flung ther gun in an' yanked open ther knife jest as ther critter came down over ther bank arter me, an' he sailed down where I had jumped. I saw him do it, and I know he spread out some red things like wings. I don't say they was wings, but they looked like wings. I yanked open my knife and I cut the painter. The tide was in, and the dory was afloat, which was a good thing fer me, for when I jumped in I gave her a shove that sent her away from the shore. I got ther oars inter ther water and pulled. The critter didn't chase me any arter it reached the edge of the water."

Again the excited speaker wiped his face with the soiled handkerchief, and then he sat down in a chair, as if the remembrance of the adventure had taken all the strength out of him. He was shaking all over.

Frank Merriwell and Bruce Browning looked at each other.

"How is that for a vivid imagination?" grunted the big fellow.

"It's pretty good, but he seems to believe it himself," said Frank.

"He does act that way," confessed Bruce.

"I am getting interested," declared Frank. "When I get a chance, I shall visit Devil Island."

"Where is it?"

"Not far from here, if I remember right."

"If I thought there was anything down there worth seeing, I wouldn't mind going myself," said the big Yale man; "but these fishermen are such confounded liars that you can't tell."

Those who had been listening to the story were urging the hunchback to tell some more. After a little time, he stopped wiping his face and said:

"That's all. The critter turned tail and disappeared, while I nigh pulled my arms out gittin' away. Anybody that wants to can go nosin' round Devil Island, but Put Wiley will keep away. Next time the critter'd git me sure."

"Now, whut do ye think of that, Sile Collins?" cried Jeb, triumphantly. "If I'm a liar, I ain't ther only one on Deer Island."

"Humph!" grunted Sile. "Let a yarn like this git started, an' half the folks that go near Devil Island will see this ere critter. Some folks is great at seein' such things."

But his appearance of ridicule did not disguise the fact that he had been impressed by the story of the hunchback.

"Devil Island alwus hes bin haunted," declared one of the listeners. "That's why it's deserted ter-day. The quarry ain't worked out, but the big boardin' house stands empty on the island; the house ain't occupied——"

"Sence that woman from Rockland lived in it," broke in another.

"She didn't live there long. I guess she saw things on the island that made her reddy to git off."

"Queer freak for a woman to live there all alone, anyhow," observed Jeb. "We used to see her round the house or on the shore when we run down past the island, but all to once she was gone."

"Sence then," put in a man who had not spoken before, "I've seen lights in the winders of the old boardin' house at night and in the winders of the other house, though I've never ketched a glimpse of a livin' critter movin' on the island by day."

"Oh, it's haunted," nodded the one who had declared so before. "Anybody what wants to can go foolin' round there, but I'm goin' to keep away."

He rose to his feet. He was tall and thin, with a broken nose that seemed to tell the story of some fierce fight at an island dance. His starboard eye was crooked, so that it was difficult to tell just which way he was looking. He took in a fresh chew of tobacco and slouched out of the hotel.

"This is a place to see odd characters," said Merriwell.

Browning nodded.

They listened to the men who remained, and for some time there was an animated discussion about the creature on Devil Island. In the midst of it the hunchback left the room.

"I want to have a talk with that fellow," said Frank. "Come on."

They followed the hunchback outside.

"Wait a minute, if you please," called Frank, hurrying after the hunchback.

The fellow paused and turned round.

"What do ye want?" he asked.

His voice was harsh and unpleasant, and there was a suspicious look in his eyes.

"I heard your story about the creature you saw on Devil Island," said Frank.

"Waal, what of it?"

"My yacht is out there in the harbor, and I am thinking of taking her and running down to Devil Island. I have a great desire to get a look at the monster. You spoke about Bold Island harbor, and I want to find out just how to get in there and how near I can anchor to Devil Island."

The light in the eyes of the hunchback seemed to shift in a queer way as he stared at Frank. Browning had come up and was watching the fellow closely.

"You keep away from Devil Island!" almost snarled Put Wiley, as the deformed fellow had been called. "You don't know what you'll strike there, and——"

"I'll take my chances on that. All I want of you is to tell me the best place to lay while I am down there. I want the *White Wings* in a good harbor if a storm should come up."

"Waal, I don't tell ye nothin' about it. All I've got ter say is keep away."

Then, despite Frank's effort to say something more to the fellow, he hurried away.

"Well, that's a really jolly chap!" observed Browning.

"All of that," laughed Frank.

"He didn't seem to like your appearance, Merry."

"Well, I can't say that I admired his appearance."

"You will have to seek your information elsewhere."

"It wasn't so much that I wanted to find out about Bold Island harbor. I wanted to get him talking. Thought I might be able to trip him up if I got a good chance to ask him questions."

"But he wouldn't talk."

"He seemed suspicious."

They watched the hunchback go into a store. Just before passing through the door, which stood open, he turned his head and looked back.

"Wanted to see if we were following him," smiled Frank.

They walked about the village, finally returning to the hotel. As they approached the hotel Inza and Paula came out and asked to be shown around the village.

For an hour the four strolled about. From the yacht in the harbor Diamond saw them occasionally, and the Virginian's heart was throbbing with anger. He felt that he could kill Bruce Browning without a qualm of conscience.

Finally the party returned to the hotel, but, before leaving the girls, Frank had invited them to be ready for a short cruise on the yacht the following morning, and they had promised to do so.

As the boys approached the wharf beside which their boat floated, a man came toward them and spoke to them. He was the man with the crooked eye and broken nose.

"I hear you chaps are thinkin' of goin' down to Devil Island?" he said, one eye seeming to look at Frank while the other looked at Bruce. "Is that right?"

"We may go down there," answered Frank.

"To-morrow."

"Better not."

"Why?"

"It's dangerous."

"How?"

"You heard the yarns about the critter on the island, and you ought to know why."

"Those yarns are the very things that make me want to go down there," declared Frank.

The cock-eyed man looked surprised.

"You don't want to be ketched by the monster, do ye?"

"No, but we'd like to catch the monster," laughed Frank.

"You can't do that. The critter ain't human. If he ain't the devil hisself, he's one of the devil's imps."

"Well, we'd like to catch a genuine imp. If we could capture a real imp and take him to Boston or New York we could get a royal good figure for him from the manager of some dime museum. Freaks and curiosities are in great demand, and they are very scarce."

The cock-eyed man seemed astonished and disgusted.

"Why, you dern fools!" he exclaimed. "You don't 'magine you kin ketch a real imp, do ye?"

"We can give him a good hustle," answered Merry, with apparent seriousness. "He'll have to be lively if he gets away."

"I've hearn tell of how you city chaps didn't know much, but I did s'pose you knowed more'n that!" cried the man. "You'll be kerried off if you go down to Devil Island and try to chase the critter there. You'll disappear, an' you'll never be heard of ag'in."

"We'll take our chances."

"Say, I want ter tell you something. We don't say much about it round here, but most ev'rybody knows it. There was a man kem here this spring from Boston. He heard about Devil Island being haunted, and he was jest darn fool enough to want to go down there and see the spook. He went. He got some lobster ketchers to set him ashore and wait for him. They wouldn't go ashore with him, but they stayed in the boat reddy to take him on when he got reddy to leave. He never left!"

"What happened to him?"

"Who knows? 'Bout half-a-nour arter he went ashore there was the awfulest screech of agony come from somewhere on the island. Seemed jest like a man givin' a death yell. It scart them lobster ketchers so they rowed off a piece, but they waited till dark. He never come. Then they rowed off, and nothing of that air man has ever bin seen sence."

"Didn't anybody go down to the island to see if they could find him? A tree may have fallen on him, or something of that sort."

"There was six men went down from here two days arterward, an' whut do you s'pose they found?"

"The man from Boston."

"Didn't I tell ye he hadn't never been seen sence! They found a new-made grave!"

"What was in the grave?"

"They didn't wait to see, but they saw whut was at the head of the grave."

"What was that?"

"A new granite headstone."

"Yes?"

"True's I'm here. It was cut out nice an' clean, an' on it was chiseled some words."

"What were the words?"

"Sacred to the mem'ry of Rawson Denning."

"Who was Rawson Denning?"

"That was the name the man from Boston sailed under!"

The cock-eyed man whispered the words, his effort plainly being to make them as impressive as possible.

"Now," said Merriwell, "you have awakened my curiosity so that nothing can keep me away from Devil Island. I wouldn't miss going down there for anything. I simply dote on mysteries, and this seems to be a most fascinating one. I am going to lay claim to it, and I'll wager something that I solve it. Hereafter the mystery of Devil Island belongs to me till I make it a mystery no longer."

"Waal, you are a fool!" snarled the cock-eyed man. "I told you this for your own good, so you might have sense enough to stay away, but you ain't got no sense in your head! Go on, if ye want to, and I'll bet you git planted side of the man from Boston!"

Then he turned round and walked away.

"It is plain enough," murmured Frank, "that you do not want us to go to Devil Island. We will go there to-morrow."

"I should guess yes!" grunted Browning. "I am feeling just like looking the place over."

Then they entered their boat and rowed off to the yacht.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MONSTER OF THE DEEP.

The following forenoon the *White Wings* sailed out of the harbor at Green's Landing, bearing beside her regular crew Miss Gale and the girls. She was bound for Devil Island, and neither the girls nor their chaperon had wished to be left behind.

It was a glorious summer day, with a medium breeze. As they ran out of the harbor Frank noticed a man at work in a lap-streak sailboat.

It was the fellow with the broken nose and the crooked eye, and he seemed to be preparing to get away. He did not even glance toward the *White Wings*.

Merry called Browning's attention to the man.

"There is our amiable friend who gave us the warning," he said.

"That's so," nodded Bruce. "By jingoes! that's a peculiar boat he's in. Look at her—long and narrow. Don't look as if she'd carry much sail without upsetting."

"That's right," agreed Frank. "It is a queer boat, but she has mast enough for a big spread of canvas."

They thought no more of the boat till they were in sight of Devil Island. Then Bruce saw a small boat that lay low in the water and carried her big spread of canvas in a reckless manner,

although she was laying over before the wind. This boat was literally flying through the water, and it was plain enough that she was a wonderful sailer.

"Look here, Merry," said Bruce, "isn't that the lap-streak in which we saw our friend, the cock-eyed man, as we were leaving Green's Landing?"

Frank had a glass at hand, and he quickly took a survey of the flying sailboat.

"Sure as you are born!" he cried. "That is the very boat! How in the name of all that is wonderful does she stand up under that spread of sail?"

"Don't ask me," grunted Bruce. "I didn't suppose she could carry half as much."

"Look at the speed of her!" exclaimed Hodge.

"There's only one man in the boat, is there, Merry?" asked Bruce.

"I believe there is," said Frank. "Our friend with the crooked eye is steering."

"I don't see anybody else."

"Because the other person is keeping out of sight."

"What?"

"There is a man lying in the bottom of that boat."

"How do you know?"

"I saw him lift his head to look at us a few moments ago."

"That's strange."

"It's plain enough he doesn't want to be seen."

"What does it mean?"

"Don't know."

They watched the flying boat take the lead of them and saw it bear toward a distant rocky point of the island ahead. Near that point some sagging sheds could be seen. The small boat rounded the point and was hidden behind the island.

"There is Bold Island, famed for its wonderful clams, over yonder," said Frank. "Bold Island harbor must lay between that and Devil Island, but I didn't find it on the chart. However, there is a passage between the two islands which is perfectly safe at high water. We will run down in there and drop anchor as near Devil Island as possible."

They did so, finding a sheltered cove where it was plain that a boat could lay in any kind of a storm.

Close to them was the rocky shore of Devil Island. Beyond the rocks rose a high bank, upon which was a gloomy tangle of woods. There was something forbidding in the appearance of the island with the unpleasant name.

Frank and Bruce were eager to get ashore at once. As soon as the sails were cared for and things were ship-shape, they prepared to leave the yacht.

In vain Paula had tried to draw Diamond into conversation. Jack would answer her questions—he was extremely polite—but he made no attempt to be entertaining. At last, just as Frank and Bruce were preparing to enter the small boat, she left Jack and called to Inza:

"Come on!"

Then, to the astonishment of the boys, the girls came over to the rail and asked to be assisted into the boat.

"Eh?" grunted Browning. "Where are you going?"

"With you," answered Paula. "We're not going to stay here and mope with nobody to talk to. Aunt Abigail is reading in the cabin, and I don't believe she will mind."

"Perhaps you had better ask her," said Frank, weakly.

"It isn't necessary," assured Inza, quickly. "Come, help me into the boat. You lazy fellows, did you expect to get out of giving us a row? I know you don't want to pull us around, but you can't get out of it."

And then she came over the rail and leaped lightly into the boat. Browning aided Paula, after giving Frank a helpless look.

"We can't get out of it," whispered Merry. "We'll row them round a while, and then we'll bring them back to the yacht."

Bruce had brought out a repeating rifle from Frank's supply of arms in the cabin, and that was placed in the prow of the boat. Both girls sat on the stern seat.

With a double set of oars the boys pulled off from the yacht. It was a strange spectacle to see Bruce Browning handling an oar, but he had been a famous all-round athlete when he first entered Yale, and he had not forgotten how to row.

They asked the girls where they wished to go, and Paula answered:

"Oh, anywhere."

Under other circumstances, Browning might not have been so willing to pull at an oar, but he knew Diamond was gnawing his heart out, and the big fellow had developed a sudden satisfaction in tormenting the Virginian.

A distant island attracted the girls. On a ledge near it was a flock of white gulls, covering the ledge so it looked as if it were a mass of snow. They pulled toward the island.

The gulls proved shy and keen of sight, for they began to leave the ledge shortly after the boat drew away from the yacht, and half the distance to the island had not been covered before not a gull remained on the ledge.

"Didn't even get near enough for a real good shot with the rifle," grunted Bruce. "I'd like to get a shot at something."

Then he gave a cry of astonishment, took in his oars quickly, and caught up the rifle.

"What is it?" asked Frank.

"Look! look!" exclaimed the big Yale man, rising to his feet with the rifle in his hands. "There is a target for me!"

They looked in the direction indicated, and they saw something that at first seemed like a black rock. But it moved—it was swimming slowly along the surface of the water.

"A whale, by Jove!" shouted Merriwell. "Let him have it, Bruce!"

Browning lifted the rifle and took careful aim.

Crack!

He did not miss his mark. The whale was seen to give a sudden start, and then, stung by the bullet, the monster of the deep rushed straight at the boat!

"Look out!"

"He's coming!"

"My goodness!"

Not till he saw the whale start straight for the boat did Bruce Browning realize what a foolish thing he had done. It seemed that the monster was bent on the destruction of the boat and its occupants.

Merriwell uttered the first cry, which was a warning to Bruce, who was still standing, rifle in hand. Frank was going to use the oars, and he knew he would throw Bruce into the bottom of the boat by starting suddenly without warning.

The two girls uttered the other exclamations. Paula screamed and covered her face with her hands, while Inza turned pale and stared at the onrushing monster.

Frank fully realized their peril. He knew that it meant certain death to them all if the whale struck the boat, and there seemed no possible escape.

Bruce dropped down and Frank gave a surge at the oars that made the boat give a leap like a thing of life. Then Merriwell pulled as never before had he rowed, not even in the nerve-straining, soul-killing college races against Harvard.

Jump! jump! jump!—how he made the boat leap through the water! He was making the boat leap to get out of the whale's course.

Bruce tried to get his oars into the rowlocks and aid, but, for once in his life, at least, the big fellow had lost all his coolness, and he lost an oar overboard.

"He'll strike us!"

"We're lost!"

"Hold fast!"

Frank continued to pull, but he was ready to drop the oars and make a leap for Inza the moment the boat was struck.

"I'll do my best to save her!" he mentally exclaimed.

Still he knew the shock would hurl them far into the water, while the boat would be shattered in pieces. He might be stunned—he might be instantly killed.

For all that Inza stared straight at the whale, it is probable that she realized their terrible peril

far better than Paula, who was so frightened that she covered her eyes with her hands.

Frank began to realize that there was a possibility of getting out of the way if the whale did not change its course. He strained every nerve—he pulled for life.

"Thank Heaven!"

Browning gasped the words, for the monster had not swerved from its original course, and it dashed past the boat some distance astern.

Even then Frank was not satisfied that the danger was past. He expected to see the whale stop, turn about and rush at them again.

Nothing of the kind happened. The monster was headed straight for the distant passage that led out between the islands toward the lower bay and the open sea. He seemed to be in a great hurry, too, for he made the water fly as he sped along, the waves in his wake causing the little boat to rock when he had passed.

Merriwell stopped pulling and sat watching the whale, never uttering a word till it had passed out of sight far down the bay. Then he turned and observed:

"It's plain enough that he doesn't consider it healthy around here, and he is in a hurry to get away."

There was a smile on his face, and he seemed quite undisturbed by what had happened.

"Oh, Frank!" cried Inza, "what if he had struck us?"

"He would have bumped his nose."

"Oh, how can you joke now!"

"Now is the time to joke. I didn't have time to think of a joke a little while ago."

Browning dug himself out of the bottom of the boat, hoisted his huge body to a seat, and drew a deep breath of relief.

"A man who shoots at a whale with a rifle is a thundering fool!" he observed.

"And a man who tells him to shoot is another," laughed Frank.

"That is my first adventure with a whale," said the big Yale man, "and, if I have my way about it, it will be my last."

"Is—is he really gone?" faltered Paula, looking around.

"Yes, Miss Benjamin," assured Frank, "he has departed in the direction of Greenland."

"And he didn't touch the boat?"

"If he had we'd be enjoying a swimming match for the yacht now."

"If he had," said Inza, "some of us would have been killed right away, and the rest of us would have been drowned."

"Let's go back to the yacht!" urged the trembling Paula, her voice choking.

"I am quite ready," said Inza. "I don't care about going over to that island now."

So Frank pulled back to the floating oar, and then the boat was headed toward the *White Wings*.

Merriwell did his best to restore the girls' spirits. He joked and laughed, and before the yacht was reached he had almost convinced them that they had been in no great danger.

"But, oh, it gave me such a fright!" said Paula. "Just to see that huge creature coming through the water straight toward us! It was awful!"

Frank was chosen as the one to relate the adventure to Miss Gale, for the girls were aware that she might scold them for leaving the yacht without her consent, and Frank could make it all right with her.

Hans was on deck, but he had not seen their adventure with the whale, although he had heard the report of the rifle, for he cried as they approached:

"Vot you shooted? I heard der gun ven id fired you off."

"We shot a large seabird," answered Frank; "but the varmint got away from us."

"Vot kindt up a pird vos a varmint?" asked Hans. "You don'd remember dot I haf efer seen von, do I?"

"It is large enough to make a fish chowder," explained Merry.

"Vot vos I gifin' you?" cried Hans. "Who efer heart a pird uf dot could make a vish-chowter! I vos guyin' you, I oexpect."

Browning threw him the painter as they came alongside, and soon the girls were safely on the

yacht.

"Come back as soon as you have fixed it with Miss Gale," said Bruce, "and we will go onto the island and investigate."

Frank nodded and then went below. In a few minutes he came out laughing and assured the girls that it was all right. Then he dropped into the boat again, and soon he and Browning were on Devil Island.

They pulled the boat up on the beach and made it fast. Frank took the rifle, and Bruce looked at his revolver, which he had slipped into his pocket before leaving the yacht the first time. The *White Wings* was riding at anchor within easy speaking distance of the shore.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Bruce.

"The buildings are on the other side of the island," said Merry. "Let's go straight across."

"All right."

They found a path by which they could climb the bank, making it plain that human beings had traveled on the island not a little at some time, even if the place was deserted then.

Following the path a short distance, they came to three small camps built of logs. The camps were not in a very pleasant location, although it was a sheltered spot.

After looking around the huts a few minutes, they turned from the path and struck straight up through the woods, which were thick and dark. Beneath their feet twigs crackled and the dead leaves of a year before sometimes rustled where they had piled together but had not rotted. The woods were dark and in places the ground was covered by moss, so that their feet made not a sound.

Higher and higher they climbed, till they came out into a natural opening that was surrounded by the gloomy trees. This seemed close to the highest ground on the island, which could be seen rising rocky and bare through the trees at one side of the glade.

And in the midst of the glade was a grave that had not been made many months, and a granite stone stood at the head.

"It's the grave the cock-eyed man told us of!" exclaimed Frank. "Let's look at the stone."

They approached the grave, and Frank bent down to look at the stone. As the cock-eyed man had said, on it were the words:

"Sacred to the memory of Rawson Denning."

As Merry was looking at the headstone it seemed that a voice in the air above them hoarsely whispered:

"Dead and buried!"

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE DARK WOODS.

"Eh?" gasped Browning, amazed. "What was that?"

"Dead and buried!"

Again that mysterious, awesome, uncanny whisper that seemed to float in the air. They looked around, they looked upward, they saw nothing but the blue sky above the leaves and somber trees that surrounded them.

"Dead and buried!"

Now it seemed to come from the ground—seemed to issue from the grave before them! It was as if the dead man hidden away down there had uttered the words.

Frank Merriwell shrugged his shoulders, while his companion shivered and felt for his revolver. A cold chill swept over the big Yale man, as if he felt the touch of a dead hand. He was awed despite the fact that there was nothing superstitious in his character.

They listened, expecting to hear the whispers again, but there was such a silence in the woods as seemed to press down on them like a crushing weight. Not even a breath of a breeze reached the spot to rustle the trees, and no sound of the surf chafing against the distant rocky shore reached their ears.

It seemed at that moment that they alone were the only human living creatures on that uncanny island. A sense of desolation came upon them and made them feel as if they were far, far from human beings, buried as in the heart of a mighty desert.

They did not stir; they stood there listening.

Silence.

Once, far on a Western desert, Browning had experienced the same feeling of loneliness, but then there was not the grewsome, ghostly fear that now clutched at his heart and chilled its beatings so it seemed to be struggling feebly like an imprisoned bird fluttering against the cruel bars of a cage.

The big fellow choked. There seemed to be a lack of pure air for him to breathe. He longed to cry out, but his tongue lay stiff and paralyzed in his mouth.

Then came the thought that some uncanny spell was being wrought about him, and that soon he would be body and soul in the power of the evil spirit of the island.

With a mighty effort he moved, he spoke, he said:

"Come, Frank, let's get away from here!"

His voice was husky and hoarse, so that he was startled by its sound. Merriwell glanced toward him, lifting a hand with a gesture that warned to silence, while he bent his head toward the grave and listened.

For some moments both stood still, and again Browning felt that strange spell stealing upon him, as if hypnotic eyes were peering out from the shadows and looking down into his soul. He shook himself, he even looked around in search of those eyes; but he saw nothing save the dark, gloomy woods and the funereal shadows.

Frank straightened up. There was a queer look on his face.

"Did you hear it?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Of course I heard it," answered Browning, thinking he spoke of the whisper. "The words came to my ears distinctly."

"No, no; I did not mean the whisper."

"Then what did you mean? I heard no other sound."

"It is strange, for I fancied I heard it distinctly."

"Where did the sound come from?"

Without a word, Merriwell pointed downward toward the grave. There was a look on his face that made his companion shiver.

Bruce swallowed down the lump in his throat.

"I am a fool!" he thought. "I am ashamed of such childish fears!"

Then he forced himself to distinctly ask:

"What kind of a sound did you think you heard?"

"A rustle—a movement. It was as if the body down there had turned restlessly in its bed of earth!"

Never did Bruce forget how those words sounded in the deep silence of the black woods. Never did he forget the sensation of unutterable horror that they brought with a shock to his soul. He stared at Frank, his jaw dropping, while awful thoughts ran riot in his brain.

They had heard the whispered words, "dead and buried," which at first seemed to float in the air, and then appeared to come up from the grave before them. Browning fancied the dead lips down there uttering those words. He fancied the murdered man turning restlessly in his cold, dark bed—turning, twisting, unable to rest till he had been avenged.

What thoughts fled through Frank Merriwell's brain? Surely he was besieged by uncanny fancies, but never in all his life was he more on the alert. The very air of mystery that surrounded him was a stimulant. He had solved many mysteries, and now he was determined to solve this one.

Down the slope in the shadows of the dark woods below there was a rustling sound. Quick as a flash, Merriwell wheeled, rifle in hand, and bounded in that direction.

Browning did not care to be left there alone beside that grave, and he followed Frank in a hurry. He saw Merry disappear amid the trees, heard a sudden chattering, and then there was a flash of fire and the clear report of a rifle. Frank had fired at something while he was on the run.

The big Yale man crashed into the woods and came upon his friend, who was stooping to pick up a dead squirrel.

"I rather think this fellow made the rustling that seemed to come from the grave," said Merry. "I was deceived by my ears, that is all. As I ran in under the trees here I could not resist the temptation to take a shot at him, for he was running, too. Now," he slowly added, gazing sadly at the dead squirrel, "I wish I had not fired."

"Oh, it's nothing but a squirrel," said Bruce. "If I could make such a shot as that I'd be proud of

it."

"I am not proud, only sorry," said Frank, as he gently placed the squirrel on a soft bed of moss. "Look at the little fellow, Bruce! A few moments ago he was full of life, happy and free; now he is dead, killed by a cruel brute of a man! I didn't think I'd hit him, but that is no excuse. I ought not to have tried. Somewhere he has a home, a nest, a mate, perhaps little ones. He'll never return to his soft nest, never again will he scamper through the woods, leaping from bough to bough, playing hide-and-seek through the brush and the leaves. He is dead, and I killed him. Bruce, this one thoughtless, hasty act of mine lies like a sore weight on my conscience. I'll not forget it in a week. It will trouble me—it will haunt me."

Frank's voice was rather husky with emotion and his handsome face betrayed his deep feeling of sorrow, and Bruce Browning, who was not cruel or hard-hearted, but who would have killed a squirrel and never given it a second thought, now began to realize that there might be something wrong in the act.

"Oh, it's nothing to make a fuss over," he said, quickly.

"Yes, it is," declared Frank, sincerely. "That little squirrel never harmed me, but I murdered him. He was one of God's creatures, and I had no right to lift my hand against him. I feel like a brute, a wretch, a murderer!"

Then Frank knelt down on the moss beside the dead squirrel.

"Oh, little squirrel!" he said, his voice breaking into a sob; "how much I would give could I restore your life to you! But I have killed you, and all my regret and sorrow over the act will not bring you back to scamper and frolic through the woods."

To his astonishment, Bruce felt a misty blur come over his eyes, and there was a choking sensation in his throat.

"Come away, Merry—come and leave it!" he exclaimed, thickly. "Don't be a fool!"

"No," said Frank, "I can't leave him this way."

He took a handkerchief from his pocket and wrapped the squirrel in it, doing so with such gentleness that Bruce wondered more and more. Then he searched about till he found a thin, flat rock that was about a foot long and four inches wide. With that rock Merriwell scooped a grave in the ground. That grave he lined with soft bits of moss, and then he took the squirrel, wrapped in the handkerchief shroud, and placed it in the grave. The earth was thrown in on the little body, and heaped up in a mound till it was a tiny model of the grave in the glade above. Then Frank thrust the flat rock into the ground as a headstone, and a tear dropped silently down.

Browning had turned away. The big fellow had been taught a lesson he would not soon forget, and more than ever he admired and respected Frank Merriwell, who could be as brave as a lion or as gentle as a dove.

"Come."

Frank had arisen. Bruce followed him from the spot.

They did not climb the rise and again enter the glade that contained the mysterious grave, but Frank led the way down through the woods till they came out to the rocky shore of the island, along which ran the path they had left some time before. Now they struck into this path and followed it round the island.

Not a word passed between them till they came to the old granite quarry. There on their right the bluff of rock rose nearly a hundred feet in the air, with cedars growing away up on the heights. There were drill marks on the face of the rock. A weed-grown railroad ran into the quarry, and on the track sat a flat car, loaded with granite.

"By jingoes!" exclaimed Browning. "It's plain enough there was some business done here some time."

Frank looked at the face of the broad wall of granite.

"I wonder why they ceased quarrying it?" he speculated.

"I suppose the fishermen would say it was because the island was haunted."

"More likely because the granite was not of the best quality. Now that stone does not look to me as if it is first class. It seems to me it is poor granite, and that is why the quarry was abandoned."

"Guess you are right," nodded Bruce.

They walked along the track which led out of the quarry and down toward some sagging sheds, in which they could see other flat cars.

When the sheds were reached, they turned to the right and saw at a distance a house. Beyond the house was a large square building with many windows. Not far from the car sheds was an old wharf.

"There is the house where the boss must have lived," said Merry; "and beyond it is the boarding

house for the laborers."

"Let's go look them over," said Bruce, who seemed remarkably energetic for him.

So they walked over to the house. It was securely locked, and the windows were fastened down. Near the house was a well, from which they drew water and took a drink from an old dipper that hung on a rusty nail driven into the curb.

From the house a path led down toward the boarding house. They walked down there and could look down into a beautiful little cove close at hand.

"Why didn't we run in there and anchor, instead of anchoring away round back of the island?" said Bruce.

"Simply because no one mentioned this cove, and I did hear Bold Island harbor mentioned," answered Frank.

In the distance they could see three or four white sails. Far away beyond a group of islands rose a trail of smoke that told some small steamer was passing. A gull was circling over the cove, and a black crow cawed dismally from the top branch of a tall spruce.

For all that the sun was in the sky, there was something oppressively lonely and deserted about Devil Island.

"Let's try the doors here," suggested Bruce.

The front door was fastened, but they found a back door that they were able to force open, as the nails that held it had rusted in the rotten wood till they readily bent before the pressure.

"I don't know as we have any right to go in here," said Frank.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Bruce. "The place is deserted."

"Somebody owns it."

"According to the yarns of the fishermen, it is owned by a monster with blazing face and black holes for eyes."

"None of them told of seeing the monster anywhere around this building. He was seen in the woods or on the other side of the island."

"I think we'll see him here just as quick as anywhere," grinned Bruce, who had thrown off the uncanny feeling that had possessed him as they stood beside the grave in the woods.

"Those stories were not told for nothing," declared Frank.

"Why were they told?"

"I don't know—not yet."

"But you have an idea?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I rather fancy somebody wishes to keep people away from this island for some reason."

"I thought the same thing."

"What that reason can be I do not know."

"But, Frank," said Bruce, hesitatingly, "you heard something as we stood beside that grave up there in the woods?"

"Yes."

"A whisper?"

"Sure."

"What did it say?"

"Dead and buried."

"Then it was not imagination, for we both heard the same thing. Now how do you explain that?"

"Somebody whispered the words."

"Where was that somebody?"

"You know just as well as I do; but those words were whispered for our ears to hear. We heard them."

"I do not believe in ghosts any more than you do, Merriwell, but I will admit that there was a mighty queer feeling came over me as we stood there near that grave."

"I felt it," confessed Frank. "Had I believed in ghosts, I should have been badly frightened."

"Well, let's look this building over. We may find something in here."

So they began to explore the old boarding house. It was a large building, and they climbed the stairs to the second story, where none of the windows were boarded up. Up there were the rooms where the laborers had slept. They looked through them all, but found nothing of interest. At last they stopped by a window and looked out upon the water.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Merriwell. "Look down there!"

"What is it?"

"A boat."

"Where?"

"Beyond the land at the other side of the cove. It's laying close in to shore. See the mast?"

"Yes, I see it now. Why, it almost seems aground! Wonder what it's there for?"

"Whoever was in the boat has come ashore on the island."

"Then why didn't he run into the cove down here?"

"Because the boat would be seen in the cove, and where it lays it is not liable to be seen from the island."

"Why should anybody wish to come onto the island here and not be seen?"

"I don't know, but I'll wager something that that is the lap-streak sailboat belonging to our friend, the cock-eyed man. If I am right, he is somewhere on this island."

"He warned us not to come here."

"Yes. He told us what happened to the Boston man who came here. It was plain to me that he wanted us to keep away. He ran down ahead of us, and he is on the island. Why should he care to frighten us away? Why should he hurry to get here ahead of us? I tell you, old man, this is a mystery worth solving."

Bruce grunted. He felt that Merriwell was right, but he realized it might not be an easy thing to solve the mystery of the island.

The big Yale man stood looking out of the window and watching the boat, while Frank continued his investigations. Merriwell wandered from room to room, and at last descended the stairs again.

"If he gets an idea that there is really a wonderful mystery here," muttered Bruce, "he will stay till he has solved it if he spends the remainder of the summer in this vicinity. Never saw a fellow who took such an interest in anything mysterious."

The wind was rising again. It rattled a window, and somewhere about the building it made a loose board clap, clap, clap, in a way that made Browning think of clods falling on a coffin.

All at once, somewhere down below in the old building, a shriek rang out, startling, shrill, wild and awful. It froze the blood in Browning's veins and seemed to cause his hair to stand upon his head. Following the shriek came—silence!

CHAPTER XX.

FRANK SEES THE MONSTER.

Instantly Browning thought how the fisherman had told of the awful screams that came from the lips of the monster of the island. Had that monster uttered this cry?

Where was Merriwell?

"Frank!"

Browning shouted the name of his friend and the empty rooms echoed with the sound.

"Frank Merriwell!"

From room to room rushed the big fellow. There was no answer to his cries.

Quickly satisfying himself that Merriwell was nowhere in the upper story of the boarding house, Bruce bounded down the stairs four at a time.

"Frank, where are you?"

No sound save his own voice and the echoes.

A sickening sensation seized upon Browning. He began to feel that a calamity, a tragedy, had taken place.

From room to room he rushed, but he saw nothing of the one he sought. Was it possible Frank had left the building without saying anything to him? He could not think so.

All at once he stood before an open door, and he dimly saw a flight of stairs leading downward into the darkness. A cold, dank smell came up from the depths below.

Browning quickly decided that there must be some sort of a cellar or basement down there. The door was open. Frank had gone down to investigate.

But the cry that had rung through the building! What had happened below?

For a moment Bruce hesitated. Then he quickly felt in his pocket and drew forth a match safe. A moment later, with lighted match in his fingers, he was descending the stairs into the dank and moldy basement.

At the bottom of the stairs was another door. It was open. Bruce stepped through it and stumbled over something, dropping his match, so that he was in the densest darkness.

At that moment the wild shriek rang out again so near that it seemed uttered in his very ear.

He had his revolver in his hand, and he whirled, his heart having sprung into his mouth, ready to use the weapon. In the darkness he saw nothing.

Bruce was shaking as he crouched there. He heard his teeth rattle together, and he realized that he was completely unnerved. He was tempted to leap up and bound up the stairs. Indeed, the desire to do so was almost irresistible.

He listened, thinking he might hear something like a moving person, but after that blood-chilling scream there was no other sound.

At last he put out his hand and touched the object over which he had fallen. That it was a human body he instantly realized.

The thought that Frank Merriwell lay there dead in the darkness nearly overcame him. He feared to light another match. That touch had told him that the body was not that of a person stiff and cold, as it must be had it lain there some time. It was still warm, as if with life, but still—how still!

Browning's fingers shook as he got out a match. He prayed that he might not look on the face of his dead friend. The horrible fear of what he might see completely unmanned him.

Scratch—splutter—flare!

He lighted the match, and it blazed up at once. Its light showed him the sight he had dreaded to behold. Frank Merriwell lay before him, his face ghastly pale, his eyes closed.

The match dropped from the nerveless fingers of the big Yale man and went out. A low groan escaped his lips.

Then came the thought that Merriwell might not be dead. Quickly he caught up the body, flung it over his shoulders, and then he literally leaped up the creaking stairs.

Bruce did not pause till he had carried Frank outside the building. Then he took a look at Merry's pale face, saw blood trickling down out of his hair, and rushed with him to the well near the house.

Placing Frank on the ground, the big fellow fell to bathing his head, upon which was a slight wound that cut through the scalp. It was not twenty seconds before Frank opened his eyes.

Bruce gave an exclamation of joy.

"By Heaven! I thought you were dead!" he cried.

Merriwell looked dazed for a moment, and then murmured:

"I saw it!"

"Eh? Saw what?"

"The monster!"

"What? You did?"

"Sure."

"Where? Down in the basement of the boarding house?"

"Yes."

"What did it look like?"

"Just as described."

"Fiery face and hands?"

"Yes."

"Black holes for eyes?"

"Yes."

Browning gasped.

"What did it do?"

"Shrieked."

"I heard it!"

"And then it seemed that the whole building fell on me. There was a bright glare of light, and the next I knew was when I opened my eyes just now."

"Something struck you down."

"I think you are right."

"Know I am. I found you down there in the basement—brought you out. Oh, but I did think you were dead when I first saw your white face by the light of the match I held! I haven't recovered from the shock of it yet! It was awful!"

In a few moments Frank was able to sit up. The cut on his head was not serious, but his head was throbbing with a shooting pain, and he was dizzy and weak.

"Well, I've seen the monster all right," he said, with a grim smile. "There's some satisfaction in that."

"And I have heard it," put in Bruce. "I don't know that I care about seeing the thing."

"It did look something like the Old Boy himself," said Frank. "Don't wonder these fishermen are scared by it."

"Well, I suppose you are satisfied now?"

"Oh, no!"

"No? What will you do?"

"Oh, I'd like to know what the monster is made of."

"This investigating seems to be rather dangerous."

"And that makes it all the more fascinating. However, I think it will be well enough to give it a rest for the present."

"We'll go back to the yacht?"

"Yes, and have some dinner. After dinner we can take another whirl at the monster. We must not stay away too long this time, or the people on the yacht will worry about us."

"What shall we tell them?"

"Nothing. It will not do to tell of this adventure."

"But this handkerchief about your head," said Bruce, who was tying it in place; "how will you explain that?"

"Fell and struck my head. I did fall, you know, and my head must have struck the ground down there in that basement. We mustn't let them press us too closely. If they get inquisitive, we must change the subject."

Thus it was arranged. When Frank first arose to his feet he was so weak that he found it necessary to lean on the arm of his companion, but his strength came to him swiftly, so that he was like himself before he had returned more than a third of the way to the *White Wings*.

Then of a sudden he remembered that he had dropped his rifle when he was struck down in the basement, and he wanted to return for it at once. Bruce objected at first, but Frank was determined, and he finally won.

They retraced their steps and boldly entered the building. Bruce followed Merriwell down the stairs into the basement, holding his revolver ready for use while Frank lighted matches. Then they searched for the rifle, which Frank knew he held in his hand at the moment when he was struck down.

They could not find it, for it was not in the basement, nor was it anywhere in the building.

The boys quickly decided that the rifle had been removed by human hands, but the mystery was just as deep.

Leaving the building, they did not immediately return to the *White Wings*, but made their way past the little cove, through the stunted cedars and over the rocks to a position where they could look down upon the boat that was lying close to the island shore.

As Frank had surmised, it was the lap-streak sailboat belonging to the cock-eyed man. There was no one in or around it.

"Bruce," said Merry, "I have a proposal to make."

"Make it," grunted Browning.

"I have an idea that the person who owns that boat is concerned in the mysterious doings on this island."

"Well?"

"I am going to watch for him."

"When?"

"Now."

"You mean that you are not going back to the yacht?"

"Not right away."

"Then I shall stay with you."

"That will interfere with my plan."

"How?"

"If we stay away from the yacht very long it is certain to alarm the girls."

"It might."

"I want you to go back and tell them I have discovered signs of game here and have stayed to see if I can't bag it. You need not say what sort of game. Then I want you to get Hodge and bring him with you, taking three of the guns and sufficient ammunition. As you will be going out for game, that will create no alarm. Leave Diamond and Dunnerwust to guard the girls and Miss Gale. I will remain here till you return, and you might bring me something for lunch. Tell them it is likely to take some time to bag our game, and caution them not to be alarmed if we do not return before nightfall."

"But I don't like the idea of leaving you here alone," protested the big Yale man. "There is no telling what may happen."

Frank laughed softly.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "I shall not venture into the old boarding house alone, and it is not likely I'll not be able to defend myself here on open ground."

Bruce hesitated.

"How are you feeling now?" he asked.

"All right."

"Strong?"

"As ever."

"That crack on the head——"

"Oh, I am all over that now. Go on, old man, and don't worry about me. You know that, as a rule, Frank Merriwell is able to take care of himself."

"That is a fact," nodded Browning. "But you are not armed. Here, you must take this revolver."

He held the weapon out to Merry.

"But then you will not have a weapon."

"I am all right," declared Bruce. "I can handle two or three ordinary fellows without a gun."

Fully aware of the giant's extraordinary strength, Frank knew he spoke the truth, and so he accepted the revolver.

"Now I have an idea," said Merriwell, "that you had better not return to the yacht by the path."

"Why not?"

"It is likely that path is watched, and it may be well enough not to let the watchers know one of us has remained here. If they think we are gone, they may betray themselves by their movements.

"How am I to go back, then?"

"Go round the island the other way. You can keep in this fringe of woods the most of the time, so that you will not be seen. It may be a bit harder traveling, but I fancy it is the best thing to do."

"All right. Take care of yourself, Merriwell. Keep your eyes open, and do not get another crack on the head."

"Don't worry about that. Take your time."

So Bruce started off, leaving Frank there where he could watch the boat.

Not until Browning had disappeared and Frank was quite alone did he realize the loneliness of the place. The water washing against the rocky shore made the only sound to be heard, unless it was the occasional cry of a wheeling gull.

The tide was going out, and already the black ledges were rising out of the water in the distance. Those were called "half-tide ledges" by the fishermen. There were other black rocks which rose barren and bleak above the highest tides. Near those ledges at certain seasons of the year sportsmen set their "tollers," or decoys, and crouching in nooks of the rocks, fired hundreds of shots at the sea birds lured to their doom by the wooden representations of their mates.

Merriwell found a place where he could sit in a sheltered spot and watch the sailboat, at the same time having a good view of the bay and the islands and ledges.

As he sat there Frank meditated on the mystery of the island. He was fully convinced that there was some reason why certain human beings desired to frighten all others away from the place. That the man from Boston had been murdered and buried on that island was quite probable. Perhaps he had been murdered for booty; perhaps he had discovered the secret of the island, and his death had been accomplished in order to seal his lips. In the latter case there must be some powerful reason why the desperadoes who slew him did not wish the secret revealed to the world.

These thoughts led Merry to the conclusion that some criminal business was carried on upon that island. He was well aware that he was taking desperate chances in trying to find out what sort of business it was, but the mystery lured him on, and the very fact that there was danger lent a fascination to the adventure.

How long he sat there thinking thus he did not know, but at last he was startled by a sound near at hand. He turned quickly and what he saw brought him to his feet with a bound.

Peering from the bushes was the most horrible face he had ever looked upon. It was twisted and contorted in a frightful manner, the lips were drawn back from long, yellow fangs, the eyes seemed to glare like coals of fire, and about these frightful features tumbled a mass of tangled hair.

"The monster!"

That thought flashed into Frank's mind. He had no doubt but he was face to face with the creature that had frightened the simple fishermen from the island.

For some moments Frank stood there, staring at that horrible face. Then a clawlike hand came out through the bushes and seemed to reach toward him, while a howl that was blood-curdling came from the creature's lips.

That sound was the same that had frightened the fishermen into running for their lives, but, instead of running, Frank made a dash for the creature, Browning's revolver grasped in his hand.

It was a most astonishing move on the part of the boy. For a moment the monster of the island remained motionless, and then that horrible face disappeared.

With a leap, Frank plunged straight into the bushes, ready to grapple with the thing.

He found nothing! It had vanished!

Swaying bushes close at hand guided him, and he scarcely paused an instant. Straight forward he rushed, ready for the encounter at any instant.

He caught a glimpse of something plunging through the bushes, and he followed fearlessly.

A moment later he came out to open ground, and ahead of him he saw a misshapen figure running with wonderful speed toward the head of the cove.

Perhaps for the first time since the creature had been seen on the island the order of things had changed and it was the pursued instead of the pursuer.

"Stop!" shouted Frank.

The monster looked back over a twisted shoulder, and snarled like a wild animal, but ran faster than ever.

"Stop, or I shall shoot!"

Frank flourished the revolver, running as hard as he could in pursuit.

The command was not obeyed.

In an attempt to frighten the creature into obeying, Frank fired two shots into the air.

Still the thing ran on.

"Well, I see I must catch him," muttered Merriwell.

He set his teeth and made wonderful speed over the uneven ground. Never in any college sprinting match had he made such speed. He was determined to overtake that hideous thing and

solve the mystery of the island.

Frank soon saw he was gaining. The creature looked back and saw the same, whereupon it seemed to increase its efforts.

But, although the monster was a swift runner, it could not get away from Merriwell. The cove was passed, and the race continued up the rise toward the big building above.

Frank was drawing nearer and nearer. He reached out a hand to grasp the shoulder of the hunchback, for there was a large hump on the back of the fugitive.

At that moment the panting thing whirled and grappled with him suddenly.

Frank was taken by surprise by the movement, and in a twinkling he was flung to his knees. The monster snarled with satisfaction and sought to clutch his throat with those clawlike hands.

Summoning all his strength, Merriwell fought his way to his feet and obtained a better hold on the thing, keeping those twisted fingers away from his throat.

Then there was a fierce struggle for the mastery. During that struggle the tushes in the mouth of the being with whom Frank was battling suddenly fell out and dropped to the ground.

They were false teeth, made to look as hideous as possible.

And now Merry could see that the man's face was made up to appear twisted and deformed, and, a moment after the teeth fell out, the shaggy wig of tangled hair was torn away, showing that also was false and a part of the make-up.

Now Merriwell recognized the man before him.

It was the hunchback of Green's Landing—Put Wiley!

"Really, Mr. Wiley, this is quite a surprise!" exclaimed Frank, triumphantly. "You had a splendid make-up, but the cat is out of the bag now."

"Curse ye!" grated the hunchback. "You'll pay for this with your life!"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"I do."

Wiley's voice did not utter these two words; they were spoken by another person, and Frank was clutched from behind. Strong hands closed about his neck, and hard fingers crushed into his windpipe, so that his breath was shut off in a moment.

Frank could not withstand this onset, he was forced to his knees. Being unable to breathe, he tried to tear those crushing fingers away, but the effort was in vain. He had dropped the revolver, and it was beyond his reach.

He knew at that moment that he was in the clutch of the ruffians who had murdered the man from Boston, and he had no doubt but a like fate was meant for him. Still he was powerless to save himself, for he was given no show. Things turned black and began to whirl around him, bombs seemed bursting in his head, bells were ringing in his ears, and then—nothingness!

When Frank recovered consciousness he felt as if his windpipe had been crushed, and he seemed numb and helpless in every limb. He realized immediately that he was being roughly handled, and he heard a harsh voice say:

"That's all right. He can't git erway. We can't waste any more time."

He opened his eyes and looked up into the face of the speaker—the cock-eyed man!

Put Wiley, the hunchback, was there, too.

"Hello!" growled the man with the crooked eye. "He's come round. I'm glad on it, fer I want him ter know jest what his nosin' foolishness has done fer him."

Frank tried to speak, but he could not utter more than a wheezing whisper. The hunchback raised a foot, as if to bring it down on the face of the helpless lad, for Frank was bound hands and feet, but the other man thrust him aside, growling:

"Whut's the use! He'll be dead in five minutes. Don't kick ther poor fool."

Then Frank realized that he was bound across the track of the old railroad that ran from the sheds to the quarry. The look that came to the face of the helpless lad seemed to tell the cock-eyed man that he understood the situation.

"You've made a fool of yerself," declared the man, unpityingly. "You was too nosy. Inquisitive critters alwus git inter trouble. The Boston man was too fresh, and he's planted. You saw his grave."

Strangely enough, at that moment the helpless boy asked a queer question:

"Where were you when you made that ghostly whisper?" he managed to huskily inquire.

"I dunno what good it'll do to ye ter know," was the answer. "You'll be dead right away. Mebbe

one of us was hid in a holler tree near ye."

"What do you mean to do with me?"

"Waal, we've tied ye here acrost ther rails. Up there in the quarry is a car loaded with granite. It won't take much ter send it scootin' down the track, and it will cut you clean in two. You'll have time enough to think whut a fool ye was and say yer prayers while we are startin' ther car, but you'd better begin now. Good-by."

Then the two murderous wretches hurried up the track and quickly disappeared.

Frank tried to cry for aid, but he could not make a sound that could be heard ten rods away. He twisted and squirmed in a vain effort to free himself. And then he fell to listening, listening, listening.

It was not long before he heard the sound which he dreaded. There was a distant rumble, a faint jarring of the rails.

The car had started down the incline!

"God help me!"

The rumbling sound grew louder and louder. The car was gathering speed as it came on.

"Frank—Frank Merriwell!"

He heard Browning call near at hand, and now he made a mighty effort and answered:

"Here! Quick! Help!"

The big Yale man came rushing to the track, followed by Hodge, just as the car loaded with granite came into view.

Instantly Bruce realized the peril of the lad who was bound to the rails, and he saw there was no time to cut the ropes and set Frank free.

With a hoarse shout he leaped forward, catching up a stout stick of timber in an instant. One end of the timber he thrust under the rails of the track, and then he lifted on the other end with all his wonderful strength.

The track was old, the ties were rotten, and the spikes gave way. The rail was pried aside in a moment. Then Bruce went at the other and tore that up.

The car was upon him. He made a great leap backward and got off the track barely in time.

Then, an instant later, the car, loaded with granite, left the rails and shot down the bank, spilling the slabs of rock and plunged with a splash into the water, disappearing from view.

Frank was saved!

It was an hour later when Merriwell, Browning and Hodge returned to the *White Wings*. With the exception of a slight hoarseness, Frank could speak as well as ever, although his throat was sore and lame.

The boys had not returned to the yacht till they were certain the hunchback and the cock-eyed man had left the island, for the lap-streak boat was seen bound up the bay under full sail.

Browning was fierce for revenge. Merriwell did not say much, but deep down in his heart he was determined to punish the ruffians who had so nearly ended his existence. He cautioned the boys not to let the girls or Miss Gale know anything of the adventures on the island.

"We will land them at Green's Landing," he said, "and then I am coming back to this island. The mystery of this place is not yet solved. Why are those two men trying to frighten everybody away from here? I want to know that, and I mean to know it."

On reaching the yacht Jack Diamond was found paying every attention to Paula Benjamin, and it was plain that there was no longer a misunderstanding between them.

The Virginian shot Browning a glance of triumph, in which was also a warning.

But Bruce scarce gave Jack or Paula a thought, for other matters were on his mind then. He was eager and anxious to get rid of the girls and their chaperon in order that the party might return to Devil Island and seek to solve the deep mystery of the place and punish the wretches who had tried to end Frank's life.

CHAPTER XXI.

SETTLING A POINT.

"Now, fellows," said Frank Merriwell, as he faced his four "shipmates" in the cabin of his yacht, *White Wings*, which was riding at anchor in the harbor at Green's Landing, "I have called you together for a council of war."

"I'm tired," grunted Bruce Browning. "Can't I rest in my bunk while the powwow is going on?"

"No," came firmly from Frank, "this is a matter of business, and it won't hurt you to sit up a while."

"Oh, get a brace on!" exclaimed Diamond, flinging the words at the big Yale man. "Act as if you had some life in you, old fellow."

The manner in which the words were spoken made the usually polite Virginian seem quite unlike himself, but Bruce simply grinned, observing:

"You shouldn't hold a grudge because I flirted a little with Miss Benjamin, Diamond; you got a lead on me while Merriwell and I were investigating on Devil Island, and won her back, all right. Don't be sour over it."

The Southerner sprang up, his eyes flashing:

"Mr. Browning," he said, hotly, "I warn you not to speak lightly of Miss Benjamin! You seem to take delight in mentioning her in connection with every little occurrence, and it is getting tiresome. There is a limit!"

"Huah!" grunted the giant. "Touchy, mighty touchy. First thing I know he'll be challenging me to a duel."

"It would be useless to challenge you!" flashed Jack. "You Northerners are too cold blooded to fight."

"Well, now, this will do!" cut in Merry, promptly rising to his feet. "I won't have it on board my yacht."

"Then I suppose we can go on shore and fight it out," said Jack, sourly.

"If you want to make fools of yourselves—yes."

"You are very plain spoken, Mr. Merriwell."

"It is necessary at times, Diamond. Hold your temper in check, old man, and don't talk about Northerners and Southerners. There is no North, no South. The time is past. When you came to Yale you were full of freakish notions about the North and the South, but I fancied you had been pretty well cured of that. I see it will crop out occasionally, though."

To this Diamond made no retort, but he looked thoroughly angry. With another fellow Frank would have laughed him out of the mood, but he knew it would not do to try that on the Virginian, for Jack could not endure a bit of ridicule.

However, Merry talked quietly, and soon he could see he was pouring oil on the troubled waters, for the look of anger was leaving Diamond's face, and Browning had assumed a lounging attitude.

"This is no time for hard feelings between any of us," said Frank. "As I said a few minutes ago, I have called you together for a council of war."

"Vot did I mean ven you said dot?" asked Hans Dunnerwust. "Berhaps you don'd understood me as vell as I might. Vot for haf dot gouncil uf var peen caldt?"

"Yes," said Bart Hodge, "just what are you driving at, Merriwell?"

"Fellows, we have struck a mystery."

"I thought you had solved the mystery of the monster of Devil Island."

"I solved the mystery of the monster's identity and discovered the creature was the hunchback, Put Wiley, in disguise."

"But he came near ending your career."

"With the aid of the cock-eyed man, whose name, I have learned, since returning to Green's Landing, is Dan Hicks. I could have handled Wiley alone, but Hicks came to his aid and caught me by the throat, grasping me from behind. Together they knocked me out and tied me to the old railroad on the island. But for Browning's wonderful efforts in ripping up the rails, they would have succeeded in their attempt to send a flat car loaded with granite down the track, and I must have been cut in two. I tell you, fellows, it was a wonderful sight to see Bruce pry up those rails and send that car, granite and all, into the water. Ah, Browning!" exclaimed Merriwell, his voice betraying his feeling despite his effort to keep it under control, "it prolonged my life when you were born strong."

"Oh, it wasn't much work to rip up those rails," said the big fellow, with an air of modesty. "You see, the spikes that held them were planted in rotten wood, for the ties are very old."

"You never moved half as fast before in your life, Browning," said Hodge. "You did get a hustle on then."

"I had to," grunted Bruce. "Saw there wasn't any time to loaf."

"You saved my life," declared Frank. "The identity of the monster is solved, but the mystery of the island is as deep as ever."

"Shust vot do I mean ven you said dot?" asked Hans.

"Why should the hunchback rig himself up in that horrible manner and try to frighten persons away from the island?"

"There is a mystery," confessed Diamond.

"Certainly it is," nodded Merriwell. "Discovering the identity of the monster has not seemed to clear things up much. It has added to my curiosity."

"Berhaps id peen a healthy thing to stayed away dot islands from," observed Hans, sagely.

"Whatever the secret of the island may be," said Frank, "those men are ready to commit murder in order to guard it."

"They came near succeeding," said Hodge.

"It looks as if they have succeeded."

"Eh? How?"

"You remember the story of the Boston man who was landed on the island and never seen afterward."

"The cock-eyed man told that story."

"Yes."

"Perhaps that was a part of his plan to scare us away from the island—to keep us from going there."

"Perhaps so; but you remember he told us there was a grave on the island and the headstone was marked, 'Sacred to the memory of Rawson Denning.'"

"Yes. More of his plan to scare us away."

"The grave is there."

"What?"

"Sure."

"You—you——"

"Found it. Bruce was with me. We came out into a dismal glade in the heart of the black woods, and there was the grave and the headstone with the words upon it."

"Jingoes!"

Hodge stared at Frank a few moments, and then asked:

"Do you really believe the Boston man was murdered and buried in that grave?"

"Rawson was the name he gave, and the grave was found on the island after his strange disappearance. It seems probable enough that he is planted there."

"By Chorch!" exclaimed the Dutch boy, turning pale; "I don'd vant to monkey aroundt dot island all alone by yourself."

"Do you have any idea what the mystery of the island can be, Merriwell?" asked Hodge, eagerly.

"Of course I do not know any better than yourself, but I have a suspicion."

"What do you think?"

"Yaw!" cried Hans; "vat do I think?"

"I believe some kind of unlawful business is carried on there, and for that reason the criminals are using every means to frighten away anybody who might prove troublesome or inquisitive."

"Then will it pay us to be troublesome and inquisitive?" said Diamond.

"That is the very matter we are here to discuss. The girls and Miss Gale are comfortably located here at Green's Landing, and they will be able to amuse themselves for a day or two. If we wish, we can run down to Devil Island every morning and return here every night. I am willing to confess that my curiosity is aroused, and I would give something to solve the mystery of the place; but I do not wish to drag any of my friends into danger where they do not wish to go."

"I hardly think there is one in this party who will not stand by you wherever you go, Merriwell," said Bart, quickly. "You can count on me."

"I knew it."

"And me," grunted Browning.

"I thought so."

"Und I vos anodder!" exclaimed Hans.

"That is good."

"Don't think for a moment that I will go back on you," said Diamond. "I started on this cruise with the intention of staying with you, and I shall."

"Good. That part of it is settled. I have said that the mystery of that island belongs to me, and I will solve it. I mean to keep my word."

"Vale," said Hans, "I never knowed yourseluf ven you didn'd keep your vord, Vrankie. But maype you don'd vant to took some more chances uf peing runned ofer a railroat on?"

"Hardly. We have a fair breeze. Shall we run down to the island this forenoon?"

"Come on," said Diamond, suddenly. "If we have a mystery to solve, the sooner we get after it the better."

There was a thump against the side of the yacht, and a voice called:

"Ahoy on board there! I want to see the captain of this craft."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MAN IN GRAY.

When Frank reached the deck he saw a jolly-looking little man in gray clothes coming over the rail. Beside the yacht lay a dory, in which sat a fisherman who had rowed the old man off to the *White Wings*.

"Dang a dory," exclaimed the little man in gray, with a chuckle. "She may be all right to row round in on a troubled sea, but she'll tip quicker'n scat if you step up on the side of her. This one near spilt me into the drink after I was alongside here. What I want is a flat-bottomed scow or raft. I hope this yacht is good and steady, for I'm going to take a cruise in her."

"You are?" gasped Frank, smiling. "Well, that is cool."

"Of course," nodded the little man, brightly. "Everything around me is cool, even to my name, and that is Cooler—Caleb Cooler."

"I like your nerve!"

"I thought you would, though I have seen people who didn't like it. Some folks are fussy—here, my man," turning to the boatman, "here is the fifty cents I promised you if you would set me on board here. I shan't want you any more. You may go."

"Hold on," came firmly from Frank, who also spoke to the man in the dory. "I think Mr. Cooler is mistaken. He will want you—to take him ashore again."

"Oh, no—no, indeed," chuckled Mr. Cooler, pleasantly. "You are quite wrong, young man. I am going to Devil Island with you."

"The—the—dickens you are?" exclaimed Frank. He came near using another word in the place of "dickens," for now he was literally astounded.

"Oh, yes," nodded the queer old man, still laughing. "I won't be a bit of bother. In fact, you will find me mighty jolly company. Tickle me gently, and I am more fun than a variety show. I have been paid in my day to travel around with folks just to amuse them. I'm sure death to the blues, and I am better than all the doctor's medicine you ever took."

"Well, I haven't the blues, and I am not in need of medicine."

"Say you so? You're in luck. You do look cheerful and healthy, that's a fact."

"But I have some curiosity."

"Glad to know you are troubled by something."

"Yes, I am curious to know how you happened to come aboard this yacht in order to get to Devil Island."

"Why, aren't you going there?"

"Perhaps so; but how do you know it?"

"Feller told me so."

"When?"

"Little while ago."

"Where?"

"Up at Jobbins' store."

"What kind of a fellow? How did he look?"

"Looked as if some chap had swatted him with a brick right on the bridge of his proboscis, for it had a strong list to starboard, and one of his eyes was keeping watch at the end of it, while the other eye was on guard to see that no more bricks were coming in that direction."

"The man with the cock-eye!" exclaimed Merriwell.

"Sure as you live!" cried Hodge, who had followed Frank to the deck. "It's Hicks."

"So that scoundrel has dared venture into Green's Landing so soon," said Frank, grimly. "And he knows he did not succeed in his foul attempt to murder me!"

"Eh?" exclaimed the little man, in surprise. "What's that? Murder? Did he——"

"Never mind," interrupted Frank, eying the man in gray, as if seeking to read his thoughts. "I have a little affair to settle with Mr. Hicks, and the worst recommendation you could have is the fact that he sent you here. He simply surmised that I contemplated returning to Devil Island."

"But don't you?"

"That is my affair, Mr. Cooler. In no case do I propose to carry passengers."

"I am not passengers. I am simply a passenger. I won't bother you a bit. Even if you are not going to the island, I'll pay you to land me there."

"You seem very anxious to reach the place."

"I am. I am in a bigger hurry than a dog with a package of firecrackers tied to his tail. It's a matter of business. No time is to be lost."

"You will have to seek another mode of conveyance."

"What? Now, you are not in earnest! Ha! ha! He! he! I see that you are something of a joker. It's all right, all right. I tumble to your game."

"And I think I tumble to your game, Mr. Cooler," said Merry, sternly. "You can have the information you want."

"The information?" repeated the queer old man, in apparent consternation. "Why, it can't be that you are connected with the Eastern Bay Land Syndicate?"

"I do not know anything about the Eastern Bay Land Syndicate."

"What a relief!" sighed Mr. Cooler. "Really, you gave me quite a start. But I am ahead of them. If the island is as represented, I will secure it. This part of the Bay is bound to become famous with summer people."

"I do not know what you are trying to give me, but I tell you I am onto your little game. Go back to Mr. Dave Hicks and tell him I am going to Devil Island. I have met him there once; tell him I shall be pleased to meet him there again."

"But I do not want to go back to Mr. Hicks," protested the little man. "I want to go to Devil Island with you."

"You can't go."

"I must. Young man, I will pay you any——"

"I do not want your pay. You came aboard by that boat. Get into it and return ashore. If you are so anxious to get to Devil Island, you will find plenty of fishermen who will set you on there if you pay them for it."

"You are wrong. All the fishermen seem afraid to go near it. I tried several of them this morning, and then the man with the broken nose and the bent eye told me you were going down that way. That is why I am here."

The little man in gray seemed very much in earnest now, but Frank had made up his mind and was not to be turned.

"Get into that boat, sir," he commanded. "We can't take you to Devil Island."

"You'll have to," said Mr. Cooler, stubbornly. "I am here, and I am going with you."

"I rather think not," drawled Bruce Browning, who had been brought to the deck at last by the sound of talk.

The big fellow picked the little man up by the collar, carried him to the rail and dropped him into the dory, saying to the boatman:

"Take him ashore immediately, or he will have to swim ashore, for I shall throw him overboard if he boards the *White Wings* again."

The queer little man in gray looked astounded and then amused. He reached up and pulled his coat collar round into place, and stared at Bruce, beginning to chuckle, as if the whole thing was a very entertaining joke.

"He! he!" he laughed. "Excuse me. Can't help it. Very funny. You chaps act like you thought I'd bite. I won't bite. Never bit a man in all my life. However, I see you are determined to go away without me, and I'll not try to force myself upon you. If there is anything I detest it is a man who makes himself obnoxious by forcing himself on others. He! he!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Hans. "I vos der funniest man you efer seen, ain'd id? Vale! vale! vale! Der next dime you come aproad der *Vite Vings* you hat petter stayed ashore."

"Now, that is more than I can stand," cried the little man, trying to look fierce. "No Irishman can talk to me like that."

"Vat?" shouted Hans. "Who vos I callin' an Irishman? You petter peen careful ur you vill got me indo drouple! I vant you to understood I nefer peen an Irishman in mein life!"

"I don't wonder you deny your nationality," said Mr. Cooler. "But you cannot deceive anyone. That mug and that brogue will betray anywhere that you are Irish to the bone."

Hans began to jump up and down excitedly, shaking his fist at the little man.

"You shust safed my life py geddin' off this yotch vrom!" he yelled. "I murdered der last man vat caldt you Irish! Uf I efer seen you again you vill punch mein face off, und don'd you vorgot id!"

"Oh, keep cool, Patsey," advised the man in gray.

Now a wild howl issued from Dunnerwust's throat, and he rushed to the rail, leaning over to shake his fist as near his tomentor as possible.

"Uf you dare to caldt me Batsey aken you vill gif me a lickens!" he wildly threatened. "I von't pe caldt Batsey! Batsey vasn't your name, so don'd you dare to caldt me dot! I vos porn in Sharmeny."

"What part of Ireland is that in?" mildly inquired the little man. "I should say by your brogue that you came from County Cork, or somewhere in the south of Ireland."

"Oh, gif me someding to murter him mit!" shrieked Hans, like a maniac. "Gif me a gun! I vill shot him on der spot, or somevere near id! Gif me a gun!"

Then he made a wild rush for the cabin, still howling for a gun, and fell with a great clatter down the companion way.

"Take my advice, Mr. Cooler," said Frank, who was laughing now, "get as far away from this yacht as possible before Hans comes on deck again. He has gone for a gun, and there are several below, all of them loaded."

"As I do not care to be filled full of lead, I will take your advice," said the man in gray, calmly. "Irishmen are very quick-tempered, and I see I have ruffled this one somewhat. However, he proved very amusing for a short time. Good-day, Mr. Merriwell. I hope to see you later. In fact, I think I shall—Bill, you may set me ashore."

Bill, the boatman, was somewhat nervous, and he rowed away from the yacht as hastily as possible.

The dory was not many lengths away before Hans came howling to the deck, wildly flourishing one of Merry's shotguns.

"Shown me to him!" yelled Hans, almost frothing at the mouth. "Vere vos der man vot caldt you an Irishmans? He vill shoot me in a minute uf I see heem! Vere he vos?"

Then as he saw the dory pulling away, he rushed to the side of the yacht and prepared to shoot, but Frank seized him and took the gun away in a twinkling, saying, sternly:

"Are you crazy, Hans? Do you want to be hanged for murder? I never saw you this way before."

"Dot man caldt me an Irishmans!"

"Well?"

"He caldt me Batsey?"

"A very natural mistake, considering that you have a face that is strongly Irish in its general appearance and you have associated with Barney Mulloy so much that you have acquired his brogue."

Hans gasped and staggered.

"Vot do you hear?" he faintly said. "Uf dot peen a fact, I vos retty to shuffle off der mortal pucket und kick der coil! I don'd vant to lif no longer ven I got to lookin' an Irishman like und dalkin' so I mistook volks for von! My heart vos proken!"

Then, sobbing violently, he again staggered toward the cabin and once more fell down the companion way.

Laughing heartily, Frank followed him, and found Hans lying where he had fallen below.

"Are you hurt?" asked Merry, anxiously.

"Yaw!" sobbed Hans.

"Bad?"

"Yaw!"

"Where?"

"All ofer."

"Can't you get up?"

"I don't vant to got ub. I vant to die! Id vos my heart dot vos hurt. Oh, shust to vancy dot my vace looks like an Irishmans! Mein Gott! id vos awful!"

"Perhaps you can have your face changed, so do not take it so much to heart."

"Now you peen shoking."

"No; in New York there is a man who advertises to make over faces—to change them completely. It is possible that he might be able to remove the Irish look from your face."

Hans sat up.

"Py Chorch!" he cried. "Uf dot peen a vact, I vos goin' to had a new vace shust as soon as you can! Id peen der only thing vot vill kept me a brison oudt uf. I shall murder der next man dot caldt me Irish!"

"Well, you can have your face built over when you get back to New York, so don't take it so much to heart."

Hans got up after a while and dragged himself to a seat, while Frank replaced the gun in the strap from which the Dutch lad had taken it.

Browning came loafing down into the cabin, followed by Hodge.

"What do you make of that queer little man, Merriwell?" asked Bruce, flinging himself down lazily.

"I sized him up as a spy," said Frank. "He was sent off to find out if we intended to return to Devil Island. He found out."

"He certainly is an odd character."

"As queer as anything I have seen down this way. Somehow he did not seem like a native."

"No native to him," said Bart, as if that point was settled in his mind.

"He did have a crust," said Bruce.

"A crust!" cried Frank, laughing as he remembered what had taken place. "Why, I never saw anything like it! Came on board and calmly informed me he was going to Devil Island with us, and he would not think of leaving when I told him we did not want him."

"And he was not even ruffled when I dropped him over into the dory. He is well named, for a cooler customer I never saw."

"And he said he would see you again, Merry."

"I noticed that."

"But he didn't seem much of a desperado," yawned Bruce.

"Appearances are deceptive."

"Yaw!" muttered Hans. "Don peen a vact somepody took me an Irishman vor! Dot vos der plow dot gif me der lifer gomblaint mit my heart in!"

"I don't suppose, Merry," said Bart, "that you will defer your visit to Devil Island because of what lately happened?"

"I should say not!" exclaimed Frank. "I am beginning to get warmed up. If they but knew it, somebody is doing the very things to spur me on to solve the mystery."

"Hadn't we better leave Diamond here at the landing to look after the girls?" said Bruce. "It's plain he does not wish to waste the time to go down to Devil Island."

"It is plain you do not know anything about it, sir!" said Jack, sharply, as he stepped into the cabin. "I am ready to go, and the sooner we start the better I shall like it. If we are to investigate,

I am in favor of getting at the investigation without delay."

"We will get away as soon as possible," said Frank. "All hands on deck."

In a very short time the *White Wings* was running out of the harbor, headed for Devil Island.

From the shore more than one pair of eyes were watching her with looks that boded no good to her inquisitive and daring owner.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CLAMBAKE.

As Bold Island harbor was sheltered and the yacht could lay close in to the shore of Devil Island and be so hidden that she would escape observation to a large extent, Frank ran in there, choosing that anchorage in preference to the one in the cove on the other side of the island of mystery.

It was near low tide when Merry ran in there, and he did not stop till the keel of the *White Wings* stuck fast in the mud at the bottom.

"I thought you were getting in too near," said Hodge.

"Not getting in near enough to suit me," declared Frank. "The bottom is soft here, and the yacht would sit up straight in the mud if the tide ran out so that she was left high and dry. It is low water now. At high water she will float all right and have any amount of water under her keel."

As soon as everything was attended to on the yacht, Frank cried:

"Come on, fellows, let's row over to Bold Island and see if we can find some of her famous clams. We may not get another opportunity like this."

"Oh, what's the use," yawned Browning, sleepily. "Too much trouble. I'm going below and turn in."

"I will stay to look after the yacht while Browning gets his nap," said Hodge.

Diamond was ready to go with Frank, and Merry asked Hans to come along. They had purchased a clam hoe at the Landing, so they were prepared to hunt the shy and retiring clam.

"Vale," said Hans, sadly, "I vill go mit you, poys, but I don'd peen aple to took no bleasure mit der shob since I vos caldt an Irishman. I don'd pelief you vill efer got ofer dot."

He looked very sad and downcast, as if he were nearly, heartbroken, causing Merry to laugh softly.

The three got into the boat and pulled over to Bold Island, where they began searching for the clams that have made the island famous throughout Penobscot Bay.

It was some time before they could find any clams, for the beach had been dug over and over till it did not seem there was a place left untouched. At last Frank turned over a large, flat rock, and down in the sand beneath it they struck their first clam. That clam, measured in its shell, was exactly seven inches long and a little more than five inches wide, while the shell itself was almost as white as the shell of an egg.

When Merry turned up this clam, Hans staggered and sat down on the sand with great violence, and there he sat, staring and muttering:

"Vot der tyrful vos dot? Uf dot don'd peen der varter uf all glams, you vos a liar! I don'd pelief I efer seen anyding like dot pefore in all your porn tays!"

"Hurrah!" cried Merry. "Here's proof the fishermen down this way are not all liars, or do not lie about everything. They told me this was the kind of game we should find here."

"But this must be unusual," said Diamond. "Can't all of them be like this."

"They say so."

"Well, they cannot be very good to eat. They must be too tough."

"On the contrary, I have heard they are splendid eating. Here is another! By Jove, it's fully as large as the first!"

Hans sat still on the sand and stared straight at the first clam turned out. Frank looked at him and saw the Dutch boy appeared on the verge of bursting into tears.

"What's the matter, Dunnerwust?" he asked.

"I vos peginnin' to seen things queer," replied Hans. "Vot do I think? Vale, uf dot glam don'd look like der mug an Irishman of, you vos a liar! Uf I kept on seein' things like dot to remindt me vot dot man in gray said, id vill drife me to trink ur to sluicide!"

They had brought along a bucket, and it did not take long to fill it with these large clams. Then they emptied it into the bottom of the boat and found another bucketful before stopping. With those they returned to the boat.

"We will go ashore on Devil Island, where there are plenty of rocks of all kinds, and seaweed, and there we'll have a clambake," said Merry. "There is wood enough on Devil Island, too, and it is nearer to the yacht."

The sound of their oars brought Hodge on deck.

"What luck?" he asked, as they approached.

"Great luck," answered Frank. "Get in, and we will take you ashore over yonder, where we are going to have a clam roast."

The clam hoe was passed up to Bart, and then he swung down into the boat, and soon all were ashore on the island of mystery.

Frank began constructing an oven amid the rocks, sending the others for fuel and seaweed. It did not take long to make preparations for the bake, and soon a roaring fire was blazing, as a lot of dry wood had been found near the deserted camps on that side of the island.

Frank took the clams down to the water and washed them carefully, a bucketful at a time, turning them all into the hollow of a large rock near the fire.

As the fire grew hotter, Merry threw stones into it and kept it roaring. None of the stones were smaller than a man's fist, and some were larger than a man's head.

"Why are you doing that?" asked Hodge.

"You will see when the time comes," smiled Frank.

Hans sat on a rock and stared into the fire, his air of dejection being extremely ludicrous to behold.

"Come, come, forget it!" exclaimed Merry. "Cheer up and be like yourself."

"I can nefer peen like yourseluf again so long as I had this face onto me," sighed Hans. "Id peen a vrightful thing to think dot I might peen misdooken any dime an Irishmans vor! Dunder und blitzens! I vos all proken ub in peesness ofer dot!"

It was useless to try to cheer him up. The more they talked to him the sadder and more downcast he looked.

After a while Frank had burned out nearly all the wood, and nothing was left but a dying fire. He did not wait for it to die down, but raked away everything but the red-hot coals and some of the stones in the fireplace of stone. Then he took the wet seaweed and threw it into the fireplace, where it began to sizzle and steam.

"In with the clams, boys!" he cried, as he began to toss the big fellows in upon the seaweed.

They helped him, and soon all the clams were scattered on the steaming seaweed. Then he covered them with more seaweed, and, aided by the others, piled the hot rocks he had drawn out of the fireplace on top of this mass of seaweed.

What a sizzling and steaming there was, and what a delightful odor came to their nostrils! Quickly Frank had another fire going, and by this he kept hot a mass of rocks he had heated in the first fire, but had not piled upon the seaweed. In this way, by the time the rocks on the weed were cooled off, more rocks were ready to take their place, and the clams were kept steaming.

After a time, Merriwell announced that the clams must be nearly done. He sent Hans off to the yacht to bring Browning ashore. The Dutch boy found it difficult to arouse the big Yale man, but Browning was fond of clams, and he came along quickly enough once he was fully awake and understood what awaited him.

As the boat reached shore, Merriwell began to rake the rocks off the seaweed.

"Ye gods!" grunted Bruce, sniffing the air as he approached. "What heavenly aroma is this that greets my nostrils?"

When the clams were uncovered and he saw them with their huge shells yawning and the meat within looking white and tempting, he declared he was very happy to be living.

"Gather round, fellows," said Frank, "Capture your clams and devour them. There will be no ceremony in this case."

Then, as Browning fished out a clam and held it triumphantly aloft, a man came whistling softly down the bank, joined the group without a word, raked out a clam and extracted it from the shell, being the first to taste the feast Frank had prepared.

It was the man in gray, Mr. Caleb Cooler!

"Yum!" exclaimed the man in gray. "That clam is hot!"

"Well, you are cool enough!" said Frank Merriwell.

"Oh, I'm Cooler," chuckled the queer old fellow. "Told you so some time ago. Howdy, boys. Fine day, isn't it? Think we will have some more weather? Or don't you know 'weather' we will or not?"

Bruce Browning arose to his feet and removed his coat.

"That's one way to keep cool at a clambake," grinned the man in gray. "What are you going to do?"

"Mop up the beach with you," answered Browning, quietly. "I am going to teach you a lesson."

"Teach is correct as you applied it," said Mr. Cooler. "Down this way I find people say 'learn' for 'teach.' Just think how bad it would have sounded had you said you were going to learn me a lesson."

He raked out another clam, but dropped it, shaking his hand and blowing on his fingers.

"Even though I am Cooler, I find some things are warm enough," he murmured. "That clam must have been near a fire. I dote on clams, baked, boiled, fried or frizzled, it don't make a dern bit of difference. Whenever I get an opportunity I go gunning for clams myself. I think it is great sport to shoot a clam on the wing. With a good bird gun and a dog, I presume it is an easy thing to bag clams around here?"

He was not paying the least attention to the big Yale man, and Browning's threat to "wipe up the beach" with him seemed forgotten.

Hans was glaring at the man in gray, while strange, gurgling sounds came from his throat. All at once he gave a yell, rolled over backward and scrambled to his feet.

"Don't touch him, Pruce!" warned the Dutch boy. "I peen goin' to smash dot veller myself!"

"Ah there, Irish," chirped Mr. Cooler. "You will catch cold in your liver if you let the wind blow down your throat that way. Have a clam and let it stop that orifice in your countenance."

This made Hans so angry that he danced wildly and began to choke and gurgle in his endeavor to shriek forth something, but the man in gray did not even look at him.

There was something extremely ludicrous about it all, and Frank was forced to laugh. When he saw Merry laughing, Hans seemed to lose all his strength, and he dropped down on a rock, completely knocked out, even though he had not been touched.

Browning was grinning now, for he saw the humor of the situation, and he could not help admiring the nerve of the queer old fellow.

"Look here, Mr. Cooler," said Frank, "who invited you to help yourself?"

"Eh? Oh, why, I didn't need an invitation to join old friends like you chaps. I knew you would be glad to see me."

"We are," grunted Browning, "tickled to death."

"Then sit right up and take hold, boys," chuckled Mr. Cooler. "Catch your clam and peel him. We'll have a real jolly time."

He raked another one off the seaweed.

"How did you get here?" asked Merry.

"I didn't walk, because I couldn't. Had to hire a fellow to bring me down, and then he didn't want to get near enough to the island to set me ashore. Wanted me to swim. Charged me five dollars, too. Never mind; the company will have to pay it."

"What company?"

"Why, the company I represent."

"But what company do you represent?"

"The greatest land improvement and development company on earth. You must know the one I mean, for it is the only one. It is the Bay Islands Land Company. The Eastern Bay Land Company has sprouted in competition to us, but we purpose to nip the rival concern in the bud. I am here to investigate such islands as may eventually become summer resorts and obtain options on them when I can get at the real owners. That's one great difficulty—to find the real owners. Some of them do not seem to have any owners, and yet sheep are pastured on them summer and winter. Some of them are owned by the government. Down at Vinal Haven I heard about Devil Island. They said there was some sort of a mystery here. An island with a mystery is certain to be a great attraction for summer visitors. I made a skip for Devil Island to see if it had any attractions beside the mystery. Had hard work getting here. Nobody at Green's Landing seemed to feel like dropping me here, you refused to do so, I couldn't walk. But I didn't get excited. The more difficulties beset my path the cooler I became. I am here, gentlemen, and I'm glad I came. I admire clams. They are fine. I think these clams are the finest I ever tasted. Have some, boys."

Mr. Cooler seemed to regret the time he had spent in talk, for he made a fierce dive at the clams and raked out two of them.

Merriwell's friends all looked at him to see what he would do under the circumstances. Frank was smiling, but there was a look of doubt on his face. For once in his life, he seemed in a quandary. There was something about this little, chuckling, jolly old man that seemed to forbid anyone to do him personal violence. Bruce Browning felt that. He realized that he would feel ashamed of himself if he should give the old fellow a shaking. And it was plain that Cooler could not be frightened away in any ordinary manner. Nothing seemed to alarm him.

"Sit up and eat some clams, fellows," said Frank, quietly. "Let him fill up, and then we'll tie a big bowlder to his neck and sink him out here in the harbor."

"Hum!" coughed the man in gray. "That's right, young man—let me fill my sack with these clams before you put me to soak. Perhaps you had better let me rest a while after that, too, for I never like to take a bath after a full meal. It isn't healthy. The best physicians condemn the practice."

So, with the exception of Hans, they again gathered around the clams and started to enjoy the feast. Hans retired by himself and sat on a flat rock, muttering and looking savage. At times he would shake his fist at the back of the man in gray.

Mr. Cooler seemed to have a remarkable ability to talk and devour clams at the same time. As Browning afterward expressed it, he "talked a blue streak." He told them he was a great traveler, he had been all over the United States, all over the world.

"Why," he said, "in Berlin I appeared at court."

"How much was the fine?" asked Frank, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Young man," exclaimed Cooler, "you astonish me. To look at you, I would not suppose you could be frivolous. I am slightly that way myself. Can't help it; born that way. Always see something humorous in everything. It's better than medicine; it keeps the liver in a healthy condition. Now, clams are hard to digest, but taken in connection with laughter and jollity they digest much better. There is enough sadness in the world if we do not go around with our faces drawn down. Be jolly. That's my motto."

There was something infectious in his light spirits and careless air. Despite themselves the boys found they were growing interested in this queer old fellow.

Frank studied Mr. Cooler carefully. Had he not felt certain that the man was playing a part, he would have enjoyed the old fellow's chatter. But Frank could see beneath the surface, and he was absolutely satisfied that Mr. Cooler was not what he represented himself to be. Frank had never heard of the Bay Islands Land Company; he did not believe there was such a company in existence.

If Cooler was lying, why was he doing so? What was his object in attempting to force himself upon them? Why had he come to the island in such a manner?

Frank had decided that Cooler was a spy and he had been set upon them by the very ones who were so determined to drive them away from that island. In that case, this light-hearted, careless old fellow was connected with a gang of criminals who did not hesitate to do murder in order to conceal their crimes.

Mr. Cooler did not stop eating clams till the last one was devoured, and he disposed of that himself.

"Ah!" he sighed, drawing back and finding a comfortable position, where he could sit with his back resting against a bowlder. "Now, I do feel good! Young gentlemen, I am glad you came. Accept my congratulations on this remarkably successful clambake. You have done a good job; I have done another. My stomach has not been in the best possible condition lately. I've been living at home. My wife cooks. Six months ago she was a magnificent, a celestial cook! Oh, how beautifully she could broil a beefsteak! But, alas! Also alack! She got the bicycle craze; she bought a wheel. Now she is an inveterate scorcher."

He took a pipe out of his pocket and began to fill it, chattering away in a jolly manner as he did so. He seemed inclined to do all the talking.

"Doesn't your jaw get tired at times?" inquired Frank.

"Eh?" came in surprise from the little man. "Why?"

"I should think it would, you talk so much."

"He! he! Ho! ho! Wait a minute. Ha! ha!—knew there was another way to laugh if I could think of it. Jaw get tired? My dear young gentleman, if you had a wife like mine, you would consider it a privilege to talk occasionally. I do not get an opportunity when I am at home. When I get away from home, I make up for lost time. Haw! haw!—came near forgetting that method of laughing. Don't mind me. I know I am something of a chinning machine, but I am harmless. Why, I wouldn't harm a—a—a lion."

He lighted the pipe and puffed away a few moments, talking a streak while he smoked. Frank was considering the advisability of pinning him down and demanding to know his real reason for being there, when, of a sudden, the little fellow jumped up spryly as a boy, exclaiming:

"This won't do. I must complete my tour of investigation. I must attend to business. I must look

the entire island over and be ready to leave when that man comes back for me. Young gentlemen, I thank you for your hospitality. I wish I might stop longer, but, unfortunately, I cannot. So long, so long, so long."

Browning made a move, as if to stop the man, but Frank gave a sign to let him go. Mr. Cooler scrambled nimbly up the bank, turned and waved his hand with a flirting motion, and then vanished into the bushes.

"Fellows," spoke Frank, quickly, "I'm going to follow him. I must do it alone. I'm armed. I can take care of myself. But if I do not return in an hour, look for me."

Then he sprang up the bank after the mysterious man in gray.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WHISPERING GLADE.

Frank had learned the art of trailing from Indian guides in the West, and, for a white person, he was an expert. As a shadower, he had the skill of one who had been all his life in the business.

He did not let the man in gray get far away before approaching near enough so Mr. Cooler could be seen occasionally as he slipped through the bushes.

But it was not difficult to follow the queer old man, for Cooler did not seem to imagine for a moment that he was shadowed. He walked swiftly, puffing away at his pipe, and the smell of burning tobacco came back to the nostrils of the pursuing lad.

After a little time the man struck the path that runs round the island and through the old granite quarry. Then he walked still more swiftly, but Frank also found less trouble in following.

Soon the quarry was reached. Cooler passed straight through this and struck the track which led down the incline to the sheds near the wharf.

Now Frank was not able to pursue him so closely; he was forced to linger far behind, for to keep close meant certain discovery should the man look back.

Still he followed. The track ran through a cut and wound slowly along a bank, to one side of which lay the water.

Frank reached the cut and saw the man in gray disappear beyond some bowlders. A moment later Merry was at the bowlders, peering down the track toward the still retreating form of the little man, over whose shoulders at regular intervals curled blue puffs of smoke.

Frank had expected that the man would be suspicious and would look round frequently. He was astonished when the man did not look round at all.

"He doesn't act like a criminal," Frank decided. "He hasn't the air of a criminal. He walks along as if he had not a care in all the wide world and did not fear to have all his actions watched. It is strange—very strange."

Already Merry had learned that men who commit crimes betray themselves by certain peculiar movements. The thief unconsciously assumes the pose of a man picking a pocket, or taking what does not belong to him. The burglar crouches in his walk and steals along catlike. The guilty man often casts sly backward glances over his shoulder. It is rare for him to have the air and manner of innocence.

But this little man in gray, when, without doubt, he believed himself to be alone, was still the same care-free, careless old fellow.

He disappeared into one of the sheds at the end of the railroad. Frank had slipped yet a little nearer and watched from a place of hiding.

Five minutes passed, and then the man in gray and another man came out of that shed and took the path that led toward the old boarding house.

Frank uttered a low exclamation.

"Is it possible?" he muttered. "I believe I know that fellow with him."

He watched the companion of the man in gray. As they passed from view, he again muttered:

"I do know him! He is Dan Hicks, the cock-eyed man! That settles it! Mr. Caleb Cooler is just what I thought—he is one of the gang, and he came here to spy upon us!"

Frank ran lightly down the track, hidden by the bank beyond which the men had disappeared. He stooped as he ran. Ahead of him he saw the point where Browning had pried up the rails and sent a flat car, loaded with granite, into the water, thus saving Frank's life. He shuddered as he thought of his sensations during those terrible moments of peril while he was bound to the track and could hear the car rumbling toward him.

The bank grew lower till at last he could not keep hidden behind it if he ran farther down the track. Then he flung himself flat on the bank and crawled up till he could peer over.

The two men were walking toward the distant boarding house. Hicks was talking excitedly, while Cooler still smoked. Hicks looked back suspiciously, but the man in gray did not turn his head.

They passed the house where the overseer had lived when he was on the island with the crew of men who worked in the quarry—they were again hidden from view.

Over the bank scrambled Frank. Keeping the house between him and the men, he ran swiftly forward.

In a short time he reached the house. He paused to listen, his heart thumping loudly.

He could hear nothing.

Then he slipped round the house. He carefully peered round each corner before advancing. At the second corner he halted, for again he could see the men he was shadowing.

They were near the old building in which Frank had been struck down. The man in gray seemed to be asking questions. He was surveying the surroundings as if he had never inspected them before.

For fifteen minutes they stood there talking, and then they went into the building.

Frank decided to return to his friends. He quickly darted up an incline toward some cedars, which he saw grew thicker and thicker higher up the slope. Soon he was hidden by the bushes.

Then Frank went forward more slowly, taking pains to keep in the bushes. Up above was a ledgy height. He came to it after a time. He found a position where he could look down into the old quarry. From that position he could see the overturned car and the granite which lay in the water at the foot of the bank down which it had jumped. He could also look far out over the island-dotted bay. He could see small boats in the distance, he could see white sails, he could see the sunshine reflected on the blue water. In the midst of this mass of water and islands lay Devil Island, shrouded by mystery, lonely and desolate, shunned by man.

Once before he had strongly felt the air of desolation that seemed to hang about the place, and now the same uncanny sensation was creeping over him again. Somehow it seemed that he was far from men, far from life, lost in a lonely waste of water, cast on an uncanny island.

He shook himself, trying to throw off the feeling. He wondered why it should come upon him at that time, and then he began to remember how he had first felt it once before when near that very spot.

"The glade—the grave in the woods!"

He muttered the words, realizing that the woods were close at hand. They lay there dark and gloomy. He must pass through them in order to reach the *White Wings*, or he must retrace his steps and take the path. To do the latter would be sure to expose him to the men he had watched.

But Frank did not wish to turn back. There was something fascinating as well as repellent about the woods. Down there was a grave. At the head of the grave was a stone. On that stone was chiseled:

"Sacred to the Memory of Rawson Denning."

Denning, like Frank Merriwell, had been inquisitive. He had attempted to solve the mystery of the island, and he had disappeared. Afterward the grave had been found on the island. No one had dared open that grave to see if the body of the missing man from Boston lay within.

Frank felt a desire to look at that grave again. He went down toward it, entering the thick woods. Every step that he advanced seemed to cause the feeling to grow stronger upon him. The woods were silent and deserted. It did not seem possible that there could be a thing of life other than Frank anywhere within them.

All at once, with astonishing suddenness, he came out into the opening and there before him was the grave, the headstone gleaming gray in the dim light.

Frank paused. Involuntarily he listened. He had not forgotten how, on his other visit to the spot, both he and Browning had seemed to hear a mysterious whisper in the air, had seemed to hear a rustle down in that grave, as if the murdered man turned restlessly. Without knowing why he did so, Frank listened again.

"Look!"

He started, for it seemed that he had heard that whisper. He glanced all around.

Silence in the woods. Not even the rustle of a leaf. How lonely it was!

"Look!"

Again that word, coming from he knew not where.

At what should he look? What did it mean?

Then he told himself that it was all his imagination—he had heard no whispered word. He advanced toward the grave; he stood beside it.

"Look!"

Was it imagination? This time the whisper sounded amazingly clear and distinct.

"Look at what?"

In spite of himself, he spoke the words aloud. He did not expect an answer, and he gasped for breath when it came:

"The stone!"

A quiver ran over Frank Merriwell's body. Of all the mysteries on this island, the mystery of this black whispering glade in the woods was the greatest.

He bent forward and looked at the stone. There were fresh chips on the mound, and at a glance he saw that the name "Rawson Denning" had been chiseled out. Below it another name had been cut into the stone, so that the inscription now read:

"Sacred to the Memory of Frank Merriwell."

CHAPTER XXV.

SEARCHING FOR FRANK.

As time passed and Frank did not return, the boys began to grow restless and anxious.

"I don't like it," declared Diamond, pacing the beach, upon which the tide was washing higher and higher as it came in. "I did not think much of letting him go away alone. We all know what happened to him once when he was alone on this island."

"He knows it himself," said Hodge; "and it is mighty hard work to catch him twice in the same trap."

"Oh, he's shrewd enough, but he can be overpowered by numbers. What do you think about it, Browning?"

Bruce was stretched on the sand, his head pillowed on his coat, which lay on a rock.

"I'm not going to think for an hour," he grunted. "Too much trouble."

"Oh, your laziness makes me disgusted!" snapped Diamond.

"Huah!" came in a puff from the big fellow. "Something seems to be gnawing you still."

"Poys," broke in Hans, who still looked sad and weary of living, "I made der biggest mistook uf your life ven I let Vrankie go away alone all py himseluf to chase dot liddle defil mit der saucy mouth—you heard me vawble!"

"If he had fallen into trouble, he would have done some shooting to let us know."

"But should we have heard it, Hodge?" asked Diamond.

"The island is not very large."

"I think it is pretty large, and I do not believe we could hear a gun fired on the other side even under favorable circumstances, and the circumstances are not favorable now."

"Why not?"

"Wind is blowing the wrong way."

"Didn't think of that."

The boys soon concluded that the shooting on the farther side of the island would not be heard by them, and straightway their anxiety increased.

Diamond was for starting out at once to look for Frank. He did not believe in waiting till the hour was up; but Hodge, who in his heart was the most anxious man of the party, objected to disobeying Merry's plain command.

"He told us to stay here an hour, and I shall stay here," said Bart.

"I suppose you would stay if you heard him shouting for help?" said the Virginian, hotly.

Bart flushed, for he did not fancy being spoken to in that tone of voice.

"I have always found it best to do just as Merriwell directs," said Hodge, stiffly. "If you wish to go search for him, you may go. I remain here twenty minutes longer."

Browning grunted his approval of the stand taken by Bart, and Jack gave them both a savage look.

Hans, who had refused to partake of the clams while the man in gray was present, was feeling very hungry, and that made him still more miserable.

"Oxcuse me, poys," he said. "I must made a raid der ship's brovisions ubon. I vill peen pack britty soon, if nod before."

Then he took the boat and rowed off to the yacht, where he lost no time in satisfying the cravings of his "inner man."

As the Dutch lad appeared on deck to row ashore again, Browning suddenly straightened up from his recumbent position. He had his watch in his hand, and the Dutch lad heard him say:

"The hour is up, Hodge."

Immediately Bart turned toward the yacht and shouted to Hans:

"Bring two of those guns ashore, and plenty of cartridges for them. Be lively about it! We are in a howling hurry."

"All righd!" shouted Hans, in return, as he plunged down the companion way.

He was not long in getting the guns and placing them in the boat, but when he reached the shore it was discovered that he had brought the wrong cartridges.

Then Hodge leaped into the boat and rowed out to the yacht for what was needed, returning in a few minutes.

Browning, however, usually careless and lazy, was fretting at the delay, for the big fellow remembered how, but a short time before, he had saved Frank's life by a hair's breadth. A delay of one minute in that case would have been fatal.

Bruce had some imagination, and he was beginning to picture Frank in all sorts of peril.

"Look here!" came fiercely from Diamond; "what are you chaps up to? Do not think for a moment that you are going to leave me behind! I'm going with you! I am going to help find Merriwell!"

"Of course, you can come if you insist," began Bruce.

"I do!" cut in Jack.

"But I scarcely think it advisable," the big fellow continued. "At least two of our party should remain and watch the yacht."

"Hans is enough for that."

"Don't you pelief I vos goin' to stayed here alone!" squawked the Dutch boy. "You don'd plaid dot tricks on me!"

Jack tried to argue with him—tried to convince him that there could be no danger in remaining on board the yacht; but Hans was obstinate, and the effort failed.

"You don'd fool me dot vay," he fiercely exclaimed. "I don'd stayed alone here, dot vos all."

It became plain that one of the boys would have to remain with him. Hodge had returned with the proper ammunition, and Jack was not supplied with a gun.

"Well," he said, fiercely, "I was the first one who wanted to go after Merriwell, but I seem to be left out of it. All right! I may come later. Perhaps you will need me."

"Perhaps so," confessed Bart, grimly. "Give us plenty of time to make a circuit of the island and return here. Then, if we have not appeared, you will have a reason for coming."

"Und I vill come mit him," put in Hans.

"Don't leave the *White Wings* unless you feel it is for the best. We are going prepared for trouble, and it will be a warm crowd that gets the best of us. Come on."

Away went Bart and the big Yale man, scrambling up the bank with their guns and quickly disappearing into the bushes.

Bart took the lead, but Browning was at his heels, swinging along with a stride that covered ground swiftly. There was a look of intense anxiety on the face of the giant.

Round the island to the quarry they went, down the railroad they hurried, and soon they were in sight of the spot where not many hours before Frank had nearly lost his life.

Browning drew a breath of relief when they did not find the mangled body of Merriwell stretched on the track. Somehow he had felt it was possible the wretches had captured Frank and completed their work at last, and he was dreading to walk down that railroad, fearing he should find the friend he loved and admired dead upon the rails.

"He is not here."

The words came from Hodge, and they were exactly what Bruce was thinking.

"No."

"Where shall we go now?"

"To the old boarding house." Away they went toward the building. It looked before them, the sunshine glinting on its windows, apparently utterly deserted. There was something forbidding in its appearance.

"We shall not find him there!"

Hodge spoke the words in full conviction that time would be wasted in looking through the building.

"Perhaps not," admitted Bruce; "but I know of no other place to look."

This was a confession that the big fellow would be "stumped" if no trace of Frank was found in the building.

They reached it, passed round to the back door by which admission had been obtained when Frank and Bruce visited it the first time, and there they hesitated.

The door was standing open.

"Just exactly as we left it!" exclaimed Browning. "No one has closed the door."

This seemed to surprise him. Hodge pushed forward and went in. Bruce followed.

The empty rooms echoed to their steps. Everywhere were cobwebs, dust, decay. Some of the windows were broken, some were boarded up.

From room to room they went, they ascended the stairs, they spoke in whispers.

The sun shone in upon the floor, but it brought nothing of cheer to the deserted building. It seemed like a mocking attempt to make the place look pleasant, an attempt that served to show its dreary desolation all the more plainly.

"He is not here," whispered Bart.

"The basement," came from Bruce. "It was there that I found him when he disappeared the other time."

Down the creaking stairs they went, Browning taking the lead now. The door at the head of the stairs leading into the dark basement was open.

"Just as we left it," declared the big fellow. "It was fastened in the first place, so Merry said. He had to force it open."

They lighted matches as they went down the stairs into the basement. The place was dismal enough, filled with old boxes and barrels.

"Frank!"

Browning called, causing Hodge to start and drop his match. Then they stood still and listened.

Squeak! squeak!

A rat scampered across the ground beneath their feet.

That was all. There was no answer to Browning's call.

"He is not here."

"No."

They lost little time in hastening up the stairs and getting out of the old building. As soon as they were in the open air they drew deep breaths, for they had been stifled and oppressed.

"Where next?" asked Bart.

"The house," said Bruce. "We must not go away without looking through that."

"Can we get in?"

"We will find a way—or make it!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

AGAIN AT THE GRAVE.

The door of the house would not open for them. Bruce threatened to burst it in with his shoulders, but Bart advised him not to do so, unless as a last resort.

Then a window was found that would open, and soon they had clambered in.

There was some furniture in the house, but still the place had the same dreary, deserted air of the big building they had just left.

Browning began by shouting Frank's name, to which cry there was no answer. The rising wind rattled a loose window.

It did not take them long to go through the house, to which there was no cellar, and they found nothing to indicate that a human being had entered the place for months.

As they stood outside, after getting out of the window and closing it behind them, they looked at each other in a helpless manner.

"What has become of him?" asked Bart, huskily.

"That is what I would like to know," confessed Bruce. "He seems to have disappeared completely."

"And the man in gray——"

"Is gone, too."

"Browning, I am afraid Merry was lured into some sort of a trap."

"So am I."

"Why should they take him in particular, and not harm any of the rest of us?"

"Perhaps their motto is one at a time."

"No. I believe Frank was selected out of our party as the one to get out of the way. He was determined to solve the mystery of this wretched island, and he was the leader of our party. The ruffians fancied that they would put an end to all trouble by getting him out of the way, for they fancied we would run at once."

Browning grunted, and Hodge went on swiftly and fiercely:

"By the eternal skies, they made a big mistake! I'll not leave this island till I know what has happened to Frank Merriwell, or I am dead!"

"Nor I," nodded Bruce. "I'm with you, old man."

"If he has been harmed," Bart went on, "the wretches who did the dirty work shall suffer! I swear it!"

"I'm another."

"We will bring them to justice!"

"Or kick the bucket trying."

They shook hands on it, and they were in deadly earnest.

They decided not to return to the yacht by the path, but to go over the island and through the woods. Thus, by chance, they followed almost directly in Frank's footsteps.

As they drew near to the dark woods, Browning felt a tightening at his heart—a sensation similar to that he had once before experienced as he stood beside the lonely grave in the dark glade. He sought to throw it off, but could not do so.

"Come," he said.

"Which way?" asked Bart.

"This way."

He seemed to feel something drawing him toward the grave in the glade, and Bart followed without another word.

Unconsciously the big Yale man stepped softly, as if he feared to alarm somebody or something. The moss beneath his feet gave no sound. Not even a twig snapped. Without knowing that he did so, Hodge imitated Browning's stealthy manner.

The wind souged through the pines and cedars in a fitful manner. There seemed to be strange rustlings in the air.

At the edge of the glade Bruce halted. There was the grave, with the gray headstone. He stood there staring at it. Somehow he was possessed by a feeling that the grave had something to do with the vanishing of Frank Merriwell, although his reason told him that such a thing was folly.

"What is the matter?"

Hodge almost whispered the question, for he was beginning to feel the uncanny air that overshadowed the place.

"There is the grave," said Bruce.

"What grave?"

"Why, the one we told you about—the grave of the Boston man who disappeared in such a mysterious manner. It is supposed that he was murdered on this island and buried there."

Bart shivered.

"You act as if you half expected to see another grave beside that one," he muttered.

"Not so soon."

"But to-morrow——"

"If Frank has been foully dealt with, the villains have not been given time to make another grave. His body is hidden somewhere. But I will not believe anything of the kind has happened. We shall find him somewhere—alive and well."

"We must!"

Bruce remembered the strange whispering they had heard there when he and Frank visited the place, and now he listened, half expecting to hear it again.

The silence was unbroken save by the mournful sound of the wind in the trees.

Bruce went forward quickly and stood by the grave. Bart came up, and together they looked down at the gray headstone.

"What is that?" asked Hodge, pointing. "Somebody has been doing something to the stone since it was placed here."

They bent down and looked at the stone.

"Why," cried Bruce, "the first name has been chiseled off! Another name has been put on! That name is——"

"Frank Merriwell!"

Astounded, they stared at the headstone. What did it mean? Why was that name upon it?

The tightening sensation grew around Browning's heart. All at once it seemed that the mystery of the island was deeper and darker than ever before.

"Now what do you think of that?" cried Bart, huskily.

Bruce shook his head, for the moment feeling that he was not able to speak. It did not seem that he could govern his voice. All sorts of wild fancies were rushing through his head.

He looked at the mound, and a feeling of relief came to him when he saw that it seemed undisturbed.

Hodge was shaking. He reached out and grasped the big fellow's arm with a savage clutch.

"Was it—was it meant for a warning?" he asked.

"Yes," said Bruce, quickly grasping at that explanation, "it must have been. You have struck it, Hodge."

"Then it is not likely Frank saw it."

"Perhaps not, and yet he may have come here."

Then they stood there a long time, silently staring at that stone, on which was chiseled the name of the friend they held dearest in all the world.

At last Bruce hoarsely said:

"Come, let's get away from here!"

"But it may be that—somehow—we may strike a clew here. This may be a clew. This may explain what has happened."

"If this explains it, there is but one construction to be placed on Frank's remarkable disappearance."

"And that is that he is——"

"Dead!"

In the treetops the wind seemed to repeat the word in a whisper.

But neither Bart nor Bruce were willing to believe that Frank Merriwell was dead, for all that his name was there before them on the gray stone at the head of the lonely grave.

"Dead or living, I'll never rest till I know the truth!" came passionately from Bart's lips. "If he is dead, the murderers shall suffer!"

"We must throw off the feeling that anything so awful has happened. Even now he may be with

the others at the yacht. While we have been searching for him, he may have returned."

Hodge caught at this eagerly.

"You are right!" he said. "Come on; we will hurry back there."

They left the glade, turning to look back as they passed on into the gloomy woods. They were glad to get away.

At first they hurried on, their hearts buoyant with the thought that they should find him waiting for them at the yacht. He would laugh at them, would jolly them because of their foolish fears. The placing of his name on the headstone of the grave was a ghastly joke, and nothing more.

In his mind Browning was thinking how he would growl at Merry for causing them so much trouble. He even thought of the words he would use.

But as they came nearer and nearer to the side of the island near which the yacht was anchored, their spirits fell again and they were beset by doubts and fears. What if they should not find Frank waiting for them when they arrived?

These doubts caused them to walk slower and slower, for they dreaded to hear that Frank was still missing.

"It seems to me," said Bart, "that it is very probable Merriwell will not be with Jack and Hans."

"He may not be," confessed Bruce.

"If he had returned, they would have fired guns and done things to let us know it."

"We might not have heard them."

"We should. The wind is right. We are near the yacht now."

Bruce felt like turning back and making another search. He dreaded to return and report that they had discovered nothing save the name of the missing lad on the headstone of a grave.

All at once they came out of the woods upon the high bank, from which position they could look down into the cove where the yacht lay. There she was, swinging idly with the incoming tide, and on her deck they could see Dunnerwust and Diamond. Merriwell was not in sight.

Almost as soon as they came out of the thick woods, they were seen by Diamond, and he called to them:

"What have you found?"

"Nothing," answered Hodge, gloomily. "Hasn't Frank returned?"

"No!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

SLIPPERY MR. COOLER.

Immediately Diamond and Dunnerwust got into the boat, which floated beside the yacht. They took guns, and Hans soon rowed the boat ashore. Bart and Bruce came down the bank and told them where they had been and what they had seen.

On hearing about the name on the headstone, Diamond became greatly excited.

"My God!" he cried. "Can it be that Frank has been killed? If so, I'll never forgive myself for letting him follow that man alone! Oh, that treacherous little devil! I could strangle him! I wish I had him here now!"

"So do I, py Chorch!" shouted Hans.

"It would not be healthy for Mr. Cooler," said Browning.

"Were you speaking of me, young gentlemen?" chirped a familiar voice, and down the bank came the man in gray, calmly walking up to the astonished lads. "I hope you were not saying anything behind my back that you do not care to repeat before my face."

"No!" rang out the clear voice of the Virginian. "I called you a treacherous little devil, and I repeat it!"

"That's complimentary, to say the least," grinned the man in gray, in his provokingly careless manner. "But I'd like to know what I have done to lead you to speak thus disparagingly of me. Wouldst tell me?"

Browning reached out and collared the queer old fellow, lifting him off his feet and swinging him around so he was in the midst of them.

"There!" grunted the big Yale man, with satisfaction. "Now we have you! You can't run, so don't try it!"

"If you try it, by the Lord Harry! I'll fill you full of lead!" came hoarsely from Hodge, who was fingering the gun in his hands as if he longed to shoot Cooler anyhow.

"Ah, me!" sighed the little man. "How rude you are, young gentlemen! Is it possible you are in your right minds?—or have I fallen in with a lot of lunatics? Why, I wouldn't run for anything! It's not necessary to threaten me. I wish you would tell me what I have done to arouse your ire."

"Where is Frank Merriwell?"

"Hey?"

"Where is he?" snarled Diamond, showing his white teeth. "Don't lie, man! Don't try it! If you do we will put you where you will lure no other person into a trap!"

"Goodness me!" said Mr. Cooler, somewhat mockingly. "You are very much excited, young man. I do not know what you are driving at."

"Don't lie! I tell you it is dangerous! We are desperate!"

"You really seem so."

"Where is he?"

"How do I know?"

"You do know! He followed you, and you trapped him some way. What have you done with him?"

"He! he!" chuckled the little man. "Followed me, did he? Why did he do that? It seems to me he should have been more careful."

"There it is!" burst from Hodge. "That is the same as a boast! Now we know you have done something to him!"

"You are a very knowing young man."

Now the manner of the man in gray aroused the anger and resentment of the boys. He seemed to be taunting them.

"Shall we shoot the snake, Bruce?" asked Diamond, his face purple with passion. "Shall we avenge Frank?"

"Not just yet," said Browning. "We will give him a chance for his life."

"You are very kind!" murmured Mr. Cooler.

"If he will tell us what has become of Frank—if he will lead us to Frank, we will spare his life."

"What if I don't know where he is?"

"You do know. You dare not deny it!"

"You are very much mistaken, for I do deny it. I give you my word of honor that I do not know where Mr. Merriwell is at this moment. I do know he followed me. He thought he was doing a very shrewd thing, and I must confess that I rather admired his skill at it, but I knew all the time that he was behind me."

"Ha!" exclaimed Hodge. "Then you know what became of him?"

"No. He followed me over to the other side of the island, and then he started to return by coming straight back through the woods. That is all I know. I am here to learn if he returned safely. If he did, I intended to warn him that his life was in danger if he should go about the island alone. You must see that I am serious now."

"Oh, yes, we see!" came scornfully from Diamond. "It is too thin! It will not work, Mr. Cooler. You know too much not to know more. If you wish to keep your skin whole, just lead us straight to Frank Merriwell—that's all!"

"I can't. I would do it if I could. But I give you my word to do my best to save him if he is in trouble. That is the best I can do."

Diamond's anger caused him to lose his head so that he threatened the old man with his fist. He quickly realized what he was doing, however, and, with an air of apology, he cried:

"If you keep it up, you will lead me to do something of which I shall be ashamed. You can't fool us, old man. We have you foul, and we'll never let up on you till you lead us to Frank Merriwell. We are young, but you will find we can keep a pledge like men."

In truth, Cooler seemed in earnest as he said:

"Young gentleman, you wrong me very much. I am ready to go with you and do what I can to help find Mr. Merriwell, but that is all I can do. It will be better if you will let me go alone. I shall be able to work alone far better."

"Oh, yes," sneered Hodge. "You think we are fools! No, we go with you."

"All right. I am ready."

It did not seem that anything further could be forced from his lips. They warned him that they would not hesitate to shoot if he tried to run away, and then they climbed the bank.

"If you want me to lead you," said Mr. Cooler, "come on."

He did not take the path, but plunged into the woods. They kept close to him, watching him.

"If you try to lead us into a trap," said Hodge, "you will be sorry. If we are ambushed here in these woods, my first shot will be at you. I'll fix you, if I never do another thing."

There was nothing like bluster in the words, and Mr. Caleb Cooler knew Bart meant exactly what he said.

"That is all right," nodded the little man. "Shoot away."

He led them toward the glade in which was the mysterious grave. At last they stood around the grave, and he said:

"Here is something I discovered since coming to the island. That name was on the stone before I joined you at the clambake. I forgot to tell you about it."

"Yesterday there was another name on that stone," said Browning. "The new name must have been cut there after we left the island yesterday afternoon."

"I do not know when it was cut there," declared Cooler; "but everything shows it must have been very recently. I do know it was there when I landed on this island to-day."

"And you know who cut it there!" accused Diamond.

"If you think so, it is useless to deny it."

"Now take us to Frank Merriwell!"

"All I can do is aid you in the search. I am willing to go anywhere with you."

They passed on from the dark glade, leaving the mysterious grave behind them.

Cooler seemed inclined to keep to the left, although the woods were thicker there. They pushed forward, as if passing through a jungle. Branches whipped them in the face, and beneath their feet the underbrush crackled.

All at once Diamond shouted:

"Stop! stop! Where is Cooler?"

"Why," grunted Browning, "he's right here. Thunder! He was at my elbow a moment ago. I scarcely took my eyes off him."

"He isn't here now!" rang out Jack's voice. "He has disappeared! He is trying to hide in these thick bushes. Scatter and search for him! If you see him running, shoot at his legs! Stop him somehow!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE VOICE IN THE NIGHT.

The excited lads beat the bushes in vain. Caleb Cooler had disappeared in a moment, as if the ground had opened and swallowed him. It seemed impossible that he could give them the slip in such a manner, but he had.

At last four very disgusted and angry boys stopped in a little opening and looked at each other.

"We are a set of chumps!" declared Hodge.

"That's so!" grunted Browning.

"Ought to have held onto the snake all the time," came savagely from Diamond. "Oh, if we had him here now!"

"Yaw!" gurgled Hans. "Uf we had him here now he wouldn't done a thing to us!"

"I feel like crawling into a hole," growled the big Yale man.

"So do I," nodded Hodge; "but I don't know where to find a hole small enough. What fools we are!"

"Yaw!" again gurgled Hans. "Vot fools you vos!"

"But I'm hanged if I can understand it," said Bruce. "How did he do it? That is what I want to know."

"He was within reach at one moment and gone the next."

"Let's search again."

They did so, but the time was spent in vain. They were close to the rocks which rose above the ground in the vicinity of the quarry, but it seemed an utter impossibility for anyone to hide amid those rocks.

They decided to remain in the vicinity and watch for Mr. Cooler, thinking he was in a place of hiding near at hand, and he would be forced to show himself sooner or later. Having decided on this, they scattered somewhat, but were within call of each other. Then they settled down to watch for the man in gray.

It became ominously silent there amid the cedars and pines, save when the fitful wind made a rustling. Once a squirrel was heard chattering in the distance.

An hour passed, and then Diamond could stand it no longer. He called them together and said:

"Fellows, while we remain idle here, those villains may be completing the work of putting Merriwell out of the way. I think we are wasting our time."

"So do I," said Hodge.

"Und I vos some more," put in Hans.

Then they decided to scour the island. If hidden near at hand, Cooler knew they were watching for him, and it was not likely he would make a move.

Two hours were spent in wandering over the island, calling to the missing lad. They awoke the echoes in the dark woods, but the echoes were the only answers to their cries.

Disheartened and desperate, they returned to the cove in which the yacht lay. They were troubled by fears that something had happened to her while they were away, but when they obtained a view of her, she was seen riding peacefully at anchor.

The small boat was there, and Bart was the first to reach it. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation, and then called the attention of the others to a slip of paper that lay beneath a stone that had been placed on one of the seats. A moment later he secured the paper.

"There is writing upon it!" he declared.

"Read it!" exclaimed the others, pressing nearer.

On the paper, which seemed to be a leaf torn from a pocket account book, were scrawled the following words:

"You fellers Haid better git erway Frum Devul irelan in a Blame big Hurry or you will git used the saim as frank Merryfull did. you wunt Naver se no moar of Him."

"That settles it!" said Diamond, bitterly. "Frank is done for this time! They have finished him—the devils!"

"Well, they'll never drive me away from this island till I have found out how they did it and who they are!" vowed Hodge. "Right here I swear I will spend the rest of my life in avenging Merry, if it is necessary."

"I am with you!"

"And I!"

"Yaw! Me, too!"

They shook hands on it, with bared heads. Never were four lads in more deadly earnest.

The sun was low in the western sky, tinting the rippling waters with golden light. The scene was a peaceful one, and it did not seem possible that an awesome and appalling tragedy had taken place on that quiet little island that day.

Despite their determination, the boys were stunned and at a loss to know what was to be done. They entered the boat and rowed off to the yacht.

It was plain no one had visited the *White Wings* while they were away, for nothing on board was molested.

Hans was hungry, but he was the only one of them all who seemed to have any appetite. They did not talk much, but all were thinking, and the Dutch boy cried softly over the food he ate.

Little had they dreamed when they started out on the cruise that anything so terrible could happen and that they would be so completely dazed and bewildered. Their hearts were full of sorrow, but on their faces were looks of resolution that told they did not mean to be driven away till they had fulfilled their oath.

The sun went down redly in the west and tinted twilight crept over the water. In the woods on shore darkness gathered swiftly. They stared away toward those woods, as if watching for the appearance of their missing friend.

All at once Jack caught hold of Hodge, hissing:

"Look there!"

"Where?"

"Down toward the point. See—back in the shadows beyond the two pines! Can you see them there?"

"I see something."

"Two figures?"

"Yes."

"I saw them move—saw them come out of the woods. They are men, and they are watching us!"

"That's right."

"And one of them is that snake, the little man in gray!"

"I believe it!"

"I know it! Get a rifle, Hodge!"

"What would you do?"

"Shoot him!" panted the hot-blooded Virginian. "Get a rifle! I will put a bullet through the villain!"

Although hot-blooded and reckless himself Bart realized that Diamond must not do anything of the kind. But he did not find it necessary to reason with Jack, for the two men turned and disappeared into the woods.

"They're gone!" exclaimed the Virginian, regretfully.

"But they may come back again. We must keep a close watch to-night. There is no telling what desperate deed they may attempt."

So the night was divided into watches, and each lad took his turn on deck.

The sky became overcast, so there was little light. The black shadow of the shore seemed potent with dangers.

Bart had his second watch on deck, and it was not far from midnight when he was startled to hear a voice hailing from the shore:

"Ahoy, the yacht!"

"What do you want?" asked Bart, gripping a revolver and staring toward the point from which the voice had seemed to come. "Who are you?"

"Caleb Cooler, at your service," came back the answer. "I thought I'd tell you something that may relieve your minds somewhat. Frank Merriwell is alive and unharmed."

Bart gasped.

"Why do you come to tell us that?" he asked.

"Because I know you are worrying about him. Don't worry. He will be with you to-morrow."

This angered Bart so that he lifted his revolver, being tempted to send a random shot toward the point from which the voice seemed to come, but he changed his mind and lowered the weapon.

"So long," called the voice of the queer old man. "Turn in and sleep. You won't be troubled."

"That is what they want us to do," thought Bart. "It is a trick. But they can't fool us that way."

No further sound was heard from the shore. Cooler did not answer, although Bart called to him several times.

Jack had heard Hodge speaking, and he came on deck. When Bart told Diamond what had happened, the latter was furious.

"If I had been here, I would have fired six shots in his direction," he declared.

Diamond took his turn on deck, and it was about two o'clock when he fancied he heard the sound of oars. The sound came nearer and nearer, till at last it seemed that the boat reached the island, and then the sound was heard no more.

Morning dawned, and Browning arose in a strangely agitated state of mind. Never had his companions seen him in such a condition. When asked about it, he said:

"Boys, I had a queer dream. I'm going to tell you what it was. I dreamed that Frank Merriwell is

buried in the grave on the island. I thought him buried alive. We dug him out and restored him to life."

"It can't be that Merry is buried there, for the mound has not been disturbed lately," said Diamond.

"All the same," declared Browning, "I am going to open that grave. I am going to know the secret it holds."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SECRET OF THE GRAVE.

Browning was determined, and it was not long before he had worked the others into a state of excitement over it. Without waiting for breakfast, they sprang into the boat and rowed ashore.

"I saw some tools in the sheds at the end of the railroad," said Bruce. "We will secure them."

The path was taken, and they passed through the old quarry and down the track to the sheds. There they found a pick and spade. With those in their possession, they hastened to the black glade in which lay the grave.

For once in his life Bruce Browning was filled with energy—he was aroused. But even as he reached the grave, he halted suddenly, his hand uplifted, hoarsely gasping:

"Listen!"

The boys were silent.

"Help!"

It was a smothered cry, and it seemed to come from the ground at their feet. It made the hair of the Dutch boy stand and his teeth chatter. It astonished and amazed them all.

"Help!"

Again that smothered cry seemed to come from the grave. What did it mean?

"Use the pick, Hodge!" hoarsely commanded Browning. "We will soon open it up. Go at it lively!"

Bart obeyed, and the ground gave back a strange, hollow sound as he struck his pick into it. Browning shoveled away the dirt, having torn off his coat to work with greater ease.

Soon something of a hole had been made in the mound.

All at once, with a cry of horror, Bart started back, pointing down into the hole they had made.

"Look!" he gasped. "That ring—that hand! It is Frank Merriwell's hand!"

And there before them they saw a human hand that seemed to be thrust up through the ground.

Hans began to pray.

The hand moved—it clawed desperately at the ground!

"It is Frank!" Diamond almost screamed. "He is down there! He has been buried alive! Dig, fellows—dig! But be careful not to hurt him!"

At that moment the ground caved in at their feet, and up out of it rose the dirt-covered head of Frank Merriwell. He rubbed the dirt out of his eyes, and then he cheerfully observed:

"Good-morning, fellows! It seems to be a pleasant morning outside, but it's a trifle close inside. If you will take hold and pull me out, I'll be much obliged."

They clutched him—they dragged him to the surface. Behind him lay a deep, dark hole that was not filled by the earth that had caved in.

"Well, of all things wonderful!" grunted Browning. "Never knew anything like this before—never heard of anything like this! I believe I am still dreaming!"

"Frank, are you hurt?" asked Diamond.

"Not much," answered Merry. "They trapped me without much trouble. I didn't have a chance to get hurt."

"But to be buried under the ground—to be in a grave!"

"Eh? A grave? Why, Great Scott! It is the grave—and the stone with my name on it! This is the spot where I was caught. I was standing right here. A man dropped down out of this tree and struck on my shoulders. He laid me out, and it wasn't hard to tie me up. Then I was towed away under ground, and a guard was placed over me. It's a close little hole down there, but the guard left me after he had watched till he was tired, and then I finally managed to get free, and I tried

to dig out where they had closed up what once was the mouth of the cave."

"What's that?" asked Hodge. "A cave?"

"Exactly; and there was an opening into it here at one time. They closed it up and made this fake grave over the spot. That's just what they did."

"But your voice—we could hear it."

"Look at this headstone. There is a hole straight down through it. Below there is a tube that runs down into the cave. Anyone at the lower end of the tube can speak so they can be heard here. That is how those mysterious whispers reached our ears. Oh, it is a great scheme! It made the place seem haunted."

"But where is the other opening to the cave?"

"It must be near here, though I was blindfolded when I was taken in. Mr. Cooler was in the game. He came up suddenly a long, long time ago. Talked with the chap who was guarding me. Said he had been forced to dodge you chaps."

"That's when he gave us the slip," said Diamond. "I'd like to see the little whelp again!"

"Your wish shall be gratified," said a familiar voice, and Mr. Cooler walked into the glade, followed by three other men, all dressed in black. "I am here!"

"It's the gang!" cried Diamond. "We'll have to fight for it, fellows!"

"Don't fight," advised the man in gray, laughing. "It isn't necessary. We are not the gang, but we have the gang nicely corralled. You have known me as Caleb Cooler, but I am, in fact, Dustin Douglass, of the secret service. These gentlemen with me are deputies, and we have just captured a gang of counterfeiters who have been making all sorts of trouble for the government. If you think I am lying, young gentlemen, I will show you my credentials. I managed to get in with the gang myself by pretending to be a skillful shover of the queer, and that is why I have been seen with some of them. Last night my deputies came onto the island in a boat, and this morning we raked in all of the gang. We have them nicely ironed over at the old boarding house, where one of my men is watching over them. Among them, Mr. Merriwell, are your friends, Hicks and Wiley. Somehow they think you were concerned in their undoing, and they have expressed sincere regrets that they did not do you up, instead of capturing you and stowing you here in the old cave. The chap who was watching you came over to get his breakfast this morning, and now he is ironed with the others. There are four in all.

"I trust you will pardon me for the deception, young gentlemen," smiled the little secret service officer. "Had to do it, you know. Just came over to set Mr. Merriwell at liberty, but I see you are here ahead of me."

Bruce Browning leaned against a tree, looking tired and unnerved.

"This is too much for me!" he muttered. "I'm sure to go into brain fever! I can't comprehend it all."

Nor could the others just then, but every word the little man had spoken proved true. He showed them the skillfully concealed entrance to the cave, which was sometimes used in which to hide the bogus money. They understood how he had been able to give them the slip in such a remarkable manner.

Then all went over to the old boarding house, where the boys inspected the prisoners. Dan Hicks glared at Frank and cursed him, snarling:

"All I regret is that I didn't cut your throat!"

Beneath the building was a room the boys had not discovered, and there the "queer" had been made.

At last the mystery of the island was solved, and Frank Merriwell was satisfied. But the boys had been furnished with a topic for conversation and discussion that would be interesting for a long time to come.

And Frank was well satisfied to leave Devil Island at last.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK MERRIWELL'S CRUISE ***

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