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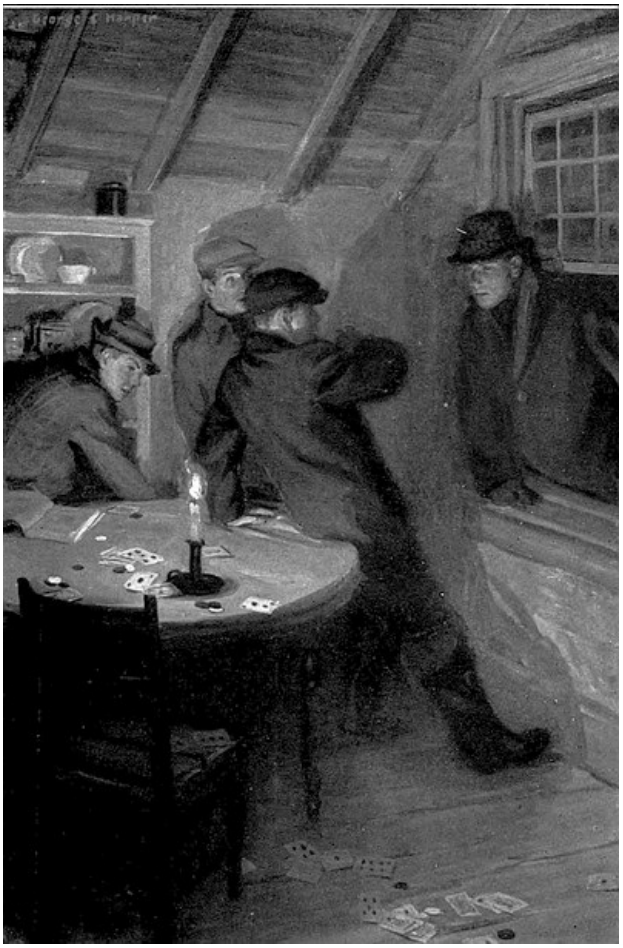

“DON’T HAVE A FIT, DEERING, IT’S ONLY MACLAREN”

DEERING OF DEAL

OR

THE SPIRIT OF THE SCHOOL

BY
LATTA GRISWOLD

"Toujours fidèle et sans souci"

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1914

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To

JOHN GLENOE WRIGHT
LEE HALL JONES
ROBERT GROSVENOR
LUCIUS SCOTT LANDRETH, JR.
HARRY L. FENNER
SAMUEL M. SHOEMAKER, JR.

in warm friendship and in memory of
many happy days at school

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FOREWORD

The Author desires to state that none of the characters in this story, either boys or masters, are portraits. The incidents are entirely fictitious, and Deal School, though it shares certain topographical features with the school with which the Author is connected, exists only in his imagination.

ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOL,
NEWPORT: *18 April, 1912*.

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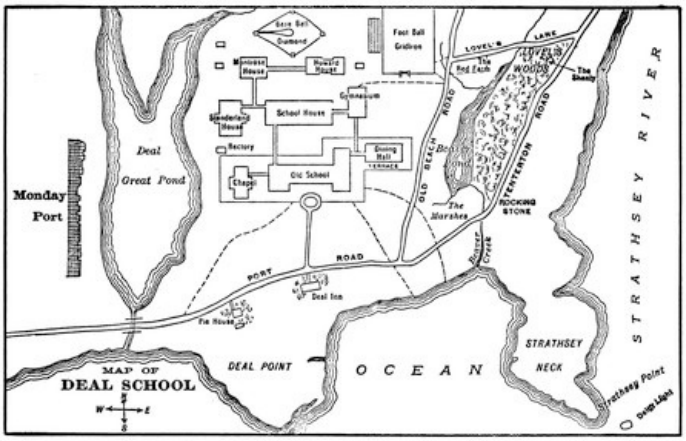

MAP OF DEAL SCHOOL

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ILLUSTRATIONS

“Tall, eager, a face to remember,
A flush that could change as the day;
A spirit that knew not December,
That brightened the sunshine of May”

Fresh breezes blow and touch their favorite hill,
The waters quiver in the mellow light,
Wafts Paradise her fragrance o’er the marsh,
The Campus gleams with crimson and with white.

Fair banners flutter in the flowing winds,
And hopes are gleaming from the eyes of youth;
Old songs, from hearts that throb with loyal blood,
Arise, and echo with the ring of truth.

Bright laughter, merry shouts attune the air,
And over all the place is cast the gleam
That early summer lends unto the hours,
The passing hours that flow as doth a dream.

Fleet eager boys the base attain; the ball
In ambient air speeds like a fleeing bird;
Swift hands and sure arrest its vagrant flight,
As from a hundred throats hurrahs are heard.

Dear scenes! as pensive through them wandering,
The shadows lengthen in the slanting light;
Mists float across the golden campus, gleam
As light of stars in stilly depths of night.

Then faces in the wreathes of mist appear,
Dear faces that we loved in long ago
Shine brightly; voices murmur in the air,
Beloved voices that we used to know.

Fades far the dreamy present, fades the day,
With its enduring hopes and passing fears;
Old Boys surround us; and the heart is glad
For all the friendliness of vanished years.

CHAPTER I

DEAL SCHOOL

If one chanced to examine the catalogues of Kingsbridge College for the past hundred years it would be found that in most of them is recorded the name of some dead and gone Deering—a name famous in the annals of the South—who came up from Louisiana, “marched through the four long happy years of college,” as the old song has it, with an arts degree to his credit; or, perchance, marched out at the end of one or two of them with nothing to his credit at all. Kingsbridge was a tradition in the Deering family, southern though it was—a tradition that was hardly broken, even when in 1861 Victor Deering and a hundred other chivalrous youths threw their text-books out of the windows and enlisted in the armies of the Confederacy. Victor’s father, Basil, too, was in the war, and laid down his arms at Appomattox as a brigadier-general—brevetted for gallantry on the field of action. For a while it seemed that no Deerings would go to Kingsbridge, but time at length healed the old antagonisms, and when it became a question where young Anthony, Victor’s boy, should go to college, there was no longer any question [2] that Kingsbridge should be the place.

Preparing for Kingsbridge, before the war, had meant going first for three or four years to Deal School, another Cæsarean seat of learning, almost as well known as the college itself. The warm-hearted old general had as fond memories of the school-topped, wind-swept hill above the rocks of Deal, as he had of the meadows and hills about Kingsbridge. There were a great many family counsels held in the old house on the bayou; some prejudices pocketed; some feminine qualms appeased and tears dried; and a great deal of correspondence was exchanged between the Head Master of Deal and the old General, who ruled his family to the third and fourth generation.

And so at length on a bright crisp September morning, when he was about fifteen years old, Anthony Deering found himself getting out of the little way-train that runs from Coventry to Monday Port across the Cæsarean flats, and enquiring diligently for a hack to drive him out to Deal School. He had made the journey up from New Orleans alone, without a quaver until he came to his journey’s end. He was a day late for the opening of school, so that he was the only passenger to alight at Monday Port.

A vociferous cabman offered him the services of a dilapidated fly and a bony horse. He looked about for better, but not finding them, he pulled his belt a trifle tighter, swallowed the lump in his throat, and quieted the man by thrusting his bag into his hand. Then he jumped into the crazy vehicle, and shouted in a high voice, “Deal School!”

Tony had never been to Monday Port before, but he had heard a [3] great deal of it from his mother, who had spent gay summers there in her girlhood, before the war. It had once been a favorite resort for Southerners, but after their exodus, was taken up by Northern people, and for a decade or so was one of the most popular Cæsarean watering-places. The town occupied a long stretch of level country between the sea and a range of low-lying sandhills. Its streets were pretty and clean, shaded for the most part by maple trees, with modest cottages on either side, and here and there more pretentious modern “villas,” representing almost every conceivable style of architecture. Tony was not much interested in Monday Port, however, and he eyed these pleasant homes with a rueful glance, which gave an odd expression to his attractive young face; for despite the shadows in his gray-blue eyes and the frown on his dark brows, it was evident that he was anything but a surly or fretful lad. There was a sparkle in the depths of the shadow; lines of cheerfulness behind the frown; the glow of health in his cheeks.

At last the old horse dragged the fly listlessly out of the shady street and they came into an open space, which fronted on a broad

sheet of water flowing down with a fine sweep to the sea. A long bridge led across Deal Water to a straight white road which cleft a clean path through the rising meadowland. Eastward the wide expanse of green was edged by a line of tawny sands, where the turf swept down to the bluffs. Beyond lay the sea, sparkling like a great splendid jewel. Tony loved the sea, and a thrill went through him as [4] he saw it again now after a long time. A load seemed lifted from his heart, though there was still some wistfulness for the sleepy bayou and the old plantation and the dear familiar faces. He remembered how so many Deerings before him had crossed that great still pond on their way to school, and had known that restless sea during happy boyhood.

"Is that the school?" he cried to the driver, springing up as he caught sight of a pile of buildings which crowned a hill-top at the end of the long white road ahead of them. There seemed to be a great many of these buildings, standing shoulder to shoulder, long and low for the most part, but one higher than the rest, marked by a tapering spire. The rays of the morning sun glinted on the windows so that they seemed ablaze with light. A fresh breeze was blowing off the ocean. There was the smell of seaweed in the air and of herby autumnal flowers. Here and there a field was stained literally purple with Michaelmas daisies,—a vivid contrast to the deep green of the meadows.

Tony could scarcely contain himself as the fly crawled up the steep road. Then, just as they reached the summit, a few paces before they turned into the school drive, another splendid view opened to them unexpectedly. On the other side of the school grounds the hill descended much more precipitously toward a point of rocky land which jutted into the sea; to the east the land bent with an enormous curve, embracing a wide beach about a mile in length; then, turning sharply again, rose into hilly land, thickly wooded, rocky-shored, which crowded about the great inlet, [5] somewhat misnamed the Strathsey River. Across the morning haze gleamed the shores of a broad peninsula known as Strathsey Neck. In the midst of the river,—or bay, for it was really that,—a pile of rocks jutted from the waters, on which was situate a lighthouse, marked in the charts as Deigr Light.

Tony was a little bewildered by the unexpected impelling beauty of the situation. The cab turned into the school driveway then, and at the end of a graveled elm-shaded avenue, he saw a low long building of gray stone—of Tudor architecture, he learned afterwards —approached by a broad flight of stone steps.

A maid-servant met him at the door, surmised that he was the new boy, and said, "I will show you at once to the Doctor's study." They passed through a large hall, which Tony just could see was attractive, with its black oak paneling and the great open fireplace at the farther end, and then he was ushered into a cheerful pleasant-looking room, his hand was heartily clasped, and a gruff kindly voice bade him welcome.

Tony looked up, and saw a pair of sharp blue eyes, set deep under shaggy gray brows in a firm strongly-lined face, under a mass of thick gray hair, looking enquiringly into his. It was a kindly, inquisitive glance, as though their owner were wondering what manner of boy this was. Doctor Forester was growing old now, but he was still in the prime of his activity as a vigorous and effective head master. He looked down upon the fair copper-colored head of the boy, and into his frank gray-blue eyes, which looked back [6] fearlessly.

"Ah, Deering, I am glad to see you. I am sorry you are late, however, for it is not the best way to begin," he said, speaking with a sharp accent, and in quick phrases, which Tony was to learn were characteristic.

"I know, sir, but my grandfather—"

"Your grandfather, my boy, used to get caned once a week by old Doctor Harvey for the same incorrigible offense. But I understand the situation. You are not to blame. You are to have a room in Standerland Hall and sit at Mr. Morris's table in the dining-room. Stop here a moment, while I send for a boy to show you about. Then you can get your books, and go into class the last morning period. We are going to try you in the Third. The master-in-charge will assign you a seat in the schoolroom." The doctor touched a bell on his desk. "Send Lawrence to me, please," he said to the servant who answered it; and then turning to Deering again, "Well, my boy, how

is your grandfather? Has he told you that we were at Kingsbridge together? He was a senior when I was a freshman. He rescued me one night at a hazing-bee. Those were good old days—never the like of *them* again! I am glad they are sending you north to school and college. Ah, Lawrence! come in, come in. Lawrence, this is Anthony Deering. He is to be in your form and hall. Take him about a bit—that's a good fellow—introduce him to the masters—and report to Mr. Morris before the last period. Good-bye now. Come to the Rectory to tea this afternoon, Deering, and we can have some talk about the General." [7]

The Doctor said all this very rapidly, and almost before Deering and Lawrence had finished their embarrassed greeting, he had turned to his desks and was busy with his papers.

James Lawrence—or Jimmie, as he was always called—was a slender, dark-haired handsome youth. He had a frank countenance, an engaging smile, black hair, and beautiful dark eyes. He recovered his self-possession in a moment and looked Tony over critically, as he waited for the Doctor to finish speaking. "Very good, sir," he said, at length. "Come along, Deering, and I'll show you where you are to room."

"You may think the old gentleman is in the clouds," he said, as they turned into a long corridor leading from the Doctor's study, "but we have to wake up early in the morning to fool him—not that we don't, you know!—but he is keen enough to make it mighty interesting. Why I have got twenty-five distinct directions about you already. You are to sit next me at table, for instance, and poor old Teddy Lansing is transferred to Mr. Williams."

"Will he mind?" asked Tony, a trifle anxiously.

"Well, you'll find out if he does mind. Teddy's a noisy brute. There! that's the way into the schoolroom," he interrupted himself to say, "you'll wish you could forget it in a week or so. Take a tip, watch Kit Wilson and me; we'll show you a trick or two. But you are so beastly new.... See that animated broomstick toddling along? That's old Roylston, the Latin master; you'll meet him too soon for your comfort; we won't stop now, despite the Doctor's instructions. Give him a wide berth, and don't bluff him." [8]

By this time they had got outside the Old School on the terrace, with the wonderful outlook over bay and sea. Tony began to make some remark about the view.

"Oh, the view!" exclaimed Lawrence, "You'll get used to that too. That's Lovel's Woods over yonder," he said, pointing to a stretch of thickly-wooded hilly land by the Strathsey shore, "rather useful in the winter term. You're in Standerland, eh? That's that long crazy gray stone building over the quad. Lucky dog to get a room, say I. Bill Morris is the master—a decent sort; an old boy, strong therefore with the doctor. Thank heaven and the Head that you're going to be under Bill. No, we aren't going over there now. You'll have to scamper over there to wash up before dinner. I've got a page of Cæsar to do before last period, so let's toddle to the schoolroom. Bill's in charge, and he'll smooth things over. Wait for me after school and I'll pilot you in to grub."

They had brought up now at the entrance to the Schoolhouse, which was connected with the Old School by a cloister and formed the north side of a great quadrangle. To the west lay Standerland House and the Chapel, a pure Gothic structure with a beautiful tower and spire, and the Rectory, the Head Master's residence, between. Eastward lay the Gymnasium and the Refectory or dining-hall, the latter on a line with the Old School. North of the Schoolhouse was another quadrangle, flanked by Standerland and the Gymnasium, with Montrose and Howard Houses on its northern side. Beyond that still lay the playing-fields. All this Jimmie barely had time to indicate, as the two boys ran up a wide flight of steps, traversed a broad corridor, and entered the schoolroom, where he introduced Tony to the master-in-charge. [9]

Tony could never remember what was said by either of them; he felt as if the gaze of the hundred pair of eyes, belonging to the hundred boys bent over their desks, was burning into his back. There was a vague sort of comfort in the pleasant tones of Mr. Morris's voice, and somehow he came back to consciousness a little later, and found himself seated at a desk, with a brand new copy of the *Gallic Wars* open before him, and his lips pronouncing over and over in a meaningless sort of way—"*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres*...."

Thus Deering’s school days at Deal began.

CHAPTER II

A HAZING BEE

As a matter of fact Tony did not get over to Standerland all that day. He had waited for Lawrence after that first curious hour in the schoolroom and the subsequent recitation in Cæsar with Mr. Gray, generally known as “Pussie,” a clever, sarcastic young master, who mercifully however paid him no attention. Instead then of running over to the dormitory to wash up, Jimmie led him down a flight of back stairs in the Schoolhouse, and through a series of subterranean passages, to a remote little room, in which stood a stationary washstand in official disuse, which had probably been designed for the use of the servants. This Jimmie announced with pride to be his private luxury. “It saves a deal of time and trouble to wash here,” he explained. Tony could not see that it really did, but he felt at once a boy’s pleasure in doing the irregular thing.

In this makeshift of a washroom they found another boy, already washing his hands. He was a bright-eyed, fair-headed, stockily-built youth, whose face sparkled with good nature. “Hello, Jim,” he cried, as they came up, “who is your new friend?”

“Deering was his father’s name,” Jimmie answered facetiously, “Anthony was bestowed upon him by his sponsors in baptism.”

“So! Well, fellow Christian, where do you hail from?” [11]

“I?—I come from Louisiana.”

“Louisiana! that’s a heck of a way to come. Well, Deering Anthony, lace my boots while I dry my hands.”

“Go to the deuce, Kit!” Lawrence broke in. “Deering’s in the Third. Take your sloppy boots to the First Form locker-rooms, and don’t brag here. Swat him, Tony, if he gets fresh.”

Kit burst into a ripple of delicious, infectious laughter. “Oh, that’s the ticket! Well, Tony, my darling, will you condescend to dip your lily fingers in this humble basin? The attar of roses unfortunately is ‘all,’ as the excellent Ebenezer Roylston has been known to put it. Permit me to offer you a towel.” With the words he deftly extracted Jimmie’s handkerchief, and thrust it at Deering. There was a laugh and scuffle between the two boys, quickly over as a distant bell sounded; they grabbed their coats, and fled unwashed toward the great dining-hall, which occupied the same relation to the Old School on the east as the Chapel did on the west.

“Can you play football?” asked Kit, as they ran along the terrace.

“I don’t know—” began Tony.

“Well, come out this afternoon, and find out. Report to me in football togs at three, and I’ll give you a chance on the Third Form squad.”

“Thanks awfully.”

“Cut that out! Scoot now after Jimmie, or you’ll be late. Good-boy Bill hates a laggard, and you’re at his table.”

Then had come the first bewildering dinner, with the myriads of [12] strange faces about him. Already he thought of Jimmie Lawrence, next whom he sat, as an old friend. In the afternoon he was carried off to the Store and fitted out with football clothes, and then led off to the playing-field back of the quadrangle to be tried out. The game was strange to him, and he felt an awkward muff at it. But as a matter of fact he was quick and fleet and intelligent, and at the end of the afternoon, Kit deigned to pat him on the shoulder and to bid him reappear on the morrow. “You are not half bad, you know; for a land-lubber, so to speak. Mind you’re regular, and don’t eat toffy, and keep clear of the pie-house!”

At 5 o’clock Tony found himself excused from afternoon school by the Doctor’s command, and went in to tea at the Rectory and was introduced to Mrs. Forester—a sweet, motherly, middle-aged woman; and to two or three masters, the sarcastic Mr. Gray amongst them; and to four or five members of the noble Sixth, who were discussing the new football material. Tony spent a pleasant half-hour there, and after a talk with, or rather from, the Doctor about Kingsbridge and Deal in the olden time, he was sent back to the schoolroom and to afternoon recitations.

At 9 o’clock he was dismissed from evening school, and the attentive Lawrence steered him over to Standerland Hall, where Mr. Morris showed him the rooms he was to share with a Fourth

Former. This was a pleasant little apartment, consisting of a study and two bedrooms, which looked eastward, over Lovel's Woods and the Strathsey River.

"You can unpack to-morrow," said Mr. Morris, "but you may take [13]
half-an-hour now to get acquainted with your room-mate."

As they entered the room a tall, lanky youth had arisen from a Morris chair. He had rather fair, well-moulded features, a cool gray eye, a quiet but somewhat patronizing manner, a drawl to his speech, and a general air of distinction, not unmingled with conceit.

"This is Tony Deering, Carroll. Tony, allow me to present you to your room-mate, Mr. Reginald Carter Westover Carroll, of Virginia."

"Awh, thanks, Mr. Morris, for getting it all in," drawled Carroll. "How-de-do, Deering; pray don't hesitate to make yourself at home." He languidly extended his hand, and allowed Tony to shake it. "Won't you honor us, Mr. Morris?" he asked, waving his hand gracefully in the direction of the deep easy chair.

"No, thank you; not to-night, Reginald. Be good enough to explain to Deering the simple rules that theoretically will govern his behaviour. Lights are to be out at nine-thirty. Good-night."

He shook hands with the boys cordially, and left them alone together. Deering looked curiously about him, a hundred questions on the tip of his tongue; which however he refrained from asking, as he saw Carroll sink back into the Morris chair, extract the novel that he had slipped under it when he had heard the knock, and resume reading.

Tony stood for a moment, a trifle disconcerted. He was a little at loss to know what might be the etiquette of such an occasion. "I [14]
say," he blurted out at last, "I think you might put that book down and tell a fellow a thing or two."

Carroll placed the book on the table at his side, with an air of mild surprise. "Dear child," he murmured indulgently, "shall we adopt the Socratic method?"

Tony flushed. "What is the Socratic method?"

"You ask questions; I answer—a few of them."

"I don't know that I have any particular questions to ask. I supposed we might find something to say if we tried hard enough. However, if you will tell me in which room I am to sleep, and at what hour we are expected to get up, I think I can get on without troubling you any further."

"As to the first of your enquiries," the long languid youth replied, "as I happen to have the advantage of being in the Fourth, and to have arrived a day earlier than you upon the scene of action, I have chosen the larger one to the right, which is protected from the early morning sun by a trifling angle of the exterior wall. A murderous bell will assassinate your innocent sleep at seven in the morning. The time that you arise will be determined by the length of time it takes you to dress and your estimate of the value of late marks. Breakfast, my Socrates, is at half-past seven. Are the problems too much for you?"

Tony smiled. "I reckon I can figure them out."

"You are both tautological and verbose. The single word 'reckon' would have expressed your meaning quite as accurately and not less elegantly."

"Oh, I don't go in for elegance."

Carroll lifted his eyebrows with an air of feigned surprise, and [15]
surveyed Tony for a moment or so with languid interest. When it appeared that his new acquaintance had nothing further to say, the older boy leaned his head wearily back upon his chair, and took up his book again, holding it open with an air of heroic patience.

"I think I'll turn in," said Tony at last.

"Ah!" murmured Carroll, "in that case, I may bid you good-night."

Poor Tony was a little chilled by his reception, and he flung himself somewhat petulantly out of the study and into his bedroom. He turned on the light, undressed quickly, and got into bed. For a long time he lay thinking; first of Carroll, the elegant, languid, supercilious Carroll, and rebelled with passionate inner protest at his fate in being cast to room with him. Why had it not been Jimmie Lawrence—clever, handsome, jolly Jimmie, of the sparkling eyes, and the good-natured banter? or the likable self-important Kit, or any one of a dozen or more good fellows he had run against that

day? But the memories of them appeased him. He felt himself lucky to have hit it off so well with such as they; and certainly there was much about the school that he was going to like; and it was fine to have a room to himself, a privilege that he had learned was exceptionable with Third formers and was supposed to be due to a "pull" his people had with the Doctor; and it was good luck to be under such a master as Bill Morris, whom he had already decided was to be his favorite. What a horrible fate it would have been to have sat next at table or roomed in the house of Mr. Roylston —"Gumshoe Ebenezer," as the boys called him! or to have had to [16] submit to Mr. Gray's sarcasm too often! All things considered, he felt he was very lucky; and so he stifled a queer feeling of loneliness and homesickness, and turned over and tried to go to sleep.

He had heard Carroll moving about for awhile, and then, as he thought at half-past nine, he had heard the click of the electric light as it was turned off, the closing of a study door, and he supposed that Carroll had also gone to bed.

It was perhaps an hour later that he heard a soft tapping, repeated once or twice; then presently a movement in the study, and the creaking of a door being opened and closed; then the sound of whispering in the room without. Tony sat up in bed, wide awake now, and listened intently. In a moment his bedroom door opened. "Who's that?" he called.

"Shish! be still! don't make a sound, or I'll break your head." Somebody fumbled with the switch, turned the current on, and in a second the bedroom was flooded with light. Four boys, dressed in crimson and white jersies and old trousers, with red caps pulled down over their eyes, crowded into the room.

"What's the matter?" cried Tony in a whisper, springing out of bed.

"Excellent pupil!" drawled Carroll, at this moment thrusting his head through the doorway, "even in the moment of excitement he preserves the Socratic method."

"What do you want?" Tony repeated, backing up against his wall, a pathetic but sturdy figure in his white pajamas.

"Get into your clothes, and come along," said a big fellow, with [17] the air, real or assumed, of a bully.

"Where?"

"Where you're bid."

"I'll be hanged if I will."

"You'll be hanged if you won't," the other rejoined, advancing toward him menacingly.

"Careful, Chapin!" whispered one of the others, "the kid'll squeal in a moment, and we'll have Bill in on us."

"To heck with Bill! I'll have that kid, or I'll know the reason why!"

"Gently, Arthur dear," murmured Carroll. "Never resort to force until persuasion is exhausted. Dear Socrates, we desire the pleasure of your company for a walk abroad. The hour is unusual, but therefore the greater is the compliment. My friend Chapin is impetuous and slightly rude, but I counsel you to accept his invitation."

"What do you want with me?" asked Tony, stubbornly.

"Don't ask me to repeat, I beg of you. Time presses, and the patience of my friends is on the ebb."

"Hang your friends' patience!" exclaimed Tony. "I won't—"

"It will hang them, my child, if you do not come. The effort to remove you by force will cost them no end of a hanging."

Tony saw that whatever resistance he might make, the kind that would save him was tabooed. He had only to make a noise, of course, and the master of the house would come to his rescue. Intuition told him that this was impossible, as impossible as also he [18] felt it would be to submit placidly to hazing. Being southern, Tony had his prejudices. An objection to interference with his liberty even in the easy-going fashion of school-life was one of them. He decided at once that his protest, however, must be made out of doors, when all chance of attracting the attention of the masters was over. All this went through his mind a great deal more quickly than it can be told. As he made his decision, he pulled on his trousers and a jersey over the shirt of his pajamas, slipped his feet into "sneakers," and professed to be ready.

"Mumm's the word, through the corridor," whispered Chapin, as

they slipped out into the dark passage-way, and cautiously felt their way towards the stairs. Carroll had condescended to take Tony's hand, partly that he might guide him in the dark, partly to make sure that the boy did not give him the slip.

At last they emerged upon the campus. It was dark and still. A late moon was casting its waning light over the hills beyond Strathsey Neck. The boys, still speaking in whispers, led Tony quickly across the ghostly campus, and into a field below the chapel, which sloped down toward the curving beach and sea. As they evidently meant to take him farther still, Deering pulled back here, and wrenched his arm free of Carroll's grasp.

"I have gone far enough," he said. "Tell me what you want of me, here."

"Biff him, Kid," exclaimed one of his captors, in a voice in which the note of brutality sounded painfully real.

"Nay, nay, gently," interposed Carroll. "Let me deal with [19]
Socrates.... We would lead you to the beach, my friend, where the little lobsters and the mermaids play, and there have you sing us songs and make us merry with your quips and jests; while we, from the recesses of a certain cave well known to us, extract certain delightful viands, and feast."

Tony listened patiently to this speech, with an expression of contempt upon his face that it was fortunate his captors could not see.

"Oh, all right, Carroll," he said in reply, "go ahead, if you want to. I tell you frankly, the four of you may be able to beat me into a pulp, but you are not going to haze me."

"No?" with an air of incredulity.

"No."

The irritable member of the party poked Tony in the ribs at this point, and for his pains got a stinging blow on the ear. This youth, whose name was Chapin, was exceedingly angry at this, and Tony's fate doubtless would have been settled then and there, had not the other three interposed, and restrained Chapin's efforts to enforce an immediate punishment, protesting if there was a fight now he would spoil the fun. After an exciting altercation, which nearly resulted in the hazing party itself engaging in a civil war, peace was restored and the five proceeded toward the beach.

They walked some distance along the sands, which the ebbing tide had left damp and firm, to a point a little on the nether side of a deep stream, perhaps twenty yards wide, which divided the beach from a rocky bit of coast on the farther side. There was a rocky [20]
formation along the shores of this stream in the shelter of which Chapin soon indicated the mouth of a natural cave by thrusting his arms deep into the crevice, and then bringing forth one after another several large tin boxes and armfuls of fuel.

One boy quickly started a fire in the lee of a rock, the flame of which was shielded from the view of the school by the neighboring dunes. The other three, leaving Tony for the moment to his own devices, though they kept a watch on him, made preparations for a feast. From the tin boxes they produced various canned stuffs, biscuits, sweets, and the like, while the others began to fry some sausages in a skillet over the fire. It was probably near midnight, and so thrilling and so interesting were these proceedings, that for the moment Tony forgot that he too was not one of them out for a lark and began to enjoy himself hugely. Suddenly Chapin took a seat on a rock, and calling to him sharply, reminded him on what a different status he was there—a despised new boy to be hazed for freshness. He wondered, not without some alarm, what they proposed to do to him.

At length, just as Carroll handed up to Chapin a nicely done sausage, Tony's principal tormentor turned to him. "Well, Deering, suppose you get up on that rock there, and give us a sample of your beautiful southern voice. We'll have 'Louisiana Lou,' if you please."

Tony felt a cold shiver run down his back, but nevertheless he braced himself against the rock, instead of mounting it, and faced Chapin. Thorndyke and Marsh drew near, and Carroll looked up from where he was kneeling at the fire.

"Come along.... Nah!" he snarled, in answer to some remark of [21]
Carroll's, "I am going to haze this kid to the limit. Come, step lively there, Deering; what's the matter with you? Crawl up on that rock, or I'll biff you over the head."

Tony backed off a little. “I supposed you knew,” he said, “that I didn’t intend to be hazed when you brought me down here.”

“Didn’t intend to be hazed!” cried Thorndyke, a strapping big chap. “Well, I’ll be——What did you think we asked you to—a party?

“No,” Tony answered. “But I came because I didn’t want to raise a rumpus up near the School, where you might think I was scared and trying to squeal out of it.”

“So you ain’t trying to squeal now, eh?” asked Thorndyke.

“Not a bit, but I don’t intend to be hazed all the same.”

“Why, Socrates, my love, do you expect us to fight you in rotation so as to convince you of the fact that you *are* going to be hazed?” asked Carroll, in tones of sarcasm.

“Oh, biff him!” cried Chapin.

Tony backed a little. “I don’t expect you to fight me, no,” he answered; then like a flash he kicked off his sneakers, slipped off his coat, and cast it full into Chapin’s face, with his hands behind it, sending him sprawling over Carroll, and upsetting their fire. With a cry, he leaped upon the rocks above. “You’ve got to catch me first.”

There was a chorus of startled exclamations, and then all four [22]
started after him, leaping upon the rocks. Tony ran lightly to the farther side, and then just as Thorndyke’s face appeared over the ledge behind, he sprang into the air, off the rocks, and disappeared beneath the waters of Beaver Creek.

“Wait till the little devil comes up,” cried Marsh, standing on the brink of the rock and looking at the bubbling water. “He’ll swim across, but he can’t get back to the school without coming this way. Two of you go round by the bridge. Reggie and I’ll wait here.”

Chapin and Marsh started on a run for the bridge, which spanned the creek along a dune road about a hundred yards from the beach. Carroll and Thorndyke watched for the reappearance of Tony on the surface of the creek, but no Tony reappeared. The seconds lengthened into minutes; they heard their two companions stamping across the bridge, but not a ripple disturbed the dark waters of the creek.

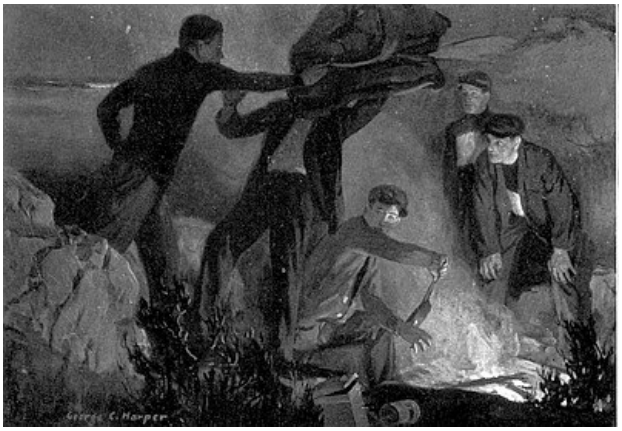
“Good heavens! what’s become of him?” whispered Thorndyke.

“Nothing!” Carroll responded irritably. “Watch the opposite bank.”

In a moment more Chapin and Marsh were on the other side. “Have you seen him?” they called.

“He hasn’t come up yet,” Chapin answered, in an agitated voice.

“Hasn’t come up yet! Then I’m going in after him!” and with the words Marsh plunged into the stream. He floundered about for a moment or so, diving here and there, but in four or five minutes crawled to shore exhausted. The others had investigated the bank to the bridge.



LIKE A FLASH HE SLIPPED OFF HIS COAT AND CAST IT FULL IN CHAPIN’S FACE

“He must have swum up stream,” suggested Marsh. [23]

“He hasn’t come up to the surface, you ass!” said Carroll. “Do you think he can swim a hundred yards under water?”

“What then do you think we are going to do?” he asked, in ghastly tones.

“Why two of us are going up to Doctor Forester, and two are

going to stay here and keep watch.”

“You don’t think....”

“What, in heaven’s name, can we think?”

Carroll and Marsh started on a run up the beach, leaving their two companions crouched on the rocks, peering down fearsomely into the stream. The night seemed to them to grow colder, darker, more dismal. The moon in fact had set.

“By Jove, this is rum!” Thorndyke choked, in a grisly effort to seem at ease.

“It’s ghastly, Harry,” whispered Chapin, as he put his hand on the other boy’s arm.

CHAPTER III

“PAX”

It is not to be supposed that we share the fright of the four hazers. Tony of course was not drowned, nor indeed at any time had he been in danger. He had not lived on a Mississippi bayou for the greater part of his life in vain. He was an excellent swimmer, and he had the knack to an unusual degree of swimming under water a long distance.

When Chapin had first advanced upon him, he had intended to fight, but he realized at once that such a course would be foolish, for he would inevitably be conquered, and forced in the long run to go through the “stunts” even in a more unpleasant fashion than if he submitted at once. He had, however, no intention of submitting so long as he saw any possibility of a way out of the situation. Suddenly it occurred to him that by jumping into the creek and swimming for some distance under water, he might get a start in the way of escape that it would be difficult for his pursuers to make up. In this way the hazing might be avoided for the night at least, and on the morrow he could take counsel as to the future with some of his new-found allies.

No sooner did he think of this stratagem than he acted upon it. As we have seen, it proved even more successful than he had [25] expected or hoped. The creek was quite deep enough for him to swim a considerable distance beneath the surface. He headed up stream, and kept under water to the limit of his endurance. Then, instead of coming to the surface in the splashing, sputtering fashion of the amateur, he came so far up as to thrust only his face above the waters for breath. So careful were his movements that the anxious watchers did not detect him even at this moment. A second time he went below, swimming beneath the surface for some yards, until he emerged again, this time within a short distance of the bridge. A few strokes brought him to this hiding-place, and he had scarcely ensconced himself there, clinging to one of the heavy wooden supports, when he heard Chapin and Marsh rushing across the planks above his head. He could tell by their tones of alarm, as they talked farther down the bank, that they thought he had drowned. He heard one of them jump into the creek and splash vainly about for some moments, and at last he heard two of them depart, and saw the shadowy outlines of the other two, as they returned disconsolate to wait by the rocks.

In about five minutes Tony crawled out from his hiding-place beneath the bridge. He was shivering with the cold, but otherwise not the worse for his long immersion. He ran softly along the dune road, about a hundred yards or so behind Carroll and Marsh on their way to the school. He followed them at a safe distance across the meadows and the campus, and watched them as they rang the bell of the Head Master’s house. Then he hurried off to his own [26] room in Standerland, slipped off his wet clothes, and got into bed. A little alarm as to his safety on the part of his would-be tormentors, he thought, would be a just bit of revenge, particularly against the supercilious Carroll.

While Deering lay comfortably in bed, rapidly recovering in body and spirit, the two conspirators had a mournful few minutes as they explained matters to Doctor Forester, who had thrust his head and his pyjama’d shoulders out of an upper window.

The Head Master listened to their frightened explanations. “Very well,” he said at length, “I will dress at once. In the meantime, one of you go quickly over to Standerland and see if by any chance he has returned there. It is possible that there has been a serious accident, but I think it much more likely that he has simply outwitted you. I trust that is the case. Report to me immediately.” And with that the Doctor closed his window sash with a bang.

With his heart in his mouth Carroll ran across the quadrangles to Standerland House, resolving with more passion than he customarily allowed himself that the Head had shown himself a brute. He felt his way along the dark corridor, still cautious, although convinced that it was but a matter of moments when the whole school must be alarmed. He always recalled that walk upstairs as one of the most disagreeable quarters of an hour of his life. At last he found his door, entered his study, and breathed a sigh

of relief as he switched on the light. Then he cautiously opened the door into Tony's bedroom, and gave a frightful start as he saw the boy sitting up in bed. But Carroll was not one to betray more than momentary surprise. He gave Tony a long curious look, sufficiently assured after the first glance that he was not a ghost. "So, my Socrates," he said, "you are back?" [27]

"It would seem so," answered Tony dryly, and as the older boy thought, impertinently.

"One wondered, you know," Carroll remarked quietly, as he turned off the light and left the room.

In five minutes he was back at the Head Master's house. "Deering is in bed, sir," he reported to the non-committal head at the upper window.

"Good; I thought so. Do you go now after your companions on the beach. Return at once; get back into bed as quietly as you got out of it, and the four of you report to me to-morrow morning after prayers. I fancy that whether or not you become the laughing stock of the school will depend entirely upon yourselves. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir."

Carroll had lost but a trifle of his suavity during this nocturnal adventure. He hurried off now to the beach, and explained the situation to Thorndyke and Chapin, who were so rejoiced to learn that they had not been the cause of an involuntary suicide that they forgot to be annoyed with Tony for outwitting them. It was a cold and dejected trio of boys that stowed away the remains of the unenjoyed feast, and then betook themselves up the hill, crept silently into their dormitories, and went to bed.

On the morrow they were excused from first study and reported to the Head Master. To their surprise Doctor Forester had very little to say to them. "I had intended to give you a lecture," he said, looking up from his writing and without laying down his pen, "and probably a severe punishment, but I fancy you have learned a lesson.... You can see, at least, to what the hazing of a high-spirited boy might lead.... I understand your ideas about hazing. I do not share them. I believe that you will not disappoint me when I say that I expect the practice to stop from this day." [28]

"Quite so, sir," said Thorndyke.

"And that is all," added the Doctor, giving them a nod of dismissal.

"Phew!" exclaimed Chapin, as they entered the corridor, "that's sliding out easy."

"Rather," answered Thorndyke, "unless we have the whole school howling at us when the kid squeals."

"Which he's sure to do," suggested Marsh.

Carroll withered them with a glance. "I rather fancy not," he drawled. "He's a southerner and a gentleman."

"Well, let's hope not," interposed Thorndyke.... "There, don't get huffy, Harry, you can't help coming from Chicago."

"Who wants to help it, you big cow?" cried Marsh, giving his chum Thorndyke a good-natured push against the wall. "But if I thought, as Carroll does, that there were not any gentlemen north of Mason and Dixon's line, I wouldn't come to a northern school."

"Rot!" vouchsafed Carroll. "Let's whoop her up for Gumshoe, and avoid any daffy questions about being quizzled by the Head." [29]

* * * * * * * *

Tony found it difficult the next day not to take Jimmie Lawrence or Kit Wilson into his confidence, and tell them of his adventure of the night before. But he conquered the temptation, for he was singularly incapable of enjoying himself at the expense of any one's else discomfiture. Tony was not without his faults, as we shall see, but he genuinely disliked to make other people uncomfortable. Perhaps this was an inheritance from a long line of ancestors who had had rather nice ideas about what constitutes a gentleman. At any rate, he was born that way, and did not deserve any special credit for it. He realized that if he told his story he might easily make his three captors the butts of the school, but that was not a form of revenge that appealed to him. Accordingly he held his peace, and if it had depended on him the story never would have been told. But we may say in passing, that eventually Carroll told the tale himself: it entered into the body of Deal tradition, and is frequently told by old Deal boys when hazing is a subject of

conversation.

Tony felt almost familiar with the schoolroom as he entered after prayers the next morning. A score of faces were now known to him, and so many had seemed friendly as he looked into them, that the homesick feeling and the alarm of the night before rapidly passed away. Occasionally he noticed Mr. Morris's glance resting upon him, as he sat at his books during the day, in a particularly interested [30] and friendly way. There was something in Morris's face—an attractiveness, perhaps one would call it, for he was not precisely handsome—a winningness in the directness of his glance, that more than once had won boys at almost first sight. Morris had the genius of inspiring enthusiasms, and he was to inspire one in Tony. The master was soon to hear from Carroll the inwardness of Tony's exploits, and marvel with him at the boy's "whiteness" in not talking. Mr. Morris was the occasional recipient of the intimate confidences of the supercilious Virginian, for even Carroll had moments of weakness when he felt the need of unburdening himself and receiving sympathy—moments, as he would have said, when he was not himself.

As the day wore on Tony was inclined to forget his unpleasant adventure of the night before. The afternoon found him again on the football field, absorbed in learning the game, and winning encomiums in the eyes of Kit, who until Thanksgiving would have few thoughts aside from football. Kit was captain of his form eleven, and his interest in its success was equaled only by the readiness with which he would sacrifice his best players to the school team or even to the scrub if they were needed. He was delighted with Deering's advent, as he had felt he was weak in ends, and Tony's fleetness promised much in that direction.

The likelihood of his securing a position on his form team gave Deering a prestige that stood him in good stead as a new boy; and as he was lively, good-natured and appreciative, it seemed that on [31] the whole he would have an agreeable time.

There was, however, a rift in the lute—which Tony detected the second day of his school life. As he would pass Chapin in the Schoolhouse corridors or on the campus, he could see by the expression on his face that he had taken the result of their adventures of the night before in bad part. They exchanged no words on the subject, but Chapin's behavior was in such contrast to that of Thorndyke and Marsh, or even of Carroll, all of whom had smiled good-naturedly when they had met him, that he put it down that in Chapin he had made an enemy. At the time this troubled him very little. He wondered of course if he should be hazed again, but surmised correctly that if he were it would not be by the same crowd.

The spirit with which he went into things, his success on the form team, and the powerful friends that he had made in Wilson and Lawrence, the leaders of the Third, soon secured him an immunity from hazing in any form. The Sixth frowned on the custom, so that none but adventurous spirits were apt to attempt it.

Tony was tired out that night, and as soon as he was dismissed from the schoolroom at nine o'clock, he ran over to Standerland and got into bed, scarcely noticing Carroll, who had the privilege of working in their common study. Hardly, however, was he in bed, than the door was opened, his light switched on, and again Carroll appeared, but this time there was a friendly grin on his face, and a box of biscuit and a jar of jam tucked under his arm.

"Don't jump, my philosopher!" he exclaimed, "I am alone and [32] unarmed." Then he advanced to the bed, and held out his hand. "Shall we make it 'pax'?"

"With all my heart," laughed Tony, and gave Carroll's hand a friendly shake.

"Suppose then we smoke a pipe of peace," and Carroll extracted from the recesses of his pocket two brierwood pipes.

"Hang it!" said Tony, "I don't smoke, you know. Aren't you afraid of getting caught?"

"Oh, yes, somewhat," answered Carroll, as he nonchalantly lighted a match. "But what will you have? School bores me to extinction. I find myself within two days craving nefarious excitement. You are fortunate to possess a calmer temperament. Here, help yourself to the jam and biscuit."

"You seem calm enough," commented Tony.

“I assume that, little one, for amusement, I am in reality excitable to a degree. Now take that incident last night—”

“Oh, let’s drop that,” said Tony.

“On the contrary, I should like to discuss it. I was rather a beast to go in for it, you know, when you had been, as it were, put in my tender care. It was the fun of doing something that one knew would get one into trouble if one were caught. You behaved in a singular fashion, I must confess, and lamentably upset our little calculations. Somehow, after blowing the business to the Head the joy of the affair was gone. I felt like a sick cat when I crawled into bed at one A. M.” [33]

“What happened?” asked Tony.

Carroll took a deep pull at his pipe, and blew the smoke out of the window. “Old Hawk laughed at us, and sent us to bed as though we were First Formers. Say, it was rather decent of you, you know, not to peach to the fellows.”

“How do you know I didn’t?”

“Well, we’ve escaped the jolly horsing we’d have got if you had, that’s all.... Do you know, I approve of that,—well, to a degree. Confound it! there’s curfew. Lie still, I’ll souse the light. I guess we’re safe enough. Bill saw us both in, and he isn’t one to nose about after lights unless there’s a beastly noise. Bill is such a gentleman that one hates to take advantage of his considerateness, —like this!” And he blew a puff of smoke into Tony’s face.

“Why do you do it then?”

Carroll got up and turned out the light; then resumed his seat on Tony’s bed.

“Why do I? Hang it, Deering, I sometimes wonder why I do a number of things. I’ve a great notion to chuck it.”

Tony had the good sense to make no reply to this remark, but to munch instead with rather unctious enjoyment on his biscuit and jam. Carroll seemed to meditate for the moment in the dark, then knocked his ashes out on the window-sill, and leaned over, feeling for the jar. “Where the deuce is the biscuit? That jam is the real article, you know. There is a great gulf between the jam I use and what one gets in the refectory. Would that in that gulf we might souse the housekeeper, eh?”

And so they talked the shop and jargon, the boyish confidences, and experiences, and plans, that have been the theme of nocturnal talks ever since schools were invented. It was quite late before Carroll returned to his bedroom, and Tony immediately dropped to sleep, feeling that after all he had misjudged him upon first appearances. His next conscious thought was as he leaped to his feet in answer to the strident tones of the rising bell. [34]

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[35]

CHAPTER IV

MICHAELMAS TERM

This late talk with Carroll did more toward putting Tony at his ease in the school than perhaps anything that happened to him. From that time on he became very friendly with his room-mate—all the better friends doubtless because they always maintained toward each other a certain reserve, due rather to Carroll's involuntary elaborateness of manner than to any deliberate effort on their part. All the better also was it that real as was their mutual regard for each other neither had that enthusiastic affection that school boys so frequently experience, and of which Tony was already aware in another direction. For just such a friendship quickly developed between him and Jimmie Lawrence.

He has missed one of the purest joys of life who has not known the delights of an enthusiastic boyish friendship. It has its sweetnesses, its fears and scruples, as has every other love; but there is a cloudless carelessness about its happy days as about no other period of life. For Tony, in that first Indian summer at Deal to wander off from the common fields with Jimmie Lawrence, into unfamiliar haunts, into the enchanted region of Lovel's Woods, or along the rocky kelp-strewn shores of the Strathsey River or the tawny beaches of the Neck, was a joy pure and unalloyed.

Among others Carroll watched the development of this friendship [36] with interest. Carroll was not the sort to give his affection quickly in such whole-hearted fashion, though he cared deeply enough about things, he thought. He neither approved nor disapproved of his room-mate's devotion to Jimmie, certainly was not jealous of it. If such things must be—he had a way of smiling with his assumed air of cynicism when friendship was mentioned—why he supposed Jimmie Lawrence was as worthy of Tony's devotion as the next boy. Carroll never spoke of this friendship to Tony, but tactfully began to welcome Jimmie as a visitor to their rooms during that fall term. To his own form-mates he referred to his study as "the kindergarten." He did, however, speak unusually frankly to Tony of another friendship which that youth appeared to have made. They had wandered toward the beach one evening. Football practice was just over; Tony had had his bath and was glowing a beautiful pink and white in the soft air of the Indian summer twilight.

"Do you know," said Carroll, flecking at the pebbles in the sands, as they stopped at the creek, "that you have made a great hit with our beloved Bill?"

Tony laughed. "Bill's made a great hit with me, I may say. But doubtless that's plain enough."

"Oh, perfectly," answered Carroll who was used to boys liking Mr. Morris, "but it has never been evident before that Bill has particularly cared for one of us rather than for another; he has been extraordinarily decent to everyone with whom he has to do, just as [37] Gumshoe has been extraordinarily odious. For myself, I have always disliked intensely the attitude that most school masters think it expedient to assume—to wit, a sort of official consciousness of a universal *in loco parentis*, a grim determination to make people think every boy is liked just in the same way, which we know is impossible, and as undesirable as it is unreal. Witness, Gumshoe really makes me grateful to him, despite his native hideousness, because he never addresses me without a sarcastic snarl or an odious grin as though I were amusing him. One understands that amusement."

"Oh, quite," said Tony, absently.

Reggie did not like these little interjections in his monologue. "Don't assume to be paying attention," he commented now. "I know of course that you are not until I get back to you. Don't think it necessary to assent. I am accustomed to talking without being listened to."

"Oh, dry up, Reggie, go on with Bill—what about him?"

"Ah, I thought our curiosity had been aroused. This, little one; he had succeeded better than most people in liking a good many fellows, with the result of course that the fellows really like him. But, for you, his liking is more patent than usual. I congratulate you —not to say, I envy you."

“Nonsense,” began Tony.

“Cultivate him, my boy.”

“Oh, I mean to do that,” Deering answered. “Tell me, do you like Mr. Morris, Reggie; you’re such a—”

“I, oh I adore him,—in my way; but even so much is between you [38] and me. He is a demi-god, the superman. As for me, I amuse him, interest him, baffle him a little, I hope; but he will never be fond of me. It will be a relief to Bill when I get out of his house.”

“Don’t you think it’s just that he’s never been sure whether or not he could trust you?” asked Tony.

Carroll for once started. “Trust me? Good heavens, Deering, I imagine the man takes me for a gentleman.”

“Oh, of course, that—I meant rather in other ways; if he counts on you to help out....”

“Oh!” Carroll exclaimed, with a tone of relief, “I dare say not.... I dare say not....” And for a while he seemed to think rather seriously. Tony wondered to himself how he had happened to stumble on what doubtless was a sore spot with his room-mate in his relation to the house-master. As for Carroll’s talk about Mr. Morris’s good opinion, Tony only took that half seriously. He hoped it was true, of course. Tony liked to be liked, as perhaps most people do.

Those were really golden days for him, which he was always to recall with a peculiar sense of pleasure. He was consciously happier than he had ever been before, because often at home there had been certain family shadows that dimmed the day. Life went well with him that first fall term. He seemed to catch the spirit of the school almost by intuition; indeed, as he said to himself one afternoon as he stood on the terrace in front of the Old School, looking down across the sloping meadows, past the ochre-colored beach, out upon Deigr Rock and a quivering ocean, it was in his [39] blood: it was his inheritance and tradition to be a part of and to love Deal School.

He was quick and sensible enough to keep his classroom work up to the average, and though he did not distinguish himself as a scholar, he suffered very little from detention or pensums, those popular devices for the torture of the dull and the lazy. He had his long afternoons free, save for football. And football in that day, under what Tony ever felt was a wise dispensation of the Head’s, was never allowed to absorb more than an hour, except when a game was on. As it was, he always had a good hour or so of daylight in which with a congenial companion,—Jimmie, or Kit, or Carroll, often,—he could explore the surrounding country. And this for Tony soon became the most fascinating way of spending his time. Before the Michaelmas term was over he had got to know every path and by-way for five miles roundabout. To a boy who had eyes as well as wits there was a plenty to interest him in the region about Deal;—the bold and varied shore, with its rocks and beaches, its coves and caves, its points and necks, the abode of wild fowl of the sea; the rolling fertile country to the north; Lovel’s Woods; the quiet waters of Deal Great Pond; the quaint streets of the old town of Monday Port, with its rotting wharves and empty harbor.

This strange old town, despite everywhere the lingering touch of the summer invasion, with its suggestion of a vanished trade, in the winter was bereft of all save its memories of a bygone order of things; and with these memories, to an imaginative boy, the town [40] seemed heavy. It required a special permission and a good excuse for any of the schoolboys, except the Sixth, to get the freedom of its streets. Tony was especially keen for such excuses and such freedom. His first walk there had been with Mr. Morris, who seemed to know the intimate stories of its houses, to be familiar with all its little secrets. In less conventional conversations Tony planned escapades for that direction; but as yet nothing very definite suggested itself. The penalties for being caught in Monday Port without the good excuse were considered excessive and usually not worth the risk. Mr. Morris had a glorious tale of the days when he was a schoolboy at Deal, of the actual exodus from the school by night of the whole Fifth, the boarding of a schooner that had lain dreaming in the sleepy harbor for a day or so, a thrilling sail into the open, and the overhauling of the pirate crew by the Head in a steam-launch. Those were the good old days of birching, and yes, Mr. Morris had caught it. He had smiled at the memory as if it were a pleasant one.

Golden days that more and more took the aspect of holidays as

midst school strain and throbbing excitement, they drew near the day of the “great game” with Boxford, the rival school across the Smoke mountains.

It had seemed possible for some time that Tony might make end on the School team. Mr. Stenton, the athletic director, though he had a vigorous way of finding fault, forever threatening the boys with defeat and the benches and fines, secretly regarded Deering as a “find.” He had watched his play for a week or two on Kit Wilson’s [41]
Third Form team; saw that he was green but teachable, and judged that he was one of the swiftest runners that had ever come to Deal. The end of the first month found Tony a member of the School squad.

To the old boys it seemed almost “fresh” that a newcomer should be able to play football so much better than they, and to be a greenhorn at that! But Jack Stenton knew his business; he was an old Kingsbridge man, and he had played on the Kingsbridge eleven in the very earliest days of American football, when it was a very different game indeed. And Stenton made up his mind that Tony eventually should make the Kingsbridge eleven. Deal boys had not been taking many places on Kingsbridge teams of recent years, which was a matter of real grief to the faithful coach. Stenton, however, was the last man in the world to give a boy a good opinion of himself, so that he pretended to hold out to Tony but the smallest hope. “You may squeeze into shape,” he would say, “but I doubt it.” And in truth he was averse to playing a new boy in a big game; so that up to the eve of the Boxford game the line-up was in doubt. Tony had a vigorous rival for his position, in Henry Marsh, one of the members of the hazing-bee of the first few nights at Deal. Marsh was quick; Tony was quicker; but Marsh had the advantage of knowing the game, and clever as Tony was proving himself, he nevertheless was a greenhorn.

His promotion to the school squad did a great deal for Deering in the way of increasing his popularity. Kit Wilson no longer patronized him; on the other hand he was rather proud of Tony’s friendship, [42]
and took a good deal of credit to himself for having discovered him. He proposed Deering for membership in the Dealonian, a semi-secret society that took a great deal of credit to itself for the smooth and successful running of the School. Membership in it was an honor, which a new boy rarely achieved. It was enough to have turned our friend’s head, but he was singularly not a self-conscious youth, and to this it was due that his quick success aroused so little jealousy. Tony had the quality of lovableness to a marked degree, which is after all a quality; it was what won him at college in later years the nickname of “Sunshine,” a famous nickname in the annals of Kingsbridge, as Kingsbridgeans know—but that’s another story.

In all the unexpected happiness of the term there was for Tony nevertheless the inevitable rift in the lute. Chapin was still sulky toward him; and he could see beneath a rather elaborate courtesy, that Henry Marsh, Chapin’s particular crony, was anything but friendly. This lack of friendliness became so noticeable to Carroll that despite his intimacy with the two, he began to draw somewhat away from them. Carroll thought that they had singularly failed to appreciate Tony’s “whiteness” in saving them all from an unmerciful horsing. Even the Head Master had called their attention to that in his brief discourse to them on that unpleasant morning afterwards.

Carroll met the two coming out of Thornton Hall—the refectory—one evening after supper, and joined them as they walked around [43]
the terrace in the moonlight.

“I say, you fellows,” he began, plunging *in medias res*—Carroll always took the unexpected line—“why the deuce do you keep so sour on young Deering?”

Chapin looked up quickly, his eyes glinting unpleasantly in the moonlight. “Hang it, Carroll!” he exclaimed, “what’s that to you? We’ve no obligation to take up with every little southern beggar that comes to school, as you seem to have.”

“No, assuredly,” Carroll replied, suavely, “but it occurs to me that when a chap has behaved as uncommonly decently to us as Deering has, you might show a little—well, appreciation.”

“Rot! Deering has had a swelled head ever since the night of the hazing-bee, and if Jack Stenton sticks him on the team for the Boxford game there’ll be no holding him. We will be for sending him up to Kingsbridge instanter.”

“You are uttering unspeakable nonsense, my dear Arthur, and

you know it. Give the lad a show; play fair. What's the matter with you, Harry?" he added, turning to Marsh, "it is only lately that you have taken to snubbing him."

Marsh gave an uneasy laugh. "Oh, Arty and me hang together," he said lamely.

"Well, that is more than you can say for your English," remarked Carroll, with a contemptuous smile, and turned away.

Chapin followed him up, and laid an arm upon his shoulder. "Look here, Reggie," he exclaimed, "don't let's bicker about this kid. I don't like him, but what difference need that make between us? [44] We have stuck pretty close these four years. Come on now, let's slip down to the cave, hit the pipe, and talk things over."

"No, thank you," replied Carroll briefly.

"Come on, Reggie, do," put in Marsh, "we've bagged a bottle of wine to-day, and we'll bust it to-night in your honor."

"Thanks, no; seductive as your offering is, I rather fancy you may count me out of your little meetings in the future." And with the words Carroll went on his way.

The two boys looked after him a moment, until he entered the Old School, when Chapin exclaimed, with an oath, "Let him go, Harry; we'll count him out all right; but we'll get even with his cub."

Marsh murmured an assent, but hung back a little when Chapin renewed the proposal to visit the cave on the beach. "Don't let us go to-night, Art; remember you're in training."

"The deuce with training. What's the use of banging your head against a football for a month if a greenhorn like that is to be shoved into the front row at the last moment. I'm going to have some fun nights, and you'll see, I shall be as fit as a fiddle in the morning anyway." And as he spoke, he drew Marsh's arm within his, and together they started for the beach.

From that day Carroll avoided them, a circumstance that did not increase their friendliness toward Tony. It had been comparatively easy at the time for Reginald to take the course he did, but as the days came and went, he began to miss the companionship of Chapin [45] and Marsh more than he cared to acknowledge. Although naturally there was little in common between them, for so long a time he had identified himself with them and their crowd,—attracted by their willingness to engage upon any lark however wild and their keenness to avoid school rules, a process to which his own languid existence had been secretly dedicated,—that he keenly missed the nefarious exploits their companionship afforded. To be sure he had stopped smoking, he was bracing up a bit and helping Mr. Morris out with the discipline of the house, but beyond that he craved as ardently as ever the excitement and adventure of his more careless days.

At that moment he was ripe to have entered into a closer intimacy with Tony, or even with Mr. Morris. But Deering was absorbed in the life of his form, and except at night he and Carroll had no opportunity of being together, and then Tony was so tired out with football practice that by "lights" he was ready to tumble into bed. And so they fell quite out of the way of having nocturnal talks. Mr. Morris had a great liking for Carroll, despite his obvious faults, but he had long since given up the hope of knowing him better, of getting beyond Carroll's supercilious reserve and too-elaborate courtesy. The consequence was that he detected no change now in the boy's attitude and failed to make the advances that Carroll would have responded to so readily. For the first time Carroll became seriously dissatisfied with his life at school. He was really bored, as he had always pretended to be, and also lonely, [46] which of course he did not acknowledge, even to himself. He was a little inclined to think in his heart that his half-conscious efforts at reform were not worth while. However he decided to stick it out for the year at any rate, and settled down to the monotonous routine with an air of indifference, and kept steadily away from his old companions.

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[47]

CHAPTER V

THE BOXFORD GAME

The first cold snap gave way again to Indian summer with just enough northwest wind to make good football weather. The practice went on diligently. Lesser rivals came week by week to Deal and literally and metaphorically bit the dust ere the great Boxford game drew near. The school was a-quiver with excitement. The form leaders marshalled the boys onto the field in the bright clear afternoons and stimulated them to cheer until they were hoarse. The *pros* and *cons* of winning were the principal theme of conversation during recreation times, and hours and minutes were counted as the great day came nearer and nearer.

The day before the game a mass meeting was held in the Gymnasium, and the Head and Mr. Stenton and such other masters as had athletic proclivities were called upon for speeches, while the boys cheered everything enthusiastically without discrimination. Sandy Maclaren, the doughty captain of the eleven, mounted the rostrum amongst others, and delivered his sentiments in a terse series of twelve stammering words, “Boys, we’ve got to win; and that’s all I have to say,” which was greeted with an applause that more skilled orators seldom evoke. The form games were over, and the form teams had disbanded; all effort was concentrated now upon the chief game of the year. [48]

Tony, from his place amongst the scrub players, heard it all with tingling ears and beating heart, absorbing that intangible energy—school spirit—as air into his lungs. This unexpected and vehement stirring of his emotions bewildered him. He thought he was just beginning to understand what love of school might mean. Then they sang “Here’s to good old Deal” and “There’s a wind that blows o’er the sea-girt isle” in a fashion that brought the heart to the throat and tears of exquisite happiness to the eyes. And at last Doctor Forester dismissed them with a few encouraging words that sounded very much like a blessing.

Jimmie Lawrence sought Tony’s side, as the boys poured out of the Gymnasium. “Hey, Tony, ain’t it grand?” he exclaimed, as he twined his arms around his friend’s neck. “Oh, say, boy, we’ve *got* to win.”

Tony gave a little gulp and squeezed Jimmie’s hand. “Oh, Jimmie, I never felt so great in all my life.”

The night before the game they were in Jimmie’s rooms in Standerland and a crowd of Third Formers came trooping in. “No school to-night,” cried Kit Wilson, “there’s to be a P-rade around the campus at eight-thirty sharp. Tony, you lucky dog, don’t it feel good even to be a despised scrub?”

Tony laughed. “Say, fellows, you don’t know how it all strikes a greenhorn like me. Why, it makes me feel bully to be alive.” And as he stood there in the center of the room, with smiling friendly faces about him, health and excitement glowing in his cheeks and a happy smile playing on his boyish lips, there was an unconscious feeling within them all that it was bully for him to be alive. [49]

Rush Merton, an irrepressible, black eyed, black haired youth, proposed a fresh song and started to bellow it forth, but the boys were keen for talk and promptly smothered him with sofa pillows—an assault that was resented so violently that in much less time than it takes to tell Jimmie’s attractive rooms were in that sad condition, technically known as “rough-house.” In the midst of the hubbub a stentorian voice made itself heard, “Here stop this nonsense!” And Jack Stenton, the hardy popular athletic director, came in. “Don’t make nuisances of yourselves, children. Pick up those sofa pillows, compose yourselves, and listen to words of wisdom from an older and wiser man.”

“Hear, hear!” came in boisterous good-nature from a dozen throats. Rush gathered himself together from the pile of cushions, made an absurd bow, and indicated Mr. Stenton with a pompous wave of the hand. “Gentlemen, I yield the center of attention (and the center of gravity,” he added *sotto voce*) “to our beloved athletic director. Mr. Athletic Director, we are all ears.”

“Good! You are all Third Formers, eh?” said Stenton, with a smile, as he looked them over good-naturedly. “I fancied that I might find you congregated in this den of iniquity. Well, I have come

up here to tell you fellows how much I appreciate Kit Wilson's spirit in cheerfully giving his best form players to the scrub. He has set an [50]
example to the other forms that is bound to be a fine thing for the athletics of the school. And I want to tell you also that the form, this time, is going to get something out of it—an honor that I don't think has fallen to the Third Form previous to this in the history of Deal School. After due consideration Captain Maclaren and I have decided to play Deering at left end in to-morrow's game."

For a moment there was silence, due to the overwhelming surprise, for they had hardly dared hope that Tony would be given a chance except as a substitute; and this meant that he had won out against Marsh who had played on the team last year. Deering himself looked in helpless amazement, first at Stenton, then at his form mates. Jimmie broke the stillness at last by exclaiming in a shrill voice, "Come to my arms, my frabjous boy," and clasped Tony wildly about the waist. Then the cheers rang forth, despite Stenton's protest, until Mr. Morris came running out of his study to find out what the racket was.

"Come, come," Mr. Stenton cried at last, "cut this now; and you, young 'un, get to bed and don't celebrate any more to-night. Hello, Mr. Morris, we have decided to put Deering in the game to-morrow —hence this bedlam."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Morris heartily, as he shook Tony's hand. "But you boys had better get out now and join the procession; they are meeting before the Chapel."

AFTER DUE CONSIDERATION CAPTAIN MACLAREN AND I HAVE DECIDED TO PLAY DEERING AT LEFT END IN TO-MORROW'S GAME.

At last they were gone, having wrung Tony's hand two or three [51]
times each, and Deering and Lawrence were left alone. For a moment neither boy spoke, but stood looking at each other, their eyes glistening with friendliness that had been heightened by the excitement and the common joy. Jimmie was as unaffectedly glad as if the honor had come to him. Then Tony slipped into a chair by the window, and putting his head upon his hands stared out upon the campus, which was beginning to be covered with groups of boys, converging toward the Chapel. "I wish old Jack had let me go out and help celebrate," he said, with a little laugh. "I can't sleep if I do go to bed."

Jimmie sat down on the chair, and slipped his arm about Tony's neck. "You must, dear old boy, all the same; 'cause you've got to win for us."

Tony laughed, and clasping Jimmie's hand, he looked up at him with a sudden seriousness that in after days Jimmie was to recall as having been profoundly significant. "Jim," he said, "I know that Sandy and Larry Cummings and Chapin and the rest of 'em can play football a thousand times better than I will ever do, but just the same there's something that kind of tells me that I am going to have my chance to-morrow in a special way. I must do something to prove to Jack and Sandy that they aren't making a mistake. Oh, Jim, you don't know how I feel—awfully puffed up and absurdly small. I wish it were you."

"You're all right, old boy; and Sandy and Jack know their business a blame sight better than we do. Now cut it for bed, and I'll go out and help make the night hideous."

In his own rooms, where Tony went as soon as Jimmie left him, [52]

he found Carroll deep in a Morris chair and the pages of a French novel. “Hello, Reggie,” he cried, “aren’t you going to p-rade?”

“Not I, kiddo,” answered Carroll, indifferently. “I fancy I’ve reached that patriarchal age, in spirit if not in the flesh, when one puts away childish things. I am mildly moved, however, to go and tell Stenton and Maclaren that I approve of them, but I’ll content myself with saying that to you. It is worth while to have swift-moving pedalities, isn’t it?”

“So it seems,” Tony muttered, a little disappointed by the coolness of his friend’s tone. “Well, good-night,” he added, “I am going to turn in.”

Carroll had not meant to be supercilious, and for a moment after Tony left him, avoiding his glance as he had, he laid down his novel and started toward Deering’s bedroom. His hand was almost on the knob, the generous hearty words on his lips, but he hesitated, and at last turned back and took up his book. The study door was open, and at that moment Mr. Morris paused at it, evidently on his way to the campus.

“Not celebrating, Reginald?” he enquired.

“No, Mr. Morris,” answered Carroll, rising.

A momentary wave of anger swept over Morris’s strong kindly face. “Is it that your school spirit is so slack or that your French novel is so absorbing?”

Carroll bowed with an icy politeness. “I am afraid, Mr. Morris,” he said at last, with compressed lips, “that whichever explanation I gave would mean the same to you.”

“I am afraid it would, Reginald,” said Mr. Morris, as he turned [53]
away, with something like a sigh. “Good-night.”

“Good-night, sir.”

Carroll sat for a long time without reading, listening to the shouts upon the campus. At length he picked up his novel, went into his bedroom, and undressed. Before getting into bed, he darkened his transom, lighted a small electric night-lamp, and laid a pad and pencil on the table by his bedside. For an hour or more, long after the excitement had ebbed without and the boys had got back and gone noisily to bed, long after he had heard the watchman make his stealthy midnight rounds, Carroll sat there in bed, gazing dreamily out of his window upon the moonlit sea and the misty outlines of Lovel’s Woods and at the ruby intermittent glow of Deigr Light, and now and then he jotted down a line or word upon the pad. This was what he wrote:

The pure stars shine above the flowing sea,
  The strand is gleaming in the moon’s soft light,
The south wind blows across the murky lea,
  The lamps of Monday glimmer in the night.

The moon sags slowly in the violet west,
  A yellow crescent, cloud-hung all about,
As though in weariness it sinks to rest,
  And one by one the glowing lamps go out.
So flutter all the little weary souls
  In trembling dreams a moment and are still;
The school is wrapped in darkness; on the shoals
  The tide turns; night enfolds the silent hill.

* * * * * * * * *

The day of the game turned out bright and fair, after a dull gray [54]
morning, with ozone and freshness in the nippy air of early November. Recitations of a sort were held in the morning, though to be sure most of the masters fell into reminiscent vein and àpropos of nothing at all told their classes stories of the bygone heroes of the School—of Nifty Turner’s mighty kick and Pard’s immortal run from the enemy’s ten-yard line. Mr. Roylston alone had the ability and the temerity to hold his form down to an unrelieved discussion of the sequence of tenses in *Cæsar* and mercilessly put Kit Wilson into detention for misconstruing an obvious Imperfect with the remark, “I guess to-day it is an Historical Present.” Kit served his detention and passed into history.

The team, including Tony in a brand-new red sweater with a gorgeous black “D” across the breast, were excused from school at noon, and had dinner in the Refectory with the Boxfordians, who had coached across the hills in the morning. By two o’clock the teams were on the field, passing footballs, catching punts and kicking goals in regulation fashion.

The boys poured out of the Schoolhouse after two o'clock call-over, and crowded the side lines, while the faculty and their wives and distinguished visitors from Boxford and Monday Port filled the line of wooden bleachers which had been run up the day before.

Doctor Forester and the Head Master of Boxford walked up and down within the lines, repeating the same amiable courtesies and remarks about the weather and the view and the condition of the teams that they had made for years, as though this were the first [55] instead of the twentieth struggle in which Deal and Boxford had been engaged. It was a specially important game, as the score in games between the two schools was a tie.

The present scribe, who was not a football player, cannot undertake to describe that eventful game in technical language. The intricacies of formation and mass play were beyond his humble abilities at school, as he has no doubt they are to the majority of people who nevertheless follow the game with as keen interest as if they knew it. That is to say, it is inconceivable to him, that anything could be quite as exciting to a Deal boy or a Kingsbridge man as to see his school or college team pressing nearer and nearer the coveted goal, or to watch a fleet-footed boy dodge through a broken field, sprint as though the fate of empires hung upon his fleetness, and sprawl gloriously at last behind the enemy's line on top of the ball. The technically curious are referred to Vol. LX, No. 2 of the *Deal Literary Magazine*, where they will find a more accurate account than they certainly will find in the pages of this chronicle. They will miss there, however, an incident, which impresses the scribe as having been the most important of the game.

Suffice it, the ball was kicked off at three o'clock by the Boxford center, and went sailing down the field into the arms of Sandy Maclaren on the ten-yard line, and eleven blue-garbed Boxfordians went chasing after it lipity-cut. Here one described a graceful parabola as his knees encountered the hardy back of Arthur Chapin, another went flying off involuntarily in a reverse direction as he [56] caught Deering's hand in his ribs, but one, surer than the rest, dived for a tackle and laid Sandy low just as he was crossing the thirty-yard line. Cheers rang out indiscriminately from both sides of the field, until the scattered teams had run together, and, kneeling face to face, with hands clenched, faces grimly set, the muscles a-quiver, waited while Kid Drayton, Deal's little quarter-back, gave the signals in his high shrill voice, "Forty-nine, eleven, sixteen." Then the ball was snapped, and Chapin, the half-back, was hurled through a hole in Boxford's line for a gain of seven yards. Once, twice, thrice, the Deal boys made their distance to the indescribable joy of their supporters. Then the Boxford team, recovering from the unexpected strength of the first onslaught, stiffened and became as a stone wall, and held Deal for three downs, so that Thorndyke, the full-back, dropped behind for a kick. The oval went spinning through the air, Tony speeding away almost under it, dodging the player who tried to intercept him, so that as the Boxford half leaned back to catch the ball, he downed him in his tracks. For the first time Tony heard the *Sis*, *Boom*, *Ah!* of the rippling cheer ring out with his own name tacked on to the end of it.

Back and forth, now tucked tight under the arm of a red or a blue sweater, now sailing luxuriously in the air, the ball was worked over the field; near Boxford's goal, near Deal's; or worried like a rat by a pack of terriers in the middle of the gridiron. The two teams were almost equally matched, and the first half ended without a score.

"You are doing well, young 'un," said Stenton to Tony, as he [57] stood in the center of the Deal team in the locker-rooms under the Gymnasium between the halves. "Give him a chance, Drayton, and send him around right end. I think it will work."

"All right, sir," the little quarter-back squeaked. "I've been counting on Chapin mostly, but toward the end he seemed to be completely tuckered."

Chapin looked up from the bench where he was sitting. "You were so blame winded yourself that you could hardly give the signals," he snarled.

"Drop that kind of talk!" exclaimed Stenton. "You have been playing like a tackling dummy for the last ten minutes. If you want to lose the game for us keep that up."

"I am playing the best game I know," Chapin answered surlily. "If you don't like it," he muttered, though Stenton did not hear him, "go get another of your Third Form pets. You chucked Marsh, one of

your best players."

The second half opened, and each team seemed to come back fresher to the fray. With a few trifling exceptions there had been no injuries. Chapin seemed the only boy on whom the strain was telling, and Stenton correctly surmised that that was because he had not been keeping training. And as a matter of fact at a fatal moment his form told. The ball had been worked down well toward Deal's goal line, and each time through Chapin. Suddenly the Boxford full-back dropped back for a kick: the center sent the ball spinning to him, and a second later he made a drop kick that sent the ball like a great bird sailing majestically between the Deal goal [58] posts. And the score was 4 to 0 in favor of Boxford.

Pandemonium broke loose on the visitors' side-lines, while the home boys were still with apprehension and disappointment. Soon the ball was back in the center of the field in Deal's possession, and was being pushed, inevitably it appeared, toward Boxford's goal, and the strident cries of "Touchdown, touchdown, touchdown!" rang across the campus from the throats of three hundred Deal boys. "How much time?" cried Sandy. "Three minutes to play!" called the time-keeper, and his ominous words were taken up and repeated by the referee. Tony felt as if his heart would break. Why, why, why, he wondered, did not Drayton give him a chance? And Jack Stenton, anxiously pacing the side-lines, wondered too. And then suddenly Tony heard Kid's squeaky voice ring out, "Sixteen, twenty-two, one,"—his signal! And bracing nerves and sinews, he waited breathlessly as the left half received the ball, and, dodging the arms of the Boxford player who had broken through, thrust the smooth little pigskin into Tony's arms. Away he dashed, with Chapin, Maclaren, and Thorndyke interfering, round right end. He thrust his hand into the shoulder of the opposing tackle, successfully dodged a heavy Boxford boy who had dived to tackle, and with Chapin by his side, went tearing down the field, which was perfectly open save for the frantic quarter-back of the Boxford team, who was dashing forward to intercept him. Thirty yards more and the game was won! but the quarter-back was almost upon him. "Keep ahead! keep ahead!" he screamed at Chapin, who seemed for the instant to be [59] lagging behind. Twenty yards!—and he could see the Boxford quarter dashing diagonally across the field toward him, and almost feel his arms pinioning his legs. An instantaneous glance—yes, yes, he could make it if Chapin would only keep up with him and ward off that quarter as he made his lunge. Then, just as the Deal boys rose to a man, with a frantic cheer, the supreme moment was come. The line was reached, but suddenly Deering felt a jolt; the quarter's arms were about his waist, as they went sprawling toward the goal-line; but another arm clothed in a *red* sweater had thrust itself next Tony's body and given the ball a terrific shove. In an agony of horror, as he fell heavily to earth, he saw the football fall out of his arms, bound to the ground in front of them, and Chapin and the Boxford quarter lunge together, as they all went down in the mêlée. But the Boxford boy was on the ball and had scored a touchback!

There was a shrill whistle, and the crowd of players were about them, the Deal boys uttering harsh cries of anger and disappointment; the Boxford boys cheering in delirious joy, and above it all a hoarse voice screaming "Time! time!" Tony pulled himself together. "What's that?" he exclaimed in bewildered fashion. "Deal this way," yelled Sandy Maclaren; and then to him in a contemptuous aside, "The game's over, you fool; get up and cheer."

Suddenly he realized the whole situation, realized much more than any one else did at that strenuous moment, for he remembered the red-clothed arm that was responsible for the catastrophe of his losing the ball, and he gave a long look full into Chapin's face, but [60] held his tongue. With a sudden overwhelming bitterness he realized that Chapin had had his revenge.

As soon as the cheer was over he ran across the field toward the Gymnasium, passing Jack Stenton on the way, who gave him a glance of unmitigated disgust. "Couldn't you have kept from fumbling for one second when the game was in your hands?" he hissed at him, forgetting himself in his bitter disappointment. Tony bent his head and ran on—not back to the lockers, but to his own room in Standerland, where he locked himself in. He refused to open even to Jimmie Lawrence, who came knocking there presently, loyal despite his grief, anxious only to commiserate his friend, whom he knew was suffering more keenly than any of the rest of them.

CHAPTER VI

AFTERMATH

The outcome of the game for several days cast a deep gloom over the school. No one apparently had seen Chapin's dastardly play, so that the cause of the defeat was very generally ascribed to Tony's fumbling. The Boxford boys had driven off in great glee, Deal joining good-spiritedly in their cheers; but the bells remained silent; the bon-fires were not lighted, and the school settled down to a doleful Saturday night. Little groups of boys gathered here and there after supper, and discussed the incidents of the day. Sandy Maclaren and Stenton were universally blamed for having risked the experiment of playing a green boy in a big game, but with boys' native generosity they showed no animosity toward Deering. He had lost the game—the consciousness of that, they realized, was bitter enough punishment for him. Even his own form mates thought it natural that he should prefer to keep to himself that evening, and showed little sympathy for Jimmie Lawrence's anxiety on his behalf. Jimmie had tried again and again to get into Tony's room, but could get no response to his repeated knockings.

Had he known all that was going on in Tony's mind and heart, he would have understood. For shut in his bedroom, flat upon his face [62] on the bed, Deering was struggling with the keenest temptation he had ever faced. He realized acutely the opprobrium, the unjust opprobrium, that he would meet with, perhaps not crediting his schoolmates for as much generosity as they had; and though he would not have feared to face the boys had the fault been his own, he could not trust himself yet to meet them, see their disappointment in him, receive their tolerant sympathy, when he knew that a word from him might free himself from ignominy and cast the blame where it belonged. And as he lay there, great waves of hate for Chapin swept over him. He clenched his fists and drove them into the pillows, longing that his fingers were about Chapin's throat and that he might choke out of him a confession of his dastardly betrayal. To his overwrought mind his future in the school looked dark and unattractive. The two months that he had spent there had been so bright and happy; he had made such warm friends and won for himself, it seemed, such a promising place in the regard of the school; and now, he felt, all must change, and his fool's paradise go tumbling down. To have been given his chance, and failed through the willful meanness of another, and failing, to have cost his school the victory! For a moment he felt that he would pack his trunk, go down and tell Stenton the truth, and then take the first train out of Monday Port and leave the school to settle the wrangle how it would.

And then he remembered his grandfather's parting words, as the old general had stood in the portico of the white-pillar'd house on the far-away bayou, "Never repay a meanness by a meanness, my [63] boy; and you will make a good sort of Christian." And now, would not telling, truth though it were, be repaying a meanness by a meanness? Yes; but with the acknowledgment, wrung from his conscience, he burst into tears, tears of helpless disappointment and chagrin. Telling on another, especially in his own defense, Tony had always instinctively felt the most exquisite form of meanness.

After a time he slipped from the bed, and fell on his knees by the bedside, obeying an unconscious need, in response to the suggestion of an unbroken habit of putting his boyish trust in an unseen power that knew and understood. "Oh, God," he cried, "don't let me be mean." And after a time, though as a matter of fact he prayed very little more while he knelt there, he rose up, removed his soiled football clothes, washed and dressed, and slipped out quietly upon the campus. He avoided meeting the wandering boys, took himself to the beach, and with wind whistling and waves roaring in his ears, in tune with his mood, he walked the four miles out to the extreme point of Strathsey Neck. It was a grim walk, but not an unhappy one, for he had won his battle and had definitely made up his mind to be silent about the game as he had been silent about the hazing.

* * * * * * * * *

But Tony was not the only person who had witnessed the game that day and knew who in reality was responsible for the defeat. Mr.

Morris, who chanced to be standing on the side near the Boxford goal-line, had seen with perfect distinctness all that took place during that exciting moment of the game. And though several of the boys standing near him had exclaimed, “It looks as if Chapin had knocked the ball out of Deering’s arms himself,” with his accustomed reserve, he held his peace and made no comment. The incredibility of such an act on Chapin’s part had speedily driven from the boys’ minds the momentary impression. Morris, observing at the time of the game that Reggie Carroll was standing near him, had moved over to join him. But at that instant time had been called, and immediately the field was a scene of indescribable confusion. The house master pondered over the matter during the evening, but could not make up his mind as to the proper course of action. [64]

Just before lights that night he strolled into Carroll’s and Deering’s study, where he found Reggie as usual at his ease in a Morris chair with a novel in his hands. Carroll affected French novels, largely because he could plead the excuse when he was caught reading them that it was for the sake of his languages.

“Come in, do, Mr. Morris,” exclaimed Carroll, with a trace less than his wonted coolness. The master entered, closing the door behind him. “Where is Deering?” he asked, as he seated himself on the couch, and taking up a paper-cutter from the table, began to play with it.

“He has just come back from a long walk, and turned in, sir. Would you like to speak with him?”

“No, no, thank you,” Morris answered. “But I will sit for a moment, if you like, and talk with you. That was an unfortunate game to-day, was it not?” And as Morris asked the question he looked at Reggie closely. [65]

“Very,” the boy answered, laconically.

“Particularly for our friend Deering,” persisted the master.

“Yes, I wish they had not played him; it was a poor experiment.”

“Had you supposed him a careless player?”

Carroll looked up languidly, but there was a keen glance in his eyes, and a note of significance in his voice, as he answered, “No, sir, I don’t think him a careless player, Mr. Morris.”

“And yet he fumbled at a most inopportune time,” suggested Morris, musingly.

Carroll flung his book a little impatiently on the table, and looked the older man frankly in the eyes. “Mr. Morris,” he exclaimed, with every trace of indifference gone, “I am going to tell you in strict confidence what I know about the game. It is scarcely a decent thing for me to tell it, but then I saw it.”

“Yes, yes,” Morris murmured, encouragingly.

“I saw Arthur Chapin knock the ball out of Tony’s arms just as they crossed the line and the Boxford quarter tackled him. I believe he did it on purpose. Now, I know,” he went on quickly, “that it is a terrible accusation to make against a fellow even in confidence to you; but that’s what happened, and I don’t know what I ought to do about it. It’s incredible, but I saw it.” And springing from his chair, Reggie began to pace excitedly up and down the room.

“Yes,” said Mr. Morris, quietly, “it is incredible, but I saw it too.”

“What!” exclaimed Reggie. “You saw it, Mr. Morris?” [66]

“Yes, just as you describe it. It is due to the fact that I supposed you also had seen it that I came in to talk it over with you to-night. I am afraid Chapin is capable of that sort of thing.”

“Well, then——”—Reggie stopped—”Well, then,” he repeated, “I suppose it is up to us to tell the Head.”

Morris appeared to be lost in thought. “Of course,” he said, after a moment, “that is the right course to think of; but I am not sure, my dear fellow, that I think it best for us to do that just yet. I want to wait a bit, I think, and see what Deering might wish us to do. You can be sure he knows it.”

“Oh, yes, I am sure he knows,—he couldn’t help knowing.”

“Well, personally I can’t see what good will come by going to the Head right away. I am quite sure that if it is brought officially to Dr. Forester’s notice that he will feel obliged to make it known to the school, both as a punishment to Chapin and in justice to Deering.”

“But ought that not to be done?” asked Carroll.

“Well, in one sense, yes; but do you know, Reggie,—though it may seem unwise in me, I have an extraordinary faith in Deering’s

judgment about this matter. I want to know how he takes it before we do anything."

"I don't think *he will* want us to do anything. But, sir, think of what his not telling will mean to him; think of the way the school will treat him for a while!"

"Yes, but only for a while. There are possibilities in the situation, [67]
Reginald, that I think we were wiser not to spoil by acting upon snap judgments."

Carroll reflected. "Right, O wise man!" he exclaimed in a moment. "Shall we sound Tony, then?"

"Rather not, I should say. Let us see the line that Tony takes himself. A few days will not make any difference, and we can set things straight, you know."

"But, Mr. Morris, the school is going to lose the credit of victory."

"Ah! it must do that in any case. *One* of our men fumbled, you know, whether accidentally or not; it makes no difference in the result of the game:—Boxford won. What's really at stake, my boy, is the character of those two fellows, and that's everything —*everything*, Reggie!"

"By Jove, Mr. Morris," exclaimed the boy impetuously, "if anyone will ever make me believe that, you and Deering will." And he shook the master's hand more heartily than he had ever done before.

Deering appeared the next day at his usual place in school, and faced the ordeal bravely enough. It was an ordeal despite a general effort on the part of a majority of the boys to avoid discussion of the game in his presence. Here and there, to be sure, he met with the veiled glance of contempt or unfriendliness. Hardest of all, however, he found it to receive Sandy Maclaren's and Mr. Stenton's kindly sympathy. The Great Sandy, as the boys affectionately called him, from his pinnacle as the Head of the School, was a hero to Tony. Sandy's confidence and friendliness had been one of the chief factors in what he regarded as his success. The friendliness was still [68]
there, but Tony sadly feared the confidence was shattered.

Stenton took him by the arm as the boys were pouring out of morning Chapel the next day, where they had heard a sermon in which the Doctor had obviously taken his illustrations from the defeat of the day before. Stenton drew Tony along with him toward the Old School.

"I want to apologize to you, Deering," he began, "for the way I spoke to you yesterday afternoon. I was horribly upset by the unexpectedness of things, and simply lost my temper. I know you did your best, and I know too that no one is proof against accident in football or anything else."

Tony bit his lip and set his teeth. "Thanks, Mr. Stenton," he said briefly. "I appreciate your speaking to me in this way."

"It was poor interference, anyway," went on the master, "Chapin might have saved the day if he had been a bit faster. He had no wind yesterday."

Tony kept silent, and there was an awkward pause in the conversation, during which they came to the steps of the Old School. "Well," said Stenton, turning off, "I only wanted to tell you that I am sorry I spoke irritably. I want you to have your chance next year again, and show that you are the player I think you are."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Stenton," said Tony again, and turned away.

That night after Chapel Tony had his first talk with Carroll since the game. It was desultory enough, until Reggie spoke out frankly and expressed his sympathy. Then Deering was immediately alert, [69]
his face flushed quickly, and he spoke with rather a tone of irritation. "Don't let's talk about the game, Reggie. It was a bad business, and I have made up my mind that the less said about it the better. Matters can't be changed, and all I can hope to do is to make good next year. Stenton has as much as promised that I shall have the chance. I want to forget yesterday's game as quickly as possible."

"Right!" said Carroll. "I promise you, you shall hear no more of it from me."

A little later, after Tony had gone to bed, Carroll went in to see Mr. Morris, and repeated the substance of this conversation.

"It's as I thought," he said in conclusion, "we shall hear no more of it from Tony. Do you still think, sir, that we should hold our tongues?"

“For the present, yes,” answered Morris. “If you don’t mind, Reggie, I want to manage this myself. In the course of time, I shall see Chapin, if he takes no action to clear Deering. It will be infinitely better if he confesses of his own accord. The truth will be known some time, and in the meanwhile I don’t think Deering will really suffer in popular estimation. The boys like him, and they will forgive what they think is his carelessness. If the confession comes from Chapin both boys will get some good out of it. I feel sure that the Doctor would approve of this, though I feel equally sure that if the matter were brought to his attention now he would feel obliged to act as Head Master at once.”

“Very good, sir: I shall say no more about it, until you give me leave.”

[70]

Morris was right. Tony did not suffer very greatly, and in the course of a few weeks the game was practically forgotten. Chapin certainly showed no inclination to right the wrong he had done, and for the time being, Morris was content to let matters drift.

Within a month the school broke up for the three weeks’ Christmas recess. Tony did not make the long trip south for a visit home, but instead went with Jimmie to the Lawrences’ country-place on Long Island, where the boys spent a happy holiday, riding and shooting, and being plied with good things by Jimmie’s indulgent parents. Tony made a good impression on Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, and this visit to his friend’s home, served to deepen and strengthen the happy intimacy between the two boys. Early in January they were back at Deal for the long winter term, which Tony was promised would be exceedingly dull. He rather welcomed the relief from football practice, however, and sensibly made up his mind to make the term count in his form work. For so far, Tony’s reputation as a scholar had scarcely kept pace with his popularity as a genial companion and a good athlete.

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[71]

CHAPTER VII

LOVEL'S WOODS

"Ough, school again!" exclaimed Jimmie Lawrence, with a grunt, as he jumped off the platform of the little way-train at Monday Port one bright cold afternoon the following January. "I say, Tony," he continued, linking his arm in that of his companion, and fishing in his pockets with his disengaged hand for his luggage checks, "this term it is school and no mistake! An unspeakable odor of gumshoe pervades the premises; Pussie Gray hurls math. lessons at your head a yard long, and the masters generally shriek exhortations at you as though you were deaf as well as dumb."

"Nonsense, Jimmo! I am right glad to get back." And Tony drew in a deep breath of the cold pure air, and his eyes glistened as he looked out across the snow-clad landscape—the white town clinging to its hills, the frozen pond, the troubled blue waters of the bay. "I've never seen any snow to speak of, you know; think of the sliding down Deal Hill! Mind, old boy, we're to pack over to Lovel's Woods this afternoon and see to a cave."

"Gemini crickets! Deering, you'll get enough of the Woods before the winter's over. Me for the form-room and a heart to heart talk [72] with my loving schoolmates."

"Be an old woman if you like," interrupted Kit Wilson, who joined them at this moment. "Tony and I will find the cave, and you've got to pony up the first supply of grub."

"Oh, very well," said Jimmie, with a grand air, as the three boys climbed into a fly. "If you will direct the coachman of this equipage to stop at the Pie-house, I will give Mrs. Wadmer a *carte blanche* order for the proper supplies; and we'll have a feed to-morrow afternoon. At present, I'm perished with cold."

By this time the driver had applied the whip to his poor horse, and the dilapidated fly was crawling up the cobblestones of Montgomery street. Once the top of the hill was gained, it moved along more rapidly, and soon Monday Port was left behind, the icy shores of Deal Water had been skirted, and the long hill that led up to the school was being climbed. The school "barge," filled with a shouting, laughing crowd of small boys, was lumbering along ahead of them, and a dozen or so more cabs such as our friends had chartered dotted the white road. They passed a few of these, and noisy greetings were exchanged.

"There's a trifling pleasure in seeing the kids once more," said Jimmie, settling back after they had passed the barge, and assuming a *blasé* expression. "It would be rather jolly to be a prefect and boss 'em all about.... Whoa-up! here's the Pie-house and there's Mother Wadmer in the doorway with a smile of welcome as broad as her [73] pocketbook is deep. Hello, Mrs. Wadmer," he cried, as the cab drew up before a small frame house by the roadside, on the portico of which stood a tall angular Cæsarean dame, with a calico apron drawn over her head.

"How de do, Master Lawrence; howdy, boys. Come right in, and I'll give you a glass of the best cider you've ever tasted. 'Tis Mister Wadmer's own brew, and a fine thing to begin the term on."

The three boys piled out of the fly, and in a moment were merrily greeting the crowd of youngsters who already had established themselves about the long deal table in Mrs. Wadmer's hospitable kitchen. "Hello, Jim!" "Hello, Kit!" "Hello, Tony," and a dozen other names, nicknames or parts of names, rang out. The boys shook hands, exchanged rapid notes of vacation experiences, gulped down several glasses of cider, and consumed a score or so of luscious tarts.

"When did you get back, Tack?" Kit enquired of a large, ungainly, rosy-cheeked boy who came from Maine.

"This morning," answered Turner. "I came down on the boat last night to New York—scrumptious time. Say, Kit, have you heard the latest at school?"

"No, we just got in, crawled across the flats from Coventry. What's up?"

"What's up? why, some meddlesome jackanapes in the Sixth got wise to something irregular last winter and has gone to the Doctor with a doleful tale about the wickedness that's supposed to go on in

the Woods; so the fiat has gone forth: no caves for boys below the Fourth."

"No caves!" shouted a dozen boys. A storm of protests and [74]
exclamations arose. "Well," said Jimmie, as the hubbub ceased, "school will be a jolly old jumping-off place then."

"No caves for boys below the Fourth," echoed Kit. "Well, I announce my promotion then. Come on, Tony; come on, Jim; let's get up to school and get the facts."

They stalked out amidst howls of derision, and re-entered their chariot. Jimmie had taken care, however, to direct Mrs. Wadmer to stack it well with such provisions as were in customary requisition in Lovel's Woods. The worthy landlady of the Pie-house was officially deaf to all rules that emanated from the Head unless they were presented to her in writing. She owed, it may be said in parenthesis, her long career under the shadow of Deal School to the admirable loyalty of many generations of Deal boys.

As luck would have it, to Tony's amusement as he watched Jimmie's expression, the first person they met in the Old School whither they went at once to report, was Mr. Roylston, who held a roll-call in his hands and wore on his face a look of patient suffering and in his eyes an expression of latent indignation. Our friends, thanks to their digression at the Pie-house, were ten minutes late.

"How do you do, Mr. Roylston?" exclaimed Kit, offering his hand, and receiving three of the master's lifeless fingers. A pencil occupied the other two. "Ah!" he murmured,—Kit afterwards declared, with satisfaction,—"Lawrence, Wilson, Deering—ten minutes late. I congratulate you on the punctual way in which you [75]
begin the new year."

"Oh, sir, we were beguiled by the way," protested the irrepressible Kit. "The woman beguiled me, sir, and I did eat."

"Faugh!" exclaimed Mr. Roylston. "Spare me your coarse irreverence. You are redolent of the unpleasant odors of the Pie-house. I will give you five marks apiece."

"Oh, sir!"

"Please, sir!"

"I beg of you, sir. Pray divide 'em, sir."

"Silence, Wilson; you are impertinent as well as irreverent. If you linger longer with this futile protesting, I shall double your marks. Kindly go at once and unpack your trunks."

"Please, sir; we always do that in the evening, sir; and I hope you will allow us to go to the form-room, sir."

"Don't 'sir' me so. Write out for me before to-morrow's school fifty lines of the Æneid, and go at once."

"Very good, sir!" And lest they all get a similar dose of "pensum," as such punishments were called, they hurried off to the Third Form common-room. There they found a crowd of newly-arrived boys, engaged in a vociferous denunciation of the Doctor's new rule against caves in the Woods. The news had evidently been announced by the prefects.

"What a gloomy old piece of rubber the Gumshoe is!" muttered Kit, as they were entering. "Fancy soaking me a pensum two minutes after I'm back at school. Hey, you fellows!" he cried, [76]
"what's this racket?"

A dozen boys started to explain together, so that from their noisy chatter nothing could be gathered, except "Woods," "caves" and execrations on the Head and the Sixth, with Kit's lament on the gloomy Mr. Roylston rising above it all like a dismal howl.

A Fourth Form boy,—Barney Clayton, by name,—thrust a red head through the open doorway. "Oh, fy!" he yelled, "what a precious howl you kids are letting out! What's the matter? does the prohibition against caves rile your independent spirits?"

"Get out, you red-head!" rose in angry chorus; and one boy shied a dog-eared Latin book at the fiery shock in the doorway. In a second a shower of missiles,—ink-stands, books, chairs, waste-paper basket,—went flying through the doorway and out into the corridor. Barney ducked his head and fled, shouting back derisive taunts. The commotion attracted the attention of Mr. Roylston at his post in the main hall, and he came flying to quell the disturbance. And, alas! he arrived just at a moment to receive full in the face the contents of a waste-paper basket, which Kit had flung. The débris descended upon him in comical fashion. The poor gentleman was speechless with indignation; but the situation was too much for the boys;

despite his angry countenance, his blazing black eyes, they greeted his appearance with shouts of laughter.

He waited, inarticulate with rage, until the commotion ceased, finally quelling them to a spell-bound silence by the sheer force of [77] his anger, and a little also, by the righteousness of his cause.

"In the whole course of my career as a schoolmaster," the master said at last, with a nervous jerk to each phrase, but pronouncing each word with the deadly precision of a judge uttering a capital sentence, "I have never been met with such gratuitous insult. Every member of this form will consider himself on bounds until further notice. As for you, Wilson, you shall be reported immediately to the Head, and if my recommendation can effect it, you will receive the caning you deserve."

"We were not throwing at you—we didn't know you were coming —" began Kit.

"Silence! do not add hypocrisy to insolence. You had been told to go to your rooms.... Disperse now at once, and do not show yourselves before supper. You Wilson, Lawrence and Deering, remain behind and clean up this disgusting mess. It is not surprising, I may say, that the Head feels himself unable to trust this form in the Woods this winter." And with this parting shot, Mr. Roylston turned and walked away, with what dignity he could command.

The boys, somewhat subdued by the dispiriting announcement of bounds, marched off gloomily, and our three friends stayed behind and began to clear up the débris.

"Well," said Kit at last, turning a half-merry, half-rueful countenance to his companions, as he seated himself upon a broken chair, "what a gloomy ass it is! But, oh my dears, did you observe his beautiful pea-green, Nile blue, ultramarine phiz as the contents [78] of the waste-basket descended upon his lean and hairless chops? Oh, my! what a home-coming! what a sweet heart to heart talk we've all had together!"

"And a jolly good caning you'll get, Kitty, when Gumshoe has had his talk with the Doctor."

"Jolly good," replied Kit, rubbing his legs with a wry face. "But in the meantime, mes enfants," he continued, "since I am to be swished, it shall not be that I suffer unjustly; we are going to make the swishing worth while. We are off to the Woods this minute. We'll take the stuff over, stow it in the cave, put up a notice, and be back by supper. I'll be hanged if I'll pay any attention to Gumshoe's twaddle about bounds or to the Doctor's nonsense about caves. Are you with me, Jimmie, old boy?"

"Well, rather," Jimmie replied. "The experience of the last quarter of an hour has quite discouraged me with regard to the peace and quiet and healthy conversation us nice boys ought to have in form common-room."

Tony had kept silent. "Well, are you going to cut for a quitter?" asked Kit, turning upon him with an indignant glare.

"Not I," said Tony quickly.

"Then help stow this truck. We've an hour and a half till supper, and the Gumshoe will undoubtedly think we have *disperrssed* to our rooms." And he gave an absurd imitation of Mr. Roylston's manner of speaking.

Ten minutes later they were running down the slope of Deal Hill, under the cover of the stone walls; then tearing across the frozen marshes, and clambering up the steep banks and crags that [79] bounded the west side of Lovel's Woods. The sun was sinking in the west, and its rich mellow golden light fell athwart the snow-clad woodland, flooding it with glory, save where the great masses of pine and cedar cast broad splotches of shadow. The splendid loveliness of the dying afternoon, the biting cold of the wind, the thrill of doing the forbidden, filled Tony with a delicious sense of happiness and adventure.

Each boy had his arms full of cooking utensils, food, boxes—the varied paraphernalia of a cave. It had been an ancient custom at Deal during the winter for boys to have caves in Lovel's Woods, where they cooked weird messes during the afternoons when there was no skating. This year the Doctor, owing to certain abuses reported by the prefects the year before, had decided to restrict the use of caves to the three upper forms.

Kit had a particular cave in mind, far away on the remote side of

what was known as the Third Ridge, a cave that he and Jimmie and Teddy Lansing had had together the year before as Second Formers. This desirable spot was a natural formation in the rocky side of the farther of the three ridges of which Lovel's Woods consisted. It was practically inaccessible from below, and the entrance above, well concealed by a clump of low cedars, was a narrow cleft in the rocks, at the extreme edge of which the initiated might descend to the cave by a series of dangerous steps which the boys had fashioned in the side of the precipitous cliff.

Tony and Kit climbed down into the cave, while Jimmie, lying flat [80] on the ledge above, handed down to them the supply of stores. These were safely stowed in a strong box, which had lasted out the previous season, and made secure. When the boys had clambered up again, they discovered that the sun had set and the darkness was gathering swiftly. The clear crescent of the new moon hung in the western sky a band of gold, and the evening star was rising over the ocean.

"Twenty minutes to supper: we can just make it," exclaimed Kit, looking at his watch. "Heave ahead, my hearties, and let's run for it."

And run they did, at breakneck speed along the mazy paths, through the tangled undergrowth, over the slippery crags, across the frozen marsh. Kit, the imprudent, was impudently singing at the top of his shrill voice the verses of one of the School songs.

"Out of the briny east,
  Out of the frosty north,
Over the school-topp'd hill,
  Whistle the shrill winds forth.

"Over the waves a-quiver,
  Over the salt sedge grass,
Over the beaches tawny,
  The bright wind spirits pass."

And the other two boys took up the ringing refrain,

"Grapple them e'er they go,
  Grapple them e'er they go."

Luck was with them. They reached the school as the great bell in the Chapel struck six. Five minutes later, after a hasty wash and [81] brush-up in their rooms, they were in the great library, shaking hands with the Doctor and Mrs. Forester and with masters and boys.

The three, more closely united than ever by their sense of sharing a dangerous secret, kept together during chapel, and directly after were for making off to Jimmie's room, when Sandy Maclaren, looking wonderfully handsome and "swagger" in his town clothes, laid a heavy hand on Kit's shoulder. "Not so fast, boy. The Doctor wants to see you instanter at the Rectory."

Kit heaved a sigh in mock heroics. "Hail, blithe spirits," he lamented, murdering his quotation, "hail and farewell."

The boys pressed his hands heartily. "Is it a caning, Sandy?" they asked.

"Well, I rather think so," answered Maclaren, with a smile. "You weren't very keen not to distinguish between Barney Clayton and Mr. Roylston."

"They were both butting in," protested Kit.

"Well, cut along now. And you two report to Bill, he's looking for you."

Kit found the Doctor in his comfortable study at the Rectory, standing before a glowing log fire, with his swallow-tails spread to the blaze.

"Ah, Christopher," the Head Master exclaimed, shaking hands with the culprit, "I'm glad to see you."

"Thank you, sir. Maclaren said you wanted to see me particularly?"

"I do, most particularly. Take off your coat."

Kit backed a little. "But, sir——" [82]

"Yes, my boy, I dare say you have full and ample explanations, but I am quite sure they will not impress me. I know that you were but one of many in this fracas, and that it is your misfortune—shall I say?—rather than your fault that your particular missile took

unfortunate effect. But we must all suffer at times for our mistakes, perhaps a little unjustly. The moment has struck when you must suffer too. The sooner we get at this business the sooner it will be over."

"Very good, sir," said Kit, and silently removed his coat. And then the Doctor took a familiar implement of stout old hickory from a corner, and swished him soundly. Those were the happy days when debts against school discipline were so quickly and effectively liquidated.

Kit bore no grudge to the Doctor, and comparatively little to Mr. Roylston. "It was worth it," he confessed to Jimmie and Tony afterwards, "and I rather think this lets me out, conscientiously lets me out, you know, from paying attention to his futile announcement of bounds."

It goes without saying that the Doctor's prohibition against Lovel's Woods was about as unpopular a rule as had ever been promulgated. Combined with the fact that the Third Form were bounded for a month, as a consequence of their trouble with Mr. Roylston, the Lower School began the term in a bad mood. The Third Formers were particularly disgruntled with the prefects, who had assumed the responsibility of keeping Lovel's Woods in order. It appeared that smoking had been indulged in the year before quite extensively by some of the younger boys, and gambling was [83] suspected on the part of a few of the older ones. The Doctor's rule had been more in the nature of a preventive than a punishment.

But the effort to keep the rule effective was more of an undertaking than the prefects had realized; for they felt themselves required practically to police the forbidden district, a task, the novelty of which soon wore off. With the older boys caves were not particularly popular. Chapin and Marsh started one together, and moved into it the paraphernalia that they had hitherto kept stored in the cave on the beach by Beaver Creek. All of the prefects, acting on Maclaren's advice, gave up their caves in order to set an example; with the result that there were hardly more than a dozen in official operation.

For the first few weeks of the term the prefects were so zealous in their police duties that few boys cared to run the risk of "skipping" to the Woods. Even our three friends, despite their firm resolution to evade the rule, for the time being felt it the part of wisdom to lie low. Accordingly they avoided the Woods as if it were plague stricken and industriously played hockey every afternoon on Deal Great Pond, which was fully two miles away. But toward the end of January a thaw set in, the skating was spoiled, a heavy snow came, and their usual sports were interrupted; consequently the temptation to visit the cave *sub rosa* grew stronger than ever. Gradually also the inclement weather dampened the ardor of the prefects and they began to relax their vigilance over the forbidden territory. And we may say in passing that Tony and Jimmie and Kit [84] spent several delightful afternoons in their hiding-place, and the parts of one or two wildly thrilling nights after lights.

Despite his nefarious proceedings in contravention of the rules, be it said to his credit, Tony was making good his resolution of "poling" at his books, and felt confident of taking a good stand in the school when the ranks were read at the beginning of February. The football game, so far as his part in it was concerned, as Morris had predicted, seemed forgotten. He avoided Chapin as much as he could, and when they inevitably met he treated him with a courteous indifference which the older boy doubtless understood and was thankful to accept.

Carroll, after a vacation spent in New York where he had seen all of the plays and dined at the best restaurants and gone to many more dances than were good for his health, returned to the school more than ever dissatisfied and disgruntled with the life he led in it. The talk with Mr. Morris about Tony, the consciousness that they possessed an important secret in common, served a little to make his relations with his house master easier, but he was still unable to give his friendship in the easy way he longed to give it. Neither, to his deepening chagrin and regret, was he making progress in his friendship with Deering, for Tony was more than ever absorbed in the life of his form, and spent all his free time with Wilson and Lawrence. He seemed unconscious of the affection he had won from Carroll and this, with Carroll's intense consciousness of how completely his affection was going out, served to make their

relations anything but free and spontaneous. So far as Tony thought about his room-mate that term it was as of an older fellow with whom he was not very congenial, and of whose laziness and indifferent attitude toward the school he did not approve. He thought Carroll to be wasting his time both at his books and in the school life, in either of which he could have counted immensely. Had Tony been less absorbed in his younger friends, he would probably have found a good deal in Reggie to like and value, as earlier in the year he had begun to feel he should. [85]

From his cozy den in the midst of Standerland Hall, surrounded by his well-loved books, his few but carefully chosen pictures, Mr. Morris watched the life throbbing about him with sympathetic insight and keen interest. He was not one of those fortunate schoolmasters who do not allow their profession to engage their affections. Morris, with a surrender that was effectually a sacrifice, for he had gifts and opportunities that might have won him a finer place in the world, gave his life completely to the school. He had loved it as a boy, he had looked back upon it during college with fond recollection and yearning, and after three years or so at a professional school, having taken his examinations for the bar, he had gone back to accept Dr. Forester's offer of a mastership. For half-a-dozen years he had been there now, and each year the place and the boys got a deeper hold upon his heart and his interest. He was scrupulously fair and evenly kind; therefore deservedly popular; but despite this he had his favorite boys, not usually known as such by the school at large, to whom he gave a special affection and a deeper interest. From the first day, when Deering, with his sparkling eyes and bright, clear-cut, eager face, had come to him for a seat in the schoolroom, he had felt for him that keen attraction which, as he grew to know the boy's high spirits, lively sense of honor, and sunshiny nature, had deepened to a real affection. In Carroll also he had always felt a special interest, and had been glad when Tony was put to room with him. He saw Reggie's growing devotion to Deering, and was sorry that Tony did not respond to a greater extent. Morris felt that Carroll needed the strengthening influence of a strong unselfish friendship with the right sort of boy to help make a man of him. Occasionally Morris had the two boys with others in his rooms for tea or on Saturday nights for a rarebit and a bit of supper, but otherwise occasions did not present themselves for his getting to know them better. He was sorry for this, but saw no very satisfactory way of making them. By the end of January it seemed to him that Reggie was in quite the worst attitude that he had ever been, thoroughly indifferent to the work and life of the school. [86]

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[87]

CHAPTER VIII

A MIDNIGHT LARK

That winter proved to be a hard one, with frequent snows and violent winds, which put an end to the skating within a few weeks after Christmas, and left the majority of the boys with no very satisfactory pastime in the free afternoons. There was sliding down Deal Hill a good part of the time, and to Tony, who never before had experienced the pleasures of a northern winter, this was great fun; but after a time it palled upon his two cronies, Jimmie and Kit, and at their suggestion surreptitious visits to the cave in Lovel's Woods became more frequent. Perhaps that this was a forbidden pleasure added a keener zest than they otherwise would have taken in it, and that several boys had recently been caught in the Woods and punished severely gave an element of danger to their visits that made them even more fascinating. Aside from the disobedience that these visits involved, they were innocent enough. The boys, having reported at call-over for a walk, would skirt the beaches and enter the Woods from the east, completely out of range of the school and comparatively safe from detection unless they chanced to encounter prefects or masters walking in the Woods themselves. The indefatigable Mr. Gray often bent his steps in that direction, but to [88] the school's intense delight, without noticeable result. The snows were so heavy and the walking consequently so difficult that the vigilance of masters and prefects at last completely relaxed. From that time on the boys who cared for the trouble had a fairly clear field. Our friends were fortunate in having a cave on the extreme eastern edge of the woods, so that the approach from the beach was easy. Once this was gained, they made a fire, cooked sausages, fried pan-cakes of an extremely leathery quality, and made coffee that certainly they would not have drunk in any other place.

Tony had told Carroll of their exploits, and had even invited him to pay them a visit and partake of their "feed," an invitation that was decisively declined. "It is certainly not worth while," he replied, with a smile, "to run the risk of getting the Doctor quite sour on me for the pleasure of partaking of the results of your culinary skill."

"A great deal better for you," Tony retorted, "than moping in doors half the time over sickly French novels."

"Possibly; but French novels are not the only alternative to the Woods," Reggie answered, "and as a matter of fact I have begun to go in for tremendous tramps."

"You must take 'em mostly at night, then."

"I do frequently," was the somewhat tart reply, "the night air has always had a fascination for me."

In truth Tony was aware that Reggie had resumed his old custom of disappearing from their rooms after lights, paying visits, he [89] incuriously supposed, upon some of his friends. The fact gave him little thought.

One afternoon the three boys were in their cave. Tony was turning pan-cakes in a skillet, while Jimmie was laboring with a dark mixture that they euphemistically called coffee. Kit sat on the branch of a tree, with his head over the ledge, on the look-out for any wandering prefects.

"Hurry up, you frabjous duffers," he called down, midst a stream of amiable chaffing; "it's close upon four, and we'll have to bolt the grub in order to get back to Gumshoe's five o'clock."

"Why don't you get down and work a bit, then? Nobody's coming along this late. Get the plates out, and pour some syrup out of the jug. No work: no eat."

"Too many cooks spoil the broth," he laughed.... "Shish!" he exclaimed suddenly, and ducked his head below the ledge.

The three kept a tense silence for a moment. They heard footsteps crunching in the snow above and passing on. Kit cautiously peeped over the ledge. "By Jove," he whispered, "it's Reggie Carroll and Arty Chapin. I thought it was a couple of prefects."

He slid down from the tree, and began to gobble up one of Tony's pan-cakes. "By the by, Tony, I thought the elegant Reginald Carter Westover Carroll had severed his friendship with that specimen of common Chapin clay."

"So he had," answered Tony, musingly. "I didn't know they had taken up with each other again."

"What a queer duck Reggie is," said Jimmie, as he poured out [90]
three cups of coffee. "Have you ever made him out, Tony?"

"Not I. We hit it off well enough after the first few days—for a time. But this term I have hardly seen anything of him. I am sorry he is in with Chapin again."

"And I. I've always liked Reggie despite his supercilious disdain, but Arty's a beast, and always was," said Kit, drinking his coffee at a gulp. "Here, let's stow these things, and cut around to the north and take a peep as to what that precious pair are up to. Evidently no five o'clock for them."

"What's the difference where they are going?" said Tony. "I have no mind to spy on them."

"Well, I have a consuming curiosity," Kit rejoined. "They're up to mischief, I'll be bound."

"Light out then," said Tony, "for Jim and I are going back over the ridges."

"And leave your precious footprints in the snow," protested Kit. "La! la! stow the stuff, will you then? I'll report if there's anything doing."

And despite his companions' adjurations Kit clambered off over the rocks and started out in the direction indicated by Carroll's and Chapin's footsteps in the snow.

The boys got safely back without being detected, but Kit was a quarter of an hour late, and created a sad disturbance when he entered in the midst of Mr. Roylston's Third Latin recitation.

"The incorrigible Wilson," remarked Mr. Roylston, without turning his beady black eyes in his direction, "will kindly take a [91]
pensum of one hundred lines for being late and disturbing the class."

"Very well, sir," said Kit.

"Spare me your comments, pray. Continue your recitation, Turner; Book Four, Chapter Fourteen, line twenty. Proceed. Cæsar —"

"Oh, yes, sir.... Qui omnibus rebus subito perterriti—" Tack spelled it out painfully, and fell mercilessly upon it, "Who to all quickly having been thoroughly terrified. Et celeritati nostri et discessu suorum.... And with quickness to us both a descent...."

Mr. Roylston transfixed the floundering youth with a withering glance, and there was a moment of awful silence. "With quickness to you, I may suggest, Turner," he said at last in scathing tones, "descent into your seat and a zero in my mark-book."

He turned to Kit. "Wilson, let us see if you can cast light upon the darkness into which Turner has led us."

"I am afraid I can't, sir."

"No?" murmured the master. "Well, I was not hopeful," and he quietly recorded a zero in his mark-book. "Now, Deering—"

Tony took up the passage, and got through it correctly enough, but not without being harassed by Mr. Roylston's interruptions and glances of incredulity at his rendering of the Latin. The Latin recitations at Deal under the famous Ebenezer Roylston—he was the editor of an edition of Cicero that was classic in its day—were periods of agony and boredom. But at last this particular recitation came to an end, and immediately afterward, Kit threw his arms [92]
about the necks of his two friends, and drew them into a vacant classroom.

"Well?"

"What's up?"

"Oh, you frabjous kiddos! I tracked 'em for a mile—'twas a mucker trick, I'll admit, but I've got it in for Chapin. And what do you think, those two blooming jays are playing poker with their crowd in a shanty back of the Third Ridge. If it weren't for Reggie, I swear I'd peach on Chapin."

"I swear you'd do nothing of the sort," said Tony.

"Well, perhaps not," assented Kit, temporarily crestfallen. "But I must say that's a crummy thing of them to do. Fine school spirit, eh!"

"Well, we have been skipping bounds pretty regularly this fall, if I remember correctly."

“My dear child,” remarked Kit paternally, “when will you learn wisdom? The Doctor carefully distinguishes between moral offenses and offenses against school discipline. Now, bounds are obviously disciplinary and not moral; hence we are mere wandering angels, while those poker fiends are equally hence of the lower regions.”

“Rot!” was the courteous rejoinder. “It is obvious to any but a bonehead like yourself that the Doctor imposed bounds this year for moral reasons, because he had wind that just that sort of thing was going on.”

“Ah!” resumed Kit sarcastically. “I perceive the glimmerings of a conscience. You are getting the remorse for your own sins?”

“Not particularly. I am only objecting to the complacent way in [93] which you shove Carroll and Chapin outside the pale of decency.”

“Well, I’m easy, old boy; I certainly won’t be damned for making pan-cakes in Lovel’s Woods; but I can readily see that Reggie might for playing poker there. But it isn’t so much the poker I object to, as his beastly taste in companions.”

“Thunder and blazes, Kit, what’s it to you who Reggie goes with?”

“Nothing much. But of a kindness warn your room-mate against Arty; he is an awful bounder and always was.”

“Well,” answered Tony, “Reggie knows him better than we do; and it is certainly not my business to give him advice. Come on; let’s quit this jaw, and go in to supper.”

Disposed as Tony had been openly to defend Carroll against this criticism, he condemned him yet the more severely in his heart. He knew that Reggie realized the defects of Chapin’s character; that he was spoiling his chances of a prefectship the next year by his association with him, and that he was running the risk of public expulsion if it should be discovered that he was playing poker. After a good deal of hesitation he made up his mind to speak to Reggie on the subject. Accordingly he waited that night until after lights, and then slipped over to Reggie’s room, hoping to please him by this suggestion of renewing their nightly talks. But to his disappointment Carroll was not there. Tony turned back into the study, and stood for a moment at the window looking out upon the white campus, flooded now with the light of a full moon.

Suddenly he heard the latch of his door turn and some one slip [94] into the room.

“Hello, Reggie,” he whispered, “is that you?”

“Shish! no—it’s me—Kit,” came the soft reply. “Jimmie is outside —we’re going to the Woods. Get into your clothes and come along.”

“Oh, hang the Woods!” exclaimed Tony. “I am sleepy and want to go to bed.”

“Don’t be a quitter. Jim’s got a box from home; we’ll have a bully good time, and we can get back by midnight. Where’s your precious room-mate—gone to the shanty?”

“I don’t know—I suppose so.”

“Well, perhaps we’ll meet him; come on.”

The lark proved too strong a temptation, and after a little more persuasion, Tony yielded. He slipped on his trousers and a sweater, his stockings and boots, and a coat, and was ready. The two boys crept silently down the corridor, past the door of Mr. Morris’s room, over the transom of which a bright light was shining, and down the stairs. Once Kit tripped, and they sank down below the head of the stairs, just as Mr. Morris opened his door and stood at it for a moment listening. Then the master closed his door again, and the boys went out into the cold frosty moonlight night, and joined Jimmie, who was waiting for them at the fives-court.

Morris, however, was an old hand at his business, and not a clumsy one. He stepped into his bedroom, which was darkened, and going to the window stood there watching. Presently he saw the three dark figures, unrecognizable at the distance, creep along the fives-court, dash across to the cloister that led from Standerland to [95] the Schoolhouse, and then disappear behind the clump of trees at the corner. Confident that he had heard some one leaving his own dormitory, the master then made his rounds, and surely enough found that Deering, Lawrence and Wilson were missing. Curiously enough Tony’s happened to be the last room that he entered, and when he found his bedroom empty, thus being sure that the three he had seen were accounted for, he neglected to look into Carroll’s room, and returned to his study to wait for their return.

About ten o'clock as he sat before his fire, meditating the course of his action, a rap sounded on the door, and in response to his invitation, Doctor Forester came in.

"Ah, Morris," said the Head Master, coming forward and standing with his back to the fire, "I am sorry to disturb you at this time of night; but there is mischief afoot, and perhaps you can help me catch the offenders."

Morris looked at the Doctor attentively, but for the moment did not volunteer his information.

"This afternoon," continued the Head, "Maclaren found an old shanty back of the Third Ridge, rigged out with the paraphernalia of a poker game. It has evidently been in use, and from the character of the débris, he thinks, by some of our boys. Maclaren supposes that some of your boys have been getting out at nights, and may be the culprits. Is that possible?"

"Yes," answered Morris, "quite possible. I should not have said so [96]
an hour ago, for I keep a close watch upon that sort of thing, or at least I try to; but as a matter of fact three of my boys are missing at this moment."

"Who are they?" asked the Doctor sharply.

"Lawrence, Deering and Wilson."

"What! they are the last boys in the School that I should be inclined to suspect of that sort of thing, though I regret to say, Maclaren has some evidence that I fear implicates Deering. Have you any idea that they are gone to the Woods?"

"I fear they have, sir. I heard a noise in the hallway a half-hour ago, and slipped out to see what it was. For the moment I supposed I had been mistaken, but a little later from my bedroom window I saw three boys disappear back of the Schoolhouse. I did not know who they were until I had made my rounds, which was just a few minutes ago."

"Well, they must be found. If they are implicated in this affair at the Third Ridge shanty I shall deal with them severely. Fine boys, too! it's a great shame.... Maclaren and Cummings are waiting in my study; I will go and give them this clue."

"If you like, sir, I will go for you, and go with them."

"I would be obliged if you would. In that case, I will remain here until your return."

Morris put on his great coat and boots and started out, while the Doctor settled himself before the fire with a book. A little later the master with the two prefects whom he had found at the Rectory, set out for Lovel's Woods.

Early in the evening Thorndyke, who was a member of the crowd [97]
that frequented the shanty, had got wind of Maclaren's discovery through Lawrence Cumming's indiscreet confidences, and had hastened to the rendezvous—the stone bridge by the Red Farm below Deal Hill—and had warned his companions. They had quietly returned to their dormitories; indeed, while the Head Master and Morris had been talking in the latter's study, Carroll had softly stolen upstairs, slipped into his room, and quietly got into bed.

Our other friends, following Kit's ardent but injudicious leadership, were making a detour to the north on their way to their cave with an intention of taking a peep at the nefarious doings at the shanty.

It was a long walk, and a cold one. Tony and Jimmie had little heart for it, but the irrepressible Kit led them gaily on. They skirted Beaver Pond, threaded their way along the ridges over familiar paths, and at last debouched upon the little clearing in which the abandoned shanty was situated. On every side stretched the thick woods, traversable only by those who knew their devious paths. To the east of the shanty the ridge ended abruptly, there was a sheer descent, and over the tops of the trees on the hillside one could get a splendid view of the distant ocean, the Neck, and Deigr Island beyond the point, with its light faithfully blinking red and white.

"No one about," exclaimed Kit, peering in at a dark window; "what a lark!"

"Now that we're here," said Jimmie. "I'm for investigating."

"By Jove! the window's unfastened!" cried Kit, already tugging at the sash. In a moment he had it up, and disappeared over the [98]
window-sill. He struck a match inside and his companions could see him moving about. Presently he found a candle, lighted it, and set it on the table. "Come on in," he called. "Here's a rummy old pack of

cards.” And he kicked the deck of cards across the room.

Deering and Lawrence climbed in and joined him in an interested examination of the room. The structure, which contained only this one room, it may be said, had been built some years before by a gentleman of the neighborhood, who had literary tastes, and sought the quiet and seclusion of this spot for their development. Of late it had been disused, however, for a period of six or seven years. There was an old table, a few rickety chairs, and a strong-box, such as the boys used in their caves; aside from these no furniture of any description. The embers of a wood fire glowed on a great hearth at one side of the room. In a cupboard the boys found several soiled packs of cards, a pile of poker chips, and some empty cigarette boxes. “The real dope, I suppose,” Kit commented “is in the strong box, or hid some place outside. I reckon we can’t bust into it. What a silly lot of asses; if the prefects don’t get on to this, I’m a loser. But what a jolly old joint it is, eh?”

“Rather,” said Jimmie. “There’s a pile of dishes in the sink yonder —they’ve evidently had a feed here this afternoon. There’s live coals on the hearth. Hmmm—smell the tobacco!”

“Makes my mouth water,” was Kit’s prompt reply. “Let’s fire up, and have our feed here, and leave a note thankin’ ‘em for their hospitality. It isn’t likely that anybody will turn up this time o’ night. [99] Get the bundle, Tony; and you, Jim, lend a hand while we start the fire.”

The two began industriously to lay a fresh fire on the great andirons, while Tony made for the window. As he reached it there rose before him what seemed a monstrous head and body. He gave a cry of alarm. “Great heavens! who is it?” he screamed.

“Don’t have a fit, Deering; it’s only Maclaren.”

Tony immediately recovered his equilibrium. “Only Maclaren!” he repeated, in a voice of despair. “It’s all up, kiddos.” And he turned a white face to his amazed companions in the shanty.

“Only Maclaren!” wailed Kit, as he threw his bundle of faggots on the hearth. “You poor fool, there’s Mr. Morris too.”

It was a sorry procession that wound its way back to Standerland that cold January night. The Doctor was waiting for them in Mr. Morris’s study, grown a little impatient at the long delay. The clock had struck eleven before he heard the footsteps on the stairs.

Mr. Morris had rather deprecated explanations on the way back, preferring to let the Head deal with the case himself; nor were the boys much inclined to talk. Upon their arrival at Standerland, Mr. Morris gave a succinct account of their capture, while the Doctor listened, a cloud gathering upon his brow.

“Well,” he said sternly, as Morris finished, “what were you doing in Lovel’s Woods at this time of night? Lawrence, you may answer for the three.”

“We skipped out just for the lark, sir.”

“You have been in the habit of paying these visits to the Woods?” [100]

“Yes, sir—once in a while, sir,” Jimmie answered, in rather a doleful tone.

“What have you done there?”

“Simply fooled about in our cave, sir.”

“Do you call that shanty your cave?”

“No, sir—our cave is on the east side on the Third Ridge.”

“Well, what were you doing at the shanty?”

“We were investigating it, sir; we had never been there before.”

“None of you?”

“None, sir.”

“Is that true of you, Wilson?”

“I?” exclaimed Kit. “No, sir; that is, sir, I have been there once before, but only on the outside and looked in at the windows.”

“And you, Deering?”

“No, sir, I have never been there before.”

Dr. Forester had turned on Tony like a flash. “How then do you account for the fact that a letter addressed to you was found there this afternoon?”

“A letter addressed to me found there!” exclaimed Tony, in surprise. “I can’t account for it. I do not know how it got there.”

“Do you know of other boys being there?”

“I believe other boys have been there; yes, sir.”

“Do you know what boys have been there?”

“I really can’t say, sir.”

Tony was growing restless and ill at ease under this severe cross-examination. It suddenly dawned upon him, that the Doctor did not [101] appear to accept his replies as he gave them.... In his quick passionate southern way he fired with resentment. His face flushed, he stammered in giving his replies, and once or twice inadvertently contradicted himself. Jimmie and Kit looked at him in amazement; for a moment the suspicion crossed their minds that Tony had perhaps after all been going to the shanty with Carroll. Even Morris, who had been serenely confident that the boys would clear themselves of the charge of gambling, showed a troubled countenance as the cross-examination went on.

“Come, come,” said the Doctor, “I would like you to suggest some explanation as to how a letter addressed to you was found in that shanty this afternoon.”

“I don’t account for it,” Tony replied. “I know nothing about it. I know nothing about the shanty; I never saw it until to-night.”

“That statement,” commented the Doctor mercilessly, “conflicts with what you implied a few moments ago. You allowed me to infer that you do know what boys go there.”

“Suppose I do,” exclaimed Tony passionately. “Suppose I do—I shan’t tell anything about it. I have never been there, and I have nothing to do with it.”

“Well, sir, there is still another bit of evidence that inevitably suggests to me the suspicion that you must know more than you admit. The strong-box in that shanty was rifled this afternoon by the Head Prefect under my direction. In it were found several packs of [102] playing cards, a quantity of poker chips, and a memorandum-book.”

“Well, sir?”

“Do you know anything about that memorandum-book?”

“I do not.”

The Doctor drew it from his pocket as he spoke, and opened it. “I find here various entries, evidently sums of money owing to certain persons. I find here the entry ‘A. D. to R. C.—$5.’ Between these pages is a check on the First National Bank of New Orleans drawn by you in your own favor and endorsed on the back. Do you recollect such a check?”

Tony racked his memory, and recalled at last that a week or so before he had given Reggie such a check in payment of a small loan. “I made out such a check; yes, sir.”

“To whom did you pay it?”

“I decline to tell you, sir.”

“What did you pay it for?”

“In payment of the sum of five dollars which I had borrowed.”

“The boy to whom you paid this will corroborate your statement?”

“Possibly, sir—I don’t know. I certainly shan’t ask him to. I am accustomed to tell the truth.”

“You decline then to explain to me how this check came to be found in this memorandum-book in the strong-box of that shanty?”

“I know nothing about it to explain. I paid the check to a friend. I don’t know how it came to be in the shanty.”

“Have you ever played poker in this school?” [103]

“No, sir; I have not.”

“Could this check have had anything to do with a poker game?”

“I don’t know—not so far as I am concerned.”

“What do you mean by ‘so far as I am concerned’?”

“I mean that I have never played cards for money, or given that check in payment for a gambling debt. As to whether other boys have gambled in the shanty or elsewhere, I do not know. I have nothing to say.”

“You have broken bounds repeatedly this term?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That will do for to-night. You three boys may go to bed now. Report to me to-morrow morning at the Rectory after Chapel. You will not attend recitations or take any part in the school activities until this matter is settled.”

The three culprits silently took up their caps and went off to their rooms; Jimmie and Kit, distressed and alarmed for themselves, but

even more for Tony; Deering was sullen and angry.

Doctor Forester sank back for a moment in his chair and looked helplessly at his master and his prefects. “I don’t think for a moment that that boy is not telling the truth, Morris. But there is the letter, the check, and the memorandum-book. What do you make of it?”

“I would stake my life on his honor,” exclaimed Morris generously. “For a moment I doubted him when he was confronted with your evidence; but there is an explanation for it, I am sure. Perhaps we will find it out; perhaps not. But whether we do or not, I would take Deering’s word.” [104]

“Doubtless you are right. His grandfather was the same sort of hot-headed chivalrous youth, always in trouble, always refusing to clear himself if there were a shadow of doubt as to involving some one else. Nevertheless, this business is to be probed to the bottom, and I shall be inclined to expel the offenders without mercy. Come, boys, get to bed now; come to see me in the morning. You too, Morris. Good-night. I don’t know when a case of discipline has given me so much distress.”

When they were gone, Morris crossed over to Deering’s room, and tapped on the door. Receiving no reply, he opened it and walked in. As he found no one in the study, he went into the bedroom, and there he discovered Tony lying on the bed, shaken by a storm of sobs. Carroll was sitting by his side, with his arms around him, trying to get some explanation of his distress.

Reggie looked up at the master. “What is the trouble, Mr. Morris? I can’t get a word from Tony.”

Morris explained in a few sentences what had happened.

“But, sir—he gave his word?”

“I know, I know,” exclaimed the master. “I believe him absolutely, but I am afraid there is a strong evidence against him that he will have to explain to the Head.”

“But the Doctor must know that he is telling the truth. I never knew him to misjudge a boy.”

“Even so—but whether he believes him or not, the Head is forced to probe the matter. He cannot accept Tony’s refusal to speak, and you must admit, Reggie, the letter, the check and the memorandum are pretty strong evidence.” [105]

Carroll paled, but he met the master’s gaze firmly. “I can explain that, sir. The memorandum was made out to a boy who has the same initials as Tony. I left the check which Tony had paid me in the memorandum-book by mistake.”

“You—Reginald!”

“Yes, yes—I have been playing poker there all this term, or at least for a good part of it. Is it too late to go and tell the Doctor?”

“No, I think not; I believe he would like to know to-night.”

Without a word Carroll rose up and left them.

Morris sat down then on the edge of the bed by Deering’s side, and tried to calm him, making him understand at last what Reggie had done. Then he persuaded him to undress; and waited until he had got into bed; then, with a quiet good-night, he turned out the lights and left him alone.

The Doctor’s study contained a door which gave directly upon the campus, so that the boys had easy access to him without the formality of going to the front door of the Rectory and sending their names in by a servant. When the Doctor was busy and did not wish to be disturbed, he placed a little sign in the window to that effect. There was no such sign as Reggie stood in the snow outside, at the foot of the few steps that led to the study door. The window-shades were up and Carroll could see the Doctor standing before the fire—a characteristic attitude—his brows knit in perplexity. The boy’s heart went to his throat, for like every Deal boy the Doctor’s good opinion was what secretly he coveted intensely. But there was only a moment’s hesitation before he went up boldly and tapped at the door. [106]

The Head Master was surprised to see him at that hour of the night, and waited a little gravely for his explanation.

Carroll made his confession in a few words, stating the case against himself baldly and without a word of palliation. “I have to say, sir,” he concluded, “that I have only come to you to save Deering, who has had absolutely nothing to do with the affair, and who told you the entire truth. I could not sleep, sir, if I thought you

doubted his honor. Why, sir——”

“Yes, Reginald, I agree with all that you can say about Deering. I have persistently believed in the boy despite the seemingly strong evidence against him. I am glad you have set me right there. As for yourself, you know that you have behaved badly, and I feel your conduct deeply. But I think you are atoning for it now in the sacrifice you are making for your friend. I do not want to know the names of your companions in this gambling episode, but I want to feel that I may count on you from this moment to make an effort to have it stopped.... Make no promises, but give me reason to keep my trust in you from now on.”

He extended his hand. “Good-night now; tell Deering to come to me after Chapel to-morrow morning.”

“Good-night, sir,” said Carroll with a thick voice, as he grasped the Doctor’s hand.

CHAPTER IX

AN ENDING

"Well, Sandy," said the Doctor to his head prefect the next morning, as he waved the embarrassed Maclaren to a comfortable chair, himself standing with his back to the fire, "I am afraid I have been near making a very bad mistake." And he related in a few words, without involving Carroll, the revelation that had been made to him the night before.

"I see, sir," said Sandy. "I suppose of course, sir, that you can't give me the name of your informant. I should like to do a little investigating on my own responsibility."

"No, I can't," responded the Head decisively. "And for some reasons I am sorry; but it was such a manly and unselfish course for the boy to take, that I freely forgave him and promised him immunity. So far as he is concerned, I have no doubt that is the best course. But there are others—the ringleaders, I suspect. I want the investigation made, of course, if you can do it without acting on mere suspicion. If you can get me evidence in a straightforward way, I shall act on it. Just now, I wish you would find Deering and ask him to come in here to see me."

"Yes, sir."

Maclaren took his leave then, and the Head Master turned to his morning mail. [108]

Within fifteen minutes Tony stood before him. He had not slept well and the strain through which he had been passing had told on his appearance—his freshness was dulled, there were circles under his eyes, his usually eager manner was unwontedly quiet and subdued.

The Head put the matter very briefly and frankly. "The evidence seemed very strong against you, my boy," he concluded; "though I will say in justice to you that even when things looked darkest I never ceased to believe in you. I felt the difficulty, but I saw no way out but to push things on."

"I understand, sir," Tony replied. The weight was off his heart now, but he was still a little constrained and self-conscious. He was thinking how much he would like to say many things to Reggie and wondering if he could say them when the opportunity came.

"I must say, taking it all in all," resumed the Doctor, "that heredity seems to demonstrate itself afresh in your case with unusual force. You remind me uncommonly of your grandfather. There was an affair at Kingsbridge in his sophomore year—a piece of brutal hazing. It was rather bad, you know, in our day. But Basil had had absolutely nothing to do with it. He was captured by the proctors under suspicious though in reality perfectly innocent circumstances, and to save a guilty friend, he maintained a stubborn silence to the verge of expulsion. The friend's confession at last saved him also."

Tony smiled. "That's like my grandfather, certainly." [109]

"I admire the trait, you know," continued Doctor Forester, "but I think there are limits to its indulgence. There is a point, as a boy seldom can realize, at which the authorities must probe very much as the law probes, with a fine disregard for personal feelings. Things that deeply concern the moral welfare of the boys here I must sometimes be inquisitorial about in a way that I little like. I think it well to suffer for a friend, but not to the extent of permitting untruth to establish itself in the minds of those who after all are responsible for your welfare."

"I am afraid, sir, I don't know where to draw the line."

"No, my boy, I am afraid you do not."

"I think it was pretty fine of Carroll to come to you, sir," ventured Tony upon this.

"Yes, yes, so do I. But I think also that it would have been uncommonly mean if he had not. I have forgiven Reginald, partly because of his confession, partly too because I feel quite confident that he is not the ringleader, that he too has been to some extent a victim. I am not quite sure that he altogether deserves the immunity I have promised him—the complete immunity was a concession to you."

"To me, sir?"

"Yes——"

"I don't see how, sir?"

"No? Well, perhaps some time you will. You may go now. I am sorry for what has occurred; sorry to have felt it my duty to accuse you, to probe your replies. You will consider yourself, however, [110] gated until further notice, and so will your friends, Wilson and Lawrence. I do not propose to overlook your breaking bounds at midnight. If that happens again, look out for more serious trouble."

"Thank you, sir."

They shook hands then, and Tony left.

How, how, mused the Head, as he looked after the boy, was one to put pressure upon the keenness of that sense of honor; and should one, if one could? Sometimes even a head master realizes that there are limits to his wisdom. One of the indications that the limits of Doctor Forester's wisdom were less restricted than is often the case was the sincerity with which he frequently questioned his own actions.

After dinner Tony found his cronies waiting in the quadrangle back of the Old School for a report on his interview with the Head. He informed them briefly of the fact that he had been cleared and discharged on the several items of the accusations, but also of the penalty of gating that had been imposed upon the trio.

"Well, that's all very nice and jolly," said Kit, as the three sat and kicked their heels against a bench outside their form common-room, "and really not much of a soak for the provocation we undoubtedly gave 'em. I only hoped in the old gentleman's excitement about the shanty that he'd forget our minor sins. Not he! But, on the other hand, considering that they spoiled the best part of the lark and insulted you uncommonly by supposing all manner of rotten immoral things, I'm equally torn as to whether it's not an awful [111] roast and with wondering how we get off at all, at all."

"Say, kiddo, you are all tangled up," said Tony, feeling Kit's head for indications of unsuspected abnormalities.

"I am, I confess it," that youth blandly responded. "Kindly inform Jim and me, who've been unfeelingly omitted from these interesting interviews, who was the victim that went so willingly to the sacrifice?"

"Well," interrupted Jimmie, "not Arty Chapin—"

"No, Chapin's a bounder."

"Not Hen Marsh."

"No, Hen's a shadow of Arty's, and a poor measly sort of shadow at that."

"Nor Buster Thorndyke."

"Rather not," assented Kit; "Buster's just plain garden variety of no good."

"Well, there are other candidates, of course, for the honor; but though nameless I guess we can count on them failing to qualify—all of which rather narrows the possibilities to Reginald Carter Westover Carroll."

"Now look here!" exclaimed Tony. "It's to Reggie's credit or I wouldn't admit it. Reggie's a peach. I can't stand for a word against him. He's made everything all right."

"Oh, Reggie's all right," admitted Kit soothingly. "Reggie is certainly all right. Haven't I always said so? Haven't I deplored from the very beginning that he was in with such a crowd of bounders. This only proves that he's too good for them. I only hope," he added, [112] with mock gravity, "that this will have taught him a lesson and that in the future he will model himself upon us."

Upon this Tony turned and with a powerful swing of his left arm swept Kit out off the bench onto the snow. But Wilson, in his sudden descent, reached out instinctively, grabbed Tony by an arm and a leg, and pulled him down on top of him. Jimmie joyously fell on the heap. For several blissful moments there was wonderful rough-house. Tony emerged at last, sent Jimmie sprawling, and established himself for a brief triumphant moment on Kit's stomach.

"Swear you'll never tell any of it, or I'll stuff your mouth full of dirty snow. Swear!"

"I swear," yelled Kit. "Let me up, you white trash! Jim, to the rescue!"

But Tony was up and at bay, and by whirlwind sparring was keeping Jimmie at his distance. Kit was ludicrously slow, and had a

bad thump on his knee, which he rubbed ruefully as he arose with exaggerated dignity.

"Cut it," he bellowed. "Come on, do let's crawl back in the sun and be nice and quiet and comfy again."

The other two quickly desisted and helped the wounded warrior to his seat. "I'm sorry, kid," began Tony. "Didn't mean to hurt you. Does it hurt *so* much, old man?" he added, teasingly.

Kit could not resist, but lumbered forward, despite the thumped knee, and fell afresh on the light-footed Deering.

"Keep off, Jim!" yelled Tony, and again they went crashing to the [113]
ground. "He has got to eat that nice clean white snow."

"No—! I swear," protested Kit. But they were in for it, and with Jimmie standing by, after a few moments of furious wrestling, both fed the other handfuls of snow, until exhausted with laughter and the effort, they lay supine and called on Lawrence piteously to help them up.

"I'm off," said Jimmie, "call-over bell is ringing, and the Gumshoe's on deck."

"Oh, hang, oh hang the Gumshoe," pleaded Kit.

They picked themselves up, cheeks glowing, eyes glistening, clothes and hair tossed.

"Such is life," said Wilson, ostentatiously rubbing his knee.

At this moment Mr. Roylston emerged from the door of the Old School and was passing them on his way to the Gymnasium to hold call-over. He glanced at their disheveled clothes and paused.

"Will you take our names, sir?" asked Lawrence.

"Hm—yes," replied the master at length. "And may I ask, do you propose to wallow for the rest of the afternoon in the dirt and snow?"

"Not much else to do, sir," answered Kit ruefully, "we're gated."

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Roylston, not making the pretense of concealing his satisfaction, "to whom is the credit of having awarded you with your just deserts? I may ask?"

"Certainly, sir," responded Kit blithely, "the Head."

"Ah, indeed. Well, I will note your names." And with that he [114]
passed quickly on.

"Ain't he the tender-hearted elder brother?" said Kit, with a not altogether pleasant glance in the direction of the master's retreating figure. "Well, I vote we play fox and geese and keep the amiable Gumshoe chasin' us through the houses. 'Twill be our only means of getting exercise."

And fox and geese it was, and Mr. Roylston and they had plenty of exercise, and that night Deering and Lawrence and Wilson had a good long rest as they stood outside of Mr. Roylston's study-door in Howard House until the clock struck twelve.

The gating, however, did not last many weeks, and before long our friends were back at their old haunts again.

Sandy Maclaren meanwhile was pursuing his investigation with both ardor and discretion. He felt certain of his victims, if he only had patience to watch their doings carefully. Chapin and Marsh were in his house, so that he could note their absences up to lights without deliberately spying. After lights Sandy was at a loss, for he did not believe in going into a boy's bedroom to see if he were there. Nor on the other hand was it possible often to visit the shanty. However he gained an unexpected ally in his house master, Mr. Roylston. The doings at the shanty in Lovel's Woods had come to that gentleman's ears; he also had his suspicions; and he did not share Sandy's scruples about quietly making sure half-an-hour after lights that none of his boys were out of their rooms.

He came one evening toward the end of the term to Maclaren's [115]
study about half-past ten. Sandy was almost ready for bed. "Chapin and Marsh are not in their rooms, Maclaren," he said.

"What, sir?" exclaimed Sandy, starting to his feet, "how do you know, sir?"

"That is of no consequence. Chapin and Marsh are out of their rooms."

"Do you know where they are, sir?"

"I have some reason to suspect that they are playing poker in that wretched shanty in the Woods."

"Oh, but we raided that, you know; took all their stuff,—if it was

they."

"Yes, but a clever criminal goes directly back to commit his crimes in the same place. After a little time he is nowhere so safe. Most fools think lightning never strikes in the same place twice. I have suspected them for some time, but I have not before been sure that they were missing. I am sorry to ask you to make a journey over to the Woods at this time of night, but I cannot well leave the House. You will probably find them, I think; in which case you will direct them to report to me at once. I will wait up until your return."

Poor Sandy began to pull on his clothes. He did not like the job, not merely because it was cold and dark, but because he would have preferred to have received the information from another master. He was not adverse to catching Chapin and Marsh, if he was to catch them, but he felt a little sorry for himself as well as them that it all had to come on such a night. He routed out Larry Cummings to go with them, and they started on the dismal journey. After all, duty [116] was duty, they reflected; and if that gang could be broken up it would be a good thing for the school.

It was nearly midnight when Sandy, Larry and their victims—Chapin, Thorndyke and Marsh—returned to Mr. Roylston's study. The master received them with a quiet satisfaction. It was a good, and thought Sandy a little unkindly, an easy night's work for him.

"You will all retire at once," he said in grave judicial tones, "and in the morning you will accompany me to the Rectory."

It was a clear case for the Head Master on the morrow, though he singularly failed to congratulate Mr. Roylston on the success of his detective work. He suspended judgment until he could talk with Mr. Morris about Reggie Carroll's connection with the affair.

Morris, when the Head had sent for him, was convinced that Carroll deserved the leniency; that there were chances for him in the school of making good that did not exist for Chapin, that were doubtful for Thorndyke and Marsh. Carroll certainly had improved, markedly improved, since his confession. He had broken, Morris felt, with his old crowd.

"Besides," he added, "as for Chapin there is an old score against him that should perhaps weigh with you in your decision, Doctor Forester."

"Yes?—what is that?"

Morris told the story of the Boxford game of the year before.

"Ah, I see," said Doctor Forester, and he did see with an [117] admirable lucidity. "And Deering held his tongue about that too?"

"About that too," answered Morris.

"Unusual boy!"

"A very fine boy, sir."

"Yes, a fine boy. Well, I think that settles it. After Chapin is gone I shall tell the prefects the whole story, and I think perhaps it will be well that the school should know it too, at least through them. We can trust them to do justice to the football episode, anyway."

"I agree with you, sir,—now; but for a long time I wanted to let things take their course. It has been good for Deering. It has deepened his easy-going pleasant nature; or rather it has served to bring out the deep things that are in his nature."

"Yes, yes—that was right, I dare say. But that you have told me now makes my course perfectly clear. I am glad you have done so."

Chapin was shortly summoned to the Rectory. He had a brief and uncomfortable interview with Doctor Forester, and an hour later he boarded a train bound for Coventry, and was heard of at Deal School no more. Marsh and Thorndyke and one or two others were suspended for the rest of the term, and after this house-cleaning the school settled down to its normal life.

One afternoon not long after these events Doctor Forester paused on the terrace of the Old School and looked over the playing-fields. The snows had melted, the frost was out of the ground, it was one of the first warm days of the Spring shortly before the Easter [118] vacation, and the boys were playing ball for the first time, rushing the season as they commonly do. Doctor Forester liked baseball, for it gave him less anxiety than some other games.

Morris had joined him as he stood on the terrace in the pleasant sunlight. Morris was an Old Boy, and the Head had a special feeling for him that for the most part he carefully concealed. He welcomed him now with a sympathetic nod.

Just below them a rod or so away Jimmie Lawrence and Tony Deering were passing ball.

“Good to see the baseball starting, eh? Who are those two boys just below us? Deering and Lawrence? I am getting blind, I fancy. I wish Deering were as good a baseball player as he is a good football player. Oh, yes, I know you like the other game. Look, how quick he is! I like that. By the by, I have thought often of what you told me of his keeping his mouth shut about Chapin’s trick in the Boxford game. It was like a Deering. His grandfather was just such a chivalrous fool—such a good Christian, Morris! I like a boy like that here. He will do something. I wonder what?”

“Who knows, sir? We can count on him, I feel sure of that.”

“And that is much. One muses of these boys now and then—what the future has for them. Yes—you do, I know. I envy you sometimes knowing them as you can and do. How much one wants to do for them, eh? That Deering, now—we must watch him. He will be worth while.”

“Yes, I think so. We shall see, sir, just how.”

“Yes, we shall see.” And still musing, the Doctor turned away. [119]

Morris stayed on for a long time watching the boys on the playing-fields.

The Head Master had turned as he was about to enter the Old School and glanced again at his younger colleague, and a smile of quiet affection and satisfaction stole over his keen kindly face.

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[120]

CHAPTER X

FINCH

One stormy night in the early autumn, two years after the events narrated in the last chapter, a group of masters were sitting in their common-room at Deal School. Supper was just concluded; a cheerful fire burned on the hearth, and the crackling of the flames was a pleasing contrast to the roar of the wind and the dashing of the rain without. Two of the masters were playing chess under the light of a lamp, the others were sitting before the fire, smoking and talking.

"Well," remarked Beverly, one of the younger men, noted among his colleagues for his readiness to express an opinion upon any subject in the universe, "what do you think of the Head's latest departure?"

Mr. Roylston pursed his thin close-shaven lips as though he were about to reply, but before doing so he carefully pressed the tobacco into his pipe, and struck a match and applied it. "I don't know," he muttered, between the puffs, in rather a high jerky voice, "that it makes very much difference what we think. But I am inclined to characterize it as an arrival rather than a departure."

"It is certainly very much with us," commented Gray, with an absent-minded glance into the fire.

"Well, I predict its speedy extinction," resumed Beverly. "It is [121]
difficult for me to conceive how the Doctor can suppose that Finch will ever get on here. Upon my word, did you ever see such an object?"

"Upon *my* word, I did not," answered Gray. "But here it certainly is, and in a sense it is bound to get on. I am entrusted with its table manners, if one may speak of what does not exist."

"I believe that Morris is to have it in his house," said Roylston, looking over at the chess players.

"It? who? Oh, you are talking about Finch, eh? Queer little duffer, isn't he?"

"Queer?" murmured Beverly in a tone that spoke volumes of intense pity for the limits of Morris's vocabulary. "Perhaps you can really tell us something about it, Mr. Morris?"

"Nothing much, I'm afraid," Morris replied. "The Doctor has some special interest,—he's a trust, I understand, from a very old friend. It is very much up to us, I fancy, to help make things easy for the poor kid. I shall speak to some of the boys in my house about him, and ask them to go out of their way to be a bit decent."

"Speedy execution were the more merciful, I should say," commented Mr. Roylston, taking a comfortable pull at his pipe.

"Nonsense! he'll make good," said Morris, a shade of irritation crossing his face, "that is, if we give him half a chance."

"I don't precisely see why we should be supposed to give him less
or more chance than we give to every boy," said Beverly, a little [122]
pompously. "I am sure we all——"

"*We* can't perhaps," Roylston rejoined, "but doubtless Mr. Morris, who has the advantage of certain confidential relations with the boys of his house which we do not enjoy, probably can."

"Oh, come, Roylston," exclaimed Morris, making a bad move in his game with Stenton. "Of course, I shall use my influence with the boys in my house to make things easy for poor Finch. Why should I not?"

"Echo answers 'why,'" replied Mr. Roylston, somewhat annoyed; and then he added with an air of indulgence, "but be assured, my dear fellow, I have no intention of criticising your extraordinary theories afresh."

"Thank you," said Morris and gave his attention to his game. "Your move, Stenton, I think."

Mr. Roylston sent a characteristic glance of patient suffering in the direction of his colleague, and then held up his hands for the benefit of the company as though to say, "You see how useless it is to discuss these things with our friend over there." He then bade them all a tart good-night, and went off to keep his duty in the schoolroom.

His way led across the Gymnasium. There, in the center of a crowd of boys engaged in making his life miserable, stood the new

boy, Finch, who had just been the subject of conversation in the masters' common-room. He was a sorry specimen of a boy, to be sure; the sorriest probably that through mistaken kindness had ever found his way to a great school of wholesome, healthy youngsters. [123] He was thin, he was pallid, he was ugly. He had the face of a little old man, weak light eyes, a high dome-like forehead, over which straggled little wisps of thin yellow hair. His ill-formed mouth was parted now in a snarl half of rage, half of terror, as he glanced from one jibing boy to another, like a hunted rat. His clothes were too small for him, and his thin little legs, which long since should have been concealed by long trousers, were incased in bright red knitted stockings. These had acted upon the imagination of his schoolmates like the proverbial red rag upon a bull, and were the subject of the stream of jibes and jokes that were being heaped upon him. It was not a representative crowd of boys that surrounded him, but a miscellaneous crew of lower schoolers who had followed in the wake of a fat Third Form boy, known as Ducky Thornton, the self-appointed chief inquisitor of the moment. The noise was unduly loud, consisting for the most part of catcalls and strange and weird squeaks from the throats of a dozen excited small boys. It was the sort of commotion that under ordinary circumstances Mr. Roylston would have promptly checked and rewarded with a liberal distribution of pensums. Such indeed had been his immediate impulse, but as he started to carry out his purpose, he had caught sight of Finch and there had flashed into his mind the irritating exchange of words about him in the common-room. He checked the feeling of compassion for the new boy and his annoyance at the disturbance, and passed quickly into the cloister that led into the schoolroom.

Fortunately for Finch a more resolute champion now appeared [124] upon the scene. It was Kit Wilson—on his way across the Gymnasium. Quick as a flash he took in the situation, and, crossing the room with a leap and a stride, he landed in the midst of the party of "horsers." He grabbed one small boy by the collar of his coat and sent him spinning out into the middle of the Gymnasium, another he pushed out of his way with something of his football manner, and ended by applying a kick to Ducky Thornton that even that well-cushioned individual was apt to remember. "Here, you infernal cads!" he cried, "cut this out! what the deuce do you think you're up to?" The crowd of small boys scattered instantly, leaving poor Ducky, with rueful face and painful limp, to hobble away by himself, pursued by a volley of Kit's variegated vocabulary that was more picturesque than elegant.

Finch stood still where Kit had found him as if transfixed. He was relieved, thankful for the rescue, but incapable of saying so. His face looked hideous in the bright glare of the electric light, drawn as it was by anguish and blazing with what seemed like superhuman hate. Kit stared at him a moment, amazed by the passion of the boy's face; almost shocked by its weird uncanny venom. Conquering the instinctive feeling of revulsion, he put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "You poor little duffer," he said, "I'm sorry for you. Don't take it too hard. They're a crowd of little curs, but their bark is worse than their bite."

"I hate them," snarled the boy. "I hate them." Then his face [125] relaxed, and the light faded in his little blue eyes, as they suffused with tears. "Thank you all the same," he added, his voice still trembling with passion.

"What's your name?" asked Kit.

"Jacob Finch."

"Oh! you're the new boy, eh? Where do you come from?"

"Coventry. I wish I was back. I can't stand it here."

"Rot!" exclaimed Kit, with the easy-going philosophy of popularity and success. "Cut along to the schoolroom now, and let me know if Ducky Thornton bothers you again."

"All right," Finch murmured, and dropping his head, he stole off through the cloister, keeping well within the shadow of the wall until he reached the schoolroom. There he was received by Mr. Roylston, who showed him a seat, and immediately afterwards called the room to order.

Kit, having watched Finch out of sight, stalked off grandly across the Gymnasium, dropping a word of warning here and there to the groups of small boys who had watched the encounter from a safe distance. Ducky Thornton witnessed his departure from an angle in

the wall, whither he had retired with a few of his satellites. His face, at no time very attractive, wore now a most repulsive expression of contempt. “By golly,” was his comment, “he’s the swell head, ain’t he? I wonder if he hurts?”

“Not as much as you do, Ducky, I guess,” squeaked a premature wit and got his ears cuffed for his effort.

A few minutes later Wilson dropped into the study of Number Five Standerland, which Deering and Lawrence were sharing that year, Carroll having been promoted to the Old School, a privilege of the Sixth. The two boys were sitting at their desks, books open, it is true, but rather deeper in football than Virgil. Kit received a characteristic welcome. [126]

“Hello, old sport, drape yourself on a couch, and listen to this fairy tale about the pious Æneas. Tony’s boned it out.”

“Oh, chuck the stuff!” growled Kit. “I’ll do it after breakfast with a trot. I’ve only got ten minutes now for a pow-wow. Have you seen the new kid?”

“Well, rather,” answered Jimmie, “the Doctor has loaded him onto Bill. He’s to have Number Three single right across the hall. The little beast is in the Fifth.”

“Pon honor?” said Kit. “Why, he looks like a sub-First Former. I just rescued him from a crowd of Lower Schoolers that were putting it to him particularly nastily. I gave Ducky Thornton, that wallowing white elephant of the Third, a kick that I reckon’ll make his sitting down uncomfortable for a week. But Finch is such a gloomy little toad that I was almost sorry I’d done it.”

Tony smiled. “That must have been good fun. But I am sorry the Doctor took him here; can’t understand it, in fact. He’ll never do, poor rat!”

“Well, hardly.”

“By the by, kiddo, what——Come in!” he interrupted himself to cry in response to a knock at the door.

Morris entered and was welcomed by the boys in a manner that bespoke both familiarity and deference. The master waved them back into their comfortable chairs. “Thanks, no; I am not going to rob the lot of you of these precious moments of study. I should like to speak to you, Tony, for a few minutes in my study.” [127]

“Certainly, sir.” Tony followed the master down the hallway to the familiar cheerful study—Tony had really got to know his house-master more intimately the year before.

“Make yourself comfortable,” said Morris, “for I want to talk with you for a little while—quite seriously.”

Tony sat down upon the couch, leaned back amongst the pillows and put his hands beneath his head, looking up at Morris who stood on the hearth rug with his back to the open wood fire. “All right, O wise man!” he laughed. “I am very comfy, and all attention.”

Morris looked down at the boy and seemed to study him afresh. He liked Deering very much indeed, better he felt than he had ever liked a boy before. And as he stood there, he told himself that the reason was, that beside Tony’s personal charm, the brightness and lovableness of his sunshiny open nature, there were depths of feeling and purpose that one ordinarily did not find. “Well, Tony, I want you to do something—something quite out of the ordinary—something indeed that I think will be particularly hard and disagreeable.”

“What is it?” asked the boy, “I don’t exactly crave hardship, but there isn’t a lot I wouldn’t do if you specially asked me.” [128]

“Well, I count on that; that’s partly the reason I am asking you rather than another. I want you to make a special effort to look out for Finch.”

“Gee whiz! Mr. Morris,” exclaimed Tony, sitting upright, and assuming an expression of exaggerated horror. “I’ve seen him! I’ll be decent, of course. But really, I don’t see how I can possibly stand taking that little scarecrow under my wing. Why, Jimmie and Kit would——”

“Oh, yes, I know their attitude; but you know as well as I that they would back you up in the matter. I want you to be more than decent. The boy is here, and the Head has strong reasons for wanting him to make good. As you know, all the chances are against his doing so. In truth, I should say, that the boy has no chance unless an old boy, more or less of your caliber, will definitely take him up and befriend him.”

“Nobody is going to hurt him,” protested Tony. “Why, Kit just now rescued him from Ducky Thornton and a crowd of little bullies.”

“That’s good,” answered Morris, “but that is only a drop in the bucket. That boy’s life will be unbearable unless he makes a friend. And I do not believe there is a boy in the school who would be his friend, *really his friend*,—except you.”

“His friend, Mr. Morris?...!”

“Nothing else helps you know—*nothing*.”

Tony grew serious. He thought of what friendship had meant to him:—Jimmie—his eyes moistened at the thought of him; Carroll; Morris, the man before him, whose deep kind gray eyes were looking at him now so confidently. “Mr. Morris,” he said at last, “you do know me, I reckon; you bank on my being clay in your hands.” Then he laughed, “What’s the brat’s name?—Pinch?” [129]

“No, Finch, Jacob Finch.”

“Well, all right—Finch.... The dickens fly away with him. Good-night, maestro.”

“Good-night, my boy.” They clasped hands for a moment, and Tony was gone.

“I am an ass,” he said, flinging himself on the couch by the side of Kit, when he returned to Number Five. “I’ve promised Bill to be a guardian angel to that new kid.”

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[130]

CHAPTER XI

THE DISCOMFITURE OF DUCKY THORNTON

Fifth Form year in a school like Deal usually marks a decided change in the boys; they have grown more mature, have become more serious in various ways, have definitely put away—the most of them—the childish things of school life, and are to be counted as standing for the most part on the side of the powers of law and order. They are used to the ways of the place, are thoroughly imbued with the school spirit and tradition, and consciously aim at keeping themselves and their fellows in the good old ways.

Tony's first year at Deal in the Third Form, as we have seen, had been a varied one. After the exciting events of the Michaelmas and Lent terms, his life had pursued a more even tenor of way. Chapin's detection and expulsion had served to reinstate Deering in the confidence of both masters and boys, and his genial sunshiny nature was winning for him a deserved popularity. He and Carroll, the latter now a Sixth Former, though they no longer roomed together, were excellent friends, but his real intimates were Kit Wilson and Jimmie Lawrence, the latter of whom shared his room in Standerland, while Kit lived but a few doors down the corridor. With Mr. Morris, the house master, he was on very good terms indeed. [131] He had made his place in the football team in Fourth Form year, and had played a good game but he had not distinguished himself that year. Now again in the Michaelmas term of the Fifth Form year he was engaged in daily football practice, and was again looking forward to the exciting contest in November.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Tony's two friends had not taken his declaration of making a friend of Finch very seriously, though they decided with him in a good-natured way to protect the new boy from the thoughtless or ill-natured hazing he was like to get at the hands of lower formers.

A night or so after Finch's arrival at school, Reggie Carroll dropped in at Number Five Standerland to see his younger friends. Jimmie was working in the study, but Tony had turned in early. Reggie stuck his head into the door of Deering's bedroom and discovered its occupant, having got ready for bed, just about to turn off the light. "Come in," said Tony, "and find something comfortable to sit down on—the bed will do. Where are you wandering this time of night?"

"Well, it is only nine o'clock," said Reggie, "and as a matter of fact, I was wandering over to have a 'jaw' with you, as you sometimes so delicately term a heart to heart talk."

"Well, fire away," said Tony, but in tones that did not hint he expected to find the conversation interesting. He was rather pensive, unwontedly silent, and looked out of his window over the dark fields.

Reggie essayed several topics of conversation, but without much [132] success. He was about to take his leave, when something in Tony's expression arrested his attention.

"What on earth is the matter with you, boy?" he asked at last, as he playfully grabbed Tony by the shoulder and began to maul him.

"Let up!" cried Tony. "Can't you see I'm thinking out the problems of the universe? You mess me all up and I don't know where I'm at."

"Well, compose yourself, and let me offer you advice."

"Let up then, do! And consider the appropriateness of the figures of speech, as Gumshoe would say. Bill Morris has been darn white to me——"

"Rather," commented Reggie, with a smile, "we are all green with envy at his whiteness."

"Don't interrupt; as I was trying to say, Mr. Morris has been exceedingly white to me; so much so that I have often wondered how I might show him I appreciate it. Well, the fact is, he has asked me to do something just lately that I don't in the least want to do, and I don't see how in the deuce I am to get out of it."

"Knowing Morris," commented Carroll, lazily, "I don't in the least fancy you are going to get out of it. He lays his plans too well. What does he want?"

"Have you seen Finch, the new boy?"

“Finch?—oh! the kid they call Pinch. Yes, boy, I have seen him; one look was too much. It’s awful.” Then Reggie’s eyes lighted, and he gave an exclamation. “By Jove, I see it all—the whole thing—Bill wants you to be his guardian angel.”

“Precisely,” said Tony, with an expression of infinite disgust. [133]

“And you, my child, fully mean to be.”

“Hang it!” said Tony. “I suppose I do.”

For a moment Carroll was silent and his expression changed from one of good-natured raillery to one of subtle sadness.

“Poor little devil!” he said at last, “why not?” Tony looked at him to see if he were joking. “Oh, I know I couldn’t do it,” Reggie went on. “I haven’t the knack or the grace, or whatever it is called. But old Bill is right; you have. Why, kiddo, the world’s a hell for a lot of people just because the rest of us, who have had more of a chance, sit tight and comfy and don’t care.”

“I suppose it is,” said Tony grimly, “but to tell the truth, I hate to think about such things—for a while yet, anyway.”

“There is one thing to be said,” Carroll continued, without paying any attention to Tony’s remark, “if you do it, do it from the bottom up. Make a good job of it.”

“It’s sheer asininity,” protested Tony. “I can’t do it. Oh, Reggie, I hate him! he’s a loathsome little reptile.”

“Naturally he is that, or Bill would not be so extraordinary on the subject. He doesn’t mess with our affairs very often, you know.”

“Yes, I know,” Tony muttered.

“Do you chance to know why the Head took him?”

“Not really—some family obligation, I believe. The kid was left to [134] him by unspeakable parents who died of disgust at their work.”

Carroll smiled. “Have you begun yet?” he asked.

“No. I have sworn fifty times a day that I’d have nothing to do with it. And now I am going to get up this blessed minute and go in and have a talk with him. Talk to Jim a bit, and I’ll be back and tell you about it.”

“All right,” said Carroll with a smile. Tony jumped out of bed, folded his blue wrapper about him tragically, struck a dramatic attitude, and stalked out of the room. Reggie joined Lawrence in the study.

Half an hour later Tony returned.

“How’s Pinch?” exclaimed Lawrence.

“How did it go?” asked Carroll.

Tony flopped down on a couch with an air of exhaustion. “Oh, so, so. I found him greasing on his confounded Virgil in a blue funk for fear I’d come to haze him. I made him read me twenty-five lines to give him a chance to recover himself, while I looked to see if I could find a redeeming feature. But Nature left that out. After a while I began firing questions at him, and when he gradually grew accustomed to the idea that I was only trying to be decent, he thawed a bit, and told me a little about himself. He’s had a tough time generally since he had the misfortune to come into the world at all. His father, who was an old college chum of the Doctor’s, seems to have turned out a sort of a rotter. He did something or other that disgraced them, and then he died and left that kid and his mother to face the music alone. She, poor woman, didn’t last long, and then [135] the Head stepped in, for old time’s sake, and out of mistaken kindness of his stupid old heart brought Finch here.... All the spirit has been kicked out of him. He’ll do at his books—he read the Virgil pretty well—but he hasn’t the spunk to resent being kicked by a First Former. He seems to live in a perpetual terror of his own shadow. I suspect Ducky Thornton and his gang have been ragging him on the quiet, and if I catch that fat loafer at it, I promise you he’ll be sorry. I think I’ll give him a good kicking to-morrow on general principles.”

“Do!” said Reggie, “that will be good for him in any case.... It might be well for you both to keep an eye on Ducky’s whereabouts in the afternoons. I have a notion that he skulks in the fives court till the master of the day is out of the way, and then sneaks back into the house. I have seen him half-a-dozen times inside, and if I had been a prefect I should have kicked him out myself.”

“Oh, hang being a prefect where kicking Ducky is concerned. To do that would be good for both our souls.”

Carroll laughed. “Well, at it, boy.” He said good-night then, and

left them.

The next day—a bright fair day in mid-November, only a few days before the Boxford game, when the first team were laying off from practice, Tony and Kit, instead of going out early for a walk with their team-mates, went into the fives court after dinner and began a game, keeping an eye, however, on the on-lookers. It rejoiced them to see Thornton's fat ill-natured face amongst a crowd of loafers on the benches. The bell rang for call-over, and the boys ran out to [136]
report to the master of the day, who was accustomed to take his stand at the Gymnasium door. To-day Mr. Roylston happened to be on duty. The roll call over, most of the boys went off to engage upon some form of exercise or game for the afternoon; but a few lazy ones, disdaining the occupations open to them, straggled back into the fives court to watch the games going on there. Later they would swim in the tank, and then stand for half-an-hour under a steaming hot shower, unless a vigilant master happened to catch them and send them about better things. Among these stragglers was Ducky Thornton.

About half-an-hour later Mr. Roylston, beginning to make his rounds of the various houses—a customary duty of the master in charge—came into the fives courts. He stood at the door, noting on his rollslip the boys who were present. By this time only Tony and Kit were playing and some half-a-dozen smaller boys were squabbling on the benches. Tony glanced at the master, and saw beyond him, standing outside on the deserted tennis-courts, the forlorn Finch who looked about him in a bewildered fashion as if he did not know what to do.

As Mr. Roylston finished making his notes, he fixed Tony and Kit with a glare of unmitigated contempt. "The delight of doing nothing for some boys," he said in a sharp, jerky tone, "is only equalled by their incapacity to do anything. Get out into the air, and take some manly exercise, or I shall send the lot of you for a walk to the end of the point."

The younger boys sheepishly slipped out, the scowling Thornton [137]
amongst them, who, Tony noticed, stopped outside and spoke to Finch for a moment. Suddenly he realized that Mr. Roylston was still speaking. "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," he said quickly. "I did not understand that you were speaking to us."

"If you would condescend occasionally, Deering," said the master, "to abstract yourself from the depths of self-satisfaction into which you are habitually plunged, you would not make it necessary for me to take your inattention for mere bad manners."

Tony flushed, started to speak, bit his tongue, and kept silent. He met Mr. Roylston's glance unflinchingly. "Did you wish to say anything, sir?" he said at last, with tantalizing politeness.

Mr. Roylston's eyes turned aside from the cool but perfectly courteous gaze with which the boy regarded him. "Merely," he added, as he turned away, "that I think you older boys—members of the first team at that—set a very bad example by frowsing in the fives court on a glorious autumn afternoon like this."

"Why, it's the first game we've played this year," cried impulsive Kit. "It's come to a pretty pass if Fifth Formers can't play a game of fives without being accused of setting a bad example."

"That will do, Wilson," exclaimed Mr. Roylston sharply, facing them again with an indignant glare in his eye. "You have not yet got over your unpleasant habit of impertinence when occasion offers. Be good enough, please, to leave the courts immediately."

Kit reached for his coat, and as he did so he flung the fives ball [138]
with a vicious twist against the side of the courts, so that it bounced back with a tremendous spring, and narrowly escaped collision with the master's head as he was passing through the doorway. But Mr. Roylston, having scored, as he thought, did not give them the satisfaction of looking back. "Gosh!" exclaimed Kit, "I wish it had hit him."

"Wish it had!" said Tony. "Come on; time's up anyway. Gumshoe'll go through the Old School now, and we'll have a look to see what has become of Ducky.... I'll wager Finch has sneaked back to his own room. He mopes there all free times, and has about fifty marks already for doing it. If Ducky's not there, we'll send him out for a run. If Ducky is—well, kiddo—?"

"Come on," said Kit, significantly stuffing a long leathern strap into his trousers pocket.

They turned out of the courts. No one was in sight; the small boys under the influence of Mr. Roylston's "suggestions" had vanished; even Finch, who had been annihilated by a sarcastic phrase as the master passed him, had crept somewhere to hide till it was time for afternoon school. Tony and Kit watched Mr. Roylston until he disappeared into the Old School, then they started on a run for Standerland.

"I'll bet the brute has got Finch in his room. It's just the time for it; besides Bill has gone over to the Woods with a lot of kids. Softly, Kit," he said, as they pushed open the big doorway leading into the main hallway of Standerland House. They tiptoed cautiously upstairs, and when they got to the head, stopped to listen, holding their breath.

"Sish! what's that?" whispered Kit. [139]

They heard a clear long wail in a high shrill voice—"Pleaseeeee!" ending in a squeal, followed by a deeper guffah, and the sound of a whip's lash.

"Hurry!" said Tony. "We'll make that bully sweat for this." Quick as a flash he was at Finch's door, trying the handle. It was locked; so he pounded vigorously. "Open up!" he called, "and the sooner the better. Open up, you fellows—do you hear?" There was a scuffle within; then silence. Some one crossed the room rapidly, and opened the door. It was a Third Form boy by the name of Clausen—a surly bad-complexioned lad. His face showed white now through the ugly blotches. Tony and Kit stepped quickly within, and closed and locked the door behind them.

Finch was sitting on the edge of the bed, whimpering. His coat and shirt were lying on the floor. Across his back were the welts of several long lashes. Another boy—Dunstan, a Fourth Former, in bad odor with the prefects, one of Thornton's satellites—was by the window, as if he were on the point of jumping out. Fortunately the room was on the second storey of the building. No one else was in sight. Kit grabbed Dunstan and flung him on the bed; but Tony, strangely cool, his eyes glittering, restrained him.

"Wait, Wilson," he said. "Take the key out of the door. Now, you Dunstan, where is Thornton?"

The boy did not answer. "Where's Thornton?" repeated Tony, grasping Dunstan by the neck and wringing it. "He's here, I know; or he was here. He couldn't get out. Here, Kit, tie this animal while I [140] look in the closets," and he slung a bit of cord to his companion. They made short work of the Fourth Former, who indeed made scarcely any show of resistance; and then, having slung him helpless on the bed, they began to search for Thornton. As Kit opened the closet in Finch's bedroom, Ducky darted out, and made for the hall door. But Tony was too quick for him. He grasped him from behind, pinioned his arms behind his back, and dug his knees into Thornton's hips. The fat boy went to the floor like a log, and in a second Tony was kneeling over him with sharp knees digging into the soft flesh about his armpits. Kit gathered the boy's sprawling feet together and tied them with a big muffler that he took from Finch's bureau.

Finch himself, during the struggle, had stopped crying, and was now putting on his shirt and coat. He had just begun to realize that this was a rescue, not a fresh attack upon himself.

"Now, Finch," said Tony, opening the door into the hall, "cut across to my room, and stay there until we come. Kit, take that little beast Clausen, and kick him down stairs. We won't bother any further with him." Kit executed this order with dispatch and thoroughness, and Clausen thanked his stars that he had got off so easily. Having got rid of Finch and Clausen, they relocked the door. "Now, you big fat bully," said Deering, "you are going to get it. Get up and pull off your coat and shirt."

As Thornton struggled to his feet—the operation was a clumsy one, as his ankles were lashed close together,—he began volubly: "You big bullies!" But he did not go far. "Here," said Kit, "wash his [141] mouth out, Tony." And Tony washed it out with plenty of Castile soap and very little water. "Now strip!" said Tony. The bully slowly took off his coat, and then his shirt. "It's not a pretty sight, is it, Kit?" laughed Tony. "Nevertheless it will hurt as much as Finch's back. Bend over."

"Please, please, let me off. 'Pon honor, I'll never do it again—I swear—I swear—please don't lick me; please, *please* don't lick—ouch!" He suddenly collapsed with a squeal of anguish, as Tony

brought the leathern strap across his shoulders with an unmerciful swish. “You wouldn’t let Finch off when he blubbered, would you? Well, we won’t let you off. Ready? Coming.”

“Ouch! ouch!!—oh, I swear—please—oh, you bullies, you—ouch! owhhh!” Then Kit stuffed a towel in his soap-suddy mouth and stilled the noise. When he had been well punished, they flung him on the bed, and let him howl there while they administered a like thrashing to Dunstan. He bore it a little more manfully, and consequently got off more easily. Suddenly they were all startled by a sharp knock on the door. “Gumshoe! by the great horn spoon!” exclaimed Kit. “Yes,” he called, “who is it?”

“Open, open this door instantly,” came in the well-known tones of Mr. Ebenezer Roylston. “Open instantly, or I shall send for the servants to break it in.”

“All right, sir,” called Kit, adding *sotto voce*, “It would be a jolly good stunt if we let him do it. Get on your coats,” he hissed at the two Fourth Formers. Instinct prompted them to quickness; but not quick enough to satisfy Mr. Roylston, for the order was repeated, [142] and the handle of the door rattled impatiently.

Kit unlocked the door at last, and Mr. Roylston entered. “What is the meaning of this unseemly commotion? What are you doing with locked doors when you are supposed to be out? What is the meaning of this strap? Why are these two Fourth Formers here crying? There has been bullying?”

Kit laughed. “That’s about it,” he said. An angry flush suffused Mr. Roylston’s countenance, as he exaggerated Kit’s laugh into impertinence. “You are going too far, Wilson. I shall report you to the Head for bullying and gross impertinence. You also, Deering ——”

“You might as well take the trouble to find out what you are going to report us for,” said Kit.

“Shut up, Kit,” said Tony. “If you——”

“Silence, Deering,” interrupted Mr. Roylston. “I am perfectly capable of rebuking a boy for insolence without your assistance. You, Thornton and Dunstan, come with me. You, Deering and Wilson, go to your rooms, and wait there until you are sent for.”

He waited until they had crossed the hall and gone into Tony’s room; then he took Thornton and Dunstan into Mr. Morris’s study at the end of the hall and was closeted with them for half an hour. Later the boys saw him leave Standerland House, cross the quadrangle and disappear within the Old School. Then they sent Finch back to his room, reconnoitred, but found that Dunstan and Thornton had disappeared.

An hour later there came a tap on their door. Kit opened it, and [143] admitted Mr. Roylston. The master took his place with his back toward the window, and made them stand in the light before him. He cleared his throat once or twice, as though he were at a loss quite how to begin. “I have made an investigation,” he said at last, “and have carefully thought over this afternoon’s affair.” He waited as if for a reply, but as the boys made none, he continued in a moment, a little more sharply and confidently. “I find that you are both guilty of the most wanton cruelty to boys younger and smaller than yourselves; though, I understand—they were singularly frank and direct with me—that you are not without what you will probably pretend is justification. Thornton admits that he had been horsing Finch——”

“Horsing Finch!” began Kit.

“Silence, Wilson; if there is any occasion for either of you to speak, pray, let Deering speak for you. I have endured about as much of your impertinence to-day as I can well stand. You undertook to punish younger boys, and did so cruelly. In my opinion your conduct is indefensible. However, I shall take into consideration your mistaken motives in the matter, and not report you to the Head, as I was at first convinced it was my duty to do. Doctor Forester is wont to deal severely with bullying. Instead, I shall gate you for a month, and require you to do a thousand lines of Virgil apiece for me within the next fortnight.”

“Mr. Roylston,” Tony spoke up quickly, to prevent Kit from uttering the ill-chosen words that he felt were on his lips. “You are [144] probably much misinformed as to the facts, and if you will permit me to say so, with entire respect, you have not asked us a question. As for me, I would very much prefer that you referred the matter to

the Head as you suggested."

For once in his life Mr. Roylston was at loss for what to say. He looked at Tony as though he could not believe the evidence of his senses. He started to speak several times, and each time changed his mind. Finally, he said, "I think that I am competent to settle this matter without troubling Doctor Forester. I warn you that refusal to do my impositions will result in the usual penalties. Deliberate and prolonged disobedience will subject you to suspension or expulsion."

"Very well, sir," said Tony.

Mr. Roylston turned thereupon, and with what dignity he could muster, walked out.

"By Jove, Tony old boy, you got him. Bless you for keeping me from blurting out. I'd have spoiled it all."

"Yes, kiddo, you certainly would. As a matter of fact, you have not been specially impertinent, considering the provocation; and what's jolly well certain is that Gumshoe doesn't want the matter to get to the Head. He knows who's to blame, but he has it in for us. Painful person, isn't he? Virgil'll rot before I do his thousand lines or pay any attention to his gating. I wish he would take us to the Head. Well, I reckon Thornton will let Finch alone now. Let's find Jimmie, and go and wash the blood off in the tank."

So saying, they locked arms, and went singing "Up above the [145] school-topp'd hill" down the corridor. They met Mr. Morris at the outer door of Standerland House. "Well, you seem to be particularly frisky this afternoon," said he, "what's up?"

"Absolutely nothing," laughed Kit; "we're just two good pure innocent happy schoolboys. Come on, magister; come for a dip with us in the tank."

"Well, wait a second, while I stow sweater and stick, and I'll be with you."

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[146]

CHAPTER XII

A GATING AND A GAME

For the next few days Thornton's thrashing was the principal theme of the school talk. The story was told, though no one knew whence it originated. Tony and Kit dismissed it with a laugh or an exclamation, but Finch, interrogated on all hands, gave a correct version. Thornton and his friends kept themselves in the background for a week or so, but nursed their grudge with the dogged determination of ill-will, and when occasion offered continued to torture Finch on the sly, but not so brutally.

The chief satisfaction that Tony got out of the incident, after the pleasure of thrashing a bully, was his talk with the Head on the subject. "I hear," said Doctor Forester, as he stopped Deering after Chapel one morning, "that there have been some lively doings in Standerland of late, in the absence of the masters."

Tony, not yet sure of the Doctor's attitude, blushed and stammered something that was quite unintelligible. The Head eyed him keenly. "For once," he said, laying his hand gently on the boy's shoulder, "I am not disposed to object to a somewhat vigorous method of taking the law into your own hands. I fancy you will have been successful in putting an end to the brutal hazing to which young Finch has been subjected." [147]

"Thank you, sir," said Tony. "We were a bit rough and pretty generally out of order, but we hoped the end justified the means."

The Doctor smiled and went on.

Tony found Kit at the lobby outside the schoolroom, and repeated the conversation in great glee.

"Great man, the Doctor!" remarked Kit, judiciously. "Now I guess we'll let the Gumshoe whistle for his lines. What a relief it is occasionally to meet with broad-mindedness on the part of those who are charged with our education. Same with the Gumshoe's gating," he added, in illogical parenthesis.

The opportunity to test Mr. Roylston's whistling powers came sooner than they expected. The day before the Boxford game, Jack Stenton called off the football practice, and had the school in to a mass-meeting in the Gymnasium. The boys sang the school songs with their traditional vigor, and listened with the utmost good nature and appreciation to speeches that in many cases had been delivered a dozen times before. The Doctor remarked that it was difficult to be original on such occasions, as though he was making the remark for the first time; but at the risk of repeating himself he did not mind saying that they had supreme confidence in the prowess of the team and that the school was confident of a victory on the morrow. Stenton gave, in his matter of fact way, impressing the boys deeply, a careful estimate of the abilities of the different players and what might be expected of them in the game, and offered a judicial estimate that the score would be two touch-downs to none in favor of Deal. Billy Wendell, the captain, stammered, in the traditional captain's manner, that the team wanted the school behind them, and that—that was about all he had to say. Other members of the faculty made remarks, some of which were witty, some merely facetious, but all received with wild applause. Then they sang some more, cheered for the team, for the school, for Jack Stenton, for Billy Wendell, and the meeting was concluded by the Head declaring a half-holiday for the team, and removing Monday Port bounds for the afternoon in behalf of the two upper forms. Many of the boys had friends coming on the afternoon trains, and counted on this largess as a general permission to go in and meet them. [148]

Kit's mother was coming, with a couple of girls. Rooms for them had been taken at the Deal Inn on the Port Road near the school. Immediately after the mass-meeting Kit called to Tony, and asked him to go in with him to the depôt and meet the five o'clock train.

"Are we really going to break the Gumshoe's gating?" asked Tony.

"We certainly are," responded Kit cheerfully. "To heck with the Gumshoe; bounds are off for the afternoon anyway. It'll be a good way to get the matter officially to the Head. By gum!" he exclaimed, glancing toward the Schoolhouse, "Gumshoe's got call-over."

Surely enough Mr. Roylston was standing on the Schoolhouse steps, with a long line of boys in single file beneath him, waiting to report. [149]

“Shall we tell him?” asked Kit.

“Guess we’ll have to,” answered Tony. “Let’s butt in to the middle of the line for once, and get it over.” Ordinarily, it may be remarked, Fifth Formers did not report, unless they were going into Monday Port. They made for the line, and Kit grabbed a Third Form boy by the arm.

“Say, Bunting, do you mind letting us in here? We’re in a big hurry.”

The small boy flushed with pleasure at the request from such popular and distinguished persons as Wilson and Deering, and readily made way. Mr. Roylston, who seldom failed to see anything that was going on around him, stopped for a moment and looked at them with an expression of stern disapproval. The boys thought that he was about to order them to the end of the line, but for once he disappointed them, and after a significant compression of his lips, went on with the call-over. There was a general titter along the line.

Soon it was Kit’s turn, and he was at Mr Roylston’s side. The master held a paper in his hand, on which was printed the school list. It was the duty of the master of the day to note on such a slip opposite each boy’s name the plans that he reported for the afternoon.

“Wilson and Deering, sir,” said Kit.

Mr. Roylston faced him. “Now that they have usurped the places of a score or so of boys who were in line before them, what do the Messrs. Wilson and Deering propose to do in such a hurry?”

“We are going to town, sir, to meet my mother who is arriving on the five o’clock train.” [150]

“Ah, indeed!” said Mr. Roylston. “I am very sorry to put Mrs. Wilson to any inconvenience, but I fear I must do so. As you both are gated for the month, it is impossible for me to acquiesce in your ingenuous proposal.”

“Beg your pardon, sir,” said Kit, “but the Head has declared bounds off for the afternoon.”

“Undoubtedly,” commented Mr. Roylston, “but I have had the unpleasant duty of gating you for a month. Next!”

Wilson and Deering were swept on by the crowd. Without further ado, they cut across the field, climbed the stone wall and started across the meadows for the town.

In Monday Port they loafed about until five o’clock, when they went to the depôt and met Mrs. Wilson. She was accompanied by two very pretty and attractive girls, Betty, Kit’s sister, and Barbara Worthington, her great friend and a boyish flame of Kit’s. The party had a merry time on the drive out the Port Road and a pleasant tea on the old-fashioned gallery of the Inn, in the golden light of the Indian summer afternoon. Absorbed in the unusual pleasure attendant upon the presence of girls at Deal, they quite forgot the predicament they were in with Mr. Roylston.

The master in charge had a better memory, and was waiting for them at the entrance of the cloister that led into the refectory, where the school was gathering for supper. He was very angry.

“I will trouble you,” he said, “to come with me at once to the Head. You have been flagrantly disobedient.” [151]

The boys followed him without a word across the quadrangle to the Rectory.

“A very annoying case, Doctor Forester,” Mr. Roylston began when they were closeted with the Head in his study. “I gated Wilson and Deering for a month, but despite my warning at call-over, they deliberately ignored the gating and went to town this afternoon.”

“It was quite necessary, sir,” protested Kit, “that I should meet my mother, who arrived at five o’clock. Besides, sir, we think that Mr. Roylston’s gating was unjust, and we asked him to refer the matter to you, sir, and he refused.”

“That was not necessary,” said the Doctor, “except under exceptional circumstances. However, I may say that it is my general understanding that when bounds are raised the day before the Boxford game, that for the afternoon ordinary penalties and restrictions are suspended. Why were they gated, sir?”

“For brutal conduct, Doctor Forester, to their younger

schoolmates."

"I am sorry to hear that," said the Head, with something like a smile flitting across his face. "You behaved brutally toward smaller boys?" He faced the culprits.

Tony smiled in spite of himself. "Why, yes, sir, I suppose we did; we planned to."

"I am sorry to hear it," said the Head. "But, Mr. Roylston, for once let us compromise and temper justice with mercy. Only [152] recently these two young brutes did a very effective and commendable service to the school,—they thrashed two bullies who had been making the life of a small boy quite miserable. Let us forgive them their brutality in the one case for the sake of their brutality in the other, where it was not undeserved. I am disposed to ask you to dispense the gating and the penalties for violating it."

Mr. Roylston compressed his lips. "I—is it just, sir?"

The Doctor smiled in his odd way. "I am disposed to insist on your being merciful, Mr. Roylston. I will guarantee that there will be no more brutality nor disobedience. Let us threaten them with dire penalties, if they are reported for brutality again. Good-day, boys."

As they went out, they heard the Doctor say in suave and cheerful tones, "Stay and have a bit of supper with me, Roylston." "Thank you, no;" answered the master, "I have duties immediately. Good-evening, sir."

"One for the Gumshoe," said Tony blithely, as they turned onto the campus.

Kit was serious. "I have always said," he remarked sententiously, "that the Gumshoe Ebenezer was an odious ass; but I have always had, until this moment, a sneaking conviction that in so saying I was doing him an injustice. Henceforth my conscience is absolved. Ass he is; ass he shall be."

"Amen," said Tony. "Fact is, Gumshoe's had it in for Finch. Mysterious beast, ain't he! We score to-day, kiddo, but the Gumshoe is not annihilated."

"No, I dare say not. The possibilities of his getting back at us are [153] pretty nigh endless. But say, Tonio, old sport, isn't Bab Worthington a queen?"

"Quite the queen, Kitty; but Betty Wilson is no mere handmaid."

"Oh, bother Betty; she's a good sort. But let's hurry, so we can get down early. I am half sorry I asked the crowd. Think I'd rather have—"

They both began to run then toward the dining-room, where the school was already at supper.

That evening "the crowd," as our friends called themselves in their modest schoolboy way, including Kit, Tony, Jimmie Lawrence, Teddy Lansing and Tack Turner, went to the Inn and spent a merry evening under Mrs. Wilson's indulgent chaperonage. There were other parties there, including the parents and sisters and cousins and an occasional aunt of various boys; a gathering of the clans loyal to Deal; a score or so of Old Boys, mostly from Kingsbridge, back for the game, who had overflowed from the crowded school into the Inn. In the proud consciousness of their undoubted superiority as college men, the Old Boys somewhat cast their younger brethren in the shade, and treated them with patronizing airs, asking them occasional questions in a patriarchal manner.

Tony alone amongst his companions seemed to shine that evening. There flashed into prominence, to their first observation, in his manner, his appearance even, something of that charm which was more and more making him a favorite, and which, though his schoolfellows never analyzed it, was to be cordially recognized later on. It would have been hard to say in just what Tony's charm lay, [154] perhaps it was that a certain serious sweetness of disposition, the finer traits of his character, for the most part unnoticed in the helter-skelter rough-and-readiness of school life, were emerging. Women, who are always quicker than men to estimate a personality, to be conscious of its finer as well as its more obvious strains, felt this at once in Tony. He was a success with Mrs. Wilson and the girls. His own friends, intimate with him in all the openness and yet sometimes quite misleading circumstances of everyday existence, who ordinarily thought of him merely as a boon companion, a genial playmate, gifted with a nice sense of honor but ready for a lark and a risk with the most reckless, were a little surprised at the evident impression he made not only on Mrs. Wilson, but on Betty and

Barbara Worthington. His friends saw in him that night a facility despite his modesty, a social poise untempered by self-consciousness, that more distinctly than ever before singled him out as their natural leader. Kit indeed, felt several miserable pangs of jealousy, as he noted Barbara's quick response to Tony's gayety, and her unconcealed desire to remain part of the group of which Tony was in some sense the center rather than wander off with him for the too obvious pleasure of a tête-à-tête. But Kit himself was too whole-souled, too merry of nature, to sulk, and save for an occasional growl to which no one paid attention, before the evening was over, he was enjoying Tony as he had never enjoyed him before, wondering at the quick development of this social side of his character which had been unobserved.

As for Tony he was quite unconscious of anything save that he [155] was enjoying himself immensely; that Betty Wilson was an extremely attractive girl, a thoroughly "good sort," as Kit had said; and that he wished there were more frequent occasions when the girls came to Deal. He was not sentimental, so that he did not imagine that he had fallen in love.

The day of the game was a perfect one for football, cool and gray, with no wind blowing. The teams were in fine condition, and the Boxford boys, who had come over in the old-time coach across the hills, looked tremendously big and strong. Tony was still playing end, the position to which he had been so unexpectedly assigned in his Third Form year, and in which, through no fault of his own, he had been the means of losing the game. To be sure in the following year, when the circumstances of that defeat had been made rather generally clear, he had redeemed himself by good playing and they had won, but he felt a keen desire this year to blot out forever, if it might be, the bitter memory of that first Boxford game. He wanted, quite selfishly he told himself,—and perhaps he was thinking a little of Betty—to win a game as definitely as he had lost one.

As the team stepped out onto the field that afternoon, resplendent in their red sweaters with the big black D across the breast, and he sniffed the cool air and heard the chorus of Deal cheers ring down the lines, he lifted his head like a good hunter keen for the chase, and a thrill of determination went through him like a shiver. They must win!

Billy Wendell had the ball under his arm as they came onto the [156] field. Immediately he tossed it to Kit, prominent to the spectators for his shock of yellow hair and his bright red cheeks despite the fact that this was his first appearance on the school team. Kit tossed it to Barney Clayton, who muffed it, and then made a quick dive and fell on it very much as a kitten plays with a ball of yarn.... So for fifteen minutes or so the preliminary practice went on, until the boys were well warmed up for the strenuous work of the game.

Then came the shrill note of the referee's whistle; the two captains met in the center of the field; the Boxford boy called and won the toss, and the two teams trotted out to their places for the kick-off. There were roars from the two grand-stands, the antiphonal ringing-out of the Deal and Boxford cheers; another blast from the referee's whistle, and Kit, who was playing center, gave the ball a kick that sent it sailing down the field to within five yards of the Boxford goal posts. A Boxford back caught it, but Tony downed him in his tracks.

Then the teams lined up, the Boxford quarter signaled to his full back for a line plunge, and in less time than it takes to write it, the great hulk of a six-foot boy went tearing through the Deal line. Deal received a shock as great as it was unexpected. They had foreseen no such smashing attack, and before they could rally to the defense, they had been forced for down after down over the smooth brown field until the play was well in their own territory....

We do not mean to describe the game in detail, for is it not written in the chronicles of the boys of Deal? Wendell rallied his team just in time to prevent Boxford from scoring in the first half, [157] when the ball had been worried to within twenty yards of his goal. Then followed an exchange of punts, which, as Edward Clavering, Deal's full back, could kick farther than his opponent, gave Deal a slight advantage. When they got the ball at last in the middle of the field, they made a few gains by end runs. They were swifter, more ingenious, better kickers than the Boxford boys, but the team from over the hills had the advantage in weight and strength.

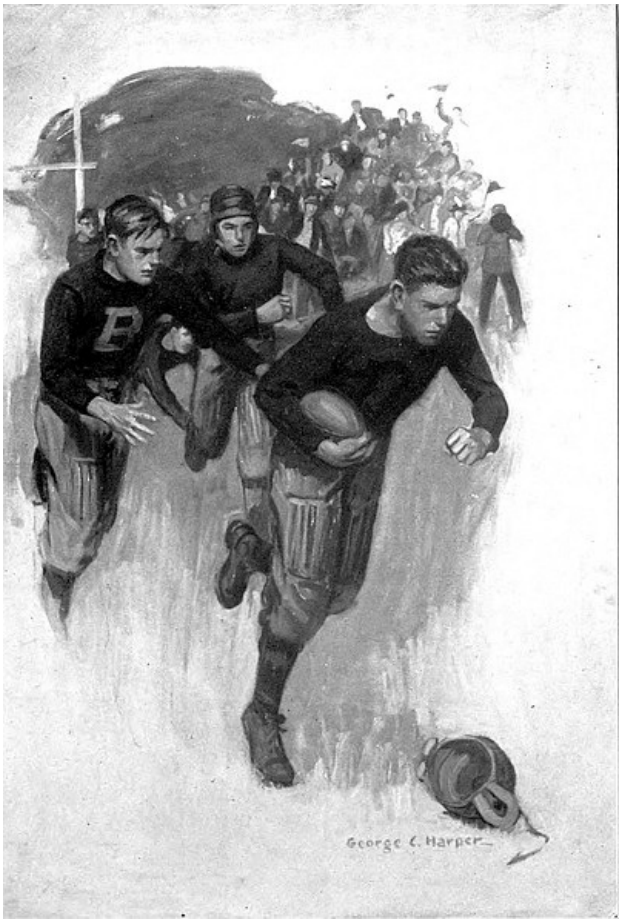
During the intermission between the halves Stenton did his best

to hearten his boys, but it was a poor best, for he felt pretty certain that they were bound to be scored against heavily in the next half. They could not stand the smashing of the line—already Clayton and one or two others had been taken out.

The second half saw a repetition of the tactics of the first. Boxford persistently hit the line, and within five minutes of the play had scored the inevitable touchdown. The enthusiasm of their supporters was only a trifle dampened when they failed to kick the goal. After that Deal worried them a good deal with trick plays, and once after gaining a considerable distance by an exceptionally long punt and a fumble, they seemed within striking distance of the goal. Clavering tried for a field goal, but to the sharp distress of his supporters the ball went wide of the mark. Boxford took the ball on their twenty-five yard line, and renewed their demoralizing attack. Despite the Deal boys' desperate efforts, the ball was forced back into their territory, straight down the field by smashing center plays toward their goal. Poor Kit had been carried off, bruised and lame, [158] but not seriously hurt; the veteran Clavering had succumbed, and Deal was left to finish the game with a team that was half composed of substitutes. It was a question now, it seemed, of simply keeping down the score.

Boxford fumbled, and again they escaped danger for the moment. But soon the ball had been worried again dangerously near their goal. Twenty-five, twenty, fifteen yards—Tony measured the distance with grim despair. Suddenly, as the Boxford quarter snapped back the ball, something unexpected happened. Signals got twisted,—at any rate, there was a fumble and a scrimmage, and twenty boys were scrambling in a heap, when the attention of the spectators was arrested by the shrill cry of the Boxford quarter, for Tony Deering, with the ball tucked under his arm, had emerged from the mass of players, and was speeding like a frightened deer down the field toward the Boxford goal.

The quarter made a desperate effort to intercept him, but Tony dodged as quickly as lightning flashes, and raced on with a clear field. The two teams, recovered, were rushing after him.... One could have heard a whisper from one side of the field to the other so tense was the excitement. The silence was absolute save for the pattering of the swift feet upon the turf.... Then the cheers broke forth, for Tony had planted the ball midway behind the goal posts. For five minutes there was pandemonium on the side lines, restrained for a moment, only to break forth afresh as Clavering kicked the goal. The game was won, for almost immediately after the kick-off, the whistle blew, and the referee called "Time."



TONY DODGED ... AND RACED ON WITH A CLEAR FIELD

CHAPTER XIII

THE NIGHT OF THE BONFIRE

If Tony had enjoyed the sensation of expanding under appreciation the night before the game, it reached fatigue point the night after. It falls to few boys, even for so short a time, to be the hero of his school; but it is one of the pleasantest experiences that can befall him. It gives the hero a feeling of kinship with the mighty conquerors of the past; a sense, intense if fleeting, of being one with Alexander, with Cæsar, with Napoleon. And though Deering bore his honors modestly, for this once he enjoyed them to the full; with the full-bloodedness of youth, he luxuriated in a sense of satisfaction with the world in general and with himself in particular. He was not ordinarily self-important, but it would have been an inhuman boy who remained indifferent to the incense of praise he received after that Boxford game. To have turned what seemed certain defeat into unexpected victory was a piece of good luck for which he was grateful, as well as he was grateful for the undoubted fact that he could run faster than most boys of his age.

Immediately after the game a score of boys, rushing across the lines, had laid bodily hold of him, hoisted him on their shoulders; and with similar groups, who had performed like service for other members of the team, they marched off the field, singing the school [160] song at the top of their hoarse voices, in dreadful tune but with an enthusiasm that atoned for all defects. Jack Stenton was in the midst of them, and he literally hugged Tony when the boys put him down at the entrance to the Gymnasium locker-room. “I’m glad it fell to you, young ‘un,” he said; “it was a great run that will be remembered as long as boys play football at Deal.”

After his shower Tony dressed, joined Kit and Jimmie Lawrence, and wandered about the campus with them, enjoying to the fullest the sensation of universal proprietorship. At half-past six, they went again to the Inn to dine with Mrs. Wilson and the girls.

Kit had a black eye and a swollen nose that hurt considerably, but which he would not have foregone for the world; they made him feel as well as look a martyr to the cause. The girls were beaming, quite unaffectedly proud to be the guests of such heroes. Kit’s bruises seemed to affect Miss Worthington rather as ornaments than otherwise, to lend a fascination not afforded by his natural good looks, for she acquiesced this time in the pairing off on the way to the school after the dinner, for the celebration, that afforded him an opportunity for the much desired tête-à-tête. Mrs. Wilson appropriated Jimmie, so that Tony and Betty were left to walk together.

Alone with him, Betty ceased to beam; in fact, became shy and unwontedly silent. Tony liked the shyness, thought her sweeter so. He felt a pronounced sentimental thrill as he gave her his hand to help her across an insignificant ditch.

“It must be wonderful,” she said at last to break the awkward [161] silence, “it must be wonderful to win a game.”

“It is,” Tony laughed ingenuously. “Do you know, Miss Wilson, I feel half ashamed of myself. I so hoped something like that might happen. I suppose a fellow ought to think of the game and the school, and I reckon most of ‘em do; but two years ago, I was the means of our losing the Boxford game, and I tell you it took me a long time to get over the feeling that gave me.”

“I know,” said Betty. “Kit has told me about that.”

“Well, it was a long time ago; but I never did really get over it.”

“But it wasn’t your fault,” protested Betty.

“Oh, yes, in a sense it was; if I had stuck to the ball tighter, I reckon it wouldn’t have happened. But that sort of made me feel that I wanted a special chance to-day.”

“Well, you got it,” said the girl, with a smile. “Of course, one cannot help wanting to do things one’s self. I suppose we are all a little bit selfish.”

They chatted on then more at ease, until they reached the great field behind the Chapel where the celebration was to take place.

Every light in the school building was blazing, and a line of Chinese lanterns had been strung to fine effect up and down the driveway and along the terraces. In the center of the playing-field

back of the school an enormous bonfire had been constructed, of drygoods boxes, barrels, fence rails, and various other combustibles, including an untenanted chicken-house that an amateur farmer of the Second Form had contributed in a genuine spirit of sacrifice. Around the bonfire were gathered three hundred boys of the school, a score or so of the masters and many of the Old Boys and friends who had stayed over. On the outskirts of the crowd there was a complement of sundry enthusiastic country urchins, who for the night had buried the proverbial hatchet usually in play between them and the school, and were rejoicing lustily in the honor that had fallen upon the entire community. [162]

As Mrs. Wilson's party arrived, Billy Wendell applied a match to a mass of kerosene-soaked excelsior, and the flames started up the pile with an avidity, it seemed, that was impelled by sympathy with the mounting spirits of the boys. A dozen rockets were fired off simultaneously, three hundred Roman candles were exploded, and a score of red fires were lighted in various parts of the field. There was a sudden blaze of splendid light.

Soon the magnificent bonfire dominated the interest. The boys circled about it, hand in hand, shouting, cheering, singing. The school bells rang out joyously on the frosty night; the strains of the school songs echoed and re-echoed, until was caught up in full chorus by those hundreds of happy voices, the triumphal song,—

"Palms of victory, palms of glory."

Finally they hoisted Billy Wendell, the captain, up on the wooden rostrum that was brought out on such occasions; and after more wild and intense cheering when the cheer leaders had sunk back almost exhausted by their efforts, they gave him a chance to speak. "Fellows," said Billy, with not more than the usual oratorical grace but with an effect that many a trained orator might have envied, "Fellows, I guess we're all glad we won. I can't make a speech; and anyway there's some one else here to whom our victory to-day really is due. And I move we have Tony Deering up here, and tell him what we think of him." [163]

Frantic howls as Billy leaped down, and a dozen boys hustled Tony with rough-and-ready good will up to the rostrum, paying absolutely no attention to his protests. Tony's presence of mind quite deserted him as he faced the encircling crowd of eager, flame-brightened faces,—also the feeling that there was anything heroic in being a hero. As they cheered and cheered him to the echo, he had a moment in which to gather his wits. "Fellows," he said at last, when the crowd had become quiet, "I'm mighty grateful for the way in which you've treated me. But I don't deserve it. The ball popped into my arms in the scrimmage, and I just ran. Any other fellow would have done the same. What really won," he added, "was that the team had made a good defense against a whirlwind attack at critical moments. And that's the reason that when we got a chance to score, it meant a victory. Ned Clavering scored the winning point by kicking the goal."

With that he jumped down, struggled through the crowd, and slipped unobserved to the outskirts of the circle. Other boys were being elevated to the rostrum, so that attention was diverted from him. For himself, his heart was full, and for the moment he wanted to be alone. [164]

He could not hear the speeches from where he stood, but the scene was before him like the stage at a play. Suddenly he noticed, standing quite near him, apart from the jubilant crowd, the lonely, pathetic little figure of the despised Finch. The boy was gazing at Tony intently, with an expression of pathetic admiration, the self-forgetting admiration sometimes experienced when we behold a noble or a fine action in which we have had no part, of which we are incapable. There was longing in the boy's pale watery little eyes, and his mouth was twisted out of shape, as though it were not fashioned to express the unwonted emotions that stirred his soul. As Tony glanced at him, with a flash of intuition, it seemed to him that he thoroughly understood the half-starved soul of Jacob Finch, his pathetic and terrible loneliness, his unreasoned terrors of life, his ardent unsatisfied longings for the boyish friendliness and companionship about him in which he had no part.... Involuntarily Tony moved toward him, and obeying an impulse quite devoid of that repulsion that Finch usually stirred in him, he threw his arm carelessly over the boy's shoulder. "It's a great sight, kid; ain't it?"

he said.

Finch was trembling as if he had a chill. His eyes glanced for a moment into Tony's intensely, then shifted, and he answered in a queer hoarse tone, "I 'spose so. I dunno." And then he added, fiercely, "But I'm glad—I'm *glad you* made that run." The next [165] instant, as if his own speech had frightened him, he shook Tony's arm from his shoulder, and slipped away into the shadows. Tony saw him no more that night.

"Poor kid!" he thought, and his eyes filled with tears. He had seen unhappiness before, in his own home, and the memory of it was bitter. Here at school he had forgotten it all; the world had seemed a bright and a happy place, and he was happy in it. Poor Finch brought back to him intensely the realization that life was not altogether as free from care, as full of affection and kindness and joy, as this gay scene and jubilant celebration would indicate. There was bitterness in the thought, and yet, in a way, he was not sorry it had come. It seemed to him now that for the last few days he had been absolutely absorbed in himself, in fact that he had been living self-absorbed for a long time; that despite his generous words from the rostrum, what he had really been glad of in the victory was, that it had been so largely due to him.

Suddenly he gave the tree against which he was standing a vigorous kick. What a fool he was! to be silly with delight at winning a football game when just across the hall from him there lived such livid boyish misery!

At length he resought his companions, and when at last the celebration was over, and the great blazing pile of the bonfire had collapsed, he walked back again with Kit's party to the Inn. Both Betty and he were quieter now than before. She was shy again, and [166] this time he could think of nothing to say. Their commonplaces about the celebration fell flat.

"You are going to-morrow?" he asked abruptly, as they turned into the grounds of the Inn.

"Yes," she answered, "quite early. Bab and I are at school too, you know?"

"Yes, I know. I wish I could see you sometimes...."

"Well, can't you?... You'll be coming home with Kit some holiday."

"Perhaps I will. I hope so." He was silent for a moment, then with a strange shyness, he said, "Will you—will you give me those violets?"

Betty was silent. She hesitated for a moment, then unpinned the violets from her dress, and gave them to him. Their hands met in the dark, and fluttered in a little clasp for the moment. Then Tony slipped the violets into his pocket. They were at the Inn steps, and to the surprise of all, he declined to come in, but bade them good-bye there.

Instead of going back to the school, he struck across the meadows to the beach. It had cleared at nightfall, and the stars were shining in a deep blue sky, and a lovely young crescent moon, cloud-clung, hung in the west. Tony walked up the beach alone, thinking, feeling intensely. The silent somber beauty of the night, the great stars, the lazy splash of the little foam-flecked waves upon the sands, the cool frosty dark, appealed to him deeply. He could scarcely have told of what he was thinking: of various things—the day's events, the celebration, Betty and the violets she had given him, Finch and his hungry eyes, life. The world seemed beautiful to [167] him, but strange and sad.... Years afterward he was to recall that night, and remember that it had marked a definite moment in the process of his coming to himself.

At the end of the beach he met Mr. Morris, who was also walking alone. "Hello," exclaimed the master, "what are you doing here? The conqueror is tired of plaudits, eh?"

"What brings *you*, magister?... I wanted to be alone I guess."

"And I," said Morris, with a smile. "Sometimes a day of excitement reacts on me like this. I need to round it off with a walk by myself. Let's go back together though, if you have had enough of yourself as I have."

"Quite enough," said Tony, as he turned with the older man back toward the school.

For a while they said nothing, but eventually the master, by tactful questions, led the boy to talk of himself. There followed one

of those long quiet conversations that come so rarely, but mean so much to boy and master when they come. When they reached the school all of the lights were out save for a glow at the spot where the bonfire had been. They shook hands and parted at the door of Morris's study.

The schoolmaster, when he was alone, instead of lighting his lamp, stood for a long while before the glowing embers of the fire on his hearth, absorbed in his thoughts. He had had a bad day, a stupid day after the excitement of the game, for there had come upon him one of those unaccountable and unreasonable moods of depression wherein it seemed to him that he was wasting his life in the [168] obscurity of a petty profession, wasting the talents, abilities, ambitions, that in college days had promised a brilliant career. He knew it was but a mood, but he had not been able to shake it off. Other fellows, classmates of his at school and college, had been back, with their good-natured, ill-chosen greetings that drove the iron deeper into his soul: "Old Morris—holding the fort—still on the old camp-ground, eh?" and the like.

As he stood before his dying fire that night, he recalled the mood of the afternoon and marveled to realize that it was gone. He asked himself the reason for its going, but he knew the answer. He knew in his heart that the best he was, the best he could be, counted here at Deal as much, perhaps, more, than it could count elsewhere; and that it counted despite the obscurity, despite the lack of recognition where he would so keenly have valued it, from those who had expected good things from him in days gone by. And he knew that the real compensation was in the response he got from, the stimulus he gave to, boys like Tony Deering. Once in a while it was given him to see the meaning of his life, as in a vision. He knew to-night, as perhaps he had never definitely put it to himself before, that he would stay on at Deal for good and all, give his best, not only for a time as for years he had somehow supposed it would only be, but his best for as long as he lived....

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[169]

CHAPTER XIV

THE SPECTACLE

Games and girls fortunately are but interludes in schoolboy life. Were it otherwise, it is to be feared that the specific objects for which boys are sent away from home during such valuable years would receive but little of their attention. There were to be no more games, except indoor baseball and fives, until the hockey season which rarely set in before the Christmas holidays.

The little group of boys, whose fortunes we have been following, were not particularly interested in indoor baseball, except Jimmie, whose athletic achievements had been altogether on the diamond in the spring. And it was well they were not, for studies had been suffering during the football season, and at the exams, which came the week following the Boxford game, both Tony and Kit found that they were standing lower in the school than they had ever stood before. Judicious advice from the Head and a sharp letter from old General Deering, who, though he was proud of Tony's athletic honors, regarded them as no substitute for scholastic achievements, kept him pretty closely at his books.

As for girls, he and Betty exchanged a few rather commonplace letters, but as the keen-eyed mistress at Betty's school soon [170] detected the nature of her correspondence, their letters were few and far between. At the Christmas holidays Tony went home with Kit to the Wilson country place on Long Island, and spent there a glorious three weeks. But, it might as well be said at once, that though Tony and Betty became the best of friends, the sentiment that had accented their walks together the night of the game at Deal, died a natural death. School and its varied interests absorbed Deering and left him little time or opportunity for love affairs.

During the winter he became interested in the Dealonian, a semi-secret society, that held frequent debates and discussions before the school, and regarded itself as being an institution of great importance. For exercise and sport he went in for hockey, where his fleetness counted as much toward success as it did in football. The Deal boys had capital hockey grounds, one on Deal Water which lay at the foot of the hill between the school and Monday Port; and the other on Beaver Pond, under the lee of Lovel's Woods which though smaller usually froze earlier.

It was customary for the Dealonian to elect a Fifth Former as its president at the beginning of the winter term. This office was supposed, and usually did, register the boys' somewhat premature choice for a head prefect for the school for the following year. Deering was elected president of the Dealonian by a unanimous vote, after very little campaigning on the part of his friends. He was generally popular, and his exploit in the Boxford game had brought him more prominently before the school than ever before. In the [171] opinion of his particular friends he was also developing qualities of leadership, which made him the logical candidate of their group for general honors. Tony valued the position of president highly. And in the fine fervor of his good resolutions he determined that through it he would do a lot for the school. The Dealonian held frequent meetings at which the entire school were invited, and at which topics of general interest were discussed by the boys themselves. It was indeed through these meetings that the public opinion of the school was largely formed and guided by the older boys.

The walk with Mr. Morris on the beach the night of the Boxford game had solidified in Tony's mind a good many resolutions. And, though it is not usually the case that the generous ideals and ambitions of boys find particular expression, since the flash of intuition into Finch's starved life had been in part the occasion of his forming good resolutions at all, it was not unnatural that he should have settled upon Finch as a concrete opportunity for putting them into effect. The talk with Mr. Morris, though Finch's name had not actually been mentioned, had also brought the matter before Tony's mind, for Morris had been the first to suggest to him the possibility of his being of use in that direction. To be sure, the sympathy with Finch had been intuitive and had not stayed with him as vividly as it had impressed him on the night of the bonfire, but then it had flashed so intensely that it was not soon altogether to expire. It glowed in the depths of his consciousness like sparks

amongst the embers of a dying fire, capable of blazing forth again if fresh fuel should be added. Tony proposed to add the fuel. [172]

He made a point, for instance, of dropping in at Finch's room in Standerland two or three times a week and chatting with the boy the odd quarters of an hour that he otherwise would have spent in genial loafing with his cronies. And though he certainly would not have kept on going there for the sake of anything that Finch could contribute to the joy of life for him, when the awkwardness of deliberately performing a kindness had somewhat worn off, he found a certain amount of compensating satisfaction in noting the light of pleasure that came into Jake's pale blue eyes, and in the relaxation of the corners of his mouth from bitter rigidity into friendly appreciation and welcome. Gradually too Finch's shyness wore off a little when he was alone with Tony; and though it can hardly be said that even in his most un-selfconscious moments he ever seemed a full-blooded care-free boy, he thawed into a semblance of humanity. He reminded Tony often of a dog that has been treated cruelly in its puppyhood, which never recovers fearlessness but shrinks even under a friendly hand.

And like a dog Jacob Finch began to idolize Anthony Deering. This was the first time in all his barren life that a fellow boy had treated him with kindness, who had not showed in his manner the repulsion the unhappy little chap had the misfortune to stir in his kind. Tony's image loomed large in his thoughts. The intense worship he paid him secretly did much to atone for the slights of others, to blot out other boys from his consciousness. He cringed [173] and shrank still under jibes and jokes, trembled with unreasoned fear before masters, quivered with fright when he found himself alone in a crowd of boys; but he did his work faithfully and with the success that comes from persistence even when a keen intelligence is lacking. More and more, however, his inner life was absorbed in his devotion to Deering.

From his seat in the chapel he could just see the wavy, copper-colored top of Tony's head. By straining a little he could frequently see his face,—bright, sensitive, mobile, smiling often that smile of a singular and rare sweetness that made Tony beautiful to others beside Finch. To Jake he was as perfect, as spotless, as wonderful, as a god. The fervor of his adoration was akin to the enthusiasm of a *devotée* for his idol. All this of course he hid, not altogether but mostly, from Deering; never voiced, though he could not help looking his devotion. He would spend hours during a day standing about in various places on the mere chance that he would get a glimpse of Tony; haunted the woods above Beaver Pond in the hockey season, where he would lie, flat and shivering, upon a projecting rock, and follow with weak, straining eyes the skaters on the ice below, his eager gaze seeking always for one bright slim form. And when he had found it, he was as happy as he often had been.

Even Tony's friends occupied but a small place in Finch's consciousness. He was grateful to Kit for his protection against Ducky Thornton and his gang of tormentors, but the only real admiration he had for Kit was because he possessed qualities— [174] Finch could not have named them—that had induced Tony to choose him for a friend.

Occasionally Tony and Jimmie would have their *protégé* in Number Five study, but on these occasions Finch seemed to suffer so much from shyness that they did not long attempt to repeat them.

Mr. Morris watched the process with inward approval and outward indifference. His own advances toward Finch had been received in a manner that gave him little encouragement. He was sorry for the boy, and he was proud of Tony's efforts to help him on and bring him out, but even his sanguine optimism and unselfish good will failed to convince itself that the Head had been wise in bringing Finch to Deal. As for Doctor Forester, with the best intentions in the world, he had few opportunities of seeing the boy intimately, and he trusted absolutely to Morris as being the one who could do the most and the best for him.

Number Five study Standerland had become during the winter term the sanctum of a privately published and privately circulated magazine, issued weekly as a rule, in pamphlet form under the title of *The Spectacle*. The inspiring genius, editor-in-chief, business manager, printing department and reportorial staff was Jimmie Lawrence. Jimmie had always had a literary turn, and usually had

received A's for his weekly themes in English from Jack Stenton, who combined with athletic prowess a genuine appreciation for good literature. In addition to required work for the masters he had written yards of short stories, poems, plays, essays and the like for [175] the waste-paper basket and his secret scrap-book. Jimmie was likewise a great reader and he had taken more kindly than the majority of his classmates to the Sir Roger de Coverly papers from *The Spectator* that Stenton had inflicted on the Fifth Form that year. He was able to appreciate the genial sympathy and quiet humor of the Eighteenth Century essayists, and more than once he had dipped his pen in ink to attempt a crude imitation of them. Practice improved his style. He had himself a fund of subtle humor that was becoming more and more evident as he matured, for it was a humor that had found little opportunity for expression in the crude horseplay and practical joking of the Lower School.

One afternoon as he was planning an essay in the Addisonian vein and style, it suddenly occurred to him that there was a fund of material for such treatment in the actual world about him. He chose little Beverly, a fledgeling master, cock-sure and sophomoric, as the subject for his first serious essay in the comic, and achieved, in his own opinion, such a success that he read his paper that evening to Tony.

"By Jove, Jim, that's a joy!" was his room-mate's gratifying criticism. "That's a blame sight better than the sawdust that Jack is trying to stuff down our throats in English."

"Well, I have me doubts as to that," Jimmie responded, "but I appreciate the compliment even if it makes the critic out to be an ignoramus."

"Words of one syllable, my dear," protested Tony, "when you try to get ideas into my cranium. Critic or not, that's darn good writing. [176] Give us another."

Jimmie smiled, closed his mathematics books with the air of one who makes a sacrifice in a noble cause, and for half an hour bent again to laborious composition. The result was a clever little skit on Ducky Thornton entitled "The Human Sofa Cushion." The wit was broader, and it struck Tony as quite irresistibly funny.

"By Jove, kiddo, we'll start a *Spectator* of our own, eh? Hit off the masters and some of our loving schoolmates, and let 'em circulate. It'll be heaps of fun."

Lawrence laughed at the vision of the possibilities that came to him. "I think it will," he said. "We'll write 'em out in your clear hand, and pass 'em on to the crowd."

And so *The Spectacle* came into existence. Jimmie did most of the composition, and Tony invariably copied it out, for Jimmie's handwriting left much to be desired, as is the case we have been told with other authors. Now and then there was an original contribution from Tony, and occasionally one from Charlie Gordon, Teddy Lansing or Tack Turner, all more crude and broad, but few absolutely devoid of real humor. In the course of a few months they had composed quite a gallery of pen-portraits, wherein were caricatured, seldom unkindly, the faults and foibles of most of the faculty and many of the boys. *The Spectacle* had a popular if restricted circulation.

It fell to Tony at length to do the paper on Mr. Roylston. None of the articles were labeled by correct names, but there was scarcely ever any doubt in the mind of the reader who had served as the [177] model of the portrait. The paper on Mr. Roylston, paraphrasing his nickname, was entitled "Soft-toed Samuel." Tony had caricatured broadly, but before being written out in his neat fine hand, the style had been softened, smoothed and improved, occasional lapses in orthography had been corrected, and the defects of punctuation supplied,—in fact the crude strokes of the amateur had been retouched by the hand of an artist. The artist was Jimmie.

It was a great success with the *habitués* of Number Five study. Tony was so pleased with it himself, that he took it in late of an evening to Finch's room with the idea of cheering up his charge who had seemed even unwontedly seedy that day.

"Here, Jake," he exclaimed, as he burst in at the door, "here's the latest *Spectacle*. Have a try at it."

Finch was lying on his couch, laid low by an intense headache. The pain was so severe that he could scarcely respond to his hero's greeting. "Thanks," he said weakly. He tried to get up, but Tony, quick as a flash, pushed him gently back.

“There, keep quiet! I didn’t know you had another headache. I’m awfully sorry, old chap. Rotten things, those headaches of yours.”

Finch smiled, and writhed with pain. “It’ll be all right, I guess.”

Tony sat down on the edge of the bed. “Why don’t you go up to the Infirmary?... Can I get you anything?”

“No ... thank you,” Jake answered. “I’ll sleep it off; it’s the only [178]
way. Don’t bother. If you don’t mind, I’ll make out better alone.”

“Mind? No. Only I’m blamed sorry.”

“Leave the *Spectacle*, will you?”

“All right, I’ll stick it here on your desk. Read it in the morning. Don’t forget to call me if you want anything. Does Bill know you’re sick?”

“Yes—he’s been in.”

“Well, good-night, Jake. Tell me what you think of it to-morrow.”

When Tony had gone out, Finch tried to get up and read the paper, but the pain pulled him back on his bed again, and he lay there in misery till sleep came at last and released him.

The next morning, with the hurry of breakfast and chapel, he had no opportunity of reading the squib until First Study, which, as Mr. Roylston held it, usually was *study* and not the loafing, letter-writing, novel-reading period it occasionally was under laxer masters. Finch, who had hard work to keep the place he was determined to maintain in the school, rarely wasted his study periods, so that he was ignorant of the various devices whereby the lazy gave the pretense of studying when they were doing other things. At the risk of an imperfect Greek lesson—for he could restrain his curiosity no longer, he took out Tony’s manuscript soon after First Study began, and was eagerly and hastily perusing it. Deering’s obvious exaggerations, and even more, though he could not distinguish them, Jimmie’s finer touches, amused him greatly. For the first time he was really smiling broadly in the schoolroom. The master, so long the traditional *bête noir* and subject of [179]
caricature, took form in his imagination, and Mr. Roylston, whom Finch feared with an abject fear, for once seemed to him to be amusing.

Suddenly, to his intense horror, Gumshoe Ebenezer stood before him, not in the spirit but in the flesh, and his long slim bony fingers closed about Tony’s manuscript as he removed it quickly from Finch’s nerveless grasp.

“I will relieve you of that extraneous matter,” he observed sharply. “It is expected that boys shall spend this period in study, not in reading amusing letters.”

“It—it isn’t a l—letter,” gasped Finch.

“It does not in the least matter whether it is a letter or not,” replied Mr. Roylston. “It is very evident that it has no bearing whatever upon Xenophon’s *Anabasis* or the Greek Grammar.”

He glanced at the title as he spoke. “Soft-toed Samuel” conveyed little to him, enough however to inform him that he had been correct in his surmise that it was tabooed matter.

“But—but, it—it isn’t mine,” protested Finch.

“No?” commented Mr. Roylston, with an accent of indifference. “I shall return it to its owner in good time, if you choose to inform me who he is.” He glanced casually over the writing.

“Don’t—don’t you dare to read that!” cried Finch, his face livid, as for the moment anger got the better of fear. “I’ll—I’ll—” he half rose from his seat, his fists clenched in helpless rage.

Mr. Roylston turned upon him with a glare. “You will do what?” [180]
he asked in tones that almost robbed Finch of his senses. “Get to work,” he added, after looking at him steadily for a moment; and then turned away, leaving his victim morally and spiritually prostrate.

Poor Finch sank back in his seat, bent his head, and fastened his unseeing eyes on the pages of the *Anabasis*. The incident, though observed and heard by the whole schoolroom, seemed not to have created a ripple of excitement. Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the room. As the master turned from Finch, he observed a hundred heads bent diligently over their books, and a slight grim smile of satisfaction crossed his face. He felt that he had reason to be proud of his discipline. He seated himself at the desk, and his eyes fell idly upon the first page of the manuscript. “Soft-toed Samuel,” he read, and a curl of contempt trembled along his thin lips. And then:

"There is no place of general resort in the school which is immune from the presence of Soft-toed Sam; sometimes he is seen thrusting his head even into the locker-rooms below stairs and listening with eager and suspicious ear to the slang and careless conversation that is apt to take place there. And woe to the boy whose tongue is not restrained on such occasions! there will be a day of reckoning. Sometimes he munches a bit of cake at the Pie-house, making pretense of joviality; but whilst he seems attentive to nothing but his goody and the Pie-lady, he overhears the remarks of every boy in the place, and makes a note of them in his little book. Sometimes he comes into the general assembly of all the boys on a Sunday evening, as one who comes to hear and to improve, but who leaves to carp. His face is too well-known, too often seen by every boy in the school. The stealthy tread of Soft-toed Samuel is ever on the trail of the lazy, the indifferent and the wicked, and where he does not find matter for condemnation provided him by nature, he creates it out of nothing. [181]
The Head has...."

Mr. Roylston turned the pages, and glanced at the conclusion.

"Thus he lives in the school as a critic of and a bane to mankind rather than as one of the species."

It was enough. The handwriting, of course, he recognized. He folded the paper neatly and placed it in his pocket.

Poor Finch meanwhile was undergoing excruciating agonies. Not a line of the Greek penetrated his consciousness, even the familiar *ἐντεῦθεν ἐξελαῦναι* was to him as the inscription on a Babylonian tablet. His own careless folly and stupidity had brought about a catastrophe, a frightful situation, in which he could see his hero was apt to suffer more grievously than himself. But in reality that was not possible. Finch was suffering vicariously with an intensity that Tony could never realize, that in such connection he could never share.

And at the end of the period he fearfully approached the master's desk. As though divining the petition trembling on his lips, Mr. Roylston bade him sternly go out with his form, adding sharply, "I shall return the paper myself when I have had the opportunity of enjoying its promising humor."

At recess Finch found Deering eating his bit of luncheon in the Fifth Form common room. He drew him aside.

"Well, Jake, headache gone?" began Tony. "What did you think of [182]
the Soft-toed Sammy? Why, what's the matter?"

Finch was white as a sheet. "Oh, Deering," he gasped, "an awful thing has happened. I—I was reading it—like a fool—in First Study—and—and—Mr. Roylston swiped it."

Tony paused in the midst of taking a bite from his bun, and looked at Jake in consternation.

"Gumshoe swiped it?"

"Yes, Deering.... I'm sorry.... You don't know ... I wish I was dead." He leaned against the lintel of the doorway and hid his face in his hands.

Tony pulled himself together with an effort. "I guess you've done me," he began. Then, as he saw Finch wince under his words, he went over quickly to his side, and put his hand on his shoulder. "There, cheer up; I was a beast to say that. It's all my own fault. It was a darn fool stunt to write such things."

After a time he calmed the unhappy lad, and got from him the details of the incident. At last he went off to report the matter to Jimmie.

Lawrence naturally was inclined to say harsh things of Finch, but he too realized that they themselves were to blame for the predicament.

"Hate to deprive you of the honor, old chap," he said, "but honesty forbids me deny the authorship and responsibility for *The Spectacle*. The horse is on me."

"The horse!" exclaimed Tony. "It will be a ton of bricks. But it's rot, Jimmie, to say you're responsible. I'll be hanged if I think sticking an adjective here and there, sprinkling commas about, and [183]
tinkering with a few mixed tenses, makes you the author. 'Tis true it's but a beastly paraphrase on Addison,—but 'twas my best and, so to speak, my own."

They waited somewhat anxiously that day for the dreaded summons to Mr. Roylston's outraged presence, but it did not come. That night on his way to Standerland from a meeting of the

Dealonian, Tony found a sealed packet in his letter-box in the Old School. It was directed to him in Mr. Roylston's minute slanting chirography. He tore it open, and found that it contained the confiscated copy of *The Spectacle* and a note from the master therein caricatured.

> "I return to you under cover," it ran, without address, "the manuscript for which, since it is in your handwriting, I presume you are responsible. It was confiscated from Finch in First Study this morning. I have read it enough to suggest that the wisest course will be for you to destroy this piece of scurrility at once, also any copies of it that may exist. I have only to say that the offense is so deep and gratuitous an insult that it is not punishable by any of the ordinary methods at our command. Vain as the supposition sometimes seems, we proceed at Deal School on the assumption that we have to treat with gentlemen and the sons of gentlemen.
>
> "E. ROYLSTON."

As he read this note, Tony by turns went hot and cold. The last sentence stung him to the quick. He was intensely angry, but as the first impulse of rage passed away, he realized with a bitter sense of humiliation that the master had a perfect right to his resentment; that for once he, Tony Deering, was absolutely, hopelessly in the wrong. Alas! while he had been fondly supposing that he was [184] beginning to live more unselfishly, beginning to do more for others than he had ever done before, he had wantonly wounded and grossly insulted, as a result of indulging in his propensity to make fun, a fellow member of the school. With the shame and repentance warm in his heart, he hurried over to Howard House where Mr. Roylston roomed, and knocked at his door.

The master looked up from his desk, as Tony entered, and his face hardened into a severe expression as he waited for his visitor to speak.

"Sir," exclaimed Tony, impulsively, "I've come to beg your pardon.... I know I have done an inexcusable thing, but I am sorry ——."

Mr. Roylston laid his pen down and looked fixedly at the boy, but the muscles of his face did not relax. "Don't you think, Deering," he interrupted coolly, "that your apology comes with a bad grace after the offense is accidentally discovered? Apparently the despicable character of your method of poking fun seems only to occur to you when you are in danger of incurring the just penalty of such conduct."

Tony bit his lips, but he felt he deserved what the master chose to say. He would not spoil his apology by showing resentment. "I dare say it seems to you that way, sir. But I can only say that at first I simply saw the amusing side of it, and that it was not until I thought how it must have seemed to you that I realized it was an unkind caricature."

Mr. Roylston perceptibly sniffed at the word *caricature*. "Gratuitous insult, it were better termed," he ejaculated.

"Well, sir, I can't undo it ... I only wish I could. I apologize to you, [185] sir, ... unreservedly."

Mr. Roylston appeared to choose his words with even more than his usual care. "I accept the apology, of course, technically. But naturally it does not atone for the offense."

"No," said Tony, "I know it does not."

For a moment there was silence. "You are curious to know what I propose to do?" asked Mr. Roylston, with a note of sarcasm.

"No—no, sir," replied Tony ingenuously. "I don't think that matters, sir. I only hope you believe what I say, that I am truly sorry for what has occurred."

He had worded his sentence unfortunately, for the master took it as a quibble. "Yes," he replied tartly, "I can well believe that you are sorry for what has *occurred*."

"I don't mean——" began Tony.

"That will do," said Mr. Roylston dryly. "I have gathered enough of your meaning for the once. No—I do not mean to punish you." A bitter smile flickered over his face. "As I sought to explain in my note, which I had every intention should put a period to the incident, our punishments in this school are not adapted to the case. One has but two alternatives in such affairs,—to expel or to ignore persons capable of such conduct. I have concluded to ignore. I bid you good evening."

Tony opened his mouth to speak again, but closed it quickly, and with a slight inclination of his head, turned and left the room.

[186] “He means to rub it in by slow degrees, by his peculiar and unspeakable methods of torture,” was Jimmie’s comment when Tony had told him of the interview later. “You were an ass not to let me share the responsibility. The Gumshoe accept an apology! why, he hasn’t the charity of a mosquito. As Kit would say,” he added thoughtfully, “he is ‘a gloomy ass.’ Well, I reckon, Tonio, old sport, we’ll have to chuck *The Spectacle*.”

“Hang it, of course, we will. It was a poor fool sheet, Jim; rather a sad business for two good little schoolboys like us to be taken up with.”

“And like most wicked things, amusing,” remarked Reggie from the depths of an armchair where he had been an interested hearer of the conversation. “Like most forbidden things, diverting.”

“What a crude philosopher you sometimes are, Reggie,” said Lawrence. “One looks to you for illuminating comment—not for the obvious platitude.”

“True, my poet,” drawled Carroll, “but there are moments when one inadvertently sinks below one’s normal level. But adieu to some diverting moments!”

“Thanks! Adieu, too, to my Addisonian English! I wish we could as easily bid adieu to the consequences.”

“I fancy it will be a long time before you say farewell to those, my young friends.”

“Hm, he evidently doesn’t mean to take it to the Head,” said Tony.

[187] “No, not yet,” said Reggie, with the air of a prophet, “the time is not ripe; but the Gumshoe, like Fate, will take a fall out of you in the hour of your pride. Beware.”

“Bosh!” said Tony, “I’m going to forget it.” And he fell to work.

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[188]

CHAPTER XV

TONY PLAYS THE PART OF A GUARDIAN ANGEL

Mr. Roylston put his policy with regard to Tony into rigorous effect. From that day, except when it was obviously necessary to speak with them about their classroom work, he ignored Deering and his friends. He treated them with an icy courtesy that was far more effective in subduing their high spirits than his sarcasm had ever been. Lawrence and Wilson, particularly the latter, were restive under the process, and often threatened, though they never attempted, open rebellion. Tony, on the other hand, was more sensitive to this peculiar method of revenge, and it was probably due to his recognition of this sensitiveness that Mr. Roylston had adopted it. Deering knew that he had been guilty of ungentlemanly conduct and he was not happy so long as his whole-hearted apology was not accepted in the spirit in which it was given. But there seemed no way in which he could improve the situation. He tried to prove his sincerity by doing specially good work in Mr. Roylston's class, but no word of commendation ever fell from the master's lips.

In truth Mr. Roylston had been wounded more deeply than he had ever been before in a long career that had been marked, too, by much open hostility. But unfortunately he was not the type that [189] could perceive that his difficulties largely lay in his own fundamental lack of sympathy with boy nature; and, resenting what he felt was the boys' unjust attitude toward him, he had not it in his soul then to forgive such an offense as Tony had been guilty of. As he looked back over their four or five years at Deal, the incident of *The Spectacle* seemed to him but the culmination of a long series of systematic attempts on the part of that particular "crowd" to belittle and annoy him. That the Head had practically required him to give up the gating penalty, that he had perhaps a lurking feeling that that penalty had been unjustly imposed, added to the bitterness he felt for our young friends.

And mixed up in all this affair of Deering and his "crowd," there was in Mr. Roylston's mind a sense, not clear but keen, that Finch was somehow concerned. He genuinely believed that Doctor Forester had made a mistake in taking Finch at Deal, and the passage of words with Morris on the occasion of the boy's arrival, had irritated him intensely. He knew, and was sometimes ashamed of the fact, that he had let that irritation affect his treatment, in little ways, of the boy himself. He had always disliked Morris, and quite sincerely thought Morris's unaffected good nature and genial optimism with regard to boys was a pose. The incident of Finch's hazing, wherein he had punished the rescuers instead of the hazers, increased his uncomfortable feeling about the whole situation. But the discomfort did not increase his humility. He knew that in much he was wrong, but he was so accustomed to the idea of supposing [190] himself to be right, that he argued away the accusations of his conscience.

On Finch he therefore continued to vent a good deal of his spleen. And on Finch the old sledge-hammer method of sarcasm was an effective weapon. The boy bore the master's reproofs with a little less outward wincing than of old, but inwardly they racked his very soul. Mr. Roylston's attitude affected him very differently from the way it affected Deering. He could not work in his class. A shaft of sarcasm, an expression of patient suffering on the master's face as the boy blundered through his recitation, altogether confused him. Day after day he would fail in a lesson which he had spent hours in preparing. From a sense of duty Mr. Roylston now and then would see the delinquent outside of the classroom, and make an attempt to clear up his difficulties. But on these occasions Finch seemingly was more completely bereft of his senses than during a recitation. Mr. Roylston mistook this confusion for willful refusal to understand, and in time treated him accordingly.

"What the deuce is the matter with you, Jake?" Tony asked once, after a trying period in Latin, wherein Finch had floundered about in absurd fashion. "You know a heap more Latin than I do, but you go in before Gumshoe and act as if he were asking you questions in Sanscrit."

"I know—I know," Finch answered, miserably. "But I can't help it. I just can't get my wits before him. Every idea flies out of my

head when he asks me a question. I am doing all right in other subjects."

"Well, why don't you go to Gumshoe and tell him?" [191]

"Oh, I've tried," said Finch. "That's worse."

"It's a beastly shame," said Tony. "But there's nothing I can do; I'm in with Gumshoe worse than ever."

"And that's all my fault!"

"Not a bit," said Tony. "I had no business to write that thing in the first place; neither had Jimmie for that matter,—about Gumshoe or anybody else. I wish I could convince him that I am really sorry."

"Well, I guess you can't do that," said Finch. "But if I had not been so stupid it wouldn't have happened. To tell you the truth, Deering, I often wish I had never come here."

"That's idiotic!" said Tony; and then asked tactlessly, "What would you have done?"

"I dunno," Finch answered. "I guess it would have been better if I had never been born."

Poor Jake resented Mr. Roylston's attitude toward his hero much more than he did the master's treatment of himself. Once or twice, glancing up from his desk in the schoolroom, Mr. Roylston caught a glance of such concentrated hatred in Finch's eyes, as actually made him tremble. He attributed it, of course, to the boy's perverse and willful laziness, and once or twice he returned Finch's stare in a way, that though the boy dropped his eyes beneath it, seemed to burn into his soul.

Jacob failed miserably in Virgil at the mid-year examinations in February, and did not do well enough in his other work to counterbalance the bad impression of his abject failure in Latin. The nervous, overwrought state in which he had been living during the [192] fall and winter told on his health. At the best he was frail, but now he suffered frequently from intense headaches that forced him much against his will, quite frequently to spend two or three days in the Infirmary.

Tony saw all this more clearly than anyone else except Morris. "What he needs," he said one evening to Jimmie and Kit, "is to get an interest in something, to be brought out of himself, to get into something that will bring him more in touch with the life of the school."

Kit, in his easy-going way, agreed; and went on strumming his guitar, on which he had been trying to pick out a new popular air. Jimmie gave the matter a little thought and asked, "What can he do?"

"Well," said Tony, after a moment or so, "I've been thinking that it would be a good thing to put him up for the Dealonian."

"The Dealonian!" exclaimed Kit, tossing the guitar aside. "Why, man, you're plumb nutty. He's got as much chance of getting into the Dealonian as I have of getting into Congress. A fine figure that little scarecrow would cut in a public meeting, wouldn't he?"

"Oh, I think he could do it," protested Tony, a little sharply, for he was annoyed by Kit's tone. "It would give him a lot of confidence if we took him in. It would make him feel that the best fellows in school were willing to give him a chance."

"I dare say it would make him feel that," Lawrence remarked judiciously. "But I can't say that I see that he has any particular claim to consideration. The Dealonian isn't exactly an asylum for the maimed, the halt and the blind."

"No, of course, it isn't, but it's supposed to be run for the benefit [193] of the school, isn't it? And 'the good of the school' simply means the good of the fellows in school. Finch has as much right to the Dealonian, if there's a chance of it being a help to him, as you or I have."

"But he hasn't any chance, d'ye see?" said Kit.

"No I don't see," answered Tony. "I dare say the three of us have a certain amount of influence, and if we chose to exert it I've an idea that we could get him in."

"Well, you can hang that harp on a weeping willow-tree," was Kit's conclusive comment, "I don't intend to try. I am perfectly willing to lick Ducky Thornton every day in the week for hazing him, if need be; I'm willing to have Tony bring him in here three or four times a week and bore us to death, if he wants to; but I'm hanged if I'll try to get him into the Dealonian. That's supposed to be made up

of the representative fellows of the school. You're carrying your guardian angelship business too far, kiddo. Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

Tony, for once, did not reply in like fashion to Kit's vigorous and breezy way of expressing himself. He reflected a moment or so, and then spoke with an unusually quiet and determined air, as though he were simply making an announcement and not asking advice. "I have thought it over pretty carefully, Kit; and I've made up my mind to try it. I only hope you fellows will back me up."

Jimmie was silent. Kit, convinced at last that Tony was indeed in earnest, protested vigorously. "You're dead wrong, Tony. You [194] oughtn't to try it. The fellows won't stand for it. And you've no right to ask me to back you up in a thing which I'm perfectly certain is a darn fool proposition."

"Well," said Tony, "you needn't back me up, if you don't want to. But that's all rot for you to say it's a darn fool notion. I've a perfect right to put him up, if I think it the thing to do, and I am going to do it."

"Well, go ahead, and waste your time. I s'pose the little pup'll lick your boots cleaner than ever in gratitude, whether you're successful or not."

Tony flared up at this. "I'll thank you, Wilson, not to call my friends pups. I reckon I can find some decent chaps to vote for him, even if I can't count on my own pals." And with that, very hot in the head, he flung himself out of the room.

"Well, I'll be darned," said Kit. "To think of him flinging me over for that drowned rat! What's the matter with him? Has he gone clean crazy?"

"He's got the kid on his brain. But no sense in your flaring out so, Kit; that's no way to get on with Tony. Naturally he's sensitive."

"Who flared up?" demanded Kit, indignantly. "I'm as calm as a millpond. Tony went off the handle because we disagreed with him. I guess I've as good a right to my opinions as he has to his."

"Oh, for gosh's sake, shut up; there's no sense in quarreling over this matter. Finch won't get into the Dealonian, but whether he can or not, I'd just as soon vote for him."

"Well, I'll be hanged if I would," asserted Wilson. "And what's [195] more I'll get up in the meeting and say it's a darn fool proposition and ought to be turned down."

"What's the sense in doing that? It'll just mean that you and Tony will have a serious falling-out, and the crowd will get busted up. What's the use? It ain't worth while."

"The heck it isn't! I won't compromise a principle for a friend ever, I don't care who he is. Nor I won't have a friend ram his ideas down my throat. I've as much right to put a fellow up or blackball him in the Dealonian as Tony has. Seems to me he's getting——."

"Oh, shut up. You are working yourself all up over nothing. It isn't worth it. Don't quarrel with Tony."

"Seems to me Tony's picking the quarrel with me. Who flung himself out of the room just now? I didn't, I guess. I tell you what, Jim, if Tony wants to keep on good terms with me, he can; but he's not going to make the price of his friendship my voting to suit him about anything. I guess we made Tony Deering in this school—you and I."

"Rot!" exclaimed Jimmie. "Tony made himself. He'd have been the head of the school if we had never exchanged a word with him. We've been darn glad to have him in the crowd, that's the truth of it; he's been the center of it ever since he's been here. You were keen enough about making him president of the Dealonian, and I guess you want him for head prefect next year."

"'Course I was keen; 'course I do ... I'm all serene. If there's a [196] quarrel, it won't be my fault. But I'm going to blackball Finch for the good of the Society, 'cause I think it would be a mistake to let him in, and I hope you'll do the same."

"Well, I won't."

"Do as you please, that's *your* right. So long, kiddo, I guess I'll seek a more congenial clime for the time bein'." And with that Kit swung himself out of the room.

Jimmie, genuinely distressed by this first serious difference in their congenial little circle, went over to Mr. Morris's room, and took him into his confidence on the subject. Morris was not a little

disturbed by the situation. He admired Tony's purpose, but with Jimmie, thought it somewhat ill-judged and ill-timed, and deplored the possible cleavage it might make in the little knot of friends. But, characteristically, he did not see his way to interfering, even with advice.

Unfortunately Tony and Kit again encountered each other that night in Reggie Carroll's room. Tony was cool, and Reggie, ignorant of what had happened, made matters worse by asking them facetiously what had ruffled the sweet waters of their friendship.

"Ask Tony," answered Kit laconically, as he thumbed a school year book and tried to think of some way of getting out of the room.

Tony shrugged his shoulders.

"What's up?" repeated Reggie.

"Nothing particular," Deering answered, after a pause. "We just don't pull together in a certain matter."

"Well, what do you expect," exclaimed Kit impulsively, "do you [197]
expect me to measure my opinions by yours?"

"Rather not," answered Tony, with a faint sneer, "you'd find them in that case a darn sight too big for you."

"Softly, softly," protested Reggie. But Tony again was gone.

When he got back to his own room later in the evening, Jimmie tried to talk the subject over with him, but Tony, ruffled and irritated, was not inclined to do so.

"I've made up my mind, Jim, so that's all there is to it. I'm going to put Finch up next Saturday night, and in the meantime I'm going to work hard to try to get the fellows to vote for him. I hope you won't blackball him."

"No, I won't do that, Tony; but I wish you'd see Kit and talk it over with him in a friendly way."

"I'll talk it over with Kit, if he wants to talk it over with me; but he has got to drop his swagger and bulldozing manner, if he wants to."

"Look here, old man; Kit's just impulsive; that's all. Suppose I, after I had thought it over, made up my mind that it would be a bad thing for the Society and blackballed Finch, would you let that make any difference between us?"

Tony thought a moment. "No, old chap, of course it wouldn't. I'd be sorry, of course, because I would feel you were wrong. But it isn't being opposed that makes me sore, it's Kit's blustering blowing way of doing it."

Jimmie went that night and sat on Tony's bed for a long time [198]
after lights. They said nothing more about Kit or Finch, but talked intimately of a variety of other things in which they were interested, in the old close pleasant way. It was a long happy quiet talk and it did much to strengthen their friendship in the times of stress that were coming.

The conversations we have recorded took place well along in the winter term on a Monday night in March. The following Saturday evening was the date of the important meeting of the Dealonian Society at which new members were elected.

Tony spent a zealous week campaigning for Finch, and found it a disheartening business. Most of the boys—there were about forty members of the Society—protested, but after long persuasion, promised to cast favorable votes, though they took pains, almost without exception, to assure Tony that they were doing it simply because he asked them. Others refused definitely to commit themselves, and Tony had to be content with that. To Jimmie's distress, Kit kept away from Number Five study all that week, and refused to make any advances toward setting things right with Tony. "I'll talk it over, if he comes to me," he would say to Jimmie over and over. "But I am going to blackball Finch, and I guess I can persuade at least one other fellow to do the same, so he won't get into the Dealonian. Tony can do what he pleases. After it's all over, if he wants to make up, well and good; I'll have no hard feelings: if he don't,—well, well and good, also."

At last, after what seemed an interminable week to our three [199]
friends Saturday night came, and the forty members of the Dealonian Society met in solemn conclave in the Library. Tony took the chair, looking a trifle nervous and anxious, and called the meeting to order. Kit was present, sitting well back, and assumed an air of bland indifference to the proceedings. There were four new members to be elected from the Fifth Form.

Routine business was transacted for a quarter of an hour, and at last the president announced, “If there is no objection, we will proceed to the election of new members. As I wish to place a name in nomination, I will ask Mr. Wendell to take the chair.”

Billy Wendell, the head prefect, captain of the football team, and the last year’s president of the Dealonian, rose from his seat, and took the chair behind the big desk in a very solemn way, very much as a president *pro tem*. walks up to the platform of the Senate. He settled himself, coughed slightly, and recognized Tony. “Mr. Deering has the floor,” he observed in judicial tones.

“Mr. President and members of the Dealonian Society, I desire to place in nomination for membership in this society the name of Jacob Finch of the Fifth Form.” As this was expected, the boys showed little surprise. Jimmie glanced back at Kit, and saw his lips curl with faint contempt. Tony too glanced about him; then, after a moment’s hesitation, he threw back his shoulders, and addressed the Society. He cast aside now the solemn traditional oratorical form that the boys made an effort to assume, and his clear sweet voice rang with feeling. “Fellows,” he said, “I believe, as we all do, [200] that this Society has the right to consider itself the most important institution in the school, and I realize that I am nominating one for membership in it, who, according to all standards we have set for ourselves and which have been so well maintained through many school generations, seems not to have a shadow of right to election. We want here fellows whose opinion counts, whose influence will be strong and positive, who have done and are able to do things for the school, in athletics, in scholarship, and in various other ways. I can’t pretend that I think that Jacob Finch will stand for these things or will do these things. But for once, it seems to me, that other considerations should weigh with us.”

The boys were startled by the unusual feeling in Deering’s voice and by the unconventional arguments he was using to urge his candidate upon their favor, and they settled into attitudes of deep attention.

“At the beginning of the year,” Tony went on, “a new boy came amongst us who, as we all know, has been treated as no boy ever was who came to the school before. He has been brutally hazed, and for months his life has been made miserable by young and old, and unfortunately he has had no way of defending himself. He has never had a chance, he hasn’t got a square deal. I have got to know him, I suppose, better than anyone else, and while I don’t claim or even think that he is an unusual fellow, I do believe there is something in him that could be made to count for the school if he had a show; if it could really be proved to him that you fellows were willing to make [201] him one of yourselves, give him not merely a fair, but a generous chance. I don’t want you merely to admit him to this Society because I ask it as a favor to me, though I hope you will do it for that reason if you won’t do it for any other; but I ask you to vote for him as an act of generous kindness toward a chap who hasn’t had the chance that any of us have had, whose life in this school up to now has been downright hell.”

With that Tony sat down. A ripple of conversation went round the room. The boys were quite won by this unusual appeal to their generosity and sympathy. Billy Wendell called them sharply to order. “Are there any further remarks upon Finch?”

Half a dozen fellows rose one after another, and declared, with a certain amount of feeling and a certain lack of grace, that they agreed with Deering, and that they thought Finch ought to be elected. Jimmie wanted to speak for Tony’s sake, but he could not quite bring himself to do so. In his heart he agreed with Kit that Tony’s judgment on this occasion was mistaken, and that were Finch elected it would not accomplish for him what Tony so generously hoped. There was a pause after good-natured Clayton had uttered a few stuttering sentimental remarks. Then Kit Wilson rose up quickly. His face was flushed, he seemed nervous, but there were lines of dogged determination about his mouth.

“Mr. Chairman,” he said, “we have all been moved by the eloquence of our popular president. I want to say, however, that I feel very strongly that the considerations that should guide us in this affair are not those of sentiment or of personal friendship. I [202] think, Mr. Chairman, that the president of this Society has no right to ask us to vote for a fellow on his nomination as a personal favor to himself. The argument that it is up to us to give Finch a better

show in the school than he's had, by electing him to this Society is no doubt generous, but it is sentimental. I agree with Mr. Deering that we should do everything in our power to make Finch's life a pleasanter and a happier one than it probably has been. I do not think, however, that to do this it is necessary to elect him to the Dealonian Society, the membership of which is supposed to be made up of those who really represent the various activities of the school. I sincerely trust he will not be elected."

With that he sat down, and some one immediately called for a vote. The Dealonian voted on membership by roll call, the secretary reading the names and the boys responding *Placet* or *Non Placet*, as the case might be. To Tony's surprise boy after boy voted in the affirmative. Tack Turner, one of "the crowd," was the first to blackball, but after him the voting again was favorable. Wilson's name was the last called. "Non Placet," he said quietly, without looking up.

"The name is rejected," said Wendell, and resigned the chair.

The meeting went on, several other names were proposed and accepted. After the adjournment, Tony, bitterly disappointed not in the result, which he had feared, but by the means it had been obtained, avoided speaking with his friends, and hurried out. In the [203]
corridor he came face to face with Kit. Their eyes met, and Tony's lip curled contemptuously. "Well," he exclaimed sarcastically, "you were successful, weren't you!"

Kit stared back with a dark scowl on his good-looking, usually kindly face. "I did as I thought right," he answered.

Tony smiled with a look of insulting incredulity. "Let me congratulate you on your sense of duty." Then he hurried on to his own room, and fell to work with self-deceptive industry at his books.

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[204]

CHAPTER XVI

A RIFT IN FRIENDSHIP

The prominent members of a particular set of boys can scarcely be on bad terms with each other without the relations of them all being more or less affected, and this was certainly the case with our friends at Deal. Tony had more and more become the real leader of the little circle, so that Kit's defection partook of the nature of a rebellion.

Tack Turner, who had blackballed Finch at Kit's request, had by that act lined himself on Wilson's side. He was a slow, rather dull boy, quieter than the others, but generally liked. He had not felt particularly one way or the other with regard to Finch, and had agreed with Kit chiefly because it happened to be Kit that spoke to him first. But having given his word, he was of that tenacious and somewhat unintelligent type, that will stick to it whether subsequent events show his position to be a reasonable one or not. His semi-indifferent attitude was transformed, however, into violent partisanship for Kit, as Tony took occasion the morning after the Dealonian meeting to express his opinion of Tack's blackballing Finch somewhat caustically.

"I confess, Tack," he said "that I never gave you the credit for much independence of judgment, but I didn't think you were quite so devoid of it as to vote just the way you were told to." [205]

Turner growled out a bitter retort to this unnecessary remark, and the two parted on bad terms for the first time in their lives.

Charlie Gordon, a light-hearted, easy-going, generous-minded lad sided naturally enough with Tony, and had been quite impressed by Tony's eloquence the evening before. Teddy Lansing had not voted, and refused to commit himself. Poor Jimmie Lawrence was torn in both directions. He had been willing enough to vote for Finch and let Tony have his way, because he was deeply and genuinely fond of him, and was accustomed to follow his lead; but he could not bring himself to feel, despite Tony's eloquent appeal at the meeting, that there was any real case for Finch with respect to the Dealonian, and he deplored the fact that Tony insisted on his plan. He was fond of Kit also; they had been chums since they had entered Deal together in the First Form five years before. His position was really a very hard one, because he felt and tried to be neutral, and neither Tony nor Kit, between whom the breach grew wider, was satisfied with neutrality. Both actually, if not expressly, were demanding partisanship.

Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of the incident—and this also Jimmie had dimly foreseen and feared—was the effect it had on Jacob Finch. Forty boys cannot keep a secret, so that it was not long before Finch heard a tolerably correct version of what had taken place at the Dealonian meeting. He was grateful to Deering for the effort he had made in his behalf, but the consciousness that he had been publicly discussed by a society of representative boys and formally rejected as a candidate for their companionship, added intensely to the bitterness of what he felt was his position. [206]

Sometimes when he was alone and thought of the incident, the hot tears would well up in his eyes and blind him. Bitter thoughts likewise would rise up in his soul and overwhelm him. He sometimes felt he could not stick it out for the year. But then, what else could he do? He could not think. He was absolutely dependent upon Doctor Forester, and he was not of the caliber to act rashly, go bravely out and face the hostile world. And the world seemed hostile to him—the very elements, these biting winter winds and prolonged northeast storms—seemed to beat against him. Hated alike by masters and boys, as he thought, he indeed was miserable. And, alas! save for his ardent affection for Deering, he began to hate bitterly and maliciously in return.

Life had taught him to be sly and silent, but heretofore beyond a furtive manner and an intense reserve, the quality of slyness had not shown itself. But now his malice seemed to demand expression, impelled him to action, and he began, first in little ways, afterwards by more systematic plans to torment his tormentors. But so secretly, so cautiously, that, though his sting was felt, his victim was ignorant whence it had come.

The principal objects of his hatred were Mr. Roylston and Kit

Wilson, the latter only after he learned of Kit's breach with Tony.
Mr. Roylston began to be afflicted with a series of annoying and [207]
inexplicable incidents; anonymous letters were slipped into his mail-box, threatening him with dire calamities unless he speedily exhibited a change of heart; his books, his papers were misplaced, to be found in out-of-the-way places; twice or thrice his study was disordered; and once, at night as he was crossing the field, mud was thrown at him and his immaculate clothes were sadly bespattered. But so carefully did the culprit destroy all clues to his identity that the master had no redress. For once he was baffled. Never, so contemptuous an opinion did he hold of Finch's spirit, did it occur to him even to suspect the poor worm whom daily he ground beneath the brazen feet of his sarcasm in the classroom.

He took little Beverly into his confidence as they sat late one night over a comfortable fire in the masters' common-room.

"These things," he remarked, "have been going on now for a number of weeks, and for the first time in my experience I do not discover the slightest clue to the culprit."

"Of course, however," was Beverly's comment, made partly to display his omniscience, partly to flatter an older colleague, "of course, you have your suspicions?"

"Of course," responded Roylston dryly, "that goes without saying. I have suspected both Deering and Wilson, whom indeed several times before have I discovered in misdemeanors of a similar character; but, if you chance to have been observing of late, you will have noticed and wondered that those two charming youths no longer consort together."

"Oh, boys of that sort," said Beverly blithely, to hide his [208]
ignorance of the alleged coolness, "boys of that sort always fall out after a time. Mischief is a poor cement for friendship."

"On the contrary it has been my observation that it often does cement it. But I am the less inclined to lay my annoyances to the two boys I have mentioned than I would be if they were as thick as they formerly were. Wilson simply has not the ingenuity or the wit to do such things for so long a time and escape detection; and Deering lacks the incentive of Wilson's impulsive and malignant vindictiveness. I am inclined to feel that I will discover the miscreant in some other set. Alas! they are not the only boys not above such things."

"I would keep an eye on my suspects, however," remarked Beverly, with an air of conviction that he was offering very subtle advice.

"Oh, my eye is ever on suspects, my friend."

At that moment Morris happened to come into the common-room, and the conversation was dropped.

Finch, impishly elated by the successful secrecy of his attentions to Mr. Roylston and finding a certain relief for his spleen in his malicious tricks, began to extend his operations, concentrating on Wilson. Kit, when he discovered the tricks that had been played upon him, would storm about noisily, berating possible miscreants right and left, but for some time with as little effect as had attended Mr. Roylston's quieter efforts. Success, however, rarely waits upon the criminal faithfully. He grows inevitably careless and falls at last into the most obvious trap that is set for him. Poor Jake proved no [209]
exception.

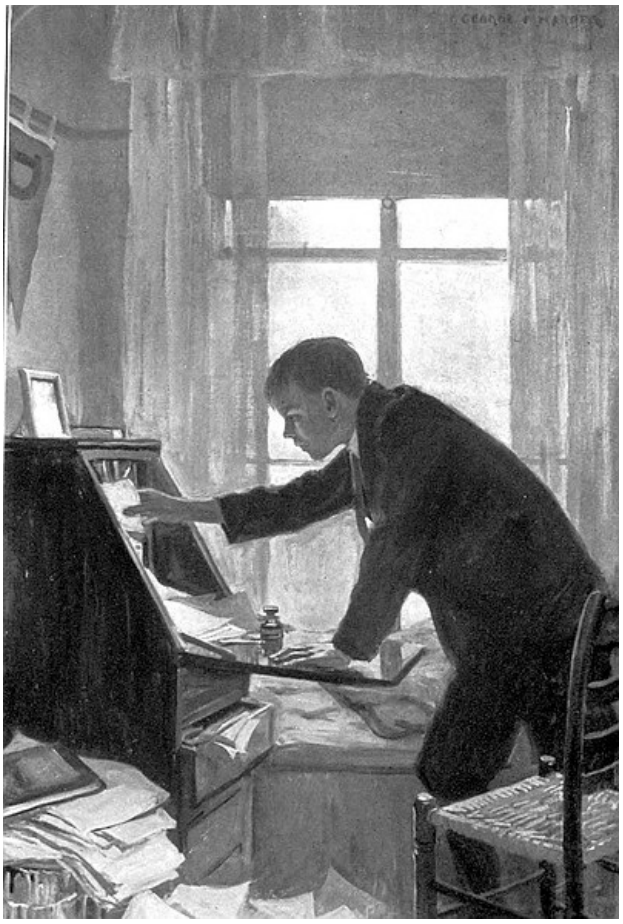
Twice in a week Kit had come in about four o'clock from his run across country with the hare and hounds, an unpopular game that he was seeking to boom, to find his room "rough-housed." It was not the general disorder familiarly known by that term, but a more systematic confusion, if we may so speak; a more malicious effort to injure his property. His prepared work for the next day's recitations would be smeared with ink so that it would have to be completely rewritten; his desk drawers would be turned topsy-turvy; his clothes hidden away in unexpected nooks and corners. This had happened several times, and the character of the destruction was more wanton than is often the case when boys indulge in such misguided forms of practical joking. He determined to watch carefully for weeks, if necessary, and catch the culprit if he should attempt to repeat his vandalism.

As usual, one afternoon after two o'clock call-over, he went off ostensibly for his run in running drawers and shirt, his white legs and arms gleaming in the winter sunshine, as he dashed down the hill with his hounds. But this time he deserted them at the foot of

the hill, skirted the path along the Rocks in the direction of Whetstone and returned to the school within half-an-hour by way of the steep-sloping south field, which faces Monday Port and which the boys seldom played upon. Unobserved, for his schoolmates were mostly far afield, he reached Standerland, tiptoed through the corridors to his room, and once inside hid himself carefully behind the curtains that screened the door into his bedroom. [210]

He waited impatiently a long dull half-hour, and several times was on the point of giving up; but for all his impulsiveness, Kit was doggedly persistent, and was quite capable of waiting there for an hour or more several times a week. And at last, to his joy, he heard a soft step in the corridor. Some one had paused before his door, and was evidently listening for sounds within. Then there was a gentle tap. Kit was still as a mouse. Another tap, another wait, then the door opened softly, and some one slipped in. Kit scarcely breathed. He could not see who it was, but he heard the intruder close the door gently behind him and stand for a moment, as Kit thought, looking furtively around him. He even came to the door of the bedroom, brushing the curtains back of which Kit was concealed as he passed. Then, satisfied at last that he was safe and alone, he went quickly to Kit's desk, opened the drawers and thrust malicious disturbing hands amongst their contents. Then he drew forth a bundle of papers. Kit heard him rattle the ink-well, and his quick ears caught the sound of the patter of the ink drops as they fell on the papers. Instantly he leaped forward, with one bound was across the room, and had grabbed the vandal by the collar. It was Jacob Finch.

For a moment, as Kit recognized the intruder, he was speechless with surprise. Finch stood as if he were paralyzed, in the position in which Kit had grabbed him. Only the ink-well had fallen from his fingers, and the black fluid was trickling from the desk onto the floor. His face was ashy, his eyes glared like those of a rat in a corner. In a second Kit recovered himself.



HE OPENED THE DRAWERS AND THRUST MALICIOUS DISTURBING HANDS AMONG THE CONTENTS

"You little hound," he hissed, his anger blazing forth. "So it's you that's been rough-housing my room!" [211]

Finch could not utter a word.

"Speak up, you cur. Bah! there's no need. I've got you in the act.

You're caught red-handed, you sneak!"

He advanced threateningly, determined to administer instantly the sound thrashing he felt was too good for the palsied little wretch before him. As he grasped Finch's collar the second time, the boy let out a weird shrill wail like the cry of an animal.

"Pah!" cried Wilson, "I can't stand the touch of you. Get out of my sight." He gave Finch a vicious kick that sent him reeling toward the door.

"If ever you come near my room again," shouted Kit, "I'll break every bone in your miserable body. You sneak! You cur! Get out!"

Poor Finch did not debate upon the manner of his going. With one movement, he had wrenched open the door and fled, not escaping, however, a parting shot from Wilson's boot.

Kit turned wrathfully to survey his damaged desk and papers, and began to clear the litter up.

"The sneak!" he muttered. "And that's the specimen that Tony Deering thought we ought to take into the Dealonian, that's the dirty little cur for whom he's thrown me over!"

Unfortunately, as Finch sped down the corridor for his own room, [212]
he ran squarely into Tony who was just coming out of Number Five study.

"Well, what the deuce is the matter with you?" exclaimed Deering, turning to look at the bewildered figure. But Finch did not reply. He dashed into his own room, and slammed and locked the door. Tony whistled softly, and went on. He was on his way to the shower, and had nothing on but his wrapper. His way led past Number Twelve study where Kit roomed, and at its door, as he turned a corner of the corridor, he saw Wilson thrusting armfuls of paper into the waste basket. Tony dropped his eyes and did not speak. Wilson looked up suddenly and recognized him, and impulsively exclaimed: "I say, Deering, just look here and see what a mess your particular pet has made for me."

Tony stopped, surprised, and annoyed by Wilson's angry tone. He glanced indifferently at the disordered room, the desk stained by the great blot of ink, the crumbled papers. "Well," he remarked, "I don't see how this concerns me or my friends."

"You don't, eh?" exclaimed Kit. "Well, I blamed well do. That's the sort of thing I've had to put up with for the last three weeks. Your friend Finch has been in here, kindly putting my room on the bum."

"Finch!" cried Tony. "I don't be—I reckon you've made a mistake."

"I *reckon* I haven't. I laid for him, if you want to know; and I had the pleasure just now of kicking him out. If I catch him in here again, I'll break every bone in his body. Since you are so deeply interested in his welfare, you'll be doing him a kindness if you tell [213]
him that for me."

Deering's lips curled contemptuously. "I don't know exactly what you are driving at, Wilson, and I don't think I particularly care."

Kit snorted, and went on with the task of setting his things to right. Tony majestically proceeded toward the shower. After he had stood for a quarter of an hour under cold water he felt considerably cooler, and when he had dressed, he stopped at Finch's room on his way to the Rectory for tea. Finch at first refused to respond to his knock.

"Come, come, open up, old man. I want to see you particularly."

It was a bedraggled depressed-looking Finch that finally opened his door. Deering pushed it back and entered. "Now, what's the trouble?" he asked. "I know something's up, because Wilson just now said he had—had put you out of his room. What were you there for?"

"He did put me out," gasped Finch. He hesitated, then lied desperately. "I wanted to borrow some paper. I thought of asking you, but Wilson had the kind I wanted. He wasn't in, or at least I thought he wasn't in, so I went to his desk, and began to pull some sheets off his pad, and he jumped on me from behind a curtain or out of his bedroom, from somewhere, I dunno where."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing much. He called me a sneak, and kicked me out."

"How did the ink get spilled?"

"I knocked it over when he jumped at me. Somebody's been [214]

rough-housing his room, I guess, and he thought it was me."

"Well, it wasn't you, Jake, was it?" asked Tony, fixing him with a keen hurt glance.

"No, Deering, 'pon my honor, it wasn't."

"Had you ever been to his room before?"

"Never alone." His eyes shifted back to meet Tony's wondering glance. "Don't you believe me, Deering?" There was a wail of despair in his voice.

"Yes, Jake, yes; of course, I believe you. I know you wouldn't lie to me. Cheer up, I'll try to get Wilson to listen to reason."

"Oh, don't—!" Jake stopped, aghast at his possible mistake. "I don't want you to do anything for me, Deering, you've done enough. I'm just always getting you in trouble."

"That's all right, Jake; helping a friend out isn't trouble."

And with that Tony went on. He stopped again at Wilson's room. The door was still open, and Kit was still fussing about his desk. He looked up at the knock, and scowled a little as he bade his visitor come in.

Tony came in and closed the door behind him. "Look here, Kit," he said, trying hard to keep control of his voice. "I want to speak to you about Finch. I think you have done him a wrong. He came in here to borrow some paper——"

"Oh, is that the song and dance he gives you? Well, I know what he came in for. If you want to know, I kept still behind those curtains for a couple of minutes while he started his dirty work, and I caught him right in the act, with that ink-well in his greasy fingers smearing my exercises with it. He has been rough-housing this room for two or three weeks." [215]

"Well, he says he hasn't, and I don't think he's a liar. Will you give him a chance to explain?"

"I'll be hanged if I will. I know he's a liar. I know it, man. Don't talk to me any such blamed rot about his coming in here to borrow paper; he's a sneak and a toad, and if he comes near me again I'll lick the life out of him."

"Go ahead, bully a chap that can't defend himself."

"Look here, Tony. I hate to quarrel with you, but it's got to come. I thought you were wrong about that kid from the first; he ain't fit for help, and 's for the Dealonian,—well, save the mark! But it's come to this—you and I can't be friends, if you are going to take that little sneak's part against me. We'll just break for good and all. You can't be a friend of mine, and take the attitude toward him that you've been taking. I might have got over the other business; but I can't get over to-day's dirty work, and for you to come in here, and tell me the pack of lies he's made up, is too much. Let's cut it out, and have done with each other."

"Oh, all right; if that's your point of view, I'm willing. You're unreasonable and hot-headed, Kit. So long, old man, I'm sorry you can't be just."

"So long," said Wilson, as Tony stalked out.

For a moment or so Kit fumed about, pulling things out of their places and thrusting them viciously back. Suddenly he put his head down on the table, and burst into tears.

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[216]

CHAPTER XVII

LEAVE-TAKING

The short Easter vacation, during which Tony had visited Jimmie, had come and gone, and our friends were settled down again into the routine of the spring term. For the time being, much to the discomfort of all concerned, the old crowd was broken up. Tony and Kit did not even speak to each other, so that Jimmie had a hard time keeping on friendly terms with them both.

The winter had long since broken completely. Long lazy days were come again when the sea glistened like glass under shining skies and the mounting sun was rapidly warming the earth into green good humor. The fields were dotted in the afternoons with a dozen developing baseball teams composed of white clad, red-capped boys. Boats, too, heavily manned by members of the rival school clubs, sped out of the little harbor tucked under Strathsey Neck, and, plied by their happy crews, went scudding on half-holidays up the River or boldly out past Deigr Light into the open ocean. It was a happy term at Deal: boys and masters expanded in the genial sunshine, and for the most part the stress of the long winter term problems and discipline was wholly relaxed. Lawrence [217] and Deering threw themselves into baseball, worked fairly faithfully at their books, and thus kept themselves happy and contented. Kit Wilson was coaching one of the younger teams on the north field, so that they did not come in contact with him very frequently. Jimmie would go to his rooms often in the evening, but he came no more to Number Five study.

Kit had said nothing about his affair with Finch; but, as he expected, his rooms were disturbed no more. Finch, terrified by discovery and the fear of exposure, for a long time abandoned his vandalism entirely. His conscience was troubled by the fact that he had lied to Tony, but less perhaps than he would have been disturbed if Tony knew the truth. There was on both his and Tony's part a certain sense of strain in their friendly relations, which Tony, however, tried to ignore. He believed of course that Finch had told him the truth about the episode in Wilson's room and that Wilson had simply been mistaken; but after Kit's open break with him, he saw no way to set things right.

This troubled him a great deal and cast a gloom over much of that bright spring term that otherwise might have been so happy. Each boy felt the loss of the other's friendship keenly, but both were impulsive, both felt themselves right, both had been stung to the quick by the other's attitude. Time, as often happens, widened the breach.

One day in Fifth English they were reading *As You Like It*, and it fell to Kit to read the lines of Amiens' song in the second act:

[218]

"Heigh-ho! sing heigh-ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most love merely folly.

"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not."

As he got toward the end of the lines, his voice almost broke. Stenton, realizing with quick sympathy that the song had taken on for him some keen personal meaning, passed on the reading immediately to another boy. Tony sat in his seat flushed and uncomfortable; for him also the verse had intense meaning. He longed to look up and catch Kit's eye, and then join him after class and say boldly how foolish he felt their coolness was. But he did not do so. He felt he never could do so. Kit had been too unfair, too bitter—the advance must come from him.

Suddenly one day, in the midst of all this intense life and activity of school so absorbing to our boys, there came a word to Tony that was rudely and without warning to take him out of it. The message came in the form of a letter from his grandfather bidding him come home at once.

"It will be bad news to you, my dear boy," he wrote, "but your

unfortunate father's business venture has been an absolute failure; he has been very ill and is only just now on the road to recovery, and your poor mother has fallen a victim at last to the worry and strain. She wants you, and the doctor and I think it best for you to come. So you must do so at once, as I am writing to the Head Master. I don't know, Anthony, whether we shall be able or not to send you back next [219] year. We poor people of the south, when Fortune turns against us, are pretty well down and out. You have made a good record at school, and I do not doubt but that Doctor Forester will promote you to the Sixth Form next year, should we be able to send you back, even if you do lose these two months. But you must come now, and at once. Telegraph me the day and hour and I will have Sambo meet you at the Junction.

"Your affectionate grandfather,

"Basil Deering."

Poor Tony read this letter over and over before he could clearly take it in. He knew something of old of his reckless father's terrible propensity to indulge in wild-cat speculation, of the disaster and trouble it had brought upon the family at Low Deering before. And now too his mother was ill! Of course, of course, he must go home. He fumbled in his drawer and found a time-table. Yes, he could leave that night. And yet—he paused, with the letter in his hand—it was like a sentence of banishment: to leave school now in the middle of the best term of the year, and with so many things in which he was interested at loose ends! He could not believe it really meant that; it could not be true. And perhaps never to return! He looked again at his letter, and the old general's words made him sick at heart. Never again to race up and down that hillside, to look out upon that splendid sea; never again to swagger about the campus with his chums in the old glad, happy, self-important way! No, no, he could not bear that it should mean that! The hot tears welled in his eyes,—but he brushed them away. Of course, his mother needed him. He had gone through before those agonizing [220] family crises, had seen his tender patient mother struggle bravely against his father's bad moods and dark despair. He knew that indeed she must have collapsed when his grandfather sent for him and she permitted it.

He ran over to the Rectory and found the Doctor in his study. He too had just been reading a letter from General Deering.

He clasped Tony's hand in his strong affectionate grip. "I am sorry for you, my boy.... Yes, I have just been reading a letter from your grandfather. There is no choice but for you to go at once."

"I can leave on the ten o'clock from Monday Port, to-night, sir," said Tony, "and catch the midnight express at Coventry, which will get me home the next evening."

"Doubtless that is the best plan," the Doctor agreed. "I don't think, from what the General tells me, that you need worry about your mother's immediate condition. But undoubtedly you are needed. I am very sorry that you should lose these two months, but you can keep up your work at home and there is no reason why you should not make the Sixth comfortably in September."

"I think I could do that, sir," replied Tony, "but my grandfather says there is some doubt about—about their being able to send me back next year."

"Yes, yes, he writes that to me; but you are to come, nevertheless. We will arrange that. I hope the financial difficulties will straighten out satisfactorily, but if worst comes to worst and they should not, why there are any number of ways that we can [221] provide for you. There is always a scholarship fund rusting in the bank,—ripening, I had better say, for just some such occasion. I fancy, even, that the school would be willing to trust you for your tuition. But one thing is quite settled: you *are* to return. And I will make that clear to Basil—to your grandfather."

"Thank you, sir; you've been mighty good to me."

"You have been mighty good to us—mighty good *for* us, I may say,—my boy.... Good-bye now, for the present.... And God bless you."

In a moment or so Tony was gone. He found Jimmie, Charlie Gordon, Teddy Lansing, and told them the news. And then, after a few hasty farewells, went to his rooms with Jimmie to pack. It was then late in the afternoon. The packing was a sad business, for he felt he must take everything. He would be away five months; perhaps, despite the Doctor's kind prophecy, for good. As this

possibility occurred to him, he would stand now and then in the middle of the room, with a coat or hat or what not in his hands, and feel it was simply impossible to go on. Tears would start in his eyes and trickle down his cheeks. He had always liked the school, even in his bad moods he had been loyal; but he had not known, he had not realized, as few boys do at the time, how the school had become a part of his very life, how intensely his affections were centered there. And then—Mr. Morris; the fellows, Jimmie, Teddy, Charlie, Kit—it would be hard to leave without saying good-bye to Kit—, Reggie!

He turned to Jimmie who had come in at the moment with his arms full of Tony's belongings that he had collected from various [222] parts of the school, locker rooms and the like. "Excuse me for a little while, Jimmie old boy; I've got to run over and see Reggie. I haven't told him yet." Tony had a pang of regret that he had seen so little of Reggie of late, "I'll be back before long."

"All right," said Jimmie dolefully. "I'll go on with the packing, if you don't mind. Don't be long."

"I won't," said Tony.

He found Carroll fortunately in his own room in the Old School. For once Reginald was studying, and Tony could scarcely remember when he had seen him so engaged. But the Sixth Former closed his Horace with relief as he recognized his visitor and kicked out a chair for him to sit down. "Well, I am certainly glad you have come. Heaven knows how long I would have kept at that futile exercise, if it had not been pleasantly interrupted. But what's up, my boy, you look as if you had seen a ghost?"

Tony sat down on the chair that Carroll had pushed out. "I have, Reggie," he said, "I have just got a letter from home; worse luck. My mother's ill, and I have to start south to-night."

"Jove, that is hard luck! When shall you get back, do you suppose?"

"I don't know. I don't think my mother is dangerously ill, but she wants me. There's been a mess about money too. The old governor has written, and says I may not get back at all—not this term any way."

"Not this term!" Reggie jumped up quickly, all the habitual [223] languor of his attitude and movements gone, and strode over to the window.

"No, I'm afraid not, Reggie."

"Why—why—I'll be gone next term, boy."

"I know, old man."

For a moment Carroll turned his back to Tony and looked out of the window into the deepening twilight, and was silent. There was a lump in his throat that kept him from speaking.

"I've only a few minutes, Reggie, old boy," said Tony, at last. "I am leaving in an hour and I am only half packed. I've got to say good-bye."

Carroll turned at this: a pathetic smile was on his lips. "It has come so suddenly, boy ... it's kind of taken the wind out of my sails." He came over then and took Tony's hand in his. "Tonio, ... I can't say good-bye.... You'll write to me ... you will come back surely.... I'll be at Kingsbridge and often back at school."

"I hope so, Reggie."

"You don't know, boy," Reggie went on, still holding Tony's hand, "I can't tell you what your being here has meant for me—you and Bill. We haven't seen each other much this year, and I reckon I've often seemed to you a poor sort of friend ... but, to put it poetically, old chap, ... the light o' my heart goes out with you."

Tony gripped the hand in his tightly at this. There was a lump in his throat too.

"Good-bye, Reggie.... I will write, and you be sure to write to me. Tell me all that's going on.... Have an eye on Finch, will you? Poor duffer!"

"Poor duffer, indeed!" said Carroll, and then added, "Poor me!" [224] Their hands clasped tightly, and then Tony was gone.

Reggie stood for a long time just as Tony had left him. "One by one the lamps go out," he murmured, quoting a line from one of his own verses. He sighed. "So runs, so runs the world away...." There was a queer sharp pain at his heart. He sat down at last and opened his Horace again, and began to read, but the words conveyed no

sense to his mind. He threw his arms out once, and whispered softly, pathetically, “Oh, Tony, Tony.... God bless you, boy; God bless you!”

Back in Number Five Jimmie and Tony were absorbed in the last stages of the packing. Morris, to whom Tony had explained the occasion of his going, had come in and was helping them. And his presence went a great way to cheer them up, for Morris refused for an instant, even in his own mind, to consider the possibility of Deering not coming back. He eased off their good-byes, and sent Lawrence over to cheer up Carroll, whom he knew would feel it more than the rest, for it was good-bye to Tony for him as he was in the Sixth and would be at Kingsbridge next year when Tony returned.

Deering said good-bye to Finch, quickly, quietly, he had time for little explanation. Finch said nothing, but died of despair within.

On the way down the corridor Tony passed Kit, a generous word was on his lips, their eyes met for a second, but Kit looked quickly away, and Tony passed on. The opportunity for a reconciliation was [225]
gone. Morris drove in to Monday Port with the boy and saw him off on the way-train for Coventry. With persistent tact, he continued to treat the parting as only a temporary one, and refused himself the melancholy pleasure of saying much to his young friend that was in his heart and that Tony might have been glad to hear. It was better so, thought Morris. The kind things could be written, if the need came.

There was a quick, short, strong grip of their hands at last, and Tony climbed into the train. He stowed his things in the empty car, and then went and stood on the rear platform and waved his hand to Morris as the train pulled out of the little station, and strained his eyes to see the last of the master’s patient, kindly friendly figure until darkness blotted out the vision. The train was rushing through the outskirts of the little town. Beyond the limits it ascended a steep grade and ran along a high level plateau for a way, and thence Tony caught a glimpse of the lights of the school shining brightly from the far-away hill, wafting him, it seemed, a friendly good-bye across the dark. Suddenly the train plunged into a narrow cut in a hill and Deering could see the lights of Deal no more.

At Coventry he had a dreary wait for half-an-hour until the midnight express for the south lumbered in and stopped on signal. As soon as he had boarded the through train, he got into his berth, for he was worn out with the wearisome journey from Monday Port and with the excitement of the last seven hours. But he could not sleep for a long time. When at last he did fall into a fitful slumber, constantly disturbed by the jolts and jars of the rushing train, it was to dream bad dreams. Once it seemed to him, in the dazed state [226]
between sleeping and waking, that he was lying in his little bed at Low Deering, that he was still a little boy of fourteen, and that the last four years at Deal had been only a dream....

At Low Deering Tony found things almost as bad as he had feared. His father, a genial, charming, irresponsible creature—the unaccountable wild olive that grows now and then on the stock of the good olive tree—had rather more deeply than usual—for the same sort of thing had happened before—plunged his family into distress. He had ventured all his available capital and more that he had borrowed, on the security of his extravagant hopes and good intentions, from his wife; staked it in a case where he stood to win twenty-fold or quite overwhelmingly lose; and, as not unfrequently happens, had lost. Then had followed, as Tony could remember the horror of it all at an earlier period of his boyhood, a trying disappearance and a return in a mood of black melancholy and idle remorse.

But the worst was over by the time he reached home. Victor Deering, thanks to his father’s stern but tender patience and his wife’s unfailing much-tried devotion, was slowly recovering his normal health, his irrepressible spirits, his habitual weaving of futile plans and nursing of quixotic hopes. But the process this time had cost his family a good deal more than its meager income could pay for and had sacrificed Mrs. Deering’s health to worry and distress. For weeks she had been lying in a state of nervous exhaustion, from which the physician at last thought she might be rallied if her wish [227]
were granted and Tony, her only child, might be with her. And so he had been sent for.

During those two hot months of the southern spring Tony

devoted himself to his mother, a devotion that was only relaxed when later, the old general having scraped together enough for the purpose, the family removed for the summer to the cooler climate of a resort in the North Carolina mountains. The mother grieved not a little for her boy's interrupted school days—she guessed at the sacrifice Tony's cheerfulness hid,—but Tony and the General knew that his return had saved her health if not her life.

Tony had been separated a great deal from his family since he had gone north to school, so that, after the first homesickness for Deal was over, he began to be deeply interested again in the old scenes and familiar friends of his early boyhood: the easy-going, ill-managed old plantation with its extensive sugar industry bringing in such income as they had; the little hill on which stood the house of Low Deering, low, white and great galleried; the sleepy bayou that stretched away below to the wild and beautiful jungle, a marshy live-oak forest, picturesquely hung with the heavy lace of the gray Spanish moss and the delicate purple of the wild wistaria; the inky black darkies, relics of ante-bellum days; the few families of similar decaying plantations in the neighborhood.

Later in the summer at Bald Rock in North Carolina, at the hotel to which their diminutive cottage was attached, there were young people again—boys to play baseball and climb the near by mountains with, girls with whom to dance at the Saturday night [228] hops on the great gallery of the hotel. Then too there was his father. Despite an inner disapproval that Tony could not help feeling for his father's irresponsible doings, for the trouble he now and then brought so deeply, perhaps unwittingly, upon them all, Tony enjoyed his father immensely. If he himself had inherited his strong sense of honor and his manly grip on life from his grandfather, and the inner patient tenderness we have sometimes noted in him from his mother, it was from his father that his charm, his quick and ready sympathy, his genial grace had come.

After the terrible six months he had given them, Victor Deering could not have done more to atone than he was whole-heartedly trying to do. It was characteristic of him, for he deeply appreciated what Deal School had done for Tony, that his repentance should have caused him to suggest to the old general that his own patrimony, hoarded by the head of the house against a rainy day, should be made over to Tony at once, and the income, the capital if necessary, be applied to completing his education at Deal and later on at Kingsbridge. General Deering took his son at his word. Victor was only too eager to promise from then on steadfast attention to the plantation, which, better managed, was capable still of recouping their fortunes and furnishing them with a living. So it began to look bright, as Tony wrote to Jimmie Lawrence, for his return to school, and without any question of taking advantage of scholarships or such aid as the Head had so kindly offered. That offer rankled, unjustly as he knew, in the old aristocrat's mind. He [229] was determined Tony should have no such humiliation to face.

Of the school in these days of Tony's enforced exile, a glimpse shall be had through the medium of Jimmie Lawrence's letters, for, of course, the two boys had written each other with some regularity.

"Deal School: *May 10th*.

"Dear Tony:

"Well, old boy, how does it seem to be getting Long Vacation two months ahead of time? I am glad to know that your mother is better; but I shan't be contented again till you tell me definitely that you will be back next term....

"I suppose you want to know what has been going on here. You won't be surprised if I say pretty much the same old thing. It is lively enough to be in the thick of it, but there doesn't seem much to write about. I have naturally seen rather more of Kit since you have been away, and though he does not say much if I try to talk about you, I can't but think that things must be all right between you next fall. I have been seeing too a lot of Reggie Carroll. Reggie, I suppose, will be the same lanky languid critter to the end of the chapter, but Bill dropped the word to me the other day that he has tremendously bucked up in his work, and that he's going in for the Latin Prize. I happen to know also that he is hammering away on some verses for Jack Stenton's prize in Poetry. From the sample he read me the other night, I have no doubt he'll get it,—it is the real thing, not the style of the poems that desecrate the pages of the *Deal Lit*. Reggie is going to turn out O. K., Bill says; and I begin to think so myself. Though I must confess, up to now, despite what you have always thought of him, I have considered him rather poor pickings and considerably proud of

nothing. I haven't seen much of Finch; he keeps pretty much to himself; in fact hasn't been in here since you left. Bill tells me however that he's to be back again next year.

"The team is developing in a satisfactory sort of way, and Teddy makes a pretty good captain. I'm playing first as usual. We have won [230] all our games so far, and I guess we'll give Boxford a good rub on June 10th. It's a shame you won't be here.

"There's not much faculty news. Gumshoe's Gumshoe! His rooms have been rough-housed several times lately, and from the way he glares at Kit, I fancy, he thinks he is responsible. Kit, characteristically, retaliates by veiled impudence that sets the Gumshoe's teeth on edge. But he champs and says nothing.

"The fellows ask about you a lot, and send their best. Let me hear from you soon, and don't forget you are to spend the last month of the vacation with me at Easthampfield. Write soon.

"Ever affectionately,

"JIMMIE."

In June there came another letter that interested Tony very much.

"Reggie has pulled both the Latin and the Poetry Prizes. Even the Gumshoe thawed a trifle and shook hands with him as he came down from the platform on Prize Day, with a set of Browning in his arms and the Jackson medal in his inside pocket. He's so blamed clever that he has got a *cum laude*. Bill beams with pride over him. The President of Kingsbridge, a funny old chap who talks through his nose and has a wit as keen as a razor, made us a bully talk, and the Doctor announced the prefects for next year—curiously enough he said the Head Prefect will not be appointed until the opening of school in September. We all suppose, of course, that that means you, and that it is only postponed until it is certain that you are coming back. The other prefects will be Teddy, Gordon Powel, Doc Thorn, Ned Clavering and myself. I had hoped Kit would be one, but he's been too independent I guess. It's a pretty good lot of fellows, I think, though I say it as shouldn't, and with you at the head, we ought to run things very much as we want to next year...."

Tony had scarcely thought of the Head Prefectship since he had left school. He believed that there were others better fitted for it than himself and who more deserved it. The fact that he was [231] President of the Dealonian made him an obvious candidate, of course; and certainly if the authorities thought him up to the position he would be glad to have it. The possibility from this time on added to the keenness with which he looked forward to his return in September.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE HEAD PREFECTSHIP

A warm bright September day at Deal. A golden light from the western sun fell athwart the green fields of the school and cast great shadows upon the beach and the tranquil bay beyond. It had rained the day before, after a long drought, so that the air was fresh and the foliage had taken on a gayer green. The long white Port Road leading down the hill toward Monday Port was dotted with hacks, flies, barges, coming to and returning from the school, each one depositing at the terrace steps a somewhat noisy and merry contingent of boys. They, after greeting the Doctor and Mrs. Forester in the great hall, scattered to their quarters to stow their belongings and compare animated notes with their friends.

From an angle of the Old School, where he was screened from view by a mass of shrubbery, Jacob Finch lay flat on his stomach, his peaked face in his hands, and his thin little legs, half hidden now by long trousers, kicking in the air behind him. Below him, descending terrace by terrace and over the green sloping fields, stretched the wonderful Deal country, so fresh and wind-swept, gleaming in the mellow afternoon light; he looked out over the curving tawny beach, the great sweep of the greenish-brown marshes, the grayish-green [233]
of the dunes, the still sheet of opaque water under the ledges of Lovel's Woods; and beyond the great fan-shaped curves of Strathsey Neck, the rocks, the islands, and at last the boundless expanse of the ocean, blue this afternoon as an Italian lake. It was an afternoon to remember, to feel glad for from a sense of its sheer beauty.

But Finch was totally unconscious of the scene before him. Instead his eyes were fastened with an intent gaze upon the white road and the long driveway that divided the playing-fields. He eagerly scanned each vehicle as it approached and deposited its load at the flight of steps that led up to the principal terrace. Each time an expression of disappointment would settle upon his face, until it was transformed again to eager interest at the approach of another carriage.

Finch had spent the summer at Deal, so perhaps there was little reason for him to become enthusiastic over a prospect of beauty of which he had had so many opportunities for growing weary. As he looked back on the spring term, he hardly knew how he had got through it. He lived during its last six weeks more than ever in his shell, studying desperately to pass his examinations. And in that he had succeeded.

After Deering's departure and his own exposure before Wilson, he avoided every one, even Lawrence and Mr. Morris. And save on two or three occasions, after a more bitter jibe than usual in the classroom when he revenged himself on Mr. Roylston, he gave up his secret vandalism. During the summer he stayed on at Deal. The time had gone pleasantly enough, and had he been able to recoup [234]
his health, he might have been restored to an equable frame of mind, but unfortunately he was physically as miserable as ever.

By the middle of August he began to worry about the possibility of Deering not coming back. After a letter or so, which characteristically he had left unanswered, he heard nothing from Tony. In August he heard, however, from Doctor Forester, who was spending a week-end with the Lawrences at Easthampfield. "You will be interested to learn," he had written, "that your friend Anthony Deering is here with James, and that there is now no longer any doubt of his returning to school in September. I look forward to great things from him as leader of the school." From that time on Finch lived from day to day on the expectation of Tony's return. He was thrilled by the implied statement of the Head Master's letter that Tony would be appointed Head Prefect, though he could not imagine that any other boy had for a moment been seriously considered. Several times the first day of the term when he had heard the boys discussing the probability of Tony's return and appointment, he smiled to himself with secret glee and a strange feeling of self-importance at his inside information. But he said nothing. It pleased him though that almost all of the boys seemed to take it for granted.

At last, on that lovely September afternoon as Jake lay under the bushes on the Old School terrace, he was rewarded for his long

vigil. In one of the last of the many carriages that drove up, he saw Lawrence and Deering. The rays of the setting sun were shining on [235] the top of Tony's bare copper-colored head and made it glow like burnished gold. To Jake's adoring eyes it was as the halo about the head of a patron saint. He watched the two boys clamber out of their hack, pay the driver, and join a merry crowd of fellows who were unofficially welcoming late arrivals. "Hello Tony!" "Hello Jim!" "Well, I'm mighty glad to see you!" With such cries he heard fresh young voices ring; and with bright eyes, he followed his hero as he entered the doors of the Old School in the midst of a happy crowd of his classmates. Through the window, to which he crept, he saw the cordial greeting that Tony and Jimmie got from the Doctor and Mrs. Forester. A moment later Finch saw Kit Wilson enter, and heartily greet every one except Tony. He sent a glance of vindictive hatred toward Wilson that it was well for him Kit did not see.

About half-an-hour after supper Jake tapped timidly at the door of Number Five study. In response there came a hearty "Come in."

"Why, hello, Finch," cried Tony, grasping his visitor's hand with a strong grip, "I declare, you're getting fat."

Finch laughed ruefully. "Not very, I guess."

"Well, old chap, how have you been? Why the deuce haven't you ever written to me?"

"I dunno; I'm no hand at writing, I guess. I was glad to hear from you though."

"How goes it? Where have you been all summer?"

"Here," answered Finch laconically.

"Here! what on earth were you doing here?"

"Didn't have money enough to go any place else. The Head gave [236] me some work in the library, cataloguing books."

"Good for him! I ought to have been working myself, I reckon. Money's been pretty scarce down our way too. By Jove, old boy, it's good to be back, you know. You don't know how much you care for the old shop till you leave it."

"No, I guess you don't," was Finch's ambiguous reply.

"Well, Jake, we're going to have a good year this time anyway. I'm going to pull you out of the dumps instanter. Jimmie says you've been cutting Number Five since I've been away. That won't do." He looked about him with undisguised pride and pleasure. "Things do look pretty nice and comfy in the old camp-ground, don't they?"

"They certainly do look good for you, Deering. You'll be Head Prefect."

"Stop your kidding, Jake."

"Oh, you know you'll get it," said Jake. "I guess it would have been announced all right last spring if you hadn't been so sure you mightn't come back. But it's all right now."

"Well, to tell the truth," rejoined Tony with a laugh, "of course I hope it's all right. It's a sort of a turn-down when a President of the Dealonian doesn't get it. But there are other chaps that deserve it on other accounts much more than I do. There's Ned Clavering and Doc Thorn. They are the right sort. We've never been very thick but there aren't two fellows in the school that I have more respect for. I reckon if I hadn't made that lucky run in the Boxford game and been [237] elected President of the Dealonian soon after, that Ned would have had a better chance than I. Fact is, I really never thought of being Head Prefect till I had that election thrust upon me."

"Clavering and Thorn are prefects all right. But you are to be head. The Doctor told me so himself."

"The deuce he did!"

"Honest. He wrote me a letter about my being here last summer while he was at Easthampfield, staying with Mr. Lawrence. He said you were there with Lawrence, and then told me that you were to be Head Prefect."

"That's funny. But if it's so, why of course I'm mighty glad. As far back as I know anything about the school there have only been three Presidents of Dealonian who were not Head Prefect in their Sixth Form year. However, it means a lot of responsibility and knocks out chances of a heap of fun."

"I guess you're up to it," said Finch with conviction.

"If I get it, I'll certainly try to make good. But as a matter of fact I haven't got it yet. Tell me how things went last year? How's the dear old Gumshoe?"

“Same as ever. I hate him.”

“Tut, tut, my child; there’s mighty few people worth hating.”

“He is,” said Jake without a smile. “He’s a sneak.”

“Now, as a matter of fact, Jake, I don’t think he is. The Gumshoe, as I have reason to know, can be uncommonly mean, but I don’t believe for a minute that he’s a sneak. I am coming by degrees, reflection bein’ aided by merciful separation, to understand the [238]
Gumshoe’s point of view: it’s pinched and peaked, but it isn’t sneaky —he is just as disagreeable to your face as he possibly can be behind your back. He’s had a hard row to hoe, and I don’t blame him now and then for being crabbed and sour. But I reckon he takes it out in that.”

“I don’t think he does,” said Finch quite unconvinced by Tony’s more generous reasoning. “I don’t think so at all. He’d strike in the dark. I don’t trust him.”

“Reggie never would either,” Tony mused for the moment; then more cheerfully, “But come, let’s talk of something pleasant. How ——Why, hello, Ted.” This last exclamation was directed at a drab comical face and ruffled head of mouse-colored hair that thrust itself through the half-open doorway. “Come in, you duffer.”

“Didn’t know you were busy,” said Teddy Lansing, entering.

“Well, I ain’t,” said Tony.

Finch rose from his seat on the window-sill and sidled toward the door. “I guess I’ll be going,” he said to Deering, and bolted.

“Now, what the deuce is the matter with him?” exclaimed Tony. “He shies at his shadow.”

“Pah—Pinch!” Teddy spat with emphasis at the waste paper basket.

Tony looked up quickly, but restrained the impulse of annoyance. “What’s the matter with Finch?”

“Oh, nothing particular. I just don’t like him. He’s a sneak. But there, I beg your pardon, Tony,” Teddy caught himself, [239]
remembering the cause of Deering’s quarrel with Wilson. “I suppose you will stand up for him. I don’t know much about him; but he got on my nerves last spring to a degree. Guess he’s bug-house.”

“He has had a blamed hard time here—that accounts for it. But I don’t think he is a sneak. If we had given him half a chance——.”

“I know, I know, old chap; you’ve certainly given him more than half a chance, and if you think it pays, all right all right. I think, you know, that Pinch isn’t worth the trouble you’ve taken with him. But I’ll admit that I had no right to call him a sneak. However he hasn’t made good here.”

“Perhaps not,” said Tony. “But I wish he could. Where’s the crowd?”

“Unpacking, I guess. What sort of a summer have you had, old man? We missed you a lot here last spring.”

“Bully—I was down in the mountains, North Carolina. Where were you?”

“Oh, home mostly. Confound! there’s the bell for Chapel. Come on, let’s wander down.”

The two boys made their way, arm in arm, through Standerland corridors, across a moonlight-flooded campus to the Chapel. At the entrance they came face to face with Mr. Roylston; he gave them a short greeting and passed rapidly within. Tony was in high spirits, and waited outside until the last moment, greeting boys he had not seen and an occasional master. He could not help wondering, as he took his seat with a feeling of pride in the Sixth Form rows, if the [240]
Doctor would announce who was to be Head Prefect that evening.

But he did not. After the customary short service, an adaptation of Evening Prayer from the Prayer-book, the Head made a few general announcements, including a faculty meeting that evening, and then gave the boys a talk. Doctor Forester was at his best in Chapel. There was a simplicity in his sermons and addresses, a rugged kindly earnestness, lit up by occasional flashes of insight and vision, that made him from the Chapel pulpit a genuine moral and religious force amongst his boys. His theme that evening was the Power of Kindness as a source of happiness and goodness in the life of the school. Tony, as he listened, felt a pang of remorse for his jibes at Mr. Roylston and a keen sting of regret for his difference with Kit; otherwise, on the whole, he thought, he did try to be kind. And he liked what the Doctor said because it put his own views into

much better, clearer terms than he could have given them.

Tony, though he had absorbed much of the best that the school and the strong men who made the school could give him, had not consciously been deeply touched or drawn to the religious life of the place. He said his prayers at night; once in a long, long time he read his Bible; he tried to do his duty mostly, he wanted usually to be kind; indeed he usually was kind; and, thought little more about it. His family were all churchmen and he supposed that some time he would be confirmed, but he had not yet been, and indeed had never understood what it was that drew people, especially boys of his age, [241] toward a more personal religion. But to-night, the old familiar hymns, sung with such hearty good will; the gracious cadences of the well-known prayers and psalms; the sense of dependence upon and communion with a Higher Power that breathed in the Doctor's talk to them: and particularly the soft singing in Latin of an old monastic hymn, set to a Gregorian rhythm which the boys always sang at evening services in the Chapel:—to-night, it all touched him more intimately and deeply than it ever had done before.

"I think I will be confirmed this year, Jimmie," he said to his room-mate, as they strolled across the campus in the soft night, with their arms about each other's necks.

"I wish you would," Jimmie replied, somewhat to his surprise. "I was confirmed last spring, and I'm mighty glad I was."

They fell then into intimate talk—of themselves, of the summer, of their plans for the year....

While the boys of the school were busy that evening with their unpacking and the setting of their rooms to order, under the supervision of the younger masters, the senior members of the faculty were gathering for their first meeting of the term in the Masters' common-room. This room was directly back of the library. Its windows opened eastward on to the terrace, and commanded a superb view of the moonlight-flooded sea and shore. The windows were opened to the night air, and the fragrance of the late honeysuckle drifted in on the soft breeze.

Doctor Forester was the last to enter. He had stopped a moment [242] in the library to speak with Finch, who was reading there.

"Oh, Jacob," he said, pausing as if he suddenly recollected something, "do you chance to remember a letter I wrote you last summer from Easthampfield when I was staying with Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I just wish to caution you not to repeat any remark I seem to recall having made there about this year's Head Prefect. I want it to come as a surprise to all the boys, as well as to the boy I think I mentioned. But the appointment is not made yet—it is always done in conjunction with the masters."

"Yes, sir."

The Doctor passed on into the common-room.

In a few moments he had settled himself behind the big table, and glanced about over his glasses at his colleagues, to see who was present. About thirty members of the faculty were there, including all of the senior masters. Morris was standing with a little group by the fireplace. Mr. Roylston was sitting by the window looking out upon the moonlit sea.

"Gentlemen, will you please come to order." The Doctor paused for a moment while they settled into various attitudes of attention. "I have called you together to-night to settle with your advice the question of the Head Prefectship. I have seldom postponed this appointment until after the Long Vacation, but last June the boy who seemed to have most claim to the place left school and it was doubtful for the time if he would return. I may say, that I should have appointed him even with that doubt unsettled, had not one of [243] the senior masters particularly requested me to postpone the appointment until this fall."

He paused again, and looked about him. "There is no reason for further delay. The obvious candidate for the position is, of course, Anthony Deering. He was, as you all know, not only the president of the Dealonian Society, which according to tradition registers the boys' choice of their leader, but he was unanimously nominated to me by the retiring prefects of last year's Sixth Form. I may say at once, that unless there is strong reason to the contrary, that I am disposed to confirm that nomination this evening. He is a boy who

has been keenly interested in most of the school activities and he has shown ability and capacity for leadership in most of them. Personally, as we all feel I imagine, he is a charming lad, high bred, coming of one of the best old southern families; and, as on several occasions I have had the opportunity for judging, he has always displayed a sense of honor and an attitude of unselfishness and kindness that is as rare as it is delightful. I should be glad, however, to hear your comments on the nomination, or to have the merits of any other boy discussed whom you may feel is entitled to consideration."

After a moment's silence, Stenton addressed the masters. "Doctor Forester," he said, "I should like to say that I thoroughly agree with all that you say about Deering. I have observed him at close quarters on the athletic field, and I never knew a squarer, more plucky lad. As you know, other things being equal, I believe that an athlete should have preference for the Head Prefectship. Two years ago I doubted if Deering would fulfill his athletic promise, [244] but his exploit in the Boxford game of last year, thoroughly re-established his athletic reputation. I think he is, simply because of his genial character and general popularity, better adapted to the position than Ned Clavering, the football captain, who would be my next choice. He too is a fine chap, and though he lacks Deering's attractiveness, he is not so quick and impulsive."

"His impulses," asked the Head, "are usually generous, are they not?"

"Yes, I think they are," Stenton replied. "He is decidedly my choice."

"And you, Mr. Morris?"

"Why, yes, sir; I fancy my opinion of Deering is well known. He has faults. He is impulsive, as Stenton says; he is quick and he has a sharp temper. But granting that, I am frank to say that he is a boy whom it has been a privilege as well as a pleasure to know. I think not merely that we would make no mistake in selecting him for Head Prefect, but that we could not possibly find another boy who would do so well."

"That is very much my impression," said the Doctor. "Unless—yes, Mr. Roylston."

"I am sorry to say," interrupted Mr. Roylston, from his seat on the window-bench, in low distinct tones in which there was discernible but a trace of feeling, "I am sorry to say there is an 'unless.' I regret very much to utter a discordant note to the chorus of praise that has been sounding for the boy whose name is under our consideration, but a sense of duty as well as deep personal [245] feeling impels me to say that I should regard it as a calamity of injustice if he should receive this appointment."

The men turned with amazement and curiosity in the direction of the Latin master. "My experience of him," that gentleman continued, "though it has scarcely been as intimate as that of Mr. Stenton or Mr. Morris,—both of whom, I understand, believe in as well as practice, cultivating intimacies with boys,—but it has been as extended. And never, I desire to say, in my long experience have I had as much trouble or been subjected to such impertinence and insult as by Deering and his satellites."

Doctor Forester interrupted his assistant master a little impatiently. "I should be obliged if you will specify some of his delinquencies, Mr. Roylston."

"I fear I should exhaust your patience," replied the master, "if I attempted to detail the difficulties to which I have been subjected. I shall content myself with but one instance which was the culmination last spring of a long series of annoyances."

All of the men in the room were now giving Mr. Roylston an undivided attention. All were surprised except Beverly; even Morris looked at him with open-eyed amazement. They knew, of course, that he had had what they regarded trifling disciplinary troubles with Deering and his friends,—a lively crowd, especially in their Lower School days,—but they had no reason to suspect that the master would take such a definitely hostile attitude in a matter that seriously affected a boy's school life. Doctor Forester had had some slight intimation, as it had been Mr. Roylston who urged the [246] postponement of the appointment.

"Some time last year," continued Mr. Roylston,—"in March, to be more exact,—I had some difficulty with Deering and Wilson, who were then chums, though I believe that Wilson has since formed

other associations. They broke a gating that I had imposed upon them, and when the matter was referred to the Head Master,—unwisely, I thought, as I trust I may be pardoned for saying,—their disobedience was not punished. From that time on I do not think that I am mistaken in saying that I marked a bravado in their attitude toward me that was just short of impertinence. I did not relax my vigilance, so there were no more overt acts of disobedience. However, they had what I suppose they considered their revenge. One day in first study I confiscated from the boy Finch a composition entitled 'The Spectacle.' Upon examination it proved to be a somewhat coarse imitation of Addison's Spectator." Mr. Roylston drew a copy of Tony's unfortunate composition from his pocket. "The particular number that fell into my hands was entitled 'Soft-toed Samuel.' With your permission, sir, I should like to read it to the faculty."

"Certainly," assented Doctor Forester, "if you think best. If you prefer——"

"I do prefer, sir."

"Very good—read it, by all means."

Mr. Roylston slowly unfolded the paper, adjusted his spectacles, and read to his colleagues Tony's effusion. He read it well, did full justice to the sarcasm, the animus that had been in the writer's mind at the moment of composition. Some of the men, conscious of [247]
the invasion it made upon magisterial dignity, were plainly in sympathy with Roylston's indignation; others found difficulty in concealing their enjoyment of its wit, and a little perhaps, in hiding their satisfaction in seeing a colleague, none too popular with themselves, held up to ridicule.

As Mr. Roylston concluded, he folded the paper and handed it to the Head Master. "That, sir," he said, "is a copy of the original which was in Anthony Deering's handwriting, and the authorship of which he acknowledged."

Doctor Forester took the poor *Spectacle* into his hands and glanced at it. "This is, of course, very distressing; very unfortunate; a *most* unfortunate occurrence."

Morris spoke up quickly. "May I ask, Mr. Roylston, if Deering did not apologize for this thing and show genuine regret?"

"For its discovery, yes," answered Mr. Roylston dryly, as he met Morris's keen glance with a stare of scarcely concealed dislike.

"No, not for the discovery; for the thing itself, I mean," said Morris.

"He apologized, of course. There was nothing else he could do as the evidence was perfect. As for contrition, you, perhaps, are a better judge of that than I."

Morris flushed. "Deering has never mentioned the matter to me, Mr. Roylston. I agree with you that it is a flagrant impropriety and that it must have seemed to you a gratuitous insult. But, of course, it [248]
was not intended for your eyes, and I dare say, is no worse than many another such squib as might be directed at any of us by almost any boy. Their sense of fun is doubtless often misdirected, but it is only a sense of fun, I believe, and usually quite devoid of malice."

"My acquaintance with Deering, Mr. Morris, has not been of so happy a nature as yours. I am not able to believe that he is devoid of malice."

"Gentlemen," interrupted the Head, "I should be glad to hear anything you have to say on the subject. I appreciate Mr. Roylston's very natural feeling. I hope very much, however, that he may see with me that it is one of those unfortunate incidents which——."

"Pardon me, sir," exclaimed the master, "if I define my attitude precisely. It will prevent misunderstanding. I have reflected on this matter for six months. I can only say that should the Head Master and the faculty of this school reward with the highest honors a boy who so deeply has insulted a member of the faculty, thus seeming to stamp with their approval a quite intolerable attitude of disrespect, that I should be under the painful necessity of severing my connection with the institution." With that he rose, bowed slightly, and excused himself.

Doctor Forester rose quickly. "Gentlemen, this is evidently a more serious question than I had supposed. I shall speak with Mr. Roylston alone, and with your permission I will take the responsibility of a decision entirely upon myself. I think we may consider the meeting adjourned."

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Had the masters that evening been less intent upon what was going on within, sharp eyes, directed to the clump of bushes immediately beneath the windows, might have detected an eavesdropper on their proceedings. But they did not, and when the meeting had adjourned, he slunk, unobserved, away.

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[250]

CHAPTER XIX

THE RESULT OF THE PROTEST

When Finch, for he was the eavesdropper, crawled out of the bushes under the window of the Masters' common-room, he darted quickly, keeping within the shadow of the Old School wall, into a little clump of trees beyond the terrace. He was stiff and sore from lying motionless so long and had got thoroughly chilled from the dampness of the ground. But his mind and soul were at fever heat.

He had heard almost all of the conversation in the room above him, and he was overwhelmed by the course of events. He felt much as a general must who receives the report of a spy informing him that the enemy have augmented forces with which he cannot hope to cope. Finch felt that he could not endure the situation another minute. It had seemed that he must shriek out more than once as Mr. Roylston had so calmly, with such deadly determination, built up his case against Deering. Finch felt his hero and himself the victims of an ignoble conspiracy.

The boy had grown of late so accustomed to deceit, that for the time being he absolutely forgot how contemptible his own action had been and how it would appear to others, to Tony. He was an Ishmael, and felt himself justified in raising his hands against every one because all hands seemed raised against him. And his poor [251] warped mind knew of no weapons except deceit, trickery, eavesdropping, with which to cope against the authority and success which were his enemies. But now he was thinking of but one thing—the position he so eagerly coveted for Tony was threatened, and, thanks to the efforts of his inveterate enemy, was apt to be given to another.

After pausing for a moment or so in the clump of bushes, in which to gather together his shivering body, he slipped off, entered the Old School by a basement door, made a detour through the locker-rooms, and emerged again in the north quadrangle. He dashed across the campus and up the stairs of Standerland to the door of Number Five study, and knocked boldly, almost without knowing what he was going to say to Tony.

Deering and Jimmie were within, with two or three other boys. Finch gave a frightened glance about, but for once he overcame his self-consciousness enough to whisper at Deering, "Come over to my room, will you? I want to see you particularly for a few minutes."

Tony went to the door. "What is it?" he began.

"Please come over," Finch continued. "I have something important to tell you."

Once in his own little room, Jake turned a white excited face to Tony, his shyness was gone, absorbed now by his passion of rage and anxiety.

"Well, what the deuce is up?" asked Tony, smiling a little at his *protégé's* agitation.

"A lot. There's just been a faculty meeting. I have heard all about it—it doesn't matter how—but all about it! and the Doctor put you up for Head Prefect—and said all manner of fine things about you— [252] all the masters were there and they were all going to vote for you—when Roylston—curse him!—got up and told about *The Spectacle*, and read them that copy of it he stole from me, and when he got through he said he'd give up his job here if you were made Head Prefect—and there was a lot of gas—and the Doctor broke up the meeting—and said he'd talk it over with Roylston. And then he went off. And I don't know what's going to happen."

"Here, here! what's all this," exclaimed Tony, as Finch paused for breath. "You're crazy, Jake. Somebody's been telling you a fairy story to get you excited."

"No, I am not crazy," Jake replied. "I tell you I know all about it."

"Well, what the dickens is it? Say it over, will you?"

Finch repeated, this time more accurately, all that he had overheard. "He's trying to queer you," he concluded, "that's what! and he may do it, if we don't do something."

"Jake, I say you are off your head. In the first place, I can't imagine the Gumshoe hating me quite hard enough for that, and, in the second, I'm blamed sure the thing has got twisted in being reported to you."

"It didn't—I heard it—about it, I mean—I can't tell you who told me."

"Well, I don't take much stock in it," said Tony, turning as if to leave. But Finch sprang forward, and put his hand on Tony's arm.

"I take a lot of stock in it, I tell you. If you don't do something, [253] you won't get it."

Tony wheeled around, his face blazing with sudden anger, "What do you think I could do? Do you suppose I'd turn my hand to get the thing? I'd cut it off first. I haven't asked to be Head Prefect, and I don't intend to ask to be, you poor fool."

Finch scarcely winced before Tony's anger. And indeed it was gone as quickly as it came, almost before Deering had finished speaking.

"Don't you want the place?" Finch asked, with a kind of wail of disappointment.

"Why, yes, of course, I *want* it," answered Tony, "but haven't you got sense enough to see, that it isn't a thing a decent chap could work for, much less ask for? Did you think I'd go over to the Doctor and tell him that I think he had better appoint me and let the Gumshoe go? I shouldn't care very much if he did go, but,—who told you about the meeting any way? I can't see why you shouldn't tell me. Was it a fellow?"

"No—"

"A member of the faculty? not Bill? he wouldn't tell a thing like that."

"No—I dunno."

"Yes, you do—did you promise——?"

"No—I—I—happened to hear some of the faculty talking."

"Hear—where?"

"On the campus."

"Overhear, you mean?"

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"Where were the masters you heard talking?" Tony was putting [254] his questions now rapidly and with intention, for he had become suddenly suspicious.

"In the common-room," Finch answered, beginning to shake nervously again.

"Where were you?"

"Outside."

"How could you hear all that outside? By Jove, man, you were under the window listening?" Tony's voice took on a sharp note of contempt.

Finch shook like an aspen leaf.

"Answer me!" demanded Tony. "You weren't *trying* to hear, were you?"

No reply. Poor Jake moistened his dry lips.

"Pah!" exclaimed Deering. "So the fellows are right, are they? you are a sneak?" He turned away in disgust, and started across the room. His hand was on the knob of the door, when Finch threw himself in his way, and grasped him tightly again by the arm.

"For God's sake, Deering," he cried in a queer cracked voice, "don't throw me over. You are the only friend I've got. Don't throw me over. I did it for your sake. God knows I did."

Tony stopped. He was appalled and bewildered by the passion in poor Finch's voice and attitude. He turned back at last, and thrust Finch a little roughly onto the couch. "Sit down there," he said gruffly. "I guess I'd better have it all out of you right now."

"Yes, yes, I'll tell you everything," whimpered Finch. "Don't throw me over."

TONY WAS PUTTING HIS QUESTIONS NOW RAPIDLY AND WITH INTENTION FOR HE HAD BECOME SUSPICIOUS

"Shut up, and stop blubbering like a kid. I won't throw you over. [255]
But just at present I'm mighty disgusted with you, I reckon you know."

Finch drew his coat sleeve across his eyes, and caught a sob or so in his throat. "I'll tell you everything," he said, with a sniffle, "just wait a second."

"All right. And mind you do tell everything, if you ever want me to trust you an inch beyond my nose again," answered Tony. He suspected there was a good deal to tell; in the last few moments a multitude of little incidents flashed into his mind; all were accounted for if Finch *was* a sneak.

"I know it was rotten, Deering," began Finch, "but I couldn't seem to help it."

"Now cut that sort of excuse out. Don't try to defend it. Just tell the truth, will you?"

"Well, I was sitting in the library reading, and the Doctor passed through, and stopped a minute and spoke to me, and told me not to say anything about the letter he wrote me last summer in which he had mentioned you as the leader of the school. He said the appointment wasn't made yet."

"Yes."

"Well, that's all, but I saw him go into the Masters' room, and I guessed they were going to have a meeting to discuss that very thing. It flashed into my head that something was up; that something had gone wrong about your getting it. I couldn't help—I swear to you I couldn't help sneaking outside and trying to hear. The windows were up, and I could hear almost everything that was said inside. As I said, the Doctor——."

"I don't want to hear anything more about that," interrupted [256]
Tony, "I'm not an eavesdropper. I don't give a continental darn what you heard. If I don't get it—all right. If Roylston's queered me, that's his business, I guess. He may think he has a right to. Maybe he has. But just at present, what I am trying to make you see is that what went on in the faculty room isn't your business nor my business, and that to sneak and listen like that is low-down."

Finch, poor chap, did not fully understand what Tony was driving at. "All right, I guess it is," he said, with a bewildered air, "but I thought——"

"I don't care what you thought," said Tony. "Do you see that was the act of a sneak? You called Roylston a sneak earlier this evening —well, whether he ever did a sneaky thing or not, you have just done one, see?"

"Yes, I see, of course, I see; but——."

"Well, if you see, all right. Now there's something else I want to get at. I want to know in what other ways you've been sneaky around school. Did you tell the Head that you had already told me about this letter?"

"No."

"Did he ask you?"

"No—not exactly—but I s'pose he thought I hadn't from my manner."

"I see. Well let's settle one or two other things, Jake. Remember the time that Kit Wilson kicked you out of his room last spring?"

"Yes." Finch was whiter than ever.

“Well, was it true—no, I mean, was Kit right—did you go there to rough-house his room that night?”

“Yes,” breathed Finch. [257]

“Had you been rough-housing his room and desk before, as he thinks you had?”

“Yes.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Tony. “And you lied to me! You let me quarrel with Kit, just because I thought you were innocent and that he had been hard on you and unfair! You let me lose one of my very best friends, just because—by Jove, I don’t understand you. It’s too rotten bad.”

“For God’s sake, Deering,” whimpered Finch, “don’t throw me over!” and then sat, biting the tips of his fingers.

Tony, wavering between anger, disgust and pity, could scarcely trust himself to speak.

At last he asked, “Why didn’t you tell me the truth that night when I asked you? Kit and I had already quarreled, but if I had known then what you had done to him, we could——Why didn’t you tell me the truth?”

“I was afraid you’d throw me over.”

Tony shuddered with an uncontrollable feeling of repulsion. “Why did you want to play such low tricks on Kit?”

“I hated him.”

“Why? Because he opposed your getting into the Dealonian?”

“No, no, not that!” exclaimed Finch passionately. “I didn’t want to get into the Dealonian.”

“Then, why?” Tony was nonplussed.

“Because he had broke with you.”

At last to his humiliation—it dawned on Tony, the depth, the [258] tragedy, of Finch’s affection; the complexity of his twisted, dwarfed nature; and anger and contempt were swallowed up in pity. He stood for a long time before the miserable lad without speaking.

“Well, Jake,” he said at length, “it is pretty bad—awful bad. I just hate to think of it.”

“What can I do?” asked Finch piteously.

“I don’t know what you can do. I want to think it all out before I talk with you any more. But if I were you I’d get down on my knees and ask God to forgive me.” Tony again put his hand on the doorknob. “I am going. I have got to think it out. I reckon you can see that you have been the cause of a lot of trouble. Don’t worry about me, though. I won’t throw you over in the way you think I might. But I can’t talk about it any more now. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” said Finch, with a gulp.

He sat for a long time on the edge of his couch with his face in his hands, staring blankly in front of him. The world upon which his soul looked out was as bare, as comfortless as his little room. He was dumbly miserable. He knew he had hurt Deering, but just how, he could not see. The fear that possessed him chiefly was that Deering would throw him over. “And I did it because of him,” he would say now and then between his clenched teeth. He could not understand Tony’s horror of the deceit, he could not fathom his unwillingness to take advantage of the information which he himself had risked so much to obtain. He knew of course that he had done a wicked thing, but the wickedness seemed almost justified because [259] the temptation had been so strong. He was sorriest about Wilson. As for the eavesdropping—when he thought of that, he clenched his fists. If Roylston were successful! I may be a sneak, he thought, but so is he. All was fair in war—and if Tony didn’t get the Head Prefectship, whatever Tony might say or feel, war it should be. “I’ll show him,” he muttered, conjuring up the vision of Mr. Roylston reading *The Spectacle* to his colleagues. “If he queers Deering, I’ll get even with him whatever happens!”

When Tony returned to Number Five study he found that the boys had left and that Jimmie had gone to bed. He undressed slowly, trying to think out the situation. Of course, he had misjudged Finch almost from the first, he realized that. The others were right. He was a difficult case, too difficult for a place like Deal. He could not have believed, had he not heard it from the boy’s own lips, that he could stoop to such methods for revenge. But there it was! He had an actual situation to deal with; a living soul, just so tempted, so weak, so corrupted by misery, to help or hurt now by fresh

judgments, which might be right or wrong. That he had been too generous before toward Finch, was no reason, however, with Tony, even for a moment, why he should be ungenerous now. He must do his best. He hoped Finch would be willing for him to talk it all over with Mr. Morris.

After a time, as he lay in bed, sleepless and still feverishly thinking, his attention wandered from Finch to his own case, to the facts, that, much as he wished to close his mind to them, were very much there. It was hard to believe that Mr. Roylston was so bitterly [260] hostile, so absolutely unforgiving. His own conscience had long ceased from troubling him about *The Spectacle*, and he wondered if the Head could take Mr. Roylston's point of view. He had forgiven himself in that matter so completely, that he could hardly realize how it still rankled with the offended master, how it might impress others. At last he fell asleep, quite assured that things would right themselves and confident that on the morrow he would learn that he had been appointed Head Prefect.

He saw Finch in the morning on the way to Chapel, and tried to greet him naturally. Finch seemed stolid, unresponsive, but not keenly conscious, as Tony had supposed he would appear, of what had taken place between them the night before.

Finch had spent a sleepless night. But now he had set his teeth and was waiting. He was staking his all, as it were, on the Head proving *fair* as he called it to himself. He was staking his reform, his remorse, his repentance on the issue which, beyond his control now by fair means or foul, depended on the Head.

The morning hymn was "I need Thee every hour," and Finch joined in it. He dumbly felt he was willing to bribe heaven to gain his end. He looked about the Chapel, and noted that Mr. Roylston was not present, and his heart leaped with the thought that the master had lost his case, perhaps even, Finch passionately hoped, the Head had accepted his resignation. He tried, but he could not listen to the reading of the scriptures and the prayers. Then the Grace was said, and the boys were settling back in their seats into [261] attitudes of attention, for the Doctor was still at the reading-desk as if he had something to say to them.

"There is still"—the Doctor's voice seemed to Finch to come from a great distance—"there is still an important appointment to be announced. The Head Prefect for the year will be——"

There was a slight disturbance in the back of the Chapel—some one had dropped a hymn-book, and the Doctor paused, it seemed to Finch for an intolerable age.

"Edward Austin Clavering of the Sixth Form."

Immediately there was a little buzz; then the boys began pouring out of the Chapel. Finch sat still. Outside he heard Doc Thorn calling for a cheer for Clavering. At last, he pulled himself together and went out. On the gravel walk boys were still congregated; he passed Tony who was shaking hands at the moment with Ned Clavering. "I say, Jake; wait a second!" Tony called, catching sight of him; but Finch, making no sign that he had heard, bent his head and hurried on.

Jimmie Lawrence, however, was waiting for Tony until with good grace he had finished his congratulations to Clavering. A good many, as they poured out of the Chapel that morning, watched with curious interest the meeting between the successful and the unsuccessful candidate. But from Tony's manner, the most critical could not have imagined a shade of envy in his cordiality.

"It is a downright shame!" exclaimed Jimmie, when at last Tony joined him. "It is an outrage. I can't understand it—why—!"

"Careful, Jim, careful. Deuce take it, I do feel a bit sore, but then [262] I reckon Ned Clavering has as good a right to it as I have."

"Perhaps he has, other things being equal; but they are not equal. You were nominated, the school wanted you, everybody expected you would get it: there is not a single reason why you shouldn't have it."

"Perhaps there is," protested Tony. "We've all been in scrapes now and then. We weren't always the angels we are now, Jim."

"Likely not, but I notice they didn't hold up my ante-angelic days against me. Why, you aren't even a prefect, do you know it?"

"By Jove, I'm not, am I?" exclaimed Deering. That fact until then had not occurred to him.

"There's something fishy behind it, mark my words. I wish we

could find out what it is."

"Perhaps we shall," said Tony. "But anyhow, I'm not going into a grouch over the affair."

"Nobody wants you to, but I wish you would show a little more sense of the rotten way you have been treated. By Jove, Tonio, I have it! it's the Gumshoe!"

Tony found no answer to this exclamation, but Jimmie, excited by his theory, did not wait for one. "D'ye remember Reggie Carroll telling us that the Gumshoe would get even?"

"When?"

"Why, after the show-up he got when you and Kit licked Ducky Thornton and he took you two to the Head for breaking his gating. And also after the time Gumshoe soured on you about the Soft-toed [263] Sammy billet-doux."

"Yes, I remember something of the sort. Perhaps he is responsible. But anyway, kiddo, I'm dished, and that's a fact."

"Oh, that Kit was one of us now, boy; wouldn't we get even?"

Tony sighed. "I reckon we would. But he isn't!"

"No, worse luck! I wish——"

What Jimmie wished was left unsaid, for at that moment Doctor Forester caught up with them, and called to Deering. "Will you please stop at the Rectory, Anthony, for a few moments? I want a word with you."

"Certainly, sir," said Tony and waited for the Head, as Jimmie, with a "So long," hurried on to a first hour recitation.

The Doctor was very cordial in his manner to Tony, and waved him to a comfortable chair in his study before he opened his conversation.

"I dare say," he began, "that you, as were others, were somewhat surprised to learn who is to be Head Prefect this year."

Tony flushed and looked uncomfortable.

"I do not mean," went on the Head quickly, "to suggest that you had no occasion for surprise. It is an open secret, I fancy, that you were slated for the position."

"Of course," said Tony, with some embarrassment, "I had some reason to suppose that I was being considered."

"More than that, I am frank to say," continued the Doctor, "I had [264] quite determined on your appointment. I wish you to understand that I changed my mind strictly with the understanding that the reasons for the change should be thoroughly explained to you."

"Yes, sir."

"I wish you to know that there is but one reason why I have not chosen you for Head of the School. The mild or mischievous infractions of discipline in your younger days, I do not take into account. You were concerned, I have learned, in fact, you were the author of a squib in which one of the senior masters was held up to ridicule."

"Yes, sir."

"Now," continued the Head, finding it a little hard to word his phrases exactly, "I agree with Mr. Roylston, the master so caricatured, that that was most reprehensible. I do not suppose you have any defense for it."

"None, sir. I can only say, while I now see how it was calculated to be taken as an insult, I did it simply for fun."

"Precisely. It was not a matter that I myself, taking all things into consideration, should have regarded as a capital crime, but it has caused deep offense to the master involved and he has not seen his way to forgetting or perhaps even to forgiving it. In fact, because of it, he has protested emphatically against your appointment."

"Yes, sir."

"I repeat, I should myself have overlooked such an offense—I should have accepted your apology in the spirit in which I think it was given. But as Mr. Roylston is unwilling to do so, I do not feel [265] that I should be justified in overruling his protest. The same reason disqualified you as a prefect."

Tony was silent.

"I need not point out to you," the Doctor continued, "that while I believe Mr. Roylston is severe, that I do not think he is acting with any conscious injustice."

"No, sir. I recognize his right to protest against my appointment.

I have not complained of your decision, sir."

"No, I know that you have not. I felt it due to you that you should understand perfectly what interfered with your appointment. I know also that I can count on you for as loyal help as though you were a prefect."

"Thank you very much for what you have said to me, Doctor Forester. I appreciate it. I am very sorry that I hurt Mr. Roylston in the way I did. Of course—I don't say this as a defense for writing what I did—I did not mean it to come under his eyes. I apologized sincerely, and though I know that Mr. Roylston did not believe in my sincerity, I can see perhaps that it was difficult for him to do so. As for my being loyal, I can't see that this makes the slightest difference one way or the other. I should like to have been Head Prefect, but I should never have thought of being chosen except for my election as president of the Dealonian and my nomination by last year's prefects. I think Clavering will make a fine Head of the School."

"I trust," said Doctor Forester, "that you will not bear ill-will toward Mr. Roylston. He is acting from conscientious motives, I am sure."

"I shall try not to, sir." [266]

With that Tony rose, shook hands with the Head Master, and took his leave.

Doctor Forester watched him as he walked across the campus, at a brisk pace, head up, shoulders back. "There," he said, turning to his wife who had just slipped into the room, "there goes a rare boy, my dear. He has made it harder for me to do my duty than any one I have ever known."

"Tony Deering make it hard for anyone to do his duty! Why, my dear, did you not appoint him Head Prefect? Every one wanted him; every one expected that he would be."

"All but one of us, dear, who had a strong, if not a fine reason, for objecting to him; but I would rather not go into it, if you do not mind. Mark my words, that boy now is the strongest boy in the school—all the stronger for not having the position he ought to have."

Mrs. Forester smiled. "That is a comfort, at least, to know. But I tell you, Henry, if we women had the appointment to make, it would take more than one strong reason to prevent our giving Tony Deering anything he ought to have."

"Well, it is fortunate then, my dear, that you women have other things to do."

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[267]

CHAPTER XX

FINCH'S HOUR

For our friends the incident was closed. Jimmie took his seat in the prefect meetings on Sunday nights and solemnly assisted, with increasing interest, in "running the school," as the members of those conclaves were accustomed to term their labors. Tony acquiesced in the inevitable with a good grace, and beyond discussing the matter in its various aspects, with Jimmie and to some extent with Mr. Morris, who was handicapped in expressing his opinion by professional loyalty, he kept his mouth shut.

Others did not. Decisions of such a nature, important to the life of a school, are rarely long kept secret. And in this instance, the Head Master did not resent the facts being known, though he himself of course maintained an absolute reserve. The facts were known sooner or later, and with a fair degree of accuracy. And the knowledge increased neither Mr. Roylston's popularity nor his peace of mind. Indeed he found himself increasingly unable to extract comfort from the reflection that a deserved punishment had been fearlessly administered or that in being just he was as wise as if he had also been merciful. During that term Mr. Roylston had many bad quarters of an hour.

As for Tony, as Doctor Forester had predicted, the loss of the [268]
Head Prefectship added to rather than diminished from his strength among his schoolmates. He became, quite naturally and spontaneously, the unofficial adviser of the prefect body, and particularly of Clavering, who made a point of consulting him upon all important matters that came to the prefects' notice. The effect of this generosity on Clavering's part was to reveal the two boys to each other and to establish a firm friendship between them.

Clavering was a heavy, solid, serious-minded boy, of a mighty frame and muscle, but slow, patient and cautious in his thought and emotions. Until Tony had become fairly intimate with him, he had never appreciated his classmate's deep and earnest character; just as Clavering, until he got behind Tony's light-hearted genial pleasantness of manner and speech, had not realized that there was anything there worth while,—any seriousness of purpose, soundness of feeling, or loyalty to principle. He had taken Tony superficially, and was surprised in the course of the term to find how much he had grown to like him; how much, too, he was depending on Tony's judgment and feeling in the various matters with which the Head Prefect in a large school may have to deal.

"I'm slow; you're quick," he said to Tony one night. "I'm fairly sure, I suppose, when I make up my mind,—but it takes me the deuce of a long time to see things straight. You seem to see into a situation, to know a fellow, right off."

"Well, I dare say I'm quick, but I make lots of mistakes, you [269]
know," laughed Tony, pleased with the compliment, especially coming from a boy who never paid them.

"They don't seem to count for much then," was Clavering's reply. He forgot that one of Tony's mistakes accounted for himself rather than Tony being the Head of the School.

"That is more comforting as a general proposition than as an afterthought," said Tony ambiguously, and turned the subject of conversation to football.

In this field Clavering seemed an expert. And such indeed he proved himself again on the gridiron that fall, for Deal turned out one of the best teams that Jack Stenton could remember, and that was paying it very high praise. They won all their games, including the one with Boxford by a score of 24 to 0, which was the largest on record. Clavering was a tower of strength to the team, and Tony, who had lost nothing of his fleetness, again distinguished himself by some brilliant, if not quite such dramatic runs as twice before he had made.

Before the boys realized it the football season was over, and the Sixth Form were looking forward to their last Christmas vacation of school days. This time Tony took Jimmie Lawrence to Low Deering with him, and had the keen pleasure of initiating his best friend into all the associations and delights of his home and country.

The Deering fortunes were in better shape, particularly as Victor

had kept his promise, and was devoting himself with industrious zeal to the plantation. The old general took a great fancy to Jimmie, particularly he found a bond between him and the boy in mutual [270] literary tastes. The old man could not lead a very intellectual life, but he reverenced it and longed for it. The promise of Jimmie's appreciation and powers was to him peculiarly delightful. The boys had a capital vacation, so that they were sorry when it came to an end and they were back at Deal again for the long winter term.

Since his confession Finch avoided Deering. He felt self-conscious about his sentimental outbreak against being "thrown over." Tony certainly had not thrown him over, but he did not see his way to be with Finch anything more than persistently patient and kind. Only once afterward was the subject of their conversation of the night of the faculty-meeting reopened.

"Of course, Jake," Tony said, "you see, just as well as I do, how absolutely wrong your actions were. I am going to leave it entirely to you to set yourself right with Wilson—right to the extent, at least, of letting him know that you are sorry. He has been mighty decent to keep quiet."

"Oh, he hasn't kept quiet," Finch rejoined sullenly. "Most of your crowd—of his crowd, anyway, know more or less about it. I have seen that all along."

"Well, perhaps they do; I have not heard them speak of it anyway. Kit can't have told it very generally, or I would have heard."

"Oh, I don't know—not after the row you had with him about me. They all like you too much, except Wilson, to give you a chance to get sore again. They don't think me worth bothering about."

"Well, even so—you have given some cause for that attitude now. [271] But I tell you what, I want to get right with Kit again. Not, old chap, at the price of throwing you over—don't think that!—but, on the other hand, I don't want to make keeping on good terms with you the price of Kit's friendship. There isn't need. And can't you see that I cannot be the one to tell Kit the—to tell Kit about you?"

Finch did not see, but he kept silent. He appreciated neither Tony's deep feeling for his friend nor Tony's delicate consideration for him. He was thinking dolefully of just how miserable and unfortunate and unlovable he was. Yet, with all the ardor of his intense famished little soul, he clung to Deering's patient tolerance, and mutely resolved to give him no chance of "flinging him off." But as for going to Kit with the truth, that was an act of which he was incapable, an act of which he was even incapable of perceiving the point.

"I'm just worthless, Deering," he said at last miserably, "I'll be thankful when it's all over."

"Now, cut that out, Jake. Get out and play with somebody. Don't mope round all the time; and come in often and see us. Jimmie is glad to have you."

"Thanks," said Finch. He longed to open again the conversation about the Head Prefectship, and learn from Tony what he really felt about that, but with dull shame for his baseness, he did not dare. And as for Tony that was a subject that he felt he never could discuss with Finch again.

Time drifted on. Finch continued to worship Deering, but he avoided him more than he had done before, and lived his own lonely, unhappy life, as many a boy had done before him at school, [272] with all that young world around him, gay, spirited, uncaring. Morris cared, but to his advances Finch proved adamant. As the term advanced, in the inevitable distraction to other interests and pleasures, it was only natural that the attention Tony had concentrated on Finch at the opening of the term, should have slacked. After a time, growing used to seeing less of him, even Tony began to feel that Finch was getting on well enough, and ceased for the most part to worry about him.

Finch had not forgotten his grudge against Mr. Roylston, but rather nursed it with the tenacity of such a nature, and took a gloomy pleasure in planning from time to time impossible schemes of revenge. For a long time Deering's tranquillity with regard to the Head Prefectship disarmed Jacob. It was hard to resent for your hero what he himself did not resent. But he nursed his grudge.

It happened along in January that the prefects had occasion to deal with some disciplinary irregularities. Being governed by Clavering's advice, they frankly mismanaged the case and involved

two or three boys in a somewhat unfair predicament. Clavering, realizing that his judgment had been at fault, appealed to Deering, who had the good luck to make a suggestion that speedily set matters straight and saved the school from rather a mess. The boys talked over the affair quite generally, and as often happens, they criticised Clavering somewhat sharply, spoke indeed more harshly, most of them, than they really felt. Finch overheard a discussion of the incident in the common-rooms which was concluded by Teddy [273] Lansing affirming rather loudly and tactlessly, “Well, it was a rotten roast when Deering did not get the Head Prefectship in the first place. Clavering is a blundering old cow.”

“That it was—a rotten roast!” came in a sharp staccato from a near-by corner. Finch had spoken, impulsively, and quite unusually drawing attention to himself.

“Yeaaaaa! Yeaaaa!” was returned in full chorus which half jeered at the boy, half applauded his sentiments.

“Bully for you, Pinch!” shouted Teddy. “You stick up for your friend, don’t you?”

“Friend or no friend,” answered Finch, with unwonted boldness, “it was a roast. He was cheated out of it.”

“Guess he was,” agreed another boy. “How’d it come about, d’ye know?”

“Yes, I know,” Finch answered, “but I’m not saying.”

“Oh, inside information, eh?”

“If you want to call it that.”

“Who from—Tony Deering?”

Finch turned to his questioner with a vicious snarl. “No, it wasn’t from Tony Deering. He don’t care. It doesn’t make any difference to him, but it makes a lot of difference to the school.”

“Well, who cooked his goose?”

“Who cooks everybody’s goose?” demanded Finch.

“Well, I guess, Pinch my boy, it don’t need a prophet to answer that question,” Teddy responded. “Very likely it was the mild and [274] gentle Ebenezer Gumshoe Roylston. You’re right, I guess. But let me tell you,” he added, as he pulled Finch aside, “Tony’s the last person in the world who would thank you for discussing his affairs in a crowd.”

Finch suddenly realized the truth of this remark, hung his head, and sidled away. But this outbreak on Tony’s behalf had excited him. It brought back all the old hopes and fears, the old pangs of disappointment and chagrin, and renewed his rage against Mr. Roylston.

Not long after the conversation which has just been reported, the mid-year examinations were held. Finch, who still had difficulty with his Latin, had studied particularly hard, and had practically crammed by heart the translation of several difficult passages from Cicero’s *Orations* upon which the Sixth Form were to be examined. As soon as he entered the examination room, over which Mr. Roylston was presiding, and had looked over his paper, noting that two of the passages he had so poled up were on it, he quickly wrote them out on a separate piece of paper, intending to write them into his examination book at his leisure; then he bent laboriously to his task of working out the paper.

Mr. Roylston, an argus-eyed examiner, eventually observed from his desk that Finch was copying something into his examination book from a detached slip of paper. He strolled leisurely and softly about the room and advanced down the aisle where Finch was sitting from behind. As he reached the boy, he glanced down over his shoulder, and saw what he was doing. He suspected, not without [275] reason, that Finch was not strictly honest in his work, and the present circumstance, it must be confessed, had all the appearance of cheating.

Without warning he reached over Finch’s shoulder, and took the examination book and the sheet of paper on which the translated passages of Cicero were written from the hands of the astonished and frightened boy. “You may leave the room,” he said, “and report to me in my study to-night at eight o’clock.”

Finch looked up at him wildly. “What’s the matter? What are you doing that for?” he exclaimed excitedly.

“You understand perfectly well,” the master replied sharply. “You are excused from this examination. Leave the room! Do you

understand me?”

“No—!” began Finch, flushing crimson.

“Go!” repeated Mr. Roylston, pointing to the door, heedless of the excited attention of the boys around.

The color fled from Finch’s face as swiftly as it had come. He rose, threw down his pencil, and dashed out of the room. Mr. Roylston folded the papers, and then composed the schoolroom with a glance.

Finch was not seen about the school again that day. At nightfall he returned from the Woods where he had taken refuge, bought himself a bun or so at the Pie-house, for he was nearly famished, and having thus made a frugal supper, at eight o’clock he presented himself at the door of Mr. Roylston’s study in Howard House.

The master had no doubt in his mind that he had detected a flagrant case of cheating, a crime that was above all others [276] abominable in his eyes. He bade Finch enter, when he heard his soft knock at his door, and then let him stand awkwardly a moment or so while he examined him critically. The haggard face, the hunted look, seemed to him those of a criminal.

“Ah!” he said at last, “you are here.”

“Yes—I am here,” Finch answered sullenly. “What do you want with me!”

“Don’t forget yourself. Incidentally, I may say, that you have involved yourself in an excessive number of late marks, if not in more serious trouble, by your prolonged absence to-day.”

“I’ll attend to that. What do you want with me?”

“In the first place, and instantly,” said Mr. Roylston in acid tones, “I want a respectful demeanor.”

Finch bit his lips. “I’m sorry.... But I’ll take what’s coming to me for being away to-day. You told me to report to you at eight o’clock. I am here.”

“Yes,” observed the master, “you are here. To come to the point ——”

“Yes, yes,—why did you take my examination book?”

Mr. Roylston had not gauged the boy’s attitude as yet. He supposed he would lie—that kind of a boy usually did. He sought Finch’s weak troubled eyes with a piercing glance. “I took it,” he said, in a cold judicial voice, “because you were cheating.”

“I was not cheating!” Finch exclaimed passionately.

Mr. Roylston smiled patiently. “The evidence is sufficiently strong as scarcely to admit of mistake. You may affect to deny it; but [277] I tell you candidly, young man, I have suspected you before; and further, you will scarcely be surprised to hear that I have very little confidence in your word.”

Finch gulped. “I was not cheating!” he repeated, but in trembling tones. For the moment despair got the better of the determination in which he had come to keep that appointment. He had cheated before. A wave of emotion swept over him, and he swayed for a moment from sheer physical weakness. What difference did it make? he felt. He did not care. A wild impulse seized him to tell the truth boldly. He would tell everything, confess everything, but about that one thing he would be believed. It was the end, he knew; but he would not have the end come and himself be involved, convicted, of what was not true. There was enough that was. The master was looking at him coldly, but for the moment was saying nothing. Finch put his hand out to a near-by table to steady himself.

“Ah!” exclaimed Mr. Roylston, a gleam of triumph in his sharp black eyes, “I see that you do not mean to dispute me.”

“Do you want the truth?” cried Finch, meeting the master’s eye again with a fierce look.

“Naturally.”

“Then you shall have it!”

Finch threw back his head; he expanded in body and soul; and kept his eyes fastened on Mr. Roylston’s countenance in which he was to see a variety of emotions depicted in the next few moments. He felt his hour was come.

“You shall have it!” he repeated, moistening his parched lips. [278]

To Mr. Roylston’s fascinated gaze, the boy seemed transformed; a soul, misshaped, distorted, hitherto utterly abased, had risen in that despised body, and was leaping forth from the boy’s eyes to grapple with his own soul. He had a sickening sense that he was

about to pass through an unseemly scene, the most unseemly and disagreeable scene of his life, and that he was powerless to avert it.

"You shall have it," repeated Finch again. "I have cheated—cheated—cheated—day after day—day after day. And I'll tell you why. Because, slave as I would, work as I could for you, I never got one mark of credit, one word of praise, one syllable of recognition from your cold hateful mouth. I tried like a dog to do my best for you—it was poor, but it was my best! but it was no use. From the day I got to this place you have hated and despised me. Oh, I have seen it, and knew it, and cursed you, cursed you for it. You wouldn't let yourself be fair. Do you know, I've lived in hell in this school. And at last, I determined to cheat you, to pay you back in the only dirty way I knew how. But to-day, something—I don't know what—it wasn't fear of you—*something* made me honest. The paper you took from me I had written out from memory after I got into the room."

"Stick to facts," said the master.

"I am sticking to facts. Believe it or not—it's true. That's true, though I who tell it am a cheat and a liar and a sneak. I have been all that—not because I was made that way or wanted to be, I don't [279] think, but because I couldn't get a chance to be myself, couldn't get a show. And you—you kept me from being decent as much as anybody else, as much as the biggest bully in the school. You want me to stick to facts. All right, I'll stick to 'em. I have hated you. I have hated you so that many a time I've wanted to kill you. And because I couldn't think of any way to fight you in the open, I have been low and vile, and fought you in the dark. You thought Kit Wilson rough-housed your rooms last year, didn't you? That's the way you suspect people without evidence, and act on your suspicions and can't hide 'em when you don't dare to act. I hate Wilson too, so I was glad when you thought he was the guilty one. But I did it, I tell you. I rough-housed your rooms and hid your papers and messed up your desk drawers and books. I couldn't stand it. I can't stand it any longer. You'll have me fired, I know that—and I don't care. But for once in your life you are hearing what is thought of you. You're hated, hated, hated!"

The boy paused for a moment, out of breath, still clutching the table desperately. Mr. Roylston tried but could not speak. A thousand emotions stung him to the quick; and deep within, there was a sense, outrageous as was this attack, that he was at the bar of an avenging justice, paying with bitter humiliation for the lack of charity of which the boy's wild words convicted him. At last he found his voice, but he was still under the spell of the strange situation.

"I will tolerate this extraordinary conversation a moment longer. [280] Why have you so viciously hated me?"

"Why—because you are cruel," cried Finch, recovering himself, "because you are pitiless, because you do wicked, unkind things in the name of justice. Yes, yes, you shall have it all. You have never given me one chance, and you were glad—*glad* to-day when you thought you had caught me at last. You are always suspecting, suspecting evil—until at last your suspicions find it or create it. You have scared me, hurt me, hounded me—I don't know how you do it, but you do do it—and, thank God, you'll never do it again. Of course, you'll have me fired now, I know that, and I don't care. And I deserve to be. I ain't fit to be here. But it's you as much as anyone else that's kept me from being fit. I am just full of hate and malice. Don't I know it? Don't I suffer from it?"

"Aside from my severity—or my cruelty, as you are pleased to call it,—for what else do you blame me?"

"Above all," cried Finch, and a note of exultation rang in his voice, "above all for the way you've treated Anthony Deering. I know him, and he is the soul of honor, he has a heart. You or I aren't fit to unlace his boots. You kept him from getting what he deserved—the Head Prefectship."

"Deering told you that?"

"No, Deering didn't tell me that. Deering's not that sort, don't you know it, can't you believe it? He isn't a sneak; but I am; and I listened under the windows of the faculty room the night you spoke [281] against him, the first night of this year. And what had he done against you except what half the fellows do to most of the masters more or less all the time? But you wouldn't forgive him, though he was fool enough to be sorry for what he had done, for making fun of you. But you couldn't be kind. I listened—I heard it all. You saved

that paper, and bided your time, that's what you did—waited your chance to get even. Do you know that many a night I've laid in bed and prayed for courage to get up and come over and do some terrible thing to you. I've actually wanted to kill you. But I don't want to now. The bitterest medicine you can take is to have, for once in your life, some one else, though it's only a worthless rotten chap like me, tell you to your face that you are cruel and unkind and that he despises you."

At last Finch stopped. He was trembling violently, his cheeks were blazing, his eyes feverish and wild, but his soul was filled with a sense of triumph.

For a moment Mr. Roylston covered his face with his hand. Then he rose up quickly, master of himself again.

"You are excited and irresponsible."

"I'm excited," said Finch, "but I know perfectly well what I'm saying."

"Of course," said Mr. Roylston, "if you are not suddenly gone insane, you must leave this school at once. You will come with me instantly to Doctor Forester."

"Oh, I'm ready to be fired."

Mr. Roylston made no reply, but opened the study door, and motioned to the boy to follow him. They left Howard House and [282] walked rapidly across the quadrangle to the Rectory. It was a warm humid night, after a week of intense cold. There was a pale young moon in the western sky.

As they reached the foot of the Rectory steps, Finch turned. "I'm not going in," he exclaimed.

"Pardon me, you are, and at once."

"I'm not. This is the end. I am done with it. I'm going to chuck it all. Say what you please, the time for browbeating, scaring me is gone. I'm off."

"Where are you going?" cried the master in alarm.

"It doesn't matter. You will never see me again." With that he turned, and ran rapidly across the campus down the hill.

Mr. Roylston strained his eyes for a moment after the fleeing figure, then ran hastily up the steps, and knocked at the door of the Doctor's study.

Doctor Forester himself opened the door, and drew the agitated master within. Deering, Lawrence and Clavering were sitting before the study fire. They had risen and were standing.

"What is the matter?" asked the Head quickly.

Mr. Roylston forgot the boys' presence. "A serious thing—a very serious thing. Finch, just now, in my study, attacked me with the most wanton, intemperate abuse. I brought him to you—but here—at the very door he turned and fled...."

"Yes—fled—why—where?"

"It is very serious, I think. I think it would be better if these boys went after him at once. I fear something terrible may happen. I will [283] explain later." He sank exhausted into a chair.

"Which way has he gone, sir?" asked Tony.

"Across the campus—down the hill. Hurry, Deering, hurry! else something terrible may happen."

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[284]

CHAPTER XXI

SELF-SACRIFICE

It was a warm muggy night. A pale moon shone dimly through the mists, and the buildings of the school cast long shadows across the campus, giving a weird uncanny effect to the scene, of which the boys were immediately conscious as they came out of the Doctor's study.

They waited for a moment outside, straining their eyes for a sight of Finch. Suddenly Jimmie discerned a dark figure just disappearing over the brow of the hill. "There he goes," he cried, "over the hills towards the beach."

"All right—after him!" urged Tony, and set the pace at a rapid trot. Lawrence and Clavering kept close behind.

In a few moments they had reached the brow of the hill over which Lawrence had seen the figure disappear. They paused for a moment to look about them. Out of range of the lights of the school, the mists were less confusing and the moonlight more effective. Tony was searching the beach with his eyes. "I can't make out a thing," he said. "Do you see anything of him, Ned?"

"Not a thing," Clavering answered. "Are you sure, Jim, you saw him a moment ago?"

"Dead sure. Look there! isn't that him?"

"Where?" [285]

"Down by the road—near the marshes." He pointed eagerly.

"Yes, yes," cried Tony. "Come on. He's no good at running. We ought to catch him before he reaches the Pond. If he gets to the Woods, there's no knowing where to find him."

They started down the hill at a rapid pace.

"He would have to go round the Pond to get into the Woods," said Clavering as they ran. "The ice is rotten; he can't cross the Pond. So let's go to the north and cut him off."

"You do that, Ned," suggested Tony. "Cut in at the farmhouse by the head of the Pond; Jim and I will keep right on. He may never stop to think that the ice has gone rotten."

"All right. Look, he's slowing up." They could see with fair distinctness.

Finch, for it was he, had reached the foot of the hill. He paused for a moment, seeming to hesitate between the Old Beach Road and the path across the marshes; and apparently chose the latter, for he crossed the road, and climbed the stone wall. Ignorant that he was so closely followed, he had not been running very fast, so that our friends were rapidly gaining upon him. By the time they had reached the foot of the hill, he was only halfway across the marshes; and was forced to pick his way, for he was not very familiar with the ground, and was handicapped by his frequent stumbling against a stone. In some places the ground was hard and frozen, in others it was wet and muddy.

"Cut across now to the head of the Pond," said Tony, as the three [286] clambered over the stone wall which divided the marshes from the road. "We can catch him all right."

Clavering diverged, as Deering suggested, and the other two kept on directly in Finch's track. It was difficult to run over the uneven ground, and once Jimmie tripped and fell over a boulder, so that they were delayed for a moment. The marshes were about two hundred yards wide, and ended at the high bank which had been built up around Beaver Pond, which was used as a reservoir. Beyond loomed the dark ridges of Lovel's Woods, ghostly in the pale misty moonlight.

As Finch emerged at last from the uneven, reed-choked ground of the marshes, Tony and Jimmie were scarcely fifty yards behind him. Suddenly he heard the sound of their pattering feet, and turned and stood still like a startled deer to listen. Then, as he made out the dark forms so little behind him, he ran rapidly up the steep bank of the Pond.

"Jake, Jake, wait for me!" Tony called. "It's Deering—wait a second!"

Finch now on the top of the bank, stopped again. Our two friends out of breath, paused at the bottom. Hardly a dozen yards divided

them.

"Wait a second! What's your hurry?" Tony repeated, starting forward again, but at that very moment his foot caught in a loose stone and he went sprawling, and Jimmie, too late to turn aside, fell on top of him. Finch did not move, but waited a moment, while the two picked themselves up. No damage was done, but they were windless.

"Who are you?" Finch called down. [287]

"It's me—Tony Deering."

Again they started to climb the bank. Finch stooped quickly and picked up a couple of enormous stones.

"Stop there!" he cried. "If you come up that bank, I'll fire this at your head. I mean it."

The two pursuers stopped involuntarily.

"Throw that rock down. What's the matter with you?" cried Tony sharply.

"It don't make any difference. What are you following me for? What do you want with me?"

"I want to know what on earth you are cutting out for like this. What's the matter? we're not going to hurt you."

"No, I know you're not. Mind—don't take a step, or I'll fire this at your head. I've chucked the whole thing. I'm clearing out, d'ye hear? I won't be stopped."

"Look here, Jake; you're crazy. Don't act like——"

"Maybe I am, but that don't alter the fact that you are not coming up that bank without getting this in your head. I won't be followed."

"For goodness' sake, Jake, listen to reason." Tony began to advance cautiously.

"Back!" cried Finch. "Get back, if you've anything to say." And he poised the rock threateningly.

Tony stopped a moment, willing to accomplish by persuasion what he was determined to effect by force if need be. "All right," he agreed. "We'll cry a truce for a minute. Don't be an ass, now—tell me what's the trouble and where you are cutting out to."

"Who sent you after me?" demanded Finch. [288]

"Mr. Roylston came——"

"Pah!" Jake uttered an exclamation of profound disgust.

"Mr. Roylston," Tony repeated, "burst into Doctor Forester's study, and said that you had been abusing him, and that you had lit out some place, and then he came near falling into a faint. So we started after you. This is no way to——"

"Well, I don't care whether it's a way or not," interrupted Finch. "I'm done with the school. I'm chucking it."

"Well, for goodness' sake, don't do it in a fool way like this. Come back and take your medicine like a man."

"I'm tired of taking medicine," Finch replied bitterly. "I've taken all I ever mean to in that school, anyway."

"Where are you going?"

"That's my affair."

"Well, come back, and you can go off decently to-morrow."

"No—I'd back down to-morrow like the shivering scared fool I've always been. To-night, I'm up to it. I'm going now—to-night."

"Where?"

"Oh, I dunno—it don't make any difference—away from here."

"Look here, Jake; that's a pretty mean way to treat me—to say nothing of the school."

"Well, I'm sorry if you feel that way. But I don't owe the school anything."

"Yes, you do, a lot; the Doctor—Bill——" [289]

"Back!" cried Finch sharply. "Don't try to sneak up on me. Let me alone. Maybe I'll write and let you know where I am. But I am going to cut out to-night."

Tony glanced at Jimmie who was close by his side. "Let's risk it, Jim," he whispered, "he can only hit one of us, I reckon." "All right—heave ahead!" Jimmie responded in a low tone.

Without wasting further words the two boys began to dash up the steep bank.

"Get down there!" Finch yelled. "I'm going to throw." He raised his arm, but something paralyzed his vicious intention. It seemed to

him that he tried to throw and could not. The big stone fell crashing from his hand, and rolled harmlessly down the bank. Finch turned, and with a cry sprang toward the icy surface of the Pond. When the boys got to the top of the bank, he was already a dozen feet out on the Pond.

"For God's sake, Jake, don't try to cross the Pond. The ice is rotten." Tony and Jimmie were now at the edge of the shore. "The ice is rotten." Deering repeated, "it can't hold you."

"I'm all right enough, I guess," Finch called back. "I'm light enough. So long!"

The two boys stood breathless, watching the retreating figure.

"What'll we do," exclaimed Jimmie, turning a ghastly face to his friend. "It won't hold him."

"No, I know it won't.... Jake! Jake!" Tony called.

There was no reply. "Quick!" exclaimed Deering, "get those [290]
planks there—we'll run 'em along the ice, and have something to hold to if we go in. We've got to follow. Quick, Jim!"

They dashed to a point a few yards up the shore where some heavy planks had been placed by the skaters early in the season to serve as seats in putting on and taking off their skates. It was the work of a second to rip up two of them, and slide them out on the ice in the direction Finch had gone.

By this time the runaway boy was about twenty yards from shore, he had stopped for the moment and was watching them curiously. When he saw them slide the planks out, he started again, heading for the opposite bank from which the dark woods loomed up. They could see him distinctly, trying to slide, his foot catching every second in the soft ice.

Suddenly there was a cry. "There he goes!" cried Jimmie, as Finch disappeared beneath the ice.

They pushed breathlessly, incautiously forward, sending the planks on ahead of them. Finch rose in the middle of the great hole that his plunge had made. They could hear him sputter and see him splash helpless in the pool of dark water and broken bits of rotten ice. He could swim, and had got to the edge of the circle of water, and was clutching desperately at the firmer ice. But each time it gave way, enlarging the hole, but bringing the boy very little nearer his would-be rescuers.

"Stick to it, Jake!" Tony called. "We'll get you out, if you can hold out. Quick, Jim. Slide the plank out."

On they went, fearful every instant that they would be in like [291]
predicament. "There's no use," said Jimmie. "If we only had a rope!"

"Well, we haven't, and he can't hold out till we get one."

At that very second Finch lost his hold again and for the second time slipped beneath the icy waters of the Pond. He came up in a moment, splashing again. "Help, help!" he called despairingly.

"All right—hold out—we're coming." They had got the plank well out now toward the struggling boy. "Hold out, Jake—We'll get it to you."

Inch by inch they got it nearer. But Finch was becoming exhausted.

"He can't do it!" cried Jimmie. "Oh, God help us! What shall we do? What shall we do?"

"Look here," said Tony. "I am going in after him if he goes down again. Keep the plank out and I can get hold of it, and hang on, maybe, till you get back with help. Yell for Ned to stay and help here, if he can. Then run to the farmhouse and get a rope. And for God's sake, go quick, Jim."

"Tony! don't—you can't!"

"I've got to. Hold on, Jake," he cried again. The end of the plank was at the edge of the hole. Finch clutched at it, but his strength was gone. "I can't," he cried feebly, and sank again.

"Do as I told you, now," said Tony. He ripped off his coat and shoes and was sliding forward. As he neared the hole, suddenly the ice crushed beneath his weight, and he sank into the bitter depths. In a second he was at the surface, and striking out boldly to the spot [292]
where Finch had gone down. He dived once, got hold of Finch's body, clasped it, and with terrible effort got to the surface again. Jimmie had pushed the plank almost within his reach. He clasped it tightly, and managed by its aid to keep his own and Finch's head above water. Finch seemed lifeless. "A rope, a rope," called Tony.

Lawrence was already crawling back to the shore, where Clavering, who had heard the commotion, had run down to meet him.

“Finch fell in—Tony’s gone in after him, and he’s got him, and’s clinging to a plank. Do what you can. I’m off for a rope at the Red Farmhouse.”

Clavering took in the situation at a glance. And as Lawrence began to start across the marsh, he began to haul a heavier plank out on the ice, calling out encouragement to Tony as he did so.

Jimmie ran like the wind, and at last reached the farmhouse on the edge of the marshes. “A rope, a rope,” he cried, to the astonished farmer into whose kitchen he had burst. “There’s two boys drowning in the Pond.”

In ten minutes Jimmie, the farmer and his son, were back at the edge of the Pond, with a stout rope which had a noose at the end. “Hurry up!” called Clavering, “he’s holding out.”

WITH TERRIBLE EFFORT HE GOT TO THE SURFACE AGAIN

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In a moment they were out on the ice and had thrown the noosed rope to Tony, clinging for dear life to the plank. He managed to get it about his shoulders, then the four, the two boys on the ice, and the farmer and his son on the shore, began to pull. It was a struggle, but at last their efforts proved successful and Tony, half-dead with the cold and almost paralyzed from the burden of Finch’s lifeless body, was hauled out on firm ice, and then carried to the shore. There the farmer’s wife had arrived with blankets and whisky. They swathed the two half-drowned boys in the blankets; the farmer and his son picked up Finch, whom they thought was dead; Lawrence and Clavering did the same for Deering, and in a few moments they were at the Red Farm. Mrs. Simpson, the farmer’s wife, had already telephoned for a doctor and to the School.

Soon Doctor Carter, the school physician, and Doctor Forester himself, arrived on the scene. They gave directions for Tony to be well wrapped in blankets and to be taken at once to the school infirmary, and then set to work in the effort to restore Finch to consciousness.

Jimmie drove up to the Infirmary in the farmer’s wagon with Tony, and helped the nurses get him to bed. Then for two hours he waited for the news from the farmhouse. It was after eleven when at last a ring came on the telephone. Jimmie sprang to the receiver. It was Doctor Forester, wanting the head nurse. “Finch is just living,” he said. “We will bring him up later. Tell the nurse I wish to speak to her.”

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CHAPTER XXII

THE CHAPEL

On the morrow the school learned the thrilling story of the night. The boys were filled with wonder at the heroism, only to be cast into the depths of anxiety by the news from the Infirmary. Finch, though living, was in a high fever and delirious; doomed, if he ultimately recovered, the physician said, to do so only after a severe illness. Deering was threatened with pneumonia. For nearly a week the issues were not certain. Then at last came the welcome announcement that Tony was out of danger and by another week would be about. Finch's malady had developed into brain fever. It would be weeks before a crisis was reached; months before recovery could be hoped for.

Clavering and Lawrence told the story of the rescue, and left nothing to the imagination in their assertion and account of Tony's heroism. In the excitement with which the boys listened to the tale and with which they waited for Tony's reappearance that they might give him a splendid ovation, it was practically forgotten—and indeed few knew—why Finch had started across the Pond that night. The scene in the Rectory study when Mr. Roylston had appeared, was kept a strict secret, owing to the Head Master's explicit injunctions.

One night, shortly after the episode, the first night that any [295] favorable news had come from the Infirmary, as Doctor Forester was sitting before his study fire, there came a tap on the door, and in response to his summons, Mr. Roylston entered.

"Ah, I am glad to see you," said the Head, who had been waiting, a little impatiently, for his assistant master to seek this interview. "Have a cigar?" he added.

"No, thank you," said Mr. Roylston, seating himself in a straight-backed chair. "I have come—as soon as I could recover from the shock of recent events—to tell you what I know—what led me several nights ago, to bring Finch here."

"Yes, yes," said the Doctor, "I want to hear all about it. I have foreborne to question you, though I realized there was something behind it which in good time you would explain. Fortunately now, we are assured that Deering is out of danger. The doctor holds out some small hope for poor Finch, but it will be a tough pull."

"Yes, I fear so. I hope, I hope deeply that he will recover. I am relieved to know that Deering is better." He paused for a moment, as though he could scarcely bring himself to say what was on his mind. "Doctor Forester, I have come to-night not only to give you an explanation but to make a confession."

"Yes," said the Head in a sympathetic tone.

"I have always tried, sir, to do my duty in this school according to my light."

"Yes," said Doctor Forester, "I believe that, my friend."

"But my light, sir, has often,—always, I fear, been a poor one." [296]

"Ah," interposed the older man, "who of us would dare say otherwise? We all fall short, every one."

"Possibly—but all are not too proud, as I have been, to acknowledge it. I have never acknowledged it, sir, until to-night—not even to myself." He paused again, to continue presently, as he shaded his face with his hand, "I will not go into details, but I want to put it boldly, baldly. I have been hard, hard to the degree of cruelty, on that poor boy who is lying now in the delirium of a dangerous fever. God forgive me!... I disapproved, sir, of your taking him here, and though, even now, I cannot say that I think you were wise in that——"

"Alas, no!" interrupted the Head Master, "not if we are to judge by the immediate results. But I think I see deeper...."

The master thought a moment in silence. "Yes," he said at last. "I think you do. It is having a wider, a deeper effect than I have realized.... But he, poor boy, has suffered, and I have so often, so uncharitably, made him suffer; while those, whom I have not liked, Morris, young Deering, and others, have been kind. It is terrible to me, sir, now to think of that suffering."

"Yes, my friend, yes; I think it must be. You have been hard, too hard; but, thank God, righteousness comes of suffering. I can see, oh, in so many ways, how poor Finch's suffering is teaching us all a

lesson, teaching us a truer religion, a sweeter, kinder philosophy of life."

"As I said," Mr. Roylston resumed, "I was hard on him, hard on [297] Deering, whom poor Finch worshiped with passionate adoration. And I accused Finch of cheating—he had not sometimes been strictly honest—but on that occasion, I misjudged him—wounded him deeply—he may have resisted a keen temptation. At any rate, worn-out, half-crazed, quite desperate, he came to me that night and made a passionate attack on me. His language was ill-tempered, ill-judged, violent!—but the awful part of it to me is, that in substance his accusations were justified. I had been, as he told me, so terribly cruel, hard, mean. I could not end the scene, unseemly as it was; for my conscience was accusing me more bitterly, more deeply, more violently than that poor half-crazed lad.... At last, scarcely knowing what to do, I sought to bring him to you.... At the very door of this room, he turned and fled. I feared he meant, as he had practically threatened, to destroy himself. And but for Deering how nearly he succeeded!"

"Yes, yes," said the Head Master gently, "I see, I see...."

"And I have," continued Mr. Roylston, "I have too been hard on Deering—have not acknowledged in him the qualities—manliness, honor, unselfishness—which I have known were there. He gladly sprang to the chance of laying down his life for the poor little abandoned wretch for whom I could not find a kind word. God forgive me, Doctor, I cannot forgive myself."

"God does forgive you, my friend," said the Head, without looking [298] up. He had been gazing into the fire, thinking deeply.

Mr. Roylston did not reply to this remark, and for a few moments both men sat in silence, staring into the fire, absorbed in their thoughts.

It was Doctor Forester at last who spoke again. "It would be easy, my friend, to assure you that you exaggerate, that you do yourself injustice; and, in truth, I think you do. But I have no wish to urge that view upon you; for I believe, to be quite frank, that there is a poor weaker side to all of us that we never have a chance of conquering altogether unless we recognize it, and if for a long time we have not recognized it or have deceived ourselves, nothing is so good for us as a frank confession. As for the details of the incidents to which you refer, of course I am in ignorance, and I prefer to be. So far as I have observed your treatment toward Finch, it merited no criticism; and as for your attitude toward Deering, I have nothing to say that I did not say the night we discussed his appointment to the Head Prefectship. I thought you severe but not unjust. As a matter of fact, if you feel now that you could wish you had taken another course, I may tell you that I do not think the fact that Deering is not Head Prefect has in the least interfered with his popularity or his influence with the boys. Clavering has made him his right hand man."

"I am glad of that," said Mr. Roylston.

"And now, after this rescue of Finch at the risk of his own life,—undoubtedly he will be the strongest boy in school."

"I think that I should like to tell him that I do fully forgive him— [299] that I regret my stand with regard to his appointment."

"Well," said the Head Master, "I think that he would like to hear."

With that Mr. Roylston said good-night. He walked over to the Infirmary at once and enquired about the two boys. Finch's condition was still unsatisfactory, but Deering was very much better —and, yes, he was quite able to see Mr. Roylston if the master desired.

Tony was still in bed, but he looked splendidly well and bright as he lay in the cool white cot, which had been pushed near the open log fire. A nurse had been reading to him. He had had a close call, but now he was practically himself again and would be going down in a few days.

He was surprised to see Mr. Roylston, but not in the least embarrassed. He shook hands cordially. The master enquired about his health, made some perfunctory remarks about the rescue and about the school, fidgeting and ill at ease, until the nurse took the hint and slipped away.

"I came," he said then, as he drew up the chair near the bedside and took a seat, "not only to enquire about you, as I have been doing

daily, but to have a little talk with you, since I know you are practically all right again."

"Yes, sir," said Tony.

"Do you know, Anthony," asked Mr. Roylston suddenly, "why it was that Jacob Finch tried to run away that night?"

"Why, no, sir—I don't—not altogether, that is. Poor Jake was in a [300]
bad way; things had been getting pretty hard for him for one reason or another, and he was making them still harder for himself. I did hear that you caught him cheating in your Latin examination, and I just supposed that that was the last straw. He's always been rather friendly with me, but he was so vicious that night down by the pond, refusing altogether to tell me why he was cutting out, that I thought him a little out of his head. But I supposed the cheating was really responsible."

"Well," rejoined Mr. Roylston, after a moment's reflection, "as a matter of fact I was altogether mistaken about his cheating in that particular examination. I believe what he afterwards told me, that he had not cheated at all; though, as he also acknowledged he had cheated so often before that I can hardly blame myself for suspecting him."

"Yes, I know," said Tony; "I am afraid poor Jake lost all hold of himself. He was not naturally a cheat or a story-teller, but—but—well, I try to think he wasn't altogether responsible."

"Perhaps not—that night in my room, at all events, he quite lost control of himself as a result of my accusation, and he told me in a very bitter language that my attitude toward him had been one of the chief causes of his unhappiness here at Deal."

Tony scarcely knew what to say to this, for of course he remembered how bitterly Finch had always hated Mr. Roylston. The master, however, did not expect a reply. "I think," he went on, "that there was a good deal of justice in what the boy said, though I did [301]
not mean to go into that with you to-night. Among other things he told me that night that he intensely resented my attitude toward you."

Tony laughed a little. "Jake showed equally bad judgment whether he greatly liked or disliked a person."

"Well," continued Mr. Roylston, "right or wrong, his remarks have caused me to think things over very seriously the last few days, and I have come to the conclusion that in this also Finch was right. I was hard on you—too hard."

Tony lay still for a moment, thinking; finally he raised himself a little and looked at the master intently. "Mr. Roylston," he said, "it's mighty white of you to come and say this to me. In return I want to tell you just one thing—the one thing I have against you—the rest has been give and take, and none of it, it seems to me, very serious. I know I have annoyed you a great many times and that occasionally in Lower School days I was more or less impertinent, but I did one thing that I was thoroughly ashamed of and thoroughly sorry for. As for your soaking me a lot in the old days, as for your preventing me from being Head Prefect, I've borne no grudge. I think you were pretty stiff—I think honestly you are too stiff as to discipline most of the time—but I never thought you were unfair or unjust, and I have but one grudge against you. And that is that when I apologized to you for writing that thing a year ago you wouldn't accept my apology really; you wouldn't believe I was sorry."

"Well, I believe so now," said Mr. Roylston, "and it is to tell you [302]
that particularly that I have come here to-night."

"I'm mighty glad, sir. That's all I ever blamed you for, sir,—really. I have often complained of you in a noisy careless kind of way, as I have of other masters, but that was all guff. I didn't any more really mean those things than I supposed you meant things when you would look at us sometimes as if we were actually beneath contempt."

Mr. Roylston reflected a moment. "I am afraid," he continued, "that on my side, I do regret a great many things. I have been genuinely lacking in sympathy more than once. I have often been unnecessarily hard. It has not been right; and, as you see, I regret it. The more keenly, I fancy, as my lack of sympathy in this particular case of Finch counted a great deal in what so nearly meant a tragedy."

"Well, fortunately, it wasn't one, sir. The nurse tells me that they think poor Jake will pull through."

“Yes, but he will not get back to work again this term; there is no chance of that.”

“What do you think, sir, will happen to him? what will he do next year?”

“Well, I am beginning to feel as I have never felt before that after all this the situation will clear itself, will be changed. I fancy he will stay on at Deal next year, and I begin to think that we will know how then to help him make good.”

“Really?—well, I wish he could. I’d feel pretty good to know that poor Jake had made good here. I’m afraid I haven’t helped him very much.”

“Haven’t helped him very much!” exclaimed Mr. Roylston. [303]
“Though what you have done for him may seem not to have counted just now, I feel very certain that it will appear to count tremendously later.”

“Why, sir—I really didn’t do anything.”

Mr. Roylston smiled. “Well, I must not talk with you any longer. Good-night, Anthony. I hope you will get down very soon, and I trust that in the future we will understand one another a little better.”

“I am sure we will, sir. And thank you ever so much for coming up.”

“I fancy,” Mr. Roylston murmured to himself, as he left the room, “I fancy that hereafter I shall understand all boys a little better.”

On the Sunday of the week that Tony was in the Infirmary, the Doctor took the opportunity to make some remarks about the boy’s act of heroism in the course of his sermon in the Chapel.

“Fortunately,” he said, “one of the boys about whom we have been so anxious the past few days is now quite out of danger and will soon be amongst us once more, and though the other must still undergo a long and severe illness the physicians hold out strong hope of his ultimate recovery.

“Naturally,” he continued, “such a dramatic incident as the rescue of one boy by another at the risk of his life has brought vividly before our minds the characters of the two boys principally involved, their situation and relation to the school. One of these boys as we know has had the advantages of a normal, happy, healthy boyhood, the other through misfortune has been deprived of almost all that the first boy has enjoyed. But the self-forgetful [304]
service of the one for the other, a service that culminated in heroism when he freely risked his life to save the other’s, has set us all an example of kindliness and consideration, an example of true religion, of unselfish Christian service, that we should take to heart....

“There have been criticisms in connection with this affair that Deal School is only adapted to dealing with and caring for the happy, healthy, lucky type of boy. I do not think so. Despite much that has been unfortunate, despite much suffering that has been involved and still may be involved, despite even the lives that have been risked, it has been a thing tremendously worth while to the school to have had that less fortunate, less happy boy amongst us.

“It is a noble and a fine thing to risk one’s life to save the life of another, and I do not doubt that most, if not all, of our boys would gladly seize such an opportunity in the same spirit as it was seized by Anthony Deering and his companions a few nights since. That gladness to risk life should be a symbol of what is infinitely harder, and infinitely more needed, I may say, but of which also our friends set us the example,—the good will and unselfishness to live for others. A school altogether fails, just as a human life altogether fails, if at heart and in spirit, it is not dedicated, so far as opportunity permits, to the service of men. The lesson of this incident is the lesson that I would we might all learn from the school.”

The Doctor’s sermon was not the kind of a sermon to be much discussed, but it made a deep impression on the school. For one or [305]
two masters and for several boys it was the inspiration as they knelt later of as earnest prayer as they had ever offered.

Doctor Forester had been going frequently to the Infirmary to see Tony, and after the first few days he had continued his confirmation instructions so that Deering could keep up with the class.

Tony’s first appearance amongst the boys after his convalescence was in the Chapel at the preparatory service the night before the

confirmation. It was a quiet little service, conducted by the Bishop and the Head. Again the theme of the address was service—a theme that in some fashion or other seemed to have flashed in and out of all Tony's consciousness and experience for the past year.

As he knelt that night in the dim Chapel and offered up a grateful thanksgiving that life and health had been spared to him, he resolved more definitely and consciously than ever before that whatever he did in the world thereafter he would never live wholly or selfishly for himself.

And in after years he was to look back on that night, as he looked back on the night on the beach when he had walked with Mr. Morris, as another important moment in the process of his coming to himself.

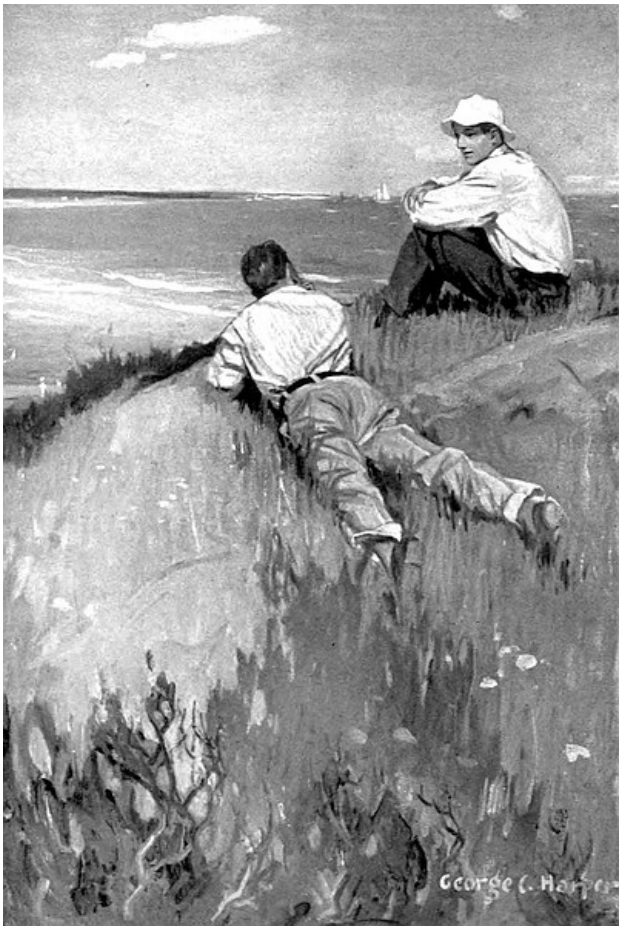
CHAPTER XXIII

THE LAST TERM

It was a warm bright May day, with just enough breeze to fleck the waves of the bay and passage with white caps and make it lively for the school crews in their heavy whaleboats, the substitute at Deal for the conventional shell.

From their post on the Rocking-stone or just by it, high up on the highest ridge of Lovel's Woods, two boys looked out upon the spreading panorama of marsh and beach and river and bay. They both were drinking it in with a deep sense of its beauty and with a sense too that it was the more beautiful in that it all was a part of the old school. Up on the hill there, across the wide valley of the marshes and Beaver Pond and Creek, rose the school itself, gleaming now in the bright western sunlight as a fairy castle of rose and gold.

One of the boys by the Rocking-stone was Tony Deering, coatless, hatless, his hair glowing in the sunlight, half-hidden by the tall sweet grass in which he lay at full length. The other was Reginald Carroll, now nearly at the end of his Freshman year at Kingsbridge College, back at the School for a week-end as he had so often been since his graduation the previous June. Much of his time on these occasions, though we have not chanced to note it, was spent with Deering, much too with Mr. Morris between whom and himself the old feeling of distrust had altogether dropped away. For during his last term at school Reggie had won his house-master's confidence as well as his regard.



"YOU WILL CERTAINLY BE COMING UP TO COLLEGE NEXT YEAR?"

The boys were sprawled flat on their stomachs in the warm sweet grass, heads on hands, at the very edge of the ridge, peering off across the tops of the pine trees and cedars that rose from the ravine between the ridges almost to a level with their heads. They looked eastward and their position commanded a view of the Strathsey river, the harbor in the bend of the Neck, the broad beach and bay, and the open ocean beyond. They could see the House crews out beyond Deigr Light; they were turning the noses of their [307]

boats toward the harbor again in the hope of getting back for supper. A dozen or more sailboats were in the river. Tony and Reggie had been sailing, and had stopped at the Rocking-stone on their way back to the School.

"Peachy day, Reg, isn't it?" said Tony, for the thousandth time sniffing of the good sea breeze.

"Well, rather," drawled Reggie for reply. He was still languid, individual, different, but distinctly more purposeful, less afflicted with the air of being perpetually bored than when we first observed him some four or five years ago.

"Doesn't it make you sort of sicky to feel you can't have it all the time?"

"It does, boy; as you yourself before long will be finding out."

"Ah—I know." [308]

"But, I tell you what, Tony; it makes it almost worth while being away, it is so wonderful to come back. College is different, likable too; but it never takes the place of school. Though I must say, toward the end of the year I begin to feel myself caring for it as I didn't in the least think I should. It's rough at first, as I told you before, as you could see from my pretending it wasn't last fall. But here—well, the heart's at home here."

Tony smiled his appreciation of the phrase. "Old chap, you do get your sentiments expressed now and then in perfectly good nice poetry, don't you? I feel like that ever so often, but to save my life I can never find words that seem in the least to do justice to my thoughts."

"Oh, well, that comes a good deal not only from feeling a thing, boy; but quite as much from the habit of hunting for the right phrase now and then, as old Jack used to tell us in Sixth English."

Tony drew in the fragrance of the May flowers that a fresh breeze stirred. "Bully, isn't it? This always was a favorite spot of yours, wasn't it, Reg?"

"Rather—oh, the time I've wasted here, little one—scribbling verse and stuff, dreaming dreams that never came true!"

"You mooning here, poetizing—you must let me see your latest, by the way,—always remind me of those jolly verses in the Harrow Song Book—remember—'Byron lay, lazily lay'?"

"More or less—mostly less; let's have it."

Tony essayed it in his clear voice.

[309]

"'Byron' lay, lazily lay,
Hid from lesson and game away,
Dreaming poetry all alone,
Up-a-top of the Peachy stone.
All in a fury enters Drury.
Sets him grammar and Virgil due;
Poets shouldn't have, shouldn't have, shouldn't have,
Poets shouldn't have work to do."

"That's all; I don't know the rest. But when we sing it at General Singing or on the steps of the Old School these spring nights, I always think of you, and wonder if you scribble verses at Kingsbridge as much as you used to at school."

"Oh, yes, still," laughed Reggie, "as much as ever—and to as little purpose as ever, I fancy. But look here, boy; I don't like to suggest unpleasant things to you such as the fact that school won't last forever, but I want to be sure of one thing—"

"Yes?"

"You will certainly be coming up to col. next year?"

"Oh, yes, if I pass my exams. But of course there's not much doubt about that. I'm not in much danger of being flunked."

"Money matters all right?"

"So, so. Yes, much better, thank goodness. But it's going to be mighty hard to pull out of the old school."

"There is one thing that helps the pulling out a lot, and particularly in your case,—" said Carroll, "—more than it did in mine—such a lot of the fellows go up to Kingsbridge from the School—quite the best of the form usually, it seems to me; so that you feel [310] quite at home there from the beginning. Then there's always a lot of Dealonians among the upper classmen who look out for you more or less. Most of your chums are going up, aren't they?"

"Yes—all, I think, except Ned Clavering. Too bad—but Ned's

going to wear the blue—and I hope we'll line up against each other some time."

"That's hard luck; but I didn't know Ned Clavering was in your crowd."

"Oh, our crowd!" exclaimed Tony, with something like a sigh.

"What! do you mean to say that you and Kit Wilson are still on the outs?"

"I'm ashamed to say, we are."

"You still sore at Kit?"

"Not in the least!"

"Well, then, what's the trouble?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Sheer asininity on both our parts, I reckon. I've started over to Kit's rooms a hundred times this term, I should say, and turned back."

"All serene with the rest of the crowd?"

"Oh, absolutely. After the Finch affair last term everybody except Kit went out of their way to be decent. Even Tack, whom I had been rather nasty to."

"Weren't you a bit sore because Kit didn't go out of his way to be decent?"

"Why, yes—naturally; I suppose I was."

"Well, listen to words of wisdom—it is all nonsense, blooming idiotic nonsense. You quarreled about Finch. He's gone. What's [311] become of that little shaver, by the way?"

"Finch—oh, he is well now, I reckon; they have taken him away—to the mountains or some place. He is ever so much better in every way than before he was ill—it seemed to need that tremendous break and sickness to get him straight. I have an idea that the Doctor,—good old chap, the Head!—will keep him on here another year, and then put him to work, without trying for college."

"You carried the guardian angelship business through, didn't you? did it from the bottom up—as I hoped you would."

"Oh, I tried.... By Jove, Reg," Tony exclaimed, looking at his watch, "it's nearly six; we'll have to wander if we want to get back in time for supper. You are staying over, of course, for the game and dance to-morrow?"

"Of course."

That evening as the Sixth were singing on the steps of the Old School, which was their custom on warm spring nights, Carroll drew Kit Wilson out of the crowd and walked him off under the shadows of the trees.

"Look here, Wilson," he said, "I'm butting into something that isn't in the least my affair, but I want to know why on earth you and Tony Deering don't drop your differences and be friends?"

Kit swung himself loose from Reggie's friendly encircling arm. "Ask Deering," he said laconically.

"I have asked Deering, and so far as he knows there is no reason under heaven why you shouldn't be as thick as you ever were. The [312] original cause of your misunderstanding has long since passed away. Deering is simply holding off because you are. He doesn't know how you will take it if he makes advances."

Still Kit kept silence.

"Come on, Wilson, don't take it like that. I haven't any axe to grind; as a matter of fact in school days, Deering's intimacy with you meant that I see a lot less of him, and I can tell you I didn't relish that. You like Tony, don't you, really?"

"Like him!" cried Kit. "Doesn't everybody like him—even the odious Gumshoe? Like him! Why, Carroll, I like him better than any fellow I ever knew."

"Well, my dear child—what then hinders you?"

"Does Tony care a hang about me?—has he ever minded our not being friends?" asked Kit huskily.

"Has he minded? why, of course, he has minded."

"Well, I never supposed he did; hasn't he had Jimmie and you and Bill Morris and a dozen others? Why, honest, Reggie, even the Gumshoe just eats out of his hand. It's marvelous—don't understand it—or I guess I *do* understand it. You can't *help* it, can you?"

"No, you can't; but note this;—the more Tony cares for, the more it seems he can. And I tell you what, Kit, with Tony or with anyone else, the loss of one friend can never be made up by gaining others.

If you and Tony don't make up, you will never forgive yourselves later. As it is, you have lost nearly a year of school life."

"I know, I know," said Kit miserably.

"Well, lose no more!" [313]

As they drew back again within the range of the singing, the Sixth were giving in fine form—"There's a wind that blows o'er the sea-girt isle," a song that Reggie had always particularly liked. He stepped forward a bit to encore them. But Doc. Thorn, the leader of the singing, catching sight of him, cried to the fellows on the steps, "Let's have 'Old Boys' now, in honor of Reggie Carter Westover Carroll."

And they rang it out with a hearty good will, with long, lingering, caressing notes to the last lines, notes that thrilled every Old Boy's heart as he heard the well-loved song.

> "... and the heart is glad
> For all the friendliness of vanish'd years."

The tears were in Reggie's eyes. He was glad it was dark, and that he could let them gather there without fear of it being noticed. And just then Mr. Morris stepped somewhere from out of the gloom and slipped his arm around Reggie's shoulders.

The singing was over then; the fellows were beginning to separate for the evening and were calling to each other as they started away from the steps. Carroll pushed Wilson forward. "Now's your chance," he whispered. "Don't you be a fool and don't let Tony be a fool!"

Poor Kit's heart was in his mouth; it seemed to him to be thumping like a sledge-hammer. He had a momentary wild hope that he would not be able to find Tony. But yes,—there he was, just taking leave of Ned Clavering and starting across the campus alone. [314] Kit hurried after him, feeling as though his legs would scarcely carry him another inch.

"I say—Tony!" he called at last, his voice husky and strange.

Deering stopped, turned, but did not recognize him. "What is it? Who's calling?"

"It's me—Kit. Wait a second, will you?"

Tony's heart was beating wildly too, for he divined what was coming; by the time Kit reached him his hand was out.

"What's your hurry?" cried Kit, grabbing the extended hand and wringing it.

"I'm not in a hurry. Are you?"

"No, not a bit." Then awkwardly, "Well, what are you going to do?"

"Not a thing—loaf—come and do it with me."

"I'm your man. Where shall we go?"

"Good, old boy. To the beach then."

They turned about, and arms went about each other's waist and neck. They swung off across the fragrant fields, soft with the new mown grass, to the beach. For a while they were silent.

"I have been a stubborn fool," said Kit at last.

"Not a bit of it; I've been a hot-headed one," protested Tony.

"Well, I guess we've both been both," said Kit lucidly. "Any way, thank God it's over."

"Amen," said Tony.

Another long silence as they strolled along, strangely happy, in the fresh caressing night.

"I say, Kit."

"Yes, old chap!"

"Let's you and Jim and me room together at college next year." [315]

"Right o! I've hated to think of college next year just on account of that—we used to plan to, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, it's all right now. Hard though it's going to be to leave the old school."

"Mighty hard, Kit."

Another silence; close step; shoulder to shoulder.

"I say, Tony."

"Yes, old boy."

"Let's swear never to let this sort of thing happen again. Let's

swear always to talk it out. No matter what, never to break again."

"All right—I swear—never to break again—absolutely—so help me, God."

"And I, I swear!—so help me, God." They wrung each other's hands.

"Say—Tonio old sport," said Kit after another pause.

"What is it, Kitty?"

"Reg Carroll's a brick, don't you think?"

"He certainly is. By the by, Kit, is Betty coming down for the dance to-morrow night?"

"Yes, gets here to-morrow afternoon; Bab too."

"Good work. Tell her, will you, before to-morrow night that you and I have made it up."

"I won't need," answered Kit; "I never let her know we had fallen out."

Tony gasped with astonishment. "Well, by Jove, kiddo, you *are* a perfect corker."

And so they strolled on, talking by fits and starts, in the sweet fragrant May night, glad of heart, the gladder that for long they had not known each other's friendship. [316]

The next few weeks were wonderful ones to Tony and his friends. On that bright Saturday a worthy rival had come from western Cæsarea to meet their baseball team and had bit the dust. Jimmie Lawrence, captain of the team now, had played first without an error and had knocked a home-run, bringing in three men—a pleasant augury for the Boxford game in mid-June. In the evening there had been the dance in the Gymnasium, and Betty Wilson had been there, lovelier than ever it seemed to Tony, as his eyes fluttered in the light of her eyes and he thrilled with a strange, nice, happy little thrill at the touch of her hand in his. And Barbara Worthington was there, and Kit too was beaming. As yet the shadow of the final good-byes had not fallen upon them. There were still three golden weeks for the reunited crowd.

* * * * * * * * *

One night, not long after the dance, Tony sat late in Mr. Morris's study, as he was apt to do these last weeks, talking things over with his older friend.

"This has certainly been a bully term," said Tony, with a contented sigh, "I don't think I have ever been so happy. I can't bear to think of leaving."

Morris had been happy too, but for him the shadow was already falling. "Ah—that's the hard part of school life—the going and the being left behind.... But you will be coming back often—that's a comfort. I never cease to be thankful that Kingsbridge is so near." [317]

"Yes, I shall be coming back mighty often. Doesn't seem really as if the school could run without us. I suppose I shall like college, but I can't imagine that it will ever be quite the same as school."

"Well," said Morris, as his mind turned back to good Kingsbridge days, "one grows fond of it. But school——"

"It's as Reggie says," Tony interrupted, "the heart's at home here. It will be bully to have Reggie and Kit and Jim and so many of the old form at Kingsbridge, but, magister, I shan't have you."

Morris's heart glowed at this. "Stupid they," thought he, "who say a boy does not show feeling or gratitude!" Aloud he murmured, "No; you will not have me. But I will tell you what reconciles me to the situation, Tony,—you will be coming back during college days pretty often; and then—I have a strong prophetic feeling—you will be coming back for good."

Tony smiled. "I wouldn't wonder, you know. I've often thought I'd like to. The heart's at home here, magister. Good-night."

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER’S NOTE:

—Obvious print and punctuation errors were corrected.

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