FOUR
AFOOT
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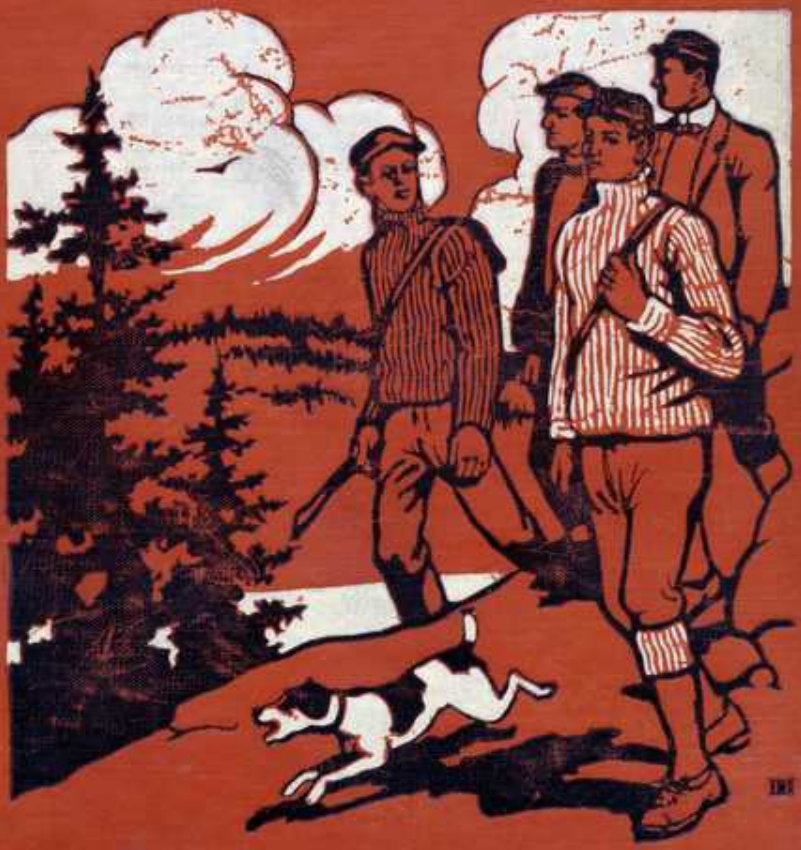
BARBOUR

APPLETONS

FOUR AFOOT

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR



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FOUR AFOOT

BY RALPH HENRY BARBOUR.

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On Your Mark.
Weatherby's Inning.

D. APPLETON & COMPANY, NEW YORK.

“Swinging along a country road on Long Island.”

FOUR AFOOT

BEING THE ADVENTURES OF THE
BIG FOUR ON THE HIGHWAY

By RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

Author of "The Half-Back," "Behind the Line,"
"Weatherby's Inning," "On Your Mark,"
"Four in Camp," etc.

NEW YORK AND LONDON
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1910

Published September, 1906

To L. S. S.

IN MEMORY OF PLEASANT HOURS

TO THE READER

Many of you who followed the adventures of Nelson, Dan, Bob, and Tom, as narrated in a previous story, FOUR IN CAMP, have very kindly professed a willingness to hear more about this quartette of everyday boys, and the author, who has himself grown rather fond of the "Big Four," was very well pleased to take them again for his heroes. It seems now as though there might even be a third volume to the series—but that will depend altogether on how well you like this one, for, as of course you understand, the author is writing in an effort to please you, and not himself. And if he doesn't please you, he would be very glad to have you tell him so, and why.

If you go to searching your map of Long Island for the places mentioned in this story you will be disappointed. They are all there, but, with one or two exceptions, under other names. You see, it doesn't do to be too explicit in a case of this sort. Mr. William Hooper, for instance, might seriously object were you to stop in front of his house and remark, "Huh! there's where old Bill Hooper lives, the fellow that wouldn't give the 'four' any supper!" Of course it is different in the case of Sag Harbor—that town has already been immortalized on the stage, and is probably by this time quite hardened to publicity. And as for Jericho—but then they never got there!

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

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FOUR AFOOT

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE BIG FOUR SET OUT FOR JERICHO

"On to Jericho!"

Dan Speede took the car steps at a bound and was out on the station platform looking eagerly about him before the other three boys had struggled through the car door. Swinging his pack to his shoulders, he waved an imaginary sword about his head and struck an attitude in which his right hand pointed determinedly toward the country road.

"Forward, brave comrades!" he shouted.

The brave comrades, tumbling down the steps, cheered enthusiastically, while the occupants of the car in which the quartet had traveled from Long Island City looked wonderingly out upon them. But as the present conduct of the boys was only on a par with what had gone before, the passengers soon settled back into their seats, and the train puffed on its way. Tom Ferris waved gayly to the occupants of the passing windows and then followed the others along the platform. The station was a small one, and save for a farmer who was loading empty milk cans into a wagon far down the track, there was no one in sight.

"Which way do we go?" asked Nelson Tilford.

For answer Bob Hethington produced his “Sectional Road Map of Long Island, Showing the Good Roads, with Description of Scenery, Routes, etc.,” and spread it out against the side of the station.

“Here we are,” he said. “Locust Park. And here’s our road.”

“That’s all right,” answered Nelson, following the other’s finger. “I see the road on your old map, but where is it on the landscape?”

“Why, down there somewhere. It crosses the track just beyond the station.”

“Certainly, but you don’t happen to see it anywhere, do you?” asked Dan.

Bob had to acknowledge that he didn’t.

“Come on; we’ll ask Mr. Farmer down here,” said Tom.

So they went on down the track to the little platform from which the milk was loaded on to the cars and hailed the farmer.

“Good morning,” said Dan. “Which is the road to Jericho, please?”

The farmer paused in his task and looked them over speculatively. Finally,

“Want to go to Jericho, do you?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered Dan.

“Are you in a hurry?”

“Why—no, I don’t suppose so. Why?”

“’Cause there’s a train in about an hour that’ll take you to Hicksville, and it’s about two miles from there by the road.”

“But we just got off the train,” objected Nelson.

“So I seen,” was the calm response. “Why didn’t you stay on? Didn’t you have no money?”

“Yes, but we wanted to walk,” answered Bob. “Which way do we go?”

“Want to walk, eh? Well, you won’t have no trouble, I guess. Pretty fair walkers, are you?”

“Bully!” answered Dan.

“Fond of exercise, I guess?”

“Love it!”

“That so? Well, there’s lots of good walkin’ around here; the roads is full of it.”

“Oh, come on,” said Tom impatiently. “He’s plumb crazy!”

“Hold on,” interposed the farmer. “I’m tellin’ you just as fast as I know how, ain’t I?”

“Maybe,” answered Dan politely, “but you see we sort of want to get to Jericho before Sunday. And as it’s already Monday morning——”

“Thought you said you weren’t in no hurry,” objected the farmer.

“Well, if you call that being in a hurry,” Dan replied, “I guess we lied to you. If you happen to have any idea where the Jericho road is——”

“Well, I’d oughter, seems to me. I live on it. Are you all going?”

“Every last one of us,” answered Nelson.

“Tell him how old we are and the family history and let’s get on,” suggested Dan *sotto voce*.

“Well, there’s four of you, eh?”

“I think so.” Bob made pretense of counting the assembly with much difficulty. “Stand still, Tom, till I count you. Yes, sir, that’s right; there are four of us.”

“Well, two of you could sit on the seat with me and two of you could kind of hang out behind, I guess.”

“Oh, much obliged,” said Bob. “But really we’d rather walk. We’re taking a walking trip down the island.”

“You don’t say! Well, you go back there about a half a mile and you’ll find a road crossing the track. You take that until you fetch the country road going to your right. Keep along that and it’s about nine miles to Jericho.”

“Thanks,” said Dan.

“You’re welcome. That’s the best way if you’re real fond of walking.”

“Oh,” said Bob suspiciously. “And supposing we aren’t?”

“Then you’d better go the shorter way and save about two miles,” answered the farmer gravely.

“Which way’s that?”

“Right down the track here for a quarter of a mile till you come to a road going to the left. Take that for half a mile and then turn to your right on the country road.”

“Thanks again,” said Bob. “You’ve had a whole lot of fun with us, haven’t you?”

“Well, you’re sort of amusin’,” answered the farmer with a twinkle in his eye. “But I been more entertained at the circus.”

Bob smiled in spite of himself, and the others grinned also; all save Tom.

“B-b-b-blamed old ha-ha-hayseed!” growled Tom. “Hope he ch-ch-ch-chokes!”

The four took their way down the track, Bob highly pleased to find the truthfulness of his map established; although Dan declared that a map that would lie nearly a quarter of a mile couldn’t be fairly called truthful. When they had gone a hundred yards or so the farmer hailed them.

“What is it?” shouted Bob.

“Got friends in Jericho, have you?” called the farmer.

“No,” answered Bob, adding “confound you” under his breath.

“Going to take dinner there, be you?”

“I guess so. Why?”

“Well, you go to William Hooper’s place about a mile t’other side of the village, and say Abner Wade sent you. He’ll look after you, William will.”

“Thank you,” called Bob.

“He seems to be a decent chap after all,” said Nelson.

“The only trouble with him is that he’s like Dan,” answered Bob. “He’s got an overdeveloped sense of humor.”

They tramped on, and presently found the road that crossed the railway. Turning into this they struck due north; at least

that's what Tom declared after consulting the compass which he carried in his pocket. Bob looked at his watch.

"Nine-fifteen," he announced. "We've got lots of time. Seven miles in three hours is too easy."

"If that old codger told us the right way," amended Tom.

"He did, because the map shows it," responded Bob.

"Don't talk to us about that old map," said Dan. "It's an awful liar, Bob."

And while they are quarreling good-naturedly about it let us have a look at them.

The boy walking ahead, swinging that stick he has cut from a willow tree, is Nelson Tilford. Nelson—sometimes "Nels" to his friends—lives in Boston within sight of the golden dome and is a student at Hillton Academy; and next year he expects, if all goes well, to be a freshman at Erskine College. That apparent slimness is a bit misleading, for the muscles under the gray flannel suit are hard as iron, and what Nelson lacks in breadth and stature is quite made up in strength and agility. In the same way the quiet, thoughtful expression on his face doesn't tell all the truth. Nelson is a good student, fond of books and inclined to think matters out for himself, but at the same time he is fond of sports and has been known to get into mischief.

Next to him walks Tom—familiarly "Tommy"—Ferris; residence, Chicago; age, fourteen years—almost fifteen now. Tom is inclined toward stoutness, has light hair and gray eyes, is at once good-natured and lazy, and has a positive talent for getting into trouble. Tommy expresses himself clearly until he becomes excited; then he stutters ludicrously. Tommy is also a

Hillton boy, but is one class behind Nelson, a fact which troubles him a good deal, since he wants very much to go up to college with his friend.

The big, broad-shouldered boy with the red hair and rollicking blue eyes is Dan Speede. Dan, who hails from New York, is fifteen years old. Whereas Tom spends a good deal of his time getting into trouble himself, Dan is tireless in his efforts to get others into trouble; and he usually succeeds. For the rest, he is fond of fun, afraid of nothing, and hasn't an ounce of meanness in him. Dan is in his senior year at St. Eustace Academy, and he, too, has his heart set on Erskine College.

The last boy of the four—and the eldest—is Bob Hethington, of Portland, Maine. Bob is sixteen—nearly seventeen—and is big, quiet-appearing, and unexcitable. He has curly black hair and eyes and is distinctly good-looking. Bob, too, is booked for Erskine.

Perhaps you have met these boys before, when, at Camp Chicora, last summer, they gained the title of the Big Four. If so, you are undoubtedly wondering how it happens that we find them on this bright morning in early September swinging along a country road on Long Island. Well, it was all Dan's fault. Dan took it into his head to get sick in early summer. As he had never been sick before to amount to anything, he thought he might as well do the thing right. So he had typhoid fever. That was in June, just after school closed, and he spent the succeeding two months at home. He didn't have a good time, and even when the doctor declared him well, Dan felt, as he himself expressed it, like a last summer's straw hat. So there was a family council. Dan's mother said Dan ought to stay out

of school and go abroad. Dan said, “Nonsense.” So the matter was left to the physician. He said what Dan needed was outdoor exercise, plenty of fresh air, and all that.

“Let him get into an old suit of clothes,” said the doctor, “and take a walking trip.” (You see, the doctor was a bit old-fashioned.) “Nothing like walking; sea trips and sanitariums aren’t half as good. He needn’t hurry; just let him wander around country for two or three weeks; that’ll set him up, you see if it doesn’t.”

Dan liked the idea, but the thought of wandering around the country alone didn’t appeal to him. “If I could only get Nelson or Bob or Tommy to go along,” he said.

“Perhaps you can,” said his father.

So three letters were written and dispatched and soon three answers came. Nelson was glad to go, Bob was equally willing, and Tom was “tickled to death.” Bob and Nelson had been at Camp Chicora most of the summer, while Tom had spent his vacation at one of the Michigan lake resorts. The last week in August there was a jolly gathering of the clans at Dan’s house, a happy reunion, and an excited discussion of ways and means. Mr. Speede engineered affairs, and by the fourth day of September all was ready. There had been much discussion as to where they should go. Nelson recommended his own State, Bob thought Pennsylvania about right, and Tom favored the Adirondacks. It was Dan’s father who thought of Long Island.

“In the first place,” he pointed out, “it’s right at our back door, and you won’t have to waste a day in getting there; and as you’ve got only three weeks at the most before school begins, that’s worth considering. Then, too, if anything should

happen to you, I could get you here in a few hours. Long Island isn't the biggest stretch of country in the world, but there's over a hundred miles of it as to length, and I guess you can keep busy. Besides, the towns are near together and you'll be able to find good sleeping accommodations; and I'd rather Dan didn't do too much sleeping out of doors just at first."

So the map of Long Island was produced and studied, and the more they studied it the better they liked it. It was unknown territory to them all, for even Dan's knowledge of the place was limited to Coney Island, and the names of places—names which amused Tommy vastly—and the evident abundance of good roads won the day.

"Me for Long Island!" declared Nelson.

"Same here," said Tommy. "I want to go to Jericho."

"And I want to go to Yaphank," declared Bob.

"And Skookwams Neck for mine!" cried Dan.

So they started to lay out a route. They laid out six. The first left out Lake Ronkonkoma, and Tommy declared he just had to see Lake Ronkonkoma. The second omitted Ketcaboneck, and Bob said he couldn't go back home without having seen Ketcaboneck. The third slighted Aquebogue, and Nelson refused to go unless that charming place was on the route. And so it went, with much laughter, until finally Mr. Speede advised them to settle only on a place to start from, take the map with them, and decide their itinerary as they went along. That pleased even Tommy.

"I shall visit Quogue if I have to go alone," he said.

What to take with them was a question which occasioned

almost as much discussion. Tommy had brought his trunk and wanted to take most of its contents along. In the end Mr. Speede's counsel prevailed and each boy limited his luggage to the barest necessities. Light rubber ponchos—squares with a hole cut in the middle which could be slipped over the head when it rained—were purchased, and these were to be used as knapsacks, the other articles being rolled up inside. The other articles included a towel, bathing trunks, brush and comb, toothbrush, extra shoe laces, a light-weight flannel shirt, three pairs of stockings, and handkerchiefs. Each boy carried a collapsible drinking cup in his pocket, Bob took charge of the map, and Tom was the proud possessor of a compass. Tom also carried a folding camera, having at length been prevailed upon to leave a choice library of fiction, a single-barreled shotgun, and two suits of clothing behind him.

Old clothes, stout shoes, cloth caps, and light flannel shirts with collars was the general attire. And so clothed, each with his pack in hand, the four said good-by to Mr. and Mrs. Speede on Monday morning, took car to the ferry, crossed the river, and boarded an early train for Locust Park, at which point their journey on foot was to begin. And so we find them, Dan a trifle pale of face but as merry and happy as any, trudging along the road toward Jericho, each prepared for a good time and eager for adventures.

And adventures were awaiting them.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH TOMMY DELAYS PROGRESS AND THEY LOSE THEIR WAY

It was a fresh, cool morning, with a southerly breeze blowing up from the ocean and rustling the leaves of the willows and maples along the meadow walls. Big fleecy clouds sailed slowly across a blue September sky, hundreds of birds flitted about the way and made the journey musical, and life was well worth living. Not until they had turned into the country road, a level, well-kept thoroughfare, did they catch a glimpse of any habitation. Then a comfortable-looking farmhouse with its accompanying barns and stables came into view.

"Let's go in and get a drink of water," suggested Tom.

No one else, however, was thirsty, and so Tom passed in through the big gate alone while the others made themselves comfortable on the top of the wall. Tom was gone a long time, but finally, just when Dan was starting off to find him, he came into sight.

"What's he got?" asked Nelson.

"Looks as though he was eating something," answered Dan. "By Jupiter, it's pie!"

"You fellows missed it," called Tom, smiling broadly. "She gave me a piece of apple pie and it was great."

"Doesn't look like apple," said Bob.

“Oh, this is squash. The first piece was apple,” was the cheerful reply.

“Well, of all pigs!” said Nelson. “How many pieces did you have?”

“Only two,” was the unruffled response. “And a glass of milk.”

Nelson looked his disgust, but Dan, reaching forward, sent the half-consumed wedge of pastry into the dust.

“Hope you ch-ch-choke!” said Tommy warmly, viewing his prize ruefully. “It was gu-gu-gu-good pie, too!”

But he got no sympathy from his laughing companions. Bob declared that it served him jolly well right.

“He’ll wish he hadn’t eaten any before he gets to the end of the day’s journey,” said Dan. “We’ve got six miles and more to Jericho, and I guess we’d better be doing ’em.”

So they took up the march again. Everyone was in high feather. Side excursions into adjoining fields were made, Dan went a hundred yards out of his way to shy a stone at a noisy frog, and Nelson climbed a cedar tree to its topmost branches merely because Bob hazarded the opinion that cedar trees were hard to shin up. Only Tommy seemed to experience none of the intoxication of the highway and the morning air. Tommy appeared a bit sluggish, and kept dropping back, necessitating frequent halts.

“Look here, Tommy,” said Dan presently, “we’re awfully fond of you, but we love honor more; also dinner. If you really want to spend the day around here studying nature, why just say so; we’ll wait for you at Jericho.”

Whereupon Tom gave a grunt and moved faster. But at the end of half an hour the truth was out; Tommy didn't feel just right.

"Where do you hurt?" asked Bob skeptically.

"I—I have a beast of a pain in my chest," said Tom, leaning against a fence and laying one hand pathetically halfway down the front of his flannel shirt. The others howled gleefully.

"On his chest!" shrieked Dan.

"Sure it isn't a headache?" laughed Nelson.

Tom looked aggrieved.

"I gu-gu-gu-guess if you fu-fu-fu-fellows had it you wu-wu-wu-wu-wu——"

"Look here, Tommy," said Bob, "you haven't got a pain; you've just swallowed an alarm clock!"

"That's what you get for eating all that pie and making a hog of yourself," said Dan sternly.

"It's Tommy's tummy," murmured Nelson.

Whatever it was, it undoubtedly hurt, for Tommy was soon doubled up on the grass groaning dolefully. The others, exchanging comical glances, made themselves comfortable alongside.

"Got anything in your medicine chest that will help him, Dan?" asked Nelson. Dan shook his head. The medicine chest consisted of a two-ounce bottle of camphor liniment and a similar sized flask of witch-hazel.

"How you feeling now, Tommy?" asked Bob gravely.

“Better,” muttered Tom. “I’d ju-ju-ju-just like to know what that woman put in her pu-pu-pu-pie!”

“You don’t suppose it was poison, do you?” asked Dan, with a wink at the others.

Tom’s head came up like a shot and he stared wildly about him.

“I bu-bu-bu-bet it wa-wa-wa-was!” he shrieked. “It fu-fu-feels like it! A-a-a-a-arsenic!”

“That’s mean, Dan,” said Bob. “He’s only fooling, Tommy. You have just got a plain, everyday tummyache. Lie still a bit and you’ll be all right.”

Tom looked from one to the other in deep mistrust.

“If I du-du-du-die,” he wailed, “I—I——”

He broke off to groan and wriggle uneasily.

“What, Tommy?” asked Dan with a grin.

“I—I hope you all ch-ch-ch-ch-choke!”

Tom’s pain in his “chest” kept them there the better part of two hours, and it was past eleven when the invalid pronounced himself able to continue the journey. There was still some four miles to go in order to reach Jericho, which hamlet they had settled upon as their dinner stop, and they struck out briskly.

“What was that chap’s name?” asked Dan. “The one we were to get dinner from.”

“Hooper,” answered Bob, “William Hooper. I wish I was there now. I’m as hungry as a bear.”

There was a groan from Tom.

“That’s all right, Tommy, but we haven’t feasted on nice apple and squash pie, you see.”

“Shut up!” begged Tom.

“How big’s this Jericho place?” asked Nelson.

Out came Bob’s road map.

“Seems to be about three houses there according to this,” answered Bob.

“Gee! I hope we don’t get by without seeing it,” said Dan. “Do you suppose there’s a sign on it?”

“I don’t know, but I’ve heard there was a tree opposite it,” Bob replied gravely. “And there’s something else here too,” he continued, still studying the map. “It’s a long, black thing; looks as though it might be a skating rink or a ropewalk.”

“Maybe it’s the poorhouse,” suggested Dan, looking over his shoulder.

“Or a hospital for Tommy,” added Nelson.

“Anyhow, I hope there’s something to eat there,” said Bob.

“Me too,” sighed Nelson. “This is the longest old seven miles I ever saw. And it’s after twelve o’clock. Sure we’re on the right road, Bob?”

“Of course. Look at the map.”

“Oh, hang the map! Let’s ask some one.”

“All right. It does seem a good ways. We’ll ask the next person we see.”

But although they had met half a dozen persons up to that time, it seemed now that the district had suddenly become

depopulated. Nelson said he guessed they were all at home eating dinner. After another half hour of steady walking, during which time Tom recovered his spirits, they came into sight of a little village set along the road. There was one store there and some five or six houses.

"Anyhow," said Dan hopefully, "we can get some crackers and cheese in the store."

But when they had piled through the door they changed their minds. It was a hardware store! A little old man with a bald head and brass-rimmed spectacles limped down behind the counter to meet them.

"Is this Jericho?" asked Bob.

"Jericho? No, this ain't Jericho," was the answer.

"Oh! Er—what is it?"

"Bakerville."

"Where's Bakerville?"

"Right here."

"I know, but—well, where's Jericho?"

"'Bout eight miles from here."

Four boys groaned in unison. Bob pulled out his map, in spite of the fact that Dan looked as though he was ready to seize upon and destroy it.

"That's right," said Bob sadly. "We got too far north."

"I should say we did!" snorted Dan. "About eight miles!"

"But I don't see how we managed to get off the right road," said Bob.

“I do,” answered Nelson. “Don’t you remember when Tom was laid out? There were two roads there just beyond. We must have taken the wrong one.”

“That’s so,” said Tom; “I remember.”

“Lots of good your remembering does now,” grunted Nelson. “If you hadn’t got to fussing with those pies——!”

“Thought you was in Jericho, did yer?” asked the shopkeeper with a chuckle. They nodded soberly. “Well, well, that’s a good joke, ain’t it?”

“Swell!” muttered Dan.

Tom grunted something about choking.

“Is there any place here where we can get something to eat?” asked Bob.

“I guess not, but there’s a hotel about a mile along. I guess you can get something there.”

So they prevailed on him to go to the door with them and point out the way.

“It’s on your way to Jericho,” said the storekeeper, pointing out the road. “You turn down that first road there and then bear to the left until you come to a big white farmhouse. Then you turn to the right and keep on about half a mile, or maybe a mile, and the Center House is just a little beyond. It’s a brown house with lots of windows and a barn.”

“Can’t help finding it,” muttered Dan sarcastically.

They were rather quiet as they passed through the village and took the turn indicated. From one house came an enticing odor of onions, and Dan leaned up against a telephone pole and

pretended to weep. That mile was as long as two, but in the end they came into sight of the “brown house with lots of windows and a barn.” But it didn’t look very hospitable. The windows were closed and shuttered, and the barn appeared to be in the last stages of decay. With sinking hearts they climbed the steps and beat a tattoo on the front door. All was silence.

“Empty!” groaned Nelson.

“Nothing doing!” murmured Dan.

“Hit it again,” counseled Tommy.

They all took a hand at beating on that door, but it didn’t do the least bit of good. The place was empty and closed up. Nelson sat down on the top step and stared sadly across the country road. Tom joined him.

“Wish I had some more of that pie,” he muttered.

Bob produced the map, which was already getting frayed at the corners, and opened it out.

“The best thing to do,” he said, “is to keep on till we find a farmhouse or something, and beg some food.”

“I could eat raw dog,” said Dan. “Any houses in sight on that lying map of yours?”

“Sure.”

“How many miles off?”

“About—er—about two or three, I should say.”

“Can’t be done,” said Dan decidedly. “I couldn’t walk two miles if there was a thousand dollars at the end of it.”

“I could do it if there was a ham sandwich at the end of it,”

said Nelson.

“Hunger has driven him daffy,” explained Dan sadly.

“Well, there’s no use staying here,” said Bob impatiently.

“Oh, I don’t know. Might as well die here as anywhere,” answered Nelson.

“Wasn’t it your father, Dan, who said the beauty about Long Island was that the towns were near together and we could get good accommodations easily?” asked Tom.

Dan made no answer.

Suddenly a noise startled them. At the end of the porch stood a boy of sixteen in an old blue shirt and faded overalls. He was plainly surprised to see them, and stood looking at them for several seconds before he spoke. Finally,

“Hello!” he said.

“Greetings,” answered Dan. “Will you kindly send the head waiter to us?”

“Huh?” asked the youth.

“Well, never mind then. Just show us to our rooms. We’ll have a light lunch sent up and keep our appetites for dinner.”

“Is the hotel closed?” interrupted Bob. The youth nodded.

“Yep. They didn’t make no money last summer, so they didn’t open it this year. Did you knock?”

“Oh, no, we didn’t exactly knock,” answered Dan. “We only kind of tapped weakly.”

“Want anything?”

“Yes, a man at Bakerville said we could get some dinner here. I don’t suppose we can, though,” added Bob sadly. The other shook his head slowly.

“Guess not,” he said. “There’s a hotel at Minton Hill, though. There’s lots of summer folks there.”

“How far’s that?”

“Not more’n six miles.”

The four groaned in unison.

“We haven’t had anything since seven o’clock,” said Nelson.

“You ain’t?” The youth became instantly sympathetic. “Well, ain’t that too bad?”

The question scarcely seemed to demand an answer and so received none. The youth in the overalls frowned deeply.

“Well, now, look here,” he said finally. “Me an’ dad lives back here in the barn and looks after the farm. We ain’t got much, but if some bread and butter and milk will do, why, I guess——”

The four threw themselves upon him as one man.

“Bread!” shouted Dan.

“Butter!” cried Nelson.

“Milk!” gurgled Tommy.

“Lead the way!” said Bob.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCES MR. JERRY HINKLEY AND AN IMPROMPTU DINNER

That was a strange meal and an enjoyable one. The menu wasn't elaborate, but their appetites were, and not one of the four was inclined to be critical. What had formerly been the carriage house had been fitted up with a couple of cot beds, some chairs, a stove, and a table, into an airy, if not very well-appointed, apartment. The boy in overalls, whose name during the subsequent conversation transpired to be Jerry Hinkley, produced a loaf of bread and a pat of butter from a box, and then disappeared for a minute. When he returned he brought a battered tin can half full of milk. Eating utensils were scarce, and the boys had to take turns with the two knives and the two thick china cups. The table boasted no cloth, and Tom had to sit on an empty box, but those were mere details.

"I looked to see if I could find a few eggs," said Jerry, as he poured out the milk, "but we ain't got but eight hens and they ain't been layin' much lately."

"This will do finely," mumbled Dan, with his mouth full of bread and butter.

"It's swell," said Tom from behind his cup.

The doors were wide open, and the September sunlight streamed in over the dusty floor. A bedraggled rooster, followed cautiously by a trio of dejected-looking hens, approached and observed the banquet from the doorsill, clucking suspiciously. Jerry sat on the edge of one of the cots

and watched proceedings with interest. But he seemed uneasy, and once or twice he started up only to change his mind with a troubled frown and return to his seat. Finally he asked awkwardly:

"Say, was you fellows meanin' to pay anything for your food?"

"Of course," Bob assured him. "You don't think we're going to let you feed us for nothing?"

"That's all right, then," said Jerry, looking vastly relieved. "We got some bacon and if you say so I'll fry you some in a jiffy."

The boys howled approval.

"You see," continued Jerry, "I was most skeered to give you bacon 'cause dad would have missed it when he got back. Dad ain't got much money, an' I guess he wouldn't like me to be too free with the victuals. But if you're willin' to pay——"

"Sure, we'll pay," said Bob.

So Jerry set a frying pan on top of the stove, touched a match to the pile of straw and corncobs inside, and produced a strip of bacon from the larder. Even Bob, who prided himself on his culinary abilities, had to pay tribute to Jerry's deftness. In ten minutes the first panful of crisp bacon was ready and a second lot was sizzling on the stove.

"Talk about your reed birds!" said Dan eloquently.

"Never tasted anything better in my life," said Nelson. "Is there any more milk there?"

Ten minutes later the banquet was a thing of the past, and

the four sat back and sighed luxuriously.

“That was sure fine,” said Dan. “My, but I was hungry!”

“Me too,” answered Nelson. “But look here, how about you?” He looked inquiringly at Jerry. “We haven’t left you a thing.”

“Oh, I had my dinner at twelve,” answered their host, as he cleared the table. “You see we have our breakfast about six, dad an’ me.”

“You say your father’s away to-day?” asked Bob.

“Yes, gone over to Roslyn to buy some feed for the horse.”

“And you live here all the year, do you?”

“We only come here last April. We used to have a farm down near Hicksville, but we lost it.”

“That’s too bad. Is there just you and your father?”

Jerry nodded soberly.

“Mother died year ago last May. Me an’ dad’s been kind of helpless since then. Things don’t seem to go just right nowadays.”

“Do you go to school?” asked Nelson.

“No. I did one year over to Newton. It was a mighty nice school too. There was three teachers. I learnt a whole lot that winter. I been intendin’ to go again, but since mother died ____”

Jerry’s voice dwindled away into silence while he stared out into the sunlit stable yard.

“I see,” said Bob sympathetically.

“Mother she taught me a lot at home when I was just a kid,” resumed Jerry. “Spellin’, ’rithmetic, and all about Scotland. She was born in Scotland, you see. I guess I know more’n most fellers about Scotland,” he added proudly.

“I bet you know a heap more about it than I do,” said Bob.

“I guess you’re through school, ain’t you?” asked Jerry.

“I get through this year,” answered Bob. “Then I’m going to college.”

Jerry’s eyes brightened.

“Is that so?” he asked eagerly. “I guess you’re pretty smart. What college are you going to?”

“Erskine. Ever hear of it?”

“No.” Jerry shook his head apologetically. “You see I don’t know much about colleges. I—I’d like to see one. I guess Yale must be pretty fine. I expect it’s bigger’n that boardin’ school over to Garden City?”

“St. Paul’s? Some bigger, yes.”

“Is the school you been going to like St. Paul’s?”

“Not much, but Nelson and Tommy here go to a school a good deal the same. Hillton. Ever hear of Hillton?”

Again Jerry shook his head.

“What’s it like, your school?” he asked.

For the next quarter of an hour Nelson told about Hillton—Tom interpolating explanatory footnotes, as it were—and Jerry listened with shining eyes and open mouth. It was all very wonderful to him, and he asked question after question. Dan

tried to tell him that while Hillton was good enough in a way, the only school worth boasting about was St. Eustace. But Tom tipped him out of his chair, and as it is difficult to uphold the honor of your school with any eloquence from the hard floor of a carriage house, Dan decided to shut up.

"I guess it costs a good deal to go to a school like that," said Jerry regretfully.

"Not so awful much," answered Nelson. "A fellow can get through the year on three hundred."

Jerry nodded gravely.

"I guess that's kind of reasonable, ain't it?"

"Yes. Then if a fellow is lucky enough to get a scholarship, it brings it down to about two hundred, maybe."

"What's a scholarship like?" asked Jerry interestedly.

Nelson explained.

"I guess it's pretty hard to get into one of them schools, ain't it?" pursued Jerry.

"Oh, not so very hard."

"Think I could do it?"

"Well—I don't know. I think maybe you could if you had some coaching."

"What's that like?" asked Jerry.

Nelson glanced appealingly at Bob, and the latter took up the task. Half an hour later the four decided that it was time for them to be going. Bob broached the matter of payment.

"How much do we owe, Jerry?"

“I guess about a quarter,” answered Jerry.

“A quarter!” cried Tom. “Get out! That was worth a dollar! It saved my life.”

“It’s worth fifty cents, anyhow,” said Nelson, “and here’s mine.”

“Well,” said Jerry accepting the coin reluctantly, “but I don’t feel just right about it. You see, the milk don’t cost nothin’, and the butter don’t cost nothin’, and the bread was only five cents, and——”

“That bread was worth more than five cents to us,” laughed Dan. “Here, take the money, and don’t be silly.” Dan held out his half dollar, and Bob and Tom followed suit. Jerry looked bewildered.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“We’re going to pay fifty cents,” said Dan.

“Yes, but he paid it,” replied Jerry, pointing his thumb at Nelson.

“He paid for himself, that’s all.”

“Gosh! I didn’t mean you was to pay fifty cents apiece!” cried Jerry. “Fifty cents is more’n enough for the whole of you!”

They laughed derisively, and tried to get him to accept the rest of the money, but nothing they found to say had any effect.

“I been paid enough,” said Jerry doggedly. “I’m much obliged, but I can’t take no more. You didn’t eat more’n a quarter’s worth of victuals.”

In the end they had to let him have his own way. As they were fixing their packs on to their shoulders Jerry approached Nelson. He held out a soiled envelope and a stump of pencil.

“Say, would you just write down the name of that school you was tellin’ about?” he asked awkwardly.

“Surely,” answered Nelson.

“‘Hillton Academy, Hillton, New York,’” read Jerry unctuously. “Thanks. I’m goin’ there some day.”

“That’s fine,” answered Nelson heartily. “You’ll like it, I’m sure. Maybe you can get up this year while I’m there. I wish you would. I’d be glad to show you around.”

“This year? No, I couldn’t do that. You see, I’ll have to earn some money first; three hundred dollars, you said, didn’t you?”

“Oh, you mean you’re going to enter?” asked Nelson.

“Yes, I’m goin’ to school there. You see”—Jerry paused and looked thoughtfully out into the afternoon sunlight—“you see, mother always intended me to have an education, an’—an’ I’m agoin’ to have it!” he added doggedly. “I’m goin’ to get out of here; there ain’t nothin’ here; I’m goin’ to get a place on a farm and earn some money. I guess one year there would help, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, it would,” answered Nelson earnestly. “And I dare say if you got through one year, you’d find a way to get through the next. Lots of fellows pretty near work their way through school. Look here, Jerry, supposing I wanted to write to you, where could I direct a letter?”

“Dad gets his mail at Bakerville. I guess if you wrote my name and his name and sent it to Bakerville, I’d get it. I—I’d

like first rate to get a letter from you. I ain't never got very many letters."

"Well, I'll write you one," said Nelson cheerfully. "I shall want to know how you're getting along, so you must answer it. Will you?"

Jerry reddened under his tan.

"I guess so," he muttered. "But I ain't much of a writer. You see, I ain't never seemed to have much time for writin'."

"Of course not! But don't let that trouble you. All ready, you fellows? Well, good-by, Jerry. We're awfully much obliged to you. Hope we'll see you again. And don't forget that you're going to make some money and enter Hillton."

Jerry shook hands embarrassedly with each of the four and followed them down to the road.

"Good-by," he called. "I wish you'd all come again. You been good to tell me about them schools. I—I had a mighty good time!"

They walked on in silence for some distance. Then, when the corner of the hotel had disappeared around a turn of the road, Tom broke out explosively.

"It's a mu-mu-mu-mean sh-shame!" he said.

"What is?" they asked in chorus.

"Why, that fellow bu-bu-back there. He'd give his skin to gu-gu-gu-go to school, and instead of that he'll have to stay there in that pu-pu-place all his life!"

"That's so, Tommy," said Bob. "It is hard luck. And he's a good fellow, too, Jerry is. Take those overalls off him, and put

some decent clothes on him, and he'd be a good-looking chap."

"Yes, and he's built well too," added Dan. "He'd make the varsity eleven first pop."

"He's the sort of chap who'd be popular, I think," said Nelson. "I wish——"

"What do you wish?" asked Dan.

"I wish we could help him."

There was an instant's silence. Then Tommy fell over a stone and began to stutter violently.

"Lu-lu-lu-lu-lu—" sputtered Tommy.

"Easy there," cautioned Dan. "You'll blow up in a minute."

"Lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu——"

"Shut up, you fellows," said Dan indignantly, "and hear what he has to say. It's going to be great!"

"Lu-lu-lu-let's!"

"Eh?"

"How's that, Tommy?"

"Once more, please."

"Lu-lu-lu-let's!" repeated Tom, very red of face.

"Oh, of course!"

"Twice that, Tommy!"

"Let's what?"

"Lu-let's help him!"

“Oh! I’d forgotten what we were talking about,” said Dan.

“Yes, that was about half a mile back,” said Bob.

“Let’s see if we can’t make up enough to send him to Hillton for a year,” went on Tommy. “He’d probably get a scholarship, and then if he found some work there, he’d make out all right the next year.”

“You’ve got a good heart, Tommy,” said Dan. “It’s a shame you don’t go to a decent school.”

Tom took no notice of the insult.

“Couldn’t we, Bob?” he asked.

“I don’t see how we could do it ourselves,” answered the older boy. “But we might get some one interested in him.”

“Three hundred isn’t awfully much,” said Nelson thoughtfully. “If we got our folks to give a fourth——”

“That’s it!” cried Tom. “My dad will give a fourth. Why, it would be only seventy-five dollars!”

“A mere nothing,” murmured Dan. “One moment, please, and I will draw a check.” He flourished his hand through the air. “‘Pay to Jerry seventy-five and no one-hundredths dollars. Daniel H. F. Speede.’ There you are. Oh, not a word, I beg of you! It is nothing, nothing at all! A mere trifle!”

“And I think I can promise for my father,” Nelson was saying. “How about you, Bob?”

“I’ll ask. I think he will give it, although I can’t say sure. He’s had hard luck lately.”

“You’re in it, aren’t you, Dan?”

“Not a cent will I allow my father to pay to send a chap to Hillton,” answered Dan indignantly. “If he wants to go to St. Eustace, now, why——”

“But you see, Dan,” said Tom sweetly, “he wants an education.”

Dan chased Tom down the road and administered proper punishment. When order was restored the four discussed the matter seriously, and it was decided that Jerry was to go to Hillton.

“Of course,” said Nelson, “he couldn’t pass the entrance exams as he is now, but if he has a year’s schooling this year he ought to make it all right. And if he doesn’t have to work he can go to school. I suppose there’s a decent school around here somewhere?”

“Plenty of them,” answered Dan indignantly.

“If he needs some coaching next summer,” said Tom, “I’ll see that he gets it.”

“You might coach him yourself, Tommy,” suggested Dan.

“He said he was sixteen now,” pondered Bob. “That would make him seventeen when he entered. Rather old for the junior class, eh?”

“What of it?” asked Nelson. “I’ll see that he knows some good fellows, and I don’t believe any chap’s going to make fun of him when they know about him. Besides, maybe we can get him into the lower middle class.”

“That’s so,” said Tom. “Anyway, I’ll bet he’s the sort that can learn fast and remember things. Wish I could.”

“Here’s a romantic-looking well,” said Dan, “and I’m thirsty. That bacon was a trifle salt. Let’s go in and interview the old oaken bucket.”

The well stood in front of a little white house, and as they went up the walk a woman put her head around the corner of the open door. Dan doffed his cap gallantly.

“May we borrow a drink of water?” he asked politely.

The woman nodded and smiled, and Tom began winding the old-fashioned windlass. When the bucket—which turned out to be tin instead of oak—made its appearance the four dipped their cups.

“Fellow tramps,” declaimed Dan, “let us drink a health to Jerry. May he be a credit to Hillton!”

“May our plans succeed,” added Nelson.

“Here’s to Ju-ju-Jerry!” cried Tom.

“To our *protégé*!” laughed Bob.

“To our *protégé*!” they echoed, and drank merrily.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCES MR. WILLIAM HOOPER AND AN IMPROMPTU SUPPER

By the time they had regained the Jericho road they had walked nearly twelve miles, and it was close to six o'clock. It had been slow going for the last two hours, for the distance had begun to tell on them, especially on Dan and Tom. Nelson and Bob, who had been at Camp Chicora for ten weeks, were in pretty good training, but even they were tired.

"Now what?" asked Dan, as they paused at the junction of the two roads.

"Well, Jericho's a good mile and a half back, according to the map," answered Bob. "Suppose we find Bill Hooper's place and see if he will give us some supper. After that we can go on to Jericho and find a place to sleep."

"All right, but are you sure there's a hotel at Jericho?" said Nelson.

"No, but Bill will tell us, I guess."

"On to Bill's!" said Dan wearily.

So they turned to the right and made toward the nearest farmhouse, a half mile distant. It proved on nearer acquaintance to be a prosperous-looking, well-kept place, with acres and acres of land to it and a big white house flanked by a much bigger red barn. They made their way up a lane under the branches of spreading elm trees, and knocked at the front door. Presently footsteps sounded inside and the portal swung open,

revealing a thickset elderly man, whose morose, suspicious face was surrounded by a fringe of grizzled beard and whiskers.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Good evening," said Bob. "Could you let us have something to eat, sir? We would be glad to pay for it."

"This isn't a hotel," said the man.

"Oh, then you aren't Mr. William Hooper?"

"Yes, that's me. Some one send you here?"

"Yes, sir. We met a man down at Locust Park who said he was sure you'd——"

"What was his name?"

"Er—what was it, Dan?"

"Abner Wade," answered Dan promptly.

The name exerted a remarkable effect on Mr. William Hooper. His face flushed darkly and his hands clinched. Bob fell back from the doorway in alarm.

"Abner Wade, eh?" growled Mr. Hooper. "Abner Wade sent ye, did he? I might have known it was him! Now you make tracks, the whole parcel of ye! If you ain't outside my grounds in two minutes I'll set the dog on ye! Here, Brutus! Here, Brutus!"

"*Et tu, Brute!*" muttered Dan as he fled down the path.

At the gate they brought up, laughing, and looked warily back for the dog. Much to their relief he wasn't in sight.

"Don't believe he's got any dog," said Tommy.

“Don’t see why he should have,” said Dan. “He’s ugly enough himself to scare anyone away.”

“I’d like to see that Abner Wade just about two minutes,” said Nelson. “Nice game he put up on us!”

“Yes. Old Bill hates him like poison, evidently,” answered Bob. “He’s an awful joker, Abe is!”

“What’ll we do?” asked Tom.

“Foot it to Jericho, I guess,” said Bob. “It’s only about a mile.”

Tom groaned dismally.

“When I get back,” said Dan darkly, “I’ll bet I’ll tell that doctor of mine what I think of his old walking!”

“Here’s some one coming,” whispered Nelson. “Let’s light out.”

“It’s a woman,” said Bob. “Guess it’s the old codger’s wife. Let’s wait.”

She was a stout, kind-faced woman, and her hurried walk from the house had left her somewhat out of breath.

“Boys,” she gasped, “I’m real sorry about this. And I guess you didn’t mean any harm.”

“Harm?” echoed Bob. “No’m, we just wanted some supper and were willing to pay for it. A man down at Locust Park ____”

“Yes, I know. That was the trouble. You see, Abner Wade and my husband ain’t been on speaking terms for ten years and more. Abner sold William a horse that wasn’t just what he

made it out to be; it died less'n a week afterwards; and William went to law about it, and Abner kept appealing or something, and it ain't never come to a settlement, and I guess it never will. If you hadn't mentioned Abner Wade I guess it would have been all right. I'm real sorry."

"Oh, it's all right, ma'am," Bob hastened to assure her. "I dare say we can find something to eat at the hotel in Jericho."

"There isn't any hotel there, far as I know," said Mrs. Hooper, shaking her head.

Dan whistled softly, and even Bob looked discouraged.

"I guess it's the cold, cold ground for us to-night," said Dan. "If I only had a ham sandwich——!"

Mrs. Hooper cast a glance up the lane.

"Maybe you boys wouldn't mind sleeping in the barn," she suggested doubtfully.

"Indeed we wouldn't," said Bob.

"That would be fun," assented Nelson.

"Anyway, I don't see what better you can do," said the woman. "It's a good five miles to Samoset, and I don't know of any hotel nearer than that. You go around here by that wall and cross over to the barn back of the garden. You'll find the little door at the side unlocked. There's plenty of hay there, and I guess you can be right comfortable. As soon as I can I'll bring you out some supper."

Tom let out a subdued whoop of joy, and Dan did a double shuffle in the grass.

"It's mighty good of you," said Bob warmly.

“Yes’m; we’re awfully much obliged,” echoed Nelson.

“We’ll be mighty glad to pay for it,” Dan chimed in.

“Well, I guess there won’t be anything to pay,” said Mrs. Hooper with a smile. “Now you run along, and I’ll come soon as I can. William’s kind of worked up, and I guess he’d better not know about it. I want you to promise me one thing, though.”

“Yes’m. What is it?” asked Nelson.

“Not to light any matches.”

“Yes, we promise.”

“All right. Run along now, and keep out of sight.” Mrs. Hooper nodded good-naturedly, and turned back toward the house. Dan struck a dramatic attitude.

“Supper!” he cried.

“Shut up, and come along,” said Bob.

“Well,” said Dan, “I guess here’s where we get the laugh on Abe. Only—well, if I ever have a chance to square things with him——!”

Words failed him, and with a sigh he followed the others down the road for a distance, over a fence, and so along a wall that skirted the truck garden. The little door was unlocked, as Mrs. Hooper had said it would be, and they stumbled into the twilight of the big barn. The only sound was the occasional stamping of a horse and the steady *crunch-crunch* of the cattle.

“Fortunate beasts,” whispered Nelson.

Overhead the mows were filled with fragrant hay, and near

at hand a ladder led up to it. From a window high up at one end of the building a flood of red light entered from the sunset sky.

"Shall we go up there now?" asked Nelson.

"No. Let's stay here until we get something to eat," said Bob.

So they made themselves comfortable, Dan and Nelson finding seats on some sacks of grain, and Bob and Tom climbing into the back of a wagon and sprawling out on the floor of it, hands under heads.

"I'll bet no one will have to sing me asleep to-night," said Dan with a luxurious sigh. "Just wait until I strike that hay up there!"

Conversation was desultory for the next half hour, for all four of the boys were dead tired. Tommy even dropped off to sleep once, though he denied the fact indignantly. It seemed a long while before Mrs. Hooper appeared, but when she did, her burden more than atoned for the period of waiting. She carried a big tray, and it was piled high. There was cold mutton, a pitcher of hot tea, milk, stacks of bread and plenty of butter, preserved pears, a whole custard pie, and lots of cake. Tom was almost tearful. Mrs. Hooper set the tray down on a box and disappeared into the harness room, to return in a moment with a lighted lantern.

"There," she said; "now I guess you can see what you're eating. When you get through, set the tray here by the door, and I'll get it later. And put out the lantern carefully. Don't leave any sparks about. In the morning you stay up in the hay until I call you. My husband will be out in the field by seven and then you can come to the house and have some breakfast.

Good night."

"Good night, ma'am," they answered with full hearts and fuller mouths. "We're awfully much obliged to you."

"Yes'm. You've saved our lives," said Dan.

Mrs. Hooper surveyed them smilingly from the door.

"Well, it's real nice to see you boys eat," she said. "I just couldn't bear to have you go tramping around so late without any supper. And William wouldn't have wanted it either, only —if it hadn't been for Abner Wade, you see."

"Yes'm!"

"Good night, Mrs. Hooper!"

"Thank you very much!"

Then the door closed behind her, and they were left to the enjoyment of their supper. And when I say enjoyment I know what I'm talking about!

"Say, fellows," said Dan presently, when the edge of his appetite had been dulled by many slices of cold meat and bread and butter, "say, do you suppose we're always going to eat in barns on this trip?"

"Much I'd care if it was always as good as this," answered Nelson, dividing the pie into four generous quarters with his knife. And the others agreed. When only crumbs remained on the tray they blew out the lantern, set the remains of the feast beside the door, and climbed up into the loft. There, burrowing luxuriously in the sweet-smelling hay, they fell asleep almost instantly.

CHAPTER V

DESCRIBES A SECOND ENCOUNTER WITH MR. WADE

At a little after eight the next morning they were on their way again. Nine hours of sound, refreshing slumber had worked a change. Dan no longer held any grudge against the doctor, while Tom, cheered and comforted by the biggest kind of a breakfast, was once more his optimistic self. They had overwhelmed Mrs. Hooper with their gratitude, had made friends with Brutus, a benevolent and toothless setter, and had left the farmhouse with sentiments of regret. For, as Tom said, who could tell when they would again find such coffee and such corn muffins! Brutus had insisted upon accompanying them as far as the farm limits, and had parted from them with tears in his eyes; at least, we have Dan's word for it. Nelson became philosophic.

"It just shows," he said vaguely, "that you can't always tell at first what you're up against. Some persons are like some dogs, their bark is worse than their bite."

"Sure," agreed Dan. "Some persons haven't any teeth."

It was the jolliest sort of a September morning. Once or twice they imagined they could catch glimpses of the ocean, sparkling and sun-flecked in the distance. Whether they actually saw it or not, they were constantly reminded of it by the fresh, salty breeze that caressed their faces.

"Why can't we go along the shore instead of here where we are?" asked Nelson.

“That’s so,” cried Dan.

Bob produced his map, and they sat on the top rail of a fence and studied it.

“After we leave Samoset,” said Bob, “we can turn down here and go to Sisset. There must be a hotel there, and we can spend the night. Then——”

“Maybe we can find a barn,” suggested Tom.

“Then in the morning we’ll go on to Seaville or some place along there.”

“But, look here,” objected Dan; “we’re a heap nearer the north shore than we are the south.”

“Yes, but what we want is the real ocean,” said Bob. “We can come home by the Sound shore.”

“Just as you say,” answered Dan. “Meanwhile, let’s get to Samoset before dinner time.”

They reached that town at a little after ten o’clock, and found it quite a lively place. There were two hotels, and although Tom held out awhile for a comfortable barn, they finally decided to go to the Fairview House and have dinner. After registering, they left their packs in the office, washed and spruced up, and went out to see the city. The main street was well lined with stores and well filled with vehicles.

“This is the first thing we’ve struck,” declared Dan, “that looks like a town. Let’s buy something.”

So they roamed from store to store, looking into every window, and speculating on the desirability of the articles shown. Tom bought a pound of peanut brittle which, on close

examination, proved to be much older than supposed. Tom declared disgustedly that it wasn't what it was cracked up to be, a pun that elicited only groans from his companions. Bob purchased six souvenir post cards, and insisted on returning to the hotel to address them. So the others accompanied him, and, while he retired to the writing room, sat themselves down on the top step in the sunlight and attacked Tom's candy.

"Nothing like candy," Dan declared, "to give a fellow an appetite for dinner."

"That may be true of some candy," answered Nelson, "but ____"

"Hello!" cried Dan excitedly. "Look there!"

The others followed the direction of his gaze, and saw a tired-looking sorrel horse coming up the street, drawing a battered buggy, in which sat a single occupant. The occupant was Mr. Abner Wade. The boys watched eagerly. Opposite the hotel Mr. Wade drew up to the sidewalk, jumped out, and tied the horse to a post. While doing so, he glanced across and saw them. A smile spread itself over his features, and he waved his hand.

"Howdy do?" he called.

"How are you, sir?" responded Dan cordially. Nelson and Tom glanced about at him in surprise. "A nice morning, Mr. Wade."

"Fine, fine!" agreed the farmer. "Well, you're getting along, I see."

"Yes, sir, thank you. And, by the way, we're much obliged for that tip you gave us. We called on Mr. Hooper, and spent

the night there. We were certainly treated well, and we're very much obliged to you, sir, for sending us there."

Mr. Wade looked surprised.

"That so? Er—did you tell William I sent you?"

"Yes, indeed, and he couldn't do too much to us—I mean for us," answered Dan gravely.

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Wade doubtfully. "Speak of me, did he?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Quite enthusiastically. And we fully agreed with everything he said," replied Dan genially.

Mr. Wade stared hard for a moment. Then:

"Well, I must be getting on," he said. "Good luck to you."

"Thank you, sir; the same to you. Hope you'll have a pleasant trip home."

It is doubtful if Mr. Wade heard the latter part of the remark, for he was entering the grocery store in front of which he had hitched. Dan sprang up.

"You fellows stay here," he said softly, "and watch for him. Don't let him out of your sight. I'll be back in a minute."

He hurried down the street and around a corner on which hung a livery-stable sign. He was soon back.

"Still there?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Nelson eagerly. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to get even with the old codger," answered Dan grimly, as he sat down again on the step.

“Where’d you go?” asked Tom.

“Livery stable. Borrowed a carriage wrench. There he comes!”

Mr. Wade issued from the grocery, cast a glance toward his horse, and then turned up the street. They watched him until he had disappeared into the bank, half a block away. Then Dan arose and, followed by his companions, sauntered across the street. For a moment he glanced carelessly in the grocery-store window. Then, quite as carelessly, he sauntered over to the buggy. There, with Tom and Nelson in front of him and apparently in earnest conversation, he drew the wrench from his pocket and, unobserved, applied it to the nut of the front wheel. Presently the trio sauntered along a few steps until Dan was beside the back wheel. A moment later they walked slowly away down the street, crossed and returned to the hotel. As he walked, from Dan’s jacket pocket came a clanking sound as the steel wrench jostled a couple of iron nuts. When they had regained the porch Dan’s look of innocence gave place to a grin of delight and satisfaction.

“You watch for him. If he comes call me. I’m going to get Bob and our knapsacks.”

“What do you want the knapsacks for?” asked Tom suspiciously.

“Because it’s more than likely that we’ll want to leave here in a hurry, my son,” answered Dan gravely.

“Without our dinner?” cried Tom.

“What is dinner to revenge?” asked Dan sweetly.

“But—but—” stammered Tom.

“S-sh!” cautioned Dan. “Not a word above a whisker!”

“But look here, Dan,” said Nelson a bit anxiously, “aren’t you afraid the old duffer’ll get hurt? Maybe the horse will run away!”

“Have you seen the horse?” asked Dan. “Now keep a watch up the street and don’t forget to call me if he comes. I wouldn’t miss it for a thousand dollars!”

“Just the same, I don’t quite like it,” said Nelson when Dan had disappeared.

“And no dinner!” moaned Tom. “Why couldn’t we let the old idiot alone until we’d had something to eat?”

Dan returned with the knapsacks and they awaited developments. Presently Bob joined them, his hands bearing eloquent proof of his recent occupation. They didn’t tell Bob what was up for fear he might forbid them to go on with it. Ten minutes passed. The dinner gong rang and Tom looked restlessly and mutinous.

“I’m going to have my dinner,” he muttered.

“All right,” answered Bob; “let’s go in.”

“Oh, just wait a minute,” begged Dan. “We’ll have more appetite if we sit here awhile longer. By the way, we saw our old friend, Mr. Abner Wade, awhile ago, Bob.”

“Yes, you did,” said Bob incredulously.

“Honest! That’s his horse and buggy over there now.”

Bob had to hear about it and ten minutes more passed. Then Tom mutinied openly.

“I’m going to have my dinner,” he said doggedly. “I’m starved. You fellows can sit here if you want to, but——”

“Here he comes!” cried Nelson softly.

Tom forgot his hunger, and the expression of rebellious dissatisfaction on his countenance gave way to a look of pleasurable anticipation. Dan and Nelson watched silently the approach of Mr. Abner Wade.

“Look here,” demanded Bob suspiciously, “what’s up, you chaps?”

There was no answer, for Mr. Wade was untying his sorrel steed. Tom giggled hysterically. In climbed the farmer.

“Get ap,” he commanded, and the sorrel horse moved off leisurely. The boys held their breath. Farther and farther away went Mr. Wade—and nothing happened! Dan began to look uneasy. Tom’s pale gray eyes opened wider and wider. And then, just when it seemed that the conspirators were doomed to disappointment, Nemesis overtook Mr. Abner Wade.

Suddenly, without warning, the front wheel on the far side of the buggy started off on its own hook and went rolling toward the sidewalk. Reaching the curb, it toppled over and fell on to the foot of a passer-by. The passer-by set up a cry of alarm—possibly of anguish. At the next moment the rear wheel, indignant, perhaps, at the desertion of its mate, lay down flat in the street. And simultaneously over went the buggy and out slid Mr. Abner Wade. The sorrel horse, evincing no alarm, stopped short in his tracks. And the crowd gathered, hiding the astonished and wrathful face of Mr. Wade and stilling the cries of the gentleman who had come in contact with the front wheel.

Over on the hotel porch four boys, doubled up with laughter, staggered into the office, and, led by Dan, passed hurriedly out of a rear door. And as they went, from the dining room came an appealing odor of cooked viands. Out on the side street Dan dodged into a livery stable and rejoined them quickly.

“Let’s go this way,” he gurgled. “I don’t know where it takes us to, but——”

“Did you do that?” demanded Bob.

“Yes; wasn’t it rich? We didn’t tell you for fear you wouldn’t let us do it.”

“You chump!” answered Bob. “Why, I’d have helped if you’d told me!”

“It was simply gu-gu-great!” stammered Tom. “Only—say, did you fellows smell that dinner?”

“Yes, my son,” answered Dan, “but there’s no dinner for us just now. Us for the broad highway!”

A few minutes later they had left the village behind and were passing between rolling meadows. Dan took two small articles from his pocket and shied them, one after another, into a cornfield.

“What were those?” asked Bob.

“Nuts,” answered Dan. “Nuts from the hubs of Abe’s chariot.”

“I suppose he can get more,” said Nelson regretfully.

“Yes, but it’ll take him some time, and they’ll charge him for them. And I’ll bet that’ll nearly break his heart. Oh, he’s a great joker, is Abe, but there are others!”

“Where’s this road taking us to?” asked Tom.

“I don’t know, but not toward Sisset, I’ll bet,” said Dan. “Pull out that lying map of yours, Bob.”

But the map didn’t help much, since they didn’t know which of the numerous roads they were traveling.

“Let’s see that old compass of yours, Tommy,” demanded Dan. “What’s the matter with it? Say, it’s gone crazy!”

“Get out! You don’t know how to use it,” said Tom. “Give it here.” He tapped it smartly on his knee, observed it gravely a moment, studied the position of the sun, and then announced, “There! That’s north!”

“Then we’re going back home,” said Nelson discouragedly, “straight back toward New York!”

“Pshaw! We can’t be,” said Bob. “Here, let’s see. Get out, you idiots, you’re looking at the wrong end of the needle. There’s north and we’re going northeast by east.”

“Ship ahoy!” murmured Dan. “Sail off the weather bow, sir.”

“Then if we keep on we’ll strike Barrington?” asked Tom.

“Yes, and that means a good hotel, Tommy, and a good dinner. It’s rather a joke on us, though,” continued Bob. “We had decided to go to the south shore, and here we are only three or four miles from the Sound!”

“We’re not that far from water,” said Nelson, pointing to the map. “Here’s Old Spring Harbor right forninst us here.”

“That’s right. Well, say, then we must be on this road here,” said Bob, pointing. “If we are, we ought to strike a bridge

pretty soon where we cross this creek, or whatever it is."

But their doubt was set at rest a moment later when a man in a dogcart slowed down at their hail and gave them all the information they desired.

"This is the Barrington road," he said, "and Barrington station is about two miles. The town is three miles from here, straight ahead. There are several hotels there and lots of boarding houses."

"That man's a regular cyclopedia," said Dan when the dogcart was out of sight.

"He's a bearer of good tidings," said Tom thoughtfully.

A mile farther on hunger overcame Tom's discretion and he partook of some half-ripe apples, against the advice of the others. But although the others viewed him apprehensively all the rest of the way, Tom showed no ill effects, although he had to own up to an uneasiness. The last two miles of the distance was in sight of the water, and once they crossed a broad creek which farther inland widened into a small lake. They rested there awhile and it was close on to four o'clock when, tired and hungry and warm, they tramped into the town of Barrington and sought the nearest hotel. Ten minutes later, after they had washed up, Dan proposed going for a swim. Nelson and Bob consented, but Tom was not to be persuaded. He sank into an armchair in the lobby in full sight of a pair of folding doors which opened into the dining room.

"You fellows go ahead," he said grimly. "I'm going to stay right here."

CHAPTER VI

WITNESSES A RESCUE AND AN ADDITION TO THE PARTY

After supper Dan reminded the others that they hadn't written to their folks about Jerry and they all sought the writing room. Those were the first letters home, and, of course, there was a good deal to write. None of them had any trouble in filling eight pages except Tom. Tom wasn't much of a letter writer, anyway, and then, besides, he had eaten a great deal of dinner and was inclined toward slumber. But he managed to make a strong plea for Jerry Hinkley and to assure his folks that he was having "a dandy time." After that he went fast asleep with his head on the blotting pad.

"Now, look here, you fellows," said Nelson, the next morning, "of course this thing of running around the island and not knowing where you're going to fetch up is very exciting and all that, but it's risky. First thing we know we'll find ourselves back in Long Island City. I move that we fix on some definite place and go there."

"That's what I think," said Bob. "Let's do it."

So they studied the map again and decided to keep along the north shore for a while and then strike across the island for the ocean side. Meanwhile the town of Kingston was settled on as their immediate destination. Kingston was some eighteen miles distant and they thought they could reach it that evening. They were on their way again at eight o'clock, for the day promised to be hot toward noon and they hoped to be able to reach

Meadowville in time for luncheon and lay off there for a couple of hours.

The Sound, blue and calm in the morning sunlight, was on their left and remained in sight most of the time. Once or twice their way led along the very edge of it. They had put some five or six miles behind them at a quarter to ten and were approaching a place where the road crossed a bridge. On the right a river wound back through a salt marsh. To the left, after running under the bridge, it emptied itself into a little bay. Near the bridge were a number of boat and bath houses, one or two cottages, and some floats and landings. On one of the landings a number of boys and men were congregated, and as the four drew near, their curiosity was aroused. Half the occupants of the float were lying on their stomachs, apparently trying to see under it, while the rest were walking excitedly about.

"Come on," said Dan. "Let's see what's up."

So they quickened their pace, turned off from the road, and made their way to the float.

"What's the matter?" asked Dan.

"There's a dog under here," explained a youth. "We were throwing pieces of wood for him and he was fetchin' them out. Then, first thing we knew, the current took him somehow and sucked him under the float. He's there now. Hear him?"

They listened and presently there came a faint, smothered yelp from under the planks almost at their feet. By that time half the inhabitants of the float had joined them, eager to tell all about it.

"How long has he been under there?" asked Bob.

“Ten minutes.”

“Five minutes.”

“Three minutes.”

The answers were varied. The boys hurried over to the side. The tide was running out hard and the river, flowing through the narrow culvert under the bridge, made a strong current which swirled against the float until it tugged at its moorings.

“Here’s where he went under,” explained one of their informants. “We were throwing sticks for him out there and he was having a bully time. He was a plucky little chap. Then the current took him and he went down. And next thing he was yelping like thunder underneath here.”

The float, inch-thick boards spiked to big logs, rested in the water so that the floor was some six inches above the surface. The dog had apparently come up underneath, was penned in by the logs, and was managing to keep his head out of water by hard swimming.

“What kind of a dog is it?” asked Nelson.

“Fox terrier, I guess.”

“Wire-haired terrier.”

“Irish terrier.”

“Well, he’s small, is he?” asked Bob impatiently.

“Yes.” They all agreed as to that. Bob turned to the others.

“Who’s going under?” he asked.

“Let me go,” said Tom. But Dan had already thrown off his coat and kicked off his shoes.

“Dan’s a better diver than you, Tom,” said Bob. “Let him try it first. I guess there’s plenty of breathing space under there, Dan.”

“Sure,” answered Dan, struggling out of his shirt. “Anyone heard the poor little chap lately?”

No one had, but at that moment, as though in answer to Dan’s inquiry, a faint, gurgling sound came from under the floor.

“There he is,” said Nelson. “I’ll stand here and call to you, Dan. You want to go under about twelve feet.”

“All right,” said Dan. “If I don’t show up inside of half a minute and you don’t hear from me, one of you chaps had better come in.”

“All right,” answered Bob; “I’ll be ready.”

Then Dan dropped feet foremost over the edge of the float and went down out of sight in the rushing green water. A moment after those leaning over the edge caught a glimpse of a kicking leg. Then several seconds passed. The crowd on the float listened breathlessly. At last, from under the boards and a few feet away, came Dan’s voice.

“All right, Nel! Where are you?”

“Here!” called Nelson, his mouth at one of the cracks.

“Must be the next section,” answered Dan’s muffled voice. “Wait a minute.”

There was a faint splashing sound, silence, and again came Dan’s voice.

“I’ve got him!” he called. “I’m coming out the other side.”

A moment later Dan's wet head and a half-drowned wire-haired terrier appeared at the same moment. The dog was held out at arm's length and Bob seized him. Others gave their hands to Dan and he was quickly pulled out on to the float.

"Gee, that water's cold!" he gasped. "How's the dog? He was just about gone when I got to him. He had managed to get one paw into a crevice in a log, but his head was under water half the time, I guess. Who's got him?"

"Here he is," said Bob. "He's all right. About scared to death, I guess, and pretty well soaked."

"Maybe he's swallowed some water," suggested Tom. "Hold him upside down a minute."

Bob obeyed and nearly half a pint of salt water streamed out of the dog's mouth. After that he seemed much better, but was content for the moment to lie in Bob's arms and gasp and shiver, looking up the while into Bob's face with an expression which surely meant gratitude. He was a forlorn little thing when they finally set him down and he feebly shook himself. The hair was plastered close to his body, and his inch of tail wagged feebly.

"Who's dog is he?" asked Nelson.

"I don't know," said one of the throng. "He's been around here for a couple of days. Don't believe he belongs to anyone. There isn't anything on the collar; I looked."

Some one brought Dan a couple of towels from one of the bath houses and he dried himself as best he could. Afterwards he trotted about the float a minute and along the edge of the little beach.

“Say, he’s a plucky one, he is,” said one of the youths to Nelson.

“Who’s that?” asked Nelson.

“Why, that friend of yours; him that got the dog out.”

“Oh, yes, Dan’s plucky,” answered Nelson. “But that wasn’t any stunt for Dan. That’s one of the easiest things he does.” And he turned away, leaving the youth staring hard.

“Well, let’s get on,” said Dan, tying the last shoe lace.

So they started back toward the road, leaving the crowd, which had grown steadily for the last five minutes, looking admiringly at Dan’s broad back. When they had reached the road, there was a shout from the float and they looked back.

“Hey! There comes the dog!” some one called.

And sure enough, there was the terrier close behind them. He apparently had no doubts as to his welcome. His tiny tail was wagging busily as he went up to Bob, sniffed at his legs, and then turned and made straight for Dan, a few feet away.

“Hello,” said Dan; “you remember me, do you?”

For answer the dog placed his front paws on Dan’s knee and looked inquiringly up into his face.

“I believe he knows you rescued him,” said Bob.

“Of course he does,” said Dan. “You’ve got sense, haven’t you, Towser?”

The terrier sneezed and wagged his tail frantically, pawing at Dan’s knee.

“Hello; catching cold, are you?” Dan picked him up and

snuggled him in his arms. “That won’t do. Mustn’t catch cold, you know.” The dog licked Dan’s face and wriggled ecstatically.

“He seems to like you,” said Tom. “Dogs are funny creatures.”

“He’s a nice little dog,” said Dan as he dropped him gently to the ground again. “I wouldn’t mind having him.”

“Wonder if he really is a stray?” said Nelson.

“Well, come on, fellows; it’s getting late,” said Bob, “and we’re only a little more than halfway to Meadowville.”

“Now you run along home, Mr. Dog,” said Dan, shaking his finger at the terrier. The terrier seemed to understand, for his manner became at once sorrowful and dejected. He watched them go off without a wag of his tail. Presently Dan stole a backward glance. The terrier was stealing along behind them some twenty yards back. Dan said nothing. A few minutes later Bob and Nelson became aware of something trotting along in the rear. They turned. The terrier stopped with one foot in the air. His tail wagged conciliatingly.

“Go home!” said Bob sternly.

The dog dropped his head and began to sniff at the ground as though the last thing in his mind was following them. Nelson and Tom laughed.

“Oh, let him come,” muttered Dan.

“It wouldn’t be fair,” said Bob firmly. “He must belong to some one and they’d probably feel bad if they lost him.”

“All right,” said Dan. “You get along home, doggie.”

But doggie was busy now following an imaginary scent along the side of the road.

“Throw a stone at him,” said Tom.

“You do it if you want to,” said Bob.

But Tom didn’t seem to want to. Finally Bob picked up an imaginary missile and made a motion toward the dog. He didn’t run, but paused and stared at them with an expression of such surprise and sorrow that Bob’s heart failed him.

“Oh, come on,” he muttered. “He won’t follow.”

Five minutes later when they reached a turn in the road they looked back. There stood the terrier where they had left him, still looking after their retreating forms. The next moment he was lost to sight.

“He was a nice little dog,” said Dan regretfully.

They reached Meadowville without further adventure just before noon, having made, in spite of the delay, a very creditable morning record. There was no choice in the matter of hotels, since the village boasted of but one—a small, white-painted, old-fashioned hostelry standing with its front steps flush with the village street. A long porch ran the length of the house, and a dozen armchairs invited to rest. But the proprietor informed them that dinner was ready and so they made at once for the washroom, removed the dust of the highway, and subsequently were conducted into the dining room, already well filled. They had just finished their soup—all save Tom, who had requested a second helping—when the proprietor appeared before them.

“Say, did any of you boys bring a dog?” he asked.

“No,” and they shook their heads.

“All right. There’s one out here and I can’t get rid of him. I didn’t know but he might belong to some of you. I never saw the cur before.”

“Here! Hold on,” cried Dan, jumping up. “Let’s see him.”

They all trooped out into the office. There, nosing excitedly about, was the wire-haired terrier. When he caught sight of them he stopped, crouched to the floor, and wagged his bit of tail violently. They broke into a laugh; all save Dan.

“It’s all right,” said Dan decisively. “That’s my dog.”

He strode over to him. The terrier rolled over on to his back, stuck all four feet toward the ceiling, and awaited annihilation. But it didn’t come. Instead, Dan took him into his arms and faced the others.

“I guess he can stay with us now, can’t he?” he asked.

“You bet,” said Bob.

CHAPTER VII

WHEREIN BARRY DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF

They rested until a little after two o'clock, and then, the intensest heat of a very hot day having passed, they took up their journey again, the party of four now having become a party of five.

The fifth member had remained on the porch while the boys had eaten their dinners. There had been some compulsion about it, as a cord had been tied to his collar and then to the railing. But after the first minute or two, during which he had evidently labored under the impression that his newly found friends were about to escape him again, he had accepted the situation philosophically and had even dozed once or twice there in the sun. He looked very much better after he had been released and, surrounded by the boys, had eaten a hearty dinner. The sun had dried his coat, and the food had apparently restored his self-respect. A man in whipcord, probably a groom or stableman, paused on his way out of the hotel.

"That's a nice-looking dog you've got there," he observed after a silent contemplation of the terrier. "Where'd you get him, if it's no offense, sir?"

Dan hesitated. Then:

"Over near Barrington," he answered uneasily.

"Thoroughbred, I guess," said the other questioningly.

Dan nodded carelessly. The man stooped and snapped his fingers.

“Here, boy, come see me. What’s his name, sir?”

“Er—Barry,” stammered Dan.

“Here, Barry!” called the man. But the terrier acted just as though he’d never heard his name before.

“He looks a lot like Forest Lad, the dog that won so many prizes in New York last winter,” continued the man. “But he’s a bit thinner across the breast than him, I guess. A fine-looking dog, though. Want to sell him?”

“No, I don’t think so,” answered Dan.

“Well, I don’t want him myself, but I guess I could tell you where you could find a purchaser, and not very far off.”

“He’s not for sale,” said Dan.

“Well, I don’t know as I’d want to sell him if he was mine,” said the other as he moved off.

“Look here, what did you call him Barry for?” asked Nelson.

“Gee! I had to call him something,” said Dan, “and that’s the first thing I thought of. I didn’t want that fellow to think I’d stolen the dog.”

“Well, but what’s Barry mean? What made you think of that?”

“I don’t know,” answered Dan, puzzled.

“I do,” said Tom. “You’d just told the man you got him at Barrington; see? Barry—Barrington.”

“I guess that was it. Mr. Barry, of Barrington. Well, that isn’t such a bad name.”

“It’s easy to say,” responded Bob. “Here, Barry.”

But the terrier only wagged his tail in a friendly way.

“He’ll learn his name quick enough,” said Dan. “I wonder, though, what his real name is.”

“Let’s see if we can find out,” suggested Bob. “We’ll call him all the names we can think of and see if he answers to any of them.”

So they started in, and the terrier, evidently at a loss to know what it all meant, laid himself down in the sunlight and observed them with puzzled eyes. They tried all the usual names they could think of, and then they started on unusual ones. But when Tom got to Launcelot, Dan interfered.

“Look here, that will do for you,” he said. “I’m not going to have my dog called any such names as that. You’ll be calling him Reginald next, I suppose!”

“What name was that that fellow got off?” questioned Nelson. “Forest Lad, was it?”

“Yes; maybe that’s his name. Let’s try it. Here, Forest Lad!”

But the terrier only yawned.

“Not the same,” said Nelson. “He doesn’t just look like a dog who would win prizes, does he?”

“Why not?” demanded Dan indignantly. “He’s a mighty fine-looking dog, I tell you!”

“Even if his name is Barry,” laughed Tom.

“Well, we’ve given him plenty of chances to choose a name to suit himself,” said Bob, “and he hasn’t done it. So I guess

Barry will have to do."

"It's a good name," said Dan stoutly. "Isn't it, Barry?"

Barry wagged his tail. That seemed to settle it.

When, presently, they took the road again, Barry remained at Dan's heels for the first half mile or so, like a well-trained dog. But when, after one or two experimental trips into the bushes, Barry found that his new master was not a strict disciplinarian, he cut loose. After that he was everywhere. Over walls, through fences, into this field and into that, chasing birds, scratching for field mice, and treeing squirrels, Barry had, as Dan put it, the time of his innocent young life. But he always came instantly when called, no matter how far away he might be; came like a small white streak of lightning, tongue out and eyes sparkling merrily. He was a source of constant entertainment, and the seven miles which lay between Meadowville and Kingston passed underfoot almost before they knew it. As they came in sight of the latter town a brisk shower began. For an hour past the clouds had been gathering, big and heavy, overhead, and now the thunder began to crash. Luckily they had but a short distance to go and they covered it in record time, Barry, barking hysterically, leading the flying column by six yards. They found a temporary refuge in a livery stable on the edge of town, and the terrier put in an exciting ten minutes hunting rats in the stalls. The stable keeper, a large, good-natured man, offered Dan $10 on the spot for the dog and when that offer was declined raised the price to $15. Dan was highly pleased at the compliment paid to Barry, but refused to part with him.

Presently the shower held up for a moment and they thanked their host and scampered for the nearest hotel. Here they met

with difficulties. The proprietor didn't take dogs. Dan argued and offered to pay extra, but the hotel man was obdurate. There was nothing for it but to try elsewhere, and so out they went again in a pelting rain and hurried down the street to the next hostelry. Here Barry was more welcome; he could sleep in the smoking room or in the stable. Dan decided in favor of the smoking room, borrowed a piece of cord from the clerk, and hitched Barry to the leg of a writing table. After supper, the rain having held up again, they went out and purchased a leather leash. Barry took very kindly to this and was for chewing it up until Dan explained the purpose of it to him. They played cards in the smoking room until bedtime, and then, having made Barry comfortable for the night on a piece of bagging, went to their rooms and, as was becoming after an eighteen-mile tramp, fell promptly asleep.

Dan and Nelson slept together. It was at about two o'clock in the morning—although that fact wasn't discovered until later—that Dan awoke to find Nelson shaking him by the arm.

"Wha—what's the row?" asked Dan sleepily.

"Barry's raising Cain downstairs," answered Nelson. "Listen!"

Their room was on the second floor near the stairway, and through the open transom floated a startling medley of sounds, frantic barks succeeded by blood-curdling growls, scurrying footsteps, and the crash of an overturned chair.

"That's never Barry!" cried Dan.

"I'll bet you it is," said Nelson. "We'd better go down and see, anyway."

But Dan was already bumping into furniture in an endeavor

to find his trousers. Nelson followed him, but he had more difficulty than his friend in finding his apparel, and Dan was out of the room and down the stairs before Nelson's search was finished.

Dan took the stairs two or three at a time; he wasn't particular; and when he reached the office a strange sight greeted his startled eyes. The one gaslight was burning dimly, but it afforded sufficient illumination to show what was going on. On the office counter crouched a man. He wasn't a very big man, nor was he very prepossessing. His clothes had seen much wear and he was badly in need of a shave. Also he was plainly frightened. And there was cause. The cause, with some two feet of brand-new leather leash hanging to his collar, leaped excitedly at the counter in a businesslike effort to get at the occupant of it, and every time he leaped he either barked or growled. Dan took in the situation in an instant, but he didn't pretend to understand it. The hotel proprietor, however, who appeared on the scene at that moment, bearing evidences of a hurried dressing, understood it at once.

“Leaped excitedly at the counter.”

“Barry!” called Dan. “Come here, sir! Come here!”

“Let him alone,” said the proprietor. “He knows his business, that dog. What are you doing in here?” he asked sternly of the man on the counter.

“Nothin’,” was the answer. “Call off that beast, can’t yer?”

“You’ll stay where you are a minute, I guess,” answered the proprietor grimly. Then he strode to the door, unlocked it, and passed out to the porch.

“Hi, Brooks! Brooks!” he called loudly. “O Brooks!”

From somewhere near at hand came an answering hail. Then things began to happen indoors. Barry, aware of Dan’s presence, had stopped his barking and leaping and was watching his prey warily from the distance of a few feet. Dan also had his eyes on the man, but for all that he wasn’t prepared for what happened. When the answering hail came the man on the counter gathered himself quickly and made a flying leap over Barry’s head. The front door was guarded by the proprietor, and Dan stood between the counter and the door leading to the washroom and the back of the hotel. Only the stairway seemed unguarded, and toward that the man fled, Barry after him and gaining at every leap. Dan set up a shout and followed Barry. At that moment Nelson, having finally got into his trousers, appeared on the landing halfway up.

“Stop him!” cried Dan. “Stop him!”

The pursued caught sight of Nelson at the same moment and his hand flew toward his pocket. Nelson drew aside warily, but as the other plunged past he threw out his leg and the next moment Nelson and the man and Barry were all mixed up in a writhing heap on the landing. But Dan was up there in a second, Barry was thrown aside, and in a twinkling the battle was decided.

“Grab that hand,” panted Nelson. “He’s got a revolver.”

Dan obeyed and wrested the implement away. It proved,

however, to be not a revolver, but a heavy, leather-covered billy about six inches long. After that the man underneath gave up the struggle and lay quiet until Mr. Brooks, who turned out to be the town constable, yanked him to his feet.

By that time most of the occupants of the hotel, including Tom and Bob, had assembled in various stages of undress, and the hubbub was considerable. Tom was wildly excited and stammered question after question. But no one paid any heed to him. A bag well filled with plated silverware, gleaned from the dining room, into which apartment the burglar had made his way by forcing a window, was found back of the counter. The officer took the names of about twenty persons, most of whom had seen nothing of the affair, and the unfortunate man was haled away to the jail. After that, for more than an hour, all the male occupants of the house sat around in the office and discussed and rediscussed the affair. Naturally, Barry and Nelson and Dan came in for much praise, Barry especially. Everyone had to pet him, and a less sensible dog might have had his head turned. But Barry took his honors modestly; in fact, he seemed rather bored by the admiration bestowed upon him. Along toward four o'clock the excitement had died down sufficiently to permit of the occupants returning to bed, and this they did, Tom bewailing loudly his ill luck in having arrived on the scene too late.

"If I had bu-bu-bu-been there," began Tommy.

"If you had been there," interrupted Bob unkindly, "the thief would have got away while you were choking over it."

CHAPTER VIII
IN WHICH POVERTY CLAIMS THE FOUR

The next day was Thursday. Nelson declared it wasn't; that it was only Wednesday; but the blue, red, and yellow calendar advertising Somebody's Smokeless Powder, which hung in the hotel office, contradicted him. But whatever day it was it was anything but a pleasant one. Last evening's thundershower had resolved itself into a steady, persistent drizzle. The boys woke late, in consequence of the early morning diversions, and when they looked at the sky and the muddy road they sighed. It was Tom who dared voice what all were thinking.

"This is no kind of weather to go messing around the country in," he said disgustedly. "Besides, there's Dan's health to think of. Why, he's just out of bed, as you might say!"

"A little rain won't hurt," said Dan half-heartedly.

"Not a bit," agreed Bob. "It—it would be rather fun. We haven't tried our ponchos yet, you know."

"I fear you're lazy, Tommy," added Nelson sorrowfully.

"Lazy nothing! Look at that street out there and then think what the country road would be like! I'll tell you one thing, if you fellows go, you go without little Tommy."

"Oh, well, if you won't go along," said Nelson, in a somewhat relieved tone.

"If you want to make us miss a day," continued Dan.

"I don't think we ought to break up the crowd," said Bob. "I

don’t believe our folks would like that. So if Tommy won’t go, why, we’ll all stay here to-day and go on to-morrow. What do you say?”

“Oh, pshaw,” said Tom disgustedly; “you’re all just as anxious to stay as I am! You make me tired!”

The others grinned.

“Only consideration for your welfare, Tommy, keeps us here,” said Dan.

“Then you can ju-ju-just let my wu-wu-wu-welfare alone,” answered Tom aggrievedly.

“Not for worlds, old chap! Come on downstairs and let’s see if we can’t find something to do.”

They went down and rescued Barry from the admiring attention of the populace, which, having learned by this time of the early morning adventure, had flocked in to view the scene and the heroes.

“I wonder what they’ll do to him,” said Dan, in reference to the marauder, as they pushed their way through the crowd about the office door.

“Put him in prison, I suppose,” answered Bob.

“Reckon they won’t do anything to him just at present,” volunteered the driver of the station ’bus who was standing near by.

“Why?” asked Dan.

“’Cause,” said the driver with a chuckle, “they ain’t got him.”

“Ain’t got him!” repeated Dan ungrammatically.

“No; he broke away from Joe Brooks last night just this side of the jail. Joe fired at him and *he* says he hit him, but I don’t believe Joe could hit a barn door, let alone a man runnin’ like all git out! Anyway, the feller never stopped runnin’; I reckon he’s runnin’ yit!”

“Well,” said Dan, as they went out on to the porch with Barry at heel, “of course he was a thief and all that, and he had one of the toughest-looking faces I ever saw, but, just the same, I’m kind of glad he got away. He looked just about half-starved, Bob. And I’m not stuck on helping to put anyone in prison. Maybe he’ll behave himself after this.”

“Well, from what I’ve seen of the tableware,” said Bob dryly, “I guess the chap’s better off without it. I don’t believe he could have got thirty cents for the lot!”

Presently they went to writing letters, and even Tom, with the burglar episode to tell of, managed to fill two pages. Afterwards they were requested to bring Barry out to the office, and, doing so, found the proprietor and a couple of dozen others assembled waiting for them. Barry was placed on the top of the office desk and the proprietor made him a speech of thanks, frequently interrupted by laughter and applause, and when he had finished presented to the hero a new collar and leash. Dan, speaking for Barry, responded somewhat embarrassedly and the new collar was placed around the dog’s neck. Then everyone went into dinner in high good humor.

“What did you do with the old leash, Dan?” asked Tom.

“It’s upstairs. Why? It’s busted, you know.”

“I know it is. Give it to me?”

“Sure. What for?”

“Oh, nothing much,” answered Tom.

But after dinner he went up and got it and disappeared for a while. When he returned he proudly exhibited a black leather cardcase and three braided leather watch fobs.

“Where’d you get those?” asked Bob.

“At the leather store. I took the leash back and told the man it was no good; broke the first time it was used. I said I’d take something else in exchange.”

“Well, I’ll be blowed!” gasped Dan. “And he did it?”

“He didn’t want to at first. Said he hadn’t sold the leash to me. But I told him you couldn’t come yourself because you had to stay at the hotel and hold the dog by the collar to keep him from running away. Then I offered to take ninety-five cents’ worth of other goods, and that fetched him; the leash was a dollar, you know. So I got this cardcase for myself in payment for my trouble, you see, and brought those fobs for you chaps. Swell, aren’t they?”

“Oh, they’re terribly dressy,” answered Dan sarcastically. “I couldn’t think of wearing mine on ordinary occasions, Tom.”

They tried to tease him about the transaction, but Tom didn’t mind a bit; he was quite satisfied with his dickering.

“If you fellows don’t like the fobs,” he told them, “you can go back and change them. He’s got some dandy things there.”

For the rest of the afternoon they played cards in the smoking room, and Dan and Nelson won overwhelmingly. Then they took Barry out for a few minutes of exercise, and

Bob squandered more money on souvenir postals and spent half an hour after supper trying to think of something to write on them. Dan and Nelson unearthed a box of dominoes and had an exciting game. Tom went to sleep in an armchair over a New York paper, and Barry, comfortably curled up in his lap, mingled his snores with Tom's.

Friday dawned fair and cool. After breakfast they packed their baggage, paid their bills—which were suspiciously moderate—and, with the proprietor's hearty "Come again, boys!" in their ears, swung off down the street. When they reached the country road they found that the rain had done a world of good. The dust was laid and the roadbed was hard and firm. Barry was in fine fettle and kept them laughing at his wild sorties after birds and chipmunks. From Kingston their route led diagonally across the island toward the south shore, which they intended to reach that evening. By this time their muscles were well hardened and they reeled the miles off without conscious effort.

They had brought lunch with them in case, as seemed probable, they should find no hotel on the way. And so when, at a little before noon, they reached the edge of a big pond where a cluster of willows along the edge offered inviting shade, they pitched camp.

"I tell you what let's do," said Nelson.

"Go ahead," said Bob lazily from where he was stretched out on his back.

"Let's have a swim before lunch. What do you say?"

They said various things, the tenor of which was that Nelson sometimes exhibited almost human intelligence and in the

present case had evolved a brilliant idea.

“But we can’t undress here,” said Bob. “Too many autos and carriages and things going along this road. Let’s keep along here by the edge until we get away from the public.”

So they took up their packs and followed the margin of the pond and after a few minutes found themselves in a thick grove several hundred feet from the highway. Here they dropped their knapsacks, undressed, and donned their trunks, Barry viewing proceedings with eager eyes. And when they raced down to the water he leaped and barked ecstatically.

“I should think,” said Nelson severely, “that you would have had enough water to last you for some time, Mr. Dog.”

“Oh, that was salt water, wasn’t it, Barry?” answered Dan. “Let’s see if he’ll come in. Here, Barry! Sic ’em!”

Barry settled the question in an instant, plunging in beside Dan and swimming about excitedly in circles and biting at the floating twigs and leaves. The water was quite warm and, as Dan said, reminded them of Lake Chicora, by whose shore they had all spent the preceding summer. But it wasn’t deep enough for Dan, to whom bathing meant diving, and he set off along the shore in search of deeper water. The others followed, Barry retiring to the shore and barking joyfully as he trotted along. There were some residences on the opposite side of the lake, almost half a mile away, and Bob pointed them out.

“Maybe they don’t allow bathing here,” he said.

“Maybe they don’t,” laughed Nelson; “but it’s too late now. There goes Dan; he’s found a tree trunk to dive off of.”

They had a fine time for half an hour and then swam back in

search of the place they had left.

"I don't see anything that looks like it," said Tom.

"Nor I," said Dan. "Say, wouldn't it be a joke if we couldn't find our clothes?"

"A mighty poor one," answered Bob. "We'd ought to have made Barry stay and look after them. Then we'd known where they were."

"Oh, they're right along here somewhere," said Nelson. "We went in opposite that big white house over there, the one with the high chimney on the outside."

"Huh!" said Dan. "That's a half mile away. Any place over here is opposite. Let's go out here and look around."

They did, and they looked a long time. But finally there was a shout from Tommy, who had meandered off on his own hook.

"Here they are!" he called. Then, a moment later,

"We've been ru-ru-ru-ru-robbed!" yelled Tom.

"*What?*" cried Dan.

"Oh, it's one of Tommy's jokes," muttered Nelson anxiously as they raced toward where he was standing. But it wasn't. It needed but one glance to prove that. The contents of the knapsacks were scattered about under the trees, the lunches were gone, and their clothes had evidently been handled. Bob picked up his coat and thrust his hand into a pocket. Then he seized his trousers and went through the same performance. And the others followed suit as though it had been a game of follow-your-leader. Then they all dropped the garments and

looked at each other blankly.

"Stripped!" said Dan.

"Every blessed cent gone," said Nelson. "Watch too!"

"I had twenty-six dollars," said Tom mournfully.

"You shouldn't carry so much wealth about with you," answered Dan with a grin. "It ought to be a lesson to you. I only had eight."

"You shut up!" growled Tom.

"Well, whoever they were," said Bob ruefully, "they made a pretty good haul. I had about fifteen dollars. And they got my watch too. But it was only a cheap one."

"Mine wasn't," said Nelson. "It cost forty dollars. Say, what's the matter with Barry?"

The terrier was running excitedly about, smelling and sniffing and giving vent to short yelps. Once or twice he started off through the trees as though nothing could stop him. But each time he turned back, whining, and began sniffing the ground again.

"Barry's got the fellow's scent," said Nelson.

"And the fellow's got every cent of mine," said Dan.

"Gee!" said Tom sorrowfully, "I don't see anything to ju-ju-joke about!"

"Hello!" Bob stooped and picked up a piece of paper. It was part of an envelope which had inclosed a letter to Nelson and had reposed in that youth's coat pocket. On the blank side a few words had been laboriously scrawled with a pencil.

"'I gess this wil tech you Not to But in,'" read Bob slowly.

"What's that mean?" asked Dan.

"Search me," said Nelson. "Who's butted in?"

"Du-du-don't you su-su-su-see?" cried Tom. "I-i-i-it's the fu-fu-fellow that su-su-stole the su-su-su-su——!"

"Silver! That's right, Tommy!" cried Dan. "That's just who did it. And I said yesterday I was glad he'd got away! I wish one of you chaps would kick me!"

"He was probably hiding in the woods here and saw us undress," said Bob. "I wish——"

"I wish I had hold of him again," said Nelson angrily. "What'll we do?"

"Get to the nearest town as soon as we can and report it to the police," replied Bob.

"Where is the nearest town? Couldn't we find a telephone somewhere around? How about those houses over there?"

"It would be a good two miles around there, I guess," said Bob, consulting his map. "And there's some sort of a town about a mile and a half ahead of us. We'd better light out for there."

"All right," said Nelson.

"I'm glad he left us our clothes, anyhow," said Dan. "And look, maybe we can find which way he went. Here, Barry, seek him out! Get after him, sir!"

Barry whined and sniffed and ran around, but every time he started off on the trail he lost it and had to come back.

“Seems to me,” said Tom, “if I had a watchdog I’d make him watch.”

“Maybe he’s lost his watch, like the rest of us,” said Nelson soothingly. “Come on; I’m ready. What’s the odds, anyhow? It’s all in the day’s work—or rather walk. We’ll feel fine after we’ve had some lunch.”

“Lunch!” sniffed Tom, struggling with his trousers. “Lunch! Where are we going to get it, I’d like to know?”

“Oh, we’ll find something in this village Bob’s talking about.”

“Wu-wu-wu-well, s’posing we du-du-do? How we gu-gu-gu-going to pu-pu-pu-pay for it?”

“By Jove!” muttered Nelson blankly. “I hadn’t thought of that!”

CHAPTER IX

SHOWS THEM BOTH HUNGRY AND SATISFIED

It was a very subdued quartet that took the road to Clearwater, the nearest village, although, after they had walked along in silence for a few hundred yards, Dan's face began to clear and the corners of his mouth stole upward as he glanced at his companions. I don't think that Barry meant to seem heartless or unsympathetic, but his conduct would have looked, to one unacquainted with his real nature, decidedly callous. He chased birds and squirrels, tried to climb trees, dug for mice, and barked and scampered just as though there was no such thing as misfortune in all the world. And only Dan, I think, understood and sympathized with him.

They walked rapidly and before long reached Clearwater. In spite of the fact that the map made it appear to be quite a village, Clearwater proved to be merely a collection of some half dozen houses surrounding the junction of two roads. There was neither store nor hotel there. They asked information at the first house they came to. To find an officer, they were told, it would be necessary to go on to Millford, two miles beyond, although if they liked they could telephone there. Bob thanked the man and was conducted to the telephone. In a few minutes he had supplied the officers at Millford with all the information possible and had described the stolen property. He promised also to see the officers when he reached Millford. After that there was nothing to do but keep on for that town.

"We'll find a telegraph office there," said Bob, "and Dan

can wire his father for some money. Then we'll go to a hotel, tell them how we're fixed, and get them to trust us until the money comes."

As no one had a better one to offer, that plan was adopted. But it was weary work, that last two miles. They were all extremely hungry; indeed, Tom looked so famished that the others almost expected to see him expire before their eyes. Nelson became temporarily unbalanced, if Dan is to be believed, and muttered incoherent things about roast beef and mashed potatoes. It was three o'clock and after when they at last wandered into Millford. It was a tiny village, but there were stores there, a telegraph office, and a hotel. They came to the telegraph office first, and so they went in and Dan wrote his telegram.

"Money stolen. Please wire fifty dollars this office. All well. DAN."

That was the message, and, as Bob couldn't suggest any improvements, it was handed to the operator. The latter counted the words.

"Twenty-five cents," he said.

"Send collect, please," said Dan.

"What's your address?"

"We haven't any yet. We're going to the hotel."

"Hotel's closed; closed first of the month."

Dan looked at Bob, and Bob looked at Dan; and then they looked at Nelson and Tom.

“Closed!” muttered Dan finally.

“Is there a boarding house here we can go to?” asked Bob.

“I don’t believe so; never heard of any,” answered the operator.

“Well—you’ll send that message, won’t you?” asked Dan anxiously. The operator hesitated.

“It’s against the rules,” he objected. “If you lived here I might.”

“It will be all right,” said Dan. “It’s to my father, and that’s his address there. We’ve lost every cent of our money, and I don’t know how we’re going to get any more unless that message reaches him.”

“Well—all right. I guess I can send it for you. You guarantee charges, do you?”

“Yes,” said Dan. “And we’ll come around in the morning for the answer. I’m awfully much obliged.”

“Where is the nearest place we could get lodgings and something to eat?” asked Bob.

“I don’t believe there’s a place nearer than Port Adams, and that’s about four miles from here. There’s a hotel there.”

“Gosh!” muttered Tom.

They thanked the operator again and went out. Then began a search for a boarding place that lasted for half an hour. They heard of one lady who had a room which she sometimes rented and they went to her posthaste. But the room was taken. At the end of the half hour they had seemingly exhausted the possibilities of Millford and were still without shelter.

“How about the police folks?” asked Tom.

“I’d forgotten all about them,” answered Bob. “Maybe they’ll let us sleep in the police station.”

But the police station proved to be only a couple of small rooms in the townhall. They told their story all over again, gave their home addresses, and departed with little hope of ever seeing their property again. For it was evident that the officer suspected them of trying to work a hoax on him, and his promises to look for the robber didn’t sound very enthusiastic. Out on the sidewalk they held a council of war. Bob was for keeping on to Port Adams where the hotel was, but none of the others agreed with him.

“I couldn’t walk four miles farther this afternoon if there was a million dollars in it,” asserted Dan.

And Nelson and Tom echoed the sentiment.

“Besides,” said Nelson, “maybe if we went there they wouldn’t take us at the hotel, and we wouldn’t be any better off.”

“And we’d have to walk back here in the morning to get the money,” added Tom.

“All right,” said Bob. “What will we do, then?”

But no one offered a suggestion. Instead they stood and stared dejectedly across the street. Even Barry appeared to have lost spirit; there was a weary air in the way he held his stump of a tail. On the other side of the street a fence was placarded with highly colored circus posters. “Millford, Sept. 9,” was the legend they bore. That was to-morrow.

“If we get that money,” said Nelson, “let’s stay and see the

circus."

"Never mind about the circus," said Bob irritably. "What we've got to do is to find some place to sleep."

"And something to eat," added Tom sadly.

"Let's sleep outdoors," said Dan. "It's going to be fairly warm to-night, I guess."

"But how about food?" asked Bob.

"Let's go to a house and ask them to feed us," suggested Tom. "Tell them we'll pay in the morning."

"No, sir," answered Bob. "That's begging, and I won't beg."

"Nor I," said Nelson.

"It isn't begging if you pay for it," said Tom indignantly.

"Well, it sounds a whole lot like it. I'd rather go without eating."

"We might draw lots," said Dan, "and eat one of us."

"Wish I was home," muttered Tom.

He thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets and stared disconsolately across at the circus posters. Then suddenly his face lighted, he uttered a gurgle, and yanked his left hand out of his pocket.

"*Lu-lu-lu-look!*" he sputtered.

They looked. There in Tom's palm lay a shining half dollar.

"Where'd you get it?" they cried.

"Lu-lu-left pocket. I pu-pu-pu-put it there du-du-day before yu-yu-yu-yesterday and forgot all abub-ub-ub—all about it!"

The others searched their own pockets frantically, but were not so lucky.

“Say, that’s great!” cried Nelson.

“You bet!” said Dan. “Are you—are you sure it’s good?”

“Course it’s good!” said Tom.

“Gee! Doesn’t half a dollar look big when you’re starving?” said Dan softly. It was passed around from one to another, all examining it as though it were a quite unusual object. Bob sighed as it left his hand.

“It certainly looks good to me,” he muttered.

“Now, what’ll we do with it?” asked Tom. “I don’t suppose anyone will give us four suppers for half a dollar.”

“We might get two for that price,” suggested Dan. “Two of us could get supper and bring something out to the others.”

“Well, don’t let Tom go,” laughed Nelson.

“If only there was some sort of a restaurant in this idiotic place!” sighed Bob.

“I tell you!” cried Dan. “We’ll go to a store and buy some grub, pitch a camp, and cook it ourselves! We can get a lot for fifty cents!”

“Good scheme!” said Bob.

“Fine!” said Nelson.

“Swell!” agreed Tom. “Come on!”

They sought the main street and the stores. At a market they purchased a pound of round steak for twenty-five cents, and, in response to Dan’s hints, the man threw in a good-sized bone

for Barry. Farther on they found a grocery store and spent five cents for a loaf of bread, seven cents for a quarter of a pound of butter, six cents for a quart of milk—the groceryman good-naturedly supplying a bottle for it—and five cents for half a dozen cookies. Thus armed they sought a place to pitch their camp. Five minutes of walking took them out of the village, and they soon espied a knoll which promised a suitable spot. They crossed a field, climbed the knoll, and found an ideal location on the western side of it. The trees were sparse, but, there was enough undergrowth here and there to serve as wind-break during the night. The four were once more themselves and in the highest spirits. Bob took command, and under his direction the others were set to finding fuel, whittling sticks for forks, and building the fireplace. By five o'clock the flames were sending a column of purple smoke up into the still evening air, and the slice of steak, cut into four portions, was sizzling over the fire on as many pointed sticks. And Barry was busy with his bone. In short, life was worth living again.

Now, if you have never spent the day out of doors and supped at night in the open with the wood smoke floating about you, you can have no very definite idea of how good that meal tasted to the Four. The steak was done to a turn, brown and crisp outside, burned a little about the edges as every camper's steak should be, and inside slightly pink and so full of juice that a napkin, had one happened along, would have done a land-office business! And then the bread! Well, I suppose it was just an ordinary loaf, but—it didn't taste so! There was a beautiful golden-brown crust all over the outside that broke with a brittle and appetizing sound. And under the crust was the whitest, softest, freshest, sweetest bread that ever made the thought of butter a sacrilege. I don't mean by that

that the butter wasn't used; it was, lavishly as long as it lasted; after it was gone it was never missed. The cookies, too, and the milk, ridiculously rich milk it was, were simply marvelous. Really, it was astonishing how much better Long Island food was than any other! And Barry, flat on the ground, both paws on the big bone and teeth busy, grunted accordantly.

Before them as they sat in a semicircle about the little fire the hill sloped down to a broad pasture, here and there overgrown with bushes and dotted at intervals with low trees. Beyond the pasture was a swamp closed in on its farther side by a line of woods looking dark against the saffron evening sky. To their right, perhaps a quarter of a mile distant, was a farmhouse and buildings, and from the house a thin filament of blue smoke arose. Now and then a voice reached them; sometimes a dog barked afar off and Barry lifted his head and listened; once the *chug-chug* of an automobile, speeding along the road behind them, disturbed the silence.

Conversation was fitful at the best during that meal, for it must be remembered that they had had no lunch and had done a day's march. And after the last morsel had disappeared no one complained of being uncomfortably full. But they had fared well and there were no complaints.

"I don't know," said Bob, "but what we'd ought to have kept something for the morning."

"Oh, never mind the morning," answered Dan. "We'll have plenty of money then and we'll breakfast in state."

They fed the fire to keep it alive for the sake of its cozy glow and then leaned back on their elbows and talked. Barry abandoned his bone with a satisfied sigh and curled himself up by Dan's side. Presently the sunlight faded and a crescent

moon glowed brightly behind the knoll. The chill of evening began to make itself felt, and now they built up the fire for more practical purposes and edged themselves nearer. Before it got quite dark they busied themselves preparing for the night. They cut evergreen branches and piled them high in the lee of a clump of bushes. The packs were opened and each fellow donned as much of the extra clothing as was possible, the ponchos serving as blankets. Toward half-past eight they settled themselves for the night, burrowing deep into the fragrant branches and lying as close together as was compatible with comfort. The little fire danced and gleamed, the crickets sang loudly from all sides, and the slender silver moon sailed overhead in a purple sky.

Then Tom fell off to sleep, and the crickets' song was quickly drowned.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH NELSON SEES STRANGE VISIONS

Although it had been fairly mild when they went to sleep, by early morning the chill had crept under the rubber blankets, and the four sleepers twisted and turned uneasily, conscious of the cold and yet too sleepy to awake. Nelson was on the outside and therefore less protected than the others. At length, unable to endure it any longer, he sat up and looked about him with heavy eyes. It was beginning to get light, and the crescent moon, far down in the sky, was becoming dim. The other three slept on. Barry raised his head above Dan's shoulder and glanced gravely across at Nelson. Then, with a sigh, he curled up again and went back to sleep.

Nelson's legs were stiff and aching, and after a moment of indecision he got up and began to walk around. That warmed him up considerably, and presently he paused and looked about him over the sleeping world. Back of the knoll a rosy tinge was creeping upward. The farmhouse showed no signs of life as yet and the chimney sent no smoke into the gray sky. And everything was very still.

And then, of a sudden, from somewhere came a strange sound, a sound that was utterly at variance with the calm hush of early morning. Nelson puzzled over it for several moments. It was a sound made up of many lesser sounds, the sound of moving wheels, of creaking wagons, of heavy footfalls, of rattling harness, of clanking metal, and, so Nelson thought, of voices. He looked about him in bewilderment. At the farmhouse not a sign of life showed, nor did the sound seem to

come from that direction. Nelson turned toward the summit of the little knoll and listened intently. Then he hurried to the top and—rubbed his eyes in amazement at what he saw. For a moment he thought that he was still asleep and dreaming.

Across the field which lay between him and the road lumbered a huge shape, black against the lightening sky. For a second it was formless, gigantic in that half-light. Then Nelson's eyes served him better, and he saw that the approaching object was an elephant and that beside it walked a man. Yet surely he was dreaming! What could an elephant be doing in the middle of that country field at five o'clock in the morning? And then, as he looked again toward the road, he found the explanation. For now, coming from the direction of the town, emerging from behind the trees which hid the road there and turning into the field, came a procession of wagons and horses and—yes, surely that strange-looking thing was a camel! It was all clear enough now. The circus had arrived!

Several sections of the fence had been removed, and one by one, with urging and coaxing, the big boxlike wagons were being driven into the field. By this time the elephant had reached the end of his journey, and the attendant had brought him to a stop some fifty yards away from where Nelson stood and was filling and lighting his pipe. The wagons lumbered, creaking and jolting, across the grass and were drawn up in two rows. Then other wagons appeared, flat and low these, and made straight for the middle of the field. And after that so many things happened at once and with such amazing celerity that Nelson could only stand there on the knoll and stare.

As if by magic a small tent arose at the end of the twin lines of wagons. Dozens of men hurried hither and thither in squads,

carrying canvas, ropes, poles, with never a sign of confusion. The camel, its ridiculous head moving from side to side superciliously, was driven over to where the elephant stood. Men with stakes and mallets followed, and in a minute the two animals were tethered. By that time the larger tent was lying stretched over the ground ready for raising. Fires gleamed near the smaller tent, and there came a rattling of pots and pans. Still another heap of canvas was dragged from a wagon and stretched out. Unconsciously Nelson had moved down the hill. The elephant watched him expectantly with his little eyes as he passed. Nelson kept on until he stood just outside the scene of operations. They were raising the big tent now. One end of it suddenly arose into air; men shouted and hurried; ropes were hauled and tightened, slackened and made fast; the great mallets rose and fell with resounding blows; inch by inch, foot by foot, the great gleaming canvas house took form. From somewhere came an appealing odor of coffee and frying bacon, and Nelson suddenly discovered that he was very hungry. He walked toward the fires.

Those who passed him looked at him curiously but offered no word of remonstrance. The sun came up behind the distant hills with a leap and glittered wanly on the tarnished gold carvings of the chariots and on the pots and pans of the busy cooks. There were two of these, and a youth of about sixteen was acting as helper. As Nelson approached, the youth disappeared into the tent with a basket of tin plates and cups. The flaps were up and Nelson could see a long table formed of planks in sections resting on wooden trestles. The boy was setting the table for breakfast. The stoves, of which there were two, were queer round cylinders of sheet iron which were fed with wood through doors in front. On one a great copper

caldron was already beginning to throw off steam. On the other an immense frying pan was filled with bacon, which, as fast as it was done, was removed to other pans upon a near-by trestle. A wagon was backed up close at hand, and as they worked, the cooks went to it for salt and pepper and other ingredients, which they took from drawers and cupboards with which the rear of the wagon was fitted. It was all very astonishing and interesting to Nelson, and he looked and looked until presently one of the cooks saw him and spoke.

"Hello," he said.

"Good morning," answered Nelson.

"You're up early," continued the other, removing the cover from the caldron for an instant and slamming it back into place. He was a thickset man with a humorous, kindly face and the largest hands Nelson thought he had ever seen.

"Not as early as you," said Nelson smilingly.

"No, that's so. It's our business, you see. Had your breakfast?"

"Not yet."

"Have a cup of coffee, then?"

Nelson hesitated.

"Got plenty of it?"

"About four gallons," was the answer. "Here, it'll warm you up. Toss me a cup, Joe."

The other cook obeyed without taking his attention from the sizzling bacon, and Nelson's friend held it under a faucet at the bottom of the caldron.

“There you are. Now you want some sugar. We haven’t got the milk out yet. O Jerry! Bring a spoon and some sugar.”

“Thank you,” said Nelson as he accepted the tin cup of steaming coffee. “It smells mighty good.”

“Well, it ain’t the best in the world,” answered the cook cheerfully, “but it tastes pretty good on a cold morning. You, Jerry! Oh, here you are. Pass the sugar to the gentleman.”

Nelson turned and for the first time had sight of the boy’s face. The hand which he had stretched forth fell to his side.

“Why! Hello, Jerry Hinkley!” he cried.

“‘Why! Hello, Jerry Hinkley!’”

“Hello,” responded Jerry with an embarrassed smile. He was quite a different-looking Jerry already. His hair had been cut, the faded overalls and blue gingham shirt had given place to a suit of plain, neat clothes, half-hidden by a long apron, and

there was a new expression of self-reliance in the gray eyes. He shook hands with Nelson a bit awkwardly, but looked very glad to see him again.

“What are you doing here, Jerry?” asked Nelson.

“I’m cook’s boy,” was the answer. “I joined the show last Wednesday, the day after I seen you. Have some sugar?”

Nelson helped himself, accepted the proffered tin spoon, and stirred his coffee.

“Do you like it?” he asked. “It must be rather a change from the farm.”

“Yes, I like it first-rate,” said Jerry.

“I don’t like to interrupt the meeting of old friends,” said the cook good-naturedly, “but they’ll be in for breakfast in about ten minutes, Jerry, and if you ain’t ready for ’em they’ll scalp you alive.”

“I better be goin’,” said Jerry. “Glad I seen you again.”

“All right,” answered Nelson. “When can I see you? Are you busy all day?”

“No; ’long about ten o’clock I generally don’t have much to do.”

“Good! I’ll look you up then,” said Nelson. “The other fellows will want to see you too; I’ll bring them along.”

“Will you?” asked Jerry eagerly from the door of the tent. “That’s mighty kind of you. Good-by. I—I’ll look for you.”

“Know Jerry, do you?” asked the cook as he pulled a box of tin cups toward him and began setting them on a trestle.

Nelson told of their former meeting, sipping the boiling hot coffee the while.

"Well, Jerry's a pretty good boy," said the cook. "Tends to his work and ain't got no highfalutin' nonsense about bein' too good for it. Come around and see us again."

"Thanks," said Nelson. "I will. And I'm awfully much obliged for that coffee; it went right to the spot."

"Knew it would. Have some more? No? Well, so long."

Nelson turned away and retraced his steps. The coffee had warmed him up, and he wished the others could have some. He stopped one of the canvasmen and asked the time.

"Twenty-five minutes after six," said the man, consulting a big nickel watch.

Nelson thanked him and went on. But it wouldn't do to wake up the others yet, for, of course, the telegraph office wouldn't be open before eight, and they wouldn't want to wait around without any breakfast. So instead of joining them he turned and looked about him. The big tent was up, and so was the dressing tent alongside. The ticket seller's box was set up beside the main entrance, and men were stretching a forty-foot length of painted canvas across some upright poles. He walked toward them and watched. When finally in place the canvas advertised the attractions of the side show. There was a highly colored picture of "Princess Zoe, the Marvelous Snake Charmer." The princess was an extraordinarily beautiful young lady and was depicted standing in a regular chaos of writhing snakes, while two others proved their subjugation by twining themselves caressingly about her arms and neck. Then there was a picture of "Boris, the Wild Man of the Tartary Steppes."

Nelson didn't find Boris especially attractive. According to the picture he was a squat gentleman with a good deal of hair on his face, a remarkably large mouth, a flat nose pierced by a brass ring, and an expression of extraordinary ferocity. Add to that that he was shown in the act of making his dinner on unappetizing-looking pieces of raw meat, and you will understand Nelson's lack of enthusiasm. Queen Phyllis, the fortune teller, while not particularly beautiful, was much more pleasing to look upon. The last picture was that of "Zul-Zul, the Celebrated Albino Prima Donna," singing before the crowned heads of Europe. Having exhausted the fascinations of Zul-Zul, Nelson wandered unchallenged into the main tent and found a squad of men erecting the seats. Even that palled after awhile, and he went out again and walked through the lane formed of the chariots and wagons. The cages were still boarded up, but the legends outside threw some light on the identity of the occupants. "Numidian Lion," he read; "Asiatic Zebra," "Black Wolves," "Royal Bengal Tiger." Now and then a cage would rock on its springs as its occupant moved about, and sometimes a snarl or a grunt reached his ears. A strip of canvas festooned the big tent on the roadside and bore the inscription in big black letters:

MURRAY AND WIRT'S
MAMMOTH COMBINED
SHOWS.

AMERICA'S GREATEST CIRCUS
AND HIPPODROME!

At a little after seven, having seen all that was to be seen at

present, he returned to the camp. On his way he stopped for a look at the elephant and camel, which were breakfasting on a bale of hay. In broad daylight the elephant was distinctly disappointing. He wasn't much larger than the camel, as far as height and length went, but there was a good deal more of him. He was secured by a short chain which led from an iron ring around one hind foot to a stake driven in the ground. He ate slowly and thoughtfully, with much unnecessary gesticulation of his trunk. He was sadly deficient in the matter of tusks, for he showed only one, and that one had been broken off about three inches from his mouth and looked much in need of cleaning. Yes, Nelson was disappointed in the elephant. Nor, for that matter, was the camel much more satisfying. He was a dirty, rusty camel with a malicious gleam in his little eyes and a forbidding way of snarling his upper lip back over his discolored teeth.

"Oh, don't be so grouchy," muttered Nelson. "I'm not going to swipe any of your old hay."

When he got back to the knoll he found only Barry fully awake, although Dan showed symptoms of wakefulness, muttering away at a great rate and throwing his arms about. While Nelson watched, the expected happened. One of Dan's arms descended forcibly on Tom's nose, and Tom awoke with an indignant snort.

"Hello, Nel," he muttered. "What time is it?"

"About a quarter after seven, I guess. I can't tell you exactly, for I seem to have mislaid my watch."

Tom gave his attention to Dan.

"Here, wake up, you lazy brute!" he cried. "Want to sleep all

day?”

He accompanied this remark with a violent tweak of Dan’s nose, and the effect was instantaneous. Dan sat up with a start and sent Barry flying on to Bob.

“Wh-what’s the matter?” he asked, startled.

“Time to get up,” said Tom virtuously.

“That’s right,” agreed Nelson. “Everyone’s eating breakfast.”

“Huh!” said Tom. “Wish I was.”

“Who’s eating breakfast?” asked Bob, rolling over with the struggling terrier in his arms.

“Well, the elephant and the camel, for two,” answered Nelson.

“Elephant and cam—!” ejaculated Dan. “Say, that’s what comes of sleeping in the moonlight. I’ve heard of it before. I wonder if you’re daffy, too, Bob. Are you? Try and say something sensible and let’s see.”

“The moonlight can’t have any effect on you,” said Bob significantly. Dan sighed.

“You too! I feared it! Say, Nelson, how are the pelicans and the white mice getting on? Had their hot chocolate yet?”

“I didn’t see them,” answered Nelson. “But the Numidian lion and the royal Bengal tiger aren’t up yet.”

“You don’t say? Dear, dear, most careless of them! Say, Tommy, how about you? Are you—er—?” Dan tapped his forehead.

“I will be if I don’t get something to eat pretty soon,” replied Tom dolefully. “How soon does that telegraph office open?”

“Eight, I guess,” said Nelson. “Wonder where we can wash up a bit?”

“How about the farmhouse over there?” suggested Bob.

“All right, I guess. Let’s break camp and go over. By the way, I saw Jerry a little while ago.”

“Jerry who?” asked Tom.

“Jerry Hinkley.”

Dan, who had started to get up, sank back again and viewed Nelson with real concern.

“What are you talking about?” he demanded.

“Why, Jerry Hinkley,” answered Nelson with a laugh. “Haven’t forgotten Jerry, have you?”

Dan shook his head sorrowfully.

“No, but you’d better forget him. Joking aside, Nel, what’s the matter with you?”

“Oh, nothing. Or—well, the fact is, I thought I saw things; elephants and camels and—and circuses, you know. I suppose I must have dreamed it.”

“Well, rather!” said Dan relievedly.

“What was Jerry doing?” asked Bob. “Feeding the elephant peanuts or riding the camel?”

“He was setting the table,” replied Nelson gravely.

“Say, you must have had a corking nightmare!” exclaimed

Tom. “I did a little dreaming myself; dreamed I was freezing to death, for one thing; but I didn’t see any menageries.”

“Well, come on, fellows,” said Bob. “Pack up and let’s get a move on. We’ll get them to loan us some water over at the house and then mosey toward town. Gee, I’m beastly hungry! Feel as though I hadn’t had a thing to eat for six weeks.”

“I had a cup of coffee about an hour ago,” said Nelson musingly.

“Say, chuck it, will you?” begged Dan earnestly. “You make me feel creepy, Nel.”

“Was it hot?” asked Tom in far-away tones as he tied up his pack.

“Boiling,” answered Nelson. “It was great. I wished you fellows had been there.”

“Thanks. Where was it?” asked Bob. “In the Sahara desert?”

“No; down at the mess tent.”

“What mess tent? Jerry’s?”

“Well, he was there. That’s where I met him. It was the circus mess tent. The cook gave it to me. It was peachy!”

“Su-say!” cried Tom. “Maybe he isn’t lying, fellows! You know there was to be a circus here to-day!”

“Yes, that’s what made Nel dream of ’em,” said Bob.

But Tom was studying Nelson’s face attentively, and something about his smile made Tom suspect that he was on the right track.

“I’ll bu-bu-bet you it’s su-su-su-so!” cried Tom. “Where is

it, Nel?”

“Come on,” said Nelson.

They followed him up to the brow of the hill. Before them lay the tents and the wagons, and, nearer at hand, the elephant and the camel were still quietly eating breakfast. They stared in amazement.

“Well, I’ll be bu-bu-bu-bu——!”

“Of course you will, Tommy,” said Nelson soothingly. “Only don’t explode.”

“—bu-bu-bu-blowed!” ended Tom triumphantly. “Wouldn’t that cu-cu-cu-craze you?”

Then Nelson had to tell them all about it.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH JERRY TELLS HIS STORY AND DAN PROVIDES DINNER

They dragged Dan away from the elephant and set out for the town and the telegraph office.

"I hope the money is there," said Tom. "Of course I want to eat, but to stay here where there's a circus and not be able to get in would be worse than starving."

"And such a bee-oo-tiful elephant," sighed Dan. "I could look for hours at that elephant and watch him curl his trunk up. Why weren't we made with trunks, do you suppose?"

"I suppose little boys like Tommy would only have suit cases?" inquired Bob.

"Robert, that is a bum joke," answered Dan severely. "Only the consideration that you are weak and faint from want of food restrains me from punishing you severely. Also Nel."

"What have I done?"

"It's what you didn't do. You didn't wake me up when the circus walked into our bedroom. Don't you think I like to see camels and lions and things as well as you do? And hot coffee too! You were pretty mean to have all that fun by yourself."

"That's what!" concurred Tom.

"Well, there's the telegraph office," said Bob. "Say, fellows, supposing—supposing it hasn't come!"

"Maybe it hasn't—yet," said Dan anxiously. "It's only a

little after eight, and if dad didn't send it last night——"

"We ought to have said 'Send immediately,'" interrupted Bob regretfully.

"That's so," agreed Tom; "immediately, if not sooner. But pshaw, why, I can just smell that money!"

"Wish I could smell the breakfast," laughed Nelson. "Here we are."

"Good morning," said Dan. "Anything here for me?"

The operator shook his head.

"Nothing yet," he answered.

They looked disappointed, and he added:

"Brooklyn's sort of slow this morning, though; maybe your message is coming."

"It's more the money I want than the message," said Dan.

"Oh, well, the money wouldn't be likely to get here for an hour or so yet. When was it sent?"

"I don't know. Last night, I hope."

"If it was sent last night it ought to be here now," said the operator.

"What'll we do?" asked Dan.

"I'm going back to the circus," said Tom. "If I've got to starve I'd rather do it there where I can keep my mind off my troubles."

"So am I," said Nelson.

"I guess we might as well all go," said Dan. "I'll come back

in an hour," he added to the operator. "It ought surely to be here by that time, don't you think?"

"I should think so," answered the operator. "Sorry I haven't got it for you now."

"Thanks. It isn't your fault, though. Come on, fellow-poverns."

"What's a povern?" asked Tom.

"It's a chap who hasn't any money," answered Dan glumly, "like you and me, Tommy, and Bob and Nelson—and Barry."

"Oh," said Tom disappointedly; "I thought maybe it was something to eat. I guess I was thinking of muffins."

"Don't do it; that way lies madness."

When they turned into the circus grounds again they put Barry back on his leash, for he showed a most unchristian attitude toward the elephant and camel. For an hour they wandered about or sat on some packing boxes at the back of the dressing tent and tried to forget that they were hungry. Then Dan and Barry left them and set off for the telegraph office once more. By that time the scene had become animated again. The horses were being hitched to the wagons and chariots, performers in costume were issuing from the dressing tent, and the elephant and camel were being decked in spangled red blankets. Tom made inquiries and learned that there was to be a parade through Millford and on a mile farther to where the summer colony was situated. Things were quite exciting for the next half hour and when all was in readiness the boys went down to the road to watch the procession pass out.

First there was an intensely dignified gentleman in hunting costume, pink coat, high hat, and all, who rode ahead on a big white horse. Then came the band, eight dejected-looking men in red tunics sitting in a boat-shaped barge. After them followed the elephant conducted by an Irishman in Arab dress who carried a short spear. The elephant's name, if the faded red blanket was to be believed, was Hercules. The blanket said so in large letters. But the Irish Arab called him "Charlie." A lady with golden hair, attired in a flowing white costume of cheesecloth made up according to the fashions prevailing in Greece many centuries ago, stood in a golden chariot and drove three well-behaved black horses abreast. A second chariot, drawn by three bay horses, was presided over by a red-faced gentleman in Roman costume. A line of animal cages followed. Then came a small pony cart hauled by a black-and-white pony and driven by a clown, a very sad-looking individual indeed. More cages, many empty; a calliope with the musician smoking a big black cigar; a float upon which five white-cheesecloth-attired ladies sat in various attitudes of discomfort; two lady jockeys driving white horses in tandem; more clowns, one riding a donkey and the others occupying a small carriage; the camel ridden by a man in a pair of baggy blue trousers and a green jacket; three trick ponies led by small boys; an ancient barouche occupied by four gentlemen in full dress and bearing placards advertising the show. That was the last of it. It trailed slowly away in the direction of the village, and the boys slipped off the fence.

"Let's go and find Jerry," suggested Nelson. "He said he wasn't busy at ten, and I guess it must be pretty near that time now. Gee, but I miss my watch!"

"And I miss my money," said Tom.

“Wait a minute,” said Bob. “Here comes Dan. Did you get it, Dan?”

Dan shook his head sadly.

“Thunder!” muttered Tom.

“Do you suppose your father’s away?” asked Bob.

“I don’t believe so. He doesn’t very often go away. Anyhow, mother would be pretty sure to open the message.”

“I think one of us had better telegraph,” said Nelson.

“Wait until noon,” said Bob.

“We’ll be starved by that time,” objected Tom.

“Look here, fellows,” said Dan. “If that money doesn’t come by twelve o’clock, I’ll get some dinner for you.”

“How?”

“I don’t know how yet. But I’ll do it, so don’t you worry. I’m mighty sorry, and I don’t see what the trouble can be.”

“Oh, don’t bother,” said Bob, noting Dan’s downcast looks. “We’ll do well enough. Who wants to eat, anyway?”

“Not I,” said Nelson. “Food has no attraction for me; I’m above it.”

“It’s bad for the digestion,” added Tom. “Let’s find Jerry. Maybe he’ll present us with a crust of bread.”

“If you ask him for food,” threatened Bob, “I’ll lick you, Tommy, till you can’t stand up—or sit down either, for that matter.”

“Who’s going to ask him?” muttered Tom. “I was only in

fun.”

They found Jerry sitting on one of the trestles outside the mess tent reading a book. When they hailed him he laid the book aside rather hurriedly, but later Nelson caught a glimpse of the cover. It was a battered arithmetic. Jerry shook hands all around and was formally introduced to Barry, and they climbed to the trestle beside him and asked dozens of questions. Above all they wanted to know how Jerry came to be with the circus.

“It sort of happened,” he said. “The day after you all was at the farm, dad sent me over to Newbury with a load of hay for the circus. I got there about eight o’clock and after I’d thrown the load off I hitched the horses and looked around a bit. And I happened to get along to the mess tent just when Mr. Foley—that’s the head cook and the man that gave you the coffee—was tellin’ Mr. Wirt—he’s one of the proprietors, you know—that he wouldn’t work another day without a boy to help him. You see, the boy they had before I came, had run away two days before, when they was showing at Flushing. So after the boss went away I up and asked Mr. Foley did he want a boy. He said he did, and I said I’d like the job. He looked me over and said for me to go and see Mr. Wirt. So I seen Mr. Wirt, and he hired me. Then I drove the hayrick home and came back in the afternoon.”

“That was slick,” said Tom. “Do you like it?”

“Yes, I like it. It’s kind of hard, but Mr. Foley and Mr. Jones are mighty good to me. I get three dollars and a half a week and plenty to eat.”

“Did your father want you to go?” asked Nelson.

Jerry shook his head.

"No; but after I'd explained to him he didn't mind—much. You see, it's kind of lonesome for dad without me there. But I told him I had to earn some money because I was going to school next year, and he said it was all right. Course I ain't goin' to stay here all winter. The show goes South next month, and I'm goin' to quit then. I got a place on a farm promised me in October, over near Barrington."

"That's fine," said Nelson. "You still intend to go to Hillton?"

"Yes. Do you—do you think I could?"

"Of course you can," answered Nelson heartily. "Only—you'd better study whenever you get a chance."

"I'm goin' to."

"It would be nice," said Dan, "if you could go to one of the schools around here this winter."

"Yes; I thought of that," answered Jerry, "but I couldn't do it, I guess; leastways, not if I was to make any money. And I got to have money," he added doggedly.

Dan looked inquiringly at Nelson and Bob, but each shook his head, counseling silence as to their conspiracy.

"Does the circus make much money?" asked Tom.

"I guess so," Jerry replied. "Sometimes we don't have very big crowds, and then again sometimes we have to pack 'em into the tent like oats in a grain bin. A good deal depends on the weather, they say. They're sort of lookin' for a big crowd this afternoon an' a slim one to-night. This ain't a very good

show place, Mr. Foley says, but it's better to make a little here than to miss a performance, like we'd have to do if we went right on to Patchogue."

Jerry put his hand in his pocket and brought out four soiled oblongs of red pasteboard.

"I thought maybe you fellers would like to go," he said, handing the admission tickets to Dan. "Those ain't for reserved seats, but the reserves ain't much better'n the others, far's I can see."

"That's awfully kind of you," said Dan, and the others echoed his sentiment.

"Can you get all the tickets you want?" asked Nelson.

"N-no," answered Jerry; "they don't give many away."

"Well, they must like you, Jerry, to give you all these," said Tom.

Jerry studied his hands a moment.

"I—they didn't exactly give me them," he owned finally.

"Do you mean that you bought them?" asked Tom.

"Yes; but 'tain't anything," Jerry responded with elaborate carelessness.

"But—but—!" stammered Tom.

Nelson reached across with his foot and kicked Tom's shin.

"It's mighty good of you, Jerry," he said gratefully. "Are you going to be there?"

"Somewheres about, I guess."

“Well, couldn’t you go with us and—and sort of explain things?”

Jerry’s face lighted eagerly.

“Guess I could if you want me to,” he answered.

“All right. We’ll look for you here, then. What time does it begin?”

“Half-past two. I’ll be here and I’ll look for you. You won’t see as good a show as usual, though,” he continued apologetically. “You see, we ain’t got Donello any more. He left us day before yesterday.”

“Who’s he?” asked Bob.

“He’s the fellow does the high dive,” answered Jerry. “Ain’t you seen the show bills? He climbs up a ladder on to a little platform about thirty feet in the air an’ dives into a tank an’ turns a somersault comin’ down. The bills say that there ain’t but three feet of water in the tank, but that ain’t so, ’cause the tank’s set down in the ground about two feet. It’s a fine trick, that is, an’ the first time I seen it I was most scared to death. But he an’ Mr. Murray had a quarrel, an’ he lit out. Mr. Murray’s been telegraphin’ around ever since tryin’ to get some one to take his place, but I guess he ain’t found anyone.”

“How far did you say he dives?” asked Dan.

“’Bout thirty feet, but it looks a lot more. An’ when he gets up there he says ‘Ready!’ in a little squeaky voice that sounds like he was about a mile away. An’ then the drums beat an’ he comes down headfirst a ways. Then he flips himself over, an’ the ringmaster he shouts ‘In mid-air!’ an’ then Donello he comes plump into the tank headfirst; an’ everyone sets up a

shoutin’ an’ a clappin’. It’s certainly”—Jerry searched for a word—“in-*spi*-rating.”

“It must be,” said Dan gravely. “I wonder what time it is.”

Jerry looked up at the sun.

“’Bout eleven, I guess,” he answered. “I got to get to work. The parade’ll be back in about half an hour, an’ we have dinner at half-past twelve.”

“Well, we’ll meet you here at about a quarter past two,” said Nelson as they slid off the trestle.

“What’ll we do now?” asked Tom.

“Guess I’ll go back to the telegraph office,” said Dan.

“We’ll all go,” said Nelson. “Then if the money’s there we can find some place to have some dinner. We don’t want to miss the show. Isn’t Jerry a corker?”

“He’s all right, Jerry is,” agreed Bob. “What was that word of his? Inspi——?”

“In-*spi*-rating,” answered Tom, laughing. “I wish Donello, or whatever his name is, was going to do his stunt. It sounds pretty fine.”

“Shucks!” said Nelson, “that isn’t very much. Why, look here, Dan, you’ve done twenty-five feet often up at camp. And as for turning somersaults——!”

“That’s all right,” responded Tom warmly, “but I’ll bet you couldn’t do it, nor Dan either. It’s one thing to dive into a lake where there’s twelve feet of water and another to dive into a little old tank.”

“Five feet’s as good as twelve,” answered Dan calmly.

“Not for me it isn’t,” said Tom.

“I know, Tommy; it takes more water to float you.”

“Huh!” grunted Tom. “I can beat you floating!”

“I don’t believe you could sink if you tried,” said Dan.

“Then what did you just su-su-say it took more water——”

“Shut up, you fellows,” interrupted Bob. “Here’s the office. Let’s learn the worst.”

It was soon learned. The operator shook his head before Dan could ask a question. Tom groaned loudly.

“I’ll stay here awhile,” said Dan soberly. “You fellows go on back if you want to. I’ll be there at a little after twelve.”

“Well, all right,” said Nelson. “Only if you don’t hear by that time I’d better telegraph to my folks. Supposing I write out a message now? Then if you don’t get any word you can send it.”

So Nelson wrote a demand for fifty dollars “*immediately*,” underscoring the “immediately,” although, as Bob pointed out, the operator couldn’t send italics.

“I don’t care,” replied Nelson. “It gives me satisfaction.”

They left Dan and, after sauntering around the streets of the little village for a while, returned to the circus field in the wake of the parade. On the way they paused to admire a lithograph of “Donello, Prince of High Divers, in his Perilous Plunge of Fifty Feet into Thirty-six Inches of Water!”

“But, look here,” objected Tom, “how many of him are

there?”

Sure enough, according to the lithograph there were three distinct Donellos. One was poised on the little platform at the summit of the ladder, while two others were turning somersaults on the way down to the tiny tank.

“Oh, that’s just poetic license,” explained Nelson. “It shows him at various points in the trip. It’s the same chap, see? Blue-black hair, pink tights, and a green velvet thingumbob around the middle of him.”

“All the same,” answered Tom, “it’s a lie, that picture.”

“As far as I can see,” responded Bob sadly, “circus posters are most all lies. I guess if they just showed what there really was to see no one would go.”

“Sure,” said Nelson. “Besides, they’re mighty interesting lies. I suppose a circus man’s got as much right to tell lies in his pictures as authors have to write them in books.”

“It isn’t the same,” objected Tom. “Authors don’t tell lies to get your money out of you, and circuses do.”

“No; authors get your money first,” laughed Bob.

“Besides,” Tom continued, “that poster says fifty feet, and Jerry says it’s only thirty.”

“Poetic license again, Tommy,” said Nelson soothingly.

“It isn’t right, though,” was the stubborn response.

“Well, don’t you care, old chap; it isn’t your fault.”

“Hunger is driving Tommy into a frightful condition of pessimism,” said Bob.

“Wish I had a fried egg,” said Tom gloomily.

“Yes, all kind of golden on top and brownish around the edges,” supplemented Bob with a grin.

“Oh, cut it out,” sighed Nelson. “You’re making me have spasms inside. I suppose we might go and stand around the cook until he offered us something to eat to get rid of us, but it would be pretty low down.”

“Couldn’t be any lower down than I feel right now,” said Tom.

“Oh, I guess Dan’ll get the money this time,” said Bob hopefully.

They found a comfortable place in the sun and stretched themselves out to wait. Nelson said he was going to try to go to sleep and forget it. But he didn’t succeed. It was long past noon when Barry pounced on them and heralded Dan’s approach. They sat up quickly and looked the question none dared to ask. Dan shook his head smilingly. Tom rolled over on the grass and muttered. Even Bob lost his temper for an instant.

“You needn’t look so thundering pleased about it,” he growled.

Dan laughed and tossed something at him. Bob snatched it up. It was a two-dollar bill.

“What did you lie for?” he demanded.

“I didn’t,” answered Dan. “The money hasn’t come, nor any message either. But there’s enough for dinner.”

“Wh-wh-wh-wh-where—” began Tom.

“You needn’t ask where it came from,” said Dan, “because I’m not going to tell you. But I got it honestly, and all you’ve got to do now is to find something to eat.”

“It sounds good to me,” said Nelson, jumping up. Bob and Tom joined him, eying Dan curiously.

“Aren’t you coming?” asked Bob. Dan shook his head.

“I’ve had mine,” he answered lightly.

“I’ll bet you haven’t! Don’t be an ass, now; there’s more than enough for the four of us.”

“Honor bright, I have, Bob.”

“Where?”

“I won’t tell you. Go on and get your dinners, you chaps, and I’ll tell you all about it later. And—er—do you mind taking Barry with you? I don’t believe he had enough.”

“Will you be here when we come back?” asked Nelson suspiciously.

“Yes, somewheres around,” was the careless answer.

“There’s something mighty funny about it,” grumbled Tom as they took themselves off, Barry following unwillingly at the end of the leash.

“You bet there is,” answered Nelson. “Dan’s been up to mischief, that’s what!”

“Well, he says it’s all right,” said Bob cheerfully, “and Dan doesn’t lie. I vote we get some dinner and——”

“Hold on a bit!” cried Nelson. “Let me see that bill.”

He took it and looked it over carefully. Then he gave a sigh

of relief.

“It seems to be all right,” he said. “I didn’t know but what it might be a fake or something. You never can tell what Dan will do.”

“That’s so,” the others agreed.

And a few hours later they were more certain of it than ever.

CHAPTER XII

WITNESSES THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF "DANELLO"

They found their dinners at the first house they applied at, and good, generous dinners they were. At a quarter of two they were returning to the circus ground, and not alone. The vicinity for two weeks past had been well sprinkled with glowing posters advertising "America's Greatest Circus and Hippodrome," and now the result was in evidence. The road to the field was lined with pedestrians and filled with vehicles. The mud-specked family carryall of the farmer or the spring wagon with boards forming extra seats for the accommodation of a large family rubbed hubs with the natty phaeton or rubber-tired station 'bus from the summer settlement. That thoroughly American vehicle, the buggy, showed the national spirit of independence by rattling along in the way of impatient and arrogant English carts and supercilious French touring cars. Tom's eyes hung out of his head.

"I didn't know there were so many people on the whole island!" he exclaimed.

"They'll have a full house this afternoon, all right," said Nelson.

When they reached the field they had difficulty in working their way over to the mess tent, so great was the throng. The side show was being liberally patronized. In the shade of the pictured canvas a man, in a high silk hat and wearing a flannel shirt with a large yellow diamond in it, stood upon a box and

pointed out the attractions with a long stick.

"This way, ladies and gentlemen!" he cried. "Don't forget the Side Show, the Palace of Mysteries, the Greatest Aggregation of Natural Curiosities ever placed before the American Public. Step up, ladies and gentlemen! It is only ten cents, a dime, the tenth part of a dollar! 'Twill neither make nor break! The Performance in the Main Tent does not begin for half an hour. You have plenty of time to visit the Hall of Wonders! See the Snake Charmer in her wonderful demonstration of Psychic Force! A beautiful young girl who handles the deadly rattlesnake, the formidable boa constrictor, and the treacherous Indian Cobra as a child fondles a kitten! Only a dime, ten cents! See Boris, the Wild Man of the Tartary Steppes! Lives on raw flesh, sleeps but one hour in the twenty-four, and speaks no word of any known language! A puzzle to the Scientists of all Countries! Listen to the Albino Patti, whose voice has the greatest range of any singer in the world and has delighted the ears of Royalty all over the Civilized Globe! Step up! Step up! Step up! Have your fortunes told by Queen Phyllis! Tells the past and the future! Reads your mind like an open book! Advises you in affairs of business for the ridiculously small price of fifteen cents. The greatest Fortune Teller of the Age! This way to the Side Show! Step up! Step up! Step up! Step up!"

Tom listened with open mouth.

"Let's go in," he whispered. "We've got half a dollar yet."

"Oh, come on," laughed Nelson, dragging him forcibly away from the enticing "barker" and the lurid canvas. "It's nearly quarter past, and we've got to find Jerry."

They pushed their way through the jostling throng, seeking

the mess tent. Since morning dealers in lemonade, sandwiches, photographs, souvenir post cards, and many other things had set up their tables. A five-cent photograph tent was doing a rushing business, and a man with a cane-toss outfit was fast becoming rich. Bob wanted to linger at the post-card booth, but Nelson pulled him away only to discover the next instant that they had lost Tom. He was discovered finally, watching the efforts of a country youth to capture a pocket-knife by throwing a wooden ring over the head of a cane.

"Say, Bob, lend me ten cents, will you?" he begged. "I'll just bet I can do that!"

"No, sir," answered Bob firmly; "you come along here."

Eventually they reached the mess tent and found Jerry awaiting them.

"Have you seen Dan?" they asked.

"Dan?" repeated Jerry, looking about as though that youth might be hidden under the wagon or the trestles. "He ain't here. Have you lost him?"

"We left him an hour ago and he promised to be around here, but he didn't say where. I thought maybe he was with you," answered Nelson. Jerry shook his head again.

"No, he ain't here."

"Well, we'll wait awhile. Maybe he'll turn up if he hasn't got lost."

But he didn't, and when the strains of the band reached them from the big tent Tom refused to sit still a moment longer.

"Come on," he said impatiently. "He's got his ticket. Maybe

he's in there now. We're missing half the fun."

So, led by Jerry, who seemed strangely excited for a boy who had been part and parcel of the show for several days, they made their way to the main tent, Nelson carrying Barry in his arms to keep him from being walked on. They fought their way through the narrow entrance and found seats near the end of the tent. There was one ring and a stage. Suddenly Tom nudged Nelson.

"Look, I'll bet they've got Donello back," he said. "See there? That's the ladder and the tank like pictures show them."

"Yes," said Jerry; "I heard they'd found a fellow to take Donello's place, but it ain't Donello himself. Here comes the grand march."

The curtains at the far end of the tent were pulled aside, and a procession of horses and chariots and animals entered and lumbered around the tan bark to the martial strains of the overworked band. Hercules wobbled along in a world-weary way, swaying his trunk as though keeping time to the music. The camel followed. Tom said he looked as though he was trying to do a cake walk. Then the three clowns suddenly appeared, fell over the ropes in time-honored fashion, and the performance began. It wasn't a half-bad show, the boys agreed, Bob pointing out the fact that it was an advantage to have only one ring because you didn't get cross-eyed trying to see two or three things at the same time. The bareback riding was good, the trick roller-skaters fair, and the clowns quite as funny as clowns ever are. Everybody ate peanuts and threw the shells on everybody else, the air grew heavy with dust, and the band played tirelessly. Tom sat with fascinated gaze and saw everything that went on. Jerry told interesting inside history of

the performers, and was greatly pleased at the evident enjoyment of his friends. It was the first time in his life that Jerry had ever treated anybody and acted as host, and he was proud and elated. The afternoon wore along and the performance with it. The ringmaster mounted the stage and invited everybody to remain for the Minstrel Show and Popular Concert to be held immediately after the conclusion of the performance.

"An amusing, instructive, and moral entertainment," he declared, "that no one should miss. Tickets are ten cents apiece. Gentlemanly agents will now pass through the audience, and all wishing to do so may purchase tickets to the Concert. Remember, they are but ten cents apiece. Keep your seats, Ladies and Gentlemen! The best part of the afternoon's performance is still to be seen!"

Whereupon, as if by magic, vociferous men appeared everywhere shouting "Tickets to the Minstrel Show and Concert! Only ten cents! Tickets here! Who wants a ticket?"

"Here he comes!" whispered Jerry excitedly.

"Who?" asked Nelson.

"The fellow that's going to dive," answered Jerry. "That's him coming along there by the ropes. See?"

But they couldn't see very well, for Donello's substitute was at the other end of the tent from them and various persons intervened. They did, however, catch sight of a figure in pink fleshings with green velvet trunks. Then the ringmaster introduced "Signor Donello, the World-Renowned Aërial Diver," and the drums rolled while the figure in pink fleshings bowed gracefully and turned to the ladder. Up he went,

nimbly, hand over hand, until he stood on the tiny two-foot platform attached to the top of the ladder high up under the creamy canvas roof. Then he turned and looked down, and for the first time the boys saw his face.

Nelson gasped, Bob half rose from his seat, Tom shouted:

"*Dan!*"

Nelson pulled him back to his seat.

"Shut up, you idiot!" he whispered hoarsely. "He'll hear you and get nervous."

"Bu-bu-bu-but he'll bu-bu-bu-break his nu-nu-neck!" cried Tom.

"Not Dan," answered Nelson, but with more confidence than he felt. "Just the same, it's a fool stunt."

"He ought to be licked," growled Bob nervously.

"Do you think he's tried it?" asked Nelson.

"Yes; he practiced before the tent opened," said Jerry. "I knew about it, but he made me promise not to tell."

"I'll bet he did," said Nelson savagely. "He knew plaguy well we'd have stopped him. That's where he got the money he gave us, I guess."

"Wh-wh-why don't he jump?" asked Tom, squirming in his place. "Do you su-su-suppose he's scared?"

"That's part of it," explained Jerry. "Donello always did that. It gets you sort of scared-like and anxious."

It certainly did. Tom's face looked like a piece of white paper. Bob was scowling at his programme. Even Nelson, in

spite of his confidence in Dan's ability to do most anything he made up his mind to do, looked rather miserable. Jerry was the least anxious of the four,—but he had witnessed the trials. The only entirely unperturbed member of the group was Barry. Barry was sniffing the mingled odors of the tent with calm curiosity.

High up above the ridiculously tiny tank of water, which to the uninitiated seemed barely deep enough to bathe in, stood Dan. He held a handkerchief in his hand the while he measured the distance. Then, carefully, he stepped to the edge of the little ledge, dropped the handkerchief, which went fluttering slowly down, accentuating the distance, and let his arms fall straight to his sides.

There was scarcely a sound throughout the crowded tent. The audience sat with upturned faces and fast-beating hearts. Tom's fingers were gripped fiercely into his legs as he watched with staring fascinated eyes. Bob was breathing like a steam engine. Nelson, hands stuffed into pockets, held his underlip between his teeth and made no sound. Barry was standing in his lap and was now sniffing excitedly, his little nose pointing toward the figure on the platform and twitching violently.

The ringmaster held up one gloved hand. The bandmaster raised his baton.

"*Ready!*"

The voice sounded a quarter of a mile away, and Nelson shivered. The pink-clad figure gave a little hop from the edge of the platform and shot downward like a flash of light. The drums broke into a roll. The ringmaster cried "*Hi!*" and snapped his long whip. When a third of the way down "Signor Donello's" arms shot out and his body revolved.

"*In mid-air!*" cried the ringmaster exultantly.

Another drop and again the falling body turned head over heels, while the drums rolled faster and the cymbals crashed. The new Donello had beaten the old one at his own trick! The next instant there was a splash and a cloud of flying spray as the body plunged headfirst into the tank.

A gasp of relief arose from the audience, and then the applause thundered forth, applause which quickly turned to laughter. For, as the performer climbed over the edge of the tank, a white streak bounded across the ring and leaped at his face. Barry had found his master.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEREIN THEY MEET THE WILD MAN OF THE TARTARY STEPPES

They were talking it over. It was after five o'clock and they were sitting in the deserted dressing tent, to which Dan, as was his privilege as a member of "America's Greatest Circus and Hippodrome," had invited them. Barry was curled up in Dan's lap. Jerry had taken himself away to his duties.

"I knew I could do it," Dan was explaining. "When Jerry told about it I just made up my mind that if the money didn't come I'd go to Murray and ask for the place. And I did. He didn't think I was quite right in my mind at first, but I asked him to let me show what I could do, and finally he agreed. Then"—Dan grinned reminiscently—"then I borrowed two dollars and a half from him, half the pay for one performance ____"

"Gosh! Did he only give you five dollars for doing that?" asked Tom.

"Well, I wanted more, but he said he'd only paid Donello five, so I gave in. Then I had some lunch in the village, found you fellows, gave you that two dollars, and went to the tent. They had got the ladder and tank filled up, and I got into my tights. Jerry went with me to see fair play. He didn't want me to try it, Jerry didn't, but I shut him up and made him promise not to tell you fellows."

"Lucky you did," grunted Bob.

“That’s what I thought,” laughed Dan. “But, pshaw, it wasn’t any stunt! Just a straight drop; and there wasn’t any possibility of missing the tank.”

“But supposing you had?” asked Nelson quietly. Dan turned and looked at him a second.

“Well, then I’d got considerably messed up, I guess,” he answered soberly. “Well, I tried a dive from about twenty feet up first; the platform is adjustable, you see; and it went all right. Then I went clear up and tried it from the top. And that went all right too. It seemed a long ways down at first, and I wondered whether the tank would stay there until I got to it. But it did. Then I did it again and tried a somersault. Murray was tickled to death. ‘You stay with us,’ he said, ‘and you’ll be making big money in a year or two.’ Then I thought to myself, what’s the use in doing only one flop when there’s lots of time for two? I asked Murray, but he didn’t like it at first. Said Donello was considered one of the best in the business and he was always satisfied with one turn. But I made up my mind to try it, and I did. It was dead easy. Murray wanted to hug me. Then he wanted me to sign a contract for six months and went up on his price; offered me two hundred dollars a month for two performances daily.”

“Gee!” gasped Tom.

“Well, that’s what I thought,” answered Dan with a laugh. “And I had to think a long while before I got up courage to say no. But that wasn’t the last of it. He’s after me yet. Maybe he’ll get me after all.”

“Not if I know it!” said Nelson indignantly. “I’d send for your dad the first thing. Nice stunts for a chap who’s just out of bed from typhoid fever!”

“Just out of bed, your granny! Well, anyway, I’ve agreed to do it again to-night.”

“You have!”

“Yep.”

“Oh, cut it out,” said Bob. “We’ve got money enough. Besides, maybe your dad’s telegram is at the office by this time.”

“I know, but I can’t go back on my promise, and I promised to perform twice.”

“Well, don’t you go and try to improve on it,” begged Nelson. “Don’t try to put in three somersaults instead of two.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Dan, grinning, “that’s an idea! I hadn’t thought of that!”

“Shut up!” begged Nelson. “If you try that trick you’ll be Done-ello for sure.”

“Instead of *Dan*ello,” added Tom.

“Wasn’t it great about Barry?” asked Nelson. “He was on my lap and I didn’t know what he was up to until he was kiting across lots with his leash dangling after him. Did you hear the crowd laugh? Barry made the hit of the performance.”

“Well, how about supper? Suppose you fellows come with me. I’m to eat with the push here, and I guess Murray’ll let you come along if I agree to pay for you.”

“That’s dandy!” said Tom. “We’ll eat with Zul-Zul and the Wild Man!”

“You’d better look out, Tommy,” Bob advised. “Maybe

he'll eat you, you're so fat and rosy."

So Dan disappeared for a moment, and presently returned with the news that Murray had given him permission to take the others to supper as his guests.

"He's mighty nice to you, isn't he?" asked Nelson sarcastically.

That supper was one of the ever-remembered features of the trip. Jerry found places for them at one end of the long table, and they looked about them with frank curiosity. Overhead naphtha torches flared, throwing deep shadows on the pine boards that formed the table. The sides of the tent were up here and there, and from without came the sound of the crickets, the voices of Mr. Foley and his companion at the stoves, and the scrape and clash of pans and utensils. Inside, the air became hot and heavy under the shallow curve of canvas, the tin plates and cups glimmered, the steam drifted up from the hot viands, and the noise was at first deafening.

This was the first table, Jerry informed them, and accommodated the performers and the "staff," the "staff" being the management. The canvasmen, drivers, animal men, and the other hands ate later at a second table. Across from the Four sat the ringmaster, between a pleasant-faced and rather elderly woman and a thin youth with pale cheeks whom Nelson recognized as the leader of the "family" of trick skaters. He wondered who the woman was, and would have been wondering yet, doubtless, had not his neighbor, a good-natured little Irishman, come to his assistance.

"You're frinds of the laddie that did the jomp?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Nelson. "We four are together. We're

taking a walking trip along the island."

"Is thot so? Well, I didn't see the jomp myself, but I heard the boys talkin' about it. 'Twas a pretty lape, they said."

"Yes; but I was awfully scared. I was afraid he'd miss the tank."

"I suppose so. Is he goin' to shtay wid the show?"

"Oh, no; he only joined for to-day." Nelson told briefly of the robbery and their subsequent adventures, and the little Irishman chuckled enjoyably.

"Sure, 'tis the plucky lad he is. But he's right, the circus be's no place for a gintleman."

"Do you belong?" asked Nelson innocently. Then he blushed and stammered until the Irishman laughed his embarrassment away.

"Sure, there's no offinse, me boy. I'm no gintleman. Yes, I belongs to the show. Now, what would you think I was, sir?"

Nelson studied him a moment and shook his head.

"Are you—are you a clown?"

"Faith, no," chuckled the other, "'tis not as bad as thot. Was you in the side show? No? Well, you'd have seen me there if you'd been. They call me 'Boris,' bedad! 'Tis a disgraceful, onchristian name, but it's money in me pocket."

"Boris? Why, I thought Boris was the—the——"

"The Wild Mon of the Tar-*tary* Shteppes? Thot's me, me lad. Raw mate's me shpecialty and I shpake no word of any known language."

Nelson glanced at the Wild Man's plate, well filled with steak and potatoes, and laughed. The Wild Man joined him.

"'Tis a faker I am. Me name's Thomas Cronan an' I was born in the wilds of County Clare, which is the grane garden spot of ould Ireland. Sure, we're all fakers in the side show. Mrs. Wheet over there is 'Princess Zoe' and does thricks with three ould shnakes thot's had the shtingers yanked out of them. She's a lady, too, me boy, if iver there was one."

Nelson, to his surprise, discovered that "Princess Zoe" was the nice-looking elderly lady at the ringmaster's right.

"An' further along there," continued his informant, "is 'Zul-Zul,' which her name is Maude Harris. She used to be an equistreen—rode the horses, you know—till she had a fall and hurted her back. Thin she blached her hair and now they call her an al-bin-o, which is an ungodly name to my mind."

"She—she sings, doesn't she?" asked Nelson, observing the young lady in question.

"Same as onybody sings, me boy, no more an' no less."

"Oh," said Nelson. "And do you—like being a Wild Man?"

"I do an' I don't," responded the other judicially. "'Tis asy money, but the life's confinin'. I'm thinkin' I had the best of it when I was drivin' the tent wagon. Thot's what I used to do. Come an' see me this avenin', an' bring your frinds. Tell Billy Conly, the feller outside, I said he was to let you in."

"Thanks," answered Nelson. "And I'll bring some raw meat with me."

"Sure," answered the Wild Man, laughing as he arose from the table, "it's kind of you, me boy, but I could ate no more to-

night. We're shmall aters on the Tar-*tary* Shteppes."

After supper Nelson and Dan walked to the telegraph office, and this time found the money awaiting them. There was also a telegram from Mr. Speede.

"Away when your message came," it read. "Have sent fifty. Sorry for delay. Try and write oftener and send address."

"I guess they're worrying about us having the money swiped," said Dan. "I'll write to-morrow. There ought to be some letters for us at Bahogue. Supposing we walk on there to-night after the show? It's only about four miles and it'll be fairly light, I guess. Wait." He turned back to the operator. "What's a good hotel at Bahogue?" he asked.

"There's the Seaview and the Bahogue House. They're both good, I guess."

"Seaview sounds good to me," said Dan. "Is there an office at Bahogue?"

"Yes."

"Good. Give me a blank."

"Reserve two rooms for me to-night," wrote Dan. "Will arrive about midnight. D. H. F. Speede."

"Will you get that off for me, please?" he asked.

They paid for the message, thanked the operator, said good night, and went back to the circus, Barry, off his leash for the moment, cutting all sorts of wild capers. Later the Four paid a visit to the side show. The performance in the main tent had begun, and they had the place almost to themselves. The Wild Man of the Tartary Steppes was seated in a chair on a platform.

He was dressed in yellow tights with a strip of leopard skin about his hips and a string of bones about his neck. A formidable club rested against his knees. On his head was a wig of loose and long black hair, and his face was painted with black and red stripes. He was not attractive, but nevertheless the picture on the canvas outside was a base libel. He tipped Nelson a portentous wink, jabbered something at him, and made signs with his hands which Nelson translated as demands for raw meat. There were a few people wandering about the tent, and so Nelson and the others waited until they had gone before approaching the wild man. Then,

"Well, boys," said Mr. Cronan, "how are ye the avenin'?"

"Fine," answered Nelson. "I've brought my friends in to see you. They've never seen a Wild Man before."

"Think of thot!" sighed Mr. Cronan. "Sure where was they edicated?"

"Are you going to eat any raw meat this evening?" asked Tom with a grin.

"Have you ony wid you?"

Tom had to acknowledge that he hadn't.

"There it is, then," sighed Mr. Cronan again. "How am I to ate it if I haven't got it? 'Tis onreasonable you are, me lad."

There were several photographs of the Wild Man lying along the edge of the platform, and Nelson picked one up and looked at it.

"Ain't thot a beautiful thing?" asked Mr. Cronan. "Does it do me justice, do you think? Put it in your pocket, me boy, an' show it to your frinds when you git home. Tell 'em 'tis the

picter of a Wild Mon what chased ye down on Long Island."

"I'd like to have it," laughed Nelson, "but I'd rather pay you for it."

"You pays nothin'," answered Mr. Cronan firmly. "Put it in your pocket, like I say, wid me compliments. Howld on! Give it me a minute." The Wild Man found a stump of a pencil in a hidden pocket, inverted the photograph on his knee, stuck his tongue in his cheek, and laboriously wrote. "There, 'tis much more valuable now."

Nelson accepted it and thanked him. On the back was written in letters half an inch high: "Your frand, Thomas Cronan, the wild man." They were formally introduced to the Snake Charmer, the Albino Patti, and the Fortune Teller; also to a sad-looking little man in a suit of misfit clothes whose duty it was to lecture about the attractions. Presently they said good-by to Mr. Cronan and went out to the ticket booth. Dan tried to pay for three reserved seats for his companions, but the ticket seller refused to accept any money.

"Go ahead in," he said smilingly, pushing the tickets and the money toward them. "This is on the show."

So they thanked him, presented their tickets, and were shown to seats, Dan, however, leaving them to go to the dressing tent and taking Barry with him. There was not so great a crowd as in the afternoon, but for all that the big tent was comfortably filled. They had grown to know a number of the performers by sight now, and the evening performance proved more interesting for that reason. Dan's fame had spread, and when, near the end of the performance, he appeared at the foot of the ladder, quite a salvo of applause greeted him.

“Look at Barry!” exclaimed Tom.

Dan had brought the terrier in with him, and now, when he began to mount the ladder, Barry started after him. The audience laughed and clapped. Barry managed three rounds of the ladder by hooking his paws over them and dragging his body up, but that was as high as he could get. Three times he made the attempt and three times he tumbled off. Then he gave it up, barked once, and stood watching his master. As before, the tent became stilled, Dan’s voice came down eerily from the platform, the drums rolled, the ringmaster cracked his whip and shouted his shrill “*In mid-air!*” the dropping pink figure revolved twice, and the water splashed from the tank. Then, as the applause broke out, Dan’s wet head appeared, and Barry leaped frantically toward it. Fighting the terrier off, Dan scrambled from the tank with the assistance of two of the red-coated men, and, grabbing Barry in his arms, disappeared toward the dressing tent.

Afterwards they sought and found Jerry. The mess tent was gone, the wagon packed, and that department was all ready for the road.

“Where do you go next, Jerry?” Bob asked.

“Ridgefield,” answered Jerry. “It’s about forty miles. We travel all night.”

“Don’t you ever go by railroad?” asked Nelson.

“Not when we can help it. It costs more, you see. Some of the performers take the train, though.”

“Well, good-by, Jerry. Take care of yourself; and I’ll write to you soon. Where is it you’re going to work?”

“Mr. Osgood’s farm,” answered Jerry. “It’s about two miles from Barrington.”

“And you’ll be there in October?”

“Before, I guess,” answered Jerry. “There ain’t much money in this, an’ since I seen you fellows again——”

He hesitated. Then,

“I kind of got more anxious to make that money,” he finished. “I guess I’ll leave the show about the twentieth.”

“Well, good luck, Jerry. We’ll see you again, I guess; anyway, I’ll write to you, because I think I’ll have some news for you.”

“What—what sort of news?” asked Jerry anxiously.

“Well, good news; I can’t tell you any more now. Good-by.”

They all shook hands, and then Jerry, as though loath to part from them, walked out to the road with them and called a final good-by from there.

“Did you get your money from the circus folks?” asked Tom of Dan, as, with packs once more on their backs, they strode off toward the village.

“You bet. But, say, fellows, I had an awful time getting away. Murray made all sorts of offers, and finally I promised him that if I ever changed my mind I’d let him know right away.”

“It was a crazy business,” observed Bob.

“But it found us our dinners,” said Tom philosophically.

“You can always be sure of Tommy’s point of view,”

laughed Nelson.

It was a clear, calm night, and walking was a pleasure. They were all well rested, and the four miles intervening between Millford and Bahogue were soon covered. A few minutes before they reached the hotel the ocean sprang into view, and they heard the beat of the waves on the beach.

“Sounds good to me,” sighed Bob. “Who’s for a bath in the morning?”

Evidently all were, even Barry, who, excited by the chorus of assent, barked loudly. They found the Seaview House without difficulty, assaulted the office gong until a sleepy porter appeared, wrote their names on the register—Dan signing as “Signor Danello”—and were shown to their rooms.

“Gee!” sighed Dan a few minutes later as he pulled the covers down and rolled under them. “A real bed again! This thing of sleeping nigh to nature is all very fine, Nel, but—the downy couch for mine every time! Good night!”

CHAPTER XIV

TOM SWIMS IN THE OCEAN AND DIPS INTO POETRY

They were sitting on the big broad veranda of the hotel reading their letters. It was eleven o'clock of an ideal September day, and the guests, of whom there were many left despite the fact that the season was almost at its close, were strolling or lounging in the sunlight and making the most of what was likely to be summer's last appearance. Beyond the road and the broad crescent of dazzling white beach lay Great South Bay blue and tranquil, the points of the little waves touched with gold. Three miles away, a line of gleaming yellow dunes, Fire Island stretched athwart the horizon.

The boys had donned clean clothes and, in their Sunday attire, looked quite respectable. After breakfast they had inquired the way to the post office and had reached it just in time to get their mail before it closed. Then, having purchased Sunday papers, they returned to the hotel veranda and settled down to read. Presently Nelson glanced up from the letter in his hand.

"Look here, fellows, this doesn't sound very promising, does it?"

"What's that?" asked Bob, looking up from his own epistle.

"Why, it's a letter from dad. You know I wrote him about Jerry, and here's what he says. Let me see.... Oh!... 'Now, about that *protégé* you tell of. The matter of seventy-five or a hundred dollars doesn't scare me, Nelson, but do you think

your plan is feasible? Three hundred would probably carry the boy through one year at school, supposing he was able to pass the examinations, but what's going to happen the next year? Of course he might get a scholarship to help him along, and it's possible he might make some money doing some sort of work in the village, but he couldn't count on these things. We might do the boy more harm than good, it seems to me. Presumably he is fairly content with his present lot, and it is a question in my mind whether it would not be advisable to let him go his own gait. If it was certain that he would not have to give up after a year or two and return to the farm and the life he is leading now, it would be different. But I don't suppose the fathers of your friends would care to undertake to provide for him for the next four years. Certainly a good deal depends on the boy. You've seen him and I haven't. Perhaps he's got it in him to get the better of difficulties and work out his own salvation after the first year or two. That would make a difference. Supposing you think this over and let me hear from you again. Or we might talk it over after you return. And let me know what the other gentlemen say. Mind, this isn't a refusal, and I shall be glad to donate a hundred or two if I can be sure that it is going to accomplish some good; but I don't think it wise to go into anything of this sort without looking over it pretty thoroughly. There is a great deal of harm done by ill-advised charity.'"

"That's just about what my father says," said Tom.

"You'd almost think they'd got together and talked it over," said Dan ruefully. "My dad gives me just about the same song and dance. How about yours, Bob?"

"He says: 'Would advise placing the sum, say four hundred

dollars, in the hands of some one, perhaps Mr. Speede, for disbursement on the lad's account. Don't believe it would be wise to pay the money over to him or his relatives. If you decide to go ahead with the proposition think I can interest Warren Chase, who is one of the trustees at Hillton. He might be able to afford assistance to the lad. Am taking it for granted that the lad is worthy of the assistance you propose; am willing to trust your judgment in this. One hundred is all I can afford at present, though it is possible that I might be able to help put Hinkley through a second year when the time came. Let me know when you want the money and I will forward check.'"

"Now, I call that businesslike," said Dan approvingly. "My dad seems to think it's all a bally joke; wants to know if Jerry had *his* money stolen too!"

"Well, let's talk it over," Nelson proposed. "Now, supposing we get enough money to pay one year's expenses at Hillton, can Jerry pass the exams? He's had no languages at all except one year's Latin in a village school."

"He ought to go to school this winter," said Bob, "and take Math and Latin—hard."

"Of course he ought! And he ought to have some coaching next summer. How's he going to do it?"

"We need more money," said Tom.

"Look here," said Dan. "Talk sense. What's to keep Jerry from going to school this winter? If we provide the money for the first year at that bum school of yours, why can't he spend this winter and next summer studying?"

"That's so," said Nelson. "But how about the second year, and the third and the fourth?"

“What’s the use of troubling about that now?” asked Dan cheerfully. “Let’s get him started and I’ll bet you anything he’ll pretty nearly look after himself. As for next summer, it wouldn’t cost much to find a tutor for him. Why, we could see to that ourselves. I know two or three fellows in New York who would be mighty glad to coach him and do it cheap.”

“That’s the stuff!” cried Tom.

“What do you think, Bob?” Nelson asked.

“I think what Dan says is sense. Education never hurt any chap, and even if Jerry didn’t get more than two years at Hillton—and I guess we could see that he got that much—it would make a difference to him all his life. But I think, as Dan does, that if we give Jerry a start he’ll be able to find his own way after the first year. Could he get anything to do at Hillton that would bring him in some money?”

“Yes,” answered Nelson, “he could. There are lots of fellows there now who are almost putting themselves through. Look at Ted Rollins! Ted came there three years ago with three dollars in his pocket and a hand satchel. And he’s going to graduate next spring. I know for a fact that his folks have never sent him a penny; they can’t; they’re poor as church mice.”

“Well, as far as I can see,” answered Bob, “our dads are ready to give the money as soon as we can convince them that we are in earnest and that Jerry deserves it. And I vote that we go ahead. You ask your father, Dan, if he’s willing to take the money and pay it out for Jerry as it’s required. We’ll all write home this evening and tell just how the matter stands and ask to have the money sent to Mr. Speede about the fifteenth of this month. Have you got Jerry’s address, Nel?”

“Yes; and I think the best thing to do, after we’re certain that everything’s all right, is to see him on the way back and tell him all about it, just what we propose to do, and all. He said he’d probably be there by the fifteenth.”

“That’s right,” said Dan.

“But, look here,” exclaimed Tom, “if we don’t need the money until next fall, what’s the good of having it sent to your father now?”

“Because,” Bob answered, “four hundred dollars put in the savings bank or invested at four per cent means sixteen dollars a year from now. And that will be enough to pay his railway fare to Hillton and back again.”

“That’s so,” acknowledged Tom. “Bob, you’re a regular Rothschild.”

“He’s a regular Yankee!” said Dan.

“Besides,” continued Bob, unheeding of compliments, “if Dan’s father has the money we’ll know where it is, and so will Jerry. There’s nothing like being certain, you know. It beats promises.”

“Right again, O Solomon!” said Dan. “I’ll ask dad about it. I guess he will be glad to look after the Jeremiah Hinkley Fund and see that it is well and safely invested. That’s settled, then. We’ll each of us write to-night and get the thing all finished up ship-shape, eh? Now who’s going for a swim?”

There was no dissentient voice, even Barry proclaiming loudly and enthusiastically in favor of the suggestion. And a quarter of an hour later they met in front of the bath houses ready for the plunge. They found the water surprisingly warm.

Barry splashed and leaped, biting at the tiny breakers and then running away from them as though for his very life. For a long while there was scarcely a breaker fortunate enough to reach the beach without first having a hole bitten in it! After some twenty minutes of diving and swimming the Four returned to the warm sand and stretched themselves out. By this time the beach had become well peopled, and from the surf came the shrieks and laughter of the women and children. Some of the larger boys had started a game of scrub baseball and were having an exciting and hilarious time. The Four sat up and looked on for a while. Then, after the ball had taken Dan in various parts of his anatomy three times, he arose disgustedly.

"Those fellows think I'm a backstop," he said. "Maybe I am, but I don't work for nothing. Come on, and let's go in again."

So back to the water they went and mingled with the throng of bathers. A group of men and older boys were arranging a swimming race out to a sloop anchored about a quarter of a mile offshore and back. One of the number, a muscular-looking fellow of about twenty-two with a Mercury's foot on the breast of his jersey, was evidently the best performer, for the others were calling on him for handicaps.

"You?" he asked of an inquiring youth. "Oh, I'll give you halfway to the yacht."

"I don't want that much," objected the other.

"Oh, very well, don't take it," laughed the crack. "It isn't compulsory, you know."

"Is this an open race?" asked Dan smilingly.

The crack turned.

“Surely,” he answered heartily. “Come on. Want a handicap?”

“Want to give me one?”

The other looked him over carefully and pursed his lips in a doubtful smile.

“You look sort o’ good, my friend. What’s your record for the quarter?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t been timed for two or three years. Give me a couple of hundred yards.”

“All right, but I don’t like your looks.”

“How about me?” asked Tom, joining them. He looked like a good-natured, pink-and-white barrel, and the crack smiled as he looked him over.

“Well, how much do you want?” he asked.

“Three hundred yards,” was the prompt reply.

“I’ll give it to you!”

“All right, put my name down,” said Tom.

The youth with the Mercury’s foot gravely wrote in the water with his finger, and the onlookers laughed. Then the contestants, of whom there were about a dozen, set off to their places. There was a good deal of good-natured argument as to the distances taken up by those receiving handicaps, but at last all were in position. Some one shouted “*Go!*” at the top of his lungs, and the race began. They were to swim to the sloop, pass around it, and return to the beach. Dan, who had no hope of winning, since he conceived the Mercury’s foot chap to be unusually good at the work, took things leisurely enough. But

Tom, quite unawed by the crack, set off as though he meant to win the race. As a result he was the first to reach the sloop, having passed three competitors on the way out to it, and turned toward home still swimming strongly.

The sea was quite smooth, and what tide there was was setting toward shore. Some eighty or a hundred yards back from the sloop he passed the crack swimming almost under water with long deliberate strokes of his powerful arms. He smiled across at Tom in a brief moment when his head was out of water, and that smile, at once amused and confident, gave Tom a foretaste of defeat. Still, he was, perhaps, two hundred yards ahead of the other, and if he could only keep his present speed up for the rest of the distance he thought he might win. Tom wasn't a sprinter, but in a half mile or even a quarter he was no mean antagonist. In spite of his rotundity of build he was strong of muscle and, moreover, had learned the science of making every ounce of effort tell. Presently Dan passed, fighting hard with another contestant. Then, back of them, came the tag end of the procession. But Tom was paying strict attention to business now and had no time for watching others. Only once, while still halfway between sloop and finish, did he let up for a moment and strive to see his principal rival, and then he saw enough to set him frantically at work again. For the crack had rounded the sloop and was hot on Tom's trail and scarcely a hundred yards in the rear. Tom struck out again with long, even strokes, swimming hand over hand and pushing the water back from him with every bit of strength in his body.

Among the breakers and just beyond them the spectators were watching eagerly. Some few swam out to speed the winner over the line. Two men and a young lady in a rowboat,

which had mysteriously appeared on the scene, shouted encouragingly to Tom.

"Go it, kid!" cried one of the men. "You can beat him! You're holding him!"

"Kid, eh?" thought Tom disgustedly. "I'll show them!"

And now, with a little more than a hundred yards to go, Tom eased his stroke a bit, for his muscles were aching terribly and his breath threatened every instant to fail him and leave him rolling helplessly about out there like a plump porpoise. And behind him, perhaps forty or fifty yards back, the crack was coming along hard and fast, still swimming with practically the same stroke he had started with.

Well, it was no disgrace to be beaten by a chap six or seven years your senior, even if you had been given three hundred yards out of nine hundred, thought Tom, in an effort to console himself. But the argument didn't satisfy him, and he took a deep breath of the good salt air and forgot for a moment that his arms and legs felt as though they belonged to some one else. Then the breakers were forming about him in little hillocks of green water, the encouraging cries of the watchers reached him when his head came dripping above the surface, and—and, almost upon him, sounded the quick and regular splash of the pursuer! Tom closed his eyes tight and tried to forget everything save the man in the blue bathing suit, who, just where the breakers paused before the curve, stood to indicate the finish line. A long swell shot him forward for an instant. Then the returning undertow made it hard fighting.

And now he was in a wide lane formed by the splashing audience and there was but another dozen yards to go. For a moment he began to hope. But for a moment only. The steady

strokes of his opponent were loud in his ears now, and as he looked for an instant a brown hand reached forward almost beside him and disappeared, burying itself in the green, froth-streaked water. It was all up! thought Tom. He hated to be beaten, did Tom, and for an instant he felt rather bad. And in that instant two things happened: the crack swimmer drew abreast of him and Tom had an idea. He suddenly remembered that he had always been able to swim faster under water for a short distance than on top, and like a flash he acted on that knowledge. Down went his head and shoulders, his heels kicked in air for a moment like a steamer's propeller out of water, and then he vanished from the gaze of the laughing, shouting watchers.

One, two, three, four, five strokes he took down there with the pale green, sunlit waters about him; then up he came, thrashing desperately. His foot struck the knee of his opponent, for a moment he had a glimpse of a drawn, set face seen across the surface of the little wavelets, and then it was all over, and he was struggling to his feet and gasping painfully for breath.

"Who won?" was the cry.

The man in the blue bathing suit shook his head ruefully.

"No one," he answered. "It was the deadest kind of a dead heat. They were side by side. We'll have to divide first money, I guess," he added, with a laugh.

The youth with the Mercury's foot on his jersey came up to Tom with outstretched hand.

"We finished together," he said smilingly. "But don't you ever talk to me again about a three-hundred-yards handicap! That was the hardest race ever I was in. My boy, you can

certainly swim, and if you'll keep at it and train off some of that flesh of yours, you'll have us all beaten by the time you get to college. What's your name?"

Tom struggled for breath. His heart was beating like a sledge hammer and his lungs were doing what he called afterwards "a double shuffle."

"Tu-tu-tu-tu—" he began. But for the life of him he couldn't get any farther. The audience tried hard not to laugh, and the crack smiled in spite of himself. He might never have received an answer to his question if Nelson hadn't come to the rescue.

"His name's Ferris, Tom Ferris," said Nelson. "He's a pretty good swimmer for a fatty, isn't he?"

That insult summoned Tom's lost breath.

"Hope you ch-ch-ch-choke!" he stammered.

"Well, you're all right, my boy," said the crack admiringly. "We'll have a talk after dinner, if you like."

Nodding, he moved off to the beach and disappeared into his bath house. Nelson took Tom by the arm and led him in the same direction. Bob and Dan, the latter having just finished fifth in the race, joined them.

"You were a cheeky beggar, Tommy," said Bob, "to try and beat that fellow!"

"Why?" gasped Tom, stretching his arms in the hope that they would stop paining.

"Why, because he's Woodbury, of"—here Bob mentioned a well-known New York athletic club—"and he holds the quarter-mile and half-mile amateur records, my boy."

“Well, I could beat him next time,” said Tom stoutly.

“Yes, with three hundred yards,” said Dan derisively.

“Huh! You had two hundred yourself,” said Tom scathingly, “and you came near not finishing at all!”

“You kicked up such a sea I couldn’t get my bearings,” answered Dan gravely. “Swam straight out to sea for half a mile or so before I discovered my mistake.”

“If you could swim as well as you can lie—” began Tom.

“Tommy! Tommy!” warned Bob.

“Well, wha-wha-what’s he tu-tu-tu-talk that way for?” asked Tom aggrievedly. “I can swim better than he can, anyway. I’d be ashamed if I couldn’t!”

Dan accepted the gibe in smiling silence, and the Four retired to their two bath houses with chattering teeth. For a while nothing was to be heard but hoarse breathing and the tread of scurrying feet as bath towels were fiercely applied. Then, warmth returning to the chilled bodies, the Four began to whistle and sing at the top of their lungs. Dan went through everything he knew and then began on his own compositions:

“Tom, Tom, the Piper’s son,
Swam a half a mile, by gum!”

It was necessary to sing it very loudly and several times over in order that the subject of the song should hear it. When satisfied by the howls of derision which came from next door that Tom and Bob had heard, he gave his attention to the latter:

“Mr. Bob, of Portland, Maine,

Wouldn’t he give you a pain?”

More howls, dismal and prolonged, from the opposition. Then Tom’s voice, eager, triumphant:

“Du-du-du-Dan, Dan, su-silly old Dan!
Eats blue paint out of a can!”

This reference to an episode of the preceding summer when Dan, playing sign painter, had got himself very thoroughly mixed up with a half gallon of bright blue paint, brought laughter from all.

“Let’s have a rhyme on Nelson,” suggested Bob.

“All right; you do it,” said Dan.

“Oh, I’m no poet. And I haven’t got my rhyming dictionary with me.”

“Oh, never mind the rhymes,” said Nelson. “Don’t let those bother you; Dan doesn’t.”

“My rhymes are always faultless,” answered the other.

“Oh, yes; like ‘son’ and ‘gum’!”

“Those rhyme!”

“Get out!”

“Of course they do! Don’t they, Bob?”

“They may to you.”

“Not every one can be a poet,
Any more than a sheep can be a go-at,”

quoted Nelson.

"I've gu-gu-gu-gu-got it!" stammered Tom.

"You have; bad," was Dan's cruel reply.

"Listen!" cried Tom, unheeding.

"There was a young fellow named Nelson—"

"Bet you can't find a rhyme for it," jeered Nelson.

"Shut up and let me tell it!

"There was a young fellow named Nelson,
Who sometimes got foolish spells on—"

"O-oh!" groaned the rest.

"'—It's quite plain to see,'
Said his friends, 'you would be
A clown if you only had bells on!'"

"Tommy, you're a regular Alfred Austin!" cried Dan. The rest cheered and applauded noisily, and Tom was so pleased with his effort that he repeated it at intervals for the next few days on the slightest provocation.

After dinner they sat for a time on the broad front veranda with Mr. Woodbury, who was quite taken with Tom, and afterwards took boat over to Fire Island on an exploring expedition. They found lots to interest them on that barren expanse of sand dune and beach, not the least of which was the life-saving station which they visited.

It was a square two-story building standing just above high

water on the seaward side of the island. A neat white-washed fence inclosed it, and it was fronted by a plot of grass of which the members of the crew were very proud. There were beds of flowers, too, geraniums mostly, bordered with beach stones. The lifeboat and apparatus were kept in a one-story addition to the dwelling house. The boys asked permission to look about and were cordially welcomed. They were shown over the place from top to bottom, inside and out. They saw the big, square dormitory with its white iron beds, each flanked by a chest or trunk containing the member's clothes, the pleasant living room, the kitchen, and the well-stocked storeroom. Their guide, a big blond-haired Swede, explained that in the winter time communication with the mainland was sometimes cut off for a week or more at a time, and therefore it was necessary to keep a good supply of food on hand.

In the living room were several charts, and Tom in examining one of them made the discovery that there were twenty-nine life-saving stations along the south shore of Long Island, an interesting fact which he brought to the attention of the others. Then they all had to count, and each one got a different result, Dan making it as high as thirty-four. After that they visited the boathouse and saw the big lifeboat, the mortar used for shooting the lifeline out to a wreck, the breeches buoy —which Tom wanted very much to get into—and many other interesting objects. At last, thanking their host, they crossed the island to the landing and returned to the hotel just in time for supper.

After that meal was over—and it took some time to satisfy their appetites, which had been sharpened by the salt breezes—they devoted the evening to letter writing. Even Tom was able to think of something to say without having to call for

suggestions from his friends. Before retiring they took up the matter of their route for the next two days.

“I think,” said Tom, “it would be mighty jolly to go over to Fire Island and walk along to the eastern end of it. We could see the life-saving stations and—and there might be a wreck!”

“Tommy, you’re a regular ghoul!” said Bob.

“What’s that?” asked Tom.

“Don’t you know what a ghoul is, you ignoramus?”

“A football goal, do you mean?” asked Tom innocently.

When the laughter had died away, they decided to keep along the south shore until they reached Peconic Bay. Then they would cross the island to the north side and return along the edge of the Sound to Barrington, where they hoped to find Jerry.

During the last five minutes of the conference Tom had been nodding shamelessly. They woke him up, disposed of Barry for the night, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XV

TELLS HOW THEY MEET THE MANNIG BASEBALL CLUB AND HOW NELSON AND BOB GET ENGAGEMENTS

They made an early start the next morning. There was a delicious fresh breeze blowing from the bay, they were well rested, and life was well worth living. For an hour they walked briskly and put several miles of hard, smooth road behind them. Then the sun began to make itself felt, and their pace slackened. Whenever they caught a glimpse of Fire Island, Tom looked toward it longingly.

"I'm going over there some time and stay until there's a storm and a wreck. Wouldn't you love to see them rescue folks?"

Bob thought that maybe he would; at any rate, he was quite certain he would much rather look on than take part.

"I wouldn't," answered Tom promptly and with conviction. "I'd love to be a life saver! Maybe, when I get through college, I will be. Wouldn't it be exciting, Bob?"

"Very," was the unenthusiastic response. "Think of tumbling out of bed at three o'clock of a winter morning, with the thermometer doing stunts around zero, and taking a nice brisk row for a half a mile or so through waves as high as that house over there! Yes, indeed, Tommy, it would be simply sweet!"

Tommy's further remarks on the subject were interrupted by

sounds on the road behind them. They turned and moved aside in time to escape being run down by a coach drawn by two horses and filled with a merry crowd of men and boys, some in gray baseball uniforms and others in ordinary attire. As the coach swept past, the Four were treated to a cheer, a wonderful medley which sounded about as intelligible as a Choctaw war cry. Behind the first coach was a second similarly filled, and this one slowed down as it reached them.

"Want a ride?" sung out a fellow in baseball attire who occupied the seat with the driver. The Four looked at each other inquiringly.

"We might ride for a little ways," suggested Tom sheepishly.

The fellow in front accepted their hesitation as assent.

"Pile in there behind," he said. "You'll find room somewhere!"

"Sure!" called a voice from the body of the coach, which was one of those long vehicles with seats running lengthwise on either side, known in some localities as a "barge." "Sure! Lots of room. Come on!"

So they went. A boy hanging on to the steps behind dropped out of the way, and they climbed in. The occupants, a merry, good-natured throng, shoved and pushed until there was room for the newcomers, and the coach started up again. Many curious looks were cast at the boys' packs, and finally,

"Going over to the game?" asked Dan's nearest neighbor.

"What game is that?" asked Dan politely.

"Oh, I thought perhaps you were going," was the reply. "It's

the game between Laurelville and Mannig; baseball, you know. We play ’em every year for a purse.”

“Oh,” said Dan, in turn. “Where’s it to be?”

“Laurelville this year. We’re the Mannig team—and rooters,” he added with a laugh. “The fellow that called out to you is Burns, our captain and third baseman. It’s going to be a great game. Everybody turns out, you know.”

“I see. Are you going to win?”

“Not likely, I guess,” was the answer. But a howl of protest arose.

“Sure, we are!”

“Beat ’em silly!”

“We won’t do a thing to ’em!”

Dan’s informant grinned and dropped his voice.

“They’ll lick us for keeps, I guess,” he said cheerfully. “Our pitcher’s sick and can’t play. We tried to get Monroe, of Brooklyn; ever hear of him? Well, he’s a dandy, but he wanted more than we could pay. We offered him thirty-five too!”

“But—do the other fellows let you get players from outside?” asked Dan.

“Oh, yes, we get ’em wherever we can find ’em. So does Laurelville. Their pitcher is Somes, of Rockaway, and he’s a dandy. We won’t be able to hit him at all. And they’ve got a catcher, too, that’s just about all right!”

“Where is Laurelville?” asked Bob.

“About four miles farther. You fellows had better come

along and see the game."

"Maybe we will," answered Bob. "What do you say, Nelson?"

"I'm willing," was the answer. "Can we get something to eat there?"

"Yes, indeed; there's a fine hotel at Laurelville. You'd better come along and root for us."

"All right," laughed Nelson. "We've got good loud voices."

"Yes," agreed Dan; "this fellow here got first prize once for making a noise; didn't you, Tommy?"

"Shut up," answered Tom, with a grin.

A fellow in baseball togs who appeared to be about twenty-five or -six years of age, and who was sitting on the other side of the coach, leaned forward and asked smilingly:

"I suppose you fellows don't play?"

"Not much," answered Bob carelessly.

Perhaps it was Tom's look of surprise or the twinkle in Dan's eye which made the other doubt the truth of Bob's assertion.

"Because, you know," he continued, "we need a pitcher like anything, and we could use a good batsman somewhere. And there'd be a little money in it too."

Tom nudged Bob and looked excitedly at Nelson.

"Why don't you, Nel?" he exclaimed.

"You dry up, Tommy," answered Nelson.

“Look here,” said the player, leaving his seat and swaying unsteadily in front of the Four, “if any of you fellows can pitch we’ll make it worth your while!”

“Thanks,” answered Nelson; “but you mustn’t mind Tommy; he’s not altogether sane; has fits once in a while.”

“But, look here, I’m in earnest!” continued the other. The other members of the Mannig delegation were leaning forward and listening interestedly.

“Well, what Tommy means is that I have pitched,” answered Nelson, a trifle embarrassed, “but I wouldn’t do for you chaps. I’m not fancy enough.”

“Tell you what we’ll do,” said the other excitedly. “You come with us and show us what you can do before dinner. And if we like the looks of it, we’ll give you twenty dollars to pitch the game for us. And if any of the rest of you can hit well, we’ll find a place for you in the outfield and pay you ten dollars. That’s a fair offer, isn’t it?”

“Fair enough,” answered Nelson laughingly. “But we couldn’t take your money, you see, because we’re going to college next year, and if we did we wouldn’t be able to play there.”

“Oh, pshaw, we don’t know your names or anything about you,” was the reply. “We’ll all forget it to-morrow. You needn’t be afraid of that.”

“Thanks,” answered Nelson dryly, “but I’d rather not.”

Tom looked greatly disappointed.

“Show them what you can do, Nel,” advised Bob. “It will be rather good fun. I’d like to play myself,” he added, turning to

the player. “I’m not in practice, I guess; haven’t played since last month, and then not much; but I can hit sometimes.”

“Prove it and I’ll pay you ten dollars for the game!” said the other quickly. “I’m manager and I can do what I say; and I will do it too.”

“Oh, no, you won’t!” laughed Bob good-naturedly. “If you want me to help you out, I’ll do it, but I won’t take any money for it. That’s understood. How about you, Nel? Want to try pitching? You can do it, I’ll bet.”

“I’ll play if you will,” answered Nelson.

“Where do Tommy and I come in?” asked Dan. He turned to the Mannig manager. “Want anyone to peddle popcorn or sell lemonade?” he inquired gravely.

“Don’t you play?” asked the manager, casting an admiring glance over Dan’s figure.

“Me? Why, I was with the Clevelands for three years,” answered Dan. “But I’ve been ill, and the doctor thinks I’d better stay out of the game for a while.”

“I see,” answered the other with a laugh. Then he squeezed himself between Bob and Nelson, and asked questions and answered them.

It seemed that the annual game between Laurelville and Mannig had become an event of some importance in that part of the island. They had played each other for six years, during which time each team had won three games. This year’s contest was, therefore, in a way decisive. Each year the merchants and citizens of the rival towns donated a purse of five hundred dollars, four hundred of which went to the victors

and one hundred to the vanquished. Each team secured players wherever they could find them, paying such prices for their services as they could afford. And as the residents of the two towns were extremely generous in the matter of donations, some of the prices paid to crack players were pretty high. The umpire, explained the manager—who told them his name was Fultz—was a professional from New York. Their team, Fultz went on to explain, had had rather hard luck this season; two of their best men had deserted them, and their pitcher was ill in bed. As a result they weren't very hopeful of victory.

"Unless," he added, observing Nelson anxiously, "you can help us out a good bit."

But Nelson spoke very modestly of his prowess, and the manager's hopes dwindled. Presently the Mannig captain, Burns, saw that something was up and came back to them. Introductions were made, and Burns declared himself highly pleased at the prospect of being assisted by Nelson and Bob. But, nevertheless, he didn't look especially enthusiastic. Perhaps the two, in their travel-stained pedestrian costumes, didn't look very much like adept ball players.

Laurelville, which they reached at about half-past ten, proved to be quite a fair-sized town; and it was very evident that it was in holiday garb and holiday humor. The windows of the stores were liberally decorated with green and white, and flags and streamers of the same colors were flaunted from the fronts of the buildings. When the coaches reached the hotel the porch of that hostelry was already pretty well crowded with guests. Naturally, the arrival of the Mannig contingent occasioned not a little interest. The adjacent sidewalk was crowded with small boys, and their remarks as the rival players

descended from the coaches were more graphic than complimentary. Tom descended to a veritable fusillade of comment.

"Say, look at the fat boy!"

"Bet yer he can run fine!"

"Get out! He ain't no player; he's the backstop, he is!"

Tom showed symptoms of annoyance, and to prevent hostilities Dan lugged him quickly up the steps of the hotel. After they had all registered, and the Four had been impressively introduced to almost every Mannigite, they adjourned to a vacant lot back of the house and held an hour's practice, observed and criticised by most of the younger population of Laurelville. Nelson showed what he could do at twirling, and, although at first he was rather wild and uncertain, after a few minutes he got settled down, and Fultz and Burns looked almost cheerful.

Bob got into the batting work and had no trouble in putting the ball wherever he wanted to. But, of course, the delivery was easy enough to hit, and his performance then was no criterion of what would happen in the game. At twelve they went back to the house and were instructed to rest until dinner time. Many of the players found seats on the porch, where they indulged in a battle of repartee with the local wits lined up along the curbstone. Others sought the billiard room and spent most of that hour of rest walking about the tables. Tom and Dan took a walk through the village, accompanied by Barry. The latter seemed to understand that for the present he owed allegiance to Mannig, and, coming across a yellow dog decorated with a bunch of green and white ribbon, proceeded to inflict summary punishment and establish the superiority of

the visitors. By the time Dan had dragged him away from his prey the green and white ribbon wasn't worth talking about. Barry stood the subsequent cuffing with equanimity, and trotted on again behind his master with a knowing leer in his eye and a section of tattered ribbon hanging rakishly and defiantly from the corner of his mouth.

The main street of the town was becoming quite populous with vehicles, and the holiday atmosphere increased every moment. The game was the one important and all-absorbing topic of conversation. When the two stopped to buy some sweet chocolate at a corner fruit stand, the Italian proprietor asked eagerly who they thought would win, and when, later on, returning to the hotel, they entered a drug store for egg phosphates, the clerk who served them was full of questions and information.

"They tell me," he said, "that Mannig's got a fellow to pitch for them who was with the Hoboken team last year, a regular peach. Did you hear anything about it?"

Dan looked wise as he sipped his phosphate.

"Something," he answered. "I was talking with Burns, the Mannig captain, awhile ago. But I understood that the pitcher is a fellow named Tilford who pitched for Chicora."

"Where's that?" asked the clerk.

"New Hampshire."

"Good team?"

"Fine! Beat everything in sight, they tell me. And this pitcher is a corker. Your men here won't be able to touch him; he's got a slow drop that'll make them look silly!"

“Are you a Mannig fellow?” asked the clerk suspiciously.

“No, we’re strangers here; just happened along this morning. Would you mind putting a bit more milk in this? It’s a little too sweet.”

The clerk obeyed, thereby practically doubling Dan’s drink. Tom watched enviously, and looked doubtfully at his own glass, which was about empty, in the hope that the clerk would offer to perform a like service for him. But the clerk was busy talking again, and paid no attention.

“Well, we think we’ve got a pretty good pitcher ourselves,” he said smugly. “Ever hear of ‘Slim’ Somes, of Rockaway?”

Dan said he had, neglecting to add that the only occasion on which he had heard of Mr. Somes was that morning in the coach. The clerk nodded with satisfaction.

“Well, just you keep your eyes on him,” he advised. “He’s one of the best there is, he is. And if you want to bet anything on the game, I know where you’ll find some one to oblige you.”

“Thanks,” answered Dan carelessly. “I make it a rule never to bet. I’m so lucky that it seems too bad to take the other chap’s money every time; I get ashamed of myself. Well, good luck.”

They went out and made their way along the crowded sidewalk to the hotel, the only incident of moment occurring when Barry was suddenly missed, and was discovered a minute later in a baker’s shop, where he had “treed” a big Maltese cat on top of a showcase. The woman in charge was highly indignant, and threatened Dan with the law until he squared himself by purchasing three jelly tarts for a nickel, and

admiring the cat.

Dinner was a confused and hurried meal, for there were at least three applicants for every place at the four long tables, and to eat calmly with a dozen persons crowding about and waiting for your chair was simply out of the question.

The game was to begin at half-past two, and at two the coaches came to the door again, and the Mannig party tumbled into them, and were driven away to a chorus of hoots and jeers from the audience outside the hotel. The ball ground was on the outskirts of the town, a very creditable field with a grand stand capable of seating several hundred persons. The Mannig team took the field for practice. Nelson and Bob had been presented with uniforms of gray flannel bearing big blue Ms on the breasts of the shirts, uniforms secured from a couple of substitutes only after persuasion almost amounting to main force. Bob was put at right field. It had been some time since he had played in the outfield, for his position was behind the bat, but after a few flies had come his way he gained the old knack of judging. For several years he had played on his high-school team, and last spring he had been elected captain. Besides this he had played with and captained the Camp Chicora team for the past two summers. Dan, too, was by this time a fairly experienced player. At school he was only the substitute pitcher, but in spite of that he was pretty clever. At Chicora he had done excellent service the past summer in the box, and he and Bob had comprised a very formidable battery. During practice he warmed up by pitching to the Mannig catcher, a long, lanky youth, named Conly, and it soon became evident that they were going to work together very well.

By half-past two the grand stand was comfortably filled and

the ground around the diamond was well sprinkled with spectators. Quite a contingent had followed the blue players from Mannig, and their ear-splitting yell was heard continuously. At a few minutes before the half-hour Mannig gave up the field to Laurelville, and the green-and-white-stockinged players trotted out for practice.

When it was twenty minutes of three the Mannig manager returned to the bench where his players were seated and announced that the umpire hadn't turned up, and that it had been decided to wait until the next train came in.

"When does it get here?" asked Burns.

"Two-fifty-six," was the answer.

"Gee! That'll make it mighty late!"

"Yes, but that's the only thing to do, I guess."

So they waited. Presently the Laurelville team came off, and the audience on the stand began to inquire, in the polite manner common to baseball audiences, why the game didn't start. At ten minutes after three the tardy official, a little, round red-cheeked man, put in his appearance, and at twenty minutes after three called "Play!"

CHAPTER XVI

WHEREIN NELSON AND BOB PLAY BALL AND LAURELVILLE MAKES A PROTEST

That was a strange and wonderful game!

Neither Nelson nor Bob—nor for that matter Tom nor Dan, who merely looked on—ever quite forgot it. The first inning was not over before it became evident that in the annual contests between Mannig and Laurelville "everything went." It was "anything to win," and "dirty playing" was not only looked for but applauded vigorously. The rivalry was intense, and the feeling between the opposing teams was not of the best.

That first inning ended without a score. Mannig had won the toss and had gone into the field. Nelson had disposed of the first three Laurelville batsmen in short order, and his reputation, which had grown at leaps and bounds during the forenoon, went up still farther. He was variously said to be a "second-string" pitcher from the New York American team, an A1 twirler from the Hobokens, borrowed for the occasion, and a youthful wonder from some small team in New Hampshire. Nelson, however, was quite unaware of the interest and curiosity which he was arousing.

But if Laurelville had failed to get to first in that inning, Mannig could boast of no better success. Her first three men went out quickly, Burns flying to shortstop, Morris striking out, and Kleinschmidt being easily beaten to first by the ball. There was all sorts of noise from the audience, and everybody,

from the small boys along the base lines to the players themselves, showed intense excitement.

Laurelville had no better luck during her second inning, Nelson disposing of three men with exactly seventeen deliveries.

Harrison, the Mannig second baseman, a fellow of twenty-six or -seven years and a powerful batter, opened up for his side in the last of the second. He didn't find Mr. "Slim" Somes very difficult, it seemed, for he caught the first ball delivered on the end of his bat and sent it flying over first baseman's head for a hit. The next batsman sent him on to second and was caught himself at first. Then came Fultz, the manager, who played in center field. He had two strikes called on him before he offered. Then he found something to his liking and knocked a long fly into left field. Left fielder failed to get under it, and Harrison romped home. Fultz was safe on first.

The Laurelville supporters jeered and shouted in an effort to drown the wild acclaim of the Mannigites, but to little purpose. If Mannig's cheer wasn't musical, it was at least powerful, and it made the welkin ring for a while. By the time things had quieted down somewhat, Bob was at the plate. Fultz evidently expected a sacrifice which would put him on second, but Bob wasn't used to playing sacrifices with one man out. The result was that on the first delivery Fultz streaked for second. The Laurelville catcher shot the ball down to shortstop, and Fultz walked off the diamond to the hoots and catcalls of the enemy. The incident worried Bob somewhat, and in a moment he had struck out. Fultz was feeling a trifle sore and let Bob know it as they trotted out to the field together. But Bob expressed such deep contrition that the manager regained his temper and

laughed it off.

The first of the third brought the Laurelville tail-enders to the bat, but the tail-enders proved more formidable that inning than the head of the batting list had theretofore. The second man up—the first had been easily disposed of—found Nelson for a two-bagger. The next man, the redoubtable Somes, got Nelson so rattled by his remarks and monkey tricks that Nelson gave him, very unwillingly, you may be certain, his base on balls. Then came a wild throw to third by Conly, who hoped to catch the runner napping, and Laurelville scored her first run.

If there had been noise before, there was pandemonium now!

Kleinschmidt, the Blue's left fielder, who had very neatly backed up third baseman and so prevented a second tally, tossed the ball back to Nelson in disgust. Burns, from third, was venting his anger on everyone within sound of his voice, and Nelson didn't escape.

"No more gifts, Tilford!" he cried. "If you can't put them over, hit him with it! Only don't let him walk!"

Nelson turned back to the next batsman, suddenly experiencing a deep dislike for the whole business. They were all a crowd of muckers, he told himself, and he wished he hadn't agreed to pitch for them. But now that he was in it he had to keep it up. So he tried to steady down and dispose of the batter. But Conly was exasperated over his wild throw and let the first delivery pass him, and the man on second got to third. A hit would mean a second tally. Nelson tried an outcurve, but the batsman only smiled. Then Nelson gave him a slow, straight ball, and the batter was caught for a strike. The score was two and one. Then came a third ball, and Nelson

wondered what Burns would say or do if the batsman walked to first. But a drop improved the situation, even though Nelson was still, to use baseball parlance, “in a hole.” There was only one thing to do, and that was to put the ball over the plate and trust to the fielders. So he did it. But he didn’t have to trust to the fielders. The man at bat found the delivery, and sent it hard and straight toward Nelson. It was coming so swiftly that he might have been excused for letting it pass. But he reached up and brought it down, even though the shock staggered him for an instant, and then sped it to third. The inning was over, with the score one to one.

Mannig trotted in, and Conly picked out his bat. He found what he wanted in Mr. Somes’s second delivery, and hit safe for one base. Nelson followed with an attempted sacrifice that worked so well that he not only advanced Conly, but reached first safely himself by a hairbreadth. That decision of the umpire’s brought out wild protest from the Laurelville supporters, and an energetic “kick” from the Green-and-White’s captain. But the umpire wasn’t the sort to let a player disturb him for very long, and soon the captain had retired to his position, muttering and glowering. Burns fouled out to catcher, and Kelly, the Mannig shortstop, was thrown out at first, Conly and Nelson each securing a change of base. When Kleinschmidt came to the plate, what was earnestly required was a safe hit, and, being an obliging chap, Kleinschmidt supplied it, sending the ball whizzing between first and second basemen, and bringing in both Conly and Nelson. And Mannig’s war whoop sounded excruciatingly. Harrison waited for something pleasing, but waited a little bit too long, and the side was out. But three to one looked very good to Mannig, and Burns begged Nelson to hold the opponents down.

By this time Nelson had forgotten his displeasure and went into the box ready to do his level best. And he did it. The first two men struck out like children, and, although the third reached his base on a hit and an error of shortstop's, the fourth batsman could do nothing against Nelson's puzzling delivery, and followed in the ignominious footsteps of the first couple. And Mannig cheered and capered, and showed very plainly that they were terribly pleased about something.

It was in the fourth that Bob vindicated himself. Simpson fanned out. Then Fultz, having reached first by being hit on the elbow with the ball, stole second a moment later. Bob came to the plate and allowed two deliveries to pass him. The umpire confirmed his judgment. With two balls to his credit, he wasn't going to accept any old thing, and so he waited for Mr. Somes to oblige him with something nice. And while he waited, the first real trouble occurred.

Fultz, down on second, was keeping both second baseman and shortstop very much worried. He had shown his ability at stealing bases, and they were watching him as though he were a mouse, and they two very hungry cats. That was all right, but when the shortstop, unseen by the umpire, who was back of the pitcher, undertook to hold Fultz by the arm, the runner objected. He not only objected, but showed the fact by sending the Laurelville player over on his back by a well-applied shove. Then the second baseman took a hand in the argument, and Fultz went down with a blow on his jaw. At that moment the pitcher ran up with the ball, and dug it, none too gently, into Fultz's ribs, and, as Fultz was reclining somewhat dazed a yard from base, Laurelville claimed that he had been put out.

But the umpire couldn't see it that way. So time was called,

and while several incipient riots took place Mannig and Laurelville argued it over angrily, each side threatening to take its team off the field. Finally, the umpire took a hand at threatening. His threat was that if they didn't go on with the game at once, he'd award it to Mannig. Whereupon the spectators were finally dispelled and the field cleared.

The incident hadn't increased the *entente cordiale*, and the opposing players eyed each other angrily. But in a moment there was a diversion. And Bob caused it. Others might have lost their heads for the time being, but not Bob. Mr. Somes, still aggrieved, was off his guard for an instant, and Bob took advantage of the fact. His bat met the nice, straight ball with a loud *crack*, and in a moment he was speeding around the bases, and Fultz, sufficiently recovered from his treatment to be able to run, trotted leisurely across the plate in a disdainful manner, which said as loudly as words, "It's a shame to do it!"

Away out, past center fielder, who was doing a lot of tall running, the ball had dropped softly to the ground. Bob swung around second and made for third. Center fielder reached the ball, scooped it up, and hustled it toward shortstop, who had run out for it. Bob spurned third base under flying feet and set his face homeward. A chaos of sound reigned. Shortstop swung about and threw the ball frantically to the plate, where the catcher, for what to him had seemed an age, had been awaiting it with outstretched hands.

Friends of Mannig held their breath. Ball and runner were both speeding for the same goal. It had seemed at first that Bob was certain of a home run, but the fielding had been extremely fast, and now it appeared that he was doomed to have his trouble for nothing. If someone had only had the sense to hold

him at third base!

Simultaneously two things happened. The flying sphere settled with a thud against the catcher's mitt, and Bob, sliding over the ground in a cloud of brown dust, touched the plate with the fingers of one eager hand. Then down came the catcher's hand and the ball, like a sledge hammer, and Bob straightened out his legs, rolled over on to his back, and lay very still.

In an instant the plate, the catcher, the umpire, and the unconscious form of Bob formed the vortex of a pushing, shouting maelstrom of humanity. Dan, who had been one of the first to reach Bob's side, strove to raise him from the ground for fear that the struggling crowd would trample upon him, but so close about him were the angry partisans of Mannig that he could only hold Bob in a sitting position, and beg for room and air. The catcher, white of face, hemmed in by the enemy, declared loudly that he had intended no harm, but he was no coward, and his tone was so defiant that it only added to the wrath of the crowd. The umpire strove mightily for peace. So far no blow had been struck, although many hands were clinched and several arms were raised. The catcher was being jostled back and forth as the throng swayed hither and thither. Dan, by dint of much tugging, at last lifted Bob in his arms, and, aided now by Burns and a stranger, fought a way through the dense throng. Once on the bench, with a sopping towel at his head, Bob soon regained consciousness and opened his eyes.

"What's up?" he asked weakly.

"Oh, that blamed catcher took you in the side of the head with the ball," answered Dan angrily.

“I know, but what”—he turned his head toward the shouting mass on the diamond—“what’s doing over there?”

“Free fight, I guess,” said Dan.

“That’s what,” said Burns, the light of battle in his eye. “Look after him and I’ll see if I can help.”

With that he sped away and was lost in the throng which was pouring on to the field from the stand.

“He didn’t mean anything,” cried Bob. “It’s all nonsense. Here, let me up, Dan!”

He climbed to his feet, stood for an instant with blinking eyes, and then, ere Dan could restrain him, was running toward the center of the gathering. Dan, calling, followed. But it was hard work getting through, and long before he reached the scene of trouble the war was averted.

Bob, shouldering his way into the struggling, shuffling mass with scant ceremony, tore the catcher out of the hands of a big, ugly-faced tough. Only one or two of the Laurelville players had managed to reach the catcher’s side, and for an instant Bob was mistaken by the Mannigites for another member of the enemy’s forces. A louder growl of rage went up, but at that moment Bob lifted his voice above the pandemonium.

“Get off the field!” he cried. “I’m not hurt! It was all an accident! Please get out of the way and let us finish the game!”

“Accident!” exclaimed an ugly, incredulous voice. “Looks like an accident, don’t it?”

Bob coolly passed a hand over the discolored lump on the side of his head and smiled.

“That’s all it was,” he replied. “Accidents will happen. If you don’t get off the field at once, Laurelville will say we interfered with the game and they couldn’t finish it. And as we haven’t played five innings yet, we’ll get left!”

“That’s so,” some one agreed. “Come on.”

“Say, you’re a plucky one, kid!” cried another.

Good nature returned, and, laughing and shoving, the throng fought its way back. As it thinned away about the plate, the Laurelville captain ran up. Seeing Bob, he turned and made for him.

“Say, what’s the matter with you?” he cried, brandishing his fist under Bob’s nose. “He didn’t mean to slug you, you baby! For two cents I’d——”

A hand shot out and swung him about.

“Shut up, Jack!” growled the catcher. “He’s all right; he ain’t made any kick; he’s just been telling his crowd it was an accident. It was too.” He looked closely at Bob. Bob nodded.

“Of course,” he answered. “I understand.”

“Well, that’s all right,” said the captain a trifle sheepishly. “I thought they were doing you up, Ted, old man.”

“Well, I guess they would have if this fellow hadn’t butted in just when he did,” answered the catcher dryly. He glanced at Bob. “Much obliged,” he muttered.

Presently order was restored once more and the game went on. Conly went out at second, after knocking what he and everyone else thought was a safe two-bagger, and Nelson fell prey to Somes’s deceptive drops. And the teams changed sides

with the score five to one, in favor of Mannig. The fifth inning commenced with the Laurelville captain at bat. He led off with a pop fly that ought to have been an easy out, but which was muffed by Harrison at second. The next man advanced the captain and went out at first. Then came a clean two-bagger that brought Laurelville's second tally. But after that there were no more hits, and, with the score now five to two, Mannig once more took its innings. But Burns, Kelly, and Kleinschmidt went out in quick order without changing the figures. Laurelville trotted in to the bench, and her captain hailed Burns.

"Say," he asked, "where's that pitcher of yours come from?"

"What difference does that make?" asked Burns.

"It makes a lot of difference. He played with some New Hampshire team, and you can't get men from outside the State."

"Oh, come off! Who said so?"

"It's in the agreement," was the reply.

"I never saw it!"

"Well, it's there. And if you play that pitcher, we won't go on with the game."

"Oh, stop if you want to," replied Burns sweetly. "I guess we've got it cinched all right."

"We'll protest it," was the answer. "You haven't any business playing either that pitcher or the fellow in center."

"Why didn't you say something about it before we beat you?" demanded Burns angrily.

“I didn’t know it,” was the answer.

Burns hesitated, and then summoned Fultz. With Fultz went most of the Mannig team. Thereupon the Laurelville players also joined the group, scenting trouble. Finally, Fultz called to Nelson.

“Say, where do you live?” he asked.

“Boston.”

“How about you, Hethington?”

“Portland, Maine,” replied Bob.

“All right,” answered Fultz. “I suppose we’ll have to drop ’em. But I never heard of the fool rule before! We’ll beat you, anyway,” he added wrathfully.

“Go ahead,” said the Laurelville captain cheerfully. “But you can’t come any tricks like that on us. I guess we’ve got a good right to claim the game as it is. You’ve played those fellows for five innings already.”

“Protest all you like,” answered Burns. “If you didn’t want them to play, you ought to have said so.”

Fultz turned to Nelson and Bob.

“They say we haven’t any right to play fellows from outside the State,” he explained. “First I ever knew it. I’m sorry. And we hate to lose you chaps. But I guess you’ve done pretty well for us. We’re much obliged, and if you want to change your mind about the pay, we’re still ready to hand over the money. I’ll see you after the game.”

Nelson and Bob retired to the bench. Neither of them was sorry to get out of the game. Bob’s head was aching a good

deal, and Nelson's arm was beginning to feel pretty sore.

"Think they can hold that lead of three runs?" asked Bob.

"I don't believe so," Nelson replied. "Depends a good deal on their pitcher. Who is he?"

"A chap named Sullivan," answered Bob. "Pretty poor, I guess."

"Well, let's stay and see it out, anyway. Hello, you chaps!" he added, as Dan and Tom came up.

"Hello, yourself," replied Dan. "What's the row?"

Nelson explained, and Tom was highly indignant.

"Ho-ho-ho-hope they ch-ch-ch—" he began.

"Yes, indeed, Tommy," said Bob soothingly, "but I don't believe they will choke. They may get beaten, but they probably won't choke."

"You might run over and suggest it to them, though," said Dan hopefully. "They might be willing to oblige you."

It soon began to look bad for Mannig. The new pitcher was fast, and at times puzzling, but he was terribly wild. Conly alone saved his team from utter rout for a while, stopping many a wild pitch. Then things began to happen. With one out, Laurelville located the ball, and started to hammer it to all parts of the diamond. Only the best sort of fielding kept her from forging ahead then and there. With three men on bases and but one out, it surely looked for a while as though Mannig's sun was about to set. But heady, fast work on the part of the infield spoiled Laurelville's chances, and only one run was added to her score in that inning. But Laurelville

trotted out looking hopeful. Next time, they hoped, they would have better luck. As the Mannig players returned to the bench, it was plain to be seen that they feared defeat. Fultz threw himself down beside Dan.

"Gee!" he said. "That was a narrow squeak, wasn't it?"

"It surely was," answered Dan. "You fellows did great work."

"Yes, that was a dandy double."

Presently Dan said:

"Seems like you are playing against the Laurelville Fire Department."

Fultz looked puzzled.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh, a chap over there in the crowd was telling me about it awhile ago," answered Dan. "He says more than half the nine are firemen. They have a volunteer department here, you know. He was wondering what would happen if an alarm was rung in. He said he bet the Laurelville captain would let the old town burn up."

And Dan chuckled at the idea.

"Did he say just how many belonged to the Fire Department?" asked Fultz carelessly.

"Yes, he said seven out of the twelve players and subs. He told me who they were, but I didn't pay any attention."

"Well, I'm on deck," said Fultz. "Guess I'll find my bat."

But Dan, smiling at his thoughts, noticed that the manager

had apparently changed his mind. For, instead of going to where the bats were piled, he walked around the bench and across to where a group of Mannig citizens were watching the contest from the grass back of third base. There he stooped and spoke to a youth in a dingy suit of clothes. Presently the youth arose, and he and Fultz wandered away together toward the end of the grand stand. As the Mannig batsman was at that moment making his second abortive strike at the ball, it is doubtful if anyone save Dan noticed them. They conversed together a moment at the corner of the stand, and then the youth lounged away out of sight, and Fultz returned and selected his bat. When he had it he turned quickly and glanced at Dan. Dan was apparently absorbed in the fate of the batter.

That was speedily decided, for he couldn't resist a slow drop that had every appearance of a straight ball, and turned disgustedly away to toss his bat into the pile. But after that Mannig's chances appeared to brighten. With only one man out, she managed to get runners on second and third, and for a time it looked as though she was about to pile up some more tallies. The Mannig contingent became wildly enthusiastic, and their excruciating war whoop filled the air. But their hopes were doomed to disappointment, for the two runners were obliged to stay just where they were while the succeeding pair of batsmen struck ignobly out. And now the seventh inning began with the score five to three, in favor of the visitors.

Once more the Laurelville players found Sullivan an easy riddle. The first man up let drive a sizzling grounder between shortstop and third baseman, and, by good running, barely made second ahead of the ball. The following batter worried the pitcher until in the end he was sent to first on four balls. Laurelville was yelling and whooping at a great rate.

“Here’s where we score!” cried the coachers back of first and third. “Any old thing will do, Eddie! A nice little three-bagger, if you can! You can’t miss ’em! He’s easy, he is! On your toes there, Jack! Down with his arm, old man! *Hey!*”

Then the third batsman cracked out a nice safe hit that was just two feet out of first baseman’s reach, and although right fielder managed to get the ball to the plate in time to send the foremost runner doubling back to third, the bases were full, and there were no outs.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH A FIRE ALARM AIDS MANNIG, AND THE FOUR LEAVE HURRIEDLY

Things looked bad, indeed, for the visiting team. The watchers on the grand stand were on their feet, shouting continuously. Not a few were joining the throng on the turf, scurrying to places along the base lines. Sullivan was plainly rattled, and his first delivery went so wild that Conly, try as he might, could not reach it. In raced the runner from third, and, close behind him, the second man. But although the first reached home safely the other met with misfortune, and was nailed a yard from the plate. But that was only one out, there was still a man on third, and the score was five to four. And, another factor in Laurelville's favor, her captain and best batsman was facing Sullivan with a cool, smiling face. One run would tie the score; two would give the home team the lead. What wonder, then, that Laurelville went wild with delight, and utterly forsook the grand stand?

Conly and Sullivan met midway between plate and pitcher's box, and conferred in whispers to an accompaniment of derisive jeers from the supporters of the Green-and-White. Then the pitcher returned to his place, twirled his arms, and shot the ball forward.

Bang!

The Laurelville captain had caught it for a nice bunt toward first base, a slow-rolling, erratic bunt that sent pitcher and first baseman scurrying for it. And in from third raced the runner.

But Simpson found the ball speedily, scooped it up, and with the same movement sent it in to catcher. The runner from third saw defeat before him and drew up. Then he turned back, and in a twinkling catcher and third baseman were running him down between them. He turned and twisted while the ball flew back and forth above his head until, at last, almost hemmed in, he made a desperate lunge toward third, sent Burns staggering aside out of his path, and reached his refuge in safety. Burns angrily picked up the ball which had been jostled from his hand, while the Laurelville supporters cheered and shouted. For, although there had been, contrary to their captain's expectations, no tally, the captain himself was sitting calmly on the bag at second. Then once more Fortune turned her back on the wearers of the Blue. Sullivan struck the next man with the ball, and after he had been rubbed and condoled with by half the Laurelville team, he went limping and grinning to first and filled the bases again!

Once more Conly strove to calm the erratic Sullivan, and once more the crowd hooted as catcher and pitcher whispered together. Then Sullivan went back and faced the next batsman. Up shot his arms, and forward sped the sphere.

"Ball!" droned the umpire.

Again, and,

"Two balls!" was the verdict.

"Pick out a good one!" called the captain from where he was dancing about at second. And the coaches shrieked and leaped in their efforts to further disturb the equanimity of the already badly rattled pitcher. Sullivan rubbed a hand in the dirt, wiped it on his trousers, and settled the ball in it carefully, striving to collect himself.

“Take your time, Jim!” called Conly cheerfully. “Plenty of time, old man!”

But there wasn’t, for at that moment from the center of town came the wild alarm of a clanging fire bell!

For an instant everyone stood as though turned to stone; everyone save the Mannig pitcher. Perhaps he didn’t hear. At all events he shot the ball across the plate, right over the very center of it, and the umpire called a strike. And, as though that had been the signal, all the Laurelville players began shouting at once. Down on second the captain was calling wildly for “Time.” The umpire was surrounded by half a dozen players each explaining breathlessly. So “Time” was announced. Fultz came racing in from center field.

“What’s time taken out for?” he cried.

“Fire!” shouted the Laurelville captain, looking excitedly about for his cap.

“What’s that got to do with the game?” demanded Fultz.

“Why, we’re most of us members of the company,” was the reply. “We’ll go on with the game after a bit. Come on, fellows! We’ll have to run for it!”

And led by their redoubtable captain the Laurelville Baseball Team streaked off the field in the direction of the town. And behind it hurried most of the spectators, for a fire promised far greater excitement than even a baseball game. The Mannig players trotted up with surprised expressions on their faces, demanding to know what the trouble was. Burns turned to the umpire.

“Mr. Umpire,” he said, “we’re ready to go on with the

game."

The umpire looked nonplused.

"Er—well, we'll wait awhile and then, if the other team doesn't show up, I'll have to call the game."

In five minutes the field was deserted save for the Mannig players and a handful of Mannig supporters. Everyone else was scurrying along the road leading to town. Dan, a quiet smile on his face, drew Nelson aside.

"Let's get out of this," he whispered. "It's not going to be healthy around here after a bit. Let's move on to the next town."

Nelson looked perplexedly at Dan's smiling countenance for a moment. Then, scenting mischief, he nodded and went in search of Tom and Bob. Without explaining, he announced that they were breaking camp, and in a twinkling the Four were following the crowd. On the way Dan told what he knew about it, and the others laughed until the tears streamed down their dusty faces—all save Bob. Bob smiled a bit, but he shook his head too.

"It's kind of a low trick, Dan," he said.

"But I didn't do it," protested Dan. "I merely told Fultz what I had heard. It wasn't my fault if——"

"But you expected him to do it!"

"What of it? Of course I expected him to; it was just the sort of a trick I'd expect these muckers to do!"

"That sounds well from you," answered Bob dryly.

"Oh, get out! I didn't tell him to do it; I didn't even suggest

it! Why, when that bell rang I was so surprised——!”

Bob had to laugh in spite of himself.

“Well, just at present what we’ve got to do is to get our things from the hotel before the irate citizens of this charming village discover that they’ve been hoaxed! And I move that we move faster!”

And they did. When they reached the hotel they found it deserted save for a sixteen-year-old boy, the proprietor’s son, who was evidently not staying there from inclination. They found him on the sidewalk, looking longingly toward where at the far end of the main street a confused rabble was pouring around a distant corner.

“Where’s the fire?” asked Dan.

“I don’t know exactly,” was the excited reply, “but it’s somewhere over by the railroad.”

“How far is that?” asked Dan.

“Pretty near a mile. And they say it’s a daisy! Maybe it’s Tompkins’s lumber yard!”

The Four heaved sighs of relief. Before Tompkins’s lumber yard was reached by the valiant fire fighters they hoped to be well on their road. Very quickly they rescued their packs, slung them on their shoulders, and, to use Tom’s expression, “hit the trail.” Once out of sight of the hotel they paused while Bob consulted his map.

“Cupples’ Harbor is three miles,” announced Bob. “That’s where we’d better make for.”

“All right,” responded Nelson, with a laugh. “Any place out

of here!”

“How do we go?” Dan asked.

“Straight ahead and turn to the left about four blocks down,” was the reply. So straight ahead they went, and allowed no grass to grow under their feet. When they had almost reached their turning they heard a great noise behind, and paused to see what it was. Down the street trotted the two Mannig coaches filled with their exultant passengers. The Mannig war whoop aroused the echoes of the almost deserted town.

“The umpire’s called the game,” chuckled Dan.

When the first coach was abreast of them they were recognized and loudly cheered. They waved their hands in response while the occupants of the coaches showered unintelligible messages upon them. But as the second load went by, one remark met their ears which they understood. Fultz, beaming and red of face, leaned far out over the side, made a megaphone of his hands, and shouted:

“You fellows had better get out of here pretty quick!”

Dan winked merrily.

“Trust us!” he shouted back.

The fire bell which had been ringing incessantly for ten minutes stopped suddenly as the Four turned from the main street and smelled the salt air from the ocean. In ten minutes they were well out of Laurelville, and slackened their pace.

“What’ll happen?” asked Tom. “When they find out, I mean.”

“They’ll be so mad they won’t be able to see straight,”

chuckled Dan. “And if they find any Mannig citizen roaming around, they’ll probably make life very interesting for him!”

“Do you suppose they’ll be able to prove that Mannig did it?” asked Bob.

“Sure to. They’ll find that the fellow who brought the alarm was a stranger, and guess at once.”

“Still, I don’t see how they are going to prove it!”

“Well, maybe they won’t,” allowed Dan. “But there’s one thing you can bet on, and that is, no matter whether Mannig gets the purse or not, there won’t be any more baseball games between the two towns for a while!”

“And a good thing too!” said Nelson. “That sort of baseball makes me tired!”

They reached Cupples’ Harbor at a little before six, very hungry, and somewhat tired. After supper Dan said:

“Say, do you fellows realize that it’s just a week since we left New York?”

“A week!” shouted Tom.

“Get out!” said Nelson. “It seems a month!”

“It surely does,” Bob agreed. “But we’ve had a pretty good time so far, haven’t we?”

“Dandy!” said Tom. Nelson laughed.

“We’re forgetting about being robbed, and going hungry, and all the rest of it!”

“That’s so,” answered Dan. “Gee! Weren’t we a disgusted lot the day we trailed into Millford? For two cents I’d have

jumped a train and gone home!”

“Guess that was the way with all of us,” said Bob. “Only we didn’t have the two cents!”

The next morning when they tumbled out of their beds they found the rain dashing against the windows, and an old-fashioned sou’easter having things pretty much its own way. To continue their journey in the face of such a storm was out of the question, and so they got their soiled clothes together, and made arrangements to have them washed in the hotel, and dried in time for them to go on the next day.

There were few guests left, and the Four had the house almost to themselves that day. After breakfast they got into their rubber ponchos, and braved the tempest. The surf was fine, and they watched a long time from the shelter of an old hut on the point, about a mile from the hotel. They got pretty wet, but it was great fun; and the roaring fire in the hotel soon dried them off after they got back. The rest of the day passed quickly enough with books and cards, and they went early to bed.

The next morning the rain still fell, but the wind had died away, and after a consultation they decided to go on. Their clean clothes were brought up to them, and after they had put some of them on, Nelson said he felt respectable for the first time in three days. The walking was hard, but they did five miles by half-past eleven, and stopped at Seapoint for luncheon or dinner, whichever it might turn out to be. It happened to be dinner, and, as they were all frightfully hungry, they ate a good deal, and felt very little like continuing their journey afterwards. Tom was for spending the night where they were, but he was overruled, and at two o’clock they set out for Beach

Neck, eight miles farther east. The rain, which had once or twice sobered down to a drizzle, now held up entirely, although the clouds still hung low and ominous. The road, however, constantly got worse, and it was slow going.

"I see where we get a late dinner to-night," said Dan, at about three o'clock. "I'll bet we haven't gone two miles in the last hour!"

"Told you we'd ought to stay where we were," said Tom.

"And I guess you were right, Tommy, my boy. Never say die, though!" And Dan hitched his pack into place, and trudged on. By four, they were still but little more than halfway to Beach Neck, and Bob got his map out.

"Well," asked Nelson, "is there any sign of civilization around here?"

"Not very near," answered Bob. "But, say, the railroad strikes the road near here somewhere—just beyond, I guess—and it's lots nearer than the road we're on."

"Nearer what?"

"I mean it's shorter that way to Beach Neck than it is by the road."

"Gee! Then let's take it!"

"Railroads are mighty hard walking, though," said Tom.

"Can't be much harder than this sloppy, sandy quagmire," said Dan. "I move we hit the ties."

So they did when, as presently happened, the railroad came into sight and ran along the highway in a neighborly fashion for a little way. It was hard walking, as Tom had predicted,

especially at first. But after awhile they got into what Dan called “the swing of it,” and it wasn’t so bad. At least, as Bob pointed out, it was a deal drier. But Tom answered that he didn’t see that that counted for much, because his feet were sopping wet already.

Half an hour later, without any warning, the rain started in again in a fashion that almost took their breath away. It came down in torrents, so that they could see scarcely a yard ahead of them, and made such a racket, besides, that Bob called a halt.

“Look here,” he gasped, “we can’t see nor hear anything, and this track isn’t a healthful place for us; a train could come along and knock us into the next county without our getting so much as a hint of it.”

They were at the beginning of a little cut, where the track had been built through a wooded hill.

“Gee!” sputtered Tom, and stumbled down the embankment to the side of the track. The others followed. The raindrops lashed their rubber ponchos, drenched their heads, and trickled down their backs. Barry, with what remained of his tail tucked as far under him as it would go, sought shelter from the pelting drops at Dan’s feet.

“Let’s break for cover!” shouted Nelson.

They broke. Nelson led the way, stumbling along what at one time had been an embankment, on which a spur track had run a few hundred yards to a gravel quarry. The quarry had become almost obliterated with underbrush and trees, and it was under one of the largest of the latter that the Four finally drew up, panting. The hill rose abruptly behind them, but the

sheets of rain were so dense that they could make out but little of their surroundings. The tree, a young maple with wide-spreading branches, kept the worst of the torrent off them for the moment.

"These ponchos are all very nice," said Dan, "but they have their limitations. I'll bet you'd get six gallons of water out of me if you wrung me. Can't we find a better place than this? The roof's leaking, and the merry little raindrops are playing tag down my back."

"How far do you suppose we are from Beach Neck?" asked Nelson.

"At least a mile," answered Bob. "You fellows stay here a minute, and I'll look around and see if there isn't a better shelter."

He brought the poncho closer about his neck, and retied it.

"If I yell, you answer. I may get lost in this drizzle."

Then he stepped out from under the tossing, dripping branches, and was lost to sight almost instantly. The others waited silently, their hands in their pockets for warmth. After awhile Bob shouted, and presently rejoined them.

"I've found an old shed or something over here. Come on."

He led the way at a run, and they raced after him, gasping for breath as the solid curtains of rain dashed into their faces. Then they were under the lee of a building, Bob was wrenching open a door which hung from one leather hinge, and in a moment they were inside, blinking the water from their eyes. At first it was too dark in there to see much, but presently as they became accustomed to it they began to make

out objects in the gray gloom.

The hut, for it was scarcely more, was about twenty feet long and twelve feet wide. There was one door, through which they had entered, and two windows, one still containing the remnants of a sash, and the other having been roughly boarded up. Along the back of the hut remnants of a double tier of wooden bunks remained. In the center of the floor, resting on four bricks, was a rusty stove. At one time there had been a pipe leading through the roof, as the round hole there indicated. But now the pipe was gone, and the hole leaked water like a spout. The place was littered with rubbish, old newspapers, tin cans, and bottles, a broken pick, and a worn-out pair of overalls. Bob lighted a match, and they explored, kicking their way through the *débris*.

"Not what you'd call a first-class hotel," observed Dan.

"No," said Tom. "And it's evidently very much on the European plan."

"Unless you can eat tin cans, Tommy," answered Bob. "But it's dry, anyhow, and that's something. And seems to me we might manage a fire in that stove with some of this truck."

"We'll be smoked out."

"We might leave the door open. Anyhow, let's see."

So they stuffed the old stove full of paper, added a few pieces of wood which they found, and touched it off. It was smoky, there was no doubt about that, but it looked cheerful, and after a minute or two even gave some warmth. The rain drove in through the door at times, and prevented the smoke from going out, but save that it occasioned an epidemic of coughing, the fire was quite a success.

“Let’s see if we can’t get some of that wood from the bunks,” suggested Nelson.

It was hard work until Dan thought of the broken pick. He showed that a pick may be used as an ax when occasion demands, and soon they had quite a respectable pile of firewood by the stove. Bob borrowed the implement, and tore off the boarding from the window, thus supplying more fuel, and creating a cross draught that cleared a good deal of the smoke out. By this time the stove was getting red hot, and they stood around it, having thrown aside their ponchos, and steamed and regained their good humor.

“Say, Nel,” asked Dan, “what does this remind you of?”

“Turkish bath,” answered Nelson.

“No, but do you remember the hut in the woods at Chicora last summer? This rain’s a dead ringer for that one, except that there isn’t any thunder and lightning.”

“Don’t suggest it,” warned Bob.

“Yes, and do you remember how scared you were at that skeleton?” laughed Nelson.

“You don’t say?” drawled Dan. “I guess I wasn’t the only one who was scared. If Bob hadn’t grabbed you as you went through the door, you’d have been running yet.”

“Pshaw!” said Nelson with a grin. “I wasn’t scared; I was just going for assistance.”

“I suppose there’s no supper for us to-night,” said Tom hopelessly.

“Supper? What do you want supper for?” asked Bob.

“Didn’t you eat enough dinner to last you a week?”

“We’re a lot of idiots not to keep some chocolate or something of that sort in our pockets,” said Nelson. “You bet that when I get to a store I’m going to lay in a supply.”

“Wish I had some now,” wailed Tom.

“We might eat Barry,” suggested Bob.

“You might get killed too,” said Dan grimly. “This old rain will have to hold up after a while.”

“It’s holding us up just at present,” observed Nelson.

And apparently it was contented to continue doing that, for the open doorway turned from a misty-gray oblong to a black, and still the downpour continued. There wasn’t a watch among them, and so they had no way of telling time.

“Well,” said Bob, filling the stove up again, “we’ve got a dry place to sleep, and that’s something. I vote we go to bed as soon as we can sleep, and get an early start. Beach Neck can’t be far off, and we can make up for supper at the breakfast table.”

“Sounds good to me,” answered Dan. “But I’m not the least bit sleepy; only hungry.”

“Same here,” murmured Tom wistfully. He was sitting on the floor as near to the stove as he could get without scorching, and Barry was curled up in his lap. “If you and I had a dog biscuit, Barry, we could do a dandy trick with it, couldn’t we?”

But Barry only wagged his stump of tail drowsily.

“He’s the only philosophic one among us,” said Nelson. “He didn’t have a tenth as much dinner as we did, and look at him!

Not a whimper!”

Whereupon Barry suddenly sat up, pricked his ears, and growled. Bob and Tom began to laugh, but Dan held up his hand.

“Wait a minute!” he whispered. “Barry hears something.”

The dog slipped stealthily from Tom’s lap and moved toward the door, sniffing and growling. They listened and watched. Then simultaneously Barry broke into fierce barking, and a face appeared in the dark frame of the doorway.

CHAPTER XVIII
TELLS OF AN ADVENTURE IN A HUT

Tom scrambled to his feet, Barry retreated, still barking and growling furiously, with the hair on his neck and along his back standing straight up, and the newcomer stumbled through the doorway, wiping his face, and peering nervously about in the half-light.

"Who's here?" he muttered. "Mind your dog, can't yer? Think I want to be bit?"

There was no answer. The boys were looking at each other with wide eyes. Then, quietly, Bob stole to the door and pulled it to. Dan seized Barry in his arms.

"A wet night," observed Dan politely.

"*Wet!*" muttered the new arrival angrily. He was rubbing the water from his eyes, and striving to get a look at the other occupants of the hut. "I'm nigh drowned, I am! Wet, says you!"

"Come up to the fire," continued Nelson, drawing back into the shadows as though to make room. Then Dan handed the dog to Tom and edged around the other side of the stove. Bob had left the door, and now, as the newcomer shuffled toward the stove, casting wary, suspicious glances into the shadows where the boys hovered, he crept around back of him. As noiselessly as he moved, however, the other heard, and started to turn. But he was too late. Bob made a diving tackle that pinioned the man's arms to his sides, and together they crashed to the floor, Bob uppermost. In a twinkle Nelson and Dan were

beside him, and the man underneath might well have cried "Down!" Barry, gurgling and yelping, struggled and fought in Tom's arms, and the noise was deafening for a moment, the captive contributing not a little to the sum of it. Then,

"Hand me a couple of towels, Tom," called Bob, and Tom, dropping Barry, fished the desired articles from his crowded pockets. They weren't very generous towels, but they served their present purpose. The man was flopped, fighting hard, over on to his face, and his hands were tied securely behind him. Then Dan arose gingerly from his struggling legs, and the second towel was applied neatly at his ankles.

"Now another towel, Tommy, or—hold on! A pair of socks'll do just as well," said Bob.

Tom fished a pair from another pocket, and Bob jammed them into the man's mouth, silencing at last the flood of unpleasant language. Meanwhile Nelson was kept busy fighting Barry off, for the terrier's fighting blood was roused, and he was aching to take part in the proceedings. Then they rolled the captive over on to his back and stood up, panting.

"There, my friend," said Bob, brushing his clothes. "That'll hold you for a while, I guess. You've encountered us about once too often. It's a pretty good idea to have a look at your host before you accept hospitality."

The man, the same ugly-faced individual who had been "treed" by Barry in the hotel at Barrington, and subsequently brought to earth by Nelson on the stairs, moved not an eyelash, but if looks could have killed, it would have been all up with Bob.

"Now, what'll we do with him?" asked Nelson, reaching for

his tie, which had worked around under his left ear during the fracas.

“Search him first of all,” answered Bob.

The captive’s eyelids flickered. Dan whistled.

“By Jove!” he said. “I hadn’t thought of that!”

“Do you suppose he’s got anything left?” asked Nelson.

“I don’t know, but I propose to find out,” answered Bob. “Lend a hand, you fellows, and look carefully.”

“Bu-bu-bu-bet you he’s spent the money,” stammered Tom, whose duty at the moment was to refrain Barry from doing murder.

“Maybe,” said Bob. He moved over to the thief. “Now, my friend, you stole about sixty-nine dollars from us, and two watches.”

The head shook vehemently.

“Oh, yes, you did,” answered Bob. “Although if you hadn’t been fool enough to leave a message behind you we wouldn’t have known it was you, and you wouldn’t be in your present fix. It ought to be a lesson to you not to rush into print—or writing, either. You’re not the first man who’s got into trouble through writing a letter. Now then!”

They ripped open his ragged coat, and went through the pockets, but the only things to reward their search were a sandwich wrapped in a piece of newspaper, a piece of lead pipe, about four inches long, with a short length of rope run through it for a handle, some tobacco and a corncob pipe, a ragged red bandanna handkerchief, and a handsome new clasp

knife.

“Shows where some of the money went,” commented Dan.

Then they searched his trousers. From a hip pocket came a half-filled, yellow glass bottle. Bob sniffed it, and threw it across the hut.

“Whisky, I guess,” he muttered. “Smells bad enough.”

At that moment Nelson gave a shout, and held up his gold watch.

“Bully!” cried Dan.

“Fine!” said Bob. “You don’t happen to find mine, do you?”

“Not yet,” answered Nelson, slipping his own watch into his pocket. “Wonder what he did with it.”

“Well, it isn’t here,” said Dan. “Let’s ask the scoundrel.”

Bob drew the gag out of the man’s mouth.

“Where’s the other watch?” he demanded.

“Where you won’t get it,” was the sullen answer.

“What did you do with it?”

There was a flood of blasphemy for reply.

“Oh, shut him up again,” said Dan in disgust. “If you’ll let me take those towels off so he can stand up, I’ll knock the tar out of him!”

Bob replaced the gag after a struggle, and the search went on. But there was no sign of any money save six coppers which Nelson fished out of a trousers pocket.

“Well, I’m glad you got your watch,” said Bob, as they

stopped work for want of any further recesses to search.

“Wish I had my twenty-six dollars,” said Tom longingly.

“I suppose he blew it in somewhere,” said Dan.

“He’s only had five days to do it,” said Nelson thoughtfully. “It’s more likely he’s hidden it somewhere.”

“We might make a bargain with him,” said Bob.

“What sort of a bargain?”

“Tell him we’ll let him go if he’ll tell us where the money is.”

“I wouldn’t believe him,” answered Dan.

“And I don’t know that we’ve got any right to let him go,” said Nelson. “He’s a thief and ought to be in jail.”

“Well, we’ve got the right,” answered Bob. “We gave the police a fair chance to catch him, and I don’t believe they ever tried. And now we’ve caught him ourselves, without their help, and we’ve got a right to do what we want with him.”

“Sure,” agreed Tom.

“Shall I give him the chance?” Bob asked. The others hesitated a moment. Then Dan nodded, and,

“All right,” said Nelson.

“Well, what do you say?” asked Bob, turning to the thief. “If you’ll tell us truthfully where you’ve hidden the money, we’ll let you go—after we’ve found it.”

There was no sign from the captive.

“What do you say?” asked Bob impatiently.

The captive wriggled his head.

“He can’t talk with the gag in his mouth,” said Dan. “Here!”

He stooped down and removed it.

“Well?” said Bob again.

“I spent ther money,” growled the man. “I’m sorry. ’Twon’t do you fellers no good to put me in jail. Lemme go an’ I’ll clear out o’ here and stay.”

“You’re wrong,” answered Bob grimly. “It’ll do us a heap of good to put you in jail. And that’s what we’re going to do. Stuff the socks back, Dan.”

“Hold on a minute!” said the captive. “How do I know you’ll lemme go?”

“You’ll have to trust us, I guess,” answered Bob.

“Swear yer’ll do it?”

“No,” answered Bob sharply. “But we *tell* you so; and that’ll have to be enough.”

The thief stared up at them in silence for a minute. Then,

“All right,” he muttered at last. “It’s in my left boot—all that’s left of it.”

Nelson was tugging at the wet lacings before he had finished speaking.

“Give me that knife a minute, Dan,” he said. Dan handed him the captive’s clasp knife, and Nelson cut the soaking strings, and drew off the boot. In the heel, a damp bundle, lay some bills. Nelson, followed by the others, moved to the light of the stove and counted them.

“Thirty-five dollars,” he announced finally.

“About half,” said Bob. “Well, that’s not so bad. It’ll pay for our night’s lodging.”

Nelson stuffed the money in his pocket.

“Let’s try the other,” he said.

“Other what?” asked Dan.

“Boot, you idiot!”

“There’s nothin’ in the other one,” said the man eagerly. “Give yer my word!”

“Don’t want it, thanks,” answered Nelson as he cut the laces. The captive began to swear again, and Dan promptly stuffed Tom’s socks into place again. Nelson drew off the second wet boot and extracted another wad of bills.

“Twenty-two,” he said. “That makes fifty-seven in all. That’s not so bad, fellows. I guess we can afford to call quits with our friend there. He’s welcome to what he got away with, I guess.”

“He hasn’t got any more boots, has he?” asked Tom.

“Untie him now,” said Nelson, “and let him put his boots on again, and get out of here as soon as he knows how. He deserves to go to jail, but we promised to let him off.”

“When we let him go,” suggested Tom, “let’s let Barry go too! What do you say?”

“I say no,” answered Dan. “Barry might bite him.”

“It would serve him right,” said Tom.

“Maybe; but I don’t want Barry poisoned,” replied Dan with

a grin.

They untied the man's hands, and stood back while he unloosed his ankles and drew the sodden boots on. He said no word during the operation, but the sullen, hopeless look on his pinched face made even Tom uncomfortable. Tom had seized the broken pick when they had untied the thief as though resolved to sell his life dearly.

"Put that thing down," said Bob disgustedly.

"He may get tr-tr-troublesome!"

"Hope he does," was the savage reply. "I only wish he'd give me an excuse to lick him! We've no business letting him loose on the—er——"

"Community," assisted Dan.

But as the man tied the cut laces together and crawled to his feet they could not help feeling a sort of sneaking sympathy for him. He was a forlorn specimen of humanity, with a pale, drawn face and little, dull, blue eyes that just now were fixed almost affrightedly on the door against which the storm still dashed in torrents. He rubbed his chilled hands together, looked longingly at the stove and then at Dan. Dan nodded silently, and he shuffled to the warmth and held his hands out.

"Where are you going?" asked Dan.

"I dunno," answered the thief. "What's it to you? You got all's comin' to yer, ain't yer?"

"We have what belongs to us," answered Dan quietly. "Why don't you go home and behave yourself?"

"Home!" said the other bitterly. "Fellers like me don't have

no homes, you fool!”

Dan was silent. The thief blinked at the red stove, coughing in the smoke. Then,

“You fellers ain’t treated me bad,” he said huskily. “I ain’t got nothin’ against yer. I s’pose yer think I’m pretty low down, but I got my principles, same as you have, only they ain’t the same, I s’pose. I ain’t never done mean to no friend, I ain’t. Nobody can’t say I don’t act square. That sounds funny to you fellers, maybe; we’re different; you’re gen’lemen; I never had no chance to be a gen’leman; I never had no chance to be anythin’ but what I am. I’m sorry I took yer dough, boys, ’cause you treated me fair, an’ it ain’t very often I gets treated fair; folks don’t think it’s worth while to act square with a feller like me. I’m just a hobo, an’ it’s fair game to kick a hobo when yer gets ther chance. We steals ’cause we has to; there ain’t nothin’ else we can do. Folks says why don’t you go to work? Who’d have us? The world ain’t treatin’ us fair, I tells yer that, boys! It keeps a blamed good watch on us when we’re growed up, but when we’re kids, an’ starvin’ and learnin’ to steal ’cause there ain’t no other way we can live, the world don’t bother about us. I know what I’m talkin’ about, I do. Look after ther kids if yer don’t want hobos, that’s the game. Well, I didn’t mean fer ter give yer no lecture, boys. I ain’t got no kick against yous; you’ve treated me all right, I guess.”

He buttoned his threadbare coat around his throat, thrust his hands in his pockets, and moved toward the door.

“Wait a minute,” said Nelson. He took the roll of bills from his pocket and selected one. “Take this,” he said. “It’ll keep you going for a while.”

The thief took it, looked at it, and thrust it into his pocket

quickly as though fearing Nelson might change his mind.

“Thanks,” he muttered.

“Before you go,” said Bob, “I wish you’d tell me one thing, just to satisfy my curiosity. What became of the other watch, the silver one?”

“I give it away,” answered the other sullenly.

“Gave it away? Who to?”

“To a feller I met at Millford, a hobo like me. He was down on his luck, and I knowed he could get a couple of plunks fer it; so I give it to him. I’m sorry, I guess, if you wants it bad.”

“Never mind,” answered Bob. “I just wondered where it was.”

Bob moved to the door and pushed it open. A gust of rain dashed in and drenched the floor, sending the smoke whirling about the room. Outside a veritable wall of water showed in the glimmering light. The thief shivered, cast a backward glance at the stove, and plunged out into the darkness and the storm. Bob stood motionless for an instant. Then,

“Oh, thunder!” he growled, and sprang after the man. In a second he was back, pushing the thief before him. He looked at the others apologetically. “I can’t help it, fellows,” he said. “We can’t send even a dog out into a storm like that.” He turned to the man. “If we let you sleep here, will you behave yourself?” he demanded.

The thief turned on him almost savagely.

“Ain’t I told yer I acts white to my friends?” he cried with an oath. “Gimme a corner an’ I won’t trouble no one.”

Bob glanced at the others questioningly. They nodded one after another. Nelson stooped and busied himself putting fresh wood into the stove. The thief scraped some rubbish together in a corner of the room, and laid himself down upon it. The boys gathered around the fire and talked together in low voices for a while. Then they laid themselves down on the bare floor, and with their ponchos over them went to sleep, Barry nestling up to Dan with a final good-night growl at the silent form in the corner.

CHAPTER XIX
TELLS OF A VOYAGE AND A SHIPWRECK

They awoke shortly before seven, aching and chilled and stiff, to find the sun pouring in through the windows of the hut.

"He's gone," said Bob.

"Who?" asked Nelson sleepily.

"Our hobo friend."

Sure enough, the corner was empty. Nelson felt quickly for the money, found it intact, and glanced about.

"Well, he hasn't taken anything."

"He kept his word, poor chap," said Dan.

"He did take one thing, though," said Bob dryly, kicking over the rubbish at the end of the room.

"What?" they demanded anxiously.

"The bottle."

They left the hut as soon as the packs were tied up, and retraced their steps to the railroad track. On every hand were signs of the storm's ravages. The sides of the old gravel pit were rutted deeply, and layers of sand and pebbles overlay the turf. Even the track had suffered in places, and a quarter of a mile toward Beach Neck they came across a section gang patching up a washout. By half-past seven they were seated at a table in the dining room of the little hotel eating like wood choppers. Through the windows beside them Great Peconic

Bay glistened in the morning sunlight.

"There's one good thing about missing your supper," said Tom, his mouth full of oatmeal, "and that is that it gives you a dandy appetite for breakfast."

They did sixteen miles that day over fairly good roads and through an interesting country. It was a fresh, brisk day with just enough warmth in the sunshine. They skirted picturesque inlets, and crossed bridges over tiny coves in which fishing boats and other craft lay hauled up amid the beach grass. In the late afternoon they reached Sag Harbor, found a hotel, visited the post office, got their mail, and ate a hearty supper. Bedtime arrived early that evening, for none of them had rested very much the night before, and they were pretty sleepy. Bob managed to write a letter, but the others begged off until morning.

A good ten hours of sleep left them feeling "fine and dandy," to quote Dan, and after breakfast and letter writing had been attended to they set out to see the town. They found plenty to interest them, and if this were an instructive narrative I should tell you some of the things they saw. But as it isn't, I'm going to leave them alone until dinner time.

After that meal had been disposed of with hearty good will, they packed their knapsacks again, and set about crossing to the north shore. Tom was for stopping at Shelter Island, but it was already the sixteenth of the month, and it behooved them to turn their faces homeward if they were to report at their schools on time. They learned that the regular ferry would take them to Greenport or Orient, but those places were too far east. So they studied the situation with the aid of a map in the office of the hotel.

“What we want to do,” said Bob, “is to get to Southold or Peconic. That will save us six or eight miles over Greenport.”

“Well,” suggested Dan, “we’ve got plenty of money now, so let’s get some one to sail us over. Or what’s the matter with sailing straight down the bay all the way to this place here; what’s the name of it? Jamesport?”

“It would take all night,” answered Bob. “It must be a good sixteen miles, and with this breeze——”

“Don’t you worry about the breeze,” said Nelson. “There’s going to be more of it pretty soon. But, considering the fact that we’re supposed to be on a walking trip, Dan, sailing sixteen miles of the way sounds a bit funny.”

“What was the place you said, Bob?” Tom asked.

“I said Southold or Peconic, Peconic for choice because it’s farther west. If we’re going to get back to New York on the twentieth as we agreed, we’ve got to cover ground during the next few days, and every mile counts. You see we’ve lost three days since we started. We want to stop back at Barrington to see Jerry, and I think we’d ought to get there about Tuesday noon. Then Wednesday morning we can go on to Cold Spring, or wherever that steamboat line starts from, and take the boat to New York.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Dan. “Let’s ask Whiskers, the clerk, about a sailboat.”

The gentleman so disrespectfully alluded to by Dan had rather hazy ideas on the subject of boat hiring, but finally advised them to “take the straight road down to the Point and ask about.”

Maybe they got off the straight road; at any rate they never found “the Point.” Instead they came out on the side of a little cove where a ramshackle boathouse, a thirty-foot sloop at anchor, and a few boats hauled up on the beach were the principal objects in sight. But as they drew nearer there came a sound of hammering from the shanty, and when they reached the door they found it inhabited by a man and a boy. The man looked like a fisherman, and the boy—well, the boy looked like a ninny. But, perhaps, that was largely because from the time the Four darkened the door until they went out he held his mouth open every moment.

“How do you do?” said Bob. “We want to get across to Peconic this afternoon. There are four of us and we’ll pay a fair price. Can you take us over?”

The man looked up momentarily from the lobster pot he was mending and shook his head.

“No, I guess not,” he replied calmly.

Bob waited, but apparently nothing more was forthcoming.

“It would be worth two dollars to us,” he hazarded.

“’Twould be worth three to me,” answered the man.

“Well, call it three,” said Bob.

“Or maybe four,” continued the other as though Bob had not spoken. Bob glanced doubtfully at the others, who nodded.

“We’ll pay four, although it seems a good deal.”

“Southold, you said?” asked the fisherman.

“No, Peconic.”

“Oh, Peconic, eh?” He shook his head sorrowfully. “Now, that’s different bait. You see, the wind’s sorter bad for a trip over to Peconic.”

“We’ll risk the wind,” answered Nelson.

“Yes, but it’s gettin’ to look pret-ty squally, an’ I don’t b’lieve I’d want to risk the boat.”

There was a whispered consultation, and finally Bob said: “Now, look here, we’ve got to get across, and you might as well take us as anyone else. We’ll pay you five dollars.”

“I couldn’t go myself,” answered the man. “But my boy here can go if he wants to. Want to take these gentlemen across, Will?”

The boy, his mouth still open, nodded silently.

“All right. You better hurry, ’cause there’s goin’ to be a bit of a blow toward night. You go along with him an’ he’ll sail you across.”

“Thank you,” answered Bob. “Shall I pay you now?”

“Not till you gets the goods, sir,” was the answer. “When you gets to Peconic landing you give the money to Will; an’ tell him not to lose it; though I rather guess he will, just the same.”

They started out, but the fisherman called them back.

“How much were you going to give him?” he asked.

Bob sighed despairingly.

“Five dollars. That was the agreement.”

“Don’t you do it. Give him three; that’s all it’s worth.”

“Oh, I understood you to say——”

“I said three or *maybe* four. Well, it’s three. That suit you?”

“Yes, indeed. Much obliged.”

“You’re welcome. An’ say!”

“Yes,” answered Bob, pausing again.

“That boy o’ mine’s about the forgetfulest you ever saw. If you capsize, just remind him to swim, will you? Like as not he wouldn’t think of it till it was too late.”

Bob agreed laughingly, and the fisherman turned back gravely to his work. When they got to the little pier, Will was awaiting them in the rowboat. They piled in and were rowed out to the sloop. Once on board, Will showed to better advantage. He closed his mouth and looked almost intelligent, although Nelson confided to Bob that if it came on a blow he thought the best thing to do would be to pitch Will overboard and sail themselves. Will cast off the mooring, hoisted the mainsail with Nelson’s assistance, and they drifted out of the cove. Once around the point of the land, the breeze filled the sail and they moved more briskly. Will put up the jib then, and the boys made themselves comfortable. Dan and Nelson stretched themselves out in the lee of the sail, and Bob and Tom remained in the little cockpit, the former trying to engage Will in conversation. But Will was not brilliant at that, and his replies to the other’s questions consisted invariably of “No,” “Yes,” and “I guess so.”

There was a fair, if somewhat fluky, breeze out of the south, and after they had crept through the narrows between the mainland and Shelter Island it was a matter of short tacking. The sun had gone in under the light clouds, and Nelson cast

frequent glances about them.

“What are you looking for?” asked Dan lazily.

“Squalls,” was the answer. “And we’ll get them before long unless I’m mistaken.”

“Can’t cut much ice in here, can they?”

“I don’t know, but I should think they might kick up quite a fuss.”

“Oh, well, we’ve got land all around us,” said Dan.

“Yes, that’s the trouble. There isn’t room enough to turn around in without hitting something. And as for that idiot there at the tiller, I wouldn’t trust him to drive a canal boat.”

“Oh, let her blow,” said Dan. “Maybe it’ll blow us down to Jamestown.”

“If those clouds over there in the northeast mean anything,” answered Nelson, “we’re more likely to get blown back toward Beach Neck.”

“Well,” laughed the other, “we don’t have to pay unless he gets us to Peconic. Think of the saving!”

There was a long spit of sand stretching out from the mainland, and as the boom swung over and they headed into the dying breeze the boat’s nose pointed straight for the end of it. Nelson glanced back. Over near the Shelter Island shore the sea was ruffled with cat’s-paws. Here, however, the last breath of air seemed to have died out.

“Say, you’d better bring her around to starboard,” he shouted. “That looks mighty like a squall back there.”

Will looked over his shoulder uneasily and shoved the helm over. At that moment the first breath of wind from the new quarter struck them, and the sloop heeled over until Dan had to grab at the mast to keep from rolling off. The next instant the sheet paid out, and the sloop righted. Then came a burst of wind that sent Dan and Nelson down to the cockpit, and took the sloop through the water at a lively clip. They were free of the sand spit now, and again the helm went over, and the boat pointed for the channel between the spit and the north shore.

"Maybe we'd better reef some," said Will questioningly.

"I know blamed well we had," muttered Nelson, as he climbed out of the cockpit and set to work. "Lend a hand, Dan!" he called. They took two reefs in the mainsail, not without difficulty, and crawled back. It was getting darker now, and there were ugly pale-green streaks on the water. But with the wind almost astern and the channel dead ahead, there was no need of present worry. The squall was not a heavy one, and might soon blow over. If it didn't they would have difficulty, Nelson was certain, in getting into Peconic. Presently they were past the end of the sand spit, and Nelson, for one, breathed easier. The boy at the helm eased her off a little, and then swung her around into the wind. At the same instant a terrific gust of wind struck them, the sloop fell off, the mainsail swung out to starboard, and Nelson made a leap at the tiller.

"Give me that thing, you idiot!" he muttered. "Let go your jib unless you want to have us all in the water!"

The boy was plainly rattled and somewhat scared, but he managed to obey.

"Now lower away on that mainsail," continued Nelson. "I

don’t know much about this old tub, and I’m not going to take any chances. We’ll try bare poles while this lasts!”

The wind was roaring around them now, and the sloop was heeling over under the force of it. Dan and Bob lent assistance, and in a trice the mainsail was down and secured. The sloop found her keel again. “Now put up that jib again,” said Nelson. “I guess we’d better keep her headed right, though I’m blest if I know where she’s going!”

“Here comes the rain!” cried Tom, and the next moment they got it. Ponchos were hurriedly donned, and Barry, shivering and frightened, crept under the seat. The shores were suddenly blotted from sight in the whirling gray mists. The sloop scudded along through the leaping waves at breathless pace. Nelson called to Will.

“Here, you take this tiller,” he said. “You know a heap more about this bay than I do.”

But the boy only shook his head.

“What?” demanded Nelson angrily.

“I don’t know where we are,” muttered the other.

“Well, do you think I do? You take hold here or we’ll pitch you overboard.”

Will crept back and took the tiller, his face white with fright.

“Hold her where she is,” said Nelson. “Where was that land the last time you saw it, Dan?”

“About over there,” answered Dan, pointing.

“That’s what I think. Starboard a little, Will! That’ll do; hold her so! We’ll keep her into the wind as much as we can. I

wonder whether that old jib is doing us any good. Wish I knew more about sailboats. If this was a launch, I could manage her. Keep your eyes open, you fellows. We may strike Brooklyn or Jersey City any old moment."

The worst of the rain passed, but the wind held on fiercely. Now and then, or so they thought, they caught glimpses of the land to the southeast of them, apparently about two miles distant.

"One thing's certain," said Nelson presently. "We won't see Peconic to-night. We must be two or three miles past that place already. Isn't there an island down ahead somewhere?" he asked of Will.

"Yes, sir, Robin's Island."

"How far from here, do you think?"

"I don't know."

"Well, what do you think? I didn't suppose you knew."

"Maybe four or five miles."

"That's good," said Nelson. "Maybe the storm will die out before we get to it. I'd hate to be arrested for knocking the paint off an island."

"Very careless of Robin to leave his old island around like this," said Dan, in a pathetic attempt to be merry.

"What's that noise?" asked Tom.

They listened, and,

"Them's waves!" cried Will. "We're runnin' aground!"

"Hard aport!" cried Nelson. Will obeyed, and Nelson seized

the jib sheet. Slowly, prancing and rolling, the sloop's head came around. The sound of surf was plainly to be heard.

"It's that blamed old island!" growled Dan. Nelson nodded, his eyes on the boat. She began to draw away on her new tack, but it was slow work. At times the surf sounded almost beside them, at times it became faint and distant, as the wind lulled or increased. Two or three minutes passed during which the Four, standing and peering through the rain with straining eyes, waited the outcome. Then, suddenly, the boat's head swirled around, Tom and Dan were thrown into a heap against the side of the cockpit, and the water streamed in over the washboard. Barry yelped with terror, and Will joined him.

“Suddenly the boat’s head swirled around.”

“She’s goin’ over!” he cried. “She’s sinkin’!”

“Cut it out!” thundered Nelson. “Get back there! Take that tiller! What did you leave it for?”

“I—I forgot!” whined Will.

“Forgot! Great Scott! I’d like to—to— Hard over now! Port, you idiot, port!”

But the water was shoaling every instant and, try as he might, Nelson could not get the boat’s head about. The sound of the pounding surf increased, and the water about them leaped and dashed. The sloop was blown, tossing and rolling, on through a maelstrom of angry white waters.

“Get that jib down, Dan!” called Nelson, and, clutching and swaying, struggled to the bow. Down came the fluttering, whipping canvas, and, with a heave, Nelson sent the anchor over. The sloop drifted side on for a space, and then pointed her nose to the tempest.

“Is it holding?” called Bob.

“No,” answered Nelson. “I didn’t think it would. Get ready to take to the water if you have to, fellows. We can make the beach all right. I can see it, now and then, dead ahead there. Maybe, though, we can manage to stick on here.”

For a minute longer the sloop drifted on, tossed about on the leaping waves, then there was a jar, her bow swung around, and she listed to starboard. The waves flattened themselves against her upturned side, and drenched the occupants.

“She’s aground at the stern,” said Nelson quietly. “I guess we’ll have to get out of this. And we might as well do it now as later. We can’t get much wetter. Here, you, get up out of that and swim!”

“I can’t!” whined Will. He was huddled in a corner of the cockpit, white and trembling.

“Can’t swim!” echoed Dan incredulously. “Well, if that isn’t

the limit!”

“Kick that coil of rope over here,” said Nelson, ducking from a wave that came washing over them. Dan obeyed. Nelson passed the end around Will, under his arms, and knotted it. “When I tell you to jump, you jump; understand?”

There was no answer, and Nelson waited for none.

“I’ll race you ashore, Dan,” he cried.

“All right! Coming, Bob? Coming, Tom?”

“You bu-bu-bet!” answered Tom. Bob, who held Barry in his arms, nodded.

“Think Barry can make it, Dan?” he asked.

“I’ll take him,” said Dan. “I hate to leave my coat and shoes behind, though.”

“We’ll have to,” said Nelson. “Wait! I saw a cod line here somewhere, didn’t I?”

“Here it is,” answered Tom.

“Good! We’ll make a bundle of the clothes, lash ’em together well, and maybe we can get ’em ashore.”

So they did it, stumbling and gasping under the assault of the waves that broke against the boat and dashed across, drenching them from head to feet. Finally all was ready.

“Here goes,” said Nelson, climbing out of the cockpit and balancing himself for an instant on the sloping, heaving deck. Then he leaped far out into the water. Dan was after him in the instant. Bob threw the bundle of clothes out, for the other end of the line was fastened around Nelson’s waist. Then Tom

followed. Bob caught a glimpse of Barry's wet head and frightened eyes as Dan arose to the surface and struck out for the shore. Bob knotted about him the rope to which Will was lashed, and turned to the boy.

"When I call for you to jump, you jump," he said. "You needn't be afraid; we'll haul you in all right."

Will looked at him silently with wide, terror-stricken eyes, and made no answer. Twenty yards away three dark objects appeared and disappeared in the green-and-white ferment. Bob climbed to the rail and leaped. The waves tried their best to smother him when he came up to the surface, but he fought for breath, and the rest was not difficult. Wind and tide set strongly toward the land, and he could not have helped going there had he tried. It seemed scarcely a minute before he felt the beach under him, and was tossed, gasping and struggling in a white smother, into the arms of Dan, who had waded out toward him. He climbed to his feet, and unknotted the rope.

"Now, all together," he said. "Jump!"

The boat was an indistinct blur, some two hundred yards out, and as they shouted they strained their eyes for sight of the fisherman's boy. But they couldn't see surely, and after an instant they pulled vigorously on the rope. It came fast.

"He must be swimming," said Tom.

"Swimming!" answered Nelson in angry disgust. "The fool has untied the line!"

CHAPTER XX

FOLLOWS WITH A RESCUE, AND INTRODUCES FRIENDS IN NEED

"If he has," said Bob quietly, "he'll probably drown out there before night."

They pulled the empty line in silently. Barry, wet and woe-begone, huddled himself against the storm, and watched out of reach of the waves.

"I wonder if there's a boat around here," said Nelson.

They turned and looked about them. They seemed to be on the end of the island, for beyond them at a little distance the waves raced by a sandy point. To their right, as they faced inland, a beach stretched away until lost in the blur of the beating rain. In front of them was beach grass, flattened under the wind, and beyond, on higher ground, a few stunted cedars and underbrush.

"We'll have to find one," said Nelson. "Two of us had better stay here, and two go and hunt. Who'll stay?"

"I will, if you say so," answered Tom.

"All right, Tom and I'll stay," said Nelson. "You and Dan see what you can find. Maybe there's a path or a road up there; looks as though there might be. You'd better put your coats on."

"Can't get any wetter," answered Dan, shivering. They untied the bundle, which had come safely ashore, and pulled

their dripping coats on. Then, with Barry beside them, they started off, and in a minute were out of sight.

It was weary waiting there on the beach with the rain pelting them, and the wind chilling them through and through.

“If we only had a fire,” chattered Tom.

Every now and then they faced the wind, and tried to make the boy in the sloop hear them. But it is doubtful if he did, for their words seemed to be blown back into their faces. Nelson looked at his watch. The soaking had not affected it, and it proclaimed the time to be twenty minutes past four.

“It’ll be dark before very long,” he said, “if this storm keeps up.”

“What time did we start?” asked Tom.

“I didn’t notice, but I guess it was about a quarter to three.”

A half hour passed, and another had almost gone, when a faint hail reached them. It seemed at first to come from the sloop, and they put their hands before their mouths and answered as loudly as they could. Then it came again, and unmistakably from behind them. They looked, and presently, like gray wraiths, figures appeared against the sky line.

“They’ve got one!” cried Tom.

Toward them came two persons and a horse drawing a dory.

“Here’s your boat!” called Bob. “And, say, this isn’t an island at all; it’s some old point! This gentleman lives about half a mile down the road, and he’s going to help us.”

The second person proved to be a big chap of twenty-eight or thirty in yellow oilskins.

“How are you, boys?” he said. “Where does she lie?”

They pointed out the location of the sloop.

“Struck on the bar,” said the man. “Well, we’ll have your friend safe in no time. Get up there, Prince!”

The horse moved down to the water, and was unhitched.

“But where’s Dan?” asked Tom.

“He had a beast of a chill, and I made him stay behind at the fire,” answered Bob. “But he said he was coming along in a minute. We had an awful time finding anybody. Got off the road, and pretty near wandered back into the bay on the other side over there. This chap’s all right. He was out harnessing that plug of his before we were through telling him.”

“Which of you fellows can row?” asked the stranger.

“All of us,” answered Tom.

“Well, I’ve only got two pairs of oars, so I guess one will be enough.” He turned to Bob. “Want to come?”

“Sure,” said Bob, “unless—” He looked at Nelson.

“No, go ahead, old chap,” Nelson answered. “You did the hard work, and ought to have the glory. I’ll stay here and look after Tommy.”

So Bob scrambled into the dory, and the stranger pushed off. They had launched at a point some little distance up the beach, and presently, when they had struggled through the breakers, they turned the boat’s nose out to sea, and worked along toward the bar. It was wet work, but not dangerous, for with careful management a dory will lift itself over the worst sea that ever ran. When they approached the sloop the stranger

hailed, but there was no answer.

“You don’t suppose he jumped and lost the rope, do you?” he shouted to Bob.

“Don’t believe so,” was the reply. “He’s probably too scared to answer.”

They worked the dory around to the lee of the sloop, and found that Bob’s theory was the correct one. Will lay in the cockpit, very scared and very, very seasick. He opened his eyes when they called to him, but evidently he was incapable of making any further effort. The stranger dropped his oars, waited his chance, and then leaped to the slippery deck. Bob held the dory as near as he could. The stranger picked up the boy and shoved the limp body over the side.

“Bring her up till she bumps,” he said.

Bob obeyed, and Will slid into the dory to lie supinely against the seat with the water washing about his legs. The owner of the dory tumbled in after him, saved himself from going out the other side, and seized his oars.

“All right!” he cried. “Push her off! We’ll go back the way we came. I’m afraid we might get carried by the point if we tried it here.”

By the time they were in the breakers again Dan had joined Tom and Nelson, and all three waded out, and dragged the boat up. Will was lifted out and borne up the beach.

“We’ll have to carry him, I guess,” said Dan.

“Put him right back in the dory when we get it on the road,” said the stranger. “It’ll be rough, but he’s had it rougher already and won’t mind, I guess.”

So, presently, with Will lying at full length in the bottom of the dory, and the others trudging beside, the procession started inland. Fifteen minutes of battle against the elements brought them to a neat and cosy little red cottage standing in a grove of cedars a short distance from the beach. Lights gleamed from the windows, and Tom and Nelson cheered feebly.

There was a roaring fire in the open fireplace of the little living room into which they were ushered, and the mellow glow of a big lamp added to the comfort of the scene. Nelson backed up to the flames, stretched himself, and grinned like the Cheshire cat.

“This is simply great!” he said with a sigh.

The host brought a little bright-faced woman and introduced her as Mrs. Cozzens, and Bob introduced Nelson and Dan and Tom with ludicrous formality considering the fact that they were all dripping wet.

“You’ll want to get your things off and dry yourselves,” said Mrs. Cozzens. “So you go right upstairs to the guest room, and Mr. Cozzens will look after you.”

Will, who had been propped up in a big armchair before the fire, began to show signs of returning animation. He lifted his head and looked about the room.

“Hello,” said Nelson. “Feeling better?”

“I guess so,” was the faint answer.

“He’d better go right to bed,” said the woman. “You carry him up, John.”

Nelson assisted, and Will was put to bed. Their host returned presently with something hot in a cup and made Will sip it.

After that, in spite of the fact the others were changing their wet garments for all the clothes, old and new, that Mr. Cozzens could find and making a lot of noise about it, Will went sound asleep on his cot. When the Four were finally ready to return to the living room they were a strange-looking quartette. Mr. Cozzens's garments were much too large for even Bob, and sleeves and legs had to be turned up generously. Tom was a striking figure in a pair of old white tennis trousers and a red sweater, while Bob in a brown canvas shooting jacket, Dan in a pair of duck trousers and a Tuxedo coat, and Nelson in a suit of blue serge that could have gone around him twice were not far behind in point of picturesqueness. They went downstairs laughing merrily to find Mr. Cozzens with a tray containing cups of steaming coffee in his hands.

"I was just going to take this up to you, boys. Here, sit down by the fire and put this down. It'll do you good. There's cream in it, and the sugar's in the bowl. Hello! No spoons? Jennie, what did you think they were going to stir with? Their fingers?"

Mrs. Cozzens hurried laughingly in with the teaspoons, and the boys made short work of the coffee.

"Supper'll be ready in a little while," said their host. "Did you spread your things out around the stove upstairs?"

"Yes, sir. They'll be dry before very long, I guess," Dan answered.

"I think we'd ought to get on," said Bob half-heartedly.

"Get on? Not while this storm lasts," replied Mr. Cozzens. "Why, you'd like as not walk into the bay! It's as black as pitch outdoors. And that reminds me I ought to be out in the

stable this minute."

"Let me help, sir?" said Nelson, jumping up. Mr. Cozzens pressed him gently but firmly back into his chair.

"You sit right there, my boy, until supper's ready. After supper we'll talk about your going on. Meanwhile you'll find books and papers around if you look, and if you smoke——?"

"No, sir," answered Bob. "We'll do finely, sir."

"Don't smoke, eh? Well, you're sensible. Do without it as long as you can. When you can't, smoke a pipe and leave cigarettes alone. That's my advice, and 'tain't so many years since I was a boy myself."

He went out, and the Four, left to their own devices, talked until the crackling wood fire made its influence felt and lulled them to drowsy silence. Barry, stretched as near the flames as safety allowed, actually snored. And then, just when they were on the point of falling asleep, Mr. Cozzens returned with a cheerful slamming of doors and stamping of feet, and looked in on them on his way upstairs.

"All right, eh?" he asked. "Supper's almost ready."

Nelson smiled half-sleepily, watched the door close, and then picked a book at random from the table beside him. It didn't promise to be very interesting, for it was a volume on Montaigne, and Nelson had small affection for that gentleman. As he returned the book to its place an inscription on the fly leaf met his eyes.

"H. Dana Cozzens, St. Alfred's School," he read.

Then their host, since he was a bit too old to be a student, must be an instructor. Nelson wondered where St. Alfred's

was, doubtful of ever having heard of it before. His conjectures were interrupted by the summons to supper.

The meal was a simple one, but everything was nicely cooked, and there was plenty of it. The Four ate until Bob, as spokesman, felt driven to apologies.

“We don’t always eat like this, Mrs. Cozzens,” he assured the hostess. “At least, none of us except Tom. I haven’t any excuse to offer for him; he’s beyond them.”

They told their afternoon’s adventure, and asked what Mr. Cozzens thought about the sloop.

“Well, it’s moderated a whole lot,” was the answer, “and if she hasn’t broken up any by this time, she won’t. She’ll probably have some of her planks sprung, but I don’t think she’ll be much worse for her accident. Now, you boys had better stay right here until morning. There’s no occasion to turn out in this storm and get all soaked up again. We can put you up without any trouble if you don’t mind being a little crowded.”

They didn’t mind it at all, only——

“Call it settled then,” interrupted Mr. Cozzens. “We’ve got plenty of cots even if our space is limited. We don’t often entertain a whole ship’s crew, you see. In fact, we’re pretty well out of the way out here on the point, and our friends, all except a few, leave us alone. That’s one reason I built here,” laughed the host. “When summer comes I want a real vacation, and that to me means rest and ease and old clothes.”

“I should think it would be fine here,” said Bob.

“It is; I’m sorry you haven’t seen it in good weather. The

next time you're over this way you must come and see us. Any time from the first of July to the twentieth of September you'll find us at home. Well, shall we adjourn to the other room and let the lady of the house clear the table?"

Back in the living room Mr. Cozzens picked a pipe from a tray, and began filling it from a big jar of tobacco.

"It was something of an accident that you boys found me at home to-day," he said thoughtfully. "I'm glad you did, for there isn't another cottage for nearly a mile. I was going up to New York this morning on business, but when I reached the village I found so much mail to be answered that I postponed the trip." He paused and smiled. "I was going to look for a boy, and now Fate has presented me with five."

"How'd I do, sir?" asked Tom promptly.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't like the job," laughed Mr. Cozzens. "I'd like to have you, but——"

"Take me, Mr. Cozzens," interrupted Dan. "I don't know what the work is, but I'll bet I can do it."

"All right," answered their host with a twinkle in his eye. "The wages are one dollar a week, and you get your board. In return for that munificent salary I expect you to get up at six-thirty, attend to the furnace, look after the horse, run errands, shovel snow, wash windows now and then, and, in short, make yourself as useful as you know how. Appeal to you, does it?"

"Well, I never washed a window yet," answered Dan, "but I guess I could do it. Anyhow, I wouldn't have to go back to school."

"Eh? But you'd be at school," replied Mr. Cozzens.

“How is that, sir?”

“That’s where I want the boy; at my school in Oak Park, St. Alfred’s.”

“Oh!” said Dan blankly, amid the laughter of the others. “That would be out of the frying pan into the fire, I guess.”

“Out of St. Eustace into St. Alfred’s,” supplemented Bob.

“Do you go to St. Eustace?” asked Mr. Cozzens.

“Yes, sir.”

“And the rest of you?”

“No, the others don’t amount to much, sir. Nelson and Tom go to Hillton, and Bob there is in the high school at Portland.”

“I see. I have an instructor with me who graduated from Hillton; Mr. Hopkinson; ever hear of him? He was a good deal before your time, though, I guess.”

“Where is Oak Park, sir?” asked Tom.

“It’s near the north shore about midway between Hempstead and Cold Spring Harbor. A very attractive place, Oak Park.”

“And you’re the Principal, sir?”

“Yes, or Head Master, as we call it. The school isn’t a large one. We had thirty-two boys last year. But it’s been in existence only four years.”

“And—and the boy you hire, sir?” continued Tom with rising excitement, “cu-cu-cu-could he do any studying?”

“Why, yes, I should want him to. Are you thinking of applying?” asked Mr. Cozzens with a smile.

“No, sir, bu-bu-bu-but I—I—” He stopped and looked at Nelson and Bob and Dan, who, suddenly guessing what Tom was thinking of, all tried to speak at once.

“Jerry!” cried Dan.

“Just the thing!” cried Nelson.

“We know the very fellow you want, sir!” added Bob.

“Well, this is interesting,” said Mr. Cozzens. “Who is he?”

“You tell him, Bob,” said Nelson. “Tom’s excited, and it would take him all night.”

So Bob told about their meeting with Jerry Hinkley in the barn near Bakerville, of their plans for his education, and of their subsequent encounter at the circus. It was rather a long story, and Mr. Cozzens frequently interrupted the narration with his questions, but when it was finished their host was clearly impressed.

“If you can get hold of that boy,” he said, “you do it. Send him right to me at Oak Park. I shall be there in three days. I can’t make any promises, but if he turns out what I expect from your description he will suit me nicely. And if he’s really eager to learn, and has an ordinary amount of pluck, he ought to be able to do very well at St. Alfred’s. He will be pretty busy, for there’s plenty to do, but he will have time to attend all classes, and to study some outside. In fact, it ought to be the very place for him. He’s sixteen, you say, but backward? He’d probably have to start with the younger boys, but if he showed willingness I’d do all I could to put him along. Whether at the end of the year he would be able to pass the examinations for Hillton, I can’t say. It will depend a great deal on himself. But I should think that, with some help during the summer, as you

had planned, he ought to be able to pass. You will see him, you say, at Barrington?"

"Yes, sir; at least, we hope to," answered Bob. "He said when we left him that he expected to be there about the twentieth. I hope we will find him! When does your school begin, sir?"

"On the twenty-third, but I should like to have him there as soon after the twentieth as possible. Supposing you let me hear from you after you get to Barrington? Let me know whether to expect him, for if you don't run across him I'll have to look for some one else."

"All right, sir, we'll telegraph you at Oak Park as soon as we get to Barrington. I hope he'll suit, sir, for Jerry is a fine chap, and we all want him to get on. You see, we—we've adopted him in a sort of way, sir!"

"I see you have," laughed Mr. Cozzens. "And very good of you it is," he added seriously. "I hope your plans for him will turn out splendidly, and if he comes to me you may trust me to do all I can for him."

"Yes, sir, we do," answered Tom earnestly.

"Well, I guess I'd better go up and have a look at the invalid," said Mr. Cozzens. "Don't hurry off," he added as the others rose. "It isn't late; sit up just as long as you want to."

"I guess we're all about ready for bed," said Bob. "I know I am."

So they followed their host upstairs. Will was sleeping as soundly as though he had not been at it four hours already. Mr. Cozzens said good night, and the Four prepared for bed. But,

in spite of their proclaimed sleepiness, they were too highly elated and excited over Jerry's prospects to drop off immediately, and it was all of an hour later when they finished discussing them. Tom had a way of getting in the last word, and to-night was no exception.

"Isn't it funny how things happen?" said Nelson. "Who'd have thought when we got shipwrecked out there on the point that it was going to turn out like this?"

"That's so," Dan replied sleepily. "Talk about luck!"

There was silence for a minute. Then Tom's voice came solemnly across the dark from his cot in the corner.

"It isn't altogether luck," he said. "I guess God had a good deal to do with it."

CHAPTER XXI

WHEREIN TOM LOSES HIS TOOTHBRUSH AND DAN TELLS A STORY

The next day, which was Saturday, the seventeenth, dawned clear and cold. It was the first touch of real autumn weather they had had, and when they hurried downstairs the fire in the living room, which had been freshly built, felt very good. Will came down with them. He declared himself "all right," but he was so uncommunicative and so ill at ease that it was difficult to find out much about him. Mr. Cozzens tried his best to draw him out at breakfast, but his embarrassment was so painful that it seemed kindness to let him alone. After breakfast they went out to the point to look after the sloop, taking the dory with them. The wind was in the north, and bit fingers and noses as it swept across the blue, white-capped bay. They found the sloop where they had left her. The tide was high, and a good sea was still running, but things looked vastly different from what they had the afternoon before. This morning it was hard to believe that there were such things as storms.

Mr. Cozzens and Nelson set out in the dory. They found the sloop two-thirds full of water, and set about pumping her out. Will had told them that they would find a pump in the locker, and they soon had it at work. After they had the water pretty well out they found that several of the planks had sprung, and Mr. Cozzens advised hauling her out on the beach and having her repaired. So they pulled the anchor in, and Nelson rowed back to the beach for Dan and Bob. The latter and Mr. Cozzens took a line from the sloop's bow and fixed it to the stern of the

dory. Then they got into the latter, and tried to pull the sloop off the sand bar, while Dan and Nelson stood in the stern in order to raise the forward part. It was hard work, but at the end of twenty minutes the sloop was afloat again, and half an hour later she was lying on her side well out of water, thanks to the efforts of Prince and all hands. There they left her, after securing her with a couple of cables, and it was decided that Will should return home by train to Greenport and ferry to Sag Harbor. They paid him five dollars, since, as Dan pointed out, they had really benefited by the misadventure, and Will, with muttered thanks and farewell, disappeared in the direction of the station.

A little while later the Four, too, took their departure, thanking Mr. and Mrs. Cozzens heartily for their kindness, and promising to come again to the red cottage if ever they had the opportunity. Mr. Cozzens walked with them as far as the neck, and pointed out their road to them.

"Good-by, boys," he said. "I'm glad I had the pleasure of meeting you, and I hope it won't be the last time. Come and see my school some time. Meanwhile, let me hear from you about your friend as soon as you can. Good-by and good luck!"

The nip in the air was conducive to brisk traveling, and when, at noon, they reached Jamesport they had eight miles to their credit. In the afternoon they did still better, and reached Fairhaven, twelve miles distant, tired and hungry and happy, at half-past six. They found letters awaiting them at the post office in the morning. Mr. Speede wrote that, since Dan was really in earnest, he would be glad to do anything in reason for Jerry, "even to the extent," he wrote, "of becoming custodian and administrator of the FUND!" Tom's father and Nelson's

also professed themselves eager to help, and Jerry's life for the next two or three years seemed to be nicely arranged. If only they could find Jerry!

The day was Sunday and, although warmer than yesterday, was still pretty cold. In spite of the fact that by waiting for the post office to open they had delayed their departure until after nine o'clock, they had resolved to make the day's journey a record one.

"We haven't done a real day's work yet," declared Bob. "We've just been loafing along. If we can make Kingston to-night that'll leave us only about half a day's tramp to Barrington, and we can get there to-morrow noon. Then we can find Jerry, spend the night there, and go to the steamer landing Tuesday morning."

"How far is Kingston from here?" asked Dan.

"Not over twenty miles."

"We can do it, then."

"Of course we can," agreed Nelson. "We're in good shape now."

"Yes," answered Dan. "Even Tommy's shape is better, I think. I'll bet he's walked off ten pounds."

"No, I don't believe so, Dan," said Bob. "You see, as soon as Tommy loses any flesh, he gets busy at the table, and puts it right back."

"Well, come ahead," said Dan. "Let's get at it. Where's that dog got to? You Barry! Where are you, you rascal? Oh, found another bone, have you? My, you're getting more and more like Tommy every day; eating all the time!"

“Hope you choke,” said Tom in a good-natured growl.

That day’s march was barren of incidents worthy of mention, unless the incident of Tom’s knapsack is worth speaking about. It was after dinner, and they had done some fourteen of the possible twenty miles when there was a cry of disgust from Tom.

“What’s the matter?” asked Dan, turning.

“Mu-mu-mu-matter!” answered Tom. “Mu-mu-matter enough! Lu-lu-lu-look at mu-mu-my knapsack!”

“What have you done to it?” asked Nelson in amazement. “It—it’s empty!”

“No wonder,” said Bob with a smile; “it’s all untied.”

“That’s no way to fix a knapsack,” said Dan soberly. “What have you done with your things?”

“Du-du-du-done with them!” sputtered Tom. “Wh-wh-wh-what do you su-su-suppose I’ve du-du-du-done with them? Eaten th-th-th-them?”

“Well, we know your appetite, Tommy,” said Nelson gently.

“Th-th-they’re su-su-scattered fu-fu-from here to the hotel! Wh-wh-wh-what’ll I du-du-do?”

By this time the others were laughing at the tops of their lungs, and it was several moments before any suggestions came. Tom stared from one to another of them in mingled reproach and indignation. Finally,

“Sit down and wait for them to catch up with you,” Dan suggested.

“Send Barry back for them,” said Bob.

“Whistle,” said Nelson.

But presently they agreed that it was hard luck, and finally calmed Tom’s despair.

“I’ll go back with you a ways,” Nelson volunteered, “and the others can go on if they want to.”

“We’ll wait awhile,” said Bob, “and then if you don’t show up we’ll walk ahead slowly, and give you a chance to catch up with us.”

Luckily they found most of the missing articles within a mile and a half. Tom’s toothbrush and a pair of stockings, however, were not to be seen.

“Let ’em go,” said Tom. “I’ll get a brush at Kingston or Barrington; and it doesn’t matter about the socks because I’ve got plenty more in my trunk. Help me tie this old thing up right, will you?”

The knapsack rearranged, they started back.

They caught up with Bob and Dan two or three miles outside of Kingston, and reached that town just at dusk. Nelson and Tom were inclined to be stuck-up over the fact that they had done three miles more than the others and therefore held the record. But Dan maintained that it didn’t count when you went over the same ground twice. Of course they went to the hotel in which they had put up on the occasion of their previous visit and where Barry had distinguished himself, and of course they received a warm welcome. Barry was in real danger of death from overeating, so attentive was the proprietor. After dinner they told the latter of their further

adventures with the thief, and it was plain to be seen that he didn't approve of their clemency, although he didn't say so. When bedtime came Dan and Nelson went into the room occupied by Bob and Tom, and stretched themselves out on the bed while the others undressed. After Bob had brushed his teeth he carried his toothbrush over to the bed in a stealthy manner, and placed it under his pillow.

"What the dickens is that for?" asked Dan.

"S-sh!" whispered Bob, finger on lips. "You know Tommy lost his."

"Huh!" answered Tom amid the laughter. "You needn't think I'd use yours!"

"That reminds me," said Dan, with a giggle. "Did you ever hear about the Englishmen on the steamer?"

"Help!" cried Nelson. "Help! Dan's going to tell a joke."

"Never mind," said Bob soothingly; "humor him; laugh if you possibly can."

"All right; you say when, Bob."

"Shut up," said Dan, "and let me tell you. It's funny. I read it in—in—*Punch*, I think it was."

"*Punch!*" howled Nelson. "Good night, you fellows; I really must be going."

But Dan pulled him back to the bed.

"You stay here," he said. "This joke's all right if it did come from *Punch*."

"Let him tell it and get it over with," advised Tom, between

splashes at the washstand.

"Well, there was an Englishman," began Dan. "No, there were two Englishmen."

"Make it three, old man," advised Nelson. "There's luck in odd numbers."

"Shut up, you! They were on a steamer, and had the same stateroom."

"Which had the lower berth?" inquired Tom.

"And they were strangers to each other," continued the narrator. "Well, one of the Englishmen went down——"

"Which one was it?" asked Bob.

"Went down to his cabin and found the other chap——"

"I know!" cried Tom.

"Well, what is it?" asked Dan indignantly.

"He went down and found the other chap had stolen the berths!"

"Oh, you go to thunder! He found the other chap using his toothbrush."

"Now!" cried Bob, and he and Nelson proceeded to go into spasms of laughter.

"Best thing *Punch* ever printed!" gurgled Bob.

"Frightfully funny!" moaned Nelson. "Oh! Oh! I shall die!"

"Imagine—imagine how the—toothbrush felt, Nel!" shrieked Bob.

"Say, will you shut up?" said Dan, pummeling Nelson.

“That isn’t all of it. Wait till I tell you. The first Englishman ____”

Loud groans interrupted him.

“It isn’t all, Bob,” said Nelson sorrowfully. Bob shook his head.

“Bear up, Nel! Who knows? Maybe he’s forgotten the rest.”

“I know!” interrupted Tom again.

“Know what?” asked Dan.

“The rest of it. The toothbrush was loaded!”

“Loaded, you idiot! How do you mean?”

“Had—had powder in it and——”

“Oh, you fellows make me tired,” said Dan good-naturedly, rolling off the bed. “Come on, Nel.”

Nelson allowed himself to be pulled to the floor, and then found his feet.

“All right, Dan,” he said. “Let’s go. They have no sense of humor here. They’re a stupid lot, anyway. Barry’s the only one who has any sense.”

“Hold on!” cried Tom, as the door was closing. “I want to know which of the two had the lower berth.”

“Find out,” replied Dan disgustedly.

Later, when the lights were out, and Dan and Nelson had composed themselves for slumber, the latter broke the silence.

“Say, Dan!”

“Yep.”

“What was the rest of that story?”

“Will you shut up and let me tell it?” asked Dan suspiciously.

“Honor bright! Go ahead!”

“Well, you see, the first Englishman came down and found the other Englishman using his toothbrush, and——”

“Meaning the toothbrush belonging to the first Englishman?”

“No—yes!” answered Dan. “Of course the first Englishman’s toothbrush, you idiot. I said that, didn’t I?”

There was no answer, and he went on.

“‘I say, my dear fellow,’ said the first Englishman, ‘that’s my toothbrush you have there!’ ‘Really?’ said the second Englishman. ‘I beg your pawdon, old chap! I thought it belonged to the ship’!”

Dan chuckled in the darkness, and waited for Nelson’s laughter.

“I think that’s pretty good, don’t you?” he asked presently.

There was no answer. Nelson was snoring placidly. Dan rolled over and thumped his pillow.

“Idiot!” he muttered.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEREIN GOOD-BYS ARE SAID, AND BARRY MAKES HIS CHOICE

"Well, we're pretty near home," said Bob at the breakfast table the next morning. "To-morrow afternoon we ought to be in New York."

"Then it's back to school!" sighed Tom.

"I'm ready," said Nelson. "School's all right, Tommy. I'm going to have a good time this year. A fellow always does his last year."

"Wish it was my last," said Tom. "You fellows'll be sophomores at Erskine when I get there, and I'll be a freshie and you won't have anything to do with me!"

"Oh, if you behave yourself, Tommy, we'll speak to you now and then as we pass," said Dan. "We're not the kind to go back on an old friend."

"You could make up a year if you tried," said Nelson. "If you had some coaching next summer you could pass the college exams all right."

"He and Jerry might be coached together," suggested Bob.

"Well, I'm going to try," answered Tom forlornly, "but I don't believe I'll be able to make it. If it wasn't for Latin——"

He shook his head dejectedly.

"Cheer up, Tommy," said Dan. "*In hoc signo vinces*, old chap! Never forget that. That means 'While there's life there's

hope.’”

“And *E pluribus unum* means one out of many,” rejoined Tom sadly. “And the one’s me.”

When they had stopped laughing, Bob said:

“I think we’ve had a pretty good time this trip, taking it all in all, don’t you?”

“Dandy,” answered Nelson. “We always do when we get together. Look at the fun we had last summer at Chicora! I think we ought to do something else together next summer. What do you say?”

He looked eagerly around at the others.

“Sure!” cried Dan. “Let’s get together, the four of us, every summer until—until we don’t want to!”

“Good scheme,” said Bob. “Let’s decide on something for next year.”

“That’s not so easy,” answered Nelson. “But we can think it over and write to each other in the spring, and—”

“What I’d like to do,” interrupted Dan, “would be to go on a cruise somewhere.”

“Sail, do you mean?” asked Tom anxiously.

“Sail or row or paddle or any old way,” answered Dan. “Pass me the toast, Nel, if you don’t want it all.”

“Catch,” answered Nelson. “Look here, how would a cruise in a launch do?”

“Swell!” said Tom.

“Just the ticket!” agreed Dan.

“Well, I think I could get our launch; I guess dad would let us have it for a month or so; and we could have a bully time.”

“That would be all right,” said Bob. “Or if we couldn’t do that we might get some horses, and take a riding trip. I knew a fellow who——”

“That’s too much like walking,” interrupted Dan. “What’s the matter with an automobile?”

“Where are you going to get it?” asked Bob sarcastically.

“Oh, borrow it. Tom’s father has a machine, hasn’t he, Tom?”

“Yes, but he isn’t fool enough to lend it to us!”

“That’s because he doesn’t know us,” answered Dan, unruffled. “I can run an auto to beat the band.”

“Not with me inside, you can’t,” said Nelson decidedly.

“Well, we’ll think it all over,” said Bob. “There’s lots of time. What we’ve got to do now is to hit the trail for Barrington and Mr. Jerry Hinkley. Aren’t you most through, Tommy?”

Tommy declared, with his mouth full, that he was quite through, and a few minutes later they were once more on their way, with the journey’s end well in sight.

“It’s certainly done you good, Dan,” said Nelson presently, as they were crossing the river. “I guess that doctor of yours knew what he was talking about. I’ll bet you’ve put on ten or fifteen pounds since we started.”

“I guess I have gained a bit,” answered Dan. “Anyhow, I surely feel fine and dandy. But I’m sorry it is all over; I’d like

to turn around and do it all over again, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, if it wasn't for school," replied Nelson. "Say, I'll see you at the football game, won't I? And you promised to come up over Sunday some time."

"I'm going to. Only I mustn't let the fellows know it or they'll throw me out. Personally, Nel, I can stand the disgrace, but——"

"Oh, dry up! We're going to beat you at football this fall. Hillton's going to have the finest team that ever——"

"Was beaten by St. Eustace," laughed Dan.

Whereupon the argument waxed warm, and for a mile or more they talked football with all the enthusiasm customary when two live, manly, American boys get together in the autumn weather.

They had covered about half the distance to Barrington when the rattle and rumble of a heavy farm wagon coming along behind warned them to the side of the road. As they got out of the way Nelson glanced carelessly around. Then he gave a shout that attracted the attention of Bob and Tom, who were some fifty yards ahead, and brought them scurrying back. The farm wagon came to a halt, and in the next instant Nelson and Dan were clambering up and shaking hands with Jerry Hinkley.

Jerry was back in his farm clothes, but for all of that he presented a different appearance to-day than on the occasion of their first meeting. Perhaps his clothes were a little neater and cleaner; surely his hair no longer looked like an overgrown mop, but was well cut and smoothly brushed. There was no doubt that Jerry was a very good-looking boy. But I think the

principal change lay in his expression. To-day he looked smilingly confident, self-assured, as though knowledge of his capabilities had found him at last, and he was eager to prove them. Much of his former diffidence, however, remained, and he shook hands with the Four, and answered their delighted greetings with smiling embarrassment. Then they were all climbing into the wagon, Jerry's way being theirs.

"Say, just look at Barry, will you," said Bob. "He's making friends with the horses."

And sure enough the terrier was leaping at the noses of the two big sorrels and whining delightedly. And the horses evidently reciprocating the sudden affection, were bobbing their heads down to him as he leaped about. Dan called to him and lifted him into the wagon, where he scurried industriously about, sniffing and sneezing and pawing at the litter of dusty straw and chaff.

"Where are you going?" asked Jerry as he chirped to the horses.

"We were going to see you," answered Nelson. "Isn't it odd we should have found you like this? Where have you been?"

"Just down the road a piece. I was delivering a load of grain for Mr. Osgood."

"Does he live near here?" asked Tom.

"About a mile beyond," answered Jerry. "I'd like for you to stop and see him. I—I been telling him about you."

"Of course we'll stop," said Nelson. "Besides—" He paused and looked inquiringly at the others. They nodded.

"Go ahead," said Bob.

“Fire away,” added Dan.

“Besides,” Nelson resumed, “we’ve got something to tell you. I guess we might as well tell it now.”

So, clinging to the seat to keep from being shaken off, he told Jerry of the arrangements they had made for his future, and finally of Mr. Cozzens’s offer of a situation at St. Alfred’s. And when it was all over, and Tom and Bob and Dan had each added eager and unnecessary explanations, Jerry still sat silent, his eyes fixed on the ears of the off horse. They waited a moment. Then,

“Look here, Jerry, it’s all right, isn’t it?” asked Dan anxiously. Jerry nodded.

“Good,” breathed Dan relievedly. “I was afraid you—er ____”

“I ain’t said nothing—I mean anything—because I don’t know what *to* say,” Jerry finally remarked, with a quick, embarrassed glance at Nelson. “I—I——”

He faltered and stopped.

“Don’t say a word,” returned Nelson. “It’s all right.”

“But I want you all to know that—that I’m very much obliged. It—it’s more than that, only I can’t just say it. I—I don’t know why you fellows have been so good to me.”

Bob laughed uneasily.

“You’re such a good fellow, Jerry, we wanted to help you,” he said. “We haven’t done anything much, though; the hardest part is left for you, old chap. But I think you’re going to make good, Jerry; we all think that; so don’t you disappoint us.”

“I won’t!” answered Jerry almost savagely. “I’m going to make you fellows glad you did it, see if I don’t!”

Nelson clapped him on the shoulder.

“That’s the way to talk, Jerry! And if you can get that place at St. Alfred’s it’ll make a lot of difference. Why, you can learn any amount there this winter, and have your board and room besides. Mr. Cozzens said it wouldn’t be awfully easy, you know, plenty of work and all that; but you’ll have time for lessons and study, all right.”

“I don’t care how hard the work is,” answered Jerry. “I can do it. Only——”

“Only what?” asked Bob as he hesitated.

“Only I don’t know as I ought to go. You see, I engaged with Mr. Osgood for all winter.”

“Oh, he will let you off,” said Nelson. “We’ll see him and tell him just how it is. That’ll be all right, Jerry.”

“I hope so,” said Jerry. “There’s the farm now; that’s his house, the white one yonder.”

Evidently Mr. Osgood was one of the progressive sort. Everything about the place, from the busy windmill to the big white house with its wide verandas and well-graveled walks, was scrupulously neat and clean, and a general air of prosperity pervaded it. And when they had rattled up the driveway to the barn, and the owner of the premises appeared before them, they discovered him to be just such a man as his place indicated. He was middle-aged, tall, and muscular looking, with a pair of humorous and kindly blue eyes which sparkled brightly from his tanned face. The boys liked him on the

instant, and Nelson decided that he would not have much difficulty in securing Jerry's release.

They tumbled out of the wagon, and were introduced by Jerry. Mr. Osgood declared heartily that he was very glad to meet them, especially as he had heard so much about them from Jerry, and was in the act of shaking hands all around when an interruption occurred. The interruption was in the form of Barry, who, released from the wagon, had spent a moment in running excitedly about the ground, and now was leaping enthusiastically upon the farmer, whining and barking joyously. Mr. Osgood stopped and looked down. Then an expression of deep surprise overspread his face.

"Well, I'll be switched!" he said slowly. "Where under the sun did you come from, Laddie?"

There was a moment of silence save for the terrier's frantic explanations. Jerry, unhitching the horses, paused and looked at Dan. Dan's face was a study. He was striving very hard to keep from looking miserable. Finally,

"Is that your dog, sir?" he asked.

"It surely is," answered Mr. Osgood. "He disappeared about two or three weeks ago. May I ask where you found him?"

So Dan, eagerly assisted by the others, recounted the tale of the terrier's rescue and subsequent adventures, and the farmer listened interestedly. Then,

"Well, that's what I call a plucky piece of work," he said admiringly, "and I'm much obliged to you. I hadn't had Laddie long, but I was getting mighty fond of him when he disappeared. And I'm glad to get him back." He hesitated. "I advertised in the Barrington paper and offered ten dollars

reward, and so—if you don't mind taking it——"

But Dan shook his head.

"I'd rather not, sir," he muttered. "Barry's made it up to me lots of times. I—we—got quite fond of him, sir."

"I s'pose you did," said the farmer thoughtfully, eying Dan. "I'm sorry," he added simply.

"What's his name, sir?" asked Tom.

"His full name's Forest Lad, but I call him Laddie. He used to belong to a Mr. Hutchinson who has a place about a mile from here and raises dogs. They say Laddie got a prize once at some show in New York, but I don't know for sure. He got sick in the spring, and one day when I was over at the Hutchinson place with some grain I admired him, and Mr. Hutchinson said I could have him if I thought I could cure him. I said I guessed all he needed was plenty of fresh air and exercise—he was in a run over there, with a fence around him—and so I took him. And it did cure him too. Now, I guess Laddie got sort of homesick one day, and started out for Hutchinson's. The place is closed up this summer—the family's in Europe, I think—and it's likely that when Laddie got there he didn't find anyone around. Maybe he thought he'd sort of wait awhile. I guess that's how you happened to run across him."

"I guess so," Dan agreed.

"I want you boys to stay to dinner," continued the farmer. "It'll be ready in about half an hour. And if Jerry's through with the team he might show you around. Maybe you've never seen an up-to-date farm, eh?"

So Mr. Osgood excused himself, and Jerry took them in charge. Barry, for Dan was always to remember the terrier by that name, elected to go with them, much to Dan's delight, and acted as though he was guide instead of Jerry. There was much to interest them, and they weren't nearly through when the bell rang for dinner, and they had to hurry back to the house. They found quite a company assembled in the dining room, for besides Mr. Osgood there was his wife and two daughters, an elderly lady whose relationship wasn't quite plain, Jerry, and four other farm hands. So they made quite a tableful when all were seated. It was a bully dinner, to quote Tom—and Tom was a bit of an authority on such things—and they ate heartily. And presently Nelson brought up the subject of Jerry and Mr. Cozzens's offer, and their host listened in silence. Nelson painted in vivid colors the advantages to accrue to Jerry, and when he was through, the farmer ate for a minute in silence. Finally,

"Well, I'm sorry to lose Jerry," he said thoughtfully, "but I'm not going to stand in his way. I didn't get overmuch education myself, but I'm not fool enough to think it's unnecessary. I guess if I'd had more of it I might have arrived where I am to-day a good deal earlier. So Jerry does just as he wants to in this matter. But if he takes my advice he will go to this school you tell about. What say, Jerry?"

Jerry maintained an embarrassed silence for a moment. Then,

"I think I'll go, sir, if it ain't putting you in no hole," he replied. "Leastways, I'd like to see Mr. Cozzens and talk it over with him."

"Right you are! You'd better go over to-morrow morning.

And then if you decide to stay I'll send your things over to you. But you must let me know right away so's I can get some one in your place. Help isn't easy to find this time of year."

"Thank you, sir," answered the boy gratefully. "I'll write to you to-morrow afternoon if I don't come back."

[As a matter of fact, Jerry didn't come back. He stayed at St. Alfred's, and never regretted it for a moment. But all this has nothing to do with the present story.]

After dinner the boys completed their tour of inspection, and then made ready to depart. Dan had been looking pretty downhearted, and when the time came to take leave of Barry he didn't feel much better. They shook hands with Mr. Osgood, were cordially invited to come again, and then turned to Jerry.

"Good-by, Jerry," said Bob. "Don't get discouraged if the work seems hard at first. It's going to be a tussle, but you can do it."

"That's so," said Tom, shaking hands. "Just you bu-bu-bu-buckle down to it, Jerry. Remember we're bu-bu-back of you!"

"Good-by," said Dan. "And good luck."

"Good-by, Signor Danello," answered Jerry with a shy effort at pleasantry. "I—I'm sorry about—the dog."

Dan nodded and moved away.

"I'll write to you now and then," said Nelson, "and tell you about things at school—our school, Jerry—so you can keep your courage up. And you'll write to me, won't you?"

"Yes," Jerry replied eagerly. "Only—I ain't a very good

writer, Nelson."

"That's all right; neither am I, I guess. Good-by. Good-by, Mr. Osgood! And thanks for letting Jerry off."

"Good-by," echoed the others.

The Four turned down the walk to the gate. Barry, who during the proceedings had been manifestly uneasy, now pricked his ears and watched Dan's departure with alert interest. Once he turned and looked inquiringly at Mr. Osgood. The farmer returned his look with a smile and a wink. Perhaps Barry understood that, like Jerry, he was free to choose for himself. For after one indecisive moment he gave a bark and flew down the walk as hard as he could go. He caught Dan at the gate, and leaped ecstatically about him. Dan, his lips trembling, waved him back and tried to tell him to go home. But the words wouldn't come. Bob and Nelson and Tom watched, silently sympathetic. Barry ran into the road and turned, his tail wagging fast, as though asking, "What are you waiting for? Aren't we all here?"

"Barry," muttered Dan miserably, "I can't take you, old chap. You aren't my dog any more. You—you'll have to go home."

Then footsteps crunched on the gravel, and Dan turned to find Mr. Osgood smiling kindly into his eyes.

"I gave him his choice," said the farmer, "and he's made it. He's yours if you want him, my boy."

Three hours later the Four—or should I say the Five?—were standing on the deck of the little steamer watching the Long Island shore recede across the waters of the Sound. The boat's nose was pointed toward New York—and school and study

and hard work. But every face there showed happiness and contentment. For, being healthy and sensible, they knew that study and hard work stand just as much for enjoyment as do vacation days. And of all in the group there on the deck the happiest was Dan, unless—well, unless, possibly, it was Barry!

THE END

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Except for the frontispiece, illustrations have been moved to the text that they illustrate, so the page number of the

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Punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

[The end of *Four Afoot* by Ralph Henry Barbour]