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THE BOYS OF BELLWOOD SCHOOL

OR

FRANK JORDAN'S TRIUMPH

BY FRANK V. WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF "TOM THE TELEPHONE BOY", "COMRADES OF THE SADDLE", "THE NEWSBOY PARTNERS", ETC.

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CHAPTER I

FRANK JORDAN'S HOME

"Where did you get that stickpin, Frank?"

"Bought it at Mace's jewelry store."

"You are getting extravagant."

"I hardly think so, aunt, and I don't believe you would think so, either, if you knew all the circumstances."

"Circumstances do not alter cases when a boy is a spendthrift."

"I won't argue with you, aunt. You have your ideas and I have mine. Of course, I bought the stickpin, but it was with money I had earned."

The aunt sniffed in a vague way. The boy left the house, looking irritated and unhappy.

Frank Jordan lived in the little town of Tipton with his aunt, Miss Tabitha Brown. His father was an invalid, and at the present time was in the South, seeking to recuperate his failing health, and Mrs. Jordan was with him as his nurse. They had left Frank in charge of the aunt, who was a miserly, fault-finding person, and for nearly a month the lad had not enjoyed life very greatly.

There were two thoughts that filled Frank's mind most of the time. The first was that he would give about all he had to leave his aunt's house. The other was a wish that his father would write to him soon, telling him, as he had promised to do, that he had decided that his son could leave Tipton and go to boarding-school.

What with the constant nagging of his sour-visaged relative, the worry over his sick father, and the suspense as to his own future movements, Frank did not have a very happy time of it. He felt a good deal like a boy shut up in a prison. His aunt used her authority severely. She kept him away from company, and allowed none of his friends to visit the house. From morning until night she pestered him and nagged at him, "all for his own good," she said, until life at the Jordan home, roomy and comfortable as it was, became a burden to the lad.

"It's too bad!" burst forth Frank as he crossed the garden, climbed a fence, and made toward the river through a little woods that was a favorite haunt of his. Reaching a fallen tree he drew from its side a splendid fishing-pole with all the attachments that a lover of the rod and line might envy. His eye grew brighter as he glanced fondly along the supple staff with its neat joints of metal, but he continued his complaint: "When she isn't scolding, she is lecturing me. I suppose if she ever hears of my fishing outfit here, she'll be at me for a week about my awful extravagance. Oh, dear!"

Frank had a good deal over which to grumble. His aunt certainly was a "tyro." She was making his life very gloomy with her stern, unloving ways. Frank had promised his parents, when they went away, that he would be obedient in all respects to his aunt. He was a boy of his word, and he felt that he had done exceedingly well so far, hard as the task had been. His aunt was very unreasonable in some things, however, and he had been at the point of rebellion several times.

"You'd think I was some kind of a beggar, to hear her talk," he grumbled to himself. "Father sends plenty of pocket money, but the way Aunt Tib doles it out to me makes a fellow sick. As to the stickpin—heigh ho! I won't think about it at all. I've lots to be thankful for. I only care that father gets well and

strong again. As to myself, he's sure to decide soon what school I will be sent away to. That means no Aunt Tib. I shall be happy. Hello! What's wrong now?"

From the direction of the river there had come two boyish screams in quick and alarming succession. Frank recognized a signal of pain and distress. He started on a run and reached the edge of the stream in a few moments. He leaned beyond a bush where the bank shelved down a little distance along the shore. His eyes lit upon quite an animated scene.

A strange-looking, boxed-in wagon, with an old white horse attached, stood stationary about forty rods distant. Just this side of it was a ragged, trampish-looking man. He had just picked up a piece of flat rock, and as he hurled it Frank discovered that he had aimed at a tree directly across the narrow stream, but had missed it.

"Why, there's a boy in that tree," said Frank. "That big bully must have hit him before I came, and that was the boy's cry I heard. The good-for-nothing loafer!"

Frank rounded the brush in an impetuous and indignant way. He was about to challenge the man, when the latter shouted something at the boy across the stream, and Frank stopped to listen.

"Are you going to come down out of that tree?" the man demanded in a bellowing tone.

There was no reply, and the man repeated the challenge. The boy addressed continued silent. Frank could see him crouching in a crotch, his face pale and distressed.

"See here," roared his persecutor, getting furious and shaking his fist at his victim, "I'm after you, Ned Foreman, and I'm going to get you! Why, you vagabond, you—you ungrateful young runaway! Here I'm your only solitary living relative in the whole world, and you sit up in that tree with a big stone ready to smash me if I come near you."

"Yes, and I will—I will, for a fact!" cried the lad, roused up. "You try it, and see. Relative? You're no kin of mine, Tim Brady. I'd be ashamed to own you."

"I hain't?" howled the man. "Who married your step-sister? Who gave you a home when you was a helpless kid, I'd like to know?"

"Huh, a healthy home!" retorted the boy. "It wasn't your home; it was my sister's, and you robbed her of it and squandered the money, and broke her heart, and she died, and you ought to be hung for it!" and the speaker choked down a sob. "Now you come across me and try to rob me."

"Say," roared Tim Brady, gritting his teeth and looking dreadfully cruel and hateful, "if I hang twice over I'll get you. Better give me some of your money."

"It isn't mine to give."

"Better give me some of it, all the same," continued the man, "or I'll take the whole of it. I'm desperate, Ned Foreman. I'm in a fix where I've got to get away from these diggings, and I've got to have money to go. Are you going to be reasonable and come down out of that tree?"

"No, I ain't."

"Then I'm coming after you. See that?" and the man held up a heavy stick and brandished it. Then he sat down on a rock and started to remove his shoes, with the idea of wading across the stream.

Frank felt that it was time for him to do something. He was not a bit afraid of a coward, but he realized that he and the boy in the tree together were no match for the big, vicious fellow just beyond him. The boy in the tree looked honest and decent; the man after him looked just what he was—a tramp and perhaps worse. Frank thought of hurrying toward the village for help. Then a sudden idea came to his mind, and he acted upon it.

The man who was preparing to go after the boy who would not come to him, sat directly under a big bush. Right over his head among the branches Frank noticed a double hornets' nest. He knew all about hornets and their ways, as did he of all the interesting things in the woods. Frank drew his fishing-pole around and upward, until its willowy end rested against the straw-like strands by which the hornets' nest was attached to the limb.

Very gently he got a hold on the connecting strands of the double nest and detached it from the limb. Then he lowered it, carefully poising it with a swaying motion over the head of the stooping figure of the man.

"Now!" said Frank breathlessly.

Already the disturbed hornets were coming out of the cells in the nest, angrily fluttering about to learn what the matter was. Frank gave the fishing-pole a swing. He slammed its end and the hornets' nest right down on the head of the tramp.

Instantly a swarming myriad of the little insects made the air black about the man. The fellow gave a spring and a yell of pain. Then, his hands wildly beating the air, he darted down the river shore like a shot.

CHAPTER II

THE TINKER BOY

"You had better hurry over here quick, if you want to get away from that man," said Frank, coming out from cover.

"Yes, I will," responded the boy up in the tree.

He threw to the ground a flat stone he had been resting in the crotch of the tree, his only weapon of defense, dropped nimbly down after it, and started for the water.

"Hold on," directed Frank; "there's a crossing plank a little way farther down the stream."

"I'm wet, anyway," explained the boy, dashing into the water, and he came up to Frank, dripping to the waist.

"Don't be scared," said Frank, as his companion looked in a worried way in the direction the tramp had taken. "That fellow will be too busy with those hornets for some time to come, I'm thinking, to mind us."

"Oh, I hope so," said the lad with a shudder. "He's a terrible man. I must get away from here at once."

As he spoke the boy ran to where the wagon stood and climbed upon its front seat. As Frank, keeping up with his pace, neared the vehicle, he noticed across its box top the words: *"Saws, knives, scissors and tools sharpened scientifically."*

"I wish you would stay with me until I get to town," remarked the boy, seizing the lines with many a timid look back of him.

"Oh, you want to get to town, do you?" observed Frank. "All right, I'll be glad to show you the road."

The boy started up the horse with a sharp snap of the lines. The animal was old and lazy, however, and could not go beyond a very slow trot.

"Turn at that point in the rise," directed Frank, pointing ahead a little distance, "and it will be a shorter cut to town."

"Yes, yes. I want to get away from here," said Ned Foreman anxiously. "Oh, there he is again!"

Frank followed the glance of his frightened companion to observe the tramp in among the brush. He was slapping his face and body as if he had not yet gotten rid of all the hornets, but he was certainly headed in the direction of the wagon.

"Your horse won't go fast enough to keep ahead of that fellow," remarked Frank. "Don't tremble so. He shan't bother you again if I can help it. Keep on driving."

Frank leaped to the road. Keeping up a running pace with the wagon, he stooped twice to pick up two pieces of wood of cudgel shape and size, and then regained his seat.

"Now, then," he said, "drive on as fast as you can. It's less than a quarter of a mile to houses. If that man overtakes us you must help me beat him off. If we can't make it together, I'll pester him and keep him back while you run ahead for help."

"I'd hate to leave you—he's a cruel man," said the lad, "but I've got quite an amount of money, and it

doesn't belong to me."

"Aha!" exclaimed Frank suddenly. "There's no need of our doing anything. I'll settle that tramp now."

From the cut in the road ahead they were making for, a light gig had just come into view. On its seat was a single passenger, with a silver badge on the breast of his coat and wearing a gold-braided cap.

"It's Mr. Houston, the town marshal," explained Frank, and his companion uttered a great sigh of relief. "Stop till he passes us. Oh, Mr. Houston," called out Frank to the approaching rig, "there's a man over yonder annoying this boy and trying to rob him."

"Is, eh?" cried the officer. "Whoa!" and he arose in the seat to get a good view of the spot toward which Frank pointed. "I reckon he's seen me, for he's making back his trail licketty-switch."

"Keep your eye on him so he won't follow us, will you, Mr. Houston?" pressed Frank.

"I'll do just that," assented the marshal pleasantly. "I'm after these tramps. There's a gang of them been hanging around Tipton the last day or two, begging, and stealing what they could get their hands on, and I'm bound to rout them out."

"There's your chance, then," said Frank, "for, from what this boy tells me, that fellow yonder is as bad as they make them."

The officer drove on slowly, keeping an eye out for the tramp. Frank's companion urged up his laggard horse. His face had cleared, and he acted pleased and relieved as they got within the limits of the town.

"Any place in particular you're bound for?" inquired Frank.

"Yes."

"Where is that?"

"I'm due at the town square."

"Then keep right on this road," said Frank, and within five minutes they arrived and halted on the shady side of a little park surrounded by the principal stores.

"I expect some one will be here to see me soon," said the lad. "I don't know how to thank you for all you've done for me. If that man had got hold of me he would have robbed me of every cent I had. I've been trying to keep away from him, fearing he might be looking for me and come across me accidentally. Now I'm safe."

"Won't he hang around and try it again when you leave town?" questioned Frank.

"But I'm not going to leave town," explained Ned Foreman, "that is, not on this wagon. I've been working for a man who runs half a dozen of these scissors grinders over the country. At Tipton here another employe will relieve me. I give him what I have taken in the last week, and he pays me my wages out of it. I'm going to give up this job now."

"Don't you like it, then?" asked the interested Frank.

"Well enough—yes, it isn't unpleasant; but I've an ambition to get an education, and have been working to that end," said Ned in a serious way that won Frank's respect. "I want to go to school. I have saved up a little money, and I shall start in right away."

"That's good," said Frank. "I'm only hoping to get away to school myself soon. Say, what kind of a traveling caravan is this, anyway?"

"I'll show you," said Ned promptly, and as both got to the ground he touched a bolt and the back of the wagon came down, forming steps. Reaching in he moved a bracket, and a section of the side of the wagon slid back, letting light into the vehicle. Frank noticed a sort of a bench, a lathe, and some small pieces of machinery.

Ned Foreman got up the steps and touched something. There was a click and a spark of light. He pulled a wheel around and then there was a chug-chug-chug.

"Now, what's that?" asked the curious Frank.

"It's a little gasoline motor," explained Ned. "Step in and see what a famous tinkering shop on wheels we've got."

"Why, this is just grand!" declared Frank, as he glanced around the interior of the wagon in an admiring way.

"Yes, it's clean, attractive and made up to date," said Ned. "The man who owns these outfits is working up some good routes. If you have anything to sharpen, now, I'll show you the kind of work we do."

Frank whipped out his pocket knife in a jiffy. Ned touched a lever near the motor, and things went whirring. There was a busy hum that made the place delightful to Frank. He was astonished and pleased to observe how deftly his companion handled the knife, putting it through a dozen operations, from grinding to stropping and polishing. Then he adjusted a little drill to a handle and said:

"I'll put your name on the handle, if you like."

"All right," assented Frank with satisfaction. "It's Frank Jordan."

"There you are," said Ned a minute later, handing the knife back to Frank.
"You'll find a blade there that will cut a hair."

"Yes, that's fine work," declared Frank, looking over the knife in a gratified way. "You've got quite a trade, haven't you?"

"Oh, sort of," answered Ned carelessly, "and the knack of doing things like this comes in handy for a fellow who has to work and wants to work. There's my man," he added suddenly, as there was a hail outside, and Frank observed a middle-aged man, with a tool-kit satchel extending from his shoulder, approaching the wagon.

"Well, good-by, and glad I met you," said Frank, shaking hands with Ned.

"Lucky for me I met you," retorted the tinker boy gratefully. "I hope I'll meet you again some time, but I don't suppose I'll ever be in this town again."

"If you ever do—" Frank paused, and then added quickly: "why, hunt me up."

He had an impulse to invite his new acquaintance up to the house, but suddenly thought of his aunt and changed his mind. Nothing would have delighted him more than to have Ned Foreman tell him about his travels and adventures, for they must have been many.

Frank strolled homeward, trying his knife on a piece of willow and shaping out a whistle. As he came up the walk to the house he heard voices inside. His aunt was speaking in her sharp, strident tones, a little more excitedly than usual.

A gruff, masculine voice responded, and Frank, wondering who the owner might be, stepped into the hall and peered into the reception-room.

"Aha!" instantly greeted him, as a man there sprang to his feet. "Here is that precious nephew of yours, Miss Brown. I say, Frank Jordan, what have you done with my diamond bracelet?"

CHAPTER III

THE DIAMOND BRACELET

Frank looked at the speaker in wonder. He knew Samuel Mace, the jeweler, perfectly well. The village tradesman was greatly excited, and he glided toward Frank in a threatening way, as if he would walk straight over him.

What made the occasion doubly puzzling to Frank was the fact that his aunt looked more severe, shocked and alarming than ever before. He did not move, drawing upright with boyish manliness, and the jeweler halted and then retreated a step or two.

"Your diamond bracelet, Mr. Mace?" repeated Frank in a perplexed tone; and then, with a faint smile,

glancing at the wrist of the angry visitor: "I did not know you wore one."

"Don't you try to be funny!" stormed the jeweler, and he seized Frank by the arm. "You young rascal, where is that bracelet you took from my store?"

Frank got a glimmering of the facts now. He was dumfounded, and listened like one in a dream, while Mr. Mace continued his furious tirade:

"He took it. Can't you see from his actions that he took it, Miss Brown? Nobody else could have done it—nobody else was in the store when he bought that stickpin he wears. After he left the shop the bracelet was missing."

"Frank, if you have the bracelet give it up," said his aunt coldly.

"See here, aunt," cried Frank, firing up instantly at this, "you don't mean to say that you imagine for one instant that I am a thief?"

"We are all sinful and tempted," returned Miss Brown in a tearful, whispering tone.

"Not me," dissented Frank—"not in that mean way, anyhow. Why, you wretched old man!" he fairly shouted at Samuel Mace, "how dare you even so much as insinuate that I know anything about your missing bracelet—if there is any missing bracelet."

"You was in my store—it was gone after you left. You took it," stubbornly insisted the jeweler.

"I tell you I didn't take it!" cried Frank.

"You give it up, or I'll have you arrested," declared the jeweler.

"If you do, my folks will make it hot for you," declared Frank. "I am no thief."

He drew himself up proudly in his conscious innocence, and marched from the room all on fire with resentment and just indignation.

"Why, the old curmudgeon!" exclaimed the boy as he passed out into the open air again. "How dare he make such a charge. I won't even argue it with him; it's too ridiculous."

He had cooled down somewhat after walking aimlessly and excitedly about the garden a round or two. When he came again to the front of the house, Samuel Mace was departing from the scene. As he caught sight of Frank he waved his cane angrily at him with the words:

"I'll see about this, young man!"

Frank went into the house to find his aunt locking up the secretary in the library, just as she did when there was a burglar scare in town. Her very glance and manner accused Frank, and he could scarcely restrain himself from arguing with her. Then he remembered his promise to his absent parents and that Miss Brown was a credulous, suspicious old maid. He tried to forget his troubles by going after his fishing-rod. This he had left at the spot near the river where he had met Ned Foreman. Frank swung along whistling recklessly, but he did not feel at all pleasant or easy.

He had returned from his errand and was putting in a miserable enough time feeding some pet pigeons when a voice hailed him from the fence railings.

"Hey, Frank—this way for a minute."

Frank recognized a friend and crony of Samuel Mace. This was pompous, red-faced Judge Roseberry. He had once been elected by mistake a justice of the peace, had never gotten a second term, but for some eight or ten years had traded on his past reputation. He managed to eke out a living by giving what he called legal advice at a cheap rate, and mixing in politics. Sometimes he collected bills for the tradesmen of the town, and in this way he had been useful to Mace. Most of the time, however, he hung around the village tavern. He looked now to Frank as if he had just come from that favorite resort of his. There was an unsteady gravity in the way that he poked an impressive finger at Frank as he spoke to the youth.

"What do you want?" demanded Frank, ungraciously enough, as he half guessed the mission of this bloated and untidy emissary of the law.

"Judicial, see?" observed Roseberry, gravely balancing against the picket fence.

"Go ahead," challenged Frank, keeping out of radius of the judge's breath.

"Come, come, young man," maundered Roseberry. "I'm too old a bird to have to circumlocate. You know your father has great confidence in me."

"I never heard of it before," retorted Frank.

"Oh, yes," insisted Roseberry with bland unction. "Had a case of his once."

"The only case I ever knew of," returned Frank, "was a collection he gave you to make. I heard him tell my mother that he never saw the creditor or the money, either, since."

"Ah—er—difficult case; yes, yes, decidedly complex, costs and commissions," stammered the judge, becoming more turkey-red than he naturally was. "We won't retrospect. To the case in hand."

"Well?" spoke Frank, looking so open-faced and steadily at Roseberry that the latter blinked.

"I—that is—I would suggest an intermediary, see? The law is very baffling, my friend. Once in its clutches a man is lost."

"But I'm not a man—I'm only an innocent, misjudged boy," burst forth
Frank. "See here, Judge Roseberry, I know why you come and who sent you."

"My client, Mr. Mace—"

"Is a wicked, unjust man," flared out Frank, "and you are just as bad. Neither of you can possibly believe that I would steal. Why, I don't have to steal. I have what money I need, and more than that. I tell you, if my father was here I think you people would take back-water quick enough. When he does come, you shall suffer for this."

Judge Roseberry looked impressed. He stared at Frank in silence. Perhaps his muddled mind reflected that the accused lad had a good reputation generally. Anyhow, the open, resolute way in which Frank spoke daunted him. But he shook his head in an owl-like manner after a pause and remarked:

"My function's purely legal in the case—must do my duty."

"Do it, then, and don't bother me," said Frank irritably, and started away from the spot.

"Hold on, hold on," called out the judge after him. "I've a compromise to offer."

"There is nothing to compromise," asserted Frank over his shoulder.

"Suggestion, then. Don't be foolish, young man."

"Well, what's your suggestion?" demanded Frank.

"We'll take a walk in the woods, see? I've got a ten-dollar bill in my pocket. I'll walk one way, you walk the other. No witnesses. I'll put the ten-dollar bill on the stump—you'll do your part at another stump. We'll turn, pass each other. Backs to each other, see?"

"I don't know what you are driving at," declared Frank.

"As you pass my stump you take up the ten-dollar bill; it's yours. As I pass your stump—backs to each other, mind you, no witnesses, matter pleasantly adjusted—I'll pick up the diamond bracelet."

"All right—that suits me," said Frank readily, but with a grim twinkle in his eye.

"You agree?" inquired the judge eagerly.

"Yes."

"Good."

"Provided you furnish the bracelet," went on the boy.

"Bah!" snorted the judge in high dudgeon, marching from the spot. "Young man, I've done my duty out of consideration for your respected family. You won't listen to reason, so you must take the consequences. I shall advise Mr. Mace to have you arrested at once."

CHAPTER IV

GILL MACE

About the middle of the afternoon Frank strolled down to the village. He had been worked up a good deal all morning, and when dinner time came he was made aware that his aunt was determined to treat him as a kind of culprit.

The cross-grained old maid did not speak to him during the entire meal. She sat prim and erect, barely glanced at him, and as Frank arose from the table, half choked with the unwelcome food he had eaten, he resolved to speak his mind.

"I'd like to say a word or two, Aunt Tib," he began.

"Say it," snapped his ungracious relative sharply.

"About this monstrous charge made against me by Mr. Mace," continued Frank.

"It is indeed a terrible charge," remarked Miss Brown, with a chilling, awesome groan.

"Of course it isn't true, and of course you can't believe it," went on Frank. "I am sure that a day or two will change things that look so black for me now. All that I am worrying about is that this affair may get to father and mother. It would simply worry them both to death, and it mustn't be. I hope you wouldn't be so cruel, so wicked, as to add to their troubles."

"I shall not write to them until you have confessed."

"Confessed!" cried Frank hotly. "There is nothing to confess. Don't I tell you that I never saw old man Mace's bracelet? Aunt Tib, I am ashamed of you. I tell you, I'm holding in a good deal. If I thought you believed that man's story I'd leave the house for good."

"You mustn't do that, Frank," she said quickly. "We must bear our crosses patiently."

"It's no use; I'm just fighting mad," declared Frank to himself as he left the house. "I just hope Mace and Roseberry will do something to bring affairs to a focus. If this thing gets around the village, it will be a nice, pleasant thing for me, won't it, now? I've half a mind to make a break and get out of it all."

Frank was in a decidedly disturbed state of mind. From being angry he got dejected, and for some time he allowed his thoughts to wander unrestrained. He actually envied Ned Foreman and his wandering career. If it had not been for his loyalty to his parents he would have hunted up the grinding wagon to ask the man who had relieved Ned to give him a job.

It would not have been so hard for Frank if he had had any close chum to whom he could have confided his troubles. But Miss Brown had spoiled all that. She kept the garden like a parlor, and scared away what few acquaintances Frank had with her severe looks and manner. The Jordans had lived at Tipton for only a year. The greater part of that time Frank had been absent at a boarding-school in a neighboring town. The lads with whom he had formerly associated in Tipton were away at various academies. Frank did not know the town schoolboys very well.

He went downtown and strolled about for a time. Defiantly he walked calmly past Mace's jewelry store, and even paused and looked through its front plate-glass show window. He passed the usual hangout of Judge Roseberry, and did not hasten his steps a bit when he saw that the judge, lounging on a bench, noticed him.

Frank fancied that after he had passed the tavern the judge said something to some of his fellow hangers on, and that they glanced after him with some curiosity. A little farther on two little schoolboys paused in their walk, stared hard at him and then scooted away, saying something about a "burglary."

"Mace is bluffing, and so is the judge," determined Frank. "They have no evidence against me, and they don't dare to arrest me. If they spread their false stories, all the same, they shall suffer for it."

Frank felt pretty lonesome and gloomy as he passed the schoolhouse. The boys were rushing out, free from the tasks of the day. It might have been imagination, but Frank fancied that one or two of them greeted him with a cool nod and hurried on. As he politely lifted his cap to a bevy of girls, he imagined that they were rather constrained in their return greeting and looked at him queerly.

Beyond the schoolhouse was Bolter's Hill, a famous place for coasting in the winter time. Just now it

had a new power of attraction for the schoolboys. An old hermit-like fellow named Clay Dobbins had lived for years at the other side of the hill. He owned a little patch of ground and a dilapidated house. His wife had died recently, and all the village knew of his two chronic complaints.

The first was that "Sairey had died leaving a sight less money than he had expected," and old Dobbins had wondered if the lawyers or the speculators had got it.

The second was that the old man had got nervous and lonely living in the isolated spot. So he had rented a hut the other side of Bolter's Hill, near the schoolhouse. He planned to have his house moved there, and intended starting a little candy and notion store.

There had never been much house-moving in Tipton, and nobody in the village was equipped to undertake even the simple task of conveying the Dobbins dwelling uphill and then down again. A house-moving firm from Pentonville, however, had engaged to perform the work. They had jacked up the house on screws, chained it securely to a log frame, and, setting a portable windlass at the top of the hill, operated this by horse power.

An immense rope cable, thick as a man's arm, ran to a pulley under the house. It was a novelty to the school youngsters to watch the horse go round and round the windlass, and to see the house come up the hill a slow inch at a time.

Work on the moving had been suspended for the day, but the boys hung around the spot. They raced through the house, clambered over the moving frame, and knocked with the workmen's mallets on the rollers to make the hollow echo that was new to them and sounded like music.

The house movers had set the windlass locked, and the strain on the rope brought it taut. The house was anchored about half way up the hill, straining at the giant cable dangerously and on a sharp tilt.

A little urchin was trying to "walk the tightrope," as he called it, as
Frank came up, shaping a willow stick with his pocket knife.

"Say, Frank Jordan," cried the lad, "won't you make me a whistle?"

"Of course I will," replied Frank accommodatingly, and got astride a moving timber and set at work. Only a few of the large boys were about the spot. Frank noticed that Gill Mace, the nephew of the village jeweler, was among their number.

Frank soon turned out a first-class whistle for the applicant, who went away tooting at a happy rate. A second urchin preferred a modest request, and Frank had just completed the second whistle when the boy he had sent away contented came back sniveling.

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Frank sympathizingly.

Between sobs the little fellow related his troubles. Gill Mace had forcibly taken the whistle away from him, and when he had got through testing its merits had pocketed it and sent its owner away with a cuff on the ear.

"I'll give Gill Mace a piece of my mind, just now," declared Frank, hastily getting to the ground. The jeweler's nephew was up to just such mean, unmanly tricks all of the time. Frank felt that he deserved a lesson. Besides, at just the present moment he had no great love for the whole Mace family.

Frank hurried around to the side of the house, to come upon Gill and his companions, who were engaged in leaping across a puddle near a pit in the hillside. He marched right up to the culprit, the little fellow he had befriended trailing after him.

"See here, Gill Mace," cried Frank promptly, "can't you find a little better employment of your time than bullying little children?"

Gill flushed up, but put on a braggart air.

"Any of your business?" he demanded blusteringly.

"I'm making it my business—it ought to be the business of any decent, fair-minded fellow," asserted Frank staunchly.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" demanded Gill, doubling up his fists.

"I'm going to give you just twenty seconds to give that whistle back to that boy, or I'm going to take it out of your hide," declared Frank steadily.

"Oho! you are, eh?" snorted Gill, swelling up and glaring wickedly at Frank. "Well, you won't get the whistle, for it's there in the mud."

"I've a good mind to make you go after it," began Frank, when Gill, making a sudden jump, landed up against him, and dealt him a quick, foul blow below the waist.

"I don't care about dirtying my hands with a thief," answered Gill, "but—"

"What's that?" cried Frank, all the pride and anger in his nature coming to the front.

"I said it," replied Gill, keeping up his doubled fists, but edging away, for the look in the eyes of his adversary warned and cowed him.

"You call me a thief, do you?" demanded Frank.

"Yes; you stole a diamond bracelet from my uncle's store this morning."

"It's a falsehood!" shouted Frank—"a falsehood as foul and dirty as the muck in that pool! That for you!"

Frank's arm shot out like a piston-rod, and into the mud-puddle, head over heels, went Gill Mace with a frightened howl.

CHAPTER V

THE RUINED HOUSE

"Well, it's been a pretty lively day for me, and every move I make I seem to be getting deeper and deeper into trouble."

This was the sentiment expressed by Frank as he retired to rest at the end of the most eventful day in his young life. The hours had indeed been full of incidents. He reviewed them all as he lay, his head on his pillow.

Frank smiled to himself as he remembered Gill Mace. The boy who had called Frank a thief was unable to repeat the vile accusation when he emerged from the puddle into which Frank had pushed him. His mouth was full of mud, his hair was a dripping mop, his clothes were plastered with it. Frank had waited to respond to any later move that Gill might decide on. The jeweler's nephew, however, made none. As he emerged from the puddle three schoolgirls, arms linked in friendly companionship, passed the spot. They noticed Gill and tittered, and Gill sneaked away without so much as even glancing at Frank again.

"I always thought you three fellows a pretty good lot," Frank spoke to the companions of Gill. "I'd hate to change my opinion by thinking you believe what Gill Mace said about my being a thief."

Frank looked so manly and earnest as he spoke these words that his hearers were impressed. One of them stepped up and shook hands with him. Another remarked that he believed no story until he had evidence of its truthfulness, and a third half intimated that he would have served Gill Mace just as Frank had done if he made an untrue accusation.

When Frank got home he discovered that his pocket knife was missing. He tried to remember what had become of it, and finally decided that he must have left it on the log frame or dropped it to the ground when he had started out to meet Gill Mace. Frank valued the knife as a pleasant reminder of Ned Foreman, and planned to get up extra early the next morning and make a search for it.

He was pretty well satisfied as he closed his eyes in sleep that the jeweler would not dare to have him arrested for the theft of the diamond bracelet.

Nothing would probably come of the ridiculous charge, except that the underhanded public insinuations of Mace would damage Frank's character. Now that he had taught Gill Mace a needed lesson, of course his family would be more bitter against Frank than ever.

"The thing will die down," decided Frank. "If they get too rampant, I'll—yes, I'll actually sue them for slander."

It must have been about midnight when Frank awoke with a shock. The echo of a frightful rumble and crash deafened his ears, and he fancied that the bed was vibrating. A scream inside the house made him sit up and listen. He was startled and bewildered.

"Frank! Frank!" quavered the terror-filled tones of his aunt, as she knocked sharply at the door of his bedroom, "get up at once!"

"What has happened?" inquired Frank quickly.

"I don't know—something dreadful, I am sure!" gasped the affrighted spinster. "It felt like an earthquake. It shook the whole town. It must have been an explosion."

"Humph! Good thing you know I'm in the house," observed Frank, as he jumped to the floor and hustled into his clothes.

"Why is that, Frank?"

"Because it may have been a dynamite explosion blowing up somebody's safe, and of course Mace would say I did it."

"Don't jest, Frank," pleaded his aunt. "I'm chilled through and shaking all over. Get outside and see if you cannot learn what it all means."

"I think myself it was probably an accidental blast at the quarry down the river," said Frank; "but I'll soon find out."

He did not dress fully, and let himself out on the porch in his slippers. As he walked down to the gate Frank noticed lights appear in many houses nearer the village, as if their inmates had been suddenly aroused from sleep.

Then distant voices, a rumbling wagon, people talking in loud tones, boyish shouts and a vague chorus of sounds unusual for the midnight hour, were drifted to Frank's hearing. From all this, however, he could think out no coherent idea as to what might be going on nearer town.

"It's not a fire, for there's no glare," he decided. "There's some kind of a commotion over near the schoolhouse, it seems. Reckon I'll dress fully and investigate."

There was a certain attraction for Frank in the distant bustle and turmoil. He went back into the house to find his aunt seated in the front hall. She was wrapped up in a shawl, pale and shivering.

"Oh, Frank, what is it?" she chattered.

"I didn't find out, but I'm going to," he announced, as he hurried on to his room.

"Is—is it coming here?"

"Is what coming here?"

"The—the—whatever it is."

"It hasn't hurt us any, has it? And I don't think it will."

Frank got back to the road ten minutes later and started on a run toward the town. Taking the middle of the road, he nearly bumped into a man where the highway turned.

"Hi, there!" challenged the latter.

"Hello!" responded Frank, recognizing a truck gardner who lived just beyond the Jordan place. "What's happened, Daley?"

"Old Dobbins' house."

"What, the one they're moving?"

"Yes. It broke loose from its bearings and has rolled right back to where it stood."

"You don't say so?" exclaimed Frank, with something of a shock.

"Yes, it has," asserted Daley, "only it's the greatest wreck of bricks and plaster now you ever saw."

"No one hurt, I hope?"

"No, except old Dobbins' feelings. He's capering around at a great rate, saying that the town, or the county, or the government, will have to pay him for the damage."

"The movers couldn't have understood their business very well to have such a thing happen." said Frank.

"Looks that way," acceded Daley, and they parted at the gateway of the Jordan home.

Frank advised his aunt of the state of affairs and went back to bed. Naturally he was curious to have a view of the wrecked house. He got up early before breakfast and took a stroll over to the scene of the disaster. The lad, too, thought of his lost knife and bore that fact in mind.

He gave up all hopes of recovering the knife, however, as he reached the spot where he believed he had lost it the afternoon previous. Where the Dobbins house had been anchored on the hillside the ground was torn up and disturbed as though a cyclone had passed over the place. At the bottom of the hill, jammed half way through the rickety old stable, was what was left of the dismantled house.

Miss Brown made Frank stay in the house and study from eight until ten every morning. With all the exciting thoughts that were passing through his mind, Frank found it difficult to fix his attention on his books that morning. He was glad to get out of the house when ten o'clock came. His pet pigeons were his first care. Then he started for the post-office, hoping that he would find a letter from his father.

"Hi, Frank," a voice hailed him as he made a short cut through a little grove at the rear of the house, and a familiar form emerged from some bushes.

"Why, it's Mr. Dobbins!" exclaimed Frank in some surprise. He had expected to find the miserly old fellow in the depths of despair over the loss of his house, but Dobbins was grinning and chuckling at a great rate.

"So 'tis Frank," he bobbed with a broad smile. "Was looking for you."

"What for, Mr. Dobbins?"

The old man blinked. Then he laughed in a pleased, crafty way and put his hand in his pocket.

"See here," he cried, and Frank noticed that he held three coins in his palm. There was a twenty, a ten and a five-dollar gold piece.

"Um-m," observed Dobbins. "Double eagle a good deal of money, isn't it now, Frank?"

"Why, yes," assented Frank wonderingly, and the old fellow picked out the twenty-dollar gold piece with his free hand and put it in his vest pocket.

"It would be extravagant for a boy to squander even as much as ten dollars, hey?"

Frank did not answer, for he could not surmise what the old fellow was getting at.

"So, if you'll consider this five-dollar gold piece the right thing," resumed Dobbins, "you're mightily welcome to it, and say, Frank—you're a bully boy!"

"How's that?" inquired Frank.

"Oh, you know," asserted Dobbins. "Take it quick, before I change my mind."

"Take the five dollars, you mean?" questioned Frank.

"Exactly."

"Why should I do that? You don't owe me anything."

"Don't?" cried Dobbins. "Why, boy, I owe you everything. No nonsense between friends, you see."

"I don't see—" began Frank.

Old Dobbins placed a finger beside his nose in a crafty, expressive way. He winked blandly at Frank, with the mysterious words:

"That's all right, Frank, boy. No need of going into particulars, but—you know right enough. Mum's

the word. Take the five dollars."

CHAPTER VI

AN ASTONISHING CLUE

"But I don't know," declared Frank forcibly, "and as I have *not* earned any five dollars, of course I can't take it."

"Sho!" chuckled old Dobbins, dancing about Frank, as spry as a schoolboy and poking him playfully in the ribs. Frank had to smile.

"See here, Mr. Dobbins," he observed, "it appears to me that you feel pretty lively for a man who has just had his house all smashed to pieces."

"That's just it—that's just it," retorted Dobbins in a tone almost jubilant. "Where would I be if it hadn't happened? Why, boy, when I think of what you've done, I—I almost would adopt you—that is, if you weren't too big an eater."

There was some mystery under all this, Frank discerned. He wanted to get at the plain facts of the case.

"I'm afraid I don't entirely understand," he began when his eccentric visitor interrupted him.

"Ho! ho!" he guffawed. "You will be *sharp*, you young *blade*, won't you? Got some *temper*—hey? True as *steel*—hi! When the rope gave out you *cut* for it—ho! ho! ho!" and the speaker went into spasms of merriment over his own wit.

"'Blade, temper, steel,'" quoted Frank. "Are you getting off a pun, Mr. Dobbins?"

"Put it that way if you like," returned Dobbins cheerfully. "There was a knife. That's the long and short of it, don't you see? A boy's pocket knife. It sawed the big moving cable. Snap! Bang! Away went the house. Whose knife? Aha! Dear me—who can tell? Sly, hey—Frank, boy? We ain't going to tell. No need of it. Artful dodgers—ho! ho! ho! Take the five dollars."

Frank gave a vivid start. He was partly enlightened now. He had mislaid his knife near the house that had been anchored on the hill side. Somebody had found it and had cut the cable with it.

"What you are getting at, then," said Frank, "is that a knife cut the rope loose?"

"Ah, just that."

"And my knife?"

"Oh, yes, it was your knife, Frank—no doubt about that at all."

"How do you know it was my knife?" asked Frank.

"Because it had your name on it. Of course I didn't see the knife used, but Judge Roseberry found it the next morning right under the windlass."

"Who?" fairly shouted Frank.

"Judge Roseberry. The knife fitted to the cut. Judge Roseberry came to me with it. 'Dobbins,' says he to me, 'business is business. I have made a discovery. The person who smashed your house is Frank Jordan, and I can prove it.' Then he told me the rest."

"And what did you say?" cried the astonished Frank.

"Well, feeling pretty perk over a discovery I had just made, I listened to the crafty old varmint."

"And what did he say?"

"He told me that you had stolen a diamond bracelet from Mace, the jeweler."

"Which was a falsehood," asserted Frank with vehemence.

"Yes, I can believe that," nodded Dobbins, "seeing that Roseberry said so. He then began to tell me how they were trying to have you give up that bracelet. He said that if I would have you arrested for smashing the house, it would break you down and make you confess about the bracelet. Anyhow, it would look so bad for you that your father would settle all the damage."

"The villain!" commented Frank.

"Them's my sentiments, too, Frank. Mebbe, if things hadn't turned out as they did, I might have acted mean and measly, too, but I was so tickled over the way they did come out that I just laughed at your boyish mischief of letting the old shack slide downhill."

"But I had no hand in anything of the sort," declared Frank stoutly.

"Let it pass, Frank, let it pass," chuckled Dobbins unbelievingly. "You see, when I came to look over the old ruins I come to where the old storeroom wall had busted out. You know it's always been a mystery to me what had become of my wife Sairey's scrapings and earnings?"

"I've heard you tell so—yes," nodded Frank.

"There they were, boy!" cried old Dobbins in a sort of ecstasy. "She'd hidden them in a hole in the wall. The wall broke out in the crash. Confidentially," and the narrator looked around cautiously and lowered his voice to a mysterious whisper, "I found in gold and silver a heap of money amounting to nigh three thousand dollars."

"Well!" ejaculated Frank.

"So, you see, it was a lucky day for me when you cut that rope."

"Which I never did," replied Frank vigorously. "If you will come over to the house, Mr. Dobbins, my aunt will assure you that I was in bed hours before and after the crash happened."

"Well, anyway, it was your knife."

"Yes," assented Frank, and explained about it being mislaid. Apparently Dobbins was convinced. He was thoughtful for a moment or two, exchanged the coin in hand for another in his pocket, and extended this to Frank with the words:

"I guess it's worth ten dollars, then."

"No, Mr. Dobbins," said Frank positively, "I can't take your money. I'll tell you, though, if you really feel kindly toward me."

"I do, for a fact, Frank."

"And want to do me a favor?"

"Try me, Frank."

"I want you to come up to the house and satisfy yourself that I have told you the truth about being home last night, and then I want you to go to town with me."

"Why, Frank, I don't doubt your word."

"No; but others may, and I want to settle this affair."

"All right, Frank, though I'd feel better if you took the money."

Miss Brown looked rather curious and perplexed when confronted by Frank and Dobbins, but satisfactorily answered the questions put by her nephew.

"Oh, Frank," she said, as he and his companion left the place, "if you are going to town I wish you would stop at the post-office."

"I will," replied Frank. "I hope there will be a letter from the folks. I shall not take much of your time, Mr. Dobbins," he explained to his companion as they started for the village.

Frank ran into the post-office as they reached it. The postmistress handed out a paper from the Jordan letter-box. Frank stuck it in his pocket a little disappointedly, for he had expected a letter from his father.

He led Dobbins from the post-office to the village tavern. As he had expected, Judge Roseberry was lounging on the bench outside, spouting politics to some loafer companions.

"Keep right with me, Mr. Dobbins," directed Frank. "I shall need your services."

"Drat me, if I can understand what you're getting at, lad," said Dobbins desperately, "but I'll stick, if I can be of any use to you."

Frank marched straight up to the crowd in front of the tavern.

"Judge Roseberry," he said calmly, but with an impressive seriousness, "I will thank you to return my pocket knife."

"Hey—h'm!" spluttered the judge, taken off his balance. "Your knife?"

"Precisely," insisted Frank.

"Why—how—who says I've got your knife?" stammered the judge, growing redder in the face than usual.

"Mr. Dobbins, here, informs me that he does," replied Frank.

"That's so," echoed Dobbins; "inasmuch as you showed it to me this morning."

"Well, if I have," observed the judge, bracing up a little, "I hold it as evidence of a crime. As an emissary of the law—"

"That's the right word, judge," grinned Dobbins—"'emissary' fits. It don't go in this instance, though. The evidence is all on Frank's side, as I have found out. He was in bed when that smash-up took place, so I reckon I won't go into any plot to ruin the character of an honest boy, this time."

Judge Roseberry gave up the knife reluctantly and felt pretty sheepish in the act, for his cronies were winking and chuckling over his discomfiture.

"I thank you very much for what you have done for me, Mr. Dobbins," said
Frank as they left the spot.

"That's all right, boy," replied Dobbins heartily; "and if these varmints make you any more threats, just sue them and I'll stand the costs—that is, if they aren't too heavy."

Frank felt quite lighthearted as he left old Dobbins and started homeward. He entered the house whistling, and threw the newspaper he had just got at the post-office into his aunt's lap. As he went outside and was passing the open window of the sitting-room, a cry brought him to a halt.

"What is the matter, Aunt Tib?" he inquired quickly.

Miss Brown held an open letter in her hand and looked fluttering and excited.

"It was inside the paper, Frank," she explained.

"Is it from the folks?" inquired Frank eagerly.

"It is," assented his aunt

"Father is well?" asked Frank breathlessly.

"He is getting better every day. But, Frank," and his aunt looked profoundly grave and important, "the serious duties of life are grave. A false step may change the whole course of a young life. There is a tide in the affairs of men——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Frank. "I know all about that; but what are you getting at?"

Miss Brown did not fancy being interrupted in one of her famous homilies, and she answered tart and terse:

"Your father has made arrangements to send you to Bellwood School, and you are to start at once."

Frank fairly staggered at the glad news. He was so overcome that he could not speak. He just bobbed his head and smiled.

The instant the youth got out of range of the house, however, a riotous, echoing yell rang from his lips as he turned a mad, capering somersault:

"Hurrah!"

CHAPTER VII

THE CONFIDENCE MAN

"All aboard!"

Frank fancied that he had never listened to a more cheery command than this given as the Western Express rolled out of the depot at Tipton.

It was beautiful weather, a glorious day that would put life and sunshine into an invalid, let alone a lively, happy boy escaping from what he considered thralldom, believing that all the joys of life were awaiting him at the end of his trip.

Frank's aunt actually smiled and waved the lad a gracious adieu from the depot platform. She had been quite gentle and kind to him the few hours preceding his departure. She had put up a generous lunch for him, and had even unbent so far as to declare that she had believed from the first that he knew nothing about the missing diamond bracelet. All this, however, had been the preface to a dozen brief lectures on thorny ways and the dark pitfalls of life. Frank was genuinely glad to escape from the gloomy influence Miss Brown cast on everything bright and happy about her.

At another part of the platform was Mace, the jeweler. He had a sullen frown on his face, and he fixed his glance on Frank as though his eyes were boring him through and through to discover the missing diamond bracelet.

The wrecking of old Dobbins' house had remained a mystery. Some thought the rope had been cut, while others were of the opinion that it had broken because of the heavy strain put upon it.

"Good—we're off!" jubilated Frank, as he waved a last adieu to his aunt through the open car window, and Tipton faded away in the distance. Then he settled down in his comfortable seat to enjoy the all-day ride to Bellwood.

Miss Brown had doled out twenty-five cents at the depot news-stand for a book full of jokes and funny pictures. Frank soon exhausted this literary fund. Then he bought some oranges from the train boy and had a lively chat with him. He bought a daily paper and read it through and through, and by noon the trip began to get a trifle monotonous.

It was about one o'clock when the train arrived at a junction, where there was a stop for half an hour. Frank was glad to walk about and stretch his limbs. When leaving time came and he returned to the train he became interested in studying two passengers.

A husky, farmer-looking man had entered the coach, followed by a stocky-built lad about the age of Frank. The latter bore the appearance of a boy sullen and unhappy over some circumstance. Frank thought he had never seen a more dissatisfied face than that of this lad. He shuffled along after the farmer in an ungracious fashion, and taking the first empty seat flopped into it unceremoniously.

"All right," said his companion. "You're probably better by yourself when you're in one of your tantrums. Just see if you can't get some of your natural meanness out of you while looking at the beauties of nature along the route."

The boy hunched up his shoulders contemptuously without saying a word in reply, while the farmer selected a seat across the aisle and directly in front of Frank. He occupied himself looking over a weekly farm paper. After a while Frank crossed over to the seat occupied by the boy who had accompanied the farmer.

"Going far?" inquired Frank in a friendly tone.

The lad did not move to make room for him in the seat. He turned a sullen face on Frank. There was dark suspicion and open animosity in his eyes.

"Far enough," he muttered.

"It's pleasant weather, isn't it?" propounded Frank, bound to be companionable.

"Say," said the boy, staring pugnaciously at our hero, "trying to pick on me, are you?"

"Why," answered the astonished Frank, "I never dreamed of such a thing."

"Yes, you did! Lemme alone!"

"All right," returned Frank pleasantly. "Only here's an orange and a funny book I want you to enjoy," and he placed the articles in question beside the boy and stepped back to his own seat.

As he did so he met the big round face of the farmer on a broad grin. The latter turned around and accosted him.

"Not very sociable, hey?" he remarked.

"Oh, I probably seem strange to him," observed Frank.

"He's that way all along," declared the farmer. "If he is my son, I say it."

"You are his father, then?"

"The only one he's got," replied the farmer. "You see, I married his mother. She's dead, now. That boy always was a sulky, ugly varmint. Why, he'd ought to be the happiest critter in Christendom. He's got eight step-brothers and step-sisters. Won't jibe, though. He's just unnateral, that fellow is. No living at home with him, so I'm taking his to a boarding-school."

"Maybe he doesn't feel well all the time," suggested Frank gently.

"What, that big, husky boy? Why, he's strong as an ox. No, sir-ree, nateral depravity, I say. I tried to whip it out of him. It did him no good."

"I shouldn't think it would," decided Frank mentally, and then the conversation dropped and the man returned to his paper.

Frank felt sorry for the grumpy, sad-looking boy across the aisle. His own loveless experience with his aunt at Tipton gave him some reason for this. The boy was worse off than he was, though, for Frank had kind-hearted, affectionate parents, while the farmer boy was motherless. The latter had eaten half of the orange and was quite engrossed in the book given him. Frank was about to start another effort to make friends, when the train came to a station and a passenger came aboard who diverted his interest.

The newcomer was a tall, dark man of middle age. He had a very solemn face and wore a black tie and choker and clothes that suggested mourning.

There were plenty of vacant seats, but after a sharp look about the coach this new passenger came to where the farmer sat.

"Seat engaged, sir?" he inquired in a polite, ingratiating way.

"No, sure not," responded the farmer heartily. "Sit down. Glad to have company."

"I fear I shall not be very good company," observed the new passenger with a dismal sigh.

"How's that, sir?" questioned the farmer curiously.

"I'm going to a funeral."

"Ah! Nigh relative?"

"Yes; a brother."

"Too bad," commiserated the farmer. "Lost my own brother last year. Bill was a hustling chap. Missed him dreadfully last plowing season."

"My brother lives at Jayville," explained the man, naming a station two stops ahead.

"Jayville, eh?" repeated the farmer. "Been there. Went to the bank there once to sell a mortgage."

"Indeed. An uncle of mine is an official of the bank."

"Is that so, now?" said the farmer. "There's the mayor, there, too; sort of a distant relative of my first wife. Don't know him, do you?"

Frank interestedly watched the stranger deftly draw from a side pocket a book. It seemed to be some kind of a country directory. Without attracting the attention of his companion, the stranger glanced over its pages, meantime suspending conversation by pretending to have a violent fit of coughing.

"The mayor," he said finally. "You mean Mr. David Norris?"

"That's him!" exclaimed the farmer.

"Oh, yes, I know him. He is a cousin of mine."

"Is that so? Shake!" said the farmer. "Why, we're quite acquainted, hain't we? Almost relatives, hey?"

"Well!" muttered Frank under his breath. "This is getting interesting. Sure as sugar, that fellow is a confidence man."

CHAPTER VIII

NIPPED IN THE BUD

Frank had traveled some in his young career, had read considerable, and had thought a good deal. The talk of the melancholy man in the white choker had led up to a point where Frank felt pretty sure he was up to some trick or other. While pretending to be interested in the newspaper he had read over and over, our hero kept eyes and ears wide open.

The stranger talked of things in general now. He asked the farmer concerning his crops, and particularly about the wife who must be a distant relative of his. Finally he observed:

"It's a pretty bad prospect for the family of my dead brother."

"How's that, neighbor?" asked the farmer.

"Left them without much of anything—that is, in the way of ready money. In fact, I must bear all the burden of the funeral expenses. I'm short myself, and it's going to cramp me to get hold of ready cash. I've got to make something of a sacrifice, and it's worrying me."

"Hope you don't have to sacrifice your homestead, or anything like that," observed the farmer sympathetically.

"I won't, just the same," declared the stranger with some force. "I promised my father I'd never let the old home go."

"That's the right sentiment, friend."

"I was offered ten thousand for it, and refused it. Then fifteen thousand—I would not listen to it. I may have to borrow on it, but it will be a small amount. I'm trying to avoid even that. Let me show you something. See those documents?" and the speaker showed a neat little package of papers secured with a rubber band. He selected the outside one and spread it open. It was a certificate of stock, printed in green and red on fine parchment paper. Its blanks were filled in with writing in great flourishes, and there was an immense gold seal in one corner.

"What's that, now?" inquired the farmer with bulging eyes. "Government bond?"

"Better than a government bond, my friend," assured the stranger. "A government bond brings a man only four per cent. a year. This stock paid me ten per cent. in January, twenty per cent. in March, and I was offered double its face value last week."

"A hundred dollars," said the farmer musingly, noting the handsome medallion figure at the top of the stock certificate.

"Yes, and worth two hundred, as I tell you. I wouldn't sell it at any price, but I'm short of ready cash, and I'll pay eight per cent. interest and give the next dividend as a bonus, for a loan of seventy-five dollars for thirty days. I'm proud and particular about my business, and I dislike to ask my friends for the loan."

"Say," observed the farmer, dazzled at the sight of the pretty document, "you mean you'll give all that security and interest for a loan of seventy-five dollars?"

"To an honest man who won't run away with the security, yes."

"I can show you letters telling you who I am," declared the farmer, perking up with pride. "Straight business with me, neighbor. I reckon I can dig up seventy-five dollars on any occasion."

"Look over the certificate, friend. You'll find the signatures all right.
D. Burlingame Gould, president—you've heard of the Goulds?"

"In the paper, certainly."

"He's one of them. Robert Winstanley Astorbilt, secretary, prominent New
York banker. Excuse me, I've got to get a drink of water. You won't find
better security in this country than a share of stock of the Little Wonder
Bonanza Mining & Milling Company of Montana."

"Hello!" said Frank to himself with a start "The Little Wonder—why, where did I see that name? I've got it! There's an item in the very newspaper I've been reading about it."

The stranger had proceeded to the water tank. He purposely left the farmer dazzled with his proposition to think over it. The latter sat in a sort of trance of avarice, staring at the enticing stock certificate.

A plan to confuse and outwit the swindler occurred to our hero. He was intent on locating the brief item he remembered having seen in the newspaper. He wanted to act on his plan before the stranger returned. Frank's eye ran over column after column, page after page.

"Got it," he breathed at last, and neatly tore out of place an item near the bottom of a page. It told of a swindle astoundingly perpetrated by a gang of confidence men in the city where the paper was published. The scheme was to induce greenhorns to invest in or loan money on mining stock of some companies that had no existence except on paper. The Little Wonder Bonanza Mining & Milling Company of Arizona headed the list of the worthless concerns.

"Quick—before the man comes back, read that," said Frank, leaning over the seat in front of him and placing the clipping in the hands of the former.

"Hey! What——"

"And then give it to him to read," added Frank with a chuckle.

"Hemlock and asparagus!" ejaculated the farmer as his glance ran over the item. "A bunko man, eh? And I was nearly gulled!"

"Well, friend," spoke the swindler suavely, returning down the aisle, "how about that little loan? You'll have to decide quick, for this is my station they're coming to."

"I see 'tis," responded the farmer, arising with a grim face that should have warned the man, who had taken him for an easy victim. "Say, you measly, flaggerbusted scrub, read that!"

The farmer did not wait to have the swindler read the newspaper item. He only thrust it near enough to his discomfited face to allow the fellow to get an inkling of its meaning. Then his sinewy hand closed on the collar of the swindler's coat.

The train was slowing up just then, and a brake-man threw open the door of the coach with the announcement:

"Jayville!"

"I'm going to introduce you to the town," grinned the farmer. "Bolt, you varmint!"

He ran the fellow down the car, the other passengers arising from their seats in excitement. Straight through the open doorway he rushed the swindler, and out upon the platform. Arrived there, the farmer changed his mind. The depot was about two hundred feet ahead. Just where the coach was running was a deep ditch.

Frank saw the stalwart farmer lift his prisoner bodily, he heard a yell and then a splash, and saw the baffled swindler land waist-deep in the ditch, deluged, silk hat, white choker and dress coat, in a cascade of murky mud.

"My wife's cousin, the banker, and his friend, the mayor of the town, can help him out of that fix if they want to," chuckled the farmer, coming back into the car and rubbing his hands as if to wash the dirt from them.

CHAPTER IX

A BOY GUARDIAN

The conductor grinned and the passengers roared with laughter when the farmer explained the incident. Even the glum-faced stepson of the narrator roused up into some interest.

"Thankee, neighbor," spoke the farmer, effusively grasping Frank's hand. "You're the right sort, sure enough—eyes wide open and up to snuff. Guess I'd better keep close to home after this. I ain't to be trusted along with them gold-brick fellows."

The old man took a great fancy to Frank and became quite confidential with him. He piled candy and peanuts on him from the train boy's supply, invited him to the farm, and wanted to know Frank's name so he could tell the folks about him.

"I am Frank Jordan, live at Tipton, and am bound for school at Bellwood," said Frank.

"Hey! how—what?" exclaimed the farmer explosively. "You don't mean to say that you're traveling to school, too?"

"Yes," replied Frank. "But who else do you mean?"

"Why, my son, Robert, over there—Robert Upton. Now, isn't it funny—he's going right to the very school you are?"

"To Bellwood?"

"That's the name—Bellwood is the place," assented Mr. Upton. "Wish you'd tell me what you know about it."

"I don't know anything about it, except what I've read and what I've heard from friends who went there," said Frank. But it seemed he had enough information to quite interest the farmer. Then the latter told him about his stepson.

"Robert's been no good at home," he said. "You can see what a sulky, unsociable fellow he is. No interest in nothing—thinks everybody hates him, and won't make up to anybody. He says he'll run away if I put him in school. If he does, I certainly will put him in the reformatory until he's of age."

Frank stole a rather pitying glance at the lad. The latter was hunched down in his seat, his hands rammed into his pockets, looking bored and miserable. Frank wondered what kind of a queer make-up his nature could be, to mope and scowl that bright, beautiful day, with the prospect of the useful chance for study and the gay life of schoolboy sport.

"Why, say," suddenly ejaculated Farmer Upton, starting under the spur of some exciting idea, "why can't Robert go with you to Bellwood?"

"He is doing so, isn't he?" said Frank with a smile.

"I mean why can't you sort of take charge of him and introduce him around, and save me the time and the expense. You see, if I go with him I can't get home until to-morrow. I can get off the train at Chester, and not buy any ticket to Bellwood, but go right back home. I've made all the arrangements for him by letter at Bellwood. The only reason I was going with him was to deliver him into the hands of the teachers and give them an inkling of what a troublesome fellow he is."

"Doesn't it strike you that that would hurt his chances with them and discourage him?" suggested Frank.

"I never thought of that."

"Excuse me, Mr. Upton," said Frank, "but maybe you're too hard on your stepson. It's hard to understand people, and a boy is a queer make-up. I will be glad to have him come with me to Bellwood, and I'll put myself out to make it agreeable for him."

"But he won't be agreeable; that's the trouble, you see," declared the farmer. "When he gets in one of them tantrums of his, you simply can't reason with him."

"Well, I'll take charge of him, if you don't wish to make the long journey,
Mr. Upton."

"I'll never know how to thank you, if you will," said the farmer gratefully. "Hi, there, Robert."

"Me?" droned the boy in the seat across the aisle.

"Who else do you suppose?" snapped his stepfather testily. "Come, rout out there, or I'll unhitch a strap somewhere and make you step lively."

Frank made up his mind that he would interest himself in the drifting waif of a fellow. As he thought of the big, husky farmer and his houseful of grown sons and daughters, he wondered if in their rough, unthinking way they had not quite broken the spirit of the motherless lad in their midst.

"Sit down here," ordered the farmer, turning the seat so it faced Frank. "This boy is going to Bellwood, Robert. He's agreed to take you along with him, and I'm going back home."

Robert shot a glance of dislike and suspicion at Frank, as if he was a link in a chain of jailers waiting for him along the line of life.

"You behave yourself along with him down at the academy, or I'll put you in the reform school," threatened the farmer harshly.

"Oh, give Bob something to think of that's pleasant," put in Frank cheerily. "It's a scary thing for a fellow, first time he goes among strangers. I'm bracing up myself to meet the rollicking, mischief-making crowd at Bellwood, who will just be lying in wait to guy us and haze us. We'll stand together, Bob, hey? and give them good as they send," and Frank slapped the lad on the shoulder, with a ringing laugh.

"They won't haze me," muttered Bob.

"Yes, they will, and then you and I will lay around to haze the new fellows who came after us," cried Frank. "Ha! ha! you'll see some fun down at Bellwood, Bob. They're a capital set of fellows, I'm told. We'll make the best of them, anyhow, and the best of ourselves. Come, friend Bob, we'll stick together and get all the fun out of life we can. Chums, is it?"

Frank was irresistible in his cheery, open-hearted good nature. Bob was ashamed to refuse his hand, but the set, glum look on his face did not lighten.

They had to change cars at a place called Chester. The farmer gave Frank minute instructions as to his charge. He went over his "perky meanness" in all its details, and he said to his stepson at parting:

"Now, then, you've got your chance to make a man of yourself. Any tantrums, and you'll hear from me quick, and hot and heavy."

This was his parental farewell, and Frank felt truly sorry for poor Bob, who, with all his sullenness, seemed entitled to a little better treatment.

After Farmer Upton had left them, Frank tried to break in on his stepson's sulky reserve, but failed utterly. Bob drew within himself. He made ungracious replies to questions put to him when Frank tried to interest him, and about two o'clock went over to a vacant seat and curled up in it and went fast asleep.

It was about six o'clock when the train pulled into Bellwood. Frank found it to be a quaint, pretty town with delightful country surrounding it.

"Come on, Bob," he spoke as they stepped to the depot platform; "we must arrange to have our trunks sent up to the academy."

"You've got my check," said Bob. "You can attend to all that; I'll wait here."

"Oh, no," replied Frank lightly, "we'll stick together until we get landed."

He was determined to afford his companion no opportunity to stray off. There was a look in Bob Upton's eye that recalled the oft-repeated injunction of his stepfather to watch out for "tantrums."

Frank arranged for the delivery of the trunks, and then made an inquiry of a truckman as to the location of Bellwood School. The man pointed out its towers about half a mile away.

They passed through the business part of the little town. At the village post-office several boys were waiting for their mail. They looked the newcomers over, but did not address them, and in a few minutes Frank and Bob found themselves pursuing a path following the windings of a little stream.

"We'll soon be there," announced Frank as they came to where on a slight rise of landscape the academy buildings stood pretty plainly in view. "What's the matter, Bob?"

The latter had halted in a peculiar, positive way. He backed slightly. His eye was defiant and determined now, instead of sullen.

"The matter is this," he announced bluntly. "I don't intend to go to that school."

CHAPTER X

AN OBSTINATE REBEL

"What's that?" demanded Frank, looking Bob over in a quiet but resolute way.

"I said it," observed Bob Upton obstinately. "I don't go to that school."

"Nonsense!" retorted Frank simply with a laugh.

He understood that a crisis had come. He read in the face of his companion a set purpose, and he prepared to meet the dilemma squarely.

"I think all the more of you, Bob," he observed, "for speaking your mind right out, but you'll have to change it this time."

"Why will I?" demanded Bob.

"Because I'm going to convince you that your scheme won't work at all."

"We'll see," muttered Bob.

"We will," declared Frank. "In the first place, you're thinking things out wrong. In the second place, I've promised your stepfather to take you to the academy."

"What of it? I didn't agree."

"No; but I never break my word. I'm going to fill my contract, if I have to carry you to Bellwood School."

"You'll have to do it, then," retorted Bob Upton. "I shan't budge an inch."

"I won't argue with you, Bob," said Frank evenly. "I'll give you some advice——"

"Don't want none," flared up Bob.

"Then I'll give you two minutes to resume the tramp."

Frank took out his watch and held it in his hand, surveying his opponent with a pleasant smile. Bob Upton with scowling brows dug his shoes into the ground for sixty seconds, and then began to back away.

"It won't do," said Frank, stepping after him and seizing his arm firmly.
"Come, now, be a good fellow."

"You let me alone."

"I shan't."

There was a vigorous struggle. Bob was stoutly built, but he was no match for Frank. The latter laughed at his threatening struggles.

"Give me a chance to fix my shoe, will you?" growled Bob as he gave up the fight and Frank released him. Then he stood patiently awaiting his pleasure, while his companion fumbled at his feet.

Bob's back was to Frank, but the latter suspected no trick. Of a sudden, however, Bob whipped off both shoes, flinging them into the creek, his cap after them, stripped his coat from place and tossed it also into the water. Then he flopped flat to the ground.

"I won't go another foot," he declared. "I'll rip every stitch of clothes on me to tatters and I'll fight like a wildcat before I'll make another step."

Frank's eyes flashed. His settled will showed in his resolute face.

"All right," he said quietly. "If you want to be handled like a wildcat, I can give you the treatment."

Quick as a flash Frank sprang to a plank reaching a few feet out into the stream. It appeared to have been a landing place for small boats. Lying across it was a piece of rope, evidently used in securing some water craft. Seizing this, Frank made a leap back to his stubborn companion, jumped squarely astride of him, and snatching his knife from his pocket, cut the rope in two. In a jiffy he had bound the struggling hands of Bob. He performed the same function for his feet. Then, arising, he looked down steadily at his helpless captive.

"I can carry you easily that way," he observed.

Frank went along the banks of the stream until he found a long branch. There was little current to the rivulet, and he soon fished out the floating coat and cap. One of the shoes had sunk, but it was in shallow water, and he managed to rescue this also.

"You're making a good deal of trouble, Bob," he remarked, "but you'll think better of it when you get cooled down."

All the stubborn resistance began to fade from the face of the wretched lad. He realized that he had found his master. The mute misery and helplessness in his eyes appealed more strongly to Frank's sympathies than had his former unpleasant mood.

"See here, Bob," said Frank, sitting down beside his companion, "while these articles are drying, better listen a bit to reason from a fellow who wants to be your friend. Will you?"

Bob turned his face away, his laps puckering.

"Oh, leave me alone," he sobbed. "I've got no friends. I never had any. I wish I could die and be out of everybody's way, that's what I wish."

"See here, Bob," said Frank, "that's downright wicked, if you mean it. I'd like to know what's the matter with you? Can't you see any sunshine in life?"

"Sunshine!" retorted Bob hotly. "Oh, yes, lots of it. Blazing, blistering sunshine in the harvest fields, where those big, selfish louts my stepfather told you about were loafing. Many a night I've crawled up to bed so tired and sore I could hardly get there, to have those fellows torment me or kick and cuff me because I wouldn't sneak down into the cellar and steal cider or preserves for them. I tell you, my stepfather has treated me wrong. I tell you, that heartless family of his had made my life so dark, I'm just discouraged."

Bob Upton broke down and cried bitterly. Frank felt very sorry for him.

"Bob," he said, "I'm glad you told me all of this. I begin to understand now. They haven't given you a fair chance; I see that. They've cowed you down and have nearly broken your spirit. All right. Show them that you're going to make something of yourself, all the same. We all have our troubles," and Frank told something of his own irksome, unpleasant life with his fault-finding aunt.

It was by slow degrees that Bob Upton livened up and then braced up. No one could help liking Frank Jordan.

"You're a cracking good fellow," said the farmer boy at last. "I hope it isn't like the spurts Jeff Upton used to have one day, and wallop me like thunder the next."

"I'll see to it that no one wallops you or jumps on you," promised Frank. "You keep right with me till

you learn the ropes and unlearn all the bitterness those relations of yours have put into you. I'm going to have you and me paired off for the same room, if I can."

"Say," choked up Bob at this, "any fellow who would do that, after seeing how measly mean I can be, is a brick. Just wait. When the time comes that I can show you what I think of you, I'll be there, true as steel."

"I believe you will," said Frank heartily. "You've been a good deal of a martyr, Bob Upton, and—there's your chance to be a hero! Quick, for mercy's sake, stop that runaway!"

Frank shouted the words excitedly. He had removed the ropes from Bob's wrists and ankles, and they had been standing near the coat spread out on the grass while they conversed. A clatter and wild shouts had suddenly pierced the air, and whirling about Frank saw coming down a steep roadway toward the river a spirited team of horses attached to a light carriage.

It had two seats, but the front one held no driver. In the rear seat, clinging frantically to one another and swung dangerously about by the swaying vehicle, were two affrighted children.

Frank was speedy, but Bob Upton was quicker. It amazed and gratified Frank to see his companion dart off like a shot. He himself ran to where the road curved down to the river to obstruct the runaway's progress when it reached that point. Bob, however, who knew all about horses from his farm experience, had made a rush on a short cut to intercept the runaway horses before they reached a spot where the descent was sharp, and where deep ravines showed on either side of the winding roadway.

Frank ran with all his might up the road, but Bob Upton by his short cut reached the point where it narrowed in an incredibly brief space of time. He had to catch at saplings and bushes to make the ascent. He was so far in advance of our hero that, while Frank continued running, he foresaw that he could not be first on the scene, and he watched Bob's progress with admiration and suspense.

Bob Upton did a risky thing. He seemed to think only of diverting or stopping the runaway team—anything to keep the spirited horses from reaching the dangerous point where the road narrowed.

Frank saw him pick up a great tree branch lying on the incline. Bearing this before him, Bob ran at the fast approaching horses with a loud shout.

Squarely into their foam-flecked faces the farm boy drove the branch, dropped hold of it, and let it rest on the carriage pole. The horses reared and tried to turn. Quick as lightning Bob grabbed a bit strap in either hand, gave them a jerk, then grasped the nose of each horse, and brought them to a panting standstill.

A man, the driver, pale and breathless, came running up from behind as
Frank reached the spot.

"Oh, you've saved them! Oh, I'll never leave them unhitched again! Boy, you shall have my month's wages—all I've got—for this!" shouted the man hysterically.

"Get the lines," directed Bob. "The horses are restive yet. Hold them till
I see what the matter is."

His practiced eye had noticed one of the horses acting queerly with one foot. As the driver gained the front seat and held the team under control, Bob picked up the off foot of one of the animals.

"This is what started them," he explained, holding up a sharp, long thorn.

"Say, who are you—what's your name? I want to see you again about this."

"Nothing to see me about," responded Bob. "Glad I was on hand, that's all.
If you loosened that check rein your horses will go a great deal easier."

"He's Robert Upton," spoke Frank, determined to give his valorous comrade all the distinction he deserved. "Bob," he added, as the restive team proceeded on their way, "you have been something of a martyr—now you are a positive hero."

"Pshaw! that little thing!" observed Bob carelessly, but his face flushed at Frank's honest compliment. "I've had a wild stallion drag me all around a forty-foot lot, and never got a scratch."

"You've made a fine beginning in the new life, Bob; you can't deny that," said Frank. "Come, get on your duds and let's travel."

Half an hour later, within the classic precincts of the big hall of learning on the hill, Frank Jordan and

Robert Upton were duly registered as students of Bellwood School.

CHAPTER XI

TURNING THE TABLES

"Frank, we are marked men!" declared Bob Upton tragically.

"Ha!" retorted Frank with a laugh. "The deadly enemy approaches!"

"No nonsense!" declared Bob, quite earnestly now. "We're in for a course of sprouts; it's to come off this very night, and the savage horde which is to begin the hazing operations is that gang of ten who occupy the big dormitory room next to us."

"How did you find all this out, Bob?"

"I overheard them plotting."

"I see."

"I'm going to spike their guns and turn the laugh on them."

"How?"

"That's telling. You'd object, so I'm going to keep my own counsel. There are four degrees of initiation. If a fellow consents to all the tests with a good-natured grin he passes muster. If he doesn't, he's tabooed."

"Well, then, let's stand muster cheerfully."

"Not I," retorted Bob grimly. "We'll turn the tables; then they'll think all the more of us. Ever hear of the Chevaliers of the Bath? Or the Knights of the Garter?"

"They are new to me—some school rigmarole, I suppose."

"Yes. Then there's Scouts of the Gauntlet."

"Worse and worse."

"And finally the Guides of Mystery."

"Whew!"

"To be a free and accepted Chevalier of the Bath a fellow has to be a water-proof rat. To be a Knight of the Garter he must consent to wake up at midnight to find a rope tackle around one ankle, and be dragged out of bed and down the hall."

"Well, we'll have to take our medicine, I suppose," said Frank lightly.

"To be a Scout of the Gauntlet," went on Bob, "is to be sent in the dark down the stairs on a fool errand, and come back to face a pillow shower. A genuine Guide of Mystery must have the grit to be left blindfolded in the village graveyard at midnight, barefooted, and with a skeleton stolen from the museum hitched to one arm."

"That's the program, is it, Bob?"

"Exactly," assented Frank's new chum. "The show begins to-night, as I say.
Stick close to me and you won't lose any rest."

Frank looked blandly and admiringly at his comrade, and was rather proud of him.

There had never come so marked and agreeable a change over a boy as that manifested in the instance of Bob Upton within three days.

There was still under the surface with Bob, when he met strangers, a certain suspicious element that had been engrafted in him. The least hint that any one was guying him or imposing upon him would

bring the old look back to his face, but Frank watched him closely, and coming to Bellwood School had indeed been the beginning of a new life for Bob.

An incident had occurred the morning after their arrival that, outside of Frank's friendly effort in behalf of Bob, had been the means of lifting the farmer boy to a new level.

The fellows at Bellwood School were of the average class in such institutions, a mixture of jolly and gruff, good and bad. Like attracts like, and the very first morning stroll on the campus Frank found himself attracted to some boys who took him into their ranks as naturally as if he had come recommended to them by special testimonials. Of course Bob went where Frank went, and loyally followed his leader.

Frank soon found out that there were two cliques in the so-called "freshman" crowd. A boy named Dean Ritchie lead the coterie that had accepted Frank and Bob as new recruits. Frank liked him from the first. He was a keen-witted, sharp-tongued fellow, out for fun most of the time and never still for a minute.

At any time the appearance of a lad named Nat Banbury or any of his cohorts was a signal for repartee, challenges, sometimes a sortie. Advances were made by Banbury toward the enlistment of the two new recruits in his ranks, but Frank had already made his choice.

"Oh, come on, he isn't worth wasting breath on," spoke up a big, uncouth fellow named Porter, when Frank had politely announced to Banbury that Dean Ritchie was a friend of some old friends of his at Tipton. "Ta, ta, Bob-up!" rallied Porter maliciously to Frank's chum. "Keep close to brother!"

Bob flushed and his eyes sparkled. His fists clenched.

"Easy, Bob," warned Frank in an undertone.

"Say, Banbury Cross," observed Bob, "there was a fellow of your name chased out of our county for sheep stealing, and another kept the dog pound. You snarl just exactly like some of the curs he keeps there."

"Banbury, cranberry, bow, wow, wow!" derided Ritchie. "Good for you,
Upton—you hit the nail on the head that time."

"Upton—Robert Upton!" bellowed the old janitor, Scroggins, appearing on the campus just then.

"That's me," acknowledged Bob.

"President Elliott wishes to see you in the library," said Scroggins.

"Aha!" snorted Banbury. "Called down already! Look out, Bob-up, you're in for a quake in the shoes."

"No; the president is going to consult him on how to raise squashes," sneered a crony of Banbury.

"Say, Frank," whispered Bob, quite in a quake, "I'm going to get it for something. What can it be?"

"Don't worry," replied Frank. "Face the music. I fancy you won't be hit very hard."

Bob went away with the old, worried look on his face. He came back radiant, and seemed to walk on air, and he never even heard the jeers of the Banbury crowd as he passed them. He made a beckoning motion to Frank, and the two strolled away together.

"Frank," said Bob, choking up, "I believe I'm some good in the world, after all."

"I told you so, didn't I?"

"I'm glad you made me come here," went on Bob. "Oh, so awfully glad! I declare——" and there Bob broke down and turned his face away for a moment or two.

"Say, Frank," he continued, "so is the president glad I came, too. He told me so. What do you think? The two children in that runaway belong to his family."

"Well! well!" commented Frank.

"I almost sunk through the floor when the good old man, with tears in his eyes, thanked me for saving them, as he called it. He said he was proud of me, and that he predicted that the academy would be proud of me, too. I tell you, Frank, it stirred me up. Strike me blue, if I don't try to behave myself."

"Good for you, Bob!"

"Strike me scarlet red and sky blue, if I don't try to deserve his kind words."

Nothing seemed to ruffle Bob after that. He simply laughed at the snubs and jeers of the Banbury crowd. He seemed to lose his old-time unsociability, and went right in with the jolly crowd that composed the stanch following of Dean Ritchie.

It was just after the nine o'clock bell had rung that evening when Bob so mysteriously disclosed his suspicions of the initiation plots of the occupants of the adjoining room.

"They're all Banbury's crowd," he explained to Frank. "Get into bed and take in the fun. They're waiting for us to quiet down. Don't speak above a whisper. Just stay awake long enough to see the program out."

Bob turned out the light and both snuggled down on the pillows luxuriously after a strenuous day of sport and study.

"Act first," whispered Bob. "Soon as the Banbury crowd think we're fast asleep, you'll hear them come stealthily out into the corridor. They've fixed the transom over our door so it will swing open without a jar. One fellow will stand on a chair. The others will hand him up the nozzle of a hose running to the faucet in their room."

"And we'll be Knights of the Bath—I see," observed Frank.

"Yes, without having to take any of the medicine. Hist—they're coming."

Frank could readily guess what the enemy had in view—the old school trick of dousing them in their sleep. He relied on the mysterious promises of his chum, and lay still and listened intently.

There was a vast whispering in the next room, a rustling about, and then more than one person could be heard just outside in the corridor.

A stool seemed to be placed near to the door. The slightest creaking in the world told that the transom had been pushed ajar.

"Hand up the hose," whispered a cautious voice.

"Here you are."

There was a fumbling sound at the transom. Then came the impatient words:

"It don't work."

"Turn on the screw."

"I have. The water can't be on."

"Yes, it is. I turned it."

"I tell you it won't work," was whispered from the stool. "Go back to the room and turn on the faucet, I tell you."

Hurried footsteps retreated from the door. Some one could be heard entering the next room. Then some one rushed out of it again.

"Say," spoke an excited voice, "we're flooded! The hose has burst, and we are deluged, and——"

"Boys, a light—the monitor's coming," interrupted a warning voice.

"Cut for it! Something's wrong! We're caught!"

There was heedless rush now from the next room. Frank could hear the hose dragged along the corridor. The door of the adjoining room was hurriedly closed.

"Off with your clothes—hustle into bed," ordered some one in that apartment.

Shoes were kicked off, beds creaked, and then came odd cries.

"Wow!"

"Murder!"

Tap—tap—tap! came a knock at the door.

"What's going on here?" asked the sharp, stern voice of the dormitory watchman.

"Thunder!"

"Oh, my back!"

"I'm scratched to pieces!" So ran the cries, and half a dozen persons seemed to bound from beds to the floor.

Bob Upton was shaking with suppressed laughter, stuffing the end of the pillow into his mouth to keep from yelling outright.

"Bob," whispered Frank, "what have you been up to?"

"Drove a plug into their hose ten feet from the faucet, slit the rubber full of holes—and filled the beds with cockle burrs," replied Bob, and, quaking with inward mirth, he rolled out on the floor.

"Gentlemen of Dormitory 4, report at the office in the morning with an explanation," droned the severe tones of the monitor out in the corridor.

CHAPTER XII

A STRANGE HAPPENING

"Bob, this is worse than the Banbury crowd could devise," remarked Frank.

"Yes. The only thing is that in this case it's friends who are responsible for it. Ugh! I'm sunk to the knees in water."

"I'm in to the waist," said Frank. "They've gone—the vandals! Off with the blindfolds. Well, this is a pretty fix!"

Two minutes previous a sepulchral voice had spoken the awful words:

"Slide them into the endless pit!"

Then, with a gay college song, the mob that had led Frank and Bob on a hazing trip, that had been positively hair-raising in its incidents, had seemed to retire from the spot. Their laughter and songs now faded far away in the distance.

"Well," uttered Bob, getting his eyes clear and his arms free, "we've had an experience."

"I should say so," echoed Frank. "That old ice chute they dropped us into must have been a hundred feet long."

"The hogshead they rolled us downhill in went double that distance," declared Bob.

"Well, let's get out of this," advised Frank.

That was more easily said than done. Comparative strangers as yet to the country surrounding Bellwood, even when they had got on solid ground out of the muck and mire of the boggy waste, they knew not which way to turn.

It was dark as Erebus and the wind was blowing a gale. Nowhere on the landscape could they discover a guiding light. They were in a scrubby little patch of woods, and they were confused even as to the points of the compass.

"I think this is the direction of the academy," said Frank, striking out on a venture.

"Yes; and we want to get there soon, too," replied Bob, "for we're going to have a great storm in a few minutes."

As Bob spoke the big drops began to splash down. As the lads emerged upon a flat field, the drops seemed to form into streams, and they breasted the tempest breathless, blown about, and drenched to the skin.

"We've got to get shelter somewhere," declared Bob. "Let's put back for the timber."

"I think I see some kind of a building ahead," observed Frank. "Yes, it's a hut or a barn. Hustle, now, and we'll find cover till the worst of this is over."

In a few minutes they came to an old cabin standing near some dead trees. It was small and square and had one door and one window. Bob banged at the door with a billet of wood he found, but could not budge it. The windows had stout bars crisscrossing it.

"Give it up," he said at last. "No one living here, and padlocked as if it was a bank. Hey, Frank, here's a chance."

In veering to the partial shelter of the lee side of the old structure, Bob had noticed a sashless aperture answering for a window in the low attic of the cabin. He got a hold with fingers and toes in the chinks between the logs, and steadily climbed up.

"Come on," he called. "It's high and dry under the roof," and his companion joined him, both half reclining across a loose board floor.

"Hear that," said Bob, as the rain seemed to strike the roof in bucket-like volume. "I hope the crowd who got us in this fix are ten miles from any shelter."

The rain kept on without the slightest cessation. In fact, it seemed to increase every minute in volume. Fully half an hour passed by. Neither lad thought of leaving shelter, and Bob had stretched himself out. The conversation languished. Then Frank, catching himself nodding, sat up and looked out of the window, noticing that his rugged, healthy comrade was breathing heavily in profound slumber.

"There's a light coming this way," spoke Frank to himself, as he peered from the window. "If it's a wagon, I'll hustle down and see if there's any chance of a lift in the direction of the school. Hello, it's two men! Hello again—they're coming right here to this hut. There, I can hear them at the front door."

Frank was convinced a minute later that the newcomers lived in the cabin, or at least had secured the right to occupy the place. He could hear them at the padlock, and then their lantern illumined the room below. Gazing through a crack in the floor, Frank could make out all they did and was able to overhear their conversation.

They were two rough-looking, trampish fellows. Each threw a bundle on the floor. The room had some old boxes in it and a pile of hay in one corner. The men seated themselves on boxes and let the water drip from their soaked clothing.

"That was a pretty husky tramp," spoke one of them.

"I see the governor isn't here yet."

"No; so it's up to us to get as comfortable as we can."

They threw off their coats, and one of them undid a bundle. He took from it some bread, cheese, and a big black bottle, and the twain were soon enjoying themselves. When they had finished eating they lay down in the straw, smoking short, stubby pipes and chatting with one another.

"Now, then, look a-here, Jem," one of them remarked, "you wouldn't see me tramping around in this kind of weather if it wasn't that there was a chance to get something out of it."

"Don't I tell you what's at the end of it, Dan?" retorted the other. "Don't I say as how the governor pays the expenses right royal while we're here? And then don't you know as how he's agreed to turn over the other half of that card, when we helps him get his plans through about this young kid up at the academy?"

"Say, that was a funny thing about that card," observed the man called Dan.

"No, 'twasn't," dissented Jem. "We got our hands on a fine piece of goods. We had to hide it till there was no danger of its being looked for. The gov and me therefore goes to a friend and we puts it in his strong safe. He is told that we has a card torn up with writing on it, atween us. The arrangement is made that he doesn't let go the property till we both presents them there pieces of card together. So you see, the gov can't get the property and run off with it. No more can I. Now, then, the gov says I can have the property entire if we help him on his present business here."

"Say," spoke up the interested Dan, "is the property pretty fine?"

"I'd call it good for a thousand dollars."

"Where did you fellows get it, Jem?"

"At a town called Tipton."

"Ah!" aspirated the listening Frank in a great gasp.

"And what was it, Jem?"

"A bracelet—a diamond bracelet," replied the man Jem.

Frank held his breath. He was greatly excited and startled. It seemed a strange thing to him that here, in a lonely loft hundreds of miles from home, by pure accident he should run across a clue to the person who had stolen Samuel Mace's diamond bracelet, the mysterious theft of which had so darkened our hero's young life.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME MYSTERY

Frank gulped down his astonishment. Then he sat still without a rustle. He was afraid that Bob might snore, wake up talking, and had an idea to creep closer to his chum, wake him up softly, and warn him to remain perfectly quiet.

Before Frank could act, however, there came a sudden interruption to the conversation between the men below, Jem and Dan. There was a thundering knock at the door.

"It's the gov at last!" shouted Jem, jumping to his feet.

"No one else!" echoed Dan.

Jem opened the door and a man staggered in. His slouch hat, dripping wet, was pulled down over his face. He was completely enveloped in a great rain blanket. The hole in its center fitted about his neck and covered him nearly to the feet, even to his arms. These held something under the cloak, for its bulging surface showed that he was carrying something.

"Help me out of this," growled the newcomer. "Good I borrowed this blanket in a convenient barn, or everything would have been soaked."

"Borrowed!" guffawed Jem.

"Haw! haw!" roared Dan, as if it was a great joke. "There you are, mate."

If Frank had been surprised and startled at the secret concerning Samuel Mace's missing diamond bracelet, he was dumfounded at the face of the newcomer.

"Why," he breathed in wonderment, "it's the man I drove off from bothering that traveling scissors grinding boy at Tipton, Ned Foreman. Yes, this is the man the boy called Tim Brady, and—whew!"

Frank's thoughts seemed to come as swift as lightning. He had marveled at the strange series of events that had given him a clue as to the persons who had stolen the diamond bracelet that had got him into so much trouble. Now that the tramp, Brady, had appeared on the scene, Frank saw how it all could have happened, for Brady was in Tipton the day the diamond bracelet was stolen.

The only thing that mystified Frank was why these people should be at Bellwood, so far away from Tipton. There was scarcely a chance in a thousand that they could have come accidentally.

When the two men had pulled the blanket from Brady, he disclosed two packages in his hand, one resembling a hat box. He placed them on the floor.

"Got the togs there?" inquired Jem.

"Yes," nodded Brady. "I'm famished; give me something to eat."

Frank did not stir. He felt that it was important that he should remain where he was. These men knew about Samuel Mace's missing bracelet. That was one point of interest. They were up to something

now; that was another.

Frank listened to every word they said, but they did not just then again refer to the bracelet nor discuss their plans. They talked generally of how easy the farmers they had met gave away meals. They discussed various stores and houses that might be robbed readily. Frank realized that they were very bad men.

Finally, having finished his meal, Brady got up from the box he had been seated on. He went over to the bundles he had brought, undoing one of them. He took out a long black dress coat. This he tried on. It buttoned up to his neck closely, like some clerical garb.

He opened the other box and took out a silk hat. As he put this on his head he straightened up and drew his face down in mock seriousness.

"My friends," he sniffled, "you see in me a penitent and reformed man."

"Hold me!" yelled Jem, rolling around on the straw in a paroxysm of laughter.

"Will it do?" smirked Brady. "Ter-rewly, my friends, I seek only now to make amends for my wicked, misspent life—a—ah!"

"Wow! Oh, you actor! It's enough to make a cow laugh!"

"Will it work?"

"Work!" chuckled the man Jem. "Why, you'd win over the president of the college himself."

Bang!

"What was that?" demanded Brady sharply.

Frank was in dismay. In his sleep Bob Upton had groaned, then moved. Probably, in some nightmare, dreaming he was back among his old tyrant masters on the farm, he had kicked out his foot, landing heavily on the floor of the loft.

"Oh, I guess it was the wind rattling some loose timber about the old ruin of a place," observed Jem.

Frank crept cautiously to the side of his sleeping comrade.

Bob was muttering restlessly in his sleep, and Frank feared another outbreak. He placed his hand over Bob's mouth.

"Wake up—quietly, now—there is somebody below," he whispered.

"What's the row?" droned Bob.

"S—st! Follow me. Get out of this. It's stopped raining."

Frank managed to get himself and his friend out of the place without disturbing the three men in the hut or apprising them of their presence. The rain had nearly stopped. Bob rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"Some tramps came into the cabin yonder after you went to sleep," explained Frank. "They are hard characters, and it is best to steer clear of them."

It took the two boys an hour to find their way to Bellwood School. Bob was tired out and sleepy, and Frank was by no means in a mood for chatting. He was absorbed in thinking out his strange discoveries of the night.

"I've got a clue to that diamond bracelet of Mace's," he reflected. "Mace don't deserve any favors from me after the outrageous way he's acted, but if I can do anything toward getting it back for him, all right. I wonder, though, what it means—that man, Brady, being here, and what trick he is up to with the high hat and the dress coat? His friend spoke of the president of the college and some 'kid.' Are they up to some thieving trick? If so, I want to be alert to balk them."

When the two boys reached the academy, they had some difficulty in locating a loose window, and they had to use caution in getting to their room. The bed felt so good after the rough experiences of the night that Frank soon joined his snoring companion in the land of dreams, leaving action as to the crowd at the cabin for the morrow.

They met their friendly persecutors of the evening before good-naturedly at breakfast. It was easy for Frank to see that Ritchie and his associates were ready to accept them as gritty comrades who could

take a joke as a matter of course.

"You've paid your initiation fee in pluck and endurance, Jordan," said Mark Prescott, the able lieutenant of Dean Ritchie in his rounds of mischief. "You and Upton can consider yourselves full-fledged members of the Twilight Club."

"Good!" laughed Frank as he started for the campus. Before he was out of the building, however, Frank got thinking of his adventures of the evening before. And instead of immediately joining his fellows he strolled around to the side of the academy.

There was a walk, not much used by the students, leading past the kitchen and laundry quarters of the school. As Frank got nearly to the end of this a baseball whizzed by him and he saw Banbury and a crony named Durkin making for it.

Just at that moment, too, Frank noticed a boy wearing a long apron sitting on a stone step just outside the kitchen door.

He was peeling potatoes, and he was peeling them right, fully engrossed in his labors, as though it were some artistic and agreeable occupation.

"Well! well! well!" irresistibly ejaculated Frank. "If it isn't Ned Foreman!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE ROW ON THE CAMPUS

"Shake!" cried Frank, rushing forward and extending a warm hand.

The boy peeling potatoes looked up in some surprise. For a minute he was puzzled. Then his face broke into a genial smile.

"It's the fellow I met at Tipton——" he began.

"That's who—Frank Jordan."

"Who saved me from getting robbed."

"Put it that way, if you like," answered Frank. "How did you ever come here?"

"Walked, coaxed freight hands, and got some passenger lifts," explained Ned. "You know I told you I was going out of the scissors grinding and into school?"

"I know you did."

"Well, I've landed. I've saved up twenty dollars. That don't go far in tuition, so I'm working my way through school."

"Good for you," cheered Frank. "You're the kind that makes a mark in the world. Say, come up to my room. I want to have a real chummy chat with you."

"I couldn't do that just now," demurred Ned. "You see, I help in the kitchen here from six to eight in the morning, eleven to one at noon and five to seven in the evening."

"I haven't seen you in any of the classes."

"No; one of the professors is coaching me. You see, I need training to get into even the lowest class. As I said, I can't leave my work here now, but I may meet you occasionally after dark."

"Come at four this afternoon."

"Think I'd better?" inquired Ned dubiously.

"Why not?"

"Well, to be candid," answered Ned manfully, "my clothes aren't very good, as you see, and some of the fellows here have pretty well snubbed me, and maybe it would be wiser for me to keep my place."

"Your place?" fired up Frank. "Except among the stuck-up cads, your place is to be welcome to all the privileges of any well-behaved student, and I'll see to it that you get them, too."

"Hi, Jordan; on the domestic list?" broke in Banbury just then. He had regained the baseball and with his companion stood staring at Frank and Ned.

"Hum! I should say so," sniggered Durkin with a chuckle. "Pah! How it smells of onions and dishwater!"

"Take your friend and introduce him to Ritchie," sneered Banbury. "He needs a new catcher for his measly team that we're going to wallop to-morrow."

"Say," spoke Frank steadily, though with a flashing eye, "I'll bet you that my friend here—understand, my friend, Ned Foreman—would prove as good a catcher as he has to my knowledge run a business where he was trusted and did his duty well. I'll make another bet—you'll be the second-rate scholar you are now two years further on, when my friend is the boss of some surveying camp, where the smartest fellow is the one who has learned the cooking and science both—not a smattering—but from the ground up."

"Yah!" yawped Banbury, but he saw something in Frank's eye that warned him to sheer off promptly.

"You'll run up against a few cads like that fellow," explained Frank to Ned. "Use 'em up in one chapter, and stick to the real friends I'll introduce you to."

"Jordan, you're a true-blue brick," declared Ned heartily, "but I know from experience how these things go——"

"There's the rally whistle for our crowd, so I've got to go," interrupted
Frank; "but four o'clock at my room. You come, or I'll come and fetch you."

Frank bolted off for the campus. As he neared his group of friends he observed the Banbury crowd, just rejoined by their leader and Durkin. Banbury was pointing at Frank and saying something, derisively hailed by his companions. Then Frank saw his stanch champion, Bob Upton, spring forward with clenched fists. Frank hurried his steps, guessing out the situation, and anxious to rescue his impetuous friend from an outbreak.

"Hi, chef!" howled out Durkin, as Frank approached, and Frank knew that the mean-spirited cads had been spreading the story of his meeting with Ned Foreman.

"What have you got to say about it, huh? Who are you?" Frank heard Bob cry out angrily, as he came nearer to the crowd.

Frank could not repress a start as he observed the boy whom Bob was facing.
He was a newcomer—he was Gill Mace. It appeared that the nephew of the
Tipton jeweler had been sent to the same school as Frank.

Gill Mace looked as mean as ever. There was a sneer on his face. He was loudly dressed, or rather overdressed. His uncle had probably provided him with plenty of spending money, for he was jingling some coins in his pocket. His money and his natural cheek had evidently made him "solid" with Banbury and the others, for they seemed to be upholding his braggart insolence.

"Don't get hot, sonny," advised Gill. "I said that Jordan needed to make friends, for he never had any where he came from," and then, staring meanly at Frank, he whispered something to Banbury.

"Hello!" broke out the latter. "That so? Jordan, how's the diamond market this morning?"

Frank started as if he had been struck by a whiplash. A bright red spot showed on either cheek. His eyes flashed, his finger nails dug into the palms of his hands.

He advanced straight up to where Gill Mace stood, brushing aside heedlessly all who were in his way. The jeweler's nephew tried to hide behind his cohorts in a craven way, but Frank fixed him with his eye.

"Gill Mace," he spoke in a firm, stern tone, "you have been telling that bully friend of yours some more of the falsehoods you peddled out at Tipton."

"I told him how you stood in that old burg," admitted Gill.

"What do you mean?"

"I said that you robbed my uncle's jewelry shop."

"Then you uttered a low, malicious falsehood," retorted Frank. "Fellows," he cried, turning to his adherents, "I ducked this sneak in a mud puddle for lying about me once. I want to now make the announcement in public that if within twenty-four hours he does not retract his words I shall whip him till he can't stand, leave the academy, and never come back till I have the proofs to vindicate myself, which I can do."

Mace turned white about the corners of his mouth.

"Everybody in Tipton knows that Frank Jordan stole a diamond bracelet from my uncle," he stammered.

"It's false!" shouted out Bob Upton, squarely springing before Gill, who retreated in dismay, "and you are more than a thief, for you're trying to rob an honest boy of his good name. Take that!"

And Bob Upton knocked Gill Mace down—flat.

CHAPTER XV

DARK HOURS

Gill Mace went down with a shock of surprise and a yell of fright. He blubbered as his teeth went together like a pair of castanets.

Banbury stepped forward in his usual braggart way. Bob did not wait for him to advance. He flew right up to him.

"You want some?" he shouted. "Come on, the whole bunch of you, one at a time."

Just then, however, Dean Ritchie uttered a familiar warning, and there was a general movement of commotion and dispersement among the group.

"Scatter, fellows," was what Ritchie said.

The Banbury contingent proceeded to sneak away. Some of Ritchie's crowd surrounded Bob Upton and cleverly tried to manipulate him out of view.

Frank, turning, learned the motive for the maneuvers. Professor Elliott stood not thirty feet away, his eyes fixed upon them. The seriousness of his countenance told that he had witnessed the fight.

Bob brushed aside his friendly helpers. He walked straight up to Professor Elliott, took off his cap respectfully and stood with his head bowed. Then some words seemed to pass between them, and Mr. Elliott turned toward the academy, Bob following him.

Frank was a good deal stirred up by the exciting events of the hour. He did not feel much desire for companionship, and less for sport. He left his friends and went up to his room.

He sat down on the bed somewhat gloomy and worried. Frank knew that the malicious story told by Gill Mace would spread through the school like wildfire.

Frank valued his fair name and the good opinion of the new friends he had made. To be dubbed a thief meant harm, and there were some who would believe the story. He recalled the impression such an accusation had made on several people at his home town, and he grew quite downcast thinking it all over.

"I won't mope," he cried resolutely, stirring about the room. "I am innocent, so who can hurt me? I won't think of it."

Frank tried to whistle a careless air, but his efforts were somewhat feeble. Then he went over to his trunk and looked over its contents. He got to thinking of Ned Foreman, and took out a suit of clothes, some neckties and a couple of shirts from the trunk, and had just placed them on a chair when Bob

entered the apartment.

"Well, what's the latest?" inquired Frank with a sharp quiz of his impulsive friend's face.

"I'm all broken up, that's the latest," declared Bob, throwing himself into a chair, his face a puzzling mixture of soberness and satisfaction. "Say, Frank, I want to say one thing with all my heart—President Elliott is a bang-up good old man. I've been ashamed, near crying, sorry, glad, mad, and just about all knocked out in the last five minutes. Oh, that measly Banbury mob! And oh, that miserable Gill Mace!"

"What's happened, Bob?"

"Why, I went to the library with the president, and told him manfully that the Mace fellow had insulted the best friend I had, you, and that I couldn't stand for it and just had to land him one."

"And the president?"

"He looked grave. Then he turned his head away. Then he sort of looked at me as if he'd been a—a corker himself in the old boy days. He gave me a mild lecture on controlling my temper. I told him he'd better have me tied up or put Mace somewhere so I couldn't find him, or I was afraid I'd break loose again."

"That was pretty strong, wasn't it, Bob?"

"I spoke my mind, and he knew it. Then he carried me right off my feet, and I'd die for that bully old man any time. He just placed that gentle old hand of his on my head and looked at me with his kind old eyes and said: 'Upton, we're going to be proud of you some day. I feel sure of that. My little ones remember how bravely you risked your life to save them the other day, and pray for you every night. Don't disappoint us, my boy. Young Jordan is a good fellow, and I am sure he wouldn't encourage you to violate our school discipline. Just simply forget the fellows who stir you up. After a good many years' experience, I may say to you that in the long run the bad ones sift out and the good ones come to the top. Make us proud of you, Upton, and become proud of yourself by controlling your temper and acting the gentleman.'"

"That was fine, and it's true," said Frank heartily. "Yes, Bob, we've got to forget those fellows. You are a true-blue champion, but you've shown your colors, so let it go at that."

"What, and have any of those fellows call you a thief?"

"Some day I shall prove my innocence," declared Frank firmly.

"You don't have to prove it—with your friends," flared up Bob. And just then the chapel bell called them to the duties of the hour.

Frank did not pass a very happy day. He mingled of necessity with the Banbury groups during the studies, but only for an occasional glowering look from Gill Mace's discolored eye and some suppressed sneers from Banbury, Durkin and others of their crowd, there was no allusion made to the cause of the fight.

However, there were mysterious whisperings going on at times. Some boys with whom Frank was not well acquainted shied off from him at noon time, and Frank knew that the poison of Mace's insinuations was working among the general school group.

Frank was in his room at four o'clock, and promptly at the hour Ned Foreman put in an appearance. Frank set aside his troubles and greeted him in a friendly manner. He locked the door and gave his visitor a comfortable chair.

"Tell me about yourself, Ned," he said. "How you got here from Tipton, and about your plans, and all that."

It was not much of a story, but its details showed again the homeless lad was set and sensible in his resolve to gain an education.

"I like you, Ned," said Frank, "and you know it, and I wouldn't be acting as a true friend if I didn't say just what was in my mind, would I, now?"

"You'll never say a thing to hurt a fellow's feelings, I'll risk that," returned Ned with a smile of confidence.

"I hope not. I've been thinking about you, and I'm interested in you. Say, is that your best suit of clothes you're wearing?"

"Best and only," acknowledged Ned bluntly. "Why?"

"Well, I've got a suit that will just about fit you, and I want you to sort of tog up when you have time to come out and join our crowd. Not that I would ever be ashamed of you no matter what you wore, but we all have a little pride."

"I'm not going to let you rob yourself to do a kindness for me," declared Ned.

"Rob myself?" repeated Frank with a laugh. "Say, let me tell you something, and you'll see how you are helping me out. I've been living with an aunt at Tipton who is a caution in some ways. She ordered a suit for me about six months ago. Well, she's a great bargain hunter, and then, too, there was some of the same cloth left, and taking two suits she could get a reduction. Here's the one I was measured for first."

Frank opened the wardrobe and showed a light checked suit he did not often wear.

"The other suit," he continued, "is this one," and he indicated the clothes he had taken from his trunk that morning. "The tailor didn't have enough cloth, and the suit is too short for me. My aunt packed it in my trunk, thinking I could wear it out knocking around Saturdays, but it won't do at all. It is nearly new, and you are a little smaller than I am, and I believe it will fit you. There are a few spare neckties and such that go with it, and there you are."

"Mine, eh?" said Ned with a smile, getting up and looking over the clothes. "It will make me dreadfully proud and dressy, Frank. I never had such an outfit before."

"You don't know the relief I have in getting rid of it," said Frank, smiling. "It's settled, then—you'll lug it away with you."

"I'll carry it away as the finest present I could possibly get," responded Ned warmly. "You don't know how I appreciate it."

There was no false pride or affectation about Ned Foreman, and Frank liked him better than ever for his manly actions. He did up the bundle for Ned. Then they had a general talk. An hour drifted by before they knew it.

"Saturday, remember," said Frank as they parted. "I want you to get in on some of the games and know all the good fellows who train with Dean Ritchie."

Frank sat alone at the window after Ned left him, reflecting very seriously.

"I couldn't tell him," he murmured; "at least, not yet. How do I know that I am right? Maybe I'm guessing it all out. Oh, dear, how I miss my father to go to with all my troubles and perplexities. I'd have a talk with President Elliott, only I don't want to bother him and make a lot of talk about things that may naturally right themselves in time. Hello, there's Bob."

Frank got up to greet his friend, who swung down the corridor and into the room, whistling.

"The very fellow!" exclaimed Frank. "I say, Bob, I want to ask your advice."

CHAPTER XVI

THE FOOT RACE

"You want my advice?" asked Bob in some surprise.

"Just that, Bob," responded Frank Jordan.

"Huh—no one ever asked that before. I'm afraid I'm not much in that line, but I'll do the best I can."

"All right. Sit down while I tell you a little story," directed Frank.

Bob had come into the room red and perspiring, as though he had just been indulging in some very violent exercise. He soon settled down to steadiness from sheer interest as Frank proceeded to talk.

Frank began at the beginning of quite a lengthy narrative. He recited the episode of the diamond bracelet. He described his first meeting with Ned Foreman. Then he brought his recital down to what he had seen and heard in the lonely hut the night of the hazing and while Bob had been fast asleep.

"You're some story-teller, and that all sounds like a story-book romance," commented Bob, when Frank paused in his narrative.

"I only hope it will end in the good story-book way," observed Frank. "This is all secret between you and me."

"Surely," assented Bob.

"I had to tell it to somebody, for it was worrying me dreadfully," confessed Frank. "You see, I'm in a dilemma."

"I do see that, Frank," nodded Bob seriously.

"I can't see it any other way, but this tramp and his friends, Jem and Dan, among them stole that diamond bracelet."

"I think so, too," said Bob. "Anyhow, judging from their talk you overheard they know where it is now."

"What had I better do? I am awful anxious to prove my innocence to the world."

"Why, I shouldn't hesitate a minute to have those three fellows arrested," exclaimed Bob.

"That wouldn't help the case any."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"They evidently haven't got the stolen bracelet with them."

"That's so, Frank."

"And I haven't the least proof in the world that they are the thieves. No,
I must get about it in a different way."

"But how?"

"You see, this man Brady knows me by sight. He doesn't know you. Do you think you could locate the old cabin, Bob?"

"I don't think I could go direct to it," answered Bob, "but I am pretty sure that by hunting for it and making some inquiries I could find it."

"All right; try it, Bob. If you succeed, sort of spy around and you may pick up something that will give us an idea of what those men are about. You see, the fact of Brady being here makes me anxious on another score."

"What is that?"

"They mentioned the academy here. I am afraid that Brady has some plan concerning Ned Foreman."

"Say, Frank, it looks that way," declared Bob thoughtfully. "Why don't you tell Ned about it?"

"I don't want to worry him until I find out something more."

"I'll get on the track of that old cabin and those men first chance I have," promised Bob. "Say, Frank, I was coming to tell you I've just done a big thing, Dean Ritchie says."

"What is it, Bob?"

"You know we are going to have a baseball game and some other matches to-morrow."

"Yes, I know," nodded Frank.

"Well, there's a foot race scheduled. The crack runner of our crowd, Purtelle, is out of trim, and they were looking for a substitute. I don't want to brag, but about the one thing in the athletic line I can do well is running."

"Then you must try to fill the bill."

"I'm going to. Ritchie asked me to give them a test. It's a long-distance spurt—twice around the track over in the meadow where they train their horses on the stock farm. I made the sample run just now. I don't know but what the crowd were guying me, but they seemed to go wild over it."

"Oh, I guess they're in earnest, Bob."

"I hope so, for that big bully, Banbury, is to be my opponent, and I'd do anything to take the conceit out of him and his crowd. Ritchie timed me, and said I had discounted the best record ever made by an academy runner."

"That's grand," said Frank.

"They took me to the gymnasium and gave me this pair of shoes for the ones I had on. They're going to grease up and soften my own shoes to make the running easier, they say. I hope I don't disappoint them."

"You won't, I am sure," said Frank encouragingly.

The next day was Saturday. The weather was ideal, and the boys anticipated a great deal of pleasure for the holiday.

Frank was pleased when his friend, Ned Foreman, showed up about ten o'clock. Ned looked neat and handsome in the light checked suit Frank had given him. He was modest and natural, and Ritchie and his crowd treated him nicely.

There was the first ball game of the series after lunch. Then the whole school adjourned to the training track for the foot race.

Banbury, Mace and their chums were in great evidence. The ball game had come out a tie, and even this barren honor swelled them up considerably. Banbury was gotten up in a flashy sporting suit, as though he was in for the championship of the world, and Mace was also overdressed. Bob wore his every-day clothes. He looked eager and hopeful as Frank helped him put on his running shoes.

The evening previous Bob's remarkable test run had been noised around the school, and Frank somewhat wondered at the vaunting spirit shown by the Banbury crowd.

The start of the race was made in good order. The opponents were off on the second, and they looked in splendid trim as they kept evenly abreast up to the first quarter post. There Bob forged ahead slightly, and there was a cheer from his excited friends. Then he lagged, and Banbury got the lead, and his cohorts gave out ringing huzzahs.

"What's wrong?" uttered Ned breathlessly, as Banbury, with a jump and kicking up his heels derisively at the Ritchie group, shot by the starting post on the second spurt with Bob fully ten yards to the rear.

"Bob is lamed," said Frank in consternation. "See, he's limping."

"Go it, Bob!" yelled the voices of a dozen loyal friends.

Bob looked haggard and unfit. One foot dragged, and he acted like a person in acute pain. At the encouraging word, however, he braced up, made a prodigious spurt, but at the end of fifty yards hobbled and fell flat.

A cry of dismay went up from the Ritchie crowd, while Banbury's adherents made the air echo with delirious shouts of triumph.

Suddenly, however, Bob was on his feet again and off down the course like an arrow.

"He's thrown off his shoes. What's up, I wonder?" spoke Ritchie.

"He's gaining!"

"He's up to him!"

"Past him—huzzah!"

The spectators held their breath. Never had the boys of Bellwood School witnessed so sensational a foot race.

Bob Upton flew like the wind. He was five—ten—twenty yards in the lead of his laboring antagonist.

His face was colorless as he crossed the starting line. A flash of triumph was in his eyes, but Frank saw that he was reeling. Our hero sprang forward just in time to catch the falling champion in his outstretched arms—the winner of the race.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRAMP AGAIN

"He's in a dead faint—give him air," ordered Dean Ritchie.

"Get a dipper of water," said Frank quickly, letting Bob slip gently to the grass.

There was a pump just beyond the enclosure. Ned ran to it, and soon Frank was sponging Bob's face with cool water.

"Who did it—and why?" spoke Bob suddenly and opening his eyes and sitting up.

He drew up one foot with a wry face. As he did so Dean Ritchie gave a start and a stare.

"Why," he cried, "your stocking is dripping with blood."

"The sole of my foot feels like a raw beef-steak," said Bob.

One of the boys had gone after the shoes that Bob had thrown off a distance from the course.

"Ritchie," he said gravely, "feel there."

His leader took the shoe, ran his hand into it, and looked into it.

"Oh, shame! shame!" he exclaimed with a wrathy face. "Whoever did this deserves to be tarred and feathered."

"What is it?" inquired Frank.

"An old trick among touts and welchers. Just feel, Jordan—some one got into the gym last night and doctored these shoes."

"Doctored the shoes?" repeated Frank vaguely.

"Yes, they set in a light cushion sole, with a half dozen blade-pointed brads under it that would break through after a little use. It's a wonder that Upton's foot isn't ripped to pieces."

"It feels pretty near as if it was," said Bob, wincing. "Frank, I guess I'm crippled for a few days. You'll have to help me get to our room."

There were dark frowns of indignation and suspicion among the group. The Banbury crowd were making off with glum faces and uneasy haste.

"Stop!" sharply shouted Ritchie after them. "I accuse nobody, but I want to say right here and now, and I want everybody to hear me, that I'm going to ferret out the low sneak who put those brads in Bob Upton's shoes. When I do, he leaves this school or I do, and one of us will have reason to remember the drubbing of his life."

"They're a fine set, aren't they?" spoke Purtelle. "Fellows, I think this circumstance should be reported to the faculty."

"No," dissented Bob Upton decidedly. "The rascals will reach the end of their tether some time, and we can't prove who worked this mean trick."

They got Bob to his room. Ned did not go there with the crowd, but he appeared a little later with a box of salve and some strips of cloth. He fixed up Bob's injured foot so skilfully that Ritchie complimented him as an expert surgeon.

Frank stayed with his friend, reading to him for a time. All the others had gone away. Finally Bob fell asleep, and Frank strolled out on the grounds. As he again entered the building bound for his room, he

ran directly against Ned as he turned down a corridor near the reception-room.

"Why, Ned," he exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

Ned Foreman was almost crouching in a dark corner. He was trembling, and his lips were white, and there was a marked terror in his eyes. Frank was profoundly startled, almost shocked at the strange appearance of his friend.

"That man is in there!" gasped Ned.

"In where?"

"The reception-room."

"What man do you mean?"

"Tim Brady."

"Oh!" uttered Frank, and a whole lot of light seemed to flood his mind in an instant. "How do you know that?"

"President Elliott send word to me that a visitor wished to see me in the reception-room. I just came down and looked in. That terrible man who calls me his relative is in there talking to the president."

"What is he after?" asked Frank.

"Can't you see?" spoke Ned in a tone of great agitation and excitement. "He has followed me clear here. He is going to drive me away from here, just as he has driven me away from other places. I can't meet him—the cold chills run all over me whenever my eyes light on him," and Ned shuddered.

"See here, Ned Foreman," said Frank, "you go right into that room. Brace straight up to that miserable wretch, and defy him. Don't be a bit scared at anything he may say to you. I'll do the rest."

"How—how can you?" stammered the terrified boy.

"Leave that to me. I know a lot I'll tell you afterward. Go ahead, now, and don't you show one particle of fear. Leave the door ajar a little, just as it is. I'm no eavesdropper, but on the present occasion I'm mightily interested in seeing and hearing all that's going on."

There was something unaccountable about Ned Foreman's dread of his professed relative. He passed into the reception-room, but he was trembling all over and his face was pale and frightened.

President Elliott sat near a table, and the tramp whom Frank knew as Tim
Brady was standing up in front of him.

He did not look much like the fellow Frank had rescued Ned from at Tipton.

In his hand he carried a high silk hat. He was clean shaven, and his hair was combed and plastered down over his bullet head. His clerical-looking frock coat was buttoned up to the chin. His face was drawn in a hypocritical expression of great concern.

"Ah, my boy! my boy!" he exclaimed, jumping about and rushing at Ned, extending both hands as if about to greet some beloved friend.

Ned Foreman shrank from his obnoxious relative in horror.

CHAPTER XVIII

A DOLEFUL "UNCLE"

Frank, peering in at the doorway of the school reception-room, saw that President Elliott looked both grave and concerned. Judging from the expression of his face, Frank decided that the academy head was not very favorably impressed with either the words or the appearance of the visitor.

"You see, kind sir," said the repulsed Brady, turning to him and snuffling as if at the point of tears,

"my own kin disowns me. Oh, sir, it is hard, hard, to have it happen so!"

Ned did not say a word. He simply kept at a safe distance.

"If I may ask," spoke Mr. Elliott, "what do you expect of this boy?"

"Forgiveness," whined the tramp. "Yes, sir, that is the word. I have wronged him cruelly. I admit it, to my shame. I was a worthless, shiftless man, and I abused him and drove him from my heart. Now I have reformed, and I seek to make atonement. He is my last living relative. To whom shall I go for sympathy, to whom shall I cling but my dead wife's brother?"

"Stepbrother," corrected Ned almost sharply. "You are no relative of mine."

"Boy, don't taunt me, don't make my sufferings more than they are," and Brady heaved a prodigious sigh. "I have given up drinking. It's this way: An old-time friend of mine, who has made eighteen million dollars in a diamond mine in Canada——"

"How's that? How's that?" challenged the learned old professor keenly. "According to the last authoritative geological data available, Canada——"

"I mean Brazil; yes, that's it, Brazil—anyhow, somewhere over in Africa."

"H'm!" sniffed the old professor suspiciously.

"He found me in rags. I told him my story. He offered to set me on my feet again if I would sign the pledge. I signed it. Then he bought me a home, and put enough money in the bank to start me in some nice little business, and some other money. I got thinking of this poor, homeless lad. It almost broke my heart. I have spent several hundred dollars having detectives trace him down."

"Jem and Dan," Frank told himself, and almost laughed outright.

"At last I find him," proceeded Brady. "I wish to provide for him; I wish to educate and make a man of him."

"Very well," nodded Mr. Elliott. "He is here at a good school. Let him remain. I shall be pleased to have him now on a basis where he can study and learn all of his time, instead of having to work his way, for he is a bright, promising scholar."

"Exactly, exactly," assented Brady eagerly; "only, you see, sir, I want to prove that I mean well by him."

"Prove it, then, by paying his tuition for a year, and leave him in competent hands," suggested the practical, sensible educator.

"Willingly," declared Brady. "I'll pay five years in advance if you say so, only I'd like to have him come with me for a week or so."

"Why?"

"To get used to me. To see that I'm in earnest I want his advice about my new house, about my business. I want to get him a fine outfit. He can have the best, sir, I assure you. I will get him a watch. I understand these college fellows like pets. I'll buy him a pug dog."

"Not for Bellwood School you won't," observed Mr. Elliott bluntly.

"No, sir, that's so," assented Brady. "I'll buy him a horse and a boat, then, anything he wants, only let him come with me. We are all of us weak, sir. I may be tempted, I may fall. Let him sort of brace me up for a couple of weeks. Then he will return, realizing that his poor old relative is genuine, and I'll be proud all the time thinking I've won his respect."

Professor Elliott fixed his eyes on the speaker as if he would pierce him through and through. Then he regarded Brady thoughtfully. Finally he spoke.

"Foreman, do you wish to go with this man?" he asked.

"No, sir, never!" cried Ned fervently. "Professor Elliott, please, please don't let him take me away!"

"Do I understand," inquired the professor of Brady, "that you pretend to be the legal guardian of this boy?"

"Oh, no, sir; no, indeed," Brady hastened to say. "I'm only his poor old—"

"Then, if you are not his legal guardian," remarked Mr. Elliott decidedly, "the boy remains here, if he so elects. That ends the matter, I think."

Brady made a great ado. He tried to look pathetic and mournful.

"My boy," he sniffled, "won't you grant the dying request—I mean the ardent request of your poor, homeless old relative?"

"I thought your eighteen million dollar friend had given you a home," intimated Ned.

"True, but what is a home without a—a relative?"

"I won't go with you, and that ends it," said Ned firmly.

"I will go, then, sir," said Brady to the professor with affected sadness, "but I shall return to make another appeal to you."

"This incident is closed, sir, and my time is valuable," observed the school president with some asperity, arising to his feet and waving Brady out of the room.

The latter directed a venomous look at Ned. Frank noted this, and shuddered as Ned himself had done. It was an evil face, unmasked now, that of the tramp, and Frank realized that his young friend would do well to keep out of the power of this hypocrite and knave.

Frank dodged aside as the man came out into the corridor. Then he followed him at a distance. He waited till Brady had reached the road in front of the academy. Then he stepped more briskly, caught up with him and touched him on the arm.

"One moment," said Frank.

"Eh—ah—what is it?" stammered Brady, halting and staring suspiciously at our hero.

"Do you remember me?" inquired Frank, looking him squarely in the eye.

"I don't," replied Brady.

"You're sure of that?"

"I never saw you before."

"Think again," spoke Frank. "I'll recall a little incident at Tipton, where I came very near getting you into the hands of the town marshal."

With a frightened scowl Brady glared at Frank, the light of recognition now in his eyes.

"I see you recall the incident," proceeded Frank steadily. "You are a scamp, and you are up to some game about my friend, Ned Foreman. Now I've something to say to you. If you hang around this place one single minute, if you ever dare to come to this academy again, I'll have you in jail inside of an hour."

"You impudent puppy!" shouted Brady, lifting his hand as if to strike Frank. "You'll do what?"

"I'll have you arrested."

"What for?"

"For stealing a diamond bracelet from Mr. Samuel Mace of Tipton," was Frank's reply.

CHAPTER XIX

A CLEAR CASE

The shot had told—Frank saw this at once.

Brady gasped for breath and turned white as a sheet.

"W—what diamond bracelet?" stammered the man.

"I guess you know," said Frank. "I guess, too, that the best and safest thing for you to do is to get that bracelet back to the man you stole it from before he sends an officer after you."

Brady simply stared at Frank. He was all taken aback. Frank saw that he was dumfounded and scared. He followed up his advantage.

"You can't play any of your 'reformed man' tricks here, I can tell you," he continued. "You practiced your game pretty well in that plug hat and swallow-tail coat up at the cabin."

"The cabin?" repeated Brady, as though he was shocked.

"Yes; the cabin with those precious 'detectives' you told the professor about, Jem and Dan."

"Say—look here—I don't see—— How do you know?"

"Never mind; you see I do," interrupted Frank. "Now, then, you follow my advice. You get those two pieces of card together, and get that bracelet from the man who has it in safekeeping for you."

Brady's eyes goggled. The amount of information Frank had about him, its tremendous importance, staggered the man. He almost reeled where he stood.

"Send it at once to Samuel Mace at Tipton," went on Frank, "if you don't want to be hunted down across the world if necessary. Then get as far as you can from here. If you don't you're lost. Yes, sir," declared Frank impressively, "a lost man."

"Thunder!" ejected the tramp in an overwhelmed sort of a way.

"You'd ought to be ashamed, hunting down an honest boy like Ned Foreman, who is trying to make a man of himself," continued Frank indignantly. "You've nigh ruined his chances already. You want to leave him alone. Mean and low as you are, he is ashamed to tell the professor about it, but I'll tell him, you bet. Now, then, you get away from here, double-quick."

The tramp started up as if he had been struck by a whip.

"And stay away," added our hero.

"I'm an abused man," sniffled Brady, trying the pathetic tack again. "You're talking Greek to me about diamonds, and that such. Suppose I was a bad one once, ain't I a reformed man now?"

"No, nor never will be, until you tell what dodge you're up to in getting
Ned into your clutches again."

"Boy, you mistake a poor old reformed man," said Brady, drawing a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his screwed-up eyes. As he did this a lose pack of playing cards came out with the handkerchief and scattered all around the ground, much on his confusion and assumed surprise.

"That looks like a reformed man, doesn't it?" said Frank. "You're a real, right bad one, you are. Now you get away from here."

Brady went. He gave Frank an awful look of hatred and menace, but he hurried his steps.

Frank stood watching him until the fellow was clear out of sight. Then, very thoughtfully, he walked back to the school.

"Maybe I said too much; maybe I spoiled my own case," he reflected, "but I was thinking of Ned's interests."

Frank had an idea in his mind that he would go to Professor Elliott, tell him the whole story from beginning to end, and see if something could not be done, here at Bellwood, to have the officers of the law try and find the stolen diamond bracelet.

When Frank got to his room Bob Upton was awake, and, pale and worried-looking, Ned Foreman sat conversing with him, and both occupied Frank's thoughts for the next hour.

Frank had a reassuring talk with Ned. He told him that he need not worry about Brady any further,

that he had pretty effectually scared the rascal away.

"All he can do is to try and kidnap you," explained Frank. "So you keep pretty close to the academy for the next few days. Then I'll know if he is hanging around here anywhere."

The next day Professor Elliott went away from Bellwood to visit a friend, and Frank had no chance to talk with him about Ned, as he had planned.

Late that afternoon Frank strolled alone from the school grounds. He had no definite purpose in view when he started. A little distance progressed, however, he thought of the old hut, and made up his mind to see if he could locate it.

For the first time since becoming a student at Bellwood Frank wore the light checked suit of clothes, the counterpart of which he had given to Ned.

Our hero had a pretty good idea as to the direction of the old cabin. He must have gone a mile, when, as he was passing through a dense patch of shrubbery, Frank became aware that some persons were following him.

Two men were skulking in his rear, advancing as he advanced, but keeping well under the shadow and shelter of the bushes.

"It's those two men—Jem and Dan," said Frank to himself.

CHAPTER XX

FRANK A PRISONER

Our hero quickened his steps a little. Then he made up his mind what he would do. He fancied he knew what the presence of the men, Jem and Dan, meant. He smiled to himself as he strolled along, carelessly now.

Sidelong glances enabled him to make out the movements of his trailers without awakening their suspicions. He could observe that they had branched off from one another, aiming at a clear space, where they planned to head him off.

This is just what they did do. Frank anticipated their action as they suddenly moved toward him. He was as cool as a cucumber, and halting hailed them with a nod and a familiar:

"Hello!"

"Hello, yourself, youngster," returned Jem, looking Frank over keenly, while his comrade stood as if ready to pounce upon the lonely boy in the woods at a given signal. "One of the school fellows, aren't you?"

Frank nodded.

"Thought so. Let's see, your name is——"

"Oh, call me Brown for short," retorted Frank with a laugh.

"You can't fool me," declared Jem, coming nearer.

"What do you want to know my name for?" demanded Frank.

"I'm sort of curious, that's all. Say, you give us the initial, and I'll bet we can guess at the rest of it."

"Think so? All right, what do you say to N, now?"

"I'd say Ned, right off the handle," piped in Dan.

"All right," laughed Frank. "Then you might take F for the last name."

"Foreman—Ned Foreman!" shouted Dan excitedly. "It's him, Jem. The light suit of clothes that Brady told us about——"

"Shut up—the bag!"

Quick as lightning Dan drew something from his breast and sprang forward. It was to slip a canvas bag over Frank's head. Then each of the men pinioned an arm, and Frank was a prisoner.

This was just as Frank had calculated it would be done, and he was not in the least worried. He figured it out that these men had been sent by Brady to kidnap Ned Foreman. The light suit of clothes had deceived them, and his own verbal parrying had aided in their accepting him as the boy they had been hired to capture.

The bag hung loosely about Frank's head. It was perforated at the top, and he could breathe easily. He could not, however, see through the opaque covering.

"Don't you make any noise now, if you're wise," ordered Jem.

"I'm not doing it, am I?" propounded Frank coolly in a muffled tone.

"Better not," said Dan. "I've got a heavy stick here, and I'd use it pretty quick."

"Who are you, anyway, and what do you want of me?" asked Frank.

"Well, lad," answered Jem, "we're going to take you on a little journey. It will take all night to do it, and we'll make you as comfortable as we can, if you behave nicely. There's a real fine man you are to see. If you do as he wants you to do, you won't be five minutes with him, and you'll leave him with good pay for all the trouble we're putting you to."

"That's fair enough; I'm agreeable," said Frank.

"He's easy enough to handle," Frank heard Jem tell Dan.

"Maybe that's all put on," suggested the other. "Don't take any risks.
You'd better leave him with me when you get to the creek, and hurry on to
Middletown and get the horse and wagon."

Frank knew that Middletown was a small village not far from Bellwood. After they had proceeded a little farther there was a halt. Dan made our hero sit down on the grass and kept hold of his arm. The man Jem seemed to go away somewhere.

It must have been nearly half an hour when Frank caught the echo of rumbling wheels. Then there was a whistle as an approaching vehicle halted.

"Come on," said Dan, helping him to his feet. "We'll take a little ride."

"Anything for a change," laughed Frank. "What are you fellows up to, anyhow?"

"You're pretty cheerful for a boy in the dark," observed Dan.

"Oh, that's all right—I'm thinking of that good pay you were talking about."

"You're a sensible young fellow," commented Dan. "Don't you worry a bit. You'll fare all right if you last through as you've begun. But if you don't, then most everything fierce is likely to happen to you."

Frank was lifted into a wagon. Its back hinged out, and it was closed again by Jem as Dan got into the vehicle after his prisoner. Frank dropped to a pile of old blankets. Then Dan lifted the bag from his head.

"Don't try to see any further than the law allows," he remarked, "and it's all right."

There was nothing to see, Frank found, but the sides, back and roof of a shut-in delivery wagon. The driver's seat was obscured by a water-proof blanket that came within a foot of the top of the wagon, leaving a small space through which light and air might come.

"All right in there?" sang out Jem, and the vehicle started up.

"You can sleep or loaf, any way you like," said Dan. "If you get hungry or thirsty we'll stop at some tavern and get you some food and something to drink."

"I'm comfortable," declared Frank. "Say, look here, we've got quite friendly. Maybe I can ask you a question or two."

"Ask away, youngster," directed Dan.

"Of course I guess what you are up to, or rather who put you up to it," said Frank.

"You wouldn't be Ned Foreman if you didn't," chuckled Dan.

"All right. Give me a guess, will you?"

"For certain."

"You're taking—me to see a man for five minutes, you said?"

"Yes, that's so."

"I'll bet you I know his name."

"Well, what is it?"

"Tim Brady."

"You've hit it wrong, youngster," declared the man Dan in apparent good faith; "it's not Tim Brady."

CHAPTER XXI

A QUEER EXPERIENCE

Frank was a little surprised at the definite announcement of the man Dan. The latter seemed to be telling the truth.

"If it's not Brady, who is behind this business?" began Frank.

"I didn't say that," retorted Dan.

"Why——"

"I said that it wasn't Brady you were going to meet."

"Oh!" uttered Frank vaguely.

"If you hadn't acted so sensible and handsomely," proceeded Dan, "I wouldn't talk with you at all. You've got me sort of chummy, though. I like you. I don't suppose there's any harm in telling you that it's a lawyer you're going to see. He'll explain the business to you."

"What is the business?" persisted Frank.

"Bless me if I know," declared Dan. "We were to do something—get you. We were to take you somewhere—we do it. After that we're paid off, and that's our end of it."

Frank did some thinking and surmising; but he could only theorize. He saw that now he was in the mix-up he must see it through.

How far they traveled in the next eight hours he could only guess at. The vehicle had two horses attached; they were pretty good travelers, and the road was a smooth and level one and in excellent condition.

A little after dark the team halted, and Jem went to some place near by and bought some doughnuts. He gave them to Dan, who divided up with Frank. Then Frank went to sleep, awoke, and went to sleep again on the heap of blankets in the bottom of the wagon, to be aroused by Dan shaking his arm vigorously and saying:

"Wake up, youngster."

"What time is it?" inquired Frank.

"Just struck midnight by the village clock," Dan informed him.

"What village?" asked Frank.

"You're not to know that, youngster," responded Dan with a chuckle, as though he considered the prisoner a pretty keen lad. "You'll have to put on this headgear again," and Frank did not demur as the bag was drawn over his head.

Then our hero was lifted out of the wagon, and Jem took hold of one hand and Dan of the other, and he was led across a yard, up a pair of outside stairs, along a porch, and then there was a pause. Jem knocked at a door. There was some delay, and then the door was opened.

"We're the men from Brady," said Jem.

"Pretty outlandish hour to disturb a man," snapped a sharp and domineering voice in return.

"Acting on orders, judge," said Jem.

"This is the lad, is it?"

"It's him, judge," answered Jem, and they entered some kind of a room.

Frank was pushed down into a chair. Then Dan removed the bag from his head.
Frank looked about him with a good deal of curiosity.

He found himself in a room that he decided must be a lawyer's office. It had cases full of law books. On a table stood a shaded lamp, and beside it was the man who had admitted them.

This was a wiry, shrewd-looking individual, whose hair was all touseled and who was only partially dressed, as if he had been aroused from sleep. He moved to a chair and drew toward him a little package of documents with a rubber band around it.

"This is the lad Foreman, is it?" he demanded.

"It's him, judge," declared Jem.

"Very good. Young man, I am acting for a client. Understand one thing. You appear before me voluntarily. If at any future time any—er—misunderstanding, complications arise out of this extraordinary midnight—er—invasion, I simply act as attorney for my client. Here's a document. It is to be signed by you. In consideration of the same, at a later date, my client is to remit to some school or other the money to pay for your schooling four years in advance."

"Don't say a word but 'uh-huh,'" whispered Dan quickly to Frank. "You'll be glad if you do it. It's all right."

"Uh-huh," said Frank obediently, but thinking somethings that would have startled the men with him if they had guessed them.

"*Ipse dixit, de facto,* as we say in the law," proceeded the judge pompously. "That's all, I think."

The speaker dipped a pen in ink. He set before Frank a two-paged document. Its first page was turned over. Its second page our hero was not given time to read, but Frank's keen glance took in words and phrases that plainly indicated to him that the document alluded to a guardianship of some kind.

Frank signed a name that was no name at all. It was a meaningless scrawl. He believed it would bring about a crisis, but he was now ready for just that. The document was drawn from his hand, but before the judge could look at it there was a ring at a telephone at the end of the room. The judge hastily thrust the document into a drawer and hastened to the telephone.

He spoke to somebody over the phone and nodded to Jem, and said:

"It's Brady."

"No need of us waiting," responded Jem. "Here's my half of that card, judge. I suppose you know the arrangement."

For reply the judge walked to a safe standing in the corner of the room, opened it, took out a little box and handed it to Jem.

Frank felt somehow that this was the diamond bracelet that had been stolen from Samuel Mace back at Tipton. The thought connected with the talk he had overheard at the cabin near Bellwood about two pieces of card. He theorized that it was the reward to Jem and Dan for agreeing to kidnap Ned Foreman.

"Got it?" spoke Dan eagerly, edging up to Jem. "Then our part's done. Let's get away from here."

Frank took a last glance around the room. It was to note a row of law books that had written on their calfskin backs the name "Grimm." Frank treasured this clue. He did not doubt that it was the name of the "judge." He did not know what town he was in, or how far away from Bellwood, but he believed he now had learned the name of the "judge," and that it would afford a starting point in a later investigation.

Frank smiled to himself as, the bag again over his face, he was taken back to the covered wagon. He wondered what the "judge" and Brady would say when they found a meaningless scrawl to the document they had gone to so much trouble to have signed.

He made up his mind that, although he was a minor, the signature of Ned Foreman to that paper meant something important. It probably gave some power to Brady over Ned. What this was Frank felt sure that he could soon find out, and he planned upon his return to Bellwood School to go straight to Professor Elliott with the whole story.

"Now, then, youngster," observed Dan as the wagon started up, "you've behaved fine. Nobody is hurt, and you've done yourself some good. I'll promise you that your schooling bills will be paid, and you just want to forget everything that's happened to-night. Don't be foolish and stir things up. It'll be no use. You'll be provided for until you're of age, and that's a good deal for a fellow who was grubbing for every cent yesterday."

Frank went to sleep after that. He was roused by Dan in broad daylight, and
Jem opened the back of the wagon. Dan walked a few steps with Frank.

"You're about two miles from your school," he said. "I've taken quite an interest in you. If I was the right sort, I'd kind of like to adopt you. Good-by."

"Good-by," answered Frank, starting in the direction of Bellwood School.

Frank walked on for a distance. He observed that the wagon had not started up immediately, and he believed that the two men would satisfy themselves that he was not delaying or lurking around before they resumed their journey.

Frank chuckled to himself. He had gone through a night of considerable mystery, but he fancied he had gathered up some pretty important points as to the reason for all the planning and plotting regarding Ned Foreman. He felt pretty well satisfied with himself.

"I don't want to pat myself on the shoulder any," was the way he put it to himself, "but I think I've done pretty well for a young fellow about my size. They would have it that I was Ned Foreman. They would have me sign that paper. I didn't tell any lies, but I wonder what that lawyer will say when he reads that signature? Grim he'll be, sure enough."

Frank at first was quite content to return to the academy. The wagon had started up at a clattering rate and he did not attempt to follow it. Suddenly, however, a crash and then the echo of loud voices halted him.

"Something happened to that wagon," decided Frank. "Jem and Dan are discussing things at a great rate, too. I'm going to see what's up."

Frank made a short cut through the shrubbery and reached the road at the point whither the loud voices of the two men led him. He came upon the wagon with one hind wheel stuck in a muddy rut and the other one smashed at the hub. From the shelter of a handy bush Frank surveyed the situation and listened to what the recent captors were saying.

"There's no use, Jem," remarked Dan. "She's a goner and you've just got to leave her here."

"But what about getting to Rockton?"

"Ain't that plain?"

"Not to me," asserted Jem.

"Why, unhitch the animal, and make it on horseback."

"Me?" hooted Jem. "Why, I never rode a horse twice in my life, and then without a saddle—not much."

"Well, unhitch, anyway; it isn't far to the town. Let the livery stable man come back after the wagon here and give you a new rig."

"There's no other way to do that I can make out," agreed Jem. "Yes, that's just what we'll do."

Frank became interested in watching them unhitch the horse from the wagon. They finally started off, Jem leading the horse. Frank was about to go about his business, when a casual remark of Dan acted like a magnet in attracting his attention away from his former purpose.

"I say, Jem," he observed in a somewhat anxious tone, "you are sure we can settle the bracelet business right away?"

"Yes, right away," assented Jem.

"Cash?"

"Ready money, sure."

"Hope you will. I want my share so I can get away from these diggings and the crowd into some new district and among new people."

"Oho! Going to turn respectable, are you?" jeered Jem.

"I'm going to try," announced Dan manfully. "I'm afraid of Brady. He's the kind of a man who goes from bad to worse. He will be sure to get you in trouble if you stick with him long enough."

"Well, as long as he pays the bills as he agrees I'm his man," said Jem.

"I'm not, and I'll cut loose just as soon as I get my share of the plunder."

That little talk decided Frank that he would not return to the academy at once. He resolved to play the detective, for a little time at least.

Frank believed that what he had done would result in the upsetting of all the plans Brady had set on foot regarding Ned Foreman.

He felt certain that when he related the circumstances of the case to Professor Elliott, the latter would speedily devise a way to protect Ned and ferret out the object of the lawyer, Grimm, and also Brady, in securing some kind of guardianship over the orphan boy.

About the bracelet, however, that was a different affair. From what Frank had just heard he was convinced that Jem had this now in his possession.

"Yes," mused Frank, as almost involuntarily he followed Jem and Dan at a safe distance, "that little box the lawyer gave Jem surely contains the bracelet stolen from Lemuel Mace, back at Tipton. It's sure, too, from what these men just said, that Jem is going to dispose of it right away. Why, if that's so, all trace of it would be lost, and good-by to my chances of ever convicting the real thieves. This man Dan, the best of the lot, is going to disappear, and, of course, Brady and Jem will never admit they stole the bracelet. I sort of feel that if I let these men slip me now I'll never be able to clear myself of the charge of stealing Mace's jewelry."

Frank was so impressed with these ideas that he trailed on after the two men. He did not know that it would do much good, but that bracelet was a kind of a lodestone, and he felt that he would give a good deal to get it into his possession.

The little procession covered about three slow miles, arriving finally at a little sleepy town. Frank had never been there before. Jem led the horse down the main street of the place, and finally turned into a vacant lot, at the rear of which stood a livery stable. A lantern was burning just beyond the wide open door of the place.

Frank lined a board fence that bounded one side of the livery stable yard. When he got opposite the open doorway where Jem had halted, he posted himself at a crack in the fence, where he could see and hear what was going on.

"Hi, there, somebody—wake up!" bawled Jem loudly.

A sleepy-eyed hostler made his appearance in a few minutes. There was a lengthy explanation as to the broken wagon. Jem seemed to make this all satisfactory in a money way. Then he told the hostler that he must have a light single rig, and the man took the horse into the stable, while Jem and Dan remained outside.

"Going on alone, are you?" inquired the latter.

"It's best," replied Jem. "You see, I've got one place in view I want to visit. You know—Staggers."

"Yes, I've heard of him," nodded Dan. "He's a mighty close one, though. Get the full value, Jem."

"I will, never fear."

"What shall I do?"

"Oh, go up to the old hut and snooze until I come back."

"I hope that will be soon."

"I won't be any longer than I can help."

"What are you doing?"

Jem was acting strangely, and the peering Frank was surprised and interested. Jem was going through a puzzling pantomime. He would touch his head in various places in a whimsical manner, then pause and appear undecided as to what he would do next.

"It's funny," he remarked, after silently going through these apparently meaningless gestures for some moments.

"What's that?" inquired Dan.

"I can't get it."

"Can't get what?"

"The high sign."

"Oho!"

"You know what I mean?"

"Yes, indeed. Brady told us that Staggers will have no dealings with any one not having the high sign."

"Exactly. Brady said it was L.E.H."

"I remember that."

"But I've forgotten part of it. Let's see, L. is lip. I know that—you touch your lip. Then E. Is it eye or ear?"

"Ear," cried Dan. "Say, I'm sure Brady said ear."

"All right. And the last? Oh, of course—hand. You touch your lip, then your ear, and then put out your hand," and Jem went rapidly through these maneuvers. "As to the grip, it's easy—slip the forefinger up the wrist. O.K.—I've got it. Say, what kind of an old tumbledown trap is that thing?" demanded Jem, as the hostler reappeared leading a sorry nag attached to an old buggy with an enormous hood and a big shallow boot at the rear.

"It's an old mail carrier cart," replied the hostler. "But it's the only single rig we've got in the stable at the present time."

"Well, I suppose it will have to do," observed Jem indifferently. "I'll be back soon, Dan."

"All right."

Jem drove out of the yard and down a road leading out of the town. The horse was a decrepit animal and did not go very fast. While trying to think out the best plan to pursue, Frank followed after the cart at a safe distance.

He had gone only a little way when he wished he had remained near the stable and had followed Dan. That would have been easier. Dan had planned to return to the hut and had already disappeared in its direction. Unguided, however, Frank did not believe that he could locate it. He kept on down the road, therefore, after Jem, unwilling to lose sight of both of the men who certainly knew all about the diamond bracelet stolen from Lemuel Mace's jewelry store at Tipton.

"This man Jem has the bracelet," reflected Frank, "and just as surely he is going to some man named Staggers to sell it or get him to sell it for them. Then he will return to Dan to divide the spoils. I can't

miss scoring some kind of a point following that cart."

This Frank did for over two miles. Then he began to grow wearied and footsore. He had no idea how many miles Jem planned to go, and finally he carried out a bold idea.

This was to climb into the deep boot at the back of the vehicle. The hood in front prevented Jem from seeing what was going on behind him. As the horse struck a patch of very rutty road, Frank ran close up to the buggy.

The vehicle was wobbling and jolting so that the action of his additional weight on the springs did not attract the attention of the driver. Frank cuddled down in the shell-shaped receptacle for mail and parcels, fairly out of sight.

It must have been fully two hours later when Jem drove into a town of quite some size. It was, in fact, a small city, and from what Frank knew of the district he decided that it must be Rockton, a place about eleven miles from the academy town.

Frank slipped from the boot of the cart after the vehicle had made one or two turnings. When he did this he dropped flat in the middle of the road and remained there until Jem had made another turn, when he was up and away, again on the trail of the man.

After proceeding quite some distance, Jem halted the horse at the edge of a sidewalk near an alleyway. He tied the animal to a ring at the curb and proceeded down the dark lane near by.

Frank had gained the shelter of an open hallway directly opposite the point where the vehicle had halted. He stood there pondering as to his next move, when the sharp clatter of running footsteps attracted his attention.

The next minute a boy about his own size darted around the corner, running at full speed. As he rounded into view, he seemed to see some one ahead blocking his way. With an utterance of dismay and excitement he veered from his course, and sprang directly into the hallway that sheltered Frank.

"Hold on, I say!" cried Frank, fairly swept off his footing.

"Don't say a word," panted the strange lad. "Some one is after me! Show yourself, fool them, or I'm a goner. Is there any way out of this?"

Frank heard the boy run down the hall, try a locked door at the rear, and utter a cry of sharp disappointment and concern.

"They've trapped me!" he gasped.

Frank stepped toward the sidewalk and peered out, not quite able to figure out what had happened or was happening. He did not want to become mixed up in any trouble, especially just now when all his energies were centered on keeping track of the man Jem.

Frank saw one man coming running around the corner which the refugee had just turned. Almost in front of the open driveway he met a man who came running from the opposite direction.

"They're constables," murmured Frank,

"Did you see him?" began the first officer.

"A boy?" queried the man.

"Yes."

"Run into that hallway."

"Ah, there he is! Out with you—aha! I've caught you at last, have I?" cried the first officer triumphantly.

He seized Frank by the arm and pulled him out on to the sidewalk. The way he whirled him around amid his wild glee made Frank's teeth chatter.

"Hold on!" our hero demanded, struggling to free himself. "What's all this about?"

"What's it about, eh?" chuckled his captor. "Mighty innocent, aren't you? Don't remember me a bit, do you? Look sharp at me, now," rallied the officer. "I guess you'll recognize me, my soft and downy young bird, if you'll look hard enough."

"I never saw you before, and you never saw me before," declared Frank, getting nettled at his rough treatment.

"Thunder! that's so."

The officer, peering closely at Frank, staggered back as though he was about to collapse. He goggled at Frank, choking with stupefaction and disappointment.

"What's the matter, Hawkes?" asked the other officer.

"This isn't the boy I was chasing."

"It must be."

"But it isn't."

"Well, anyhow, it's the fellow who shot around that street corner a few minutes ago and dodged into the doorway, for I saw him."

"Then I must have been chasing the wrong boy."

"I reckon that's so."

Both officers looked Frank over speculatively and suspiciously.

"No, he ain't the fellow," observed the officer who had grabbed Frank.
"But, say, who are you?"

"I'm Frank Jordan, a student at the Bellwood Academy," answered our hero promptly.

"We don't know that," observed the second officer.

"I can easily prove it to you," asserted Frank.

"All right, fetch him up to the station, Hawkes, and let him explain to the captain how he comes to be snooking around people's houses at this unearthly hour of the morning."

Frank was very much cut up at this decision. To leave that spot meant possibly to lose all track of Jem and the stolen bracelet.

"I'm in this town on business," he said boldly, "and I don't see what right you have to interfere with me."

"The captain will explain all that to you," observed the officer. "Here, you come right along with us."

There was no use of resisting. Each of the officers seized an arm of Frank and marched him down the street. He uttered an anxious sigh as he cast a last look back at the horse and buggy Jem had left at the curb.

When they got to the little police station of the town, Frank was confronted by the captain. He proved to be a bright, intelligent man, and looked over some letters Frank showed him.

"This boy's all right, Hawkes," declared the officer at once. "I should have thought you would have known that from a look at his honest face. Get to school, though, lad," he added in a kindly tone to Frank. "I was a boy once myself, but I know from experience that these student larks don't pay in the end. Who did you think the lad was, anyway, Hawkes?"

"A young escaped convict," explained Hawkes. "Nice little fifty dollars reward out for his apprehension, too."

"Well, it seems you started up the wrong covey this time. Good morning, lad," nodded the officer to Frank, who promptly left the station.

Frank got back to the place where he had been arrested on a run. As he turned into the street a single anxious glance made his heart sink.

"Too bad—all for a boy criminal!" he exclaimed. "The buggy is gone."

It seemed certain that during the time the officers had taken Frank to the station, Jem had transacted his business with the mysterious Staggers and had left town.

Frank came across an early riser opening up a cheap restaurant, and inquired if he had ever heard of

a man named Staggers.

"Nickname, I guess, that," responded the eating-house man. "Fellows here, shady characters, especially, have all kinds of flash names among their friends. No, don't know Staggers."

Frank was disappointed and wearied. He had the idea of saying something to the police about the bracelet. Then he made up his mind that he would get back to Bellwood and take Professor Eliott into his confidence.

Somewhat dejected and a good deal tired out, our hero turned his face in the direction of Bellwood Academy.

CHAPTER XXII

A STARTLING MESSAGE

"Wake up, Frank!"

Frank, roughly shaken by Bob Upton, sat up in bed. He rubbed his eyes drowsily, and for a moment all the strange happenings of the previous night seemed like some dream.

Then Frank recalled reaching the school about ten o'clock in the morning, when all the students were in their classes, of reaching his room unobserved, lying down on his bed in his clothes to rest and collect his thoughts, and of dropping into a nap.

"I say," hailed Bob excitedly, "where in the world have you been?"

"It's a long story," explained Frank with a prodigious yawn and stretching himself. "You wouldn't believe it if I told it to you. Have I been missed?"

"Missed?" echoed Bob, almost in a shout. "The head monitor sat up for you all night. The gardener and the steward have been searching the creek and hunting for you everywhere. Our tutor had arranged to send a party of the class to hunt for you after dinner, and there's been all kinds of excitement and fuss about you."

"I'm sorry," said Frank, "but I couldn't help it. I've been kidnaped, Bob."

"What!"

"Don't blurt it out. I want to see Ned Foreman first. He's interested."

"Gill Mace was around with his sneering meanness," said Bob. "He said the boys had better see that none of their jewelry was missing."

"Did, eh?" said Frank. "He and his uncle will be interested, too, if things come out as I think."

"Frank, I must tell Professor Drake that you've come back."

"All right," assented Frank, who proceeded to take a refreshing wash as Bob flew from the room.

He returned just as our hero finished brushing his hair.

"You're to come down to the office at once," he said.

"All right," assented Frank.

He proceeded down the stairs without meeting any of his friends. Frank knocked at the office door and was admitted by Professor Drake.

"So you have returned, Jordan?" spoke the teacher in a somewhat severe tone.

"Yes, Mr. Drake," replied Frank.

"I hope you have some satisfactory explanation to offer in regard to your absence against the rules of this school."

"I certainly have, Mr. Drake," said Frank. "There is considerable to tell, and it is very important. I would like to see the president before I say anything, though."

"Professor Elliott is absent until to-morrow," said the tutor. "I am in charge here, and you must explain to me."

"I hope you will excuse me," replied Frank, "but there is a very good reason why I must tell the president before any one else."

"You are pretty mysterious, Jordan."

"I hope you believe that I am doing just what is right until Mr. Elliott returns," said Frank earnestly.

The teacher studied Frank's manly face for a moment.

"I must at least believe that you think you are right," he said after a thoughtful pause. "We will have it that way, if you insist, Jordan."

"Thank you, Mr. Drake," said Frank. "You will find that I am not deceiving you."

Frank was greeted at dinner with a babel of questions as to his mysterious absence. He told his friends that he had been away on business; that he could explain only to the president of the academy.

He attended his classes that afternoon, and joined the crowd on the campus after study hours. A baseball game was on. Frank was right-fielder, and he knew he was on his record in this, his first game, and did some pretty good work.

The game was running pretty close. Two of Banbury's men were on bases, when Frank noticed a ragged urchin run up to a crowd of spectators.

The strange boy asked some questions, and the lad he addressed pointed to Frank.

"Are you—are you Mr. Jordan?" the youngster panted, running up to Frank.

"Yes," nodded Frank.

"Please, sir, quick—there's a man in the old cabin on Greenlee's farm. He wants Ned Foreman to come right straight to him. He's all cut up and bleeding. He's dying. The boy yonder said you'd get Ned Foreman for me."

"Who is he?" demanded Frank, interested and startled.

"I don't know, only he said he must see Ned Foreman, because he won't last long. He's in an awful state. He's in an awful state. He just hollers and yells, and he's smashing a great big bracelet with shining stones in it."

"Jordan!"

"Hi—don't miss it!" Whiz!

Just past Frank's head flew a fly from the bat Frank had not turned in time. But he heeded not the yells, "Deserted his colors!" "Run away again!" or the fact that his neglect had sent two of Banbury's cohorts home.

Frank knew at once that the man the excited boy spoke of was either Jem or Dan. The allusion to a bracelet had started him on a vivid run, the boy keeping breathlessly by his side, panting:

"I was passing the old cabin, when I heard some one groaning on the inside. Then the man told me to get Ned Foreman."

The little messenger led Frank straight to the hut and slipped down to the doorstep almost exhausted, while his companion rushed through the open doorway.

The man Dan lay on a heap of straw, silent and helpless. His clothing was stained with blood. Frank at once ascertained that he was still alive, but he had fainted from weakness.

He went out to the little fellow on the doorstep.

"What's your name?" asked Frank.

"It's Lem."

"Well, you're a grand little fellow," said Frank. "You've done a good deal already, but I want you to run to the nearest farmhouse and tell the farmer that he must get here right away to move a dying man to a doctor at Bellwood."

"Yes, sir," nodded the obliging little fellow eagerly.

"Tell him I'll pay all the expenses, and yours, too, Lem, as soon as we get through with this business."

The boy darted away. Frank re-entered the hut. As he did so his foot kicked some object, and it jangled across the rough board floor.

Frank picked it up with some eagerness and satisfaction. It was the bracelet that Lem had described —"with shining stones in it."

Our hero was a good deal excited as he examined the object in his hand. He thrust it into his pocket with quite a thrill of satisfaction. He then went closer to the suffering Dan.

The man seemed to have dropped into a deep daze or sleep. Frank realized that he could do nothing for him until he was removed to some place where skilled surgical aid could be summoned.

"It's wonderful," mused Frank, as he went outside, impatient and anxious for the return of his messenger. "This is certainly the bracelet that I've had so much worry about. I never saw it before, but it must be the one stolen from Lemuel Mace. How does it happen, though, that Dan has it here? Why is it all battered up? Where is Jem? Why wasn't it sold to the man, Staggers? Say, here's a big puzzle, but I've got the bracelet, and this man Dan can be made to explain all about it when he gets his senses back."

Frank certainly had some perplexing thoughts as to the peculiar situation of the moment. He could only theorize what had happened.

The way he figured it out was that Jem had been unable to make any bargain with the man Staggers and dispose of the bracelet. He had come back to the hut to report this fact to Dan. They must have had a quarrel over it, Frank decided. Jem had probably been beaten off. Not, however, until he had pretty badly bruised up his opponent. The bracelet must have got battered in the struggle for its possession, or Dan, in the delirium which the farmer boy had described to Frank, had banged it about, not knowing what he was doing.

Frank paced up and down in front of the hut, turning all these thoughts over in his mind, and really anxious about the condition of Dan, counting the minutes and hoping for the speedy return of his messenger with aid. He was walking slowly on his tiresome patrol, when he heard a rustle in the bushes. He turned, somewhat startled. Before he could get fully around a brisk hand slapped him sharply on the shoulder, with the words:

"Hello, you—glad I've found you!"

Frank drew suspiciously away from a lad about his own age, and a total stranger to him. He was well dressed, and had a keen pair of eyes and a pleasant, rather quizzical expression of face.

Frank was on nettles for fear Jem might return, and at first feared that the boy might be some emissary of Brady or his recent kidnapers.

"Don't know me?" questioned the lad, smiling boldly and in an extremely friendly way into Frank's face.

"Well, I know you," retorted the other. "Here, Frank Jordan, of Bellwood
Academy, shake," and he extended his hand.

"Who are you?" inquired Frank, only feebly returning the hearty handshake of the stranger.

"I am your everlasting debtor—friend, slave!" declared the lad vehemently. "See here; that night, or, rather, morning, dark hallway—two officers—nabbed you, took you for me, and I got away."

"O—oh!" exclaimed Frank slowly, and with a decided shock. "I remember you now."

"Thought you would," nodded the lad briskly. "You don't seem a bit glad to see me, but I am to see you."

Frank did not say anything in reply to this. In fact, the boy who had just revealed his identity was not

exactly welcome to Frank just at that moment. The latter remembered what the policeman, Hawkes, had said about him—that he was an escaped convict, with a reward out for his arrest. That did not speak well for the fellow. Then, too, Frank did not fancy the proximity of such a person, with a diamond bracelet in his possession presumably worth a great deal of money.

"How did you come to find me here?" demanded our hero with blunt suspicion.

"Didn't—just ran across you. But I was on my way to find you."

"Where?"

"At the academy."

"How did you know I belonged to the academy?" challenged Frank.

"Why, didn't I hear you mention the place and tell your name to the policeman?"

"Yes, that's so," admitted Frank. "But why did you want to see me?"

"To thank you."

"For what?"

"For saving me from arrest."

"Oh, then you admit that you are what the policeman said?"

"What was that?"

"A convict."

"Yes," answered the boy promptly.

"And an escaped convict."

"That's right, too."

"I don't know, then," said Frank, "that I did right in shielding you."

"Oh, yes, you did," declared the lad buoyantly. "See here, you're a good fellow, a staving good fellow. You've just about made my future for me. Isn't that a big thing to do?"

"It is, if it's true," said Frank.

"Well, you'll think so when I tell you something. See here: I was an orphan boy down at the town where you saved me. Five years ago a crowd of fellows started out one Hallowe'en night for fun. We had a mean fellow named Tompkins for a leader. He got us to obey his orders. I had to set fire to a heap of brush at one farmhouse. The others were to do certain stunts in the same neighborhood. We found out later that Tompkins was using us as tools to cover some real spite work of his. I set fire to the brush heap to scare the farmer. The wind blew the sparks into a two-ton haystack near by, and it burned down. I was scared and sorry. I was worse scared and sorry the next day, when I was arrested. Tompkins and his crowd had burned down some barns and an old mill. Their folks were rich, and they could hire good lawyers. I was a homeless orphan boy, and was made the scapegoat. They sent me to the reform school till I was of age."

Frank's mind, of course, was full of anxiety for the wounded man in the hut and impatient for the return of his messenger, but he could not help but be interested in the story of his companion.

"My name is Dave Starr," proceeded the lad. "I went to the reform school. I soon became a good-conduct trusty, but the life nearly killed me. I escaped one day, and if you go into any of the towns around Rockton you'll find my picture in the police stations, with a fifty-dollar reward offered for my arrest."

"What have you done since you escaped?" inquired Frank.

"I have tried to make a man of myself," replied Dave Starr, drawing himself up proudly. "I want to show you something," and he drew a folded paper from his pocket and extended it.

This was what Frank read:

"Received from Dave Starr $37.72, being payment and interest for damage done to my haystack by

fire. He says this was the only fire he was responsible for, and that it was an accident, and I believe him to be an honest, truthful lad. "Signed, "JOHN MOORE."

"Understand?" inquired Dave.

"I think I do," nodded Frank. "You've cleaned the slate by paying your debts."

"That's it," assented Dave. "I went back to Rockton to settle that debt, and the policeman, Hawkes, saw me, recognized me, and I would now be back in that dismal, heart-breaking old reform school if it wasn't for you."

"Well, I'm glad I happened to help you," said Frank warmly.

"I've been pretty lucky since I escaped," narrated Dave. "I went away and got work at a factory just outside a little town. One winter day, when a lot of us were nooning, an empty palace car swung from a switching train into a ditch. It caught fire. There was no water near, and a good twenty thousand dollars was burning up, when I led the fellows to the car. We snowballed it till we put out the flames. That was my start in life. What do you think? About two weeks later an agent of the railroad came around. He gave each of my helpers a ten-dollar gold piece, and he gave me one hundred dollars for saving the railroad property."

"That was fine," commented Frank,

"Wasn't it, though? Well, that was my nest egg. I bought a small stock of notions. I made money. By and by I had five hundred dollars. I had an old friend, who had known my father, who had a ranch in California. I wrote to him, and he replied to my letter saying that he had a place for me. Well, I spent a year on his ranch, raising plums. Then a month ago I struck a fine idea. I heard of how they did things in some African fruit colonies. I enthused my employer. A month ago I came East with his instructions and plenty of money to gather together one hundred monkeys."

"What!" fairly shouted Frank.

"Just as I say," declared Dave with a pleasant smile.

"One hundred monkeys?"

"Yes."

"To start a show?"

"Not at all."

"What, then?"

"To teach the little fellows to help in the plum orchards. They can be trained easily. You see, when the plums are ripe we spread a sheet under a tree and shake the tree. The monkeys pick up the plums fast as can be, and fill big wicker baskets with them. We take the gang around to other orchards, and save the hiring of a lot of men."

"Well! well!" murmured Frank admiringly. "What a novel idea."

"I've had to pick up the little animals all over the big cities in bird stores," explained Dave. "At last I've got the hundred. They are in a special car down the road, and we start for the Pacific Coast to-morrow morning."

"You certainly have had a queer experience, and you deserve a lot of credit," said Frank.

"I feel good for meeting a square, fair fellow like you, Frank Jordan," continued Dave. "I'd like to feel I had a friend in you, and if I write to you once in a while, will you answer my letters?"

"I shall be delighted," declared Frank.

"Well, I've said my say," resumed Dave in a practical way, "and I see you're busy about something about here, and I may be hindering you, so I'll say good-by."

"Good-by," responded Frank, "and good luck wherever you go."

"Thank you. I say, you wouldn't mind if I sent you a little present as a sort of reminder of what you've done for me, would you, now?" propounded Dave.

"Oh, you mustn't think of that," objected Frank.

"Do they allow pets up at the academy?"

"Oh, yes,—if the fellows keep them from annoying others."

"Well, you'll hear from me about to-morrow. Good-by, Frank Jordan."

The strange lad waved his hand to Frank in a friendly, grateful way, and disappeared just as a wagon came rattling across the field toward the old hut.

CHAPTER XXIII

UNDER ARREST

"There's some one at that transom!"

"Quick, see who it is?"

Frank, Bob and Ned sprang to their feet as the latter gave the alarm, and Frank's words started them speedily into action. Bob, half crippled though he was, reached the door of the room first, tore it open and gained the corridor.

"It was some one from the crowd next door," he reported. "I fancied I saw Gill Mace vanish into that room. It's just like him—a sneaking spy."

"Ritchie said those fellows were nosing around a good deal to find out about my being away from the academy," observed Frank. "I suppose they're pretty curious."

"Yes, and they're bolting away from the ball game the way you did stirs them up," said Bob.

"Well, the transom is nailed shut, so any eavesdropper wouldn't be likely to hear much," declared Frank.

"No, but they might see that," and Ned pointed to an object on the table, where they had been seated for an hour discussing Frank's circumstantial story of all that had happened to him from the time of his kidnaping. "I shouldn't suppose you would care to have that Mace fellow see it."

"Oh, anybody can see it and welcome, as soon as I have a talk with the president," responded Frank carelessly.

Frank took up from the table and pocketed the bracelet he had found on the floor of the old hut. It was bent and dented as though it had been handled roughly.

Frank had just returned from the town, where he had seen to it that the man called Dan was placed in a comfortable room at a hotel, with a physician in charge of his case.

The doctor told Frank that the man must have been in a terrible fight with some one, for he was wounded in several places and unconscious.

Frank told the hotel keeper that he would be responsible for the expense incurred in caring for the sick man. Our hero offered to pay the farmer whose wagon had brought Dan to the town. The farmer refused any payment, but Frank made little Lem a present out of his pocket money.

Now Frank and his two fast friends had gone over the details of his recent stirring adventures.

"I think that this man Dan is the best of the crowd of plotters," said Frank. "There must have been a fight over the bracelet. I'm glad I've got it. I can prove my innocence now."

"What are you going to do with it, Frank?" asked Ned.

"Turn it over to Professor Elliott in the morning, and tell him the entire story. I am sure that Dan can be made to tell who stole it. I believe it was Brady."

"He may tell you, too, where to find that lawyer," suggested Bob.

"Grimm—yes," answered Frank. "There's something he's been up to with Brady that is of interest to

Ned here—I am sure of that."

Frank felt certain that affairs were now on a basis where a good many things would come to light within the next few hours.

He was up bright and early the next morning, and was somewhat disappointed to learn that Professor Elliott had not yet returned to Bellwood School.

Ritchie came up to him on the campus after breakfast and took him to one side.

"I say, Jordan," he began in a confidential tone, "there's a good deal of mystery going on around these diggings."

"How's that?" inquired Frank with a smile.

"Banbury's crowd are up to something, and I feel sure it concerns you in some way."

"I can't understand how that can be."

"Nor can I," said Ritchie; "but one of our scouts says they were hobnobbing late into the night. That Gill Mace went to town last evening and sent off a rush telegram somewhere. This morning the crowd are buzzing like a lot of bees, whispering together and looking at you, and Mace walks around with his eye in the direction of the town, as if he expected something to happen. Look there, now—what's up?"

Gill Mace had hurried toward the campus of the school to meet a man coming up the road. Accompanying the latter and acting very important and excited, he advanced across the campus toward the spot where Ritchie and his friends stood.

"That's the boy," pronounced Gill Mace in a loud tone, pointing to Frank.

"Is your name Jordan?" demanded the stranger of Frank.

"Suppose it is?" inquired Frank.

"Then I've come to arrest you, that's all," said the man. "I'm a constable, and the charge is stealing and having in your possession a certain diamond bracelet belonging to Samuel Mace of Tipton."

"Yes," cried Gill Mace, "he's got it about him. I saw him with it last night."

"Oh, then you are the sneak who was spying over our transom last night, eh?" said Frank, with a glance at Gill that made him quail.

"Search him, officer—get that bracelet," vociferated Gill. "He stole it from my uncle."

"Come with me, young man," ordered the officer, extending a hand to seize
Frank's arm.

"Hold on," spoke up Ritchie suddenly, stepping in between the two. "You don't arrest Frank Jordan until we know the particulars of this affair."

CHAPTER XXIV

CLEANING UP

The constable of Bellwood drew back a trifle at the warlike demonstration of Dean Ritchie and his friends. He probably had heard of the treatment of some of his kind who had been mobbed, ducked and sent home ingloriously when they had tried to interfere with the sports of the students at the school.

"Hold on, fellows," said Frank quickly, moving his champions aside. "This man is only doing his duty."

"There's the president!" exclaimed Ned Foreman, and he ran forward to the front of the academy, where Professor Elliott had just been driven up in a carriage.

"I will go with you," said Frank, ranging himself up by the side of the officer. "I would like to speak to Mr. Elliott first, though."

"Certainly," acceded the constable willingly, awed by the crowd and pleased with the gentlemanly manner of his prisoner.

Professor Elliott stood awaiting the approaching crowd, staring in a puzzled way at them through his eye glasses. Frank walked straight up to him.

"Professor Eliott," he said, "I have just been arrested by this officer, on the complaint of Gill Mace, I am led to believe."

The academy president stared in astonishment at Frank, and then at Gill, who had kept up with the coterie.

"Yes, I had him arrested," proclaimed Gill.

"Indeed," spoke Mr. Elliott. "Upon what charge, may I ask?"

"He stole a diamond bracelet from my uncle's jewelry store at Tipton," declared Gill.

"There is the bracelet in question, Professor Elliott," said Frank, promptly placing a little parcel done up in tissue paper in the hands of the professor.

"I told you he had it. Didn't I say so?" crowed and chuckled the triumphant Gill.

"However, I didn't steal it," continued Frank. "There is a story I should like to tell you, Professor Elliott. Its telling now may save some trouble later on."

"Yes—yes," nodded Mr. Elliott in a somewhat disturbed way. "Of course there is a mistake. Officer, please come with me to the library. I wish to look into this affair."

"I would like to have Gill Mace and my friend, Ned Foreman, come with us, sir," suggested Frank.

"Certainly, Jordan. Charged with robbery! Dear me! Officer, this is a pretty serious action on your part."

"I'm only doing my legal duty, sir," insisted the constable.

"You have a warrant for the arrest of our student, then?"

"No, sir, I haven't," acknowledged the officer, "but the sheriff said I had a right to act in the premises."

"How so?" demanded Mr. Elliott.

"This lad, Mace, came to us and declared that he had seen in the possession of the Jordan boy a diamond bracelet stolen from his uncle at Tipton, the town that both of them came from."

"Well?"

"He had telegraphed for his uncle to come on at once. He expects him on the eight o'clock train. The sheriff said that, in a way, the case being under the jurisdiction of another State, we might hold the accused as a fugitive from justice, pending identification."

"Fugitive, nonsense! identification, fiddlesticks!" commented the old professor testily. "Jordan isn't going to run away. As to his identification, he has turned the property in question over to me, and, knowing him as I do, I would stake a good deal that when he comes to explain matters it will clear up the situation so far as he is concerned. You have no legal right to apprehend Jordan, officer, and we certainly will not allow you to disgrace him through an arrest, except by due process of law."

"With every respect to you, sir," said the constable humbly, "what am I to do, then?"

"Go back to town, wait till this man Mace arrives, and bring him here to consult with me."

Frank gave the professor a grateful look. He felt at that moment that Mr. Elliott was indeed what Bob Upton had so enthusiastically declared him to be "a good old man."

"Now, then," continued Professor Elliott, waving the constable away as they entered the library, "we will get at the bottom of this matter. This is the bracelet in question, is it, Jordan?" he inquired, indicating the little parcel Frank had given him.

"I think it is, Mr. Elliott."

"How did you come by it?"

"If you please, Mr. Elliott," said Frank, "I would like to tell you my story in private. It involves another person, and also some facts about his relatives, which he might not be disposed to have made public property."

"Very well," answered the professor, and he led the way to his private office at the end of the library and closed its door.

Frank told his story from beginning to end, and he had an interested and sympathetic listener.

When he had concluded, the professor extended his hand, and Frank was proud to grasp it.

"Jordan," he said, "you are a noble fellow. I liked you from the first; I like you better than ever now. If every boy in the school came to me as you have done he would find in me a true friend. I hope you will tell the boys so."

"I don't have to," declared Frank. "They all know you are a good old—I mean, their friend," stammered Frank, checking his impetuous utterance just in time, "but they are a little shy."

Professor Elliott returned to the library and Frank accompanied him.

"Mace," said the former, "you may have acted on your best convictions, but
I am assured that you have made a great mistake."

"I don't see how," muttered Gill stubbornly. "There's the bracelet. He had it, didn't he? So he stole it."

"That does not follow—except in your perverted opinion," observed the professor drily. "We will move no further in this matter until your uncle arrives. Foreman, I wish to have a word with you."

"Yes, sir," bowed Ned politely.

"I will give you a note to my attorney in Bellwood. You will tell him all that Jordan has told you, as to his experiences with the person who visited us in your behalf the other day. My lawyer will ferret out this mystery concerning you, and I feel pretty sanguine you will discover something of decided interest and profit to you."

"Thank you, sir."

"None of you three need report for studies today, as I may desire to see any or all of you later on quick notice."

The boys were dismissed. Gill Mace looked suspicious and mystified, Ned was radiant, Frank felt that his patience and loyalty to his friends were about to score a grand result.

Just then the door opened, and a blustering and excited form burst into the room.

It was Samuel Mace.

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

"Hello, Gill," said the jeweler to his nephew, and then, glaring at Frank and facing Professor Elliott in an insolent way, he added: "Now, what's doing here?"

"Is this Mr. Mace?" inquired the professor, advancing courteously.

"Yes, it is," retorted the jeweler in an ungracious tone, "and I want to know who's been interfering with my affairs, and where's the diamond bracelet that Jordan boy stole from me?"

"This lad stole no bracelet from you, Mr. Mace," said Professor Elliott positively, and placing his hand on Frank's shoulder.

"Hello! There's a scheme to cheat me and save him, is there?" flared out the jeweler. "The constable

gave me to understand that. See here, Elliott—if that is your name——"

"I am Professor Elliott, yes," interrupted the academy president.

"Well, I paid my nephew's tuition to have him associate with decent boys—not with a thief that you seem to be shielding and harboring here."

"We are not used to this kind of language at Bellwood School, Mr. Mace," observed the professor with dignity and sternness. "You will kindly desist from using the same and act like a gentleman, or leave this room."

"If I do, it will be to have that Jordan boy behind the bars mighty quick!" declared Mace.

"It would be the mistake of your life, Mr. Mace, and a costly experiment for your pocket. This boy is innocent of the outrageous, and I might say cowardly and unfounded, charge you make against him. I shall ask you to remain here for about an hour, while I attend to some details of this case which will enable me to give you a clear statement as to who stole your property."

"If it's no scheme to sneak Jordan away——" began Mace.

"Silence, sir!" ordered the professor. "Foreman, kindly show Mr. Mace to my private office and get him the morning paper from the city to read."

"I'll take my bracelet first, if you don't mind," said Mace, extending his hand.

Professor Elliott took out the little packet that Frank had given him, and turned it over to the jeweler. Mace opened it eagerly. Then he gave a jump and uttered a howl that fairly electrified those about him.

"What's this?" he yelled, displaying a piece of jewelry and nearly choking with excitement. "You're all in a scheme! You're all thieves! I'll have you all arrested!" and he flung the bracelet to the farther end of the room.

"What's the matter, uncle Sam?" inquired Gill Mace.

"Matter?" screamed the jeweler, hopping madly from foot to foot. "That isn't my bracelet at all."

"What?" involuntarily exclaimed the startled Frank.

"It's a cheap imitation affair with paste stones in it."

"Is this possible?" inquired Mr. Elliott in surprise.

"Yes, 'tis, and somebody knows it. Don't you crow nor laugh over me, Frank Jordan!" raved Mace.

"We had better not talk about crowing and laughing just now, Mr. Mace," said Frank seriously. "I think I understand about the bracelet, which I believed until this moment to be the one stolen from Tipton."

"Yah! Yes, you did!" derided the jeweler.

"I think I now guess out the mystery of this substitution. As that explanation and the fate of the real bracelet may hang on the words of a dying man, you had better get down from your high horse and help us reach the facts in the case."

Then in a low tone Frank told the professor that they had better see the wounded man, Dan, at the village hotel at once.

Mace was induced to await the movements of Professor Elliott, and within five minutes the latter and Frank and Ned Foreman were wending their way to the village.

It was arranged that Frank should visit the man Dan at the hotel, while President Elliott went to his lawyer with Ned.

It was an hour later when Frank, his mission completed, hurried his steps to overtake Professor Elliott and Ned, just returning to the academy from the lawyer's office. While in the town Frank stopped at the post-office and received a letter from his father, in which his parent stated that he was much improved in health.

"That's the best news yet," said the boy to himself.

"My lawyer believes that there is some plot afoot on the part of that man Brady to rob Foreman of some fortune," explained the school president. "He knows who this 'Judge' Grimm is, and will see that Foreman gets his rights."

"Yes," said Frank, "I have learned that this is true, and a good many other important facts in the case."

"Then the man Dan was able to see you?" inquired Ned eagerly.

"Yes, and he has told me everything," replied Frank. "He explained about the bracelet. It seems that Dan is not as bad as Brady and Jem, who stole it originally, right after I had visited the jeweler's shop. It was left in charge of Grimm, the lawyer. It was given with a sum of money to Jem after he and Dan brought me, supposed to be you, Ned, to the lawyer's office. After they brought me back to Bellwood, Jem and Dan went to the old cabin to settle up. Jem had the real bracelet. He palmed off a brass one on Dan. The latter discovered the fraud. There was a terrible fight. Dan is getting better. Jem has the real bracelet."

"Which Mr. Mace will have some trouble in recovering, I fancy," observed Ned.

"That is his business," remarked Professor Elliott drily. "We can now with the evidence of this man Dan positively prove your innocence, Jordan."

"About Ned, here," said Frank, "it seems that recently a distant relative left his dead stepsister a legacy consisting of some mortgages and a house and lot. Brady learned of this. His wife being dead, the legacy goes to Ned. What Brady was figuring on was to become Ned's appointed guardian so he could manage, or, rather, mismanage the estate until Ned was twenty-one years of age."

"We will soon have that phase of the case adjusted," observed the professor in a confident and satisfied tone.

* * * * * * *

"Hi, fellows, look there!" shouted Bob Upton.

It was two days after the arrival of Samuel Mace, the jeweler, at Bellwood School, and the boys were engaged in their usual late afternoon sports on the campus. Bob was up and around again now, not much the worse for his experience with the "doctored" shoes.

"A fight!" exclaimed several, and there was a rush for two combatants, who seemed sparring in dead earnest on the outskirts of the Banbury contingent.

Banbury himself had just come striding from the school building in a great huff. He had rushed up to Gill Mace, and pulling him away from the others had engaged him in combat.

All the fellows knew that when Professor Elliott came home a few days previous quite a lot of complaints and delinquencies awaited him. Among these the only one very serious was the burning of a haystack belonging to a farmer named Wadsworth.

Suspicion had pointed to the Banbury crowd. The farmer had once caught several members of that group smoking in his barn, and had driven them out violently. Banbury had threatened revenge, and the day before Frank had returned from his trip in the covered wagon one of Farmer Wadsworth's haystacks had burned to the ground.

Banbury had been summoned to the office of the president. Just now returning from it, he had started the present fight.

As Frank and his crowd reached the scene of the conflict and joined the ring about the combatants Banbury struck out with a blow that sent Gill Mace reeling to the ground with a bloody nose.

"Take that, you sneak!" shouted Banbury furiously.

"Hello!" exclaimed Bob Upton. "He knows his right name at last."

"I'll fix you," blubbered Gill, "you great big coward!"

"You shut up, or I'll give you worse," threatened Banbury. "A nice fellow you are! Went and peached on me about that haystack."

"You lied to the professor about us, saying we had a hand in it," declared

Gill.

"Well, you've got me suspended, sent home, and I'll probably be expelled."

"You ought to be!" yelled Gill, as a twinge of pain made him howl anew. "It was you who got me sick smoking cigarettes and thought it was funny. Yes, and it was you, too," blabbed the mean-spirited traitor, "who put those brads in Bob Upton's shoes, so he would lose the race."

"What?" shouted Dean Ritchie.

He made a vigorous break through the ranks of the crowd with the word. "The cat was out of the bag" at last, the secret told. Banbury saw the doughty Ritchie coming for him. He turned in a flash.

It was a race to the nearest school building. Banbury reached it first. The other boys, running after pursued and pursuer, arrived at the spot to find Banbury safe within the precincts of the classic temple of learning, and Ritchie fuming at the open doorway.

"I say, let up, Ritchie," suggested Frank. "We've had enough squabbling."

"Not a bit of it," demurred Ritchie. "No, sir. I said that if ever I found out who played that mean, low-down trick on Upton, the culprit or I would leave this school."

"Well, it was Banbury, and he's going to leave, isn't he?" argued Frank.

"Yes; but I said that one of us would go the worst licked boy in Bellwood. I mean to keep my word."

Remonstrances were in vain. With a grim, resolute face, Dean Ritchie took up his post at the entrance to the academy, pacing up and down and waiting for his chance to have another interview with Banbury.

It never came. Some of Banbury's crowd informed their leader of what was waiting for him, and Banbury managed to sneak out of the school by the rear, and reached the depot at Bellwood and was on his way home before Ritchie found out that he had escaped.

"Well, let him go. A good riddance," commented Ritchie, when he was informed of the fact. "His crowd needs a further cleaning out, though. I suggest a law and order vigilance committee. There's going to be a rooting up of all the cads and sneaks around here, if I have my way. This is a decent school; we've got a grand old fatherly president, and the fellow who can't have fun without meanness has got to leave, that's all."

* * * * * * *

"A box, you say?" observed Frank Jordan one day, as Bob Upton came up calling.

"Yes," returned Bob excitedly.

"Just arrived?"

"While you were out on the campus. Came by express, and directed to Mr. Frank Jordan, as big as life. What do you suppose it is?"

"Maybe some fruit from my folks in the South," suggested Frank. "What was in the box?"

"It's light. I shook it—nothing to indicate."

"Where is it?"

"I took it up to your room. Hey, Ritchie, and you, Foreman—come and be witnesses before Frank sneaks a box of goodies under cover."

The little group proceeded pell-mell up the stairs and were soon in Frank's room. Eager, curious eyes observed a box about two feet square on a little stand.

"There's holes in the top, and—hello! there's something alive in this box, Frank," declared Bob.

"Yes, I can hear it scratching," put in Ritchie.

"Oho!" exclaimed Frank, enlightened now. "This end up—handle with care. I know."

"Know what, Jordan?" inquired Ned.

But Frank did not answer. He had detached the shipping tag, and was reading some words written on its reverse side.

"I am sending you my special pet, Rambo," the scrawl read, "because nothing is too good for you. Highly educated, gentle. I know you'll be good to him."

Frank recalled his new friend, Dave, with a smile of pleasure. He took the cover off the box. Nestled contentedly in some soft hay at its bottom was a wonder-eyed little monkey. Beside the animal was a thin, long chain.

To be sure, the boys made a lot of the cute little pet during the next hour. The word went around, and Rambo held quite a reception. A drink of water and a cracker put the animal in rare good humor, and he began to show off.

Rambo would sit in a chair and hold a book, pretending to read. He could whirl around, hanging by his tail from a hook in the ceiling. His agility, displayed in springs, curvets and climbing, was something prodigious.

Frank arranged the box comfortably, and lots of fun they had with the clever, friendly little animal.

Mace and his crowd, with their usual envy for the enjoyment of others, complained finally that the chattering of the monkey awakened them nights. This was not true, but obedient to the suggestion of the monitor, until the faculty could act in the affair, Frank shut Rambo up in a room in the unused attic nights, not wishing to trust him along with the other animals in the academy stables.

This was a providential move, it developed later. The second night of Rambo's isolation, toward morning, Frank was awakened by the crash of glass. He got up to find that the monkey had burst in through the outside window. Rambo was bleeding and shivering on the floor.

"Hello, this is strange!" exclaimed Bob, roused up also from sleep. "I say,
Frank, I smell smoke!"

"That's so," replied Frank quickly. "Where does it come from?"

They ran out into the corridor, to quickly trace the smoke to its source. It evidently proceeded from the attic. Rushing there, Frank and Bob found some rafters on fire. They had evidently ignited near the chimney.

Rambo, it seemed, frightened at his danger, had broken through the attic window and had reached the boys' room in time to warn them. The fire was soon extinguished, but it might have been serious had it not been discovered in time.

That settled it for useful, vigilant Rambo. He was given permanent quarters in Frank's room, and was treated like a hero by the academy boys.

Another box came to Frank a few days later—from his father in the sunny South. It was filled with oranges, pineapples and other luscious fruits, and there was a gay supper in Frank's room that night. Even Gill Mace and his crowd were invited, and little Rambo was an honored guest at the banquet.

Frank felt that the disturbed air of the academy was clearing. Certainly his own affairs and those of Ned Foreman had come out most satisfactorily.

Samuel Mace had been convinced that Frank was innocent of any connection with the theft of the diamond bracelet. He had started out the officers of Bellwood to look up the real robbers, Tim Brady and his accomplice, the man Jem.

These two rascals had got an inkling of what was up and had fled the country—not, however, until they had disposed of the bracelet to an innocent purchaser. The jeweler had to pay out a large sum of money to recover it.

Gill Mace was compelled to retract in public his false charge against Frank, and the vindication of the latter was made complete. Then, to the surprise of our hero, came word from Banbury that Gill had once boasted of cutting loose a house that was being moved up a hill, using Frank's knife for that purpose and thereby getting our hero in trouble. This matter was investigated, and in the end Samuel Mace had to pay for the wrecking of the old building. This angered the jeweler, and he punished his nephew severely for his misconduct.

A pleasant position on a farm was secured for the man called Dan, who promised to lead an honest life in the future.

As to Ned, the homeless lad felt that the greatest happiness in the world had come into his life. The lawyer, Grimm, had been frightened into telling all about Brady's plot. The estate that belonged to Ned was traced, and Professor Elliott was legally made the boy's guardian.

The academy president called Frank, Ned and Bob to his office one evening, and informed them of the pleasant outcome of their affairs.

"Just think of it," said Ned, with happy tears in his eyes. "I'm sure of an education now, and all through the loyal friendship of the best boy I ever knew, Frank Jordan."

"I echo that sentiment," added Bob. "Why, say, I didn't know life was really worth living till I met Frank."

"Forget it, fellows," ordered Frank modestly, though flushing with genuine pleasure. "You may help me to win some battles yet."

"Jordan," spoke the bland old professor, handing a sealed letter to Frank, "you may feel very proud sending that letter to your father. It tells all the good things I know about a noble, honorable boy."

"Well, professor," replied Frank, "we've made you a good deal of trouble.
Now we're going to get down to good hard work."

"And play," added Professor Elliott, with the kindly, earnest smile that made him the true friend of the boys of Bellwood School.

THE END

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