TEAM MATES

BARBOUR

THE CENTURY CO.

TEAM-MATES

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Title: Team-Mates

Date of first publication: 1911

Author: Ralph Henry Barbour (1870-1944)

Date first posted: Sep. 17, 2019

Date last updated: Sep. 17, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190942

This eBook was produced by: Donald Cummings & the online Distributed Proofreaders team at https://www.pgdp.net

Team-Mates

Beside Sandy tripped the Obnoxious Kid, waving triumphantly her red and white banner

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By

Ralph Henry Barbour

Author of “The Crimson Sweater,” “Captain Chub,”
“Harry’s Island,” etc.

With Illustrations

By C. M. Relyea

New York
The Century Co.
1911

Published September, 1911

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TEAM-MATES

CHAPTER I
A NEW BOY ARRIVES

"How far is it to Oak Park School, please?"

The policeman on duty at the North Woodfield station turned from watching the train disappear westward along the track and gave his attention to the speaker. What he saw was a rather thin youth of fourteen with deeply tanned face from which a pair of gray eyes looked somewhat anxiously upward. The boy had removed his hat, a dilapidated straw adorned with a faded blue band, not out of deference to the majesty of the law but because the September afternoon was decidedly hot, leaving to view a head of pale brown hair, rumpled and damp, which had evidently been trimmed both recently and poorly. He wore a suit of gray flannel, a white shirt, with a stiff and creaky bosom, a narrow red four-in-hand tie and tan shoes. In spite of the fact that his attire was all of the most inexpensive sort he was quite palpably "dressed up" and extremely uncomfortable. He had set down his bag, a small and very shiny contrivance of imitation alligator skin, in order to run a new and scratchy handkerchief around inside his collar.

"What was it you asked?" inquired the officer.

"How far is it to Oak Park School, sir? And which way do I have to go, please?"

The officer had started a good many boys on their initial journey to the school and had acquired a method of procedure.

“Pick up your bag and I’ll show you, my boy. Right through here.” He conducted his charge across the waiting-room and out the further door where, along the asphalt walk, carriage drivers were clamoring for fares.

“The school’s about a half a mile up that way. Any of these drivers will take you there.”

“But they’ll charge me, won’t they?” asked the boy.

“Sure! They ain’t doing it for their health. It’s only a quarter, though. You can stand that, I guess.”

“I’d rather walk if you’ll tell me how to go.”

The officer turned for another survey of the boy before he replied. He had seen a number of Oak Park School boys, but this was the first one who had ever in his experience saved carriage fare. “Don’t quite look like he belonged at that school,” he said to himself. Then,

“’D rather walk, eh? Well, you cross the common here and take that street over by the hardware store. See? Keep right on that until you get to the school. You can’t miss it. Going to the Hall, are you?”

“No, sir; West House.”

“Well, that’s a bit farther, but you’d better go up to the school and then cross over through the park. You might go another way, but it’s longer and a good deal hotter walking, I guess. If I was you, though, I’d take a carriage. There’s a load of the boys going up now. Better go with ’em.”

“I cal’late I’d rather walk, thanks. It ain’t very far.” He put on his hat and returned his handkerchief to his pocket. “Much obliged, sir.”

“Oh, you’re welcome. Better take it easy; it’s a hot day.”

“Yes, sir, I will.”

The officer watched him cross the road, enter the common and strike off toward the other side of the Square. He smiled and then he shook his head.

“Wonder how he came here,” he muttered. “I guess he’s in for a lot of guying when the rest of ’em catch sight of him. Well, he’ll live through it.”

The boy reached the farther side of the common and started across the street in front of the hardware store. At that moment a three-seated surrey containing the driver, four boys and numerous suit-cases came along and the boy on foot had to retreat hurriedly to keep from being run down.

“Look out there, farmer! Most got you that time!”

“Look where you’re going, kid!”

He had a brief glimpse of laughing, mocking faces and then the surrey, drawn by a pair of sleek bays, dashed around the corner out of sight. He started again across the street, this time looking cautiously to left and right. But the course was clear now. Across from the hardware store was a druggist’s and huge placards told enticingly of “Ice Cold Soda” and “College Ices.” One hand went tentatively into his trousers pocket as the hiss of the soda fountain came to him. But it came out again empty and he turned down the street toward the school. “Elm Street” said the sign on the corner, but the elms were not in sight. Beyond an occasional maple, too small to throw shade, the street was treeless and the hot sunlight beat remorselessly down on either sidewalk.

There had been a fountain in the common and he wished now that he had stopped and had a drink. For a block or two small stores lined the way and he considered entering one of them and asking for water. But they were all shabby and untidy and by the time he had made up his mind to ask he had left them behind, and houses, no more attractive than the stores, had taken their place. He took the policeman's advice and walked slowly, for in spite of the fact that it wanted but a week to the first of October the day was as hot as an August one and the stiff shirt and the vest, both articles of attire with which he was somewhat unfamiliar, increased his discomfort. He hoped that the policeman hadn't underestimated the distance to the school. The bag, while it wasn't very heavy, didn't make progress any easier. And that awful collar was squeezing his neck like a vise!

He had started from home after an early dinner feeling decidedly excited and elated, but the elation was dwindling fast with every step, and the excitement had changed to something that savored both of dismay and homesickness. When, away last Spring, it had been decided in family council that he was to go to boarding school and prepare for college the prospect had filled him with delight. Now he wished himself back in West Bayport. He already missed the sight and smell of the ocean and the wharves and the shipping. It seemed unpleasantly shut in here, and the air was dead and held no tang, and the street was deep in yellowish-gray dust and even the hills in the distance looked hot and wilted under their purple haze. On the whole, he was sorely tempted to retrace his steps and take the next train homeward, abandoning Oak Park and college and all they stood for.

But of course he didn't. If he had his name wouldn't have

been John William Boland. Moreover, there wouldn't have been any story! No, he kept right along the hot road which presently bore to the left and became gradually shady with spreading elms. The shabby dwellings died away from either side and open lots and then broad fields succeeded them. Once he rested for a good five minutes perched on a stone wall in the grateful shade of a big elm, and while he sat there, hat off, rumpled hair exposed to a little listless breeze, shiny bag at his feet, two carriages filled to the brim with boys, arrivals on a later train, rattled merrily and noisily by him, and he was uncomfortably conscious of the curious looks and the muttered comments proceeding from them.

He didn't think he was going to like Oak Park School and regretted that he hadn't held out for one of the institutions which his own choice had fallen upon when the little white cottage at West Bayport had been inundated for weeks with school catalogues. He recalled one in particular, Seaview Academy, an imposing brick building fronting the ocean, backed with a jolly looking forest and adorned on all sides by winding paths sprinkled with boys and strange-shaped flower beds blooming tropically. But Seaview had been quite out of the question with its seven hundred dollar tuition fee, and, like several others which had caught his fancy, had been set aside as something beautiful but impossible.

There had been a time when the Bolands were prosperous. That was before Captain Jonathan Boland, master and half-owner of the fishing schooner *Patriot*, had been lost with all hands on the Grand Banks and Mrs. Boland and John and his sister Nan had been left with only the small house overlooking the harbor and a very little money. The disaster had occurred when John was ten and his sister a year younger, and since that

time the family had often had hard work to make ends meet. John and Nan attended public school, and in the summer the former found what work he could. The wages weren't large, but they helped. One summer he had obtained a place in a sail-loft, and another year had nailed "flats" into boxes at the fish house. But the best summer of all had been the one just past, when he had served as one of the crew of three on the little auxiliary sloop *Emma Boyd*, which sailed or chugged about the harbor selling water to the fishing boats.

It was the death of Uncle Thomas that had altered the boy's prospects. Uncle Thomas had been his mother's brother, a mysterious, seldom seen old man who had lived in Maine and who, when he decided to die at the respectable age of seventy-odd, had left a legacy of a thousand dollars to his sister. News of it had reached Mrs. Boland in the late winter and not for an instant had there been any doubt in her mind as to the investment of the money. It was to go toward her boy's education. It wouldn't take him through college, of course, but, with care, it might prepare him for it; and once old enough to find employment at a man's wages, he could, she was certain, with the Lord's help, manage the rest himself. Mrs. Boland had always been a firm believer in trusting to the Lord, and so far she had never been disappointed.

John was to study hard and prepare himself for college in three years. Neither himself nor his mother nor Sister Nan doubted his ability to do this; Nan least of all, perhaps, for to her John was something just short of super-human. Had the legacy been larger John could have afforded another year at school, but with a thousand dollars only to draw on, and tuition at good schools seldom being less than three hundred a year, you can see that three years was bound to be his limit. So the

legacy was placed untouched in the savings bank and the entire family began a systematic study of preparatory schools. In the end Oak Park had won the privilege of enrolling John William Boland among its pupils. The tuition at Oak Park was three hundred dollars a year, a price made possible by endowments from former students. It was only a dollar and twenty cents from West Bayport—you see the Bolands reckoned distance in terms of carfares!—and it possessed in addition most of the advantages offered by larger and more expensive schools. I think, though, that it was the phrase in the advertisement alluding to moral character that decided Mrs. Boland. John remembered every word of that advertisement yet; it had been read a dozen times while awaiting the school catalogue.

"Oak Park School, North Woodfield, Mass. Preparatory School for Boys. Estab. 1876. Ideal equipment for health and study. Twenty-four acres of elevated ground one hour from Boston. Special attention given to boys of fifteen and under. Enrollment limited to sixty and only boys of high moral character accepted. For further information address Dr. Horace Mitchell Webster, Principal."

John's application had been forwarded in June and a month later he had learned that it had been accepted. From that moment he had looked forward to this day. And now—why, now he was dragging unwilling feet along the road and heartily wishing himself back at home! It was extremely unreasonable of him, he knew, but somehow he just couldn't help it. It was not only unreasonable, it was ungrateful besides. And while he was telling himself so, with a terrific frown on his brown forehead, the school suddenly appeared before him.

A neat stone wall, flat-topped and half-hidden with ivy,

began beside him and went on to an ornamental iron gateway. Beyond the wall was a broad expanse of velvety green turf divided by drives and walks which led to the four buildings in sight. The nearest of these was a low two-story building of buff colored brick and limestone trimming. John guessed it to be the gymnasium, and he was right. It was full of windows, most of which were open, and the red slate roof looked very hot in the sunlight. Near the gymnasium and further from John was a handsome building of three stories, the lower of weathered shingles and the upper two of creamy-hued plaster between beams. There were two entrances, a square porch before each, and on the porches and steps were many boys. Still further away was an old building of red brick, making no pretence of architectural attractiveness and draped in ivy. This was the recitation hall doubtless. And quite a distance beyond the three foremost buildings a fourth peered around the corner of the center one. It too was of shingle and stucco and beams, but it was quite small. Beyond the school grounds there was a fringe of trees, and back of that the country rose and fell in meadows and wooded hillsides.

The policeman had said that West House was farther than the school itself and John hesitated at the gate. Then his gaze crossed the road and there was another gate, a rustic one, with the sign “West House” above it. So he turned his back on the school buildings and went through the smaller gate and followed a neat gravelled path that dipped down to a wooden bridge. Above the bridge was an oval pond half an acre in extent. Under and below it a little brook ran, fern-fringed and murmurous, to disappear in a patch of willows and alders beyond. This was the park from which the school took its name. The path led upward again and wound westward

through a grove of oaks. Here and there shrubs and plants, their leaves drooping and wilted, lined the path. With the exception of the Public Gardens in Boston, John had never seen anything as beautiful as that far-reaching expanse of turfed ground with the great wide-spreading oak trees throwing their pools of dark green shadow on the grass. There seemed to be no limits to the park, for as far as he could see his vision was shut in by leaf and branch and trunk. Once he thought he spied the top of a red chimney through the greenery, but he wasn't certain of that. He was certain, however, that Oak Park School exceeded his expectations as far as attractiveness went, and he found so much pleasure in following the path and viewing the new vistas of sun and shade that opened up before him at every turn that he quite forgot his former despondency and was so absorbed that when, quite unexpectedly, the trees stopped and a white cottage with green blinds appeared before him he was quite astounded.

CHAPTER II

WEST HOUSE SITS IN JUDGMENT

"Dutch, you're fatter than ever," declared The Fungus, digging his fingers affectionately if painfully into the other's neck as he joined the group on the steps of West House and lowered himself to a seat between Dutch and Spud Halladay. Otto Zoller turned upon him with indignation faintly visible on his round, good-natured face.

"I'm not; I'm three pounds lighter than last Spring."

"Dutch is training down for quarter," said Fred Sanderson gravely. "How much do you weigh now, Dutch?"

"Hundred and thirty-one and a half."

"Dutch!"

"Honest, Sandy!"

"We'll have to get that half-pound off you," said Spud. "Fat is fatal."

"That's cheek," said Hooper Ross, a tall youth of fifteen with amazingly black eyes and hair. "You look like a little fat cherub yourself, Spud."

"Little fat rascal!" grunted The Fungus, whose real name as entered in the school catalogue was Fergus Worthington White. The title of The Fungus suited him very well, for he had the lightest of tow-colored hair and eyes of a pale, washed-out blue. Spud aimed a kick at his insulter, but it fell short and the effort landed him on the next step below with a thud that the

other four boys found amusing.

"Where's the new kid?" asked Sandy with lowered voice.

The Fungus grinned.

"Up there," he said, jerking his head vaguely toward the second floor of the cottage. "Unpacking. You ought to see the rafts of stuff he's brought; silver brushes and a patent necktie holder that goes on the wall and trousers stretcher—"

"Trousers stretcher! He's wearing knickers," said Spud.

"Yes, but he told me he had some long trousers in his trunk. Says he didn't know which was proper here. He's a funny little kid."

"What's his name?" asked Dutch.

"Parker, Claire Parker."

"Claire? That's a girl's name, ain't it?" demanded Hoop.

"I don't know. He says it's his. He looks like a girl, too, with those nice little pink cheeks of his. He will be a valuable addition to the House Eleven, I don't think!"

"I hope the other chap will be an improvement," said Sandy. "About time for him to show up, seems to me."

"Bet you he's the fellow we saw sitting on the wall," said The Fungus. "Hope so, anyway. Ned's been rubbing it into me about the youngster. I'd laugh myself to death if that was the chap."

"Get out!" scoffed Spud. "Why, he was a regular farmer! Besides, he wouldn't be walking up."

"He might. Why doesn't Ned come down?" The Fungus

pulled himself up, descended the steps and lolled out to the center of the half-moon-shaped lawn that lay between the circling drive and the fence. “O you Ned!” he called, looking toward an upper window.

“Hello! What?” answered a voice.

“Come on down.”

“In a minute. I’m changing sides.”

The Fungus grinned as he strolled back to the group on the steps. “Ned’s changing his things over to the other side of the room,” he explained. “That gives him the bay window.”

“Hope the new fellow can play football,” mused Sandy. “We need some more talent this year, now that Means and Carter have gone. The Hall’s going to have a bully team.”

“How long since we won a game?” asked Dutch.

“Three years,” answered Spud.

“What do you know about it? You weren’t here,” said Sandy. Sanderson was sixteen and, being the oldest boy in West House, was House Leader and thereby privileged to administer rebuke. Spud grinned.

“Neither were you, Sandy,” he replied amiably.

“Didn’t say I was. And I don’t talk as though I knew it all, Spud.”

“Well, it’s time we won again,” said Dutch, breaking in on what threatened to develop into one of the periodical disputes between the two.

“Sounds all right,” said The Fungus, “but how you going to

do it? It isn't fair, anyway. The Hall's got thirty-eight fellows to pick from and the Houses only have twenty-two. Besides, we get more than our share of Second Juniors nowadays. Here's this fellow Parker, and I heard that East House is getting two of them."

"Don't believe that," said Dutch. "Brad Miller told me they were only getting three new boys altogether."

"Three! They're getting seven!" said Sandy. "And we're getting two and Hall's getting six. There are fifteen new boys this Fall. Jim told me."

"Anyhow, Hall's lost Morgan and Chase and Purdy this year," exulted Hoop, "and that'll leave them hipped."

"Piffle! Grow's just as good a tackle as Morgan was," declared Spud. "Only they wouldn't give him a fair show last year. And—"

"Where's my new fidus?" interrupted Ned Brent, appearing through the doorway with his hands thrust into the pockets of a pair of voluminous homespun trousers and viewing the group severely. "I want to see what I draw."

"Hope you draw something awful," said The Fungus maliciously. "Hope he has red hair and a mole on his nose and snores like sixty and—and—"

"Hello!" exclaimed Sandy, sotto voce. "See who's here!"

Around the corner of the house, from the direction of the park, appeared a fairly tall and slender youth of fourteen from whose sun-browned face a pair of gray eyes looked curiously and embarrassedly at the group. He swung a shiny imitation leather satchel as he advanced along the path.

“Pipe the tie,” whispered Spud in Hoop’s ear.

“*And* the trousers,” returned Hoop with a grin. The Fungus watched the newcomer’s approach with a broad smile of unholy joy. At the foot of the steps the youth stopped.

“Is this West House?” he asked, his eyes travelling from one face to another. There followed intense silence. Sandy, as House Leader, had the right to the first word and Sandy was taking his time. Meanwhile six pairs of eyes were fixed critically on the new boy, ranging from the cheap yellow shoes, very dusty from the journey, over the misfit trousers and the jacket whose sleeves were too long, lingering on the vivid red tie, loose and stringy from much wear, and lighting at last on the battered straw hat with its very blue ribbon. And the new boy, painfully aware of the scrutiny, shifted from one foot to the other and grew red under his dark tan. At last Sandy spoke.

“This,” he drawled, “is Occidental Mansion.”

“Oh!” said the boy. “Then where—” But he understood the next moment and smiled a little.

“Then I cal’late this is where I belong,” he said.

“You—*what*?” asked Sandy.

“I cal’late—”

“He’s a lightning calculator,” explained Spud helpfully. “I saw one once at a circus.”

Sandy’s eyes rested frowningly on the bag.

“I don’t think,” he said, “that we want to buy anything today.”

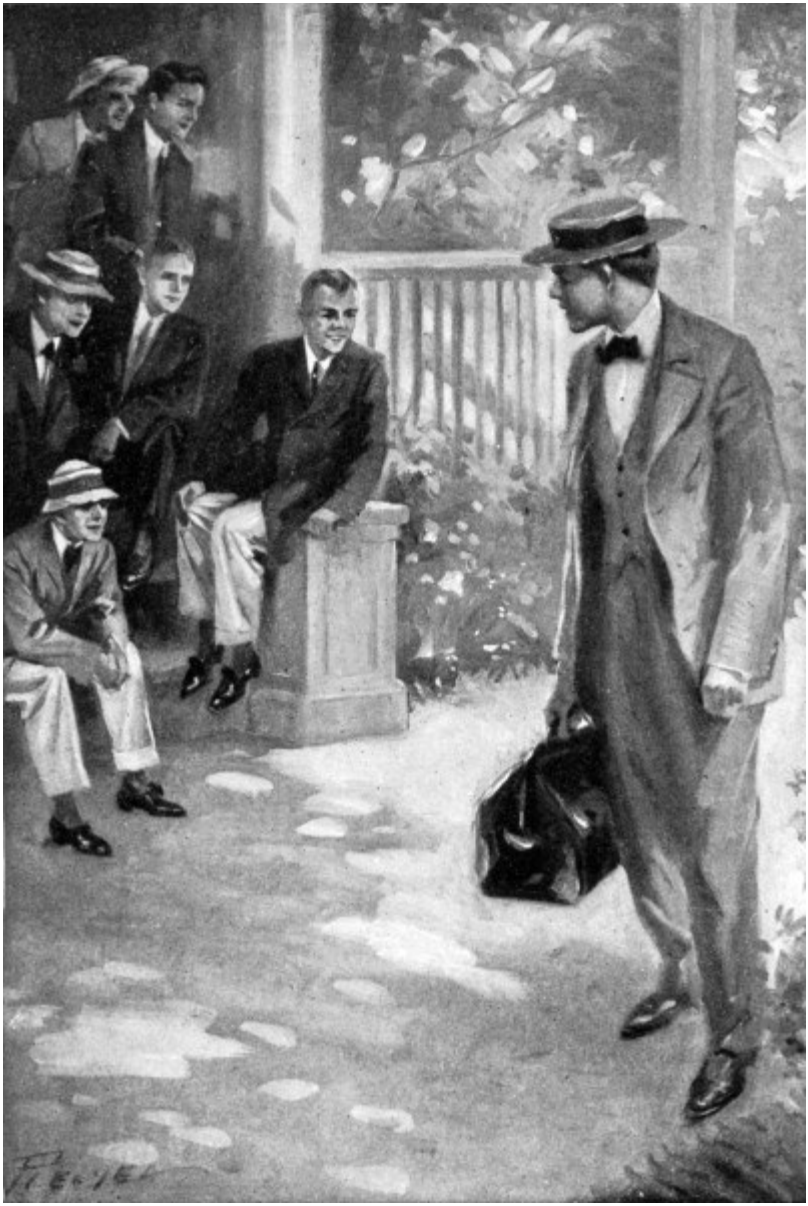
“What have you got?” asked Hoop.

“Huh?”

“Don’t say ‘huh’; say ‘What, sir?’” directed Sandy severely.

“What, sir?”

“I say what have you got,” repeated Hoop.



“Is this West House?” he asked

“Got?” asked the other confusedly.

“Sure! What are you selling; what’s in the grip there?”

“I’m not selling anything. I’ve got clothes in here.”

“Are they like what you’re wearing?” asked Spud innocently.

“Cut it out, Spud,” growled Ned Brent. “What’s your name?”

“John Boland,” was the answer.

“Where do you live?” asked The Fungus.

“West Bayport.”

“How old are you?”

“Fourteen.”

“What class?”

“Huh? I mean what, sir?”

“What class are you going into, Mr. Boland?”

“I cal’late I’m going into the First Junior.”

“That’ll be nice for the First Junior, won’t it?” laughed Dutch.

“Do you snore?” demanded The Fungus.

“I guess not.”

“You mean you cal’late not. Can you play football?”

“No, but I’d like to try.”

The Fungus viewed him pityingly and turned to Sandy.

“He’d like to try, Sandy.” Sandy shook his head sorrowfully.

“Where have I heard that before?” he murmured.

“Well, Boland, you room with me, I guess,” said Ned.

“Come on in and I’ll call Marm.”

John looked gratefully up at his roommate and edged his way between the others. Half way up the steps Hoop stuck a foot out and John completed his ascent hurriedly and ungracefully. At the top he turned with flashing eyes and clenched hand.

“Did you do that on purpose?” he demanded of Hoop.

“Do what?” inquired Hoop surprisedly.

“Trip me up.”

“Oh, did I trip you up, Mr. Boland?”

“Yes, you did, and you know it. You did it on purpose.”

“Well, supposing I did? Then what, you fresh kid?”

John gazed at him wrathfully, and then his eyes went over the other grinning faces and fell. He swallowed hard once and then turned toward the door. Hoop laughed.

“Here, hold on, kid! What if I did trip you up?” he asked.

John turned at the door and looked back at him.

“Nothing—now,” he said quietly, as he entered the house.

CHAPTER III

A VISIT TO THE INQUISITORY

Mrs. Linn, the matron of West House, was a short, ample, motherly woman of some fifty years who had in some miraculous manner preserved both her complexion and her hair. Her cheeks bloomed like roses and her tresses, which she wore wound high at the back of her head in large braids, were hued like the raven's wing. She had been born in England, had married an Englishman and had come to this country soon after her wedding. Under the stress of excitement she still lost an occasional H. What had become of Mr. Linn was a matter of conjecture amongst the boys, for while the matron in her infrequent allusions to him assumed the sorrowfully resigned air of a widow, yet his fate was never explained. Mrs. Linn had ruled over West House for nearly fifteen years. She was not a disciplinarian; in the face of revolt she was helpless and tearful; and yet she got along very well. You see, there wasn't much fun in being bad when you knew all the time that Mrs. Linn was sitting in her room downstairs, rocking back and forth in her patent rocker, and shedding silent tears. Chivalry protested. At such times West House sighed for a house master of its own sex whom it could bait to its heart's content.

The fellows liked Mrs. Linn and called her Marm—and poked good-natured fun at her amongst themselves. Conversation was her one weakness. She loved to talk. The boy who listened patiently to her discourse won her heart, a fact well known and taken frequent advantage of. When a special privilege was wanted West House to a man descended

to the matron's room and sat around in respectful and apparently interested attention while she ran on and on. Then, at departure, Sandy or Dutch, both prime favorites, proffered their request in quite the most casual manner in the world and it was almost invariably granted.

The arrival of a new boy presented an opportunity for discourse that Mrs. Linn always made the most of and it was a good ten minutes before Ned Brent closed the door behind her with a sigh of relief. John, who had accorded her polite attention every minute, thereby at once gaining a foothold in her affections, now turned to view his surroundings with frank interest.

West House accommodated eight boys, two in each of the four rooms of the second floor. Below were Mrs. Linn's room and the kitchen on one side and the parlor and dining room on the other. Somewhere at the top of the house dwelt Hulda, the maid, who combined the duties of cook, waitress, chambermaid and second-girl. The room in which John found himself was officially known as Number 1, but in house parlance was called the Den. In the same way, Number 2, across the hall, was the Ice Chest, so called because it was at the northwest corner of the house and in winter attained a temperature that would have made an arctic explorer feel right at home. Back of the Ice Chest was the Smellery. The Smellery was over the kitchen and Dutch Zoller and Hoop Ross, who dwelt therein, pretended to be able to tell an hour beforehand what was to be served at the next meal. The Sun Parlor, habitation of The Fungus and his new roommate, was so named because it had the sun almost all day. On the lower floor, Mrs. Linn's room was called the Throne Room, the kitchen was the Hashery, the dining-room the Gobblery and

the parlor the Tomb. They were partial to nicknames at Oak Park.

The Den, because it was at once on the front of the house and had the benefit of the sun as well, was accorded the distinction of being the most desirable room. Like the others, it was good-sized, very nearly square and well furnished. On the side was a deep bay with a seat all the way around it under the three broad windows. On the front were two other windows overlooking the lawn and the road and the slope of the wooded hill beyond. There were two beds, two bureaus, two shallow closets, two easy chairs, a washstand and a study table with a straight-backed chair at each side of it. On Ned's side of the room the walls were lavishly hung with pictures. Straw matting covered the floor and three small rugs were disposed in front of bureaus and washstand.

"This is my side of the room," announced Ned, seating himself in his own particular easy chair, "and that's yours."

John's gaze came back from a survey of the room and he nodded.

"Thanks. Why do they put all the pictures over there?"

"Those are mine," explained Ned. "You can hang yours on your own side."

"Oh," said John. "But, you see, I haven't got any."

"Didn't you bring anything to fix up with?" asked Ned in disgust. John shook his head.

"No, I—didn't know I should." Then he added: "Besides, I haven't any, anyhow."

"Well, you can buy some in the town. Are they bringing

your trunk up?”

“It’s coming by express. I suppose it won’t get here before tomorrow. It was cheaper to send it that way.”

“Oh,” said Ned. He observed his new roommate curiously.

“You said your name was Boland, didn’t you? Well, mine’s Brent. Hope we’ll get on all right. Now you’d better fix up a bit and I’ll take you over to see Horace. You’re supposed to report to him as soon as you come.”

“Horace?” repeated John wonderingly.

“Yes, the principal. His name’s Horace, you know.”

“I thought—” began John.

“He will ask you a lot of questions and tell you to be good, you know,” continued Ned with a grin. “Don’t be saucy to him, Boland.”

“I don’t cal’late to,” replied John, reflecting the grin. “I’ll wash up and brush my hair. It was pretty hot walking up here.”

“Why didn’t you take a chariot? Weren’t there any?”

“You mean a carriage? Thought I’d rather save my quarter.”

“You must be an economical duffer,” said Ned with a frown. “I wouldn’t do too much of that sort of thing or fellows will think you’re a tight-wad. And, say, got any other togs in that gripsack of yours?”

“Togs? You mean clothes?”

“What else?”

“Only some collars and cuffs and a handkerchief and some socks and—”

“Another suit?”

“No; why?”

“Oh, nothing,” replied Ned evasively. “Only Horace likes the fellows to dress up pretty well when they call. Thought you might have another suit with you.”

“Gosh, this is the best suit I have!” said John perplexedly. “Ain’t it good enough for him?”

“Sure,” answered Ned hurriedly. “But—er—suppose you put on another tie, old man. Horace hates bright colors. And I’d leave off the vest, I think. Much too hot for vests.”

“Yes, I don’t often wear a vest,” replied John as he took off his coat. “Nor a stiff shirt, either. But mother thought I’d better sort of spruce up, you see.” Off came the vest, exposing a pair of pink cotton suspenders. Ned shuddered.

“Got a belt with you?”

“Belt? No, I ain’t. Why?”

“I’ll lend you one. You can’t wear suspenders without a vest, of course.”

“I usually do,” objected John.

“Well, it isn’t done here, old man. You do as I tell you and you’ll be all right. Let’s see what kind of a tie you’ve got in there. Thunder! That won’t do! Haven’t you anything that doesn’t look like you—you’d pinched it from a rainbow? Here, I’ll find you one.”

“Got any other togs in that gripsack of yours?”

“The principal must be plaguey particular,” growled John as he poured water into the bowl and began to splash.

“He is; something fierce,” said Ned gravely. “You want to look just right when you tackle Horace or he will get miffed

right away. Here, put this on. And here's a belt. It's an old one, but I guess it'll do for this time. Got a cap with you?"

"What sort of a cap?" asked John with signs of a vanishing temper.

"Cloth cap, of course."

"Never wear them."

"Well, you will here. You'll have to get one. You can wear one of mine today. I've got two or three, if I can find them. If I were you I'd stick that straw in the furnace."

"What for? What's the matter with it?" demanded John, eyeing his new acquaintance aggressively over the edge of the towel.

"It looks like a last year's bird nest," replied Ned firmly. "Now don't get huffy. I'm telling you things for your own good, old man. You don't want to go around having fellows laugh at you, do you?"

"No, but—"

"Well, they will if you don't tog up like the rest of us. Here's the cap. Now stick this belt around— Gee, you haven't any loops on your trousers, have you? Never mind. Pull it tight and it'll be all hunky. Get a move on, Boland; it's most five." Ned went to the window and called. "Oh, you Fungus!" There was an answering hail from below. "Going to take him over to Horace now?" continued Ned. "'Cause if you are we'll go together. What? All right. In about five minutes." He turned and surveyed the rehabilitated John with critical and frowning regard. "That's better," he announced, the frowns clearing away. "You look more like now, old man. Can't be too careful

about your togs, you know. As old Shake said, ‘The attire doth oft proclaim the man,’ or something like that. Let those trousers come down another inch if you can. That’s the stuff. Now, then, grab that cap and come ahead.”

In the hall they came upon The Fungus and young Parker. The latter was a slim, pink-cheeked, diffident boy of thirteen who was evidently taking his advent at Oak Park very, very seriously and was rather overwhelmed by his sudden plunge into the boarding school world. The four left the house and struck off through the park in the direction of the principal’s residence, the chimney of which John had spied for an instant above the trees. Ned and The Fungus walked together, leaving the two new arrivals to get acquainted in their own fashion. Claire Parker was visibly embarrassed and John was so intent on his own thoughts that it was not until they had left West House well behind that he considered the conversational demands of the situation. Then he turned and found the younger boy observing him with shy and eager brown eyes which were instantly lowered.

“I cal’late you and me’d might as well get acquainted,” said John kindly. “My name’s John Boland. What’s yours?”

“Claire Parker,” was the reply. “You just came, too, didn’t you?”

“Yes. What do you think of the place, Parker?”

“Oh, I like it immensely,” was the eager response. “Don’t you?”

“I guess so. I’ve never been to this sort of a school before, you see. Have you?”

“No, I haven’t. I’ve never been to any school. I’ve been

taught at home. I'm awfully afraid that it's going to be hard. I suppose you've been to school for a long time?"

"Four years in grammar school. Where do you live?"

"New York."

"New York! Gee, that's a long way off, ain't it? Weren't there any schools there you could go to?"

"Why, yes, lots of them, but my mother didn't want me to go to school near home, you see."

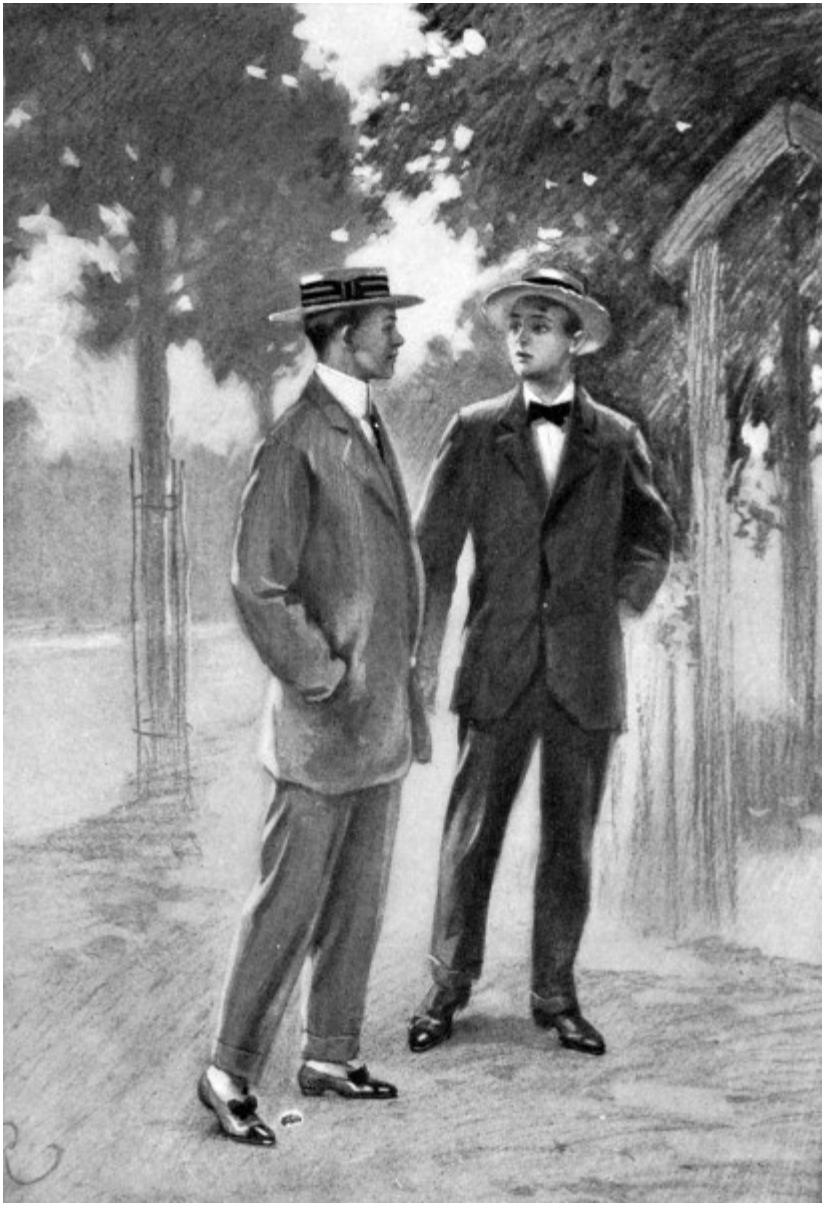
"Didn't she? Why not?"

"Well, she said I needed to learn how to look after myself, and she said the best way to do that was to go a good way off where I couldn't come home all the time and where I'd have to —to get along by myself."

"Oh. Well, I cal'late that's a good idea, maybe. I live at West Bayport. Ever been there?" Claire shook his head.

"N-no, where is it?"

"About sixty miles from here, on the coast. It's a dandy place. Lots of city folks come there in summer. There's some fine big houses on the Neck. We live in the town. I can look right down on the decks of the schooners from my window."



“My name’s John Boland. What’s yours?”

“That must be fine! I’m crazy about boats and the ocean. I can see some of the North River from our house and I love to watch the boats go up and down. I suppose you’ve been to New York?”

“No.” John shook his head. “No, I ain’t ever been there—yet. I’m going some day, though. It must be pretty big, ain’t it?”

“Awfully! It—it’s almost *too* big. You see, there are so many people there that you never get to know many of them.”

“That’s funny,” said John.

“Maybe it sounds funny, but it isn’t. One summer mother and I went to a little place in Connecticut, just a village it was, and after we’d been there two or three days I knew lots of boys, about three or four times as many as I knew at home. I suppose if I went to school I’d know more fellows.”

“I cal’late I know about every fellow in West Bayport,” said John, “and lots of fellows on the Neck, too; fellows that just come there summers.”

“Then I guess you’re never—lonely,” said Claire wistfully.

“Lonely! Gee, no! I wouldn’t be, anyhow; there’s too much to do and see. There’s always boats coming in and going out and tugs skipping around. And then there’s the big salt ships from Spain and Italy and a revenue cutter now and then; and the lighthouse tender, too. And in summer there’s most always some of the battleships in the harbor.”

“I’d like that place,” said Claire decisively. “What did you say the name of it was?”

“West Bayport,” answered John proudly. “I cal’late it’s about as nice a little town as there is. And pretty, too.”

“It must be very—very interesting,” said Claire. “Perhaps I can get mother to go there this summer, if we don’t go abroad.”

“Abroad?” echoed the other. “Ever been abroad?”

“Oh, yes, several times. I’ve been all around over there. But I like this country better, don’t you?”

“I ain’t ever been in any other—yet,” laughed John. “But I’m going some day. I’m going to England and Turkey and the Holy Land. And maybe Holland. Ever been in Holland?”

“Not to stay very long. I liked the South of France best of all. We stayed there all one winter when I was about ten.”

“Ever been to Turkey or Palestine?”

“No, I never have. I suppose you’re a good deal older than I am, aren’t you?”

“Fourteen last March,” answered John. “I cal’late you’re about twelve, aren’t you?”

“No, I’m thirteen. You seem—older than fourteen. I guess that’s Doctor Webster’s house.”

They had come to a rustic gate beyond which stood a small brick house with a red slate, many-gabled roof. Virginia creeper almost hid the lower story and shrubs were massed thickly under the windows. There was a lawn in front and a great bed of scarlet sage followed the upper curve of the drive.

“Here we are,” said The Fungus as he held the gate open and they passed through under a canopy of lilac branches. “Pull down your vests and wipe off your chins, kids, and look respectful.”

They crossed the garden and ascended the short flight of stone steps. Under the gabled porch Ned pressed the button and waited. Presently a maid admitted them and they filed into

the Inquisitory, as the Doctor's library was termed. They found four boys ahead of them. When they had been there a few minutes a door into a rear room was opened and a short, elderly man with kindly face and near-sighted eyes that twinkled humorously behind spectacles appeared.

"Now, then, who's next, please?" he asked.

A stout boy and a thin boy arose and stood viewing each other doubtfully.

"Well, which is it?" asked the principal.

"We both came in together, sir," answered the stout youth.

"So? Well, there's more of you, my boy, and so I'll see you first. This way, please."

John's turn came presently and he found himself shaking hands with Doctor Webster and being conducted across the threshold of a little sun-filled room that was dazzlingly bright after the darkened library. The door was closed and the Doctor pointed to a chair at the side of his desk.

"Sit down, please. Now then, what's your name, sir?"

"John Boland, sir."

"Boland?" The Doctor seated himself in his revolving chair and referred to a book that lay open before him. "Ah, yes, from West Bayport; where they make the codfish for our Sunday morning breakfasts. Well, John, I'm glad to see you. I hope you left your—" another glance at the book—"your mother well?"

"Yes, sir."

"She tells me in her letter that you want to go to college."

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, that’s a commendable desire,” said the Doctor heartily. “I suppose you know all about sailing a boat, John?”

“I can sail a sloop, sir.”

“Then you have that advantage over me. Now I dare say that if you knew little or nothing about sailing and you were put in a sloop at, say, Boston Light and had to make your way to West Bayport you might be able to do it, but it would be difficult work, wouldn’t it?”

“I cal’late it would, sir.”

“You calculate it would,” said the Doctor with a twinkle behind his glasses. “Yes. Well, on the other hand, if you knew how to sail that boat you’d get home safely, easily and quickly. That’s what education does, my boy. It teaches you how to set your sail, how to point your craft, how to take advantage of all the varying winds, how to meet squalls and weather storms. Without education you may be able to travel Life’s sea, but it’s going to be hard and you’re going to be tossed about more than necessary. But with knowledge it’s a good deal easier. Knowledge is power, whether you’re sailing a sloop over Massachusetts Bay or breasting the waves of Life. See what I mean?”

“Yes, sir. You mean I ought to study hard and get an education.”

“Exactly. I observe that you have a practical mind, John. Study hard; that’s the idea. But don’t let study be hard if you can help it. Try and *like* study, my boy. If you were master of a seining schooner and set out on a trip to The Georges you’d be doing something that would be at once pleasure and duty,

wouldn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Surely. Well, see if you can't combine pleasure and duty here, John. It's quite possible. Study needn't be drudgery. Keep in mind that learning is like rolling a snowball down hill. It may be slow work at first, but it gets easier every minute, and the bigger the snowball gets the more snow it takes up, until when you've reached the bottom of the hill maybe it'll be all you can do to look over the top of it. And then, if you've put your mind on it, perhaps your snowball will be bigger than anybody else's snowball. Now, let me see. You want to enter the First Junior Class, I think? And your age is what? Fourteen? Hm. Well, I think you ought to find your place there without much trouble. But we'll attend to that later. You're at West House?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's excellent. Mrs. Linn is a very capable woman and you will like her. Who are you to room with?"

"Ned Brent, sir."

"Brent?" The Doctor's brows went up and he was silent a moment. Once he frowned and once his hand went forth toward the telephone on the corner of the desk. Finally, however, he nodded his head slowly. "Well, maybe he's just the boy for you," he said thoughtfully. "We'll see later. Ned is rather a favorite of mine, but I'm not blind to his little weaknesses. However— Well, that's all this time, I think, John. I hope you'll get along nicely with us and will enjoy being here. It isn't all study here, you know; we play football and baseball and all the other games that boys like; and we try

to be out of doors all we can. Healthful bodies make healthful minds, you know. The rules aren't hard; we try not to have very many. The principal one is this, John: Be manly, straightforward and diligent. When you find that you've just got to break one of the regulations, go ahead and break it. Then come over here and tell me about it honestly and we'll try to make the punishment no harder than necessary. We don't expect every boy to behave like a sober old man all the time; boys must rare and tear a bit; all we ask is that they shall be straightforward and honest. I'll see you at school tomorrow morning, John, and we'll see how much you've already learned. Good afternoon."

The Doctor shook hands again, the door opened and John was once more in the darkened library.

"Who is next, please?" asked the Doctor.

CHAPTER IV
NICKNAMES AND MUSIC

Supper that evening proved a very pleasant affair, although John still felt too strange and ill at ease to take much part in the conversation that might be said to have raged from the instant grace was over to the end of the meal. The dining-room was a home-like apartment, light, roomy, and well furnished. There were many pictures on the walls—not a few of them photographs of former inhabitants of West House grouped on the lawn or on the steps—and a leather couch occupied the bay. A mammoth sideboard hid the door into the parlor, which was never used, and a small serving-table stood between the windows at the back, through which John looked at the edge of the oak grove. The dining-table was long enough to seat twelve quite comfortably, although its capacity was not often tested. Mrs. Linn presided at the head and Fred Sanderson at the foot. At the matron's right sat Hooper Ross, with Otto Zoller beside him and Ned Brent coming next. At Sanderson's right was Fergus White. John's place was next and his right-hand neighbor was Claire Parker. Beyond Parker, Mason Halladay completed the company. Hulda, red of face and always good-natured, waited on table and Mrs. Linn served. The food was plain, well-cooked and attractively served; and there was plenty of it. For supper there was cold meat, a plain omelet, baked potatoes, graham and white bread, preserved peaches and one of Mrs. Linn's big white-roofed pound cakes. And each end of the table held a big blue-and-white pitcher of milk which had usually to be refilled before the meal was over.

It was quite like a family party, and everyone talked when he pleased, to whom he pleased and as much as he pleased, and sometimes it became quite deafening and Mrs. Linn placed her hands over her ears and looked appealingly down the length of the table at Fred Sanderson; and Sandy served rebukes right and left until order was restored. Tonight everyone save the two new members of the household had lots to say, for they had been making history during the three months of summer vacation and had to tell about it. Even Mrs. Linn was more excited and voluble than usual, being very glad to get her boys back again, and contributed her full share to the conversation. John contented himself with satisfying a very healthy appetite and trying to learn something about his companions. For a while it was exceedingly difficult, for the boys talked in a language filled with strange and unfamiliar words.

"Another slice of the cold, if you please, Marm," said Ned Brent. "Pass along, Dutch."

"Any more bakes in the bowl, Marm? They're the slickest I've had since Com."

"Easy there, Dutch! You're training, you know, and bakes are very fattening."

"Yes, and go light on the heavy sweet, Dutch. I'll eat your wedge for you."

And it took some time for John to get the fellows sorted out by names. The round-faced, good-natured Dutch he identified easily, and he knew that the boy who had tripped him on the steps was called Hoop, but for a while it wasn't apparent whether Spud was the chubby smiling youth sitting beyond Parker or the tall, older boy at the foot of the table. But at last he had the names all fitted; Hoop, Dutch, Ned, Sandy, The

Fungus and Spud. Everyone, it seemed, was known by a nickname save Ned Brent. He was just Ned, or, on rare occasions, Old Ned. John wondered whether they would find a nickname for him. He wasn't long in doubt.

After supper the fellows congregated in the Ice Chest, the room occupied by Sandy and Spud Halladay, John being conducted thither by Ned. The Ice Chest had only the regular allowance of chairs and so several of the visitors perched themselves on the beds. John and Claire as new arrivals were honored with chairs, however. As school did not begin until tomorrow, there was no study tonight and until bedtime at ten o'clock West House might do as it pleased. It pleased to discuss the football situation and eat marshmallows and salted peanuts, the former supplied by Ned and the latter by Dutch Zoller.

"Say, Boland, you've got to come out for football, you know," announced Sandy. "We need every fellow we can get this year. Think you can play?"

"I cal'late I can try," answered John modestly.

"Wow!" exclaimed Spud. "'Cal'late,' fellows!"

"You've got it," said Sandy approvingly.

"Right-o, Spud!" cried Ned.

"Only 'cal'late's' too long. Make it 'Cal' for short," suggested The Fungus.

"Got you, kid," Spud agreed. "Make you acquainted, fellows, with my very dear friend Mr. Cal Boland."

"Speech! Speech!" cried the others. John looked about him perplexedly.

“Huh?” he asked finally.

“Don’t say ‘huh,’ Cal; it isn’t done in the best circles,” advised Dutch. “Give us a speech.”

“Me?”

“Sure thing! You’ve been christened.”

“Let him alone,” laughed Ned. “How about the other, fellows?”

“Oh, that’s too easy,” said The Fungus, grinning at young Parker. “Thought you’d all met Clara!”

There was a howl of laughter and Claire got very red and distressed. But,—

“I—I don’t mind,” he said.

“That’s the stuff! Of course you don’t. Besides, it’s a very nice nickname and rather—rather unusual,” said Hoop Ross. “Satisfied with your cognomen, Mr. Boland?”

“I cal—I guess so,” answered John, amidst renewed laughter.

“I move you, Mr. Chairman,” said Hoop, rising and bowing to Sandy, “that the christening exercises take place tonight.”

“Good stuff!”

“Second the motion!”

“Moved and carried,” proclaimed Sandy. “All in favor—Thank you, gentlemen. The motion is carried. The exercises will take place tonight at the witching hour of—of eleven-thirty at the Haunted Tarn. A full attendance is requested. And if any fellow forgets to turn out he will be court-martialed. The

usual regalia, gentlemen."

"Fine!" said The Fungus. "And there's a moon tonight. But won't half-past eleven be a little early, Sandy? Marm never puts out her light until about eleven."

"We'll use the emergency exit," said Ned gayly. "I'll sneak down and unlock the back door after Queen Hulda goes to bed and we can get in that way when we come back. Marm will be fast asleep by that time. Wish I was in the pond now."

"So do I," agreed Hoop. "My, but it's hot for this time of year, isn't it? When we came back last year—"

"Rained like fury," said Spud. "Remember?"

"Do we?" laughed Dutch. "Do we remember your suit-case, Spud? Oh me, oh my!"

"What was that?" asked Sandy. "Was I there?"

"No, you came up ahead. We had Red-Head's carriage and it was full up. Spud was holding his suit-case in his lap, and just as we made the turn into Elm Street it slipped—"

"Slipped nothing!" cried Spud. "The Fungus shoved it off!"

"Why, Spud Halladay, how you talk! I wouldn't do such a mean trick!"

"Well, anyway, it went out," continued Dutch, "and there was a nice big pool of muddy water right there and the suit-case went *kerplunk*—"

"And I hadn't shut it tight because it was sort of crowded, and the water got inside and just about ruined everything," said Spud. "Oh, it was funny—maybe. I'll get even with The Fungus yet for that."

“Spud, I didn’t—”

“Shut up, Fungus, and don’t lie. I saw you,” said Hoop.

“I was about to remark,” said The Fungus with dignity, “that I didn’t see the puddle. It was—it was a coincidence, Spud.”

“Yes, it was—not! You wait, you white-haired, bleached out toadstool!”

“Spud, you can’t call me that and live,” said The Fungus. Instantly Spud and The Fungus were thrashing and kicking about on the floor beside the window-seat. Proceedings of this sort were so frequent, however, that the others merely looked on calmly until The Fungus, by virtue of superior size and agility, had Spud at his mercy. “Beg pardon?” demanded The Fungus.

“No, you old puff-ball!”

“What?” The Fungus rubbed Spud’s short nose with the heel of his hand and Spud writhed in a vain attempt to unseat his enemy.

“Let me up!”

“Be good?”

“Maybe.”

“Apologize?”

“Never! Pull him off, someone.”

“Cut out the rough-house, you two,” said Sandy. “Let’s go down and have harmony. Got any new songs, Ned?”

“I don’t know; yes, I guess so. But I’m tired.”

“Oh, come on, Ned!”

“Don’t be a tight-wad!”

“I’ll sing for you,” announced The Fungus eagerly as he removed himself from Spud’s prostrate form. But this offer met with groans of derision and protest.

“If you open your mouth, Fungus, we’ll throw you out,” said Sandy decisively. “Come on, Ned, like a good chap.”

“But I tell you I’m tired—”

“It will rest you,” said Spud. “Nothing like music to soothe and rest you.”

“I know a lullaby,” suggested The Fungus.

“So do I,” answered Hoop darkly. “Mine’s a club. I’m not going down if The Fungus is going to howl.”

“If he tries it I’ll lick him,” said Spud. “I can lick him, you know. You fellows saw how I smeared him a minute ago.”

“How’s your old stub nose?” asked The Fungus maliciously. Spud felt of it and made a face.

“Hurts, you abominable Fungus. You just wait!”

“Come on,” said Sandy. “All down to The Tomb!”

They trooped down the stairs and into the parlor. Sandy turned up the light and Hoop opened the piano.

“I’ll bet Marm hasn’t had this old music-box tuned,” said Ned as he seated himself on the stool and ran his fingers inquiringly along the keyboard. “I should say not! It’s something fierce!”

“‘Hark, from the Tomb a doleful sound!’” murmured Spud. “What you going to sing, Ned?”

“What do you want?”

“Something The Fungus doesn’t know.”

“That’s easy,” laughed Ned. “He doesn’t know anything.”

“Give us something new,” said Sandy, seating himself beside John on the couch. “He’s a dandy singer,” he confided to the latter. “Do you sing?”

“A little,” replied John modestly.

Ned broke into a rollicking song that had become popular during the summer and the others joined lustily in the chorus. In the middle of it Dutch seized a sofa cushion and aimed a blow at The Fungus.

“Cut out the parlor tricks,” cried Hoop.

“He was trying to sing! I heard him!”

“I never!”

“You did, Fungus! You were making awful noises in your throat,” charged Dutch.

“I was trying to cough. I guess I may cough if I want to!”

“You go outdoors and do it. This is a gentlemen’s party. Give us that chorus again, Ned.”

Ned obeyed and Dutch and Hoop stood guard over The Fungus and threatened him whenever he started to open his mouth. Mrs. Linn tiptoed in and seated herself in a chair which Spud moved forward for her, beaming upon them.

“I do love to hear them sing,” she confided to Claire in whispers. “I’ve always been fond of music. My husband had such a grand tenor voice. I wish you might have heard him.”

“Yes’m,” said Claire. “I wish I might have. Did he—did he lose it?”

“Who knows?” answered Mrs. Linn with something that sounded like a sniffle. “He had genuine talent, had Mr. Linn. And he played the guitar something wonderful. ‘Derby Day’ was one of his favorite pieces. It would most bring the tears to your heyes—I mean *eyes*,” she corrected hastily.

“It must have been very nice,” murmured Claire politely.

“Here’s a fellow says he can sing,” announced Sandy in a lull. “Go ahead, Cal, and do your worst.”

But John was embarrassed and begged off.

“Come on,” said Ned. “What do you know, Cal? I’ll play your accompaniment if I can.”

“I cal’late you wouldn’t know my songs,” said John.

“Well, let’s see. What are they?”

“Know ‘The Wreck of the Lucy May’?” asked John after some hesitation.

“No, how does it go? Come over and hum it. Maybe I can catch on to it.” But John shook his head.

“I cal—I guess all the things I know are sort of funny,” he said apologetically. “I know ‘Barney Ferry’; ever hear that?” Ned had to acknowledge that he hadn’t. And he was forced to make similar admissions regarding several other songs of John’s suggestion. Finally, however, John mentioned “Sally in Our Alley,” and Ned swung around and started the tune.

“Got you there, Cal. Come on and sing it.”

So John, who had wandered across to the piano, cleared his throat, hunched his shoulders once or twice and began. Hoop and Dutch nudged each other and The Fungus winked amusedly at Sandy. But John had a surprise for them and the grins disappeared. He had a good voice and had learned how to use it, and as soon as his nervousness had been forgotten he held his audience silent and delighted. Sandy raised his eyebrows and nodded appreciatively at Dutch. They all paid John the compliment of refraining from joining in with him and when he had finished applause was genuine and whole-hearted.

"Good work, old man!" cried Sandy, slapping him on the back. "You can do it as well as Ned can."

"A lot better," said Ned. "He's got a peach of a voice. What else do you know?"

"That's all, I guess," answered John, smiling with pleasure and embarrassment.

"Now do sing something else," begged Mrs. Linn, wiping her eyes. "That was just lovely. My, the times I've heard that song when I was a girl at home! Quite carries me back, it does!"

"Maybe if you'll let me sit down there," said John, "I can sort of find the tune. I'll try if you want me to."

"Sure thing!"

"Go ahead!"

"Sing us some of those things you spoke of, Cal."

So John took Ned's place and sang right through his repertoire before he was allowed to get up. His

accompaniments weren't ambitious, but he managed fairly well, and the songs he sang, most of them old ballads of the sea that he had heard all his life, didn't demand much of the piano to make them go. Toward the last the others began to dip into the choruses with him, and there was one rollicking refrain that caught their fancy at once and for years after remained a classic at Oak Park. They made John sing that over and over, and howled in unison:

"Yo heave ho! When the wind do blow
It's up with the sail and away we go!
We'll catch the slant to Georges' Bank,
And we won't be home for a month or so;
Yo ho! Yo ho!
We won't be home for a month or so!"

"That's a winner!" declared Hoop. "'Yo heave ho!' What's the name of it?"

"I don't think it has any name," answered John. "Leastways, I never heard any."

"Its name is 'Yo Heave Ho,'" declared The Fungus. "'Yo heave ho! And away we—'"

"Kill him, someone!" begged Spud.

"It's most ten, boys," said Mrs. Linn. "Off with you."

"Now, Marm, you know this is first night back," begged Hoop. "We can stay down another half-hour, can't we? School isn't really begun yet."

"Now don't ask me—" began the matron.

"That's so, Marm," interrupted Sandy. "Rules don't count

tonight, you know. We'll have one more song, eh? Isn't that it, fellows?"

"Sure thing, Marm! One more song and then we'll go up. Come on and gather around the thump-box."

"What'll it be?" asked Ned, drowning Mrs. Linn's protests by banging chords.

"'Yo Heave Ho!'" they cried. "Can you play it, Ned?"

"I guess so. Now, then, sing the verses, Cal, and we'll do the rest!"

Mrs. Linn subsided in smiling despair and for the tenth time they yo-heave-ho'd until the chandelier swayed. At the final roar of sound Sandy turned out the lights and there was a frantic rush up the stairway.

"Good night, Marm! Good night!"

"Sleep tight, Marm!"

"Yo heave ho! When the wind do—"

"What's for breakfast, Marm?"

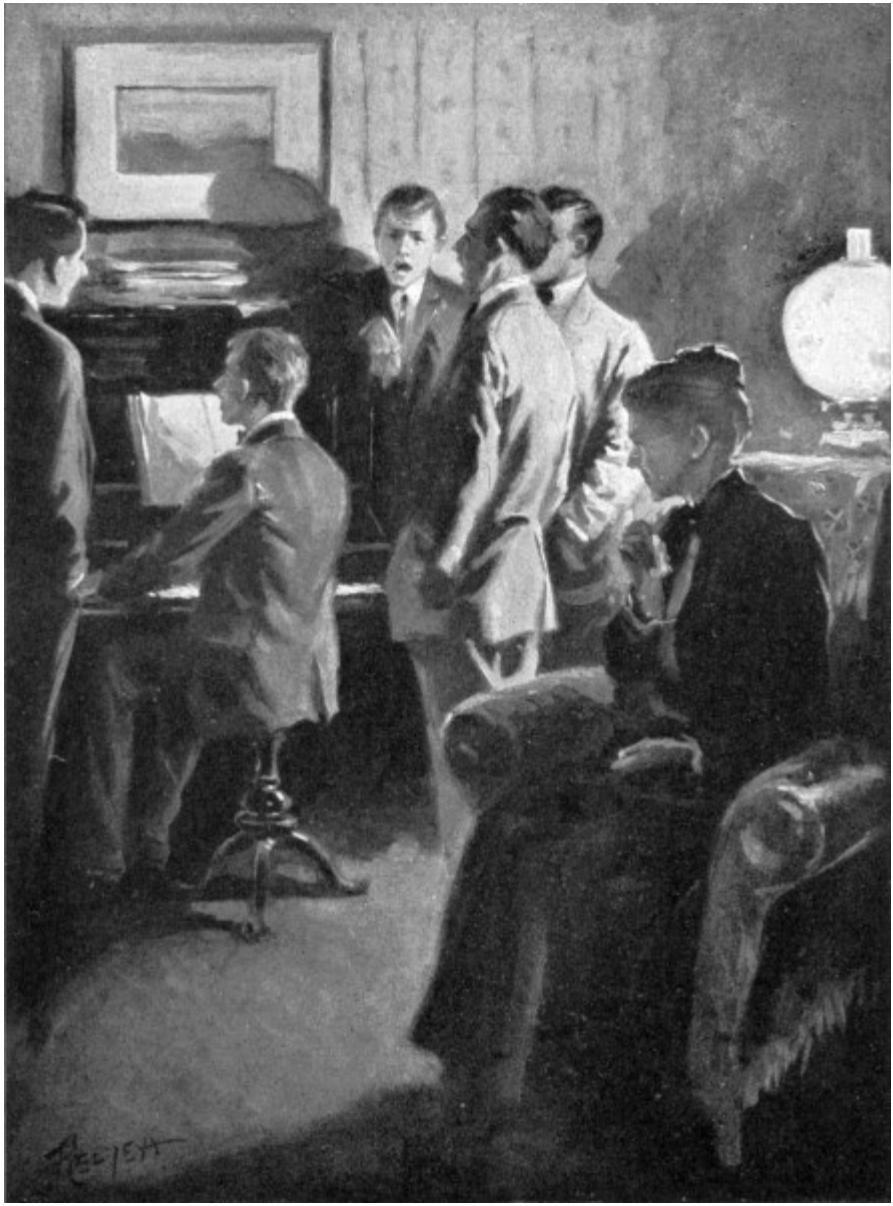
"Chops and bakes, I hope!"

"Is that right, Marm? Keep mine warm, please; I may be late!"

"Yo heave ho! When the wind do blow—"

"And we won't be home for a month or so!"

"Go-o-od *night*!"



“Yo heave ho! When the wind do blow—”

CHAPTER V
CAL IS CHRISTENED

"Cal!"

"Huh?"

"Wake up!"

"Huh?"

"Wake up, I tell you!" Ned shook his new roommate by the shoulder impatiently. "It's half-past eleven."

"Wha—say, what's the matter?" John sat up in bed suddenly and made his inquiry in a loud, thoroughly awakened voice, staring dazedly about him, from the unfamiliar figure of Ned Brent to the great path of moonlight that flooded in through the bay-windows. Ned clapped a hand over John's mouth.

"Shut up!" he said fiercely. "Want to wake Marm?"

But John, still befogged with sleep, was confused and alarmed. Where he was he couldn't imagine; this was not his little attic room at home; and who the strange figure in ghostly attire might be he couldn't imagine either. Safe to say, though, that he was there at the bedside for no good purpose; and when a hand closed over his mouth and he was told to "shut up," John's fighting blood surged within him! The next thing that Ned knew he was flying head over heels toward his own bed. He landed thereon with a force that made the springs creak protestingly and that sent him bounding up again in the air. And when he once more landed John was on him. There was

no time for explanations. Ned grappled and avoided punishment by pulling John down upon him. Then they tossed and struggled, John striving to get to Ned's throat and Ned striving just as desperately to roll him off and get the ascendancy. The bed swayed and groaned. Once John's fingers reached Ned's throat but were torn away again.

"Try to rob me, would you?" growled John vindictively.

"Let—go!" gasped Ned. "You—crazy—idiot!"

"Give up?" John asked.

But at that moment Ned got one leg free and, using it as a lever, sent John sprawling on to the floor between the beds. Ned tumbled off the other side and when his roommate had found his feet Ned was ready for him.

"What—what's the matter—with you?" he panted.

John looked across stupidly. His arms, ready for another assault, dropped to his sides and he stared about the moonlit room.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"You're in The Den, you wild idiot," answered Ned. "Where did you think you were?"

"Oh! I—I didn't know. What was the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Ned crossly. "I tried to wake you up and you lit into me and nearly broke my back."

"I'm sorry," said John penitently. "I—I was kind of half asleep and—"

"Half asleep! Gee, I'm glad you weren't awake, then!" Ned

chuckled. “Know where you are now? Know who I am?”

“Yes, now I do,” replied John sheepishly. “Did I—hurt you?”

“No, but you tried hard enough!” Ned rearranged his pajamas. “Next time it’s necessary to wake you I’ll let someone else do it. You’ve pretty near torn this sleeve out by the roots.”

“I’m sorry,” muttered John. “I got awake and saw you there and didn’t know who you were. And then you put your hand over my mouth and I thought maybe you were a burglar or something. So I—I—”

“Tried to kill me. I know all about that, Boland; you don’t have to tell me anything that happened.” Ned put a foot on the edge of the window-seat and examined an ankle solicitously. “Well, come on now, if you’re really awake. The others are waiting.”

“Where? What to do?”

“Why, you’re going to be christened at the pond.”

“Am I? I thought that was just fooling,” said John uneasily. “Do I *have* to go?”

“You bet you do! And I’m going to give you an extra ducking for the way you’ve roughed me up, Cal. Aren’t afraid, are you?”

“N-no, I cal’late not, but—”

“Come on, then, and don’t make any noise. It’s a wonder, though, that Marm hasn’t been up already. It’s a good thing I thought to close the door.”

“But we ain’t—you ain’t going that way, are you?”

“What way? In pajamas? Of course. And you’re coming in that picturesque nightie of yours. Come on.” Ned opened the door and listened. Below stairs all was quiet, but from the end of the hall came the sounds of low whispers and an occasional giggle. Ned led the way in that direction, John following. In the Sun Parlor the rest of the boys were awaiting them, six figures in their sleeping clothes, five in pajamas of various shades and styles and patterns, and one, that of Claire Parker, in a chaste white night-gown.

“Thought you were lost,” whispered Sandy as Ned closed the door behind him. “You made a beast of a noise in there.”

“Yo heave ho!” chanted Spud softly. “Who’s first down?”

“You,” said Hoop. “We want something soft to fall on.”

“Fall on your head then,” answered Spud as he climbed to the window-sill. “Here goes.” He disappeared from sight and there was a thud on the roof of the shed below, followed an instant later by a second as Spud’s weight dropped to the turf. One by one the fellows followed. When it came Claire’s turn he displayed an inclination to hold back. But Sandy reassured him.

“It’s only six feet to the roof, Clara, and about eight to the ground. It won’t hurt you, honest. Go ahead.”

So Claire gathered his courage and made the descent safely and John followed. On the grass in the shadow of the woodshed they waited for Sandy and Ned and then, forming in single file, they entered the park and proceeded along the path which John had travelled that afternoon. Once out of sight and sound of the house, Dutch, who was leading, began to prance

and cavort.

"All sing!" he called softly. Instantly the procession started a slow and mournful chant:

"Hush! Hush! Not a sound!
Spirits dread are hov'ring round!
To the Haunted Tarn we go
With our victims in a row.
Dark the night and dark the deed;
Prayers for mercy never heed.
We will drown them every one;
That's the way we have our fun!
O-o-o-oh!"

The last word was uttered in hollow, shuddering tones that sent a little shiver down John's back, in spite of the fact that he had been smiling a moment before at the ridiculous sight of half a dozen night-robed forms prancing along in the moonlight. The effect on Claire was apparent. He stopped and turned a frightened face to John, who was following.

"It's all right, Parker," said John reassuringly. "It's only fooling, you know."

"Yes, but I—I want to go back."

"No, you don't. It'll be fine to have a dip in the pond. Besides, you don't want them to think you're scared, do you?"

"N-no." So Claire went on just as Sandy commanded "No talking there!" The chant began again with another verse, ending as before in the mournful "O-o-o-oh!" The night was warm and the park was very still. A full moon sailed overhead and lighted the path save where the black shadow of an oak fell

across it now and then. Walking with bare feet on the gravel wasn't very pleasant, but aside from that neither of the "victims" was experiencing discomfort. Suddenly there was a sound of tinkling water and the pond came into view, black and silver, with the round moon reflected in the middle of it. The party followed the path to the lower end where the bridge stood. The shadows were heavy there and behind them the brook tinkled off into the darkness. The boys drew up in a semicircle with John and Claire between them and the edge of the pond.

"Can you swim?" asked Sandy.

"Yes," John answered.

"A little," replied Claire.

"Then we'll take you first, Cal. All ready, Hoop and Fungus."

The two named stepped forward.

"Want to take off that nightie?" asked Hoop.

"I cal'late I'd better," said John, suiting action to word.

"Hang it on the bridge rail, Ned," said The Fungus. "All right now, Sandy." The Fungus and Hoop Ross joined hands behind John's back and seized him under each knee.

"We christen thee Cal'late," announced Sandy.

"Cal for short," added Spud.

"Lean back," said The Fungus. John obeyed and found himself lifted off his feet. He was swung back and forward twice and the last time Hoop and The Fungus gave a heave and he shot sprawling out into the dark pool with a mighty splash.

He was up in a moment and found himself only waist deep. The water was warm and pleasant and he struck off leisurely toward the bridge.

"How is it?" asked Ned.

"Great! Come on in."

"Please don't throw me in," begged Claire. "I don't swim much."

"All right," answered Sandy. "We'll take you over there in the shallow." So the ceremony was repeated further around the pond, only this time the victim was held securely by Ned and Dutch and merely lowered into the water and brought up again laughing and sputtering. Then,—

"All in!" cried Sandy, and pajamas were tossed aside and one after another the boys shot into the water to emerge white and gleaming in the moonlight far out toward the center of the pond. It was great fun. They raced and played tricks on each other and dived from the bridge railing, the spray shooting up like cascades of diamonds in the moonlight. Claire contented himself with paddling around in the shallows, but John was a strong swimmer and matched his skill with the best of them. When, having exhausted all other means of amusement, they did "stunts" from the bridge he not only performed all the tricks that the others did, but showed them a side-dive that no one knew. Afterwards they crawled out on the turf at the upper end of the pond and lay in the shadows of the oaks and talked and spun yarns in the warm, silent night and watched the moon go sailing down the sky.

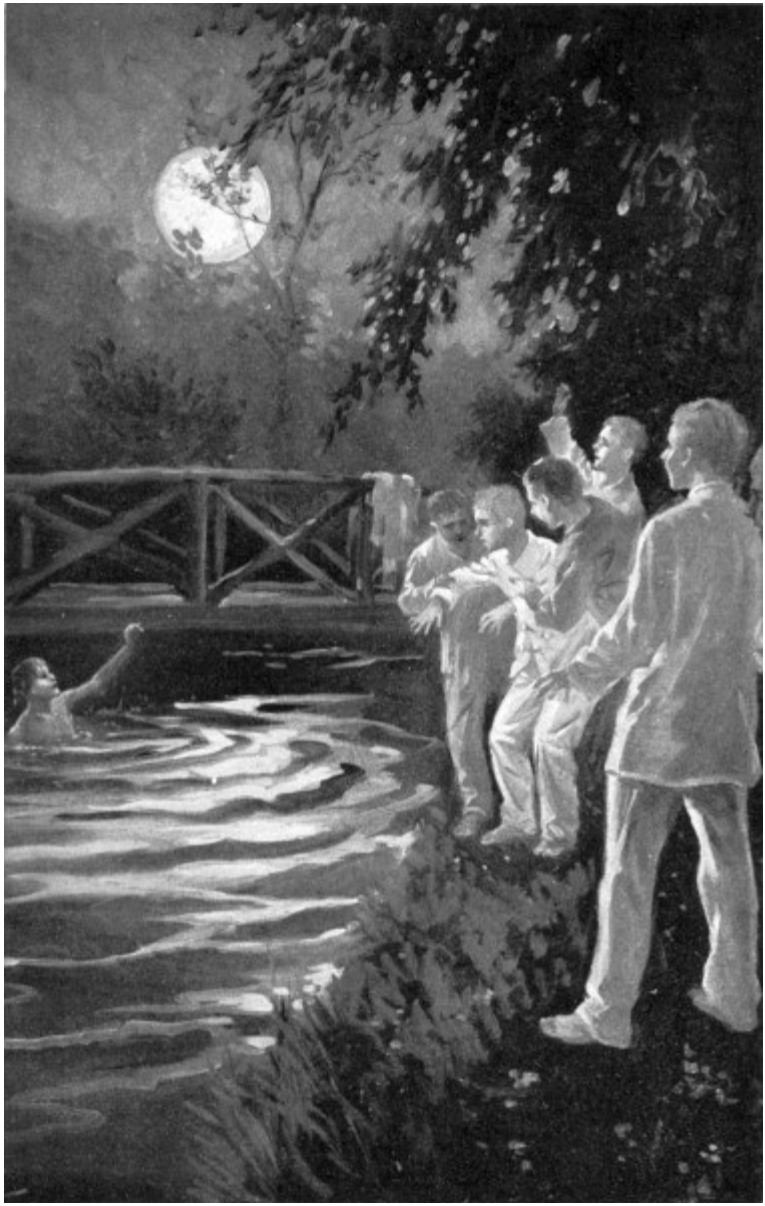
"Say," said The Fungus, "it's funny neither East House nor the Hall has ever got on to this, isn't it?"

“Because we’ve been careful to keep it quiet,” answered Sandy. “And that reminds me, you two chaps. This is a secret, you know. Not a word to anyone outside West House. Understand?”

“I’ve often thought,” chuckled Spud, “what a joke it would be if Horace or Fussy or Jim or someone happened along some night and found us here.”

“Great!” said Dutch. “We’d get fired, though.”

“I don’t believe we would,” said Sandy. “But Horace would make us promise not to do it again. So I guess we’d better not get caught at it. Wonder what time it is. I guess we’d better be getting back.”



“Please don’t throw me in,” begged Claire

“Let’s have a race to the bridge,” Dutch proposed. “We’ll all line up here even and Clara can give the word.”

So it was done and there was a wild scamper over the grass, a plunge into the pond and a frenzied race back across the

moonlit surface, John and Dutch and Sandy swimming a dead-heat. Then they found their night clothes and, holding them away from their dripping bodies, took the path back to the cottage. By the time West House was in sight they were dry and they stopped at the edge of the park and donned pajamas and night-gowns. Then they stole towards the back of the house, across the moonlit grass, and Dutch tried the kitchen door.

"Locked!" he whispered disgustedly, turning to Ned.

"Gee, I forgot to go down!" muttered Ned sheepishly. "I had so much trouble waking Cal that—"

"You're a wonder!" growled Sandy. "This is a fine note. How do we get in?"

"Perhaps some of the windows are unlocked," The Fungus suggested. "I'll go around and try them."

"I'll take this side," said Ned, "but I don't believe we'll find one undone." Nor did they.

"All tight," said Ned as he and The Fungus returned. Depressed silence followed the announcement. At last,—

"We'll have to get in the way we got out," said Spud. "Isn't there a ladder in the shed?"

"Shed's locked," said Dutch. "I tried the door."

"I've got it," exclaimed Ned. "Two of you chaps put me up on the shed roof. I think I can make the window from there."

"I don't believe you can," said Sandy doubtfully. "But you can try it."

"I can do it. Then I'll sneak down and open the Gobblery

window. You and Dutch give me a leg-up, Sandy."

Ned gained the roof without much difficulty and the others drew off to watch him essay the window of the Sun Parlor. To reach it he had to jump high enough to get his fingers over the window-ledge. He succeeded on the third attempt and then managed to pull himself up by his hands and squirm across. A minute later a window close at hand was noiselessly opened and the others crawled through. Everything progressed favorably until Ned, who was bringing up the rear of the procession, stumbled on the stairs. Those ahead raced frantically upward and were out of sight when Mrs. Linn's door opened.

"Who is it?" she cried anxiously.

Ned, rubbing his shins, replied reassuringly.

"It's me, Marm; Ned; I—I've been getting water."

"Oh! You most scared me to death, Ned. Did you find some?"

"Yes'm, lots." Ned heard an explosion of stifled chuckles from above where seven faces lined the railing. "Very nice water it was too, Marm. Good night. I'm sorry I woke you up. I didn't mean to, but I stumbled."

"Good night." The matron's door closed softly and Ned went on up to be seized by the others and gently pummeled.

"'Very nice water it was!'" snickered Spud. "Aren't you ashamed to lie to Marm like that?"

"I didn't lie," chuckled Ned. "It *was* nice water. I'm going to bed. Come on, Cal. Good night, you chaps. Somebody's got my pajamas, I guess; these don't fit; but they'll do for tonight."

Ten minutes later the only sound to be heard in West House was the gentle snoring of Dutch.

CHAPTER VI
CAL SETTLES DOWN

The next morning John William Boland began his life at Oak Park School. I give him his full title for the last time, for after his immersion in Willow Lake he was never anything but Cal among his friends, and it behooves us to follow the fashion.

It was customary for West House to proceed across the park to school in a body. The bell in School Hall rang warningly at a quarter to nine, but its tones fell on deaf ears. At ten minutes to nine the boys gathered their books together and began their search for caps. At five minutes to nine they raced pell-mell out of the house and through the park, usually arriving in the corridor of School Hall just as the last strokes of the second bell died away. But this morning, being the first day of the term, the eight boys started promptly with the first bell and passed through the park quite leisurely. Willow Lake didn't look at all like the pool in which they had disported themselves last night. In the moonlight it had seemed to Cal big and mysterious. Today, with the sunlight pouring down on it and a little breeze rippling the surface, it resolved itself into a small and quite commonplace pond, oval in shape, neatly margined with smooth turf and shaded with oaks and willows, the latter in places dipping their drooping branches into the water.

"I saw a whopping big trout in her last Spring," said Spud, leaning over the bridge and gazing longingly into the channel below. "I'm going to try for him some day."

“Better not let anyone catch you,” said Sandy.

“Aren’t you allowed to fish here?” Cal asked.

“No, nor in the Mill Pond back of the Hall. They’re full of fish, too. Some of the East House fellows fished in the Mill Pond one morning last Spring and got caught at it. They got fits from Horace. They got up at about half-past four and thought no one would see them, but Eliza piped them from her window.”

“Who is Eliza?” asked Cal.

“Mrs. Kendall; Grouch’s wife; she’s matron at the Hall. Grouch teaches math.”

They passed out through the little rustic gate, crossed the road and went in between the iron posts and under the iron grilling with its O. P. S. in monogram. The Green, as the space between the gymnasium, the Hall and the school was called, was dotted with boys, while the steps of the Hall held many others. As the company came into sight shouts of welcome reached them from all sides.

“O you West House!”

“O you Hall!” was the answer in unison. Right arms went up at an angle of forty-five degrees and right hands were fluttered with a peculiar motion from the elbow that constituted the Oak Park form of salutation. It wasn’t many days before Cal could do it as well as anyone, but just now he kept his hands in his pockets and tried to ignore the fact that dozens of pairs of eyes were studying him critically. As they followed the path that led around in front of the Hall greetings and banter fell thick.

“There’s Dutch Zoller! Dutch, you’re pretty near fat enough

to kill!”

“What do they feed you on, Dutch?”

“O you Fungus! How’s it going, boy?”

“Hello, Sandy, you old chump! Glad to see you.”

“You’re looking mighty pale, Hoop! You ought to see a doctor.”

To Cal’s surprise West House kept on its way around the corner of the Hall, following a path that led slightly downward toward a smaller building set in a corner of the grounds. There was a brook which flowed for a little distance into what Cal surmised to be the Mill Pond of which Sandy had spoken, and the path passed over a tiny rustic bridge. At the bridge the company stopped.

“Now then,” said Sandy, and—

“O you East House!” they shouted.

Two boys tumbled out on to the porch and waved, and in a moment others appeared and the hail was answered.

“O you West House!”

Hands went up in friendly salutation and then West House turned and retraced its steps, turning to the right where the path divided, and fetching up at the School House steps. By this time the entrance was alive with boys, boys of all sizes and a variety of ages, but all, excepting a sprinkling of newcomers like Cal and Clara Parker, looking excited and merry. Cal had stuck pretty close to Ned Brent and now Ned introduced him to several fellows whose names he either didn’t catch or immediately forgot. Presently, finding that no one was paying

any attention to him, a fact which helped to reduce his embarrassment, he wandered into the building.

There was nothing remarkable about School House. It was the oldest of all the buildings and the corridor was rather dark and stuffy. Rooms opened from it at left and right, and peeking into the nearer one, Cal saw a blackboard-lined apartment with a platform and teacher's desk at one end and some forty pupils' desks occupying the rest of the room. At one of the boards a middle-aged man with a scowling countenance was making cabalistic figures with a piece of yellow chalk. Evidently, thought Cal, that was the mathematics instructor who went by the unattractive name of Grouch. Suddenly overhead the bell began its last summons. A sprinkling of boys came in, but most of them continued their conversation on the steps. Cal found a new object of interest in a large pine board occupying a space near the door. Beside it hung a pad of paper and in one corner were dozens of thumb-tacks. On the board itself were many pieces of paper torn from the pad and impaled with the tacks. The messages they bore were interesting to the new boy:

"J. W.; meet me at noon at East House. Taffy."

"Growler Gay; Where's my French dictionary? Must have it today. E. M."

"Spud H.; Meet me on steps after morning. Carl."

"Lost! Tennis racket with initials J. E. L. Return to Lewis, Hall. No questions asked."

"West House Baseball. Nine plays East House at 4. All out sharp. White, cap't."

"Class Day programmes in 12 Hall after two on

Wednesday."

"Bandy Jones wants to see Pills Green after morning. Important!"

The notices were evidently survivals of last term. Cal wondered whether he would ever find his name there with a message that someone wanted to see him. The bell stopped ringing with a final emphatic clang and there was a wild rush toward the class rooms. Cal flattened himself against the notice board to keep from being swept along with the throng and Ned spied him there.

"Come on, Cal! This way to the fireworks!"

Cal struggled across and followed Ned into a room at the end of the corridor. They were almost the last in.

"Morning, sir," said Ned, and Cal turned to find Doctor Webster standing inside the green leather door.

"Good morning, Brent," returned the Doctor. "Good morning, Boland. Find a seat at the back of the room, please."

The doors were closed, the Doctor mounted the platform and struck a gong sharply and the room became quiet. Cal found himself in a seat on the last row, one of many new arrivals. As he looked about him he saw heads go down, and then heard voices join in the Invocation.

"O Lord, we are gathered again in Thy presence. Help us, we pray, to make this new day one of earnest endeavor and happy accomplishment. Aid us to subdue all evil desires and set our faces toward the light. For Christ's sake. Amen."

After a moment's silence the Doctor seated himself at his big desk and in brisk and business-like tones set the lessons for

the different classes in Latin and Greek. Afterwards the gong was struck again and many of the boys went out. Those that remained gave their attention more or less closely to their books. Then the Doctor called the new boys to him one by one and put each through an oral examination that soon settled the question of their disposal. Cal had no trouble in satisfying the Doctor as to his right to entrance into the First Junior Class.

"All right, Boland. Report to Mr. James in Room Three, please. Up the corridor to your right."

Room 3 was as large a room as the Doctor's, but contained only some twenty seats, of which rather more than half were occupied when Cal pushed the green door open and entered. In front of the first row of desks were settees used for recitations. At Cal's appearance one of the boys in the room began tapping the floor with his foot, and instantly every other boy followed suit. Mr. James looked around and signalled Cal to approach the platform. The tapping died away. The instructor was a youngish man with the appearance of a college athlete rather than a teacher. To the school he was known as Jim. He taught Natural Sciences, had charge of physical training and was Athletic Instructor. He was mightily feared by the younger boys and loved by the older. His habitual expression was one of severity and he had a way of looking at a boy that seemed to bore right through. Cal's embarrassment was so palpable, however, that Mr. James softened his severity of countenance with a smile.

"Well?" he asked.

"Doctor Horace sent me, sir."

A titter of amusement swept over the room but was silenced at a glance from the instructor.

“Doctor Horace?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you know the Doctor very well?”

“Huh? *Sir?*”

“Are you an old friend of the Doctor’s? Known him all your life?”

“No, sir, I never saw him until yesterday.”

“Then don’t you think you’d better call him by his last name instead of his first? Did anyone tell you to call him Doctor Horace?”

“No, sir—that is, Ned Brent said his name was Horace, sir. I thought it was Webster.”

“You thought right. Never mind; the mistake was natural.” Mr. James smiled. “What’s your name?”

“John Boland, sir.”

“Boland?” The instructor wrote on a card. “All right. Peters!”

A youth at the back of the room stood up instantly beside his seat.

“Boland, do you see that boy standing up? Well, that is George Peters. Peters is one of our stupidest boys, Boland. I think I might say our stupidest without risking exaggeration. That is so, Peters?”

“Y-yes, sir,” replied Peters cheerfully.

“Thank you. Now, Boland, you take the seat at the left of Peters’. You look like a smart fellow and I am hoping that

perchance that propinquity may result in contagion for Peters."

Cal walked down the aisle to the indicated seat.

"You may sit down, Peters," continued Mr. James. "And, Peters, if you experience a queer sensation don't be unduly alarmed. It will probably be only the germ of industry finding lodgment in you. Should you experience a strange impulse to glance now and then into your books don't combat it; let it grow. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Peters with a grin.

"Thank you again, Peters. You are very amiable. Am I right in thinking that you have your book upside-down? I can't be certain at this distance."

Peters glanced at the book and switched it quickly around.

"I was right? I thought so. Try it that way for awhile, Peters; reading upside-down must be difficult to even a normal intellect, and I don't think you ought to attempt it with yours."

Mr. James allowed his gaze to wander around the class room with the result that some fourteen smiles vanished abruptly from as many faces and an equal number of heads bent over books. Cal looked about him. Most of the boys appeared to be of his own age, although the unfortunate Peters was plainly a year older. Presently he descried Ned over in a corner, and, yes, that was Spud Halladay in the next seat but one. He didn't feel so lonesome after that. Presently Mr. James came down with an armful of books.

"Write your name in these, Boland, and be careful of them. We don't allow the misuse of text-books here. Peters, do you think that you can tell Boland what the lessons for today are

without unduly taxing your massive intellect?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Peters.

“Try it, then. Have you pencils and pens, Boland?”

“No, sir.”

“Come to the desk, then, and get what you need.”

Cal followed the instructor up to the platform, received an assortment of writing implements and returned to where Peters awaited him.

“Ain’t he great?” whispered Peters joyfully as he opened one of the new books and indicated the day’s lesson. “He’s more fun than a circus sometimes.”

“Don’t you—don’t you mind his talking like that?” whispered Cal incredulously.

“Mind it! Gee, no! He don’t mean anything. Jim’s a corker!”

A few minutes later a gong sounded and Cal followed the others to Room 1, where Mr. Spander, known as Charlie, taught French and German. There was no real work that morning and at twelve o’clock the noon gong released them. Cal returned to West House with Ned and Spud and found that his trunk had arrived.

“Get your things out,” counselled Ned. “Dinner isn’t until half-past.”

So Cal unpacked and Ned sat and looked on, his countenance running the gamut of expressions from surprised distaste to hopeless despair. As a matter of fact Cal’s wardrobe wasn’t one to elicit admiration. When the last thing was out Ned sat huddled in speechless disgust. Finally:—

“That’s your closet, Cal,” he said hopelessly. “Put ’em away before anyone comes in, please.”

Cal viewed him puzzledly.

“Why?”

“Oh, I like the room to look neat.” He got up and went to the window and stood for a moment frowning out at the green hill beyond the dusty road. At last, having made up his mind, he turned resolutely.

“Say, Cal, I’m a friend of yours; you know that, don’t you?”

“Why, yes, I cal’late I do,” answered Cal bewilderedly.

“Sure thing, old man. Well, what I’m going to say is for your own good. I don’t want to hurt your feelings or anything, but—but, honest, Cal, they won’t do!”

“What won’t do?” asked Cal, pausing on his way to the closet with his winter overcoat in his hand.

Ned nodded toward the things on the floor.

“Those; the—the togs, you know.”

“Why, what’s the matter with them? Ain’t they—ain’t they good enough?”

“To be quite frank, old man, they are not,” said Ned decisively. Cal studied a moment, his glance wandering from his roommate to the apparel.

“I’m sorry,” he said at last, “but they’re all I’ve got, Ned.”

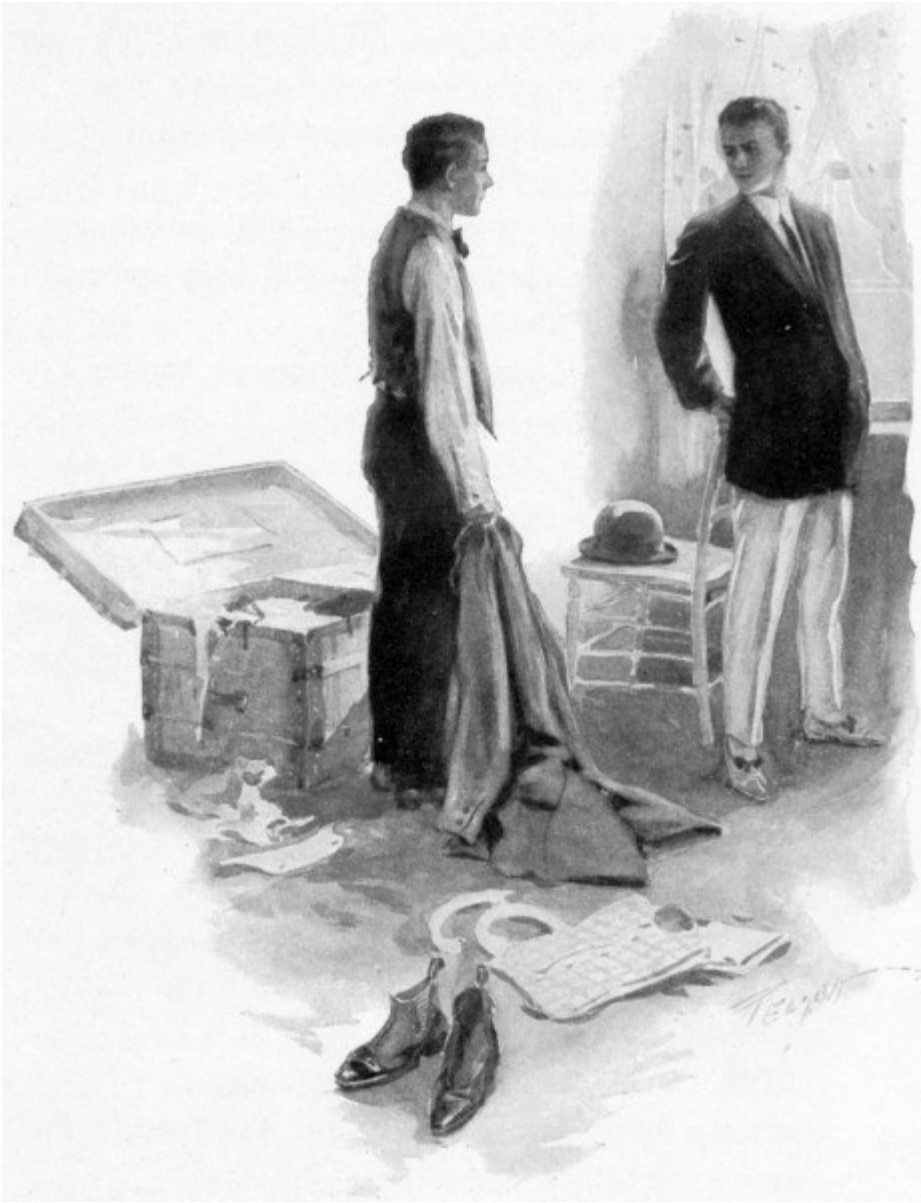
“Well, I suppose you could blow yourself to another suit, Cal, couldn’t you? And a sweater and cap and a few ties that don’t look as though they were made for a circus clown, and

—”

But Cal shook his head decidedly.

“I couldn’t, honest, Ned. You see, I—I ain’t got much money.”

“That straight? Folks hit by the panic, were they?”



“But, honest, Cal, they won’t do!”

“I don’t know anything about the panic,” replied Cal seriously. “We ain’t had much money since father was drowned.” Then Cal explained about the legacy and what miracles were to be performed with it; and how in summer he

was going to find work and make a whole lot of money toward his college expenses. And Ned listened sympathetically, a little surprised withal, and was silent when Cal had finished.

"That's different," he said at last gravely. "I didn't know it was like that with you, old man. Gee, you're downright plucky, that's what you are, Cal! But— Well, there's the dinner bell. We'll have to think this over. Course you can't spend a lot of money on clothes; I see that, all right; but there's some things you certainly do need, old man, and we'll have to find a way of getting them. Come on. How's your appetite? Mine's fine and dandy. Take hold of the rail like this and see if you can make it in four jumps. That's Spud's record. I almost did it once, but I fell at the bottom and bust the umbrella-stand to smithereens! Come on! One—two—"

CHAPTER VII
HOMESICKNESS AND GINGERBREAD

That afternoon Cal experienced his first and last touch of homesickness. School began at half-past one and lasted until three-thirty. For Cal the last half-hour was spent in the gymnasium, where he was introduced to dumb-bells and chest-weights and taught to lie on his back on a mattress and perform a number of interesting and picturesque—and, at first, extremely difficult—exercises. Each class had three sessions a week in the gymnasium. Cal followed the others into the dressing-room after the class was dismissed and made the acquaintance of a shower-bath. He liked that so much and stayed under it so long that he was one of the last fellows to get dressed, and when he reached the Green Ned and all the other West House boys had disappeared. They were not very far away, as it happened, having only strolled down to the athletic field below the gymnasium. But Cal didn't know that. Nor was he likely to discover it, since the gymnasium hid the field from sight. He stood around for a few minutes, hoping that someone he knew would appear, and at last crossed the road and returned to West House. So far there had been no time to feel lonesome, but now that sensation began to envelop him. At the bridge he stopped and leaned over the railing and let his gaze wander around the little lake. It came to him suddenly that he ought not to have come to Oak Park; that he wasn't like the other boys; that he couldn't dress well enough, was rough and

uncultivated beside them, and that they would never like him. Why, even his roommate was ashamed of the clothes he wore! He took his elbows from the rustic railing and went on along the path.

Even Claire Parker was better fitted for these surroundings than he was. Claire had been abroad four times, had lived in the city and knew a hundred little things which, not vastly important in themselves, combined to give him an ease of manner and a conversational ability that Cal was certain he sadly lacked. No one, he reflected, ever cared to talk to him. And when he was with the others all he could do was to sit silent and listen to their chatter, and wonder more than half the time what it was about! Gee, he wished he had never come! He wished he were back in West Bayport this minute.

The house was silent and deserted when he reached it and slowly climbed the stairs to the Den. The bay windows were open and the afternoon sunlight slanted in warmly under the half-drawn shades. He tossed Ned's cap aside, dumped his new books on the table and seated himself on the window-seat and gazed across the afternoon landscape. He felt pretty dejected. He cal'lated he was the only fellow in school who wasn't having a jolly good time at that moment. Ned Brent knew about everybody and didn't need him a bit. Even Claire had made friends with one or two of the younger chaps; Cal had seen him with them before afternoon school. No one wanted to know him, though; no one cared whether he was lonely and homesick! He had half a mind to pack some things in his bag and walk back to the town and take the first train toward home!

But at that moment a door opened downstairs and an eloquent odor of cooking came up to him, an odor that brought

to him a sudden picture of the little kitchen at home and his mother peering anxiously into the oven. Steps sounded on the stairs and he heard Mrs. Linn puffing her way up.

"Boys," she called. But there was no answer. Cal heard her knock on the doors at the back of the house and then come along the corridor. His own door was almost closed and he hoped that she would be satisfied to leave him in peace with his sorrow if he made no reply to her knock. But she wasn't. She pushed the door wide open and saw him at the window. And she guessed instantly what the trouble was.

"Why, John, you all alone?" she asked in simulated surprise. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"Yes'm, thank you."

"I suppose you're sort of tired after your first day here. Well, here's something that will make you feel lots better." She came in and set a great plate of smoking-hot gingerbread on the table. "I don't believe you ought to eat quite all that yourself, but perhaps it won't hurt you." She rolled her arms under her apron and looked across at him kindly. "I suppose your mother makes gingerbread, don't she?"

"Yes'm," replied Cal, looking interestedly at the pile of red-brown cake.

"Then of course you like it. What is it the boys call you? Cal, is it? Well, I shall call you Cal too after this. Somehow I never could seem to resist the nicknames; they're so much easier to remember, aren't they? Why, I just have to stop and think when I want to remember Spud's real name, or Dutch's. Now, don't let it get cold. It's a great deal better when it's hot. Maybe you'd like a glass of milk with it. Would you?"

“No’m, thanks. I—I ain’t hungry.”

“Ain’t hungry! Sakes alive, what sort of a boy are you? Why, of course you’re hungry, though maybe you don’t know it. Here, you try that nice crusty corner piece and tell me whether it’s as good as your mother’s.” She held the plate out and after a moment’s hesitation Cal obeyed. Somehow, as soon as he had sunk his teeth in the gingerbread his troubles looked much dimmer. Mrs. Linn seated herself in a chair and beamed across at him while he ate, having first thoughtfully deposited the plate beside him on the window-seat.

“You live by the ocean, don’t you?” she asked. “That’s what I’d like to do. I’m that fond of the ocean! I was at Old Orchard Beach for three weeks this summer and it was just heavenly. Seems as though I could just sit on the sand all day long and look at the waves and be perfectly happy! Is there a beach where you live, Cal?”

“Yes’m, two fine beaches.” And once started, Cal had a lot to say about West Bayport and the surrounding coast, and Mrs. Linn let him talk to his heart’s content, occasionally throwing in a question or dropping an interested “I want to know!” And while he talked the gingerbread on the plate grew less and less. Finally Mrs. Linn declared that she must go back to the kitchen.

“I’ll leave the rest of that for Ned,” she said. “But you mustn’t let the others know about it or there won’t be any for supper.”

“No’m. Thank you very much. It’s awfully nice gingerbread; just like my mother makes. I—I like lots of molasses in it, don’t you?”

“Molasses is just the making of gingerbread,” asseverated Mrs. Linn. “Molasses and spices. You’ve got to be particular about the spices too.”

“Yes’m, I cal’late you have.” He remembered that he had observed the other boys rise when Mrs. Linn entered or left the room and so he got up rather awkwardly from the window-seat and stood while she bustled out. It was funny, he reflected, how that gingerbread had altered the outlook. Oak Park didn’t seem nearly so bad now and he thought that perhaps, after all, he might be able to stick it out. He mustn’t expect to make friends the first day. And ten minutes later there was a sound of noisy footsteps on the porch, and a wild rush up the stairs and Ned and Spud burst into the room.

“Where did you get to?” demanded Ned, throwing his cap at Cal and subsiding on his bed. “I looked everywhere for you. Spud said he’d seen you coming over this way, but I didn’t believe him. Spud’s such a cheerful liar, you know.”

“You’ll believe me next time,” said Spud resignedly. “Hello, what do I smell?” He sniffed the air knowingly. “Smells like —” But Ned had already sighted the gingerbread and fallen upon it.

“Where’d this come from?” he asked with a full mouth. “Marm bring it up? No wonder you sneaked home, you foxy rascal! Spud, he’s making love to Marm already.”

“Gee, but it’s good!” said Spud, munching hungrily. “You didn’t leave much, Cal, did you?”

“I’m sorry. I—I didn’t think.”

“Don’t worry,” laughed Ned. “If you’d been Spud you wouldn’t have left any.”

“Huh! I’d like to know who fed you on perfectly good marshmallows last night,” said Spud indignantly.

“Were those yours?” asked Ned innocently. “If I’d known that I’d eaten more of ’em.”

“More! You couldn’t. You ate about half of them as it was.”

“Come on,” said Ned, when the last crumb had disappeared. “Let’s go down on the porch. It’s too hot up here. What time is it, anyway?” He looked at the gold watch he carried at the end of a handsome fob. “Quarter past five. Is that all? My, but I’m hungry. I hoped it was near supper time. I wonder if we could get Marm to let us have a few more hunks of the heavy sweet, Spud?”

“We could try,” beamed Spud. “Come on.”

For once, though, the matron resisted their blandishments and Ned and Spud sought the porch dejectedly.

“How did you get on today, Cal?” asked Ned.

“All right, I cal’late. It don’t look like it would be very hard,” he added cautiously.

“It’s awful,” sighed Spud. “You simply have to wear your young life out in study. If it wasn’t that I want to go to college mighty bad I’d throw up the grind and be a pirate. Did you ever see a pirate, Cal?”

“No,” was the laughing reply.

“Well, I thought maybe you had. Aren’t there any pirates at West Something—Bayport, is it?”

“I never saw any. But there’s a man there who was in a fight with pirates once.” And Cal told about Old Captain Macon,

one of the town characters, who, in addition to having led a highly picturesque existence as a young man, was possessed of an equally picturesque imagination as an old one. By ones and twos the other West House fellows came wandering home and joined the group on the porch. The conversation turned on school affairs and soon Cal was listening to a fervid discussion of the chances of the House Football Team to beat the Hall that Autumn. If Sandy was to be believed things were in a fearfully bad shape and the future held nothing but gloom. But Cal had already reached the conclusion that Sandy's position as head of the House had developed an overwrought sense of responsibility and a pessimistic attitude toward life. Dutch, on the other hand, saw only certain victory ahead.

"The Hall hasn't the ghost of a show this year," he declared emphatically. "We've got the men to do them up brown. Cal, you don't want to forget to report for practice tomorrow afternoon right after school."

"Wish they'd let us play outside teams," sighed Hoop.

"Don't they?" asked Cal in surprise.

Hoop shook his head. "Not football. They say it's too dangerous. Don't see much difference, myself. Naughton bust his silly old collar-bone last year tackling the dummy. I dare say he'd have gone through four or five outside games without getting a scratch."

"But you play other things with other schools?" asked Cal.

"Yes," answered Sandy. "Baseball and hockey and such. I think Faculty's right about it, Hoop."

"I know you do," replied Hoop disdainfully. "You think anything Faculty does is all right."

“No, I don’t, but I do think they’re right about football. Why, some of the big colleges have cut it out! And look at the way they’re trying to make the game over!”

“Yes, they make me tired,” said Dutch. “Every year they change the rules so you never know where you are. First thing we know we’ll be playing football with bean-bags in the drawing-room of an evening, with ice-cream and angel cake between halves!”

“Sounds good to me,” said Ned. “That would be quite like cricket, wouldn’t it?”

“Guess Faculty would like to have us play cricket instead,” said The Fungus disgustedly. “Fellow Wests, I am opposed to a paternal government.”

“Whatever that is,” said Spud. “Fungus has been studying politics, fellows.”

“Glad he’s studying something,” murmured Ned. “Speaking of study—”

“Oh, let’s not,” groaned Spud. “Let’s speak of supper. It’s most time for it. Come on up, Sandy, and wash your dirty face.”

“Everybody wash his dirty face,” cried Hoop, jumping up. “Last man upstairs gives me his preserves!”

There was a wild exodus from the porch and a frenzied rush up the stairway, followed by a stiff argument between Hoop and Dutch, the latter, who had been the last to reach the top, declaring that he had not subscribed to the terms of the contest, and that if he had he could easily have beaten Hoop.

After supper—and never, Cal thought, had he been so

hungry—there was almost an hour of leisure. There was a doubles in tennis on the court at the side of the house between Sandy and Hoop and Ned and The Fungus, and the others watched from the porch. At eight o'clock study hour began and lasted until nine. Cal spread his books out on his side of the table and Ned closed the door. It was a rule that during study hour doors must be closed and no visiting was allowed. Then Ned drew his chair up to his side of the table, fixed the drop-light with mathematical precision in the center of the left end of the green cloth and—took up a story-book! Cal viewed him in surprise.

"Aren't you going to study?" he asked.

"No. What's the use? I looked lessons over this afternoon. Besides, no one is really expected to know much the second day. Want a good book? Ever read this?"

Cal hadn't, but he resisted the temptation to examine the picture which Ned held forth for his inspection. "I cal'late I'd better study this French a little. I never had much luck with French."

"Me either," said Ned with a shrug of his shoulders. "It's a foolish language and oughtn't to be encouraged." He leaned his elbows on the table-top and was soon absorbed in his book. Cal studied religiously until Sandy put his head out of his door and cried:

"Time up, fellows!"

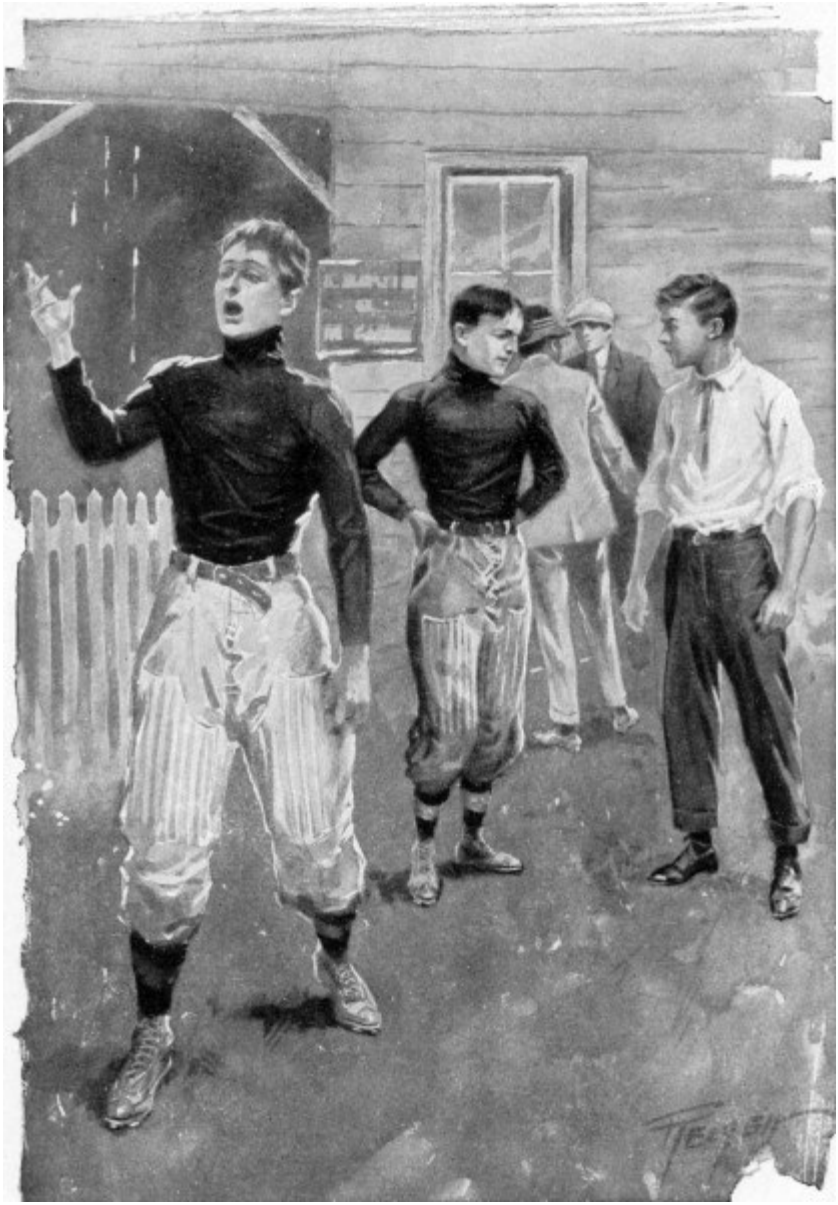
Then followed a pleasant hour before bedtime. Cal and Ned went to the Ice Chest, where Sandy and Spud dwelt, and the rest of the House joined them there. The evening ended in a grand rough-house up and down the corridor and in and out of

the rooms, and Cal, wielding a pillow in the thick of the fight, quite forgot that he had ever been either lonesome or homesick.

CHAPTER VIII

NED LAYS DOWN THE LAW

Football had heretofore remained outside Cal Boland's philosophy. There had been a game now and then at home, but for the most part the high school team had journeyed to other towns to play their contests and Cal had never watched more than two or three in his life. His conception of the game was very vague when he reported at the lower end of the athletic field for practice the next afternoon. As he owned no football clothes he merely laid aside coat and cap and rolled his shirt-sleeves up. Ned viewed his costume with misgiving, but made no comment as they went together down to the field.



Ned viewed Cal's costume with misgiving

As Oak Park played no contests with outside football teams all the interest concentrated on the inter-dormitory games. West and East Houses combined forces against the Hall, with whom they played a series of three games for the school

championship and the possession of what was known as the Silver Shield. This was an oak shield bearing a smaller shield of silver surrounded by a design of oak leaves and acorns—the school emblem—and the inscription: “Oak Park School Football Trophy.” Each year the shield was inscribed with the names of the winning players and became the temporary property of Hall or House, as the case might be. For two years running the Silver Shield had graced the parlor of the Hall, and the Houses were resolved that this Fall it must come down. As East House accommodated only fourteen boys and West House but eight, while the Hall held thirty-eight, at first glance the chances seemed to favor the Hall from the start. But the discrepancy was not as great as would appear, for the Hall held most of the younger boys, members of the Second Junior Class, who were not allowed to take part in the big games but were permitted to play amongst themselves. So that actually the Hall’s supply of football material was usually not much larger than that of the combined Houses.

The House Team was captained this year by Frank Brooks, an East House lad of seventeen who was usually known by the title of Brooksie. The Hall’s captain was Pete Grow, House Leader at the Hall and one of the best-liked fellows in school. There were two separate gridirons on the athletic field and it was an unwritten law that during athletic activities no Hall man should approach the House gridiron, and vice versa. The House used the lower field and it was on that that Cal began his initiation into the mysteries of football. I can’t say that he displayed any especial aptitude for the game or was very enthusiastic about it. He did as he was told to do to the best of his ability and perspired freely for the cause, but Frank Brooks didn’t single him out for commendation that day. On the way

back to West House after they had had their showers Cal gave expression to his curiosity.

"It seems to me, Ned," he remarked, "that football playing's pretty hard work. I always thought, to hear about it, that it was fun."

"Why, it is fun!"

"Oh," murmured Cal. "Is it?"

"Of course it is, after you get to know it."

"Well, I didn't see much fun in it today. Dropping on a wobbly leather ball that's never where you think it is and running across the field after it with the thermometer at—whatever it is at, isn't my idea of having a real good time, Ned."

"That's because you haven't got into it yet," said Ned encouragingly.

"I cal'late I never will. I didn't seem to have much luck today."

"Oh, you did well enough for a beginner," answered Ned. "Most fellows have a pretty hard time at first. You never played before, did you?"

"No, and I guess I've had enough already. I cal—guess I'll let the rest of you have the fun."

"Oh, you can't back out," exclaimed Ned.

"Why not?" Cal asked in surprise.

"Because we need you; we need every fellow we've got, and more too. Why, if Clara Parker wasn't a Second Junior we'd

have him at work!”

“But there isn’t any use in my trying for the team,” said Cal. “I’d never make it.”

“You can’t tell. We’re going to be in a hard way for men this year. You’d better stick it out, Cal. Besides, the fellows wouldn’t like it if you squealed.”

“They wouldn’t? Well, I don’t see as it’s anyone’s business but mine. If I’d rather not—”

“You haven’t anything to say about it,” declared Ned firmly. “As long as the House needs you it’s your duty to come out. Of course, you’re new yet and don’t understand the way we feel about such things here. You see, Cal, it’s the School first and then your own particular House; see? After that you can do as you like personally.”

“Oh!” Cal thought that over a moment, and then chuckled. “I see. After I do what the School wants me to do then I do what the House wants me to do, and then, if there’s any time left, I do as I please. That’s it, ain’t it?”

“Sure pop,” answered Ned gravely. “And it’s a good thing to remember, old man.”

“Supposing my mother didn’t want me to play football; and I ain’t sure that she does; then what?”

“Oh, if she wrote to Horace he’d tell Brooksie and Brooksie would let you off,” answered Ned carelessly. “But I wouldn’t try that game,” he added meaningly, “because the fellows would think you’d put your mother up to it.”

“Seems, then, like I’ve just got to go ahead and be a martyr,” sighed Cal with a rueful shake of the head. “Look

here, Ned, ain't there any nice quiet position I could fill without having to bump my breath out and skin my shins all up? How about official scorer? Ain't there something like that on the team? I cal'late I'd make a fine official scorer."

"You'll make a fine chump of yourself if you don't stop talking," said Ned with a laugh. "Do you play tennis? I'll try you a set before supper if no one has the court."

"I don't know how. Besides, I couldn't play after what I've been through back there. Why, I'm all lame and bruised up!"

Ned slapped him on the back.

"Oh, you'll get used to it," he laughed, "and just love it, old man! You wait and see."

"Love it nothing!" said Cal disgustedly. "I cal'late I'll have to keep on, but I'm plumb sure I ain't ever going to get to love it! Besides," he continued as they sat down on the steps of West House, "I don't see any sense in it! I thought football was play, but you fellows go at it like it was a matter of life or death."

"Because we want to beat the Hall this year and get the shield away from them. You wait until later and you'll be just as crazy as any of us. Things get pretty well heated up along towards November. If we win a game and Hall wins a game, why, you won't be able to eat or sleep for two days before the play-off!"

"I won't?" grunted Cal. "Huh; you just watch me!"

"You'll have to get a football suit," said Ned thoughtfully. "They don't cost much, though. You can get one that's good enough for about four dollars."

“That settles it,” said Cal with a satisfied sigh. “That lets me out. I haven’t got four dollars for football clothes.”

“Now, look here,” exclaimed Ned sternly. “You’re rooming with me, Cal Boland, and I’ve got to look after you. And you’ve got to do as I say, and you might as well understand that right now. You’ll go down to the village tomorrow before morning school and get a pair of canvas breeches and a jacket. You ought to have shoes, too, but I think I’ve got a pair upstairs that’ll fit you all right.”

“But I can’t afford it!” objected Cal.

“You’ve got to afford it,” answered Ned sternly. “What’s four dollars?”

“It’s more’n I’ve got to throw away on football things,” Cal replied with a shake of his head. “I cal’late it don’t seem much to you, but four dollars looks big to me, Ned. Besides,” he added after a moment, “I’ve been thinking about a suit. I cal—I guess you’re right about my clothes being pretty bad. I’ve been looking around and I see that the fellows here pay a lot of attention to what they wear. Some of ’em seem to wear their best clothes all the time! Well, I was thinking I’d write home and see what my mother thought about my getting a new suit. You see, Ned, I don’t want you to be ashamed to have me room with you.”

“Oh, piffle! Of course I’m not ashamed. But I do think you ought to have another suit, a sort of knock-about suit you could wear every day, you know.”

“Yes. Well, if I get that I surely can’t go buying any football clothes.”

“Now wait, Cal. There’s a place in the town where you can

get a mighty good looking suit for about twelve dollars. Of course, it isn't a wonder, but it will do well enough. Twelve dollars is pretty cheap, isn't it?"

"Y-yes, I cal'late it is," replied Cal doubtfully. "That's about what I paid for these." He looked thoughtfully at his gray flannels. "And I've worn 'em two summers."

"They're very nice," said Ned with an effort. "But I wouldn't get light gray if I were you, Cal. You see, you're sort of light yourself and darkish things would look better on you."

"They show the dirt, though."

"Not if they're kind of rough and mixy," said Ned. "If you could get a suit for twelve you could easily afford to buy the football togs, couldn't you?" But Cal looked doubtful.

"I was cal'lating to spend about twelve altogether," he replied. "Then you said I ought to have a cap and a belt and some neckties; though seems to me I'd better wear what neckties I've got; I've got a whole lot of 'em; about six or seven, I guess."

"Never mind those things now," said Ned. "As for the cap, why, you might just as well wear that one you've got on as buy a new one. It fits all right, and I don't need it. And the belt the same way. It isn't a very good one, but it will do well enough. And you can buy a couple of ties any old time. Look here, Cal, if you're hard-up just now, there's a fellow in town who will trust you if you want him to. Of course he will charge you a little bit more for what you get, and you mustn't say anything about it to anyone, because it's against the rules to get things on credit."

"I wouldn't do that," said Cal. "Besides, I've got as much

now as I will have all winter. More, I guess," he added ruefully. "I suppose I couldn't play football in what I've got? There's an old pair of trousers upstairs—"

But Ned shook his head firmly.

"Couldn't be done. You can't work in tight things, and they won't stand the strain. No, you've got to have togs, Cal."

"Have, eh?" Cal looked disappointed. "Well, all right. I wish I didn't, though. You see, I thought I'd get mother to send me ten dollars. Then I've got pretty near three dollars left from my trip. And that ought to be enough. If I just got the suit, you know. But if I've got to have football things—" He stopped and shook his head puzzledly.

"Can't you get her to send you fifteen instead of ten?" asked Ned.

"Yes, but I oughtn't to spend that much on clothes." He put his hand into his coat pocket and pulled out an old red leather wallet and found two one-dollar bills folded away in a recess. "Thought maybe I might be mistaken," he said. "Thought maybe there might be another one there." Then he counted the silver in his trousers pocket. "Eighty-five cents," he mused. "That ain't much, is it?"

"No," replied Ned, frowning. "But," he added with a laugh, "you've got eighty-five cents more than the law allows."

"How's that?"

"Rules don't let us have more than two dollars spending money," replied Ned carelessly. "We're supposed to hand the rest over to Marm and she doles it out to us. But no one pays any attention to that. I've got about eight dollars upstairs in my

collar-box."

"Gee!" Cal's eyes got big. "Ain't you afraid to lose it?"

"No; why? How could I lose it? It's in my bureau drawer."

"I wouldn't want to have that much lying around, though," Cal said. "I'd be mighty nervous about it."

"I tell you what," said Ned. "I'll lend you a couple of dollars so you can get your football togs in the morning. You can pay me back later, when you get your money from home."

"I wouldn't like to do that," said Cal. "If I write tonight I guess maybe I'd get the money by day after tomorrow; or next day, anyway."

"Oh, there's no use in waiting all that time. Besides, you need the things right away; you can't play in ordinary clothes. You let me lend you two dollars and then you kite down town in the morning; I'll go along if you like."

"All right," answered Cal reluctantly. "I'm much obliged to you. And I cal'late you'd better come along and show me where to go. I wouldn't want to get into any high-price place."

"All right," laughed Ned, "I'll look after you, old man. Here comes Spud and The Fungus. O you Spud! Want to play a set?"

"I've got you," answered Spud. "Going in for your racket? Bring mine out, will you? It's in the stair closet or back of the door or—somewhere around."

"You don't say?" inquired Ned sarcastically. "You're sure it isn't in the trunk-room or under the refrigerator or in my pocket? You'd better come in and look for it yourself."

“No, honest, Ned, it’s right there somewhere. If you can’t find it, bring The Fungus’s.”

“You do and you’ll get licked,” said The Fungus grimly as he seated himself in the hammock. “Say, fellows, has anyone glanced over the apple crop this Fall?” Spud’s gaze followed the Fungus’s over the whitewashed picket fence that marked the boundary of school territory at the left of the cottage. There was a hedge of lilac bushes on the other side of the fence which hid the next door domain from the porch. But Cal knew what was beyond, for from the bay window of the Den he could look over the hedge and through the trees at the old-fashioned white farm-house with its green shutters and its columned porch.

“Who lives over there?” he asked.

“The Old Maids,” replied Spud. “There are two of them. Their name is Curtis. They’re Tartars, too. They’ve got a dandy apple orchard back of the house and they’re very, very stingy with the fruit thereof.”

“It doesn’t do them much good, though,” said Ned, returning with the two rackets. “We usually get all we want.” The Fungus chuckled.

“Rather! And we ought to be seeing how those nice big red apples are coming on. They’re usually ready for us about the first of October, aren’t they, Ned?”

“I guess so.” He lowered his voice. “We might drop over tonight and investigate. What do you say?”

“Good scheme! I couldn’t do a thing to a couple of those pippins! I wonder if they’ve nailed up the gate again.”

“Sure! We’ll have to climb, I guess.”

“Well, we’d better stroll along and find a good place to get over. Last year I tore my bestest panties on a picket. Come on, Cal; you and I’ll look things over while those chumps try to play tennis.”

“What is it you’re going to do?” asked Cal as he followed The Fungus around the corner of the house and across the grass toward the fence and hedge.

“Why, find a place where we can get over the fence easily and not get tangled up in the hedge. We all take pillow-cases over and fill them with apples, you know. They’re dandy! Only, you want to be sure that you can get over the fence again in a hurry because the Old Maids are painfully suspicious of us West Housers. One year the hired man caught two fellows and locked them up in the shed and telephoned to Horace. And they got the dickens; pretty near fired, they were. If you get caught over there now it means suspension, at least.”

“It’s rather dangerous, then, isn’t it?” asked Cal.

“Sure. That’s what makes it such good sport,” replied The Fungus easily. “Look; here’s a place where there’s a picket off. If we could get the next one off— There it is; bully! We can crawl through there easy as pie. It’s only a little way to the orchard. If you peek through the lilacs you can see the trees. Gee, look at those apples! There’s a million billion bushels of them! See the tree down toward the brook, the one with the red, red apples on it? That’s the best in the orchard. Say, there isn’t any moon tonight, is there?”

“Why, yes, but it doesn’t come up until pretty late.”

“That’s all right then. Wish those lilacs weren’t so thick

right here," he said. "But I guess we can squirm through. Hello, what was that?"

"What?" asked Cal.

"Here's a place where there's a picket off!"

"I thought I saw something in there, something white. And

listen!" He peered into the shadow of hedge and trees. "Didn't you think you heard something?"

But Cal shook his head.

"I guess I just imagined it," said The Fungus. "Now let's fix this place in our minds, Cal. If we walk diagonally across from the woodshed toward the big chestnut tree we'll get it all right, won't we? That's easy. Don't forget to bring your pillow-case tonight. We'll come over here about half-past ten."

"I—I don't believe I will," said Cal. "I wouldn't want to get suspended, you see." The Fungus viewed him amazedly.

"Who would?"

"Well, you said if we got caught—"

"*If!* But we're not going to get caught. That's the difference. Oh, you'll come all right. If you don't, you'll be awfully sorry when you see the apples we bring back. They're perfect corkers! Those big red ones—" But words failed him and he contented himself with licking his lips and looking unutterable bliss.

"Do the women live there all by themselves?" asked Cal as they returned to the tennis court.

"Yes, with some servants. There's a big truck-garden beyond the orchard and another house where the hired man lives. They've got about fifteen acres there, I think. They're awfully rich, the Old Maids are. They own about half the clock factory back of town, by the river. You'd think they'd be more generous with their apples, wouldn't you?"

"Maybe they'd give us some if we went and asked," replied Cal innocently.

“Huh! Who wants apples that are given to you? All the fun comes in swiping them and not knowing whether someone is going to pop out at you any minute!”

Sandy, Dutch, Hoop and Claire were watching the tennis when the two conspirators returned to the front of the cottage and The Fungus at once announced the gleeful news of a raid on the orchard “at half-past ten by the old town clock.” Sandy, as became his years of discretion—he was sixteen—looked doubtful, but the rest were so heartily in favor of the adventure that he was forced to give his sanction in order to save his dignity and authority.

“It’s risky, though,” he declared with a frown. “We’ll have to be mighty quiet. If the Old Maids hear us they’ll tell Horace, as sure as shooting.”

“What of it?” Hoop ridiculed. “They can’t prove it was us if they don’t see us.”

“The trouble is that we’re under suspicion,” said Sandy. —“Good stuff, Spud! That was a dandy!—They’ll say it was us and Horace will ask us. Then what?”

There was an uncomfortable silence and everyone seemed to prefer to watch the tennis rather than face the question. At last Hoop said:

“Well, preservation is the first law of Nature, or something like that. If he asks me I’ll tell him I don’t know anything about it.”

“You can’t do that,” said The Fungus, shaking his head disapprovingly. “You can’t lie about it, you know. Especially to Horace. He—he expects you to tell the truth and you just have to do it. The only way is to keep so quiet that they won’t

hear us. And the place I've found where we can get through the fence is so far from the house that they're not likely to know anything about it. And it will be plumb dark, too. Hard luck, Ned!"

"Game and set," panted Ned. "I guess there isn't time for any more, Spud. I'll try you again tomorrow, though, you Mr. Good-player."

"What was it?" asked Dutch.

"Seven—five," said Spud. "Gee, I'm warm! What time is it?"

"Supper time; there's the bell," answered Ned. "Tell Marm I'm changing my clothes, Sandy. And don't you swipe my butter, Dutch!"

CHAPTER IX

THE GHOST IN THE ORCHARD

"At half-past ten by the old town clock," in the words of The Fungus, eight figures might have been dimly seen emerging from the dining-room window and crossing the turf toward the lilac hedge. They might have been seen, but weren't; which was just as well for the little band of marauders. In some pocket each member of the desperate company carried a pillow-case. Their coats were buttoned close and no tell-tale expanse of linen was allowed to show. One by one they bent and squirmed through the hole in the picket fence and as silently as possible negotiated the lilac hedge. The latter wasn't an easy task, for the bushes were close together and the branches had managed to form a fairly impregnable barrier. But at last they were all through, Claire Parker bringing up the rear with his heart in his mouth and his eyes staring anxiously about in the darkness. Between them and the back of the house, which, like many old residences thereabouts, consisted of a series of additions running back from the main house in an ever diminishing fashion and terminating in a disused granary, was a fair eighty yards of turf and garden, while beyond the orchard of pear and apple and plum trees, interspersed with small fruits, was near at hand. They halted in the deep shadow of a group of shade trees that stood near the hedge and listened. Not a sound was to be heard from the direction of the house. The moon wasn't in sight, although in the east the sky showed light. Stars peered down at them here and there, but for the most part clouds covered the

sky. At the front of the house yellow light shone out on the drive.

"All quiet along the Potomac," whispered Spud. "Let's hurry before that moon butts in and spoils things."

"Better keep in the lower side of the orchard," advised Hoop. "Then they can't see us possibly."

"Sure. Besides, the big red apples are down there at the corner. The others aren't worth fooling with."

"Come on, then," said Sandy. "I'll go ahead. Keep quiet, fellows. Stop your whispering, Dutch."

The band crept forward, hugging the deeper gloom of the trees until they had reached the end of the orchard. Once there, there was a quick and silent rush for a certain big tree that grew the apples they best liked. Out came the pillow-cases and hands searched the ground for fallen fruit. But there was little of that yet, for there had been no rain or wind storms.

"Who's going to shake?" asked Spud softly.

"Let Clara do it," said Hoop. "He's small and can shin up easily."

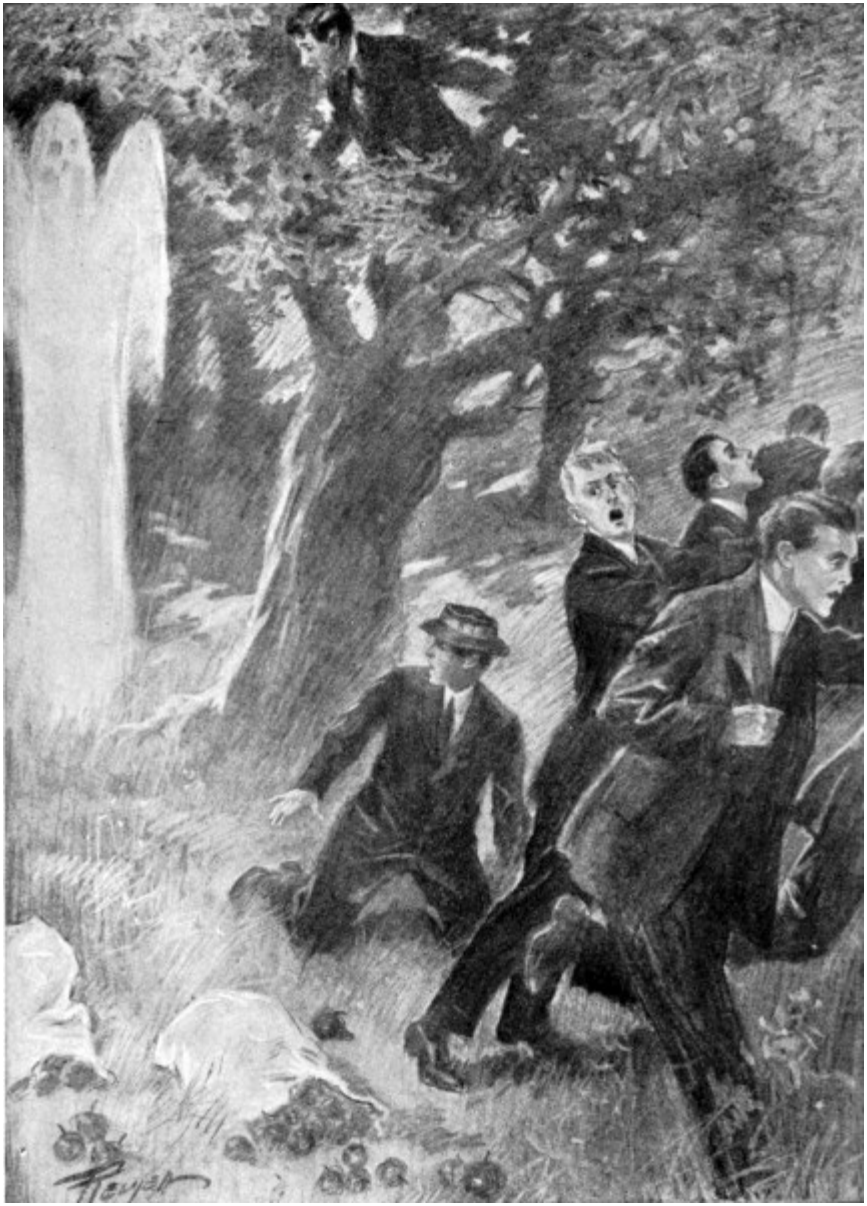
"I—I'd rather not," said Claire nervously.

"I'll do it," Cal volunteered. "You take my bag, Ned." He had soon worked his way to the crotch of the tree and from there he walked out on one of the branches and jarred it by jumping up and down. The apples fell in a veritable shower, and Spud, who had been looking up, received one fairly and squarely on the tip of his nose and said "Gee!" so loudly that he was threatened with awful things if he didn't keep quiet.

“Guess you’d yell if a big old apple hit you on the nose,” he muttered aggrievedly as he filled his pillow-case.

“Shut up, you idiot! Give her another shake, Cal!” said Sandy.

“Wait a minute and I’ll try another branch.” There was a rustling as Cal moved cautiously about the tree and then another rain of fruit began. “Anyone filling my bag?” he asked in a whisper. But his question was never answered, for somebody—it sounded like The Fungus, though he always maintained that he never opened his mouth—let out a screech of terror, and panic seized the company. Cal, with the branches adding to the darkness about him, saw nothing, but the sound of footsteps pounding the ground told him that he was being deserted by his comrades. Once someone fell and there was a smothered exclamation of alarm, and then there reached him the sound of crashing branches as the boys fled helter-skelter through the lilacs and surmounted the fence as best they might.



Panic seized the company

Cal’s first thought was to drop to the ground and race after them, for he didn’t need to be told that danger was at hand. But by the time he was ready to swing himself down the others were half-way to the fence and he realized that safety lay in

remaining where he was, hidden in the dark foliage of the tree. With his heart pounding so that he feared it would proclaim his whereabouts to the pursuit, he waited and watched. For a full minute he heard nothing and saw nothing. Then a sound reached him, a sound that resembled a chuckle, and to his overwrought ears a most diabolical chuckle at that, and an instant later there came dimly into sight a ghastly white form that almost caused him to fall out of the tree from sheer terror.

The moon was almost at the horizon and a ray of light slanted through an opening in the trees and illumined the form for a brief moment. It stood almost under the tree and while he watched, his eyes almost popping from his head and his heart standing still, it grew smaller and smaller until it was only two or three feet high, and then in an equally mysterious way lengthened again, fluttered under his gaze for a moment and then was hidden by the branches.

Cal didn't believe in ghosts, of course; what sensible boy does? But there was something frightfully uncanny about that white-robed figure and the noiseless way in which it came and went. For it had gone, although Cal didn't know how far and would have given a good deal to find out. There were drops of cold perspiration on his forehead, a queer twitching at his scalp that felt as though his hair was trying its best to stand on end, and uncomfortable shivers up and down his spine. He tried to laugh at himself, but the laugh wouldn't come. He clutched the branch tightly and waited what seemed an eternity. Once he was almost certain that he heard the closing of a distant door, but he didn't intend to run any risks. And so it was a good five minutes after the alarm that he finally dropped to the ground, looked fearfully around him for sight of the dread figure and then bolted as fast as his legs would take him for the hedge and

the fence and safety! There was no thought of avoiding noise. He crashed into the hedge and through it, scrambled over the fence—just how he didn't know—and fled across the turf to where, under the dining-room window, seven agitated comrades awaited him. When he saw them he drew up and strove to complete his arrival more calmly.

"Did you see it?" cried The Fungus.

"What was it?" demanded the others. "Did it catch you?"

"You bet I saw it!" panted Cal. "It came right under the tree and stood there and got little and then got big again and just disappeared like—like that!" And he waved his arm.

"Thunder!" whispered Spud hoarsely. "What do you suppose it was?"

"It was a g-ghost," sniffled Claire.

"Ghost your granny!" ridiculed Sandy. "It was somebody with a sheet around them, that's what it was. Anyhow, we're all in for trouble."

There was gloomy accordance with this, but the subject of the mysterious visitant was too interesting to keep away from.

"I looked up and saw it between the trees," said The Fungus, "and maybe I wasn't scared!"

"I guess you were!" said Sandy. "You let out a yell that they could hear in town."

"I never! I didn't open my mouth! I was too blamed scared!"

"Well, someone did," said Dutch. "And it wasn't me, for I never saw anything. I heard someone yell and then everyone ran and I grabbed my bag and ran too."

“You saw it, didn’t you, Hoop?”

“Sure! About seven feet high it looked and sort of phosphorescent.”

“I didn’t notice that,” said Cal doubtfully.

“Well, you didn’t see it the way we did, I guess,” said Hoop in a tone of pride. “You were up in the tree.”

“I cal’late I saw it better than anyone,” responded Cal indignantly. “Didn’t it come and stand there right under me almost for two or three minutes?”

“Gee! Did it, honest?” asked Ned. “I didn’t get more than a glimpse of it. That was all I wanted, though.”

“Well, let’s get upstairs,” said Sandy, “before anyone comes and finds us here.” They climbed in the window, each casting an anxious glance toward the orchard as he did so, and then stole noiselessly upstairs. Strange to say, each boy had brought his bag of apples safely away save Cal.

“I was too scared to even drop mine,” explained Spud, “and I didn’t know I had it until I got to the fence.”

“Same here,” said The Fungus. “It’s a good thing we didn’t leave the pillow-cases over there, though, for they’ve all got ‘West House’ marked on them as plain as daylight.”

“Who has got mine?” asked Cal at this juncture. They had all congregated in Sandy’s room and were sitting around wherever they could find space. Spud had lighted the gas and turned it half down. At Cal’s question each fellow looked at the other while dismay settled rapidly on every face. “I gave it to you, Ned, you know,” Cal went on anxiously. Ned shook his head dismally.

“I know,” he answered. “I was going to fill it, but I couldn’t fill both at once and so I leaned yours against the tree. I—I guess it’s right there now!”

A deep silence held the group, broken at length by a sigh from Claire.

“I wish I’d never gone,” he murmured miserably.

“I guess we all wish that—now,” said Sandy dryly. “If the Old Maids find that pillow-case there’ll be the dickens to pay.”

“What does it matter?” asked Dutch gloomily. “Someone saw us swiping the apples and saw us come over here. That pillow-case will only be supervacaneous evidence.”

“Don’t use bad words, Dutch,” said Hoop sternly.

“Just the same,” said Sandy, “someone ought to go over and bring that back, I think.”

There was no enthusiasm displayed. The silence grew embarrassing.

“Whose pillow-case was it?” asked Hoop finally.

“Mine,” answered Cal.

“Well, then you’d better go back and get it. If you don’t you may get us all into worse trouble than we’re in. We don’t know for sure that that thing—or person, or whatever it was, really saw us come over here. But if the Old Maids find that pillow-case under the tree with ‘West House’ marked on it in indelible ink they’ll have us bad.”

Cal looked as though he scarcely relished the suggestion and Ned came to his rescue.

“It was my fault,” he said. “I ought to have looked after it, especially as Cal was shaking down apples for us, and I’ll go back for it if some of you fellows will go as far as the fence with me.”

“No, I’ll go and get it,” said Cal, rising. “I don’t mind—much.”

“We’ll go together, then,” declared Ned more cheerfully.

So back they went, downstairs and out the dining-room window and across the grass to the broken palings, keeping very quiet, and not especially happy, either of them. But when they emerged from the hedge and stood in the shadows and viewed the scene there was nothing to alarm them and they gained courage. Besides, the moon was over the horizon now and the orchard was palely illumined.

“Ghosts don’t come out when it’s as light as this, I guess,” Ned whispered.

“I cal’late it wasn’t really a ghost,” replied Cal, “but it looked awfully like one, didn’t it?”

“I didn’t get a real good look at it,” answered Ned. “Come on and let’s get it over.” They stole along to the edge of the orchard and then rushed quickly to the protecting darkness of the trees. It was so light now that they could distinguish objects on the ground, but search as they might the missing pillow-case was not to be found.

“I left it right here,” whispered Ned, tapping the trunk of the apple tree with the toe of his sneaker.

“There are a lot of apples here but no pillow-case,” said Cal. “Looks like someone had dumped the apples out and taken the

case away, don't it?"

"That's what's happened," said Ned disgustedly. "I guess we might as well go back. We'll look on the ground between here and the fence, though. Someone might have grabbed it up and dropped it later."

But there was no sign of it and in the end they had to return to the house without it.

"Well, I dare say it won't make much difference anyway," observed Sandy pessimistically when they reached the Sun Parlor again and reported their ill-success. "We're all in for a jolly ragging and something worse."

"He can't suspend us all," said Spud hopefully.

"Why can't he?" asked Hoop.

"Too many of us. It would depopulate the school, to say nothing of West House."

"That wouldn't bother Horace," said The Fungus. "If he wants to send us home he will do it, Spud."

"Oh, well, let him then." Spud reached into his pillow-case and drew forth a big red apple, which he first polished on his knee and then dug his teeth into. "Eat, sleep and be merry, for tomorrow we die. I'm going to bed. Come on, Sandy."

"Might as well, I guess, although I don't suppose I'll be able to sleep any."

"Oh, it won't do any good to stay awake," replied Spud carelessly as he took up his bag of apples. The others followed his example, whispering good nights in the corridor, and sought their rooms. Ned cleaned out one end of his bottom

bureau drawer and emptied the contents of his pillow-case into it, afterwards restoring the case to its rightful place.

"You can have half of these, Cal," he said.

"Thanks, but I cal'late I ain't got much appetite for apples," was the sad reply. "I hate to have to go home just after I've got here, Ned. How long do you think he will send us away for?"

"Maybe a month or two; maybe until after Christmas vacation," answered Ned. "It's a beast of a note, isn't it? Whose idea was it, anyway, to go over there tonight?"

"Yours," said Cal with a wan smile.

"Was it? I dare say. I'm always getting into trouble, hang it all! Well, I'm going to hit the hay. Sufficient unto the day is the trouble thereof. Good night." And Ned tumbled into bed, drew the sheet up to his ears and was soon fast asleep.

To Cal, however, slumber didn't come so readily. He was sorely worried. If Doctor Webster sent him home for the rest of the term it would mean that he would miss half a year of school and more than likely be set back just that much in class. Besides which he would have wasted more of his small capital than he could afford. Eventually sleep came to him, after a distant clock in the town had struck twelve, and he passed a restless night disturbed by unpleasant dreams, to awake in the morning unrested and oppressed by a sense of impending misfortune that he couldn't account for until recollection of the preceding night's adventure returned to him. The boys gathered in the parlor every morning before breakfast for prayers. They took turns at reading a passage from the Bible and then knelt while Mrs. Linn offered earnest if somewhat rambling invocation. That morning Cal added a little prayer of

his own in which a promise of future good conduct was made in return for present escape from punishment. Breakfast was an unusually quiet meal and Mrs. Linn viewed the downcast countenances of her eight boys with deep concern but failed to elicit from any of them a satisfactory description of their symptoms. Only Spud ventured a reason.

"Oh, I'm feeling pretty well, thanks," he said. "I didn't sleep extra good, though. Fruit doesn't agree with me." And he winked wickedly at Dutch and received a scowl in response.

It was a surprise to them all to find that things looked much the same as usual at School House. Mr. Fordyce, known as Fussy, passed them on the steps, smiled amiably and went on quite as though the world wasn't filled with tragedy this morning. They went through their recitations in a mazed sort of way, momentarily expecting the sword of Damocles to fall. The worst trial came when they found themselves before Doctor Webster reciting Latin or Greek. They studied his face anxiously, striving to surmise in what depth of disgrace he held them. But nothing was to be learned in that way. The principal treated them the same as the rest of the class. Sandy decided that their fate had already been decreed and that the Doctor was only awaiting the end of the session to acquaint them with it. But the session dragged to its close, twelve o'clock struck, the corridor bell clanged and school was dismissed; and still there had come no summons. They scurried back to West House in a group, discussing the marvel excitedly.

"Either they didn't see us, after all," said Hoop, "or else they haven't told the Doctor."

"I'll bet it *was* a ghost," said Spud. "That's the only sensible explanation, isn't it?"

“I knew all along it was,” hazarded Claire triumphantly.

Sandy, however, was not to be cheered. “You wait,” he said gloomily. “It’ll come this afternoon. Horace is just keeping us guessing on purpose. I could see by his face that he knew all about it.”

“I’ll bet he doesn’t,” said Spud stoutly. “I’ll bet we won’t hear anything more about it. Hang those old apples, anyway! I only ate one last night and it gave me a beast of a tummy-ache. I had to get up and wander around the room for hours.”

“That was your uneasy conscience,” laughed Ned.

“Well, you had one too, then. What were you doing up?”

“I wasn’t up,” answered Ned.

“Then it was Cal. It looked like you, though.”

“I wasn’t up either,” said Cal.

“Somebody’s lying. I saw one of you roaming around in your room. My door was open and so was yours and one of you passed the window and went over in front of Ned’s bureau. I whispered across to you but you didn’t answer.”

“You dreamed it,” laughed Ned. “I’ll bet you weren’t up yourself; you just had the nightmare.”

“Oh, you run away and play,” said Spud. “I guess I know when I’m asleep and when I’m awake. I won’t say I didn’t have the nightmare, though, but that was afterwards; after my tummy had stopped aching and I’d gone back to bed.”

“I dreamed most all night, I cal—guess,” said Cal. “Awful dreams, too, they were.”

“Ghosts?” asked The Fungus.

“N-no, robbers, I think. It seemed that the house was full of them and I was trying to throw them out of the room as fast as they came in, only they were too many for me.”

“Did you eat an apple too?” asked Spud.

Dinner was more cheerful than breakfast had been until, in the midst of it, Mrs. Linn remarked:

“I had a call this morning from Miss Matilda Curtis.”

Everyone stopped eating suddenly and glanced apprehensively about him. Finally Sandy inquired carelessly:

“Wh-what did she want, Marm?”

“She came about her apples,” answered Mrs. Linn, and paused there to pour out a cup of tea. Deep and oppressive silence greeted this intelligence. It was Spud who caused a diversion finally by choking and having to be thumped on the back by Claire. Mrs. Linn handed the cup of tea to Hoop to be passed and continued.

“Yes, she wanted to know if I couldn’t use some of them. She says it’s a wonderful year for apples and they’ve got more than they know what to do with. I told her I’d be very glad of some for jelly. You boys all like apple jelly, don’t you?”

“Yes’m!” The reply was loud and enthusiastic. Gloom gave way to relief and joy and eight appetites reappeared as suddenly as they had departed.

“Gee,” said Spud afterwards on the porch, “I thought it was all up then for sure!”

“Me too,” responded Hoop. “That was the narrowest escape

I ever did have. Say, it was an apple that Adam and Eve got into trouble about, wasn’t it? They must be wicked things. I never did like them much. Anyone can have mine that wants them.”

But there were no takers.

CHAPTER X

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

Afternoon school passed as uneventfully as the morning session and no summons from Doctor Webster reached the culprits. Each of them drew a deep sigh of relief when he was safely outside the front door of School Building; and he didn't linger long thereabouts, but hurried off to the gymnasium to prepare for football practice.

"What did I tell you?" Spud demanded triumphantly as they went. "Horace hasn't heard a word of it."

"I guess you're right," said Dutch. "Only what I'd like to know is who was that in the orchard last night?"

"I wonder if we really did see anything, after all," mused The Fungus.

"I didn't," replied Dutch.

But there was a chorus of protest from the rest.

"You bet we saw something!" cried Hoop. "I saw it all right, anyway!"

"And so did I," said Cal and Sandy in unison.

"Well, whoever it was," declared Ned, "it couldn't have been one of the Old Maids, for they'd certainly have scorched the ground getting to Horace with their troubles. I'm beginning to think that Clara is right and that it really was a ghost."

"There isn't any such thing," jeered Spud as they entered the

gymnasium. “And, anyhow, a ghost wouldn’t have swiped Cal’s pillow-case!”

“Well, whatever it was or whoever it was,” said Sandy earnestly, “I’m glad it didn’t give us away.”

Practice that afternoon was strenuous and Cal, having accepted philosophically the fact that there was no escape for him, set to work and made up his mind to master the intricacies of the game. Not that it appeared much like a game to him, however. He spent a quarter of an hour handling the ball with others of the “awkward squad”; passing it, catching it, falling on it—when it was there!—and learning not a few of its idiosyncrasies. He discovered, for instance, that, contrary to his first impression, it was sometimes possible to tell which way the pigskin would bounce when it struck the ground. At first if a ball was dropped and he reached in one direction for it it was nominally certain to bound off at an opposite tangent. But after awhile he began to develop a certain sense of prophecy, as it were, and more often than not the ball came toward him rather than away from him. They put him with six other fellows in a line and he was informed that he was to play left tackle. For awhile that meant being shoved and knocked around in order that an apparently crazy boy with the pigskin clasped firmly to his bosom might spring from behind him somewhere and dash forward, only to deposit the ball on the turf again and repeat the performance. Cal was still appearing in his every-day clothes, since the orchard episode had quite put the thought of purchasing football togs out of his mind. But Ned recalled it to him on the way back to West House after practice and showers.

“We’ll have to make that trip to the village tomorrow, Cal,”

he announced. “We’ll get Marm to let us have dinner early. Just about one more day and those trousers of yours won’t be fit to wear to anything except a dog-fight.”

Cal examined them ruefully. They *did* show signs of the fray, and that was a fact. The knees bulged horribly and there was a nice collection of yellowish mud around the bottoms of them. He sighed.

“All right,” he answered. “I cal’late you’re right, Ned. Maybe, though, I could just get trousers now and let the other things go until I get some money from home. Then I won’t have to borrow from you, Ned.”

“Pshaw, what’s the difference? You might as well get the whole outfit now. Four dollars will about do the trick and I can loan you two just as well as not.”

“That’s good of you,” said Cal. “I just thought—you see I ain’t ever borrowed any money before and I don’t believe my mother would like it.”

“Oh, it’s just until you get your own money,” replied Ned carelessly. “There’s no harm in that. Borrowing’s all right when you can pay back. All the fellows borrow. Spud owes fifty cents right now. I must remind him of it when he gets his next letter. Spud’s a little bit forgetful, you see. I’ll give you the money when we get to the Den.”

But Dutch Zoller challenged him to a set of tennis as soon as they got around the corner of the house and Ned forgot the money for the time being.

“Tell you what I’ll do, Dutch,” said Ned. “I’ll play you and Cal.”

Dutch viewed Cal dubiously.

“But he doesn’t play, does he?”

“No, but neither do you, Dutch; not much, that is,” replied Ned meanly. “You see, I’ll beat you in either case.”

“You could give me thirty on a game,” Dutch suggested. “That would make it more interesting for you.”

“Thirty! Well, I like your nerve! Look here, if you don’t want to play that way I’ll take Cal with me and you play against the two of us.”

“I’d rather not,” Cal protested. “I don’t know anything about it, Ned.”

“Time you did, then. And you’ll never find a softer proposition to learn on than Dutch. Come on! Get somebody’s racket from the closet under the stairs. It doesn’t make any difference whose racket you take; they’ll all kick about it. But you’d better take the best you can find!”

In the end Cal was persuaded. He secretly wanted to learn the game and not always have to sit on the end of the porch and look on. Of course his was a funny performance and when the rest of West House arrived they had a fine time watching his efforts and cheering him on to victory. At first Cal was all for giving up, but Ned told him to “buck up and not be an idiot.” “They’re only fooling,” he said. “You’ve got to learn to take a joke, Cal, or you’ll have a pretty miserable time here, old man.” So Cal thought better of it, gripped his racket until his knuckles were white and blisters began to appear inside his hands and tried his best to profit by Ned’s shouted instructions.

“Let her go, Cal! Out here, Dutch.... Forty-thirty.... Hit it,

Cal! Oh, say, don't dodge out of the way, but bat the stuffing out of it! Hit *at* it, anyway, Cal! All right; you'll get on to it.... Deuce! Play!"

Even with such a severe handicap as Cal's partnership Ned was always able to keep the game in hand, for he didn't hesitate to invade Cal's side of the court and take every ball that he could possibly reach. And on Ned's service Dutch was nearly helpless. Toward the end of the set Cal began to see the humor of his wild slashes and awkward prancing and joined his laughter with that of the gallery. Once when he aimed a reckless blow at a low lob and accidentally hit it so that it sped back across the net and hit the ground just where Dutch couldn't get it the applause from the onlookers was so tumultuous and hearty that Cal was quite proud and made up his mind then and there that he would learn tennis if he had to die for it.

"Our set," announced Ned. "Six—four. Want to try again, Dutch?"

"If you'll give me fifteen," said Dutch.

But Cal declined to play any more. He was very tired and quite out of breath, and, besides, he knew that if he withdrew the others would make up a set of doubles. So he took his place on the porch and watched Ned and Hoop try conclusions with Sandy and Dutch and got not a few points in that way. Before the snow came Cal had learned the game. He never made a remarkable player, but he was able to beat both Dutch and The Fungus, and Ned had only to give him a handicap of fifteen to ensure a hard-fought match.

Ned and Hoop secured the first set, six—four, and were one game to the good on the second when supper time arrived.

“We’ll finish after grub,” said Sandy, “if it’s light enough. We’ve got them on the run, Dutch.”

“Hear the blatant boaster, Hoop,” said Ned. “Bet you, Sandy, you don’t get one more game in the set. Why, we’ve just been trifling with you so far, haven’t we, Hoop?”

“Trifling is the word,” responded Hoop gravely. “We have been merely amusing ourselves, Sandy.”

Sandy laughed with much sarcasm and Dutch emitted a word that sounded like “Yah!” and whatever it was expressed ridicule and defiance. How the second set came out Cal never learned, for at the supper table Mrs. Linn interposed.

“Miss Matilda said she had two baskets of apples for me if I’d send for them,” she announced. “And I was wondering whether two of you boys would go over for them after supper. I guess they aren’t very heavy.”

Apples and the Misses Curtis being just then dangerous topics, there was a prolonged hush about the table. The boys wondered if it would be safe to present their countenances at the Curtis front door. If the mysterious person in white had failed to recognize them last night might she not do so if she saw them again? They cast doubtful and inquiring glances at each other.

“Of course,” began Marm, “if you’d rather not—”

“Not at all,” protested Sandy gallantly. “We were just waiting modestly for you to say who you’d rather have, Marm. I’d love to go, only I’ve got a set of tennis to finish with Ned and Hoop and Dutch. But there’s Spud and The Fungus and Cal.”

“I’ll go, Marm,” said Spud.

“So will I,” said Cal.

“Bet you there won’t be many apples left by the time they get back,” said Hoop.

“Oh, I guess there’ll be plenty,” said Mrs. Linn. “So you can all have some when they come. I do think it’s kind of them to let me have so many.”

“Why shouldn’t they?” asked Spud. “Gee, they’ve got barrels and barrels of them, haven’t they?”

“Yes, but they sell most of them, I think,” replied Marm.

“Sell them! Why, I thought they had money to throw away.”

“They’re very rich, of course,” Mrs. Linn replied, “but I suppose they think they might as well turn the apples into money as have them rot on the ground. They’re beautiful apples, too.”

“They are indeed,” muttered The Fungus dreamily. “*Ouch!*”

“Shut up, you ninny!” commanded Sandy fiercely. The Fungus reached down and surreptitiously rubbed his shin. Mrs. Linn looked down the table wonderingly until Claire caused a diversion by asking if they might have some of the apples baked.

“Don’t you worry,” said Spud gloomily. “We’ll have ’em baked, all right; and stewed, and made into apple pies and apple pudding and all kinds of things. I hate apples.”

“Why!” exclaimed Marm. “I thought you loved them.”

Spud shook his head soberly. “No, ma’am, not since they

caused all that trouble in the Garden of Eden. I used to be quite fond of them before that, though."

"Spud, you're an idiot," laughed Ned. "I, for one, vote for baked apples, and lots of them."

"Seconded," cried Sandy. "Likewise apple pie."

"Let's have the pie without the bakes," suggested Dutch. "I can always eat pie."

"You can always eat anything," replied Sandy severely. "And you're too fat already. No pie for you, Dutch."

When supper was over Cal and Spud started for the apples. As they went out the gate Ned called after them softly.

"Say, fellows, change caps or something so they won't recognize you!"

"I wonder if they will," said Spud uneasily as they went down the street toward the Curtis gate. "I sort of wish they'd keep their old apples to themselves, Cal."

"I don't believe it was either of the Miss Curtises that we saw last night," answered Cal. "They wouldn't be roaming around in the orchard at that time of night."

"N-no, but it must have been someone! And who the dickens was it? Here we are. Let's sort of keep our faces hidden as much as we can, Cal."

That wasn't hard to do, for it was already getting toward dusk, and when they stood on the front porch and rang the door-bell they had the light behind them. Footsteps sounded inside and Spud pulled his cap down. "Look innocent, Cal," he whispered, "look innocent!"

Cal assumed what he fondly believed to be an expression of lamb-like innocence but which came nearer to being a look of utter idiocy, and then the door was opened and the unexpected apparition of a girl of about their own age confronted them. The messengers, who had expected to see one of the Old Maids, were so surprised that for a moment neither of them did anything but stare. Finally, though, it was Spud who blurted:

"Good evening. We—we came for the apples."

The young lady in the doorway seemed to find this announcement distinctly amusing. She smiled and then she laughed; and then, doubtless observing the bewildered expressions on the faces before her, she stopped laughing very suddenly and said:

"I didn't mean to laugh, really."

Whereupon Spud murmured "Much obliged" rather vaguely, and Cal, to whom girls other than his sister Nan were novel and perplexing creatures, showed a decided disposition to retreat and leave negotiations in the hands of his companion.

"Won't you come in?" asked the girl demurely. "I'll tell Aunt Matilda that you're here."

"I guess we'll wait outside," answered Spud. "We just came for the apples."

"I know." The extraordinary young lady again showed evidences of amusement as she turned away, and Spud was almost certain that he heard her giggling as she retreated down the hall. He turned to Cal with a puzzled look.

"Say, what's the matter with that kid?" he asked. "Do we look funny, or—or what? And who is she, anyway? I never

saw any girls around here before.”

But Cal didn’t know and wasn’t interested. And then the girl came back again.

“Aunt says will you please go around to the woodshed. You’ll find her there.”

Spud thanked her and they made their way along the length of the old house to where a tall, thin lady with a very severe countenance was pushing open the woodshed doors.

“Good evening. We—we came for the apples”

“We came for the apples for Mrs. Linn,” said Spud.

“Here they are,” said Miss Matilda, pointing to two piled-up baskets standing just inside the door. “You’d better set them both outside so’s I can lock up again. And tell Mrs. Linn I’d

like the baskets back tomorrow."

Spud and Cal moved the baskets outside. The shed was dark, but light enough to show that one end of it was almost filled with barrels of apples ready for heading-up. Even if they had not seen them the odor would have told the story.

"If you want some to eat," said Miss Matilda, "there's a bin in that corner over there."

"No'm, thank you," said Spud. "We don't care for apples."

Miss Matilda sniffed.

"Guess you're the first West House boys I ever heard tell of that didn't, then," she said. "Likely, though, you don't care for them unless you can steal them."

"They—they don't agree with me," said Spud uneasily. "Take hold, Cal. We'll be back for the other one presently, ma'am." Spud was in a hurry to get away, and so was Cal, and in a moment the first basket was well on its way to West House.

"I cal'late she suspects us," said Cal when they were out of hearing. "Did you see the way she looked at us?"

"Yes, but I don't care a rap how much she *suspects* as long as she doesn't *know*, and make trouble for us."

When they returned for the second basket Miss Matilda had re-entered the house, much to their relief. But as they went out a voice spoke from the end of the front porch.

"It's easier to carry them that way, isn't it?" asked the girl. The words were spoken quite gravely but there was laughter behind them. Neither Spud nor Cal found any reply to offer,

but once inside their own gate Spud turned to Cal with a frown.

"That girl knows something," he said decisively.

"You don't suppose it was she who—who—"

"Of course not," said Spud disdainfully. "A kid like that? Not likely. But I wonder what she meant by saying it was easier to carry them this way. Sounds as though she knew something, don't it?" And Cal had to agree that it did.

Spud sought information of Mrs. Linn.

"Who is the kid they've got over there, Marm?" he asked as they set the basket down in a corner of the kitchen.

"Kid?" said Mrs. Linn. "Oh, you mean the little girl. Why, she's a niece, Spud. Did you see her? Miss Matilda was telling me about her. She's come to spend the winter with them. She's their brother's child; Mr. George Curtis's, I mean. He's gone abroad or somewhere. What is she like, Spud?"

"She's a fresh kid," answered Spud, "and silly. She's pretty, though, isn't she, Cal?"

But Cal didn't appear to have any opinion to express.

"Miss Matilda's a haughty dame, isn't she, Marm? Asked us if we wanted some apples and I said no, we didn't care for them. And she said 'Hmph, guess you're the first West House boys that don't. Probably you'd rather steal them.' What do you think of that, Marm? Is that any way for a lady to speak to a gentleman? Two gentlemen?"

"Well now, Spud, you know you boys have made a good deal of trouble for Miss Matilda. She's sort of sharp, I'll say

that, but she's a real nice lady."

"She offended me deeply," said Spud.

"I'm so glad you boys didn't do it this year," said Marm.

"Didn't do what?" asked Spud, selecting an apple from a basket and setting his teeth in it.

"Why, go over there and—and trouble her apples."

"Oh! Yes, that is nice," answered Spud, winking across at Cal. "You need never be afraid of anything like that happening, though, Marm, while you have me in the house to —er—preserve order."

"You run along, Spud Halladay," laughed Mrs. Linn. "*You* preserve order! You're worse than any of them."

"Study!" yelled Sandy from upstairs.

"Sandy has a very disagreeable voice at times," muttered Spud as he led the way out, "and this is one of the times."

It was not until Cal had entered the Den and closed the door behind him that his eyes lighted on his roommate. Ned was standing in front of an open bureau drawer with a brown leather collar-box in his hand and a look of consternation on his face.

"Hello," said Cal, "what's the matter?"

Ned hesitated a moment. Then he replaced some collars in the box, put it back in the drawer and closed the drawer.

"Nothing much," he answered finally. "Only someone—only my eight dollars is gone."

CHAPTER XI

THE MISSING MONEY

"Gone!" exclaimed Cal. "Do you mean—"

"I mean it was in my collar-box a couple of days ago and now it isn't," replied Ned with a shrug of his shoulders. "Somebody's cleaned me out for fair."

"I—I'm awfully sorry," faltered Cal. "Are you sure it was there? Maybe you put it somewhere else, Ned."

"Maybe a fish can fly," answered Ned wrathfully. "I guess I know where I put it, Cal. I always keep it there. There was eight dollars exactly, a five and three ones, all folded up in a wad. It was there two days ago all right."

"But—but who could have taken it?" asked Cal perplexedly.

"That's what I'd like to know," muttered Ned savagely. "If I knew, I'd wring his neck for him!"

"Have you looked all through the drawer?"

"No. What's the use? I tell you I *know* it was in the collar-box."

"Still, you might have pulled it out, maybe, when you got a collar. I'd look if I were you, Ned."

So Ned, grumbling, looked, pulling the contents of the top drawer out and then treating the other drawers in the same manner. Afterwards he searched about the table and went through his trunk, and then, Cal egging him on, searched the

pockets of his clothes. But the hunt ended fruitlessly save for a forgotten five-cent piece exhumed from the depths of a trousers pocket. This Ned threw across the room peevishly and Cal rescued it from under a bed and laid it sympathetically on the table. Ned, hands in pockets, watched him in scowling silence. Then,

"Don't you want that too?" he exploded.

Cal looked at him in perplexity, missing the innuendo.

"What?" he asked.

Ned turned away, already regretting his question.

"Nothing," he muttered. He pulled his chair out and seated himself at the table, drawing his books toward him. "Well, it's gone," he said. "That's pretty plain. Guess we'd better be thinking of studying."

Cal took his place across the table but felt very little like studying. Eight dollars seemed a whole lot of money to Cal and I think the loss troubled him more than it did Ned. He opened his French book, but his mind, instead of applying itself to verbs, concerned itself with the problem of the missing money. Who, he wondered, could have taken it? And had it really been stolen or had Ned himself spent it and forgotten all about the circumstances? Or had Ned, in spite of his thorough search, put it somewhere else than in the collar-box? If it had been stolen suspicion must attach itself to some member of the household. That any of the fellows would do such a thing was quite out of the question. Quite as plainly, Marm was above suspicion. That left only Hulda, the maid. Hulda had been there at West House, Cal had heard, for several years, and surely she would never have kept her place had she not been

honest. No, the theory of theft was hardly plausible, he decided. Ned *must* have spent or mislaid the money.

“Well, it’s gone,” said Ned

He glanced up and surprised Ned observing him across the study table, and although Ned’s eyes dropped quickly back to

his open book Cal had time to read the message in them. A little shiver passed up his spine and he felt the blood rushing into his face. He dropped his own gaze, feeling suddenly very miserable and lonely. It was plain enough now. Ned suspected him of stealing the money! He recalled Ned's strange question: "Don't you want that too?" and now he understood. He felt terribly hurt and wounded, for he had grown fond of his chum, and that Ned could suspect him of anything so mean and despicable was like a blow in the face. But he did suspect him; that was too evident. For a moment Cal wanted to spring up and declare his innocence. Surely Ned would believe him! But the tears were very near his eyes just then and so he stared at his book and sat silent.

Presently indignation began to take possession of him. What right had Ned to suspect him of being a thief? Just because he was poor and didn't wear good clothes like the other fellows was no reason to think him a robber! He was just as decent as the rest of them, in spite of his shabby clothes! Ned thought him a thief, did he? Well, he might go on thinking so for all Cal cared. Some day the money would be found, like as not, and then Ned would see what a mistake he had made. And when he did he could beg Cal's pardon until he was black in the face, and Cal would never forgive him! Never! He was all hurt pride now, and the first and softer misery had left him. Let Ned—yes, and all the rest of them—think what they liked! They were all snobs anyway!

Cal learned very little of his lessons that evening, nor, I fancy, did Ned do much better. They were both glad when Sandy's door banged open and he gave the signal to lay books aside. Almost simultaneously Spud demanded admittance.

“Say, Cal, can you get that algebra?” he asked as he came in and seated himself on Cal’s bed. “It’s the hardest old stuff I ever did see. What’s the matter with you chaps, anyway?” he went on, sitting up and staring at them. “Anybody dead?”

“Nothing’s the matter,” answered Ned shortly.

“Ned’s lost some money out of his bureau drawer,” said Cal.

“*Lost* it! How could you lose it? How much was it?”

“Eight dollars,” replied Ned.

“Phew! That’s some money, isn’t it? How did you lose it, Ned?”

“How the dickens do I know?” asked Ned grumpily. “All I know is that it was there a couple of days ago and now it’s gone.”

Hoop and Dutch had walked in meanwhile and for their benefit the tale of Ned’s loss had to be retold. In a minute or two the whole of West House was in possession of the news and the eight boys sat around the Den and speculated as to the manner of the money’s disappearance. Cal was rather silent. Since Ned suspected him, he thought, the others would too. As a matter of fact, none of them did, but he didn’t know that. It seemed to him that every careless glance in his direction held accusation.

“Who knew it was there?” asked Sandy, unconsciously trying to look like the pictures of Sherlock Holmes.

“No one except me.”

“Are you sure? Didn’t you tell anyone?”

“Not a soul,” lied Ned. “I didn’t even mention it to Cal.”

“Yes, you did, Ned,” contradicted the latter quietly. “You told me yesterday about it. Don’t you remember?”

“Did I?” murmured Ned with a scowl.

“Yes, because you were going to lend me two dollars so’s I could get my football things and not have to wait for money from home.”

“I’d forgotten,” answered Ned carelessly. But his glance at Cal said “Fool!” as plainly as any words could have done. Cal hardly knew what had prompted him to tell that. He was angry with Ned for suspecting him and, while appreciating the latter’s efforts to keep others from doing the same, he told himself that he would accept no favors. Hoop chuckled.

“Better give it back, Cal,” he advised.

“I say,” exclaimed Spud, “maybe the fellow I saw standing at your bureau last night was the thief! Remember my telling you that I saw someone in here and whispered across and got no answer?”

“Yes, but burglars don’t wear pajamas,” said Ned.

“I didn’t say he wore pajamas. I’m almost certain that he had on a nightgown. Anyway, he was in white. And he was standing right there at that bureau.”

“What was he doing?” asked The Fungus.

“I don’t know. I didn’t pay special attention. I just whispered across ‘O you Old Ned.’ And he didn’t seem to hear me and I went on trotting about the room hugging my tummy-ache.”

“Don’t suppose you robbed yourself, do you, Ned?” asked

Sandy.

"No, I don't. Besides, I told Spud before that I wasn't up last night once."

"It must have been you, then, Cal," said Dutch with a grin. "You wear a nightgown, don't you?"

"Yes," Cal answered seriously, "but I wasn't up either. I cal —I guess Spud imagined it."

"Imagined nothing!" said Spud indignantly. "I guess I know what I see!"

"Maybe it was the ghost again," said Claire Parker in awed tones. The boys looked at him and then at each other. Dutch laughed, but it wasn't a very hearty laugh. Finally,

"You don't suppose it was, fellows?" asked Spud a trifle nervously.

"Oh, poppycock!" exclaimed Ned. "Ghosts don't swipe money out of bureau drawers. Besides—"

"Besides they couldn't spend it if they had it," said Dutch. "Just the same I think it's sort of funny about that thing we saw in the apple orchard; and then Spud seeing something in white in here just a little while after and—and—"

"Look here, Cal," interrupted Hoop, "you said you dreamed of robbers last night, didn't you?"

"Yes, it seemed to be robbers."

"There you are then! Robbers it was! Or, at least, a robber. There was one in the house, don't you see, and although Cal didn't get wide awake his consciousness warned him of danger and—"

“Oh, you fellows make me tired,” said Ned peevishly. “Forget about the money. I guess I can get some more somewhere.” He turned to Cal. “Sorry I can’t lend you that two, though, Cal,” he said constrainedly. “You see I’m wiped out.”

“It doesn’t matter, thanks,” replied Cal. “I cal’late I’ll have to get some money from home.”

They discussed the affair for half an hour longer, Spud and Dutch advancing ingenious theories to connect the mysterious visitant in the orchard with the midnight marauder in the Den. Claire—or Clara, as we ought to call him to conform to custom—sat enthralled and timorous. Claire was only thirteen, we must remember, had been brought up on fairy stories and was far from being convinced that ghosts were all moonshine. Presently Spud recalled the girl that he and Cal had seen that evening next door and told about her and her cryptic remark when they were carrying the apples home.

“I think,” said Spud, “that that kid knows more than she’s telling.”

“You don’t suppose she—was the ghost, do you?” asked Sandy.

“No, she’s just a kid. She wouldn’t think of a thing like that. Besides, she was probably abed and asleep at that time of night. But I’ll bet she’s heard something.”

“We’ll appoint you a committee, Spud, to take her a box of candy once a week so she’ll keep mum,” said The Fungus.

“Yes, make it caramels,” suggested Hoop, “and she can’t talk even if she wants to.”

“How old is she?” asked Sandy.

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered Spud carelessly. “About as old as—as a girl.”

“Really? You surprise me!”

“Well, how old do *you* think, Cal?”

“I don’t know either,” Cal replied. “I’ve got a sister who’s thirteen and I cal’late this girl’s about the same size.”

“I guess she wouldn’t know enough to make any trouble,” said Sandy. “Well, I’m off to bed. Hope you find your money, Ned. If you want a little meanwhile I can let you have some, I guess.”

The others said good night too and the Den emptied. Cal closed the door and he and Ned gathered their books together. Finally,

“I—I’m right sorry about that money,” said Cal stiffly.

“Thanks,” answered Ned. “It doesn’t matter.”

After that they undressed in silence and went to bed.

CHAPTER XII

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

Such a strange thing had happened! One of the brand-new pillow-cases was missing! This was Saturday morning and Hulda had been changing the bedding. Marm announced her loss at the breakfast table. Hulda wasn't certain whose pillow the slip had been missing from, but she thought it was Mr. Brent's.

"I can't think where it has got to," lamented Marm. "You don't know where it is, do you, Ned?"

Ned observed her frankly and gravely.

"I do not," he replied. "And I don't believe it was mine. At least, I had both last night."

"Did you? Well, then it must have been lost this morning. Perhaps Hulda dropped it somewhere."

"I hope she didn't drop it on the stairs," said Spud anxiously.

"Why?" asked Marm.

"I might slip on it," was the sober reply. Marm wondered why the fellows laughed and had to have the joke explained to her by Hoop.

"Maybe," The Fungus began, "the same person swiped the pillow-case that took Ned's eight—"

But he stopped there, pretending to choke on a mouthful of

baked potato. It had been agreed last evening that there was no use in troubling Marm about Ned's loss.

"Fungus," said Sandy in his blandest tones, "do you realize that you sometimes talk too much?"

"At least," defended Dutch with a chuckle, "he knows when to shut up!"

"I guess," said Ned to Sandy when they left the table, "that I'm just as curious as Marm is about where that pillow-case has got to."

"Pshaw," replied Sandy, "never mind about that. What bothers me is that money of yours. That's a very funny thing, Ned. Nothing like it has ever happened in West House since I've been here. You don't suppose—" he hesitated—"you don't think that Cal knows anything about it, do you?"

"Cal? Of course not," replied Ned emphatically. "I'd trust him anywhere."

"Well, he doesn't seem that sort to me, either," said Sandy. "I like the chap. Only he did know the money was there, and then Spud is certain that he saw someone in front of your bureau; someone who wore a nightgown. And excepting Cal and Clara the rest of us all wear pajamas."

"Oh, rot," said Ned. "Spud was half asleep, probably. Anyway, it's a fair guess he couldn't tell whether the person wore a nightgown or a—a potato sack. I'll bet he imagined the whole thing; dreamed it, probably. I wouldn't be surprised if I came across the money somewhere, after all," he added carelessly.

"Well, I hope you do. I'd hate to think that there was any

fellow here who would steal."

"I don't believe it was stolen, Sandy."

"But you said last night—"

"I know, but I've been thinking it over. I'm pretty careless with things, you know. I dare say I stuck it somewhere and forgot about it. We won't say anything more about it, especially outside the house."

"Not likely!" said Sandy.

Being Saturday there was no school. Ned had said something two or three days before about walking to Indian Head this morning and Cal had eagerly agreed to accompany him. Indian Head was a favorite resort with those who liked walking and lay five miles away across country. In Revolutionary times a block-house had stood there and had been the scene of an Indian massacre. Even yet relics were sometimes found and almost every fellow was the proud possessor of an arrow head purporting to have been dug up on the site of the old fort. Most of them had been purchased from the enterprising merchant who sold post-cards and curiosities in a little log-cabin at the foot of the hill and looked suspiciously new. Since the affair of last night Cal expected that the excursion would be dropped. But Ned sought him out after breakfast and reminded him in an off-hand way that he had agreed to go.

"Hoop and The Fungus are going, too," he said. "We're going to start in about ten minutes."

"All right," said Cal after a moment of hesitation. But when he had thought it over he changed his mind. His grievance against Ned still held good, and, he decided, he didn't want to

go walking with a fellow who secretly believed him a thief. So he told Ned he cal'lated he wouldn't go. And Ned said "Very well" quite indifferently and the three went off about half-past nine. Cal watched them from his window and felt some regret. It was a wonderful morning and he loved to walk.

When he went downstairs the house was deserted, the rest of the inhabitants having taken themselves off toward school. Cal put his hands in his pocket and considered. It was too fine a day to stay indoors. He cal'lated he'd better follow the others over to the field and see what was going on. Perhaps there'd be a ball game, for base-ball at Oak Park was played until snow came. Then his eyes fell on the tennis court and he went in and found a racket and for a half-hour amused himself knocking balls across the net. After that he wandered to the gate and through it and started down the road past the Curtis place in the general direction of town with a half-formed idea of working back to the field by way of the cross road, which would mean a two mile stroll. But he wasn't destined to get his walk this morning, for when he came in sight of the carriage gate beyond the white farm house he saw that the nearer post was occupied. On it, swinging her feet and munching an apple, sat the girl they had seen last evening. Cal didn't know very much about the usages of society and wondered whether he ought to take off his cap to the young lady or speak to her. She was already aware of his approach and it wouldn't look well to turn back, although he would have much preferred that solution of his quandary. He cal'lated he'd just say "Good morning," and not bother about his cap. But the matter was decided for him.

"Hello," said the girl. "Want an apple?"

"No, thanks," answered Cal. He still had several yards to go

before he would be up to her and he searched for something further to say; it was too late now for the “Good morning” he had contemplated.

“Don’t you like apples?” she asked.

“Yes, but I ain’t hungry.” He was up to her now and past and he breathed easier.

“These are Ghost apples,” said the girl. Cal stopped and turned.

“They’re wha-what?” he stammered. The girl put her head back and laughed merrily. Then,

“These are ghost apples,” said the girl

“Ghost apples,” she repeated. “They come in pillow-cases.”

She smiled mischievously down at his alarmed and puzzled face. Cal glanced apprehensively toward the house.

“What do you know about pillow-cases?” he blurted.

“Lots! Want to know what I know?” Cal nodded.

“Pillow-cases,” said the girl, “are used to cover pillows so that they won’t get soiled.” She paused and looked at him with dancing eyes. Cal grunted.

“What else?” he demanded.

“They are also used to—to gather apples in.”

“Look here, did you see us—I mean *them*—I mean—”

She nodded gayly.

“You and them both,” she laughed. “What’s your name?”

“John Boland,” answered Cal. Then he added, thinking that perhaps it was the correct thing to do: “What’s yours?”

“Molly Elizabeth Curtis.” She made a little backward movement with her head. “They’re my aunts, you know. I live in New York when I’m at home but I’m going to be here all winter. Isn’t that awful?”

“Why, aren’t they good to you?”

“Of course they are, silly. But I guess it’s going to be very dull after New York. Still, I’ve had a pretty good time so far; especially the night before last.”

Cal had drawn near and now he stood and frowned at the tormentful young person on the gate post and strove to consider what course to pursue. It was evident to him that the young person wasn’t going to tell all she knew until she was quite ready to. Spud, he reflected, had called her “a fresh kid,” and he cal’lated Spud was about right. Still, she looked nice and was quite pretty, Cal decided, as girls went. She was slender and had a very clear complexion, with cheeks in which

the color had a way of coming and going just as though she was able to turn it on or off at her convenience. Her hair, worn in a braid that hung to her neck and was caught up again with a blue satin ribbon, was deeply brown and her eyes were brightly blue. Not that Cal observed all these things at this time, however. About all he thought was that she was pretty for a girl and looked as though she was too jolly and nice to willingly get anyone into trouble. As for her age, he had guessed pretty near right, he told himself; she was probably thirteen; not more than fourteen at the most. Cal didn't know much about girls and was at a loss how to handle the present situation. He was determined, however, to get at the truth before he left there. So he began by saying sternly:

"Look here, now, you'd better tell me what you know about the other night."

"Dear me!" said Miss Molly Elizabeth Curtis, arching her eyebrows and looking fearfully alarmed.

"Because if you don't—"

"Then what?" she asked as he hesitated.

"Well, you better had," he ended lamely. She laughed.

"Don't you think, Mister John Something, that you'd better be nice to me instead of making threats? Supposing—just supposing, now—I was to show Aunt Matilda what I have hidden in my trunk."

"What—what is it?" asked Cal uneasily. Molly leaned down and whispered dramatically:

"A pillow-case marked 'West House' in black ink on the hem!"

“You—you wouldn’t do that, though,” said Cal, half questioningly. “You’re too nice a girl.”

The nice girl put her head back and laughed harder and merrier than ever, until Cal looked again toward the house and wondered if Miss Matilda could hear.

“You’re—you’re awfully funny,” she gasped finally. “Aren’t you?”

“I cal’late so, maybe,” answered Cal, willing to agree for the sake of diplomacy. “Is that pillow-case in a good safe place, Miss? You know if Miss Matilda got hold of it she’d show it to our principal and he’d— I don’t know what he’d do; suspend us, likely.”

“She won’t ever see it,” replied Molly reassuringly. “It’s in my trunk and my trunk’s locked and here’s the key.” She tugged at a little blue ribbon around her neck and drew forth the key in proof. “I’m keeping it as a trophy, you know. I mean the pillow-case. My, but it was fun!”

“It wasn’t you, was it?” cried Cal. Molly nodded with sparkling eyes.

“Yes. Want me to tell you all about it?”

“Yes, I do,” answered Cal.

“Beg my pardon for saying what you said, then,” she commanded.

“What did I say?” muttered Cal.

“That I’d better tell you or—or something! Don’t you know that you mustn’t threaten a lady? Besides,” she added thoughtfully, “it just makes them stubborner.”

“All right,” said Cal grudgingly. “I won’t do it again.”

“But go ahead.”

“Go ahead—what?” he asked.

“Beg my pardon. You haven’t yet, you know.”

“Oh, well—all right. I do.”

“But you don’t!” she exclaimed impatiently. “You just stand there and say you do and you don’t!”

“Seems to me you’re mighty particular,” he grumbled.

“I guess you don’t want to know about it, after all,” she said indifferently.

“Yes, I do, honest! I—I beg your pardon, Miss.”

“Well, but please don’t call me Miss. I’m only thirteen and you’re not a miss until you have long dresses. Call me Molly. What do they call you? Jack?”

“No, Cal.”

“Cal? That’s a funny name. Is it your middle name?”

“No, it’s just—just a—a nickname.”

“Oh, all right.” She folded her hands in her lap, having finished with her apple, and considered her narrative. “Well, it all happened like this,” she began after a moment. “You see, there’s just me here and no one to play with. Of course I don’t mind that so *very* much because I like to read books and stories. But it *would* be nicer if I knew somebody, wouldn’t it? That’s what I told Aunt Lydia and she said it was too bad I wasn’t going to school because I’d meet lots of girls there. You see, father doesn’t want me to go to school this winter because

I'm pretty well along anyhow and then my eyes got bad last spring. I told Aunt Lydia I guessed I'd like to know some of the boys next door, but she just held up her hands in horror. Did you know, Cal, that you are awfully bad? Aunt Matilda says so. She says you're a—a— Oh, what was it? A 'parcel of young varmints,' that's it!"

Cal grinned and Molly smiled back at him.

"I guess Aunt Matilda doesn't like boys very well, though," she continued extenuatingly. "Anyhow, she said I mustn't think of playing with any of you. But I used to hear you across the hedge and one day I thought I'd like to see what a 'varmint' looked like. So I went over there and peeped through. You were playing tennis, some of you, and some of you were on the porch. And just then two—I think you were one of them, Cal—came over toward the hedge and I heard you talking."

Cal grunted. The mystery was clearing up.

"I remember," he said. "We were talking about getting through the hedge."

"And stealing—I mean helping yourself to the apples."

"I guess stealing's the word," he said with a smile.

"The other boy saw me or heard me or something, don't you remember? I got down on the grass and hid until you'd gone. Then I thought what fun it would be to surprise you. I didn't want to tell because—oh, because I should think it would be rather fun to steal apples. Isn't it?"

"I don't know. It wasn't very much fun the other night!"

"Oh, yes, it was—for me!" cried Molly.

“I—we thought you were a ghost,” said Cal a trifle shamefacedly.

“I meant you to!”

“I don’t see, though, how you did it.”

“I’ll tell you. It was a—an inspiration, I guess! You see, I didn’t mind you taking all the apples you wanted, because there are just bushels and bushels of them and my aunts would never miss them a tiny bit, but I did want to have some fun. At first I thought I’d wait for you at the hedge and threaten to tell if you didn’t take me along with you. But I didn’t know any of you, you see. Then I just decided that I’d have fun my own way. So I got a sheet out of the linen-closet and a broom from the kitchen. I did that before supper and hid them under the bed in my room. What made it very difficult was that they insist on my going to bed every night at half-past nine. At home I *always* stay up until ten. So I had to go to bed as usual, though, of course, I didn’t really take all my clothes off. Aunt Lydia always puts her head in my door and says good night to me. That’s my room on the side. See the two windows over the porch? That’s how I got out. I was afraid to go downstairs because my aunts would be certain sure to hear me. So after Aunt Lydia said good night I crept out of bed and dropped the broom and the sheet out of the window. Then I came down after them.”

“I don’t see how you did it,” said Cal with a trace of admiration. “You didn’t jump, did you?”

“No, there’s a rain-spout on the other side; you can’t see it from here. I got down by that and I got back the same way. It isn’t hard at all. You stand on the porch rail and then you put one foot on the thing that holds the spout up and the other on

top of the dining-room window, and then you can get your knee over the edge of the roof and you're all right. I made sure I could do it before supper, though. After I got down I took the sheet and the broom to the wagon-shed back there and got ready. I waited and waited and thought you weren't coming after all. Then I could see you moving down by the hedge. So I crept out and went around through the blackberry patch until I was at the edge of the orchard. But you were all so busy you wouldn't have seen me, anyway. When you did see me, though, it was just too funny for anything!"

Molly laughed merrily at the memory of it and Cal said "Huh!" in a disgusted tone and looked bored.

"It was a silly trick to play," he said severely.

"Because you were fooled," responded Molly serenely. "I guess I must have looked pretty—pretty ghastly! Anyway, you all yelled like anything and just ran! I *was* glad you got your apples, though. I suppose you were all too scared to drop them!"

"I didn't get mine," said Cal grimly. "Mine were under the tree."

"Then it's your pillow-case I found!" exclaimed Molly, clapping her hands gleefully. Cal nodded. Then he grinned.

"I was up in the tree," he said. Molly frowned.

"When?"

"After—the others left."

"You never were!"

"Yes, I was. And you came right underneath and I was—

well, I was pretty frightened." Molly giggled. "You'd have been, too," he added defensively.

"Of course I would," she owned. "I guess I'd have fallen right out of the tree. I wish, though, I'd known you were up there, Cal," she went on regretfully. "I'd have stayed there, I guess. Did you see me dancing?"

"Was that what you were doing? I couldn't see very well on account of the leaves, but sometimes you looked about ten feet tall and sometimes you weren't any higher than that." Cal put his hand a couple of feet from the sidewalk.

"It was the broom made me look tall. And I guess when I wasn't any higher than that I was stooping down emptying the apples out of that pillow-case. I do wish I'd known you were up there, though."

"I'm glad you didn't," said Cal with a laugh. "It was bad enough as it was. What did you dance for?"

"Oh, just—just for fun," answered Molly vaguely. "It was a Dance of Triumph."

"Where did you go to? It seemed to me you just—just vanished."

"I suppose that was because I took the sheet off. I had a dark dress on." She smiled reminiscently. "It was lots and lots of fun, Cal."

"Maybe it was for you," he grumbled. "We didn't think it was very funny. We thought it was a ghost for sure. I cal'late the fellows will be glad to find out what it really was. Spud said last night he was pretty sure you knew something about it."

“Was he the boy who came with you for the apples?” Cal nodded. “Do you think they’ll be very—very angry with me?” she asked. “It was just a joke, you know.”

“No, I cal’late not,” answered Cal. Molly gave a little shriek of triumph.

“Now I know why they call you Cal!” she exclaimed. “It’s because you’re always saying ‘cal’late.’”

Cal reddened. “That’s why,” he confessed. “They make a lot of fun of me. I don’t see why cal’late ain’t just as good a word as—as any other.”

“I suppose it hasn’t the sanction of usage,” replied Molly glibly. Cal blinked.

“I cal’late—I mean I guess that’s it,” he murmured. Molly laughed.

“You said it again, you know.”

“Yes,” answered Cal, “I’m trying to get out of it, but I keep forgetting.” There was a moment’s pause, and then, “Mrs. Linn missed her pillow-case this morning,” he announced carelessly.

“Did she?”

“Yes. I cal—I guess if I had it I could get it back and she wouldn’t know.”

“I suppose you could—if you had it,” agreed Molly.

Cal eyed her askance.

“You might give it back to me, I think.” But Molly shook her head.

“No, it’s—it’s spoils of war. Besides, I shall keep it and make you all do just what I want.”

“What?” exclaimed Cal uneasily. “What—sort of things?”

“Oh, I haven’t decided yet. Not fully, that is. There’s one thing you must do, though. I want to learn to play tennis. I guess one of you can teach me that. And I want to see a football game.”

“Oh!” said Cal gloomily. Then, brightening up, “But your aunts won’t let you have anything to do with us,” he said hopefully.

“But they will after awhile,” answered the young lady with a slight toss of her head. “You—you’re the wedge.”

“The what?” gasped Cal.

“The wedge, the entering wedge. Aunt Lydia has been watching us out of the sewing-room window for a long time, and she will tell Aunt Matilda and Aunt Matilda will scold. Then I shall tell her what a nice, polite boy you are and that you invited me to play tennis with you—”

“I didn’t!” cried Cal indignantly.

“But you’re going to,” returned Molly calmly.

“I’m not either! I—I don’t play tennis.”

“Never mind. You’ll take me over some day and one of the other boys will show me how.”

“I guess girls aren’t allowed at West House,” said Cal desperately.

“Oh, fiddle! You don’t guess anything of the sort.”

“Well, anyhow, I won’t have anything to do with it,” declared Cal with decision. Molly looked regretful.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “because I’m so afraid Aunt Matilda will make trouble when she sees that pillow-case.”

“You—you wouldn’t show it to her!” he gasped.

“I wouldn’t want to,” she answered gently, with a shake of her head.

Cal considered a minute. Finally,

“All right,” he muttered ungraciously, “I’ll see about it.”

“Thank you,” she murmured. “And you do want me to play tennis with you, don’t you?”

“I cal’late I’ve got to,” he replied. Then the humor of it reached him and he chuckled. “You’re a pretty smart girl, you are,” he said in grudging admiration. Molly accepted the tribute gravely, but there was a glint of laughter in her blue eyes.

“I cal’late I’ve got *some* sense,” she replied demurely.

Cal flushed. “If you make fun of me I won’t do it,” he declared aggrievedly.

“I didn’t mean to make fun of you, truly,” she assured him contritely. “And—and I think ‘cal’late’ is a very nice word. I guess you’d better go now, though, because Aunt Matilda’s coming.”

“Where?” he asked in alarm. Molly nodded down the road.

“In the buggy. She’s been to the village. Oh, you needn’t run, because she’s seen you already. But if you just walk off

you’ll get away before she can say anything.”

“But—but she’ll scold you, won’t she?” he asked, pausing indecisively in flight.

“Yes, but I don’t mind. Besides, she doesn’t really *scold*; she just ‘expostulates for my own good.’ Good-by. Come to the hole in the hedge this afternoon at half-past five and I’ll tell you when I can play tennis with you. Don’t forget!”

“I won’t,” called Cal, hurrying toward home and safety.

“You *do* want me to play tennis, don’t you?” she called after him.

“Yes, indeed!” he shouted back. Then he plunged through West House gate with a deep sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

Ned and Hoop and The Fungus came back in time for dinner rather tired of body but undismayed of spirit. They brought a new assortment of “genuine” arrowheads and many highly colored post-cards. And The Fungus had purchased a photograph frame fashioned of wood with views of Indian Head on it. This, he stated, he meant to give to someone at Christmas. He was rather vague as to the identity of the future recipient and Spud got alarmed and announced carelessly that personally he didn’t care for Christmas presents.

“Of course it’s a perfectly good photograph frame, Fungus, and all that. And it looks quite expensive, too. I suppose you had to give as much as five cents for it.”

“You run away and play,” answered The Fungus indignantly. “It cost fifty cents, didn’t it, Ned?”

“Really?” exclaimed Spud. “I don’t see how they can sell them for that!” An ambiguous remark that caused The Fungus much speculation.

The trio were full of their trip and took turns narrating their adventures during dinner until at last Sandy voiced the sentiment of the rest of the company.

“Write it out, Hoop,” he said wearily, “and send it to Copenhagen. You talk so much about it I don’t believe you ever got to Indian Head.”

“That’s right, don’t give it all to us now, Hoop,” said Dutch. “Keep it and deliver a lecture in the Town Hall. I thought you were going along, Cal.”

“I was, but—I changed my mind. I cal’late my discoveries are more important than theirs,” he added meaningly.

“Discoveries?” asked Sandy. “What about?”

“I’ll tell you after dinner.”

“Something I mustn’t hear,” said Mrs. Linn good-naturedly. “I suppose you’ve been in mischief.”

“What I admire about you, Marm,” said Sandy with a laugh, “is your—your—what’s the word, Ned; acumen?”

“Marm never wears one,” said Spud gravely.

On the porch later Cal told them what he had learned that morning from Miss Molly Elizabeth Curtis. Sandy was inclined to be severe with the young lady, but the rest, especially Spud, thought it was an excellent joke.

“She must be a smart kid,” Spud asserted. “And plucky, too. Think of her climbing down a water-spout!”

“It wasn’t a water-spout, it was a rain-spout,” corrected Dutch.

“Oh, what’s the difference?”

“Lots. Rain-spouts are on houses and water-spouts are in Captain Marryat’s stories.”

“Just the same,” said Dutch, “I don’t like her having that pillow-case. Won’t she hand it over, Cal?”

“No, she won’t. She says she’s—she’s going to—to hold it

over us."

"Do what?" asked Sandy, puzzled.

"Why, keep it and make us do what she wants."

"Well, what—do you—think—of that?" gasped The Fungus.

"Someone ought to box her ears!" declared Sandy indignantly.

"You might suggest it to Miss Matilda," laughed Spud. "I think she needs it myself. Just the same, she's a smart kid!"

"I don't believe she would tell on us," hazarded Clara anxiously.

"I'm sure she wouldn't," agreed Cal. "Still, I cal—I guess we'd better be sort of decent to her."

"But what does she want?" asked Sandy frowningly.

"Well, she wants to learn to play tennis, for one thing," Cal replied. "And she says she wants to see a football game."

"Wants to come over here and play tennis?" gasped Hoop. "She certainly has nerve! Who's going to teach her, Cal, you?"

"No, I told her I didn't play. I guess it's up to you, Hoop."

The others laughed, but Hoop waxed wroth. "I guess I see myself teaching a girl to play tennis!" he said. "If she comes over here once she'll be always tagging around. Girls are beastly bothers."

"But you're just as much in it as we are," said Spud gravely. "And if she wants you to teach her I guess you'd better, Hoop."

"She didn't say anything about me," cried Hoop. "She

doesn’t know me.”

“Ah, but she wants to, probably. She admires your manly beauty, Hoop. I move that Hoop be appointed to teach her tennis. All in favor will so signify.”

“Aye!” The vote was unanimous.

“Oh, cut it out!” growled Hoop. “I don’t play well enough, anyway. Sandy or Ned ought to teach her if anybody’s got to.”

“We’ll put on the finishing touches, after you’ve taught her the rudiments,” said Ned kindly. “As to football, why, I guess that’s where Clara comes in. As he doesn’t play he will make a nice guide for the girl. All in favor—”

“Aye!”

Clara looked worried but said nothing.

“She’s as pretty as a picture, Clara,” said Spud. “Wish I were you!”

“You can take my place if you want to,” said Clara eagerly.

“Yes, but you see I have to play,” Spud answered hurriedly, while the others laughed. “Is there—is there any other little thing we can do for her, Cal?”

“Not that I know of—yet. I cal’late she’ll think of something, though,” he added gloomily.

“It’s perfect nonsense,” declared Sandy, “but I don’t see what else we can do. We’ll just have to—to humor her and get on the right side of her until she gives up that old pillow-case.”

“Even if she did,” said Dutch, “she could tell on us any time she got mad.”

“Let her! She wouldn’t have any proof then. Ned, you’re a diplomat. Suppose you make it your life’s work to recover that silly old pillow-case.”

“Oh, all right. Me for the diplomatic service. When do we get a look at this lady friend of yours, Cal?”

“I don’t know. You see her aunts don’t want her to have anything to do with us, and maybe—”

“Hooray!” shouted The Fungus. “That’s our only hope, fellows. Let’s go over and break a few windows so Miss Matilda will hate us worse than ever.”

“Or we might write an anonymous letter to her telling how depraved we all are,” suggested Spud.

“She says we’re varmints,” said Cal.

“Did she say that?” demanded Spud. “Now I *will* bust a window for her.” And he took up a tennis racket and made as though to hurl it over the hedge in the direction of the Curtis house.

“Honest to goodness, fellows, there’s something in that,” said Dutch thoughtfully. “If we could only convince the Old Maids that we are really desperate characters it’s a sure thing that she wouldn’t let that obnoxious kid come anywhere near us.”

“But how shall we do it?” asked Sandy.

“I don’t know. We’ll think it over.”

“Yes, but suppose the Obnoxious Kid—which is a perfectly good name for her—gets huffy because she can’t learn to play tennis and see the football games and goes and shows that

pillow-case to the Old Maids?" asked Sandy.

"I don't believe," answered Spud, "that she would do it anyway. I'll bet she wouldn't want them to know that she'd shinned down a water—I mean rain-spout any more than we'd want them to know that we'd been over helping ourselves to their apples."

"That's so," said Sandy. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Well, I wouldn't think too much of it now," said The Fungus dryly. "That girl is the original trouble maker and I'll bet she'd go to prison if she could get us into a fix. Girls are always making trouble, anyway. The best thing we can do is to keep her away at any cost. I think we ought to do something awful and see that the Old Maids hear about it."

"Let us hear from the Diplomatist," suggested Sandy.

"The Diplomatist agrees," answered Ned. "Let's think up some scheme for making ourselves thoroughly disliked over there. Then they'll keep Miss Molly away from us and we won't be troubled with her. I know what girls are. They're always wanting you to do things for them. She'd be an awful bother, fellows."

"Of course she would," Hoop agreed with enthusiasm, thinking of the tennis lessons.

"Well, we'll have to think up something," said Sandy. "Meanwhile I guess it's pretty near time to wander over to the field. I think they might cut out practice this afternoon."

"When's the first game?" asked Hoop.

"Two weeks from today. We haven't got a show this year, fellows." Sandy as usual was sadly pessimistic.

“Oh, get out!” said The Fungus. “We’ll wipe the gridiron up with the Hall. You wait and see!”

“Oh, I’ll wait all right, and I’ll see,” answered Sandy gloomily. “I’ve seen before. The trouble with the House Team is that it never has any team-play.”

“You’re a croaker,” said Spud disgustedly. “Come on over, fellows, and let’s get busy. Gee, I’d work Saturdays and every other old day if it meant a win over Hall this year!”

They trooped off through the park together half an hour later. Clara, although he couldn’t play on the House Team and had not attempted to get a place on one of the Junior elevens, was an enthusiastic partisan and followed practice faithfully every day. At three o’clock the two gridirons were sprinkled with players, House and Hall working diligently in preparation for the coming battles. Brooks, or Brooksie as he was called, was captain of the House Team. He was a tall, well-built fellow of seventeen, an excellent leader and a good player. At practice he was somewhat of a martinet and, as Spud said once, could get more work out of a fellow than a slave-driver. This afternoon drill was harder and longer than usual. Cal did his best, but before practice was half over had decided that he would never make a football player. Something that added to his discouragement was a calling-down by Brooks.

“I say, Boland,” said Brooks, “this isn’t an afternoon tea, you know. Don’t you come out here again dressed like that. Why haven’t you got your togs on? Too lazy to change, were you?”

He didn’t wait for an answer, but darted away to lecture a back who was dropping too many punts. Cal looked after him mutinously and made up his mind then and there that was

positively his last appearance on the football field. He was mistaken, but he didn't know it.

He had to skimp his shower-bath in order to get back to West House in time to keep his appointment at the hedge at half-past five. He didn't particularly want to keep it, but he was afraid not to. When he thought what might happen if Doctor Webster learned of the raid on the apple orchard he was ready and willing to do most anything to placate the Obnoxious Kid. She was there waiting for him.

"Hello," she said. "I'm afraid you're late."

She had squirmed through the lilac hedge and was leaning against the picket fence in full view of West House. Cal wished she had kept out of sight. He didn't exactly know why he objected to being seen there in conversation with her, but he did object and showed it by his restlessness and evident desire to be gone. Molly, observing this, prolonged matters dreadfully.

"Have you been playing football?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Cal briefly.

"It must be fun to be a boy." Molly sighed enviously. "Did you tell the others about me?"

"Yes."

"What did they say?" she asked anxiously. "Were they angry?"

"No, not exactly. Sandy was sort of mad."

"Who's Sandy?"

"He's House Leader. His name is Fred Sanderson."

“I don’t think I like him. Do you all have nicknames?”

“Yes, there’s Sandy and The Fungus and Dutch and Hoop and Spud and—and Clara. Ned Brent—he’s my roommate—hasn’t any name except Ned.”

“Do you suppose they’ll let me call them by their nicknames?” asked Molly.

“I—I suppose so. Did you—ask your aunt about letting you come over?”

“Yes. She wanted to know who I was talking to and I told her it was one of the boys who came for the apples. I said you were very well-behaved and polite and that you wanted me to play tennis with you.”

“And what did she say?” he asked anxiously.

“She said,” Molly replied cheerfully, “that I couldn’t do anything of the sort!” Cal heaved a sigh of relief and Molly frowned.

“I don’t think it’s very nice of you to look so—so pleased about it!”

“I—I didn’t. It’s too bad, isn’t it? But I cal’late she knows what is best for you.”

“You’re just glad,” said Molly unhappily. “And after I went and said such nice things about you, too!” Cal’s conscience smote him.

“I’m awfully much obliged,” he muttered. “Perhaps she’ll change her mind.”

“I’m sure she will,” responded Molly. Cal’s face fell again. “She says I may talk to you when I meet you, and that’s more

than I thought she would let me do. That's nice, isn't it?"

"Awfully," murmured Cal, striving his best to look properly appreciative. "Only I cal'late we aren't likely to meet very often."

"Oh, yes, we will. I'm often outdoors. All you've got to do is to whistle when you want to see me."

"Oh!" said Cal.

"Then I'll let you know how I'm getting along. Aunt Lydia doesn't think you boys are very bad and I'm sure she will be on my side."

"Well, I—I've got to be going," said Cal. "I hope it will be all right."

"Is Mrs. Linn nice?" asked Molly.

"Bully," Cal said.

"Aunt Lydia said she was," said Molly thoughtfully. "Well, good night. I'll see you tomorrow maybe."

"I—I don't believe so," Cal stammered. "Tomorrow's Sunday and we go to church in the morning—"

"Oh, if you don't want to!" exclaimed Molly with a toss of her head. "That's different. You're a very horrid, rude boy, Cal, and—and perhaps Aunt Matilda is quite right!"

She turned and pushed her way through the hedge and out of sight. Cal looked after her, wavering between an impulse to call her back and apologize and a sensation of vast relief. After a moment he turned away whistling and went into the house. He was sorry he had offended her, for she was a real nice girl, after all, but perhaps it was just as well, for if she remained

angry with him she probably wouldn’t bother them any more. When the others came back he said nothing of having seen Molly and hoped that Marm hadn’t observed him talking to her across the fence. If she had she made no allusion to it.

“You’re a very horrid, rude boy, Cal”

Being Saturday night there was no study required and the boys were free to do as they pleased. It pleased them to remain out of doors until it was quite dark, for the evening was warm for the time of year. There was a tennis foursome that ended in a battle, with tennis balls for missiles, involving the entire company. Afterwards they went indoors and had music. Cal was called on to sing and give his entire repertoire, Ned playing his accompaniments. After they had "Yo-heave-ho'd" to their hearts' content they went upstairs and ended the evening with a grand pillow-fight, Den and Sun Parlor versus Ice Chest and Smellery, that lasted with unabated vigor until Marm requested a cessation of hostilities.

Cal and Ned got on together without embarrassment as long as there were others about, but as soon as they were alone they found nothing to say and the coolness was very apparent. Tonight, as they were destined to do on many nights in the future, they undressed and got to bed without the exchange of more than a dozen words.

CHAPTER XIV
CAL MUTINIES

On Monday Cal mutinied. When the time came for football practice he was on his way through the park to West House. It was a dull, gloomy afternoon and the house was silent and lonesome. Resolutely he set his books out on the table and studied. It was hard work at first, but presently he got interested and long before the others returned he had prepared his lessons for the morrow. There was a general demand to know why he had not shown up at practice and Cal merely replied that he hadn't felt like football today.

"Well, I don't envy you explaining to Brooksie tomorrow," said Sandy with some severity. "But that's your affair."

Cal didn't exactly envy himself that task, but to be able that evening to sit at ease and read a bully story about hunting and trapping in Canada while Ned and all the others had to study almost made up for any trouble to come. It evidently didn't occur to Ned that his roommate had studied in the afternoon and he shot many a puzzled look across the table but asked no questions. Affairs between them had by now progressed to a stage where they never spoke to each other unless a third person was present.

The notice board in School Building served as a sort of morning newspaper and few fellows went to class without pausing to read the messages scrawled there. The next morning Cal stopped as usual and found for the first time a message for him.

“Boland. Meet me after morning. Brooks.”

“I cal’late,” he mused as he tore the slip down and replaced the thumb-tack in the corner of the board, “that means trouble. But he can’t *make* me play football if I don’t want to!”

He awaited Brooks on the steps after school. The House captain came out with Will M’Crae, quarter-back on the House Team, but excused himself when he saw Cal.

“What was the matter yesterday, Boland?” he began with a frown. “Why didn’t you show up at practice?”

“I’ve decided not to play football,” answered Cal calmly.

Brooksie stared.

“You—you’ve *what*?” he demanded.

“I’ve decided not to play any more,” Cal repeated less assuredly.

“Oh, you have?” said the captain sarcastically. “Why?”

“Well, I don’t think I’m cut out for the game, for one thing. It’s pretty hard work, too.”

“Go ahead,” said Brooks, “you’re doing fine. What else?”

“I haven’t anything to wear.”

“They sell football togs in the village,” suggested the other with ominous calm.

“I can’t afford to get them.”

“You can’t? Why can’t you?”

“Because I haven’t the money.”

A couple of smaller boys had paused near-by and Brooks,

seeing them, took Cal's arm and drew him down the steps and a little way along the East House path.

"Look here, Boland, is that straight?" he asked. "Can't you afford three or four dollars for football togs?"

"No, I can't, Brooks. I oughtn't to. I—we ain't got much money, you see." Brooks observed him, frowning intently. At last he concluded that Cal was speaking the truth and not merely exaggerating his poverty in order to escape practice.

"That's different," he said. "You come with me."

Wondering what was going to befall him now, Cal accompanied the other across the bridge and along the path to East House. He had never been there before. East House was newer than West and larger. It accommodated fourteen fellows to West House's eight. On the square porch Cal paused but Brooks beckoned him in and led the way up the stairs and into a nicely furnished room on the second floor. There were lots of pictures on the walls, a good deal of comfortable mission furniture with leather upholstery, and several Oriental rugs on the hardwood floor. Altogether the room was a revelation to Cal of what a school study might be if the occupant possessed both money and good taste.

"Sit down, won't you?" said Brooks, pushing a deep-seated chair forward. Cal seated himself, placed his cloth cap over one knee and smoothed it down there, feeling somewhat embarrassed and ill at ease. Brooks went to a closet and in a moment was back with an armful of togs.

"Here you are," he said, dumping the things in Cal's lap. "Shirt, breeches and stockings. I haven't any boots, but I guess you can use what you've got for awhile. These things aren't

new by any means, but I guess they'll last the season out. You can get Mrs. Linn to patch that place in the jersey."

"But—but I oughtn't to take these," stammered Cal.

"Yes, you ought. Now look here, Boland. I don't want to be nasty, but honestly you haven't any business to act like this. You're a new boy, and I guess that explains it, though. At that, Boland, you've been here long enough to know things. Haven't they told you that we don't shirk duty here at Oak Park? I suppose it's Sanderson that's at fault; he's a good deal of a duffer, to my mind. Tell him so if you want to. It's a shame you West Housers haven't got another chap for Leader over there."

"Sandy's all right," said Cal with a scowl. Brooks smiled.

"Well, I'm glad you've got that far," he said. "At least you've learned to stand up for your House. But hasn't Sandy told you that every fellow is expected to take hold and work for his House? That with us it's House first, School next and self nowhere?"

"Ned Brent said something like that," answered Cal.

"Yes, Ned would. Why don't you do as Ned does, then? You want House to win, don't you?"

"Of course," answered Cal indignantly.

"Well, why don't you help us then instead of sulking? What if football practice is hard? I know it well enough. I've been all through the—the drudgery, just as you are going. It isn't any harder for us than it is for Hall, though. It isn't any harder for you than it is for any other new boy. And after you've learned you'll get a whole lot of pleasure out of it."

“But it don’t seem to me,” muttered Cal, “that I ever can learn. I cal’late I’m no good at football.”

“That’s none of your business,” said Frank Brooks sharply. “That’s my look-out. If I didn’t think you could be useful to the team do you suppose I’d waste my time on you for a minute?”

This hadn’t occurred to Cal and he digested it a moment. Then,

“You mean that you think I can learn to play the game?” he asked.

“I mean that I think you can be of use to the House Team. That’s enough. If you can be of use it’s your duty to work hard and forget yourself, Boland. Get that idea?”

“Yes.”

“All right.” Brooks observed him a moment. Then he smiled and thumped him on his back. “You’ll do, Boland. No more nonsense, though, *if* you please. See you this afternoon.”

Cal bundled the togs up.

“I’ll do what I can,” he said simply, “but—”

“But nothing,” laughed Brooks. “You do what you’re told to do as well as you know how and leave the ‘buts’ to me. Glad you came over, Boland. You’ll get on all right.”

“I don’t just like to take these things, though,” Cal objected.

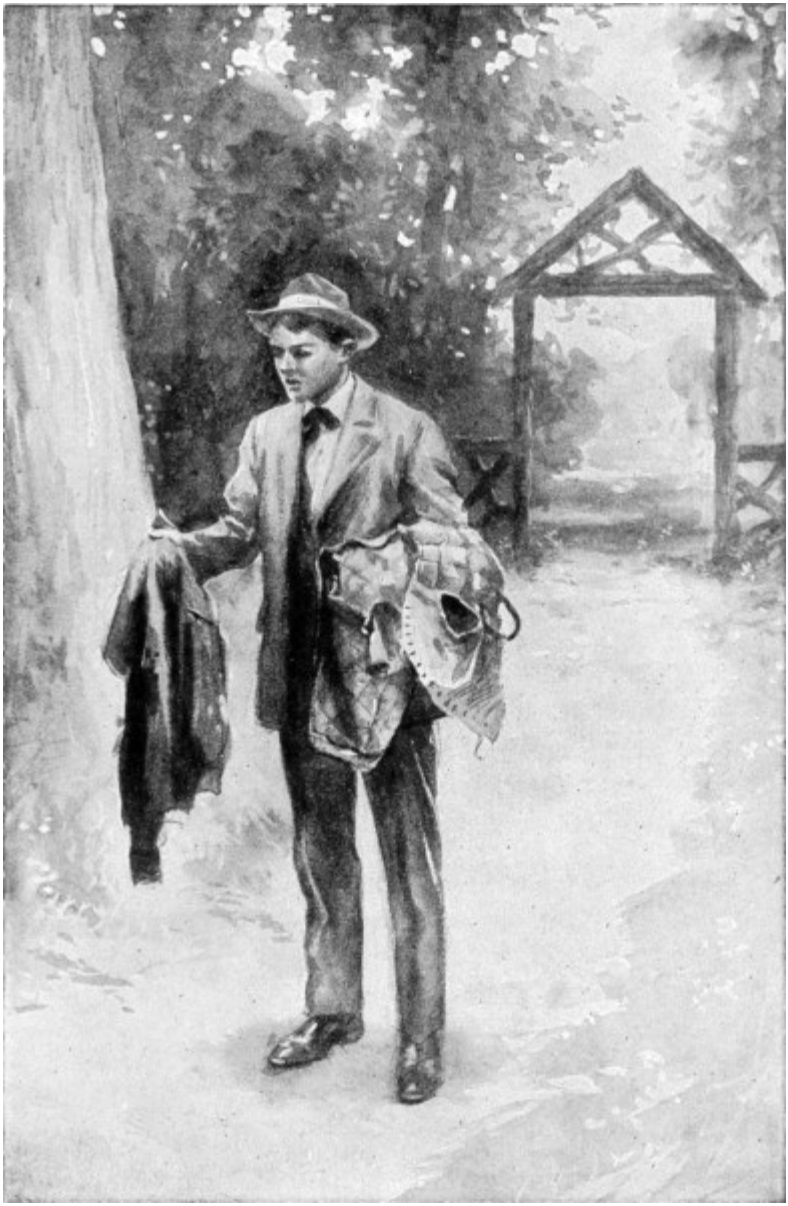
“Piffle! They’re no use to me. Call it a loan if you like. You can hand them back after the season’s through—if there’s anything left of them! Good bye.”

So ended Cal's mutiny.

Half-way through the park he stopped and examined the contents of the bundle. There was a very fair pair of khaki breeches, properly padded on hip and knee, a somewhat threadbare cherry-red jersey with a three-corner tear on one sleeve and what seemed to be a brand-new pair of red stockings. He felt very proud of these new possessions, very proud, too, that Brooks had assured him that in spite of his own misgivings he was really of some use to the team. He made up his mind to buckle down and do the best that was in him, even if, at the end, he was destined to be only an onlooker when the battles raged. And without intentional disrespect to Sandy, he heartily wished that Frank Brooks was leader at West House.

A fairly uneventful week followed. He neither heard nor saw anything more of Miss Molly Elizabeth Curtis and he and the rest of the House forgot their misgivings. They talked of her once or twice during the first few days and then, as she didn't obtrude herself, thought no more about her. Football practice went on six days in the week. They were hard at signal work now, and Cal, playing tackle on the second eleven, had grown interested in his duties. The first game was only a week away and already the air was surcharged with excitement. House boys began to sport their cherry-red and Hall fellows their blue. Football became the subject for conversation at every meal and Mrs. Linn, as was her yearly custom, displayed a well-meaning but frightfully ignorant interest in the game. Lessons suffered proportionally as football fever increased and the instructors, notably Mr. Kendall, familiarly known as Grouch, railed and scolded. Only Mr. Fordyce, who taught English and physics, and who was called Fussy, took it philosophically, apparently realizing that in a month or so

affairs would be back on their accustomed plane and no one the worse. For once Fussy belied his title. Mr. James, in whose room Cal had his desk, might have been expected to be more lenient with the fellows in their football madness than anyone else, since as physical instructor he had direct charge of the players. But Jim, as he was called, drew a hard and fast line between class-room and playground and so far as he was concerned athletic prowess was no excuse for lack of attention to studies. Several of the boys found this out during the last of October and the first of November, and it was a dull week indeed when someone was not absent from practice on either Hall or House field because Jim believed that a cessation of athletic industry would improve class standing.



He stopped and examined the contents of the bundle

At West House football put Ned’s misfortune out of everyone’s mind, excepting Ned’s and Cal’s. The mystery remained unexplained, but the generally accepted theory, introduced by Ned himself, was that the money had been

mislaid and would sooner or later be discovered. Cal appreciated his room-mate's generosity in seeking by every means to keep suspicion from him, but he hadn't forgiven Ned for himself suspecting. The breach widened rather than lessened as the days went by, and Cal wasn't very happy. Rooming with a chap to whom you have nothing to say and who has nothing to say to you is an uncomfortable business. Neither Ned nor Cal knowingly gave any evidence of the estrangement, but it didn't take the other boys long to discover it. At another time it would have occasioned more interest; just now football was the only topic holding anyone's attention.

On the Monday before the first game Frank Brooks finished his experiments and the First Team as it lined up that afternoon was the team that would face the Hall, barring accidents. West House had secured five places. Sandy was at left guard, Dutch at left tackle, Spud at left end, Ned at right half-back and The Fungus at left half-back. That left six places for East House. Brooks played right guard. The quarter-back was Will M'Crae and on him the Houses pinned much of their faith, for besides being a good general he was an exceptionally good punter. Hoop and Cal had drawn places amongst the substitutes, Hoop as a guard and Cal as a tackle. There had never been much sympathy between these two, for Hoop had a passion for saying mean things without really wanting to hurt, and Cal had not forgotten the incident attending his arrival at West House when Hoop had tripped him up on the steps. Dutch and Hoop got along splendidly together as room-mates, for Dutch was good-natured to a degree and paid very little attention to his chum's gibes. Most anyone could have got on with Dutch Zoller. Being together in the substitute ranks, however, brought Cal and Hoop together a good deal and Cal soon got to

liking the other very well and it wasn't long before he had ceased entertaining any animosity toward Hoop for the little incident on the steps. They walked back to West House together that Monday afternoon after practice was over and discussed their chances of getting into the first game. By this time Cal had cultivated quite a keen interest in football and no one worked harder or took his knocks more cheerfully.

"You're likely to get in before I do," said Hoop. "Brooks is bound to play every game through, while as for Sandy, although Truesdale will play all around him, he's no quitter. But Griffin at right guard gets hurt easily. When you do get in it will be to replace him, Cal. Dutch doesn't know how to get hurt, so you needn't look for his place."

"I suppose we're bound to get into one of the games, aren't we?" Cal asked.

"Sure. We may get into them all for awhile. You can't tell. Brooks *might* lay off part of Saturday's game so as to save himself up; he would if the game went our way, I guess. Then I'd get my whack at it. I'm crazy to get up against that duffer Williams of the Hall. He always plays high and I'll bet I can get right through him."

"I cal'late I'd be kind of scared if they did put me in," said Cal.

"Rot! You wouldn't either! You'd forget all about being scared after the first play. When the other chap is trying to pull you on your nose or walk up your spine you haven't time to think whether you're scared or not. Gee, I'll be sorry when the season's over!"

"What do they do here in winter, Hoop?"

“Oh, play hockey a good deal. We had a fine team last winter. I don’t play myself; can’t skate worth a hang; never seemed to be able to learn how. Do you?”

“Yes, I learned when I was about eight, I guess. I’ve never played hockey, though. Is it hard?”

“Yes, it is. We play basket-ball, too. That’s good fun. West House won the School Championship last year; beat East House and First and Second Hall. I played.”

“No wonder you won, then,” laughed Cal. Hoop grinned.

“I didn’t mean it that way,” he said. “Sandy’s the bang-up basket-ball player. He’s a dandy center. And Ned’s a cracker-jack, too. I guess you could make good at that if you went in for it, Cal.”

“I’d like to try. I’ve seen them play it at home.”

“It’s a lot of fun. Hello!”

They had walked over in advance of the others and now, as they turned the corner of the house, Hoop stopped still and stared. On the top step sat a girl with a brand-new tennis racket in her hands!

“Is that her?” growled Hoop in a whisper.

“Yes,” answered Cal, “and it looks as though she’d come to play tennis, Hoop.” He grinned. “Maybe you can beg off, though; tell her you’re too tired and—”

But Hoop had fled back around the corner. Cal meditated following him, but at that moment Molly turned her head and saw him.

“How do you do?” she called. “I’ve been waiting here the

longest time!”

CHAPTER XV

MOLLY TAKES A HAND

"How do," returned Cal, walking toward her with unflattering deliberation. "I thought you couldn't come."

"I know, but I feared you'd feel so bad about it," she laughed, "that I just *made* them let me. Aren't you terribly glad to see me?"

"Yes," answered Cal without much enthusiasm. "How—how did you manage?"

"Oh, I just kept at it. Aunt Lydia was on my side and she told Aunt Matilda that she guessed you wouldn't eat me if I was to come over here. I've been calling on Mrs. Linn. She's a dear, isn't she?"

"Er—yes." He was looking at the racket with strange fascination and Molly, following his glance, smiled brightly and held it out for his inspection.

"I bought it this morning. Is it a good one?"

"I think so. I don't know much about tennis rackets. Ned can tell you. He will be here in a moment; the others, too. Did you—do you want to play today?"

"Yes, if it isn't too late. I've been here a long time, but I suppose you have all been playing football."

"Yes, we had a pretty stiff practice and I cal'late we're rather too tired to—"

But at this moment the others came around the corner, Hoop, arm in arm with Sandy and Spud, scowling ferociously and evincing a desire to escape. If Cal expected evidences of embarrassment on the part of the girl he was disappointed. She only smiled interestedly.

"You'll have to introduce me, Cal," she whispered.

Cal had never done such a thing in his life, but he managed to get through with the task in some manner, Spud, claiming the privileges of former acquaintance, helping him out.

"And this," said Spud finally, "is Mr. Hooper, who has eagerly volunteered to teach you tennis, Miss—er—Curtis, while here in the background, modest youth that he is, hides Mr. Parker. Mr. Parker is our football guide and wishes me to offer his services to you."

Hoop growled something under his breath that didn't sound especially flattering to Spud, but Clara walked up and shook hands very nicely. Molly bowed and said "How do you do," or shook hands and said "I'm very glad to meet you" at each presentation, and the boys, grinning, seated themselves on the steps and frankly looked her over. She didn't seem very formidable with her pink cheeks and blue eyes, and it was difficult to realize that she figuratively held their welfare in the small hands that gripped her tennis racket.

"I suppose," she said to Sandy, "that Cal has told you that I want awfully to learn to play tennis? He said he didn't play very well but that he thought one of you would find time to show me a little about it. Do you mind my coming over here?"

Sandy proved traitor on the spot.

"Of course not," he declared heartily. "I guess any of us will

be glad to play with you. I suppose it's a bit dull over there with just the Old—I mean with just your aunts."

Spud snickered and Sandy frowned at him.

"Awfully," agreed Molly. "I thought it was very nice of Cal to want me to come over here. And I'm glad you don't mind."

Hoop surreptitiously kicked Cal in the small of the back.

"We don't mind at all," said Spud. "We're tickled. I guess there's time for a lesson now if you start right away. You'd better get your racket and some balls, Hoop."

"I'm tired," muttered Hoop, casting mutinous eyes around the group.

"Miss Molly understands that," said Ned. "She'll forgive you if you're not at your best, I'm sure."

But Molly was viewing Hoop doubtfully.

"I guess he doesn't want to," she said, turning to Sandy. "I'll come some other time."

"I'll give you a lesson myself," declared Sandy, jumping up. "Find my racket for me, will you, Clara? And bring some balls out."

"Why do you call him Clara?" asked Molly as the boy hurried inside on his errand.

"Because his name's Claire," answered Dutch.

"What a funny name for a boy! And what's yours?"

"Dutch."

Molly laughed and went around the group, nodding her head at each in turn.

“Spud.”

“Just Ned.”

“Sandy.”

“The Fungus.”

“Hooper.”

“He means Hoop.”

“And you are Cal,” she said, reaching that youth.

“Short for Calamity,” explained Spud gravely.

“Isn’t he quick?” sneered Hoop, still resentful.

“Quickest thing ever,” answered Spud affably. “Lightning is cold molasses beside me. That’s where I get my name, you know,” he added, turning to Molly. “Ex-spud-itious.”

The boys groaned, but Molly laughed appreciatively.

“I suppose,” she said, “I’ll get you all terribly mixed up at first, and I hope you won’t mind.”

“We never mind,” declared Dutch quite flippantly for him. He received his reward from Molly in the shape of a smile and for some time after secretly rather fancied himself as a wit.

“My name,” she announced, “is Molly. I guess you’d better call me that, if we are going to be friends.”

Clara returned with the racket and she and Sandy proceeded to the tennis court, the others politely electing to watch from a distance so as not to embarrass the novice.

“She’s a funny one,” observed The Fungus with a grin. “‘If we are going to be friends,’ said she. She knows mighty well

we don't dare be anything else!"

"She's a good sort," said Spud. "And I guess we might as well make up our minds to enjoying what they call female society after this. Did you see Sandy fall for her on the spot?"

"Conceited idiot!" growled Hoop. "I hope he falls into the net and—and—"

"Chokes to death," added Spud helpfully. "Remarks of that sort from you, Hoop, are sadly out of place. You are a—a renegade."

"That's all right. I didn't agree to give her tennis lessons."

"Do I really have to take her to watch football?" asked Clara.

"Of course you do," Dutch said severely. "Don't you *want* to?"

"I suppose so," answered the boy.

"Seems to me," observed The Fungus, "that our diplomat isn't on to his job. Are you—diplomating, Ned?"

"Sure thing. Diplomacy is brain-work. I'm thinking."

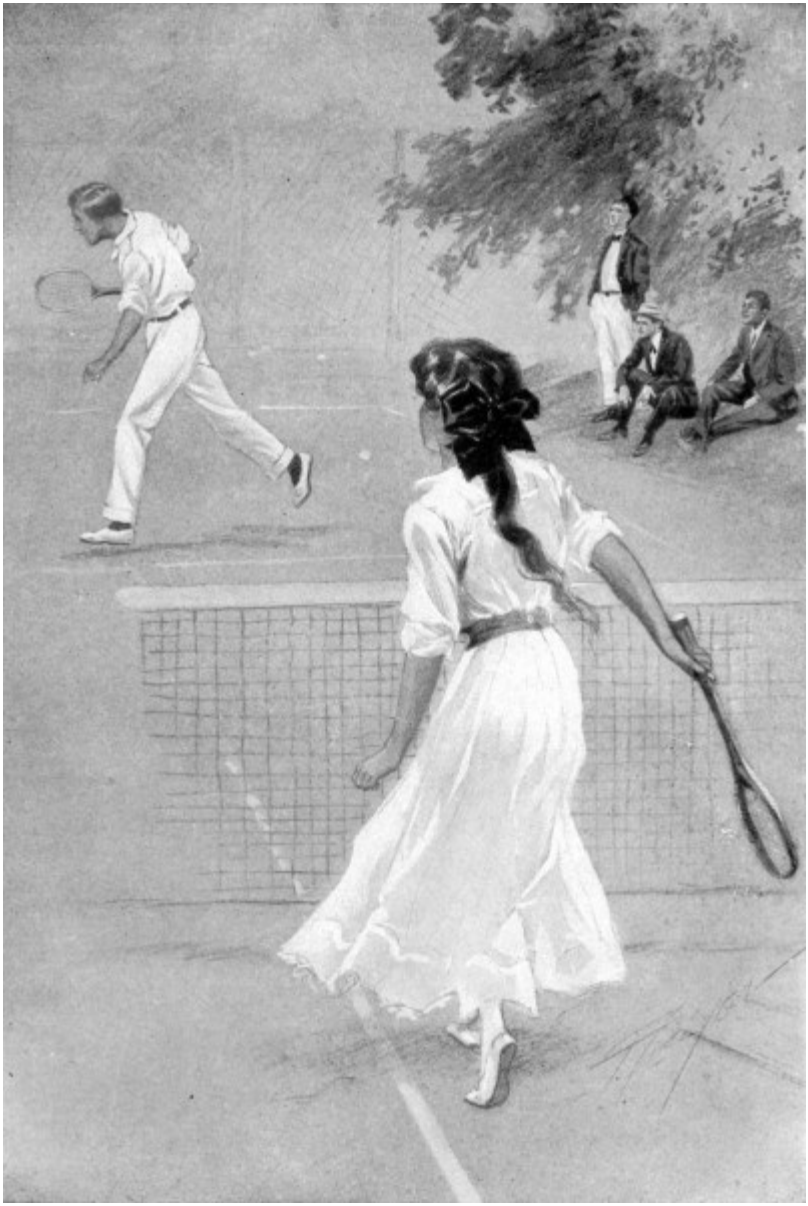
"Don't see why we gave the job to you, then," muttered Hoop. "What we ought to do is to find where she keeps that pillow-case and go over and nab it."

"Huh," Dutch grunted, "I'd like to see anyone go prowling around where Miss Matilda would catch him."

"Pshaw, what's the good of bothering about that old pillow-case?" asked Spud impatiently. "She isn't going to be mean. She's just having a little fun with us. Look at Sandy, fellows;

isn’t he having one grand good time?”

Sandy was toiling valiantly, chasing balls on all sides of the court. Molly’s efforts were ludicrous and pathetic, and for a time she couldn’t get it into her little head that there was any method to the game beside batting the balls back and forth. The supper bell brought welcome relief to her instructor, although he made believe that he simply hated the thought of stopping.



Sandy was toiling valiantly, chasing balls on all sides of the court

“You did finely,” he declared as they returned to the porch. “All you need is a few more lessons.”

“That’s silly,” answered Molly promptly. “I know very well

that I was just as stupid as stupid! I'm going to buy one of those little blue books with the rules in them the first thing in the morning. Then I'll know what it's all about. Thank you very much for teaching me. Good night."

"Good night," said Sandy, and "Good night," called the others. And Molly, her racket tucked under her arm, took her departure. Sandy subsided on the top step and said "Whew!" very expressively. The rest observed him grinningly.

"How now, gallant squire of dames?" asked Spud.

"Someone else has got to take her the next time," responded Sandy with decision. He glanced at Hoop. But that youth was looking the other way and whistling softly.

"Beautiful sunset, Hoop," murmured Spud. Hoop scowled.

"Why don't you draw lots?" he asked.

"We will," said Sandy, "after supper."

They did. He and Spud arranged the slips of paper and in some remarkable fashion the fatal slip fell to Hoop's portion.

"That isn't fair!" he objected. "You fellows faked!"

But they were very stern with him and in the end he accepted the duty with ill grace. There were three more lessons that week and Hoop officiated at two of them, the other being given by Spud. Strangely enough, Hoop, after the first time, became interested in the task and was quite loth to relinquish in Spud's favor when the third lesson was due. Clara's duties began on Wednesday. On that afternoon he took Molly in charge and escorted her to the football field, where she occasioned not a little interest on the part of the candidates. It was something new and novel to have a girl in the audience at

practice and I fancy some of the boys worked harder than usual in the hope of distinguishing themselves and so winning a glance of approval from Miss Molly. Clara was very patient and instructive. A few weeks before he had had very little football knowledge himself, but he had watched and studied with enthusiasm and was now a very capable instructor. Molly had never seen the game played before, but, while she objected to it at first as being much too rough, it wasn't long before she was an ardent champion of the House Team. Clara lent her his rule book and she studied it diligently during the next week. Some of the questions she asked were a trifle disconcerting; such as "Why don't they have the field smaller so they won't have so far to go to make a touchdown?" or "Would it count anything if they threw the ball over that bar instead of kicking it?" She listened avidly to all the football discussions on the steps of West House and declared on Friday that if House didn't beat Hall she'd never speak to any of them again. That threat must have nerved the House Team to desperation, for on the next afternoon it battled valiantly against Hall and managed to hold its opponent scoreless through thirty-five of the forty minutes of playing time, and had begun to count on a tied game at least when a miserable fumble by The Fungus on the Hall's forty yard-line turned the fortunes of the day. It was Pete Grow himself who leaked through the House line, gathered up the ball and, protected by hastily formed interference, romped over the line with it for the only score of the game. They failed at goal and a few minutes later House trailed off the field vanquished to the tune of 5—0.

House was heart-broken. To have kept Hall at bay through thirty-five minutes of the fiercest sort of battling and then to lose on a fluke was the hardest sort of luck. The Fungus felt the

disgrace keenly and looked forlorn and tragic enough to melt a heart of stone. After the first miserable ten minutes succeeding the game his team-mates set themselves generously to work to cheer him up.

"Your fault nothing!" scoffed big, good-hearted Westlake, the House center. "Why, any one of us ought to have got that ball. What if you did fumble it? Gee, we all do that. The trouble was that the rest of us weren't quick enough to make it safe."

"That's right," said Ned sadly. "I ought to have had it myself. That chap Pete Grow, though, was through like a streak."

"I guess," said Dutch, "it's up to me, when you come right down to facts. I ought never to have let Grow through."

"Never mind whose fault it was," said Brooks cheerfully. "We've just got to get busy this week and get together. It mustn't happen next time, fellows. We've got to develop team-play in the next five days or they'll wipe up the sod with us. After all, we had them at a standstill until that pesky fumble."

Clara and Molly went back to West House silent and sad. But by the time they had reached the porch and Molly had established herself in her accustomed place with her slim back against a pillar the silence gave place to regrets and discussion. Molly was inclined to be indignant with the Hall.

"They oughtn't to have taken advantage of Fungus's mistake," she declared. "I don't think that was very—very sportsmanlike, do you?"

But Clara pointed out to her that ethically Hall had not transgressed. "Fumbling's part of the game," he said, "and

you've got to take advantage of everything, Molly. We played a pretty good game, after all, I think."

"We played a wonderful game!" she assented stoutly. "Why, we just put it all over the Hall at first." Clara smiled at the phrase she used.

"Anyhow, I guess we can do better the next time. The trouble today was that we couldn't get near enough Hall's goal to try a drop-kick or placement."

"How near would we have to get?" asked Molly.

"Oh, about thirty yards, I guess. M'Crae's a dandy from the thirty yard-line."

"Wasn't Spud splendid?" she asked. "He just threw those Hall men about like—like straws!"

"Spud's a dandy end," Clara agreed. "He played all around Smith. I do wish, though, we might have won. Now we've got to get both the other games."

"And we will, too," said Molly, her eyes flashing. "You just wait and see!"

The others came dejectedly home and until supper time they threshed out the day's battle over and over again, Molly taking a fair share in the debate. The general tone was pessimistic, but Molly refused to entertain the thought of ultimate defeat for a moment.

"You've just *got* to win the next two games," she declared. "And you're going to, aren't you, Sandy?" But she had selected the wrong person in Sandy. He shook his head discouragedly.

“I’m afraid not,” he answered. “They’ve got team-play, Molly, and we play every man for himself.”

“Oh, you and your team-play!” scoffed Spud. “Why can’t we learn team-play as well as they can? You wait until next Saturday.”

“Well, I’m through,” muttered The Fungus miserably. “I guess Brooksie will put in Folsom on Monday.”

“Folsom!” jeered Dutch. “Folsom can’t begin to play your game; nor Westlake, either. Don’t you be so sore, old man. You couldn’t help it.”

“Of course I could have helped it, only—well, if Brooksie keeps me on I’ll bet it won’t happen again. After this I’m going to dig my nails into it!”

“Couldn’t you have explained to them that you didn’t mean to drop that ball?” asked Molly earnestly. “That it was just a—a mistake, Fungus?”

The laughter that this question produced cleared the atmosphere not a little and by the time the bell had rung West House was a good deal more cheerful and much hungrier.

“Isn’t she the limit?” laughed Spud as they went in to the dining-room. “Asking if Fungus couldn’t have explained that it was a mistake!”

“She’s a mighty nice kid,” said Dutch.

“She nearly yelled herself hoarse this afternoon,” said Cal. “Did you see her, Hoop?”

“Yes, and once she was jumping up and down like an Indian. I guess she’s the most enthusiastic rooter we’ve got.”

“The Obnoxious Kid,” murmured Spud.

“Obnoxious nothing!” objected Sandy indignantly. “She’s all right!”

And West House agreed to a man.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PIPPIN CLUB IS FORMED

The next afternoon, a warm Sunday, a strange thing happened. West House in full force filed out of the gate, along the road and in through the entrance to the Curtis place. The invitation had been delivered by Molly after church at noon, with Miss Matilda standing watchfully by and Miss Lydia beaming and nodding over her shoulder. It was a momentous event, for nothing of the sort had ever happened before in the history of West House. The boys had attired themselves in their Sunday best and were a very meek and well-behaving group as they mounted the porch and rang the bell. Spud pretended to be the victim of a vast and overwhelming terror and grasped Sandy's arm convulsively when they heard the bell jangle inside.

"I would I were away," he muttered. "Ah, woe is me!"

To their relief it was Molly herself, Molly in a stiffly starched muslin dress, who opened the door to them. They filed decorously in, deposited their hats and caps on the marble table in the hall and right-wheeled into the parlor. There they seated themselves in a circle about the room and felt very awkward and uncomfortable. Molly did her best to set her guests at ease, but the task was a difficult one. The assemblage was like her dress, very stiff and starchy. They discussed morning service, the weather, Spud's new necktie and the pictures on the walls, and just when things did seem to be thawing out the least little bit there was the sound of footfalls

on the stairs and instantly the guests froze into immobility.

Entered Miss Matilda followed by Miss Lydia. The guests arose as one man, painfully polite and serious. Miss Matilda motioned them back to their seats. Down they sat with a unanimity that suggested previous rehearsals. Miss Matilda announced that she was very glad to see them, and Sandy murmured—well, nobody ever knew what he murmured. But the tone was quite correct and the murmur served the purpose. Miss Lydia, plainly embarrassed, smoothed her black silk gown over her knees and smiled. Conversation proceeded by fits and starts. It went like a trolley car in a crowded street. Just when they thought it was nicely started, with a clear track ahead, it stopped with a bump. Then, after a dismal silence off it started once more with a jerk. Miss Matilda, Molly, Sandy and Spud were the principal conversationalists. Molly supplied subjects, Miss Matilda frowned them aside, Sandy rescued them and Spud babbled. Babbled is the only word for Spud's efforts. He babbled of the weather and the dust in the streets and Mrs. Linn's tonsilitis—a mild attack of no importance save as a subject for discourse—and finally of Molly's tennis. The others looked on in evident and often open-mouthed admiration and awe. Strangely enough it was Spud's last babble that cleared the conversational track for several blocks, so to speak.

"Well, I'm glad she's doing nicely at it," said Miss Matilda with a sniff, "though I don't see why she wants to learn it. In my day young girls didn't race around hitting rubber balls with snowshoes."

"It's—it's a very pleasant game," suggested Spud, vastly encouraged by his success, "and quite—er—popular

nowadays, ma'am."

"Popular! I dare say; most anything that's silly enough is popular these days, it seems. When I was a girl sewing and embroidery, yes, and plain cooking, were popular."

"Yes'm."

"Well, I don't say but what this tennis may be good for Molly. I guess most anything that will keep her nose out of books for awhile will be beneficial. And it's very kind of you young gentlemen to teach her the game."

"Not at all, Miss Curtis," protested Sandy.

"I say it is," responded Miss Matilda firmly. "Boys don't usually like to have girls about them. I told Molly that when she first asked me to let her go over to your house. She said you were different." Miss Matilda smiled briefly. "Maybe you are. My experience with boys makes me convinced that they're all pretty much alike. I haven't anything especial against them, though they most usually have dirty shoes—" Eight pair of feet crept under eight chairs—"and are noisy. And sometimes they don't pay much attention to the eighth commandment." Rapid glances were exchanged between her hearers. Dutch was plainly striving to recall which commandment was which. Miss Matilda arose in her majesty. "Come, Lydia," she said. Miss Lydia obeyed, casting a final embarrassed smile over the circle. At the door Miss Matilda paused. "I hope you will come again," she said quite graciously. "It will be very pleasant for my niece. We will be glad to see you any time so long as you behave yourselves."

Exit Miss Matilda and Miss Lydia.

Spud drew a long breath that seemed to come from his shoes

and glanced about him.

“Did anybody speak?” he inquired. Molly giggled softly. The footsteps of the Misses Curtis died away upstairs.

“I guess,” said Sandy, looking around for confirmation, “that we’ll have to be going back now.”

“Yes,” said Hoop and The Fungus in a breath.

“Oh, please!” exclaimed Molly. “Let’s go out to the shed. It’s dandy out there; and there are lots of apples.”

“Well—” began Sandy hesitatingly. But Molly had already jumped up and was leading the way. The boys seized their caps from the table and followed her down the steps and around the side of the house. At Molly’s command the sliding door was pushed back and a fervid aroma of apples met them.

“Now let’s bring some of those boxes over here by the door,” she said, “and sit down. Two of you can have the wheelbarrow.”

Presently they were all seated, Spud and Cal on an empty barrel which creaked ominously whenever they stirred, but not before Molly had led the way to the best apples and they had supplied themselves therewith.

“I’m awfully fond of apples,” she announced from her seat on a soap box by the door. “Aren’t you?” She addressed Sandy.

“Yes,” he answered, “and these are dandies; aren’t they, Ned?”

“Great,” Ned agreed with gusto. “I don’t believe we ever knew about these.”

There was a moment of deep silence. Then Molly threw back her head with a peal of laughter and the boys, looking silly and sheepish, finally joined in. So far the incident of the midnight adventure in the orchard had not been mentioned between them. But now Spud said:

“That was a great joke you played on us that night, Molly.”

Presently they were all seated

“Were you awfully angry when Cal told you?” she asked.

“No. Only Sandy. He was sort of peeved.”

“I?” said Sandy in surprise. “Not at all.” He frowned at Spud, but that irrepressible young gentleman went on.

“I guess you didn’t know, Molly,” he said, “that Ned was

appointed a committee of one to—”

“Shut up, Spud!” growled Ned.

“To get that pillow-case back. Ned’s our diplomat. Whenever he is extra nice to you you must be very careful. That’s his diplomacy. He’s after the pillow-case.”

“Oh, I’m not afraid,” answered Molly. “No one knows where it is, you see.”

“I do,” said Cal.

“Where?” asked Spud. But Molly gave a cry of alarm.

“Don’t tell him, Cal! Don’t you dare!”

“I guess it wouldn’t do him much good if I did,” said Cal. “He couldn’t get it.”

“N-no, I suppose not. Perhaps some day if you’re all just awfully nice to me I’ll give it back to you.”

“Tell us about it,” said Ned. “How did you fix yourself up that night?”

So Molly recounted her adventures, and by leaning forward they could see the rain-spout that she had clambered up and down by. Viewing it was, however, disastrous to Spud and Cal, for an empty barrel set on its side is at best an uncertain seat, and now when they both leaned forward the barrel “took it into its head,” as Spud explained, to lean backward, with a readily imagined result. When they had picked themselves up Ned tried to clap Spud’s pun.

“The barrel,” he said, “was merely trying to stave you off.”

“Hoop you choke,” responded Spud promptly.

After which scintillations Molly went on with her story.

“Of course,” said Sandy, when she had finished, “you have a perfect right to keep the pillow-case, Molly—”

“Right of capture,” interpolated The Fungus.

“But if your aunts ever found it and told Doctor Webster, we’d be in a bad mess. So don’t you think you’d better—er—better—”

“No, I don’t,” laughed Molly. “And you don’t need to worry, Sandy, one bit. It’s in a perfectly safe place, and locked up. And just as long as you’re nice to me, and do everything I want you to it will stay there!”

Spud groaned. “She has us in her power, fellows.”

“Yes, I have,” Molly exulted laughingly. “And I shall make you do anything I want!”

“Well, don’t want too much,” said Hoop.

“I hope,” inquired Spud concernedly, “that our friend Mr. Hooper is properly attentive, Molly? If he doesn’t do what you want him to let us know and we’ll kill him. And Clara, too. Is he quite satisfactory?”

“Clara is perfectly dear,” answered Molly. “And so is Hoop.” Hoop tried to look bored but was quite evidently pleased. “So you all are,” she concluded, beaming about her.

“We thank you,” said Ned, laying his hand on his waistcoat in the vicinity of his heart. “Any little thing we can do for you —”

“I shall never believe in you again, Ned,” said Molly sadly, “after what Spud told me. Whenever you say anything nice I

shall think that you're after my pillow-case."

"In that case—" began Ned, but he was drowned by a chorus of groans. "I shall sneak another apple," he finished.

"Sneak one for me, too," said Hoop. "Where do these apples grow, Molly?" he asked carelessly. Molly made a face at him.

"I know but I sha'n't tell you," she answered. "If I did you might all come over here after some and get caught."

"No, I was just thinking about next year," Hoop assured her. "We never make more than one raid a year."

"You will please," Spud admonished Cal, "not throw your cores on the club house floor. Toss them out on the gravel. They look much better there."

"Oh, let's call this a club!" cried Molly eagerly.

"Right," Ned agreed. "The Woodshed Club."

"The Apple Club would be better," suggested Clara.

"No; let me see." Sandy frowned thoughtfully. "What kind of apples are these we've been eating, Molly?"

"Newtown Pippins," answered Molly.

"There you have it, then; the Pippin Club!"

"Dandy," said The Fungus. "We're the Nine Pippins."

"And we'll meet here every Sunday afternoon," cried Molly, clapping her hands. "And this shall be our club house."

"Um," observed Ned doubtfully. "Won't it be a bit coolish in winter?"

"The house committee," said Spud, "must look into the

matter of heating the club house. Steam would do."

"We ought to elect officers," suggested Hoop. "I'll be president."

"You dry up. Molly's president." This from Sandy. "And I'll be secretary. And Ned shall be—"

"This is a mighty funny election," interrupted The Fungus. "What am I?"

"You're a toadstool," said Spud severely. "Sit down and subside. I move that Ned be elected something and that I be made treasurer."

"There won't be anything to treasure, Spud," said Molly. "Except the apples."

"Oh, we'll have initiation fees and dues," responded Spud cheerfully. "Pay up, please. I need the money."

"Better let Ned be treasurer, then," said Sandy. "He needs the money worse. He's shy eight dollars."

That aroused Molly's curiosity and she had to be told of the mysterious disappearance of Ned's money, first having been sworn to secrecy.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Ned!" said Molly. "And I don't mind your being a—a diplomat now."

"I've always heard," remarked The Fungus, "that diplomacy was an expensive career."

"I tell you what!" Molly beamed brightly across at Ned. "I'll think about it tonight when I'm going to sleep and see if I can't dream where it is, Ned."

Spud made a gesture of triumph. “Ned, your money’s as good as found!” he declared.

“Well, you needn’t laugh,” Molly protested. “I have found things that way; once I *know* of. When I was a little girl I lost my doll and I felt just terribly about it. We hunted everywhere for her, mama and nurse and me. And I was so unhappy that I cried myself to sleep after nurse had gone. And in the night I dreamed that she was hidden under the oak chest in the hall!”

“The nurse?” Ned asked.

“No, my doll, stupid! And when I got up in the morning I went down and looked and there she was! Now, wasn’t that—remarkable?”

“It was. But you see, Molly, we haven’t any oak chest in our hall.”

“We might get one, though,” said Spud helpfully. Molly pouted.

“Oh, if you’re going to make fun of me—”

“We’re not,” protested Ned. “It’s a wonderful scheme. You go ahead and dream, Molly, and see what happens.”

“Maybe you’d better eat some mince pie or a welsh rarebit or something before you go to bed,” said Sandy, “so you’ll be sure to dream.”

“I always dream,” replied Molly. “Every night of my life. And some of them are just beautiful!”

“Wish mine were,” said Spud. “Mine are just awful. You and Cal ought to compare symptoms. Cal has a fine time dreaming, don’t you, Cal? Remember the night Ned lost his

money you dreamed of thieves?”

“Really?” cried Molly. “Then it was thieves that took your money, Ned!”

“I guess it was—if the money was taken. I guess, though, that I just mislaid it.”

“Gee,” said The Fungus admiringly, “you talk of mislaying eight dollars as though it was eight cents! Wish I was rich like that.”

“I tell you what you do, Molly,” said Spud. “You dream about sixteen dollars instead of eight, and then when Ned finds it you and I’ll divide the other eight!”

“Spud, you’re too silly for anything,” said Molly severely.

“He’s a boiled idiot,” Sandy agreed. “We’ve got to be going, fellows. We’ve had a very nice time, Molly.”

“Yes, thanks, and we’ll come again,” said The Fungus.

“Next Sunday, then,” Molly replied. “Don’t forget. The Pippin Club meets every Sunday afternoon.”

“In their club house on—on Apple Avenue,” added Spud. “I move a vote of thanks to the president for her hospitality. All in favor will signify by taking another apple. It is so moved. As treasurer I’ll take two.”

“A terrible thought strikes me,” said Dutch as they left the club house. “We’ll probably have apple-sauce for supper!”

A groan, loud, prolonged and dismal, arose on the afternoon air. Spud viewed the two pippins in his hands and shook his head over them.

“They don’t look as good as they did,” he muttered. “I guess I’ll put them back—in my pocket.”

They said good-bye to Molly at the steps and then ambled back to West House, munching as they went.

CHAPTER XVII
CAL BUYS A SUIT

"House Eleven: Practice at 3:45 sharp today. No cuts. Brooks, Captain."

"Sounds like business, what?" asked Spud of Cal as he read the notice in School Building Monday morning. "Say, I hope Brooksie won't take it out on The Fungus for that beastly fumble. Wasn't that the meanest luck ever? Between you and me, Cal, Fungus ought to have recovered that ball. He had lots of time. It looked like a case of stage-fright. I guess Fungus was so horrified at what he'd done he couldn't move for a second. But he will make good all right if Brooksie doesn't take him off today. But I don't believe he will. Cap has got a whole lot of common-sense. I guess that's one thing that makes him such a dandy captain."

Spud was right in his surmise. The Fungus went back to his place at left half-back that afternoon just as though there hadn't been any fumble. The only change made was in the substitution of Folsom for Boyle at full. It was the hardest practice of the season and lasted until it was almost too dark to see the ball with any certainty. Brooks was trying to make his machine run smoother. All the parts were there and they represented plenty of power, but so far the full power hadn't materialized. A football team is like, we will say, an engine which is rated at twenty horse-power. If the engine runs smoothly it will develop its twenty, but if the parts aren't assembled just right, if each one isn't timed exactly with the

others, there's a loss of power and the twenty is perhaps no better than a fifteen. So it was with the House Team. Brooks, who had, as Spud said, a lot of common-sense—and a good deal of football sense added to it—realized that his team represented the best of the material at hand and that if it was to develop the power of which it was capable it must be perfectly adjusted. So that afternoon and every other afternoon that week the constant cry was "Get together!" The back-field was the chief offender. Play after play was pulled off—the team had a repertoire of fourteen at this stage—and always someone was too early or too late. Brooks argued and explained and pleaded and scolded. Ned gave way to H. Westlake at right half and Morris took M'Crae's place at quarter, and still things went wrong. Hoop went into the line for Brooks so that the captain might coach from back of the team. A thing that exasperated Brooks was that over on the Hall gridiron the rival team was running through its signals with all the smoothness that the House eleven lacked. But Rome wasn't built in a day and Brooks told himself that it was something accomplished if he had only made the fellows understand what was wanted. Perhaps tomorrow or the next day they would put his preaching into practice. It was a very tired group of players and substitutes that trailed back to the gymnasium at dusk. The Hall Team had long since disappeared and they had the gymnasium to themselves. Brooks, attired scantily in a generous bath towel, spoke a few words to his weary team-mates on his way to the shower.

"You fellows can play this game the way it ought to be played," he said, "play it well enough to lick Hall. But you won't until you can get it into your heads that a football team isn't made up of eleven fellows each acting for himself but of

eleven fellows acting like one. You know your plays but you don't know how to use them. That's what the trouble is. Hall hasn't any better material than we have in spite of the fact that she has more fellows to draw from. But Hall gets together. The line and the ends and the backs work like so many different parts of a watch, and the result is nice smooth football. You fellows in the line are doing pretty well, but the backs aren't helping you along. Now tomorrow I want to see this team take hold and run through its plays like clock-work. If it doesn't there's going to be another victory for Hall on Saturday. I'm doing all I can. Now it's up to you fellows."

Brooks disappeared into the bath and there was a sound of rushing water beyond the canvas curtain. That's all the sound there was for a minute. Then Brad Miller whistled a tune softly and stole bathward and one after another the rest followed, as many as there was room for, while the balance waited, subdued and chastened.

On Tuesday practice was no less vigorous, but Brooks let them off after an hour and a quarter. There was some improvement noticeable. Cal got in at left tackle for a while and did very well; so well that Dutch, relegated to the substitutes, looked distinctly anxious. It was almost supper time when West House reached home. On the steps sat Molly, a red ribbon pinned to the front of her gown in honor of the Houses. Mrs. Linn had been talking to her from the doorway but hurried kitchenward when the boys appeared.

"Didn't see you at practice, Molly," said Ned, throwing himself down wearily on the steps.

"No, I didn't go today," answered Molly. "I was teaching Clara tennis."

“What? Well, you must be getting on!”

“I don’t play very well, of course, Ned, but I know what you have to do. And that’s what I was showing Clara.”

“Oh, I see. Where is he?” Ned looked about him.

“He—he went upstairs.” Molly hesitated and looked troubled. “He got hit with a ball.”

“How awful!” laughed Spud. “Did it kill him?”

“N-no, but it made his nose bleed. It hit him right square on the nose.”

“Why, Molly!” said Spud in shocked tones. “Is that the way you treat your opponents? You ought to be playing football instead of tennis.”

“I didn’t mean to, Spud. I just hit a ball across and he was leaning over the net quite near and didn’t see it coming. It—it bled horribly.”

“Well, he will be all right,” Sandy said comfortingly. “Accidents will happen on the best regulated courts.”

“Just the same,” observed Spud, “it isn’t considered sportsmanlike to maim your enemy, Molly.” But Molly looked so troubled that Spud stopped his efforts at teasing. “I see you’re wearing the right color, Molly.”

“So is Clara,” murmured Ned.

“Yes, but if you don’t beat the Hall next Saturday I’m going to wear blue,” she answered. There was a groan of protest at that.

“We’re going to win, though,” said Spud sturdily, “aren’t

we, Cal?”

“I cal’late we’ll put up a good fight,” was the cautious reply.

“We’re going to win,” said The Fungus vehemently as he got up. “That’s what we’re going to do. Now I’ll go up and see how Clara’s nose is behaving. I hope it isn’t damaged. It’s a nice little nose.”

It wasn’t damaged, but it presented a reddened and swollen appearance when Clara brought it to the supper table a few minutes later. He had to put up with a good deal of ragging from the others.

“I shall have to tell Molly to be more careful with you,” said Spud. “You’re not used to the gentle ways of women, Clara.”

The incident, however, brought about more trouble for Molly than for her victim, for the following noon, when Cal returned from morning school, Molly called to him from beyond the lilac hedge that separated the two houses.

“Hello,” he said as he went over, “what’s the matter with you?” For Molly looked extremely depressed.

“They won’t let me go out of the yard today,” she said mournfully. “And Hoop was going to play tennis with me after dinner.”

“Why won’t they?” Cal demanded.

“Because I told them about Clara’s nose and Aunt Matilda said I was to stay at home until I had learned to be more careful and lady-like. And I told her I didn’t mean to do it, too!”

“That’s a shame,” said Cal warmly. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“Aunt Matilda says I’m harum-scarum,” sighed Molly. “Do *you* think I am, Cal?”

“I—I cal—I guess I don’t just know what that is,” he answered. “How long have you got to stay in the yard?”

“I don’t know. All of today, anyhow. Why, what have you done to your coat, Cal Boland?”

“That? That’s just a tear,” replied Cal. “Hoop and I were tussling this morning.”

“You must have it mended or it will get worse. Haven’t you another suit you can put on?”

“Only my Sunday one.”

“Then you’d better buy one at once,” she said severely. “That isn’t fit to be seen in, Cal. All the other boys look so nice, too.”

Cal viewed as much of his suit as was in sight to him and shook his head ruefully.

“I cal’late I’ve got to,” he said. “Seems like I get into a lot of trouble with my clothes. This was a perfectly good suit when I came here.” Molly laughed.

“Well, it’s perfectly good for nothing now. Get a dark suit, Cal, won’t you? You’d look so much nicer in dark clothes.”

“That’s what Ned said. Dark clothes show dirt, though, don’t they?”

“They couldn’t show much more dirt than those do,” replied Molly scornfully. “Just look at them! You ought to be ashamed to be seen in them.”

Cal looked a trifle surprised and a little ashamed.

“I guess they are pretty bad,” he muttered. “I can have them cleaned, though, can’t I?”

“I suppose so, but they’ll never be real nice again. You could wear them as a sort of second-best, Cal.”

“Y-yes. It’s sort of a bother, though, having two suits, I guess. You’d always have to be changing.”

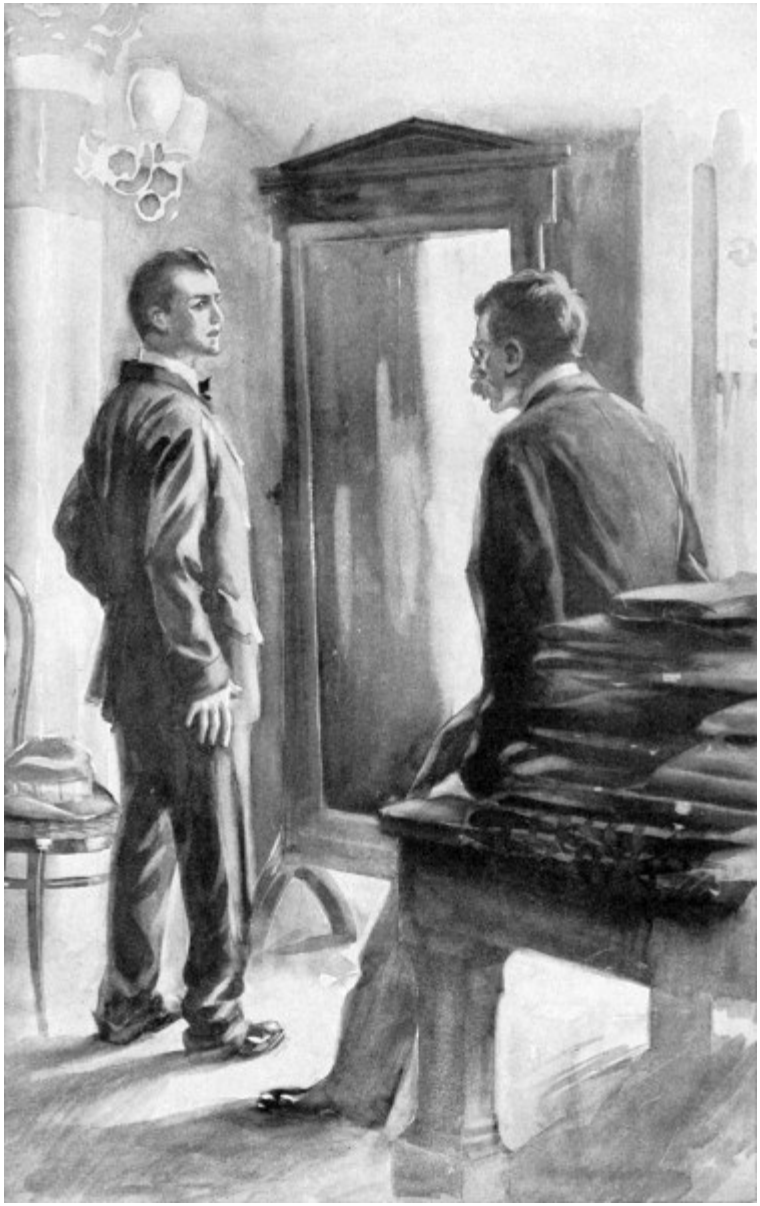
But when he left her, bearing a message to Hoop, he went up to his room and composed a letter to his mother in which he explained the necessity for new clothes and asked her to send him twelve dollars. Cal had been to the village but once since his arrival at school and consequently he still retained most of his two dollars and eighty-five cents, and some of this, he calculated, could be added to the twelve dollars if necessary. In the matter of shoes he had been lucky. His own were showing signs of giving out, and when Dutch had offered him the loan of a pair of baseball shoes, with cleated soles, Cal had thankfully accepted. These he wore when he played football, so saving his own shoes a deal of hard usage. The reply to his letter came promptly two days later.

“You’ll be wanting other things besides a suit,” wrote his mother, “and so I send you fifteen dollars instead of the twelve you asked for. Don’t forget to have your hair cut every three weeks. It will soon be time for winter underwear and you are to put on the old ribbed ones first. They are very warm but won’t last long. When you come home at Christmas time I will get you another suit of them. Does Mrs. Linn keep your socks darned up for you? And do you need more socks yet, I wonder. There are some gray wool ones here that belonged to your father but maybe they would be too thick for you. Are your

shoes holding out? You were always hard on shoes. Have them mended before they go to pieces. I am glad you are getting on so well with your studies and like your school so much. I wouldn't play football very often. The papers are full of accidents to boys playing football. It must be a very rough game. Nancy is well except for a cold on her chest and sends love to you...."

There was no practice Friday afternoon, and Cal went shopping. He wanted to ask Ned where to look for his suit, but couldn't bring himself to do it. He did ask Spud, but Spud had never purchased clothing other than boots and stockings and ties in Woodfield and his advice was vague.

"I guess I'd go to the big store opposite the Post Office," he said. "I forget the name, but you'll find it all right."



Cal buys a new suit of clothes

Cal was hoping that Spud would offer to accompany him, but Spud was looking over a few rusty golf clubs and waiting for Brad Miller to call and take him over to the links. So Cal went off by himself. He had never bought a suit of clothes

unassisted and was filled with misgivings. But they were extraordinarily polite and attentive at Simmons's Boston Store and it was all over before he knew it and he was trudging back to West House with a big pasteboard box under his arm. The clerk had offered to deliver it for him in the morning, but Cal, now that he had made the purchase, was eager to get it home and have a good look at himself in the mirror. The house was empty when he reached it, although Hoop and Clara and Molly were playing tennis outside. He tried the new suit on and looked it over. It was necessary to get on to a chair in order to see the bottoms of the trousers and when he saw them Cal had a vague suspicion that they terminated with far too many wrinkles. He wished he might have Ned's opinion on them. At least, though, he had followed advice and bought a dark suit, and one, too, that wouldn't easily show dirt. The goods was a strange mixture of black and white, the white consisting of faint lines forming a double plaid. In effect the suit was dark gray, almost an Oxford at a distance. The surface was quite rough and seemed to contain more than an ordinary share of tiny splinters of wood.

"I cal'late," he told himself, "this sheep must have lived in a lumber yard!"

The clothes didn't look nearly as natty as they had at the store and the coat had a perverse way of settling away from his neck at the back. Also, the vest—waistcoat, the man had called it—was decidedly tight across his chest. He wondered whether Marm couldn't set the top button over a little for him. No, on the whole, he wasn't nearly so satisfied with his purchase as he had been at the Boston Store, but he cal'lated it would do. He guessed it would have to! He got out of it and hung it up in the closet and stowed the box on a shelf. Tomorrow he would put

it on and have Marm mend the suit he was wearing. Then he would have it cleaned, if they didn't ask too much, and perhaps it would last him until Christmas. There was one thing to be said for his new clothes, he reflected as he made his way downstairs, and that was that they had cost him even less than he had dared hope for. Nine dollars and eighty-five cents wasn't much for a whole suit. And he had almost eight dollars left! He cal'lated—no, he *guessed* he wasn't such a poor shopper after all!

Downstairs he found that most of West House had returned and were watching the tennis. Only Dutch and Spud were absent.

"Hello, Cal," was the greeting of The Fungus. "What you been doing? Grinding?"

"I've been down town," answered Cal.

"Thunder! Wish I could go. But what's the use when you haven't any coin? Did you bring anything home with you? Any peanuts or chocolate, Cal?" But Cal shook his head.

"I just bought a suit of clothes," he said.

"Really?" The news seemed to affect them all, The Fungus, Ned and Sandy, with lively interest and surprise. "Think of that! Why, Cal, you'll be a regular Beau Brummel."

Cal didn't know what that was, but he smiled good-naturedly. "It's just a cheap suit," he explained. "This one's getting sort of shabby."

"Now that you speak of it," laughed Sandy, "it does seem a bit worn about the edges."

"Where'd you buy it?" asked Ned gruffly.

“Simmons’s.”

“Rotten hole,” Ned grunted. “I told you where to go.”

“I forgot where you said,” answered Cal meekly.

“Could have asked, couldn’t you?”

“I didn’t want to.” Sandy and The Fungus exchanged glances. That something was very wrong between Ned and Cal had been apparent for some time, but what it was no one could guess.

“Bet you you got stung,” said Ned with more than a trace of satisfaction in his tones.

“I don’t cal’late I did,” answered Cal calmly. “I only paid nine eighty-five.”

Further discussion of the subject was stopped by Molly, Hoop and Clara, who had finished their set and now joined the others on the steps.

“He only beat us six to three,” announced Molly triumphantly, nodding at Hoop. “Don’t you think we did pretty well?”

“I guess it would have been closer if I hadn’t been in it,” said Clara.

“You did splendidly! Didn’t he, Hoop?”

“He will learn all right, Molly.”

“Didn’t hit you on the nose again, did they?” asked Ned. Clara reddened and shook his head.

“I guess I never will,” Molly laughed. “It cost me two days in jail.”

“It was a pretty big jail,” said Cal.

“Yes, but it seems pretty small when you know you can’t get out of it!”

“By the way, Molly,” asked The Fungus, “did you ever dream what had become of Ned’s money?” Molly’s face fell and she sighed.

“N-no, not exactly. I tried three times, too. The first time—that was Sunday night, you know—I did dream something but I couldn’t quite remember it in the morning.” She wrinkled her forehead. “It was something, though, about apples; and Cal was in it, too. But I don’t seem to remember dreaming about the money.”

“Funny you should have dreamed of apples,” laughed Sandy.

“Not half as funny as dreaming about Cal,” said Hoop. “What you had was a nightmare, Molly.”

“Produced by too many pippins,” added The Fungus.

“I’m going to try again,” she said cheerfully. “I’m sure that was a perfectly good dream—if I only could have remembered it.”

“Sure,” agreed Ned soothingly. “Like the Irishman’s horse. It was a perfectly good horse, only it was dead.”

CHAPTER XVIII
A FALLING-OUT

The next morning Cal awoke with a feeling of excitement difficult to account for during the first moments of consciousness. Then he remembered that today was the day of the second football contest and that his new suit of clothes awaited him in the closet. He wasn't sure which excited him the most, the football game or the new clothes. Anyway, the latter came first. He sprang out of bed, washed and then got the suit from the closet. Ned, sitting on the edge of his bed, looked on silently, unwashed and undressed, while his roommate clothed himself in the new apparel. Cal pulled at the waistcoat in a vain endeavor to make it set better and yanked the coat up at the back in the hope that it would somewhere come into relationship with his collar. Both efforts were fruitless. All the time he was embarrassedly aware of Ned's unflinching stare. At last Ned spoke.

"Take them off," he said quietly.

"Wh-what?"

"Take them off."

"Why? What for? What's the matter with them?" Cal faltered.

"Matter!" cried Ned. "What isn't the matter? They look—they look like a couple of gunny-sacks! They don't fit anywhere! The trousers are the same size all the way down and are three inches too long for you. The vest wrinkles across the

top and the coat—" Words failed him for a moment. "The coat is the worst I ever saw! It doesn't touch you anywhere except on the shoulders, and one sleeve's an inch longer than the other! Matter with it! Gee, what's right with it?"

"It—it was cheap," Cal defended.

"It looks it!" was the disgusted reply. "It's the ugliest cloth I ever saw in my life. We used to have a Newfoundland dog that was about twelve years old and had grown gray and grizzled. I couldn't stand looking at that suit, Cal. It would remind me too much of poor old Charlie."

"Well, I've bought it and—"

"Take it off!" commanded Ned inexorably. "I'm not going to have any fellow that rooms with me make a show of himself if I can help it."

"But—but what can I do?" asked Cal discouragedly, eyeing the subject of Ned's disparagement with sudden distaste. "I've paid for it."

"And you paid enough for it, too. What can you do? You do as I tell you. You take it off and bundle it up. After breakfast I'll go to the village with you and I'll pick out a suit that doesn't look like poor old Charlie."

"You mean—change it? Will they let me?"

"Of course they will, though they won't want to, maybe. I'll bet the clerk that got rid of that suit to you got a raise in salary last night!"

"It looked a lot better in the store," murmured Cal.

"Yes; well we'll take it back to the store. That's where it

belongs. My, but you were easy, weren't you? How much did you say it cost?"

"Nine dollars and eighty-five cents," replied Cal meekly.

"Nine dollars too much, then. Was that all you could pay?"

"No, but it looked like a perfectly good—"

"I guess they hypnotized you, Cal," sighed Ned, beginning to dress himself. "Don't let the other fellows see it, *please*; take it off right now before anything happens to it."

Cal obeyed. He didn't for a moment resent Ned's criticism, for the suspicion that his purchase was not all he had thought it had already taken hold of him. Besides, it was awfully nice to have Ned talk to him, even if he was cross. He got into his old suit again, folded the new one back into the pasteboard box and tied it up.

"I guess you don't have to go with me, Ned," he said.

"Don't I? I wouldn't trust you to buy a—a paper collar after this! You bet I'll go with you!"

So after breakfast they started off together, Cal with the big box under his arm. Now that the matter was settled they seemed to have nothing more to say to each other and trudged along in perfect silence for the first quarter of a mile. Cal would have liked to talk. His resentment, he discovered to his surprise, had disappeared and his liking and admiration for Ned, which, he saw now, had only been smothered out of sight, made him want to get back again to the old friendly footing. When they turned into the cross road Cal summoned courage and spoke.

"It's good of you to bother, Ned," he said.

“Why?” asked Ned grimly. “When I pay for anything I want it decent; that’s all.” The tone was decidedly ungracious, while the more Cal pondered the words the less he liked them.

“When *you* pay for anything?” he repeated questioningly.

“That’s what I said,” answered Ned without turning.

Cal felt the blood creeping up into his face, but he went on in silence for a minute. Then,

“What do you mean by that, Ned?” he asked quietly.

“What I said.”

Another minute went by. The resentment and anger that had been simmering in Cal for a long time was threatening to boil over, but he strove hard to hold his temper in check.

“I paid for this suit myself, didn’t I?” he asked presently. Ned made no reply. Cal repeated the question: “Didn’t I, Ned?”

“So you say,” answered the other carelessly.

“Don’t you know that I did?” Cal’s voice was trembling.

“Sure,” said Ned ironically. Cal scowled and clenched his hands. Then,

“Look here,” he burst out, “you think I stole that money of yours, don’t you?”

“I never accused you of it,” replied Ned in an ugly tone.

“But you think so.”

“My thoughts are my own, I guess.”

“No, they’re not! You might as well say it as think it. I never

even saw your old money. Now, do you believe that?"

There was a moment's silence, and then Ned turned and looked his room-mate squarely in the face.

"What's the use of lying, Cal?" he asked with a shrug of his shoulders. "You were the only fellow who knew the money was there, and Spud saw you at my bureau that night."

"I wasn't out of bed!"

"Yes, you were," replied Ned calmly, "for I saw you too."

"You—saw me!" gasped Cal in amazement. Ned nodded.

"Yes, I woke up for a minute and saw you by the window. I was sleepy and paid no attention and went to sleep again. I didn't think anything of it until Spud spoke of it after I'd missed the money."

"You must have dreamed it! I tell you I wasn't out of bed that night, Ned!" declared Cal earnestly.

"All right, say I did dream it," answered Ned wearily. "Say Spud and I both dreamed the same thing. It doesn't matter now. Only, for the love of Mike, don't act as though I'd hurt you. I won't stand that—that confounded injured innocence of yours. Hang it, I did all I could to keep the other fellows from guessing, but I'm not going to pretend that you didn't take it just to please you! You needed the money and you took it. You ought to be satisfied."

"You lie, Ned!"

"I do, eh?" said Ned angrily. "Where'd you get the money to pay for those clothes, I'd like to know."

"My mother sent it. I wrote home for it. I can show you her

letter. I didn't take your money, and—and—"

"Don't lie about it, I tell you!" cried Ned hotly. "If you must steal—"

"I cal'late we'd better settle this right now," interrupted the other, ominously calm. He dropped the box at the side of the road and stepped toward Ned with white face and blazing eyes. There was no one in sight in either direction. Ned shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not going to fight you," he sneered. "Why should I?"

"You've got to," said Cal grimly, clenching his hands.

"I like that! Swipe my coin and then want to lick me!"

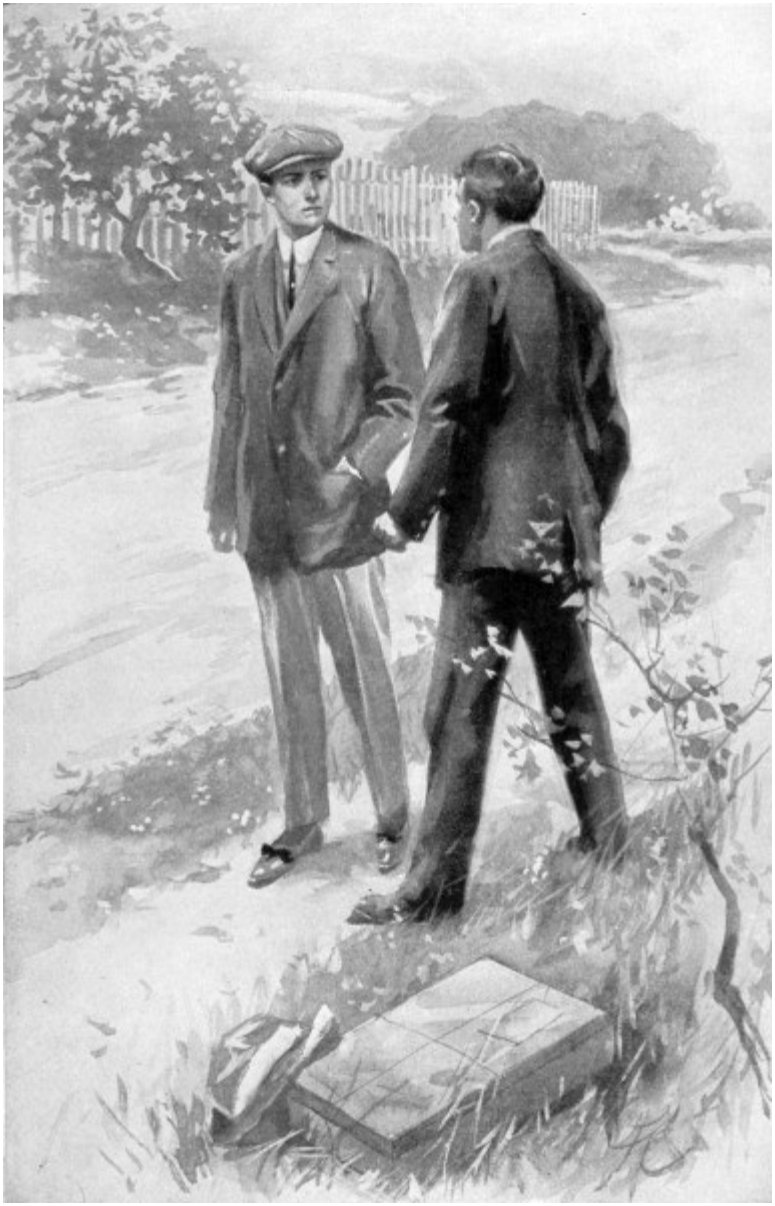
The next instant he was reeling back toward the grass, for Cal had struck him fair on the face with the palm of his hand. Ned steadied himself and stared.

"That's different," he said quietly. "I don't want to fight with a thief, but I will!"

Ned was Cal's senior by nine months, but his superiority ended there, for the younger boy was stronger and harder of muscle. Perhaps had they stuck to scientific methods Ned would have won that short engagement, for Cal knew little of boxing. His methods were primitive but effective. He met Ned's rush as best he might, receiving a blow on his chin that staggered him for an instant, and then sprang past the other's guard, threw his arms around him and strove to throw him. Ned rained blows against Cal's head, but they were too short to do much damage. For a moment they swayed there, panting and gasping in the middle of the dusty road, Ned hammering short blows against the back of his adversary's head and Cal

paying no heed to them, intent only on getting Ned at his mercy. At last he managed to get one arm across Ned's chest and gripped his shoulder. At the same instant he put a knee behind the other and in a twinkling they were flat in the weeds by the roadside, a cloud of dust about them. But Cal was on top, and although Ned struggled and writhed, he held his place. There were no blows struck now. Cal had Ned at his mercy and knew it. And it wasn't long before Ned realized it too and stopped struggling.

"Go ahead," he panted. "I'm down. Hit me!"



“We’d better settle this right now”

“I’m going to if you don’t take it back,” answered Cal grimly. “I’m going to hit you till you say you believe me. Do you?”

The white, strained faces were close and two pairs of angry

eyes glared hatred at each other.

"No!" cried Ned.

Cal raised a fist.

"You'd better. I didn't take your money. Believe that?"

"No!"

But the blow didn't fall. Cal's eyes fell instead.

"I cal'late I can't," he muttered.

"Go ahead! You—you thief! Hit me! I dare you to!"

Again Cal raised his closed hand and again it dropped back. Tears came to his eyes. "Gee, Ned, I just can't!" he sobbed. For a long moment the two boys looked at each other. Then Ned's eyes closed.

"Let me up, Cal," he said quietly.

Cal released him and arose. Ned climbed to his feet, picked his cap from the dust and examined his bleeding knuckles.

"Suppose there's any water around here?" he asked. Cal shook his head.

"There's the brook further along," he answered subduedly. He picked up his own cap and rescued his box.

"Come on, then," said Ned.

They went on along the road to the brook in silence. There Ned laved his bruised and swollen hand, and Cal, wetting his handkerchief, held it to his chin. Presently they went on again, Cal hugging the box. Nothing was said until they reached the main road and the village lay in sight ahead. Then Ned turned curiously to his companion.

“Why didn’t you hit, Cal?” he asked. Cal shook his head.

“I don’t know, Ned. I just couldn’t, somehow.”

“I guess,” said Ned presently, “we’re a couple of idiots, Cal.” Cal nodded without looking at him. It was almost a block further along that Ned spoke again.

“You didn’t, Cal,” he said. “I don’t know how I know it, but I do. I—I’m sorry.”

Cal nodded, his gaze straight ahead.

“That’s all right,” he muttered.

CHAPTER XIX
THE SECOND GAME

Ned took entire charge of the negotiations at the clothing store and all Cal had to do was to stand by, listen, watch and try on the various suits that were brought forth. Ned refused to consider anything under twelve dollars.

"Those cheap things don't pay, Cal," he said decisively. "They're just shoddy; not an ounce of wool in them; and they won't wear two weeks without getting to look like rags."

"The suit I brought back," confided Cal in a voice lowered so as not to pain the salesman, "seemed to be most all splinters and pieces of bur."

"All wood and a yard wide," commented Ned with no effort to moderate his voice and no concern for the clerk's feelings. "Probably made from one of those wooden sheep you see in the toy-shops."

At last Ned was suited, and, without intending a pun, so was Cal. The suit selected was a rough mixture that the salesman called a Harris tweed but which Ned was certain had never crossed the water. It was gray in effect, but close examination revealed a little of every color known. It was really rather stylish and had at the same time the merit, approved of Cal, of not readily showing dirt. The price was twelve dollars and Cal went down into his pocket for an additional two dollars and fifteen cents. Then Ned insisted on the purchase of a blue necktie, price thirty-five cents, and a leather belt at half a

dollar. Cal was growing uneasy and was very glad when the suit was boxed and delivered to him and he could hurry out before Ned discovered any further extravagances for him to indulge in.

On the way home they talked quite frankly of the mystery of Ned's missing eight dollars. "Of course, Cal," said his room-mate, "I might have been mistaken about seeing you up that night, but it's hard to believe. Still, you ought to know whether you were up or not."

"I don't understand that," said Cal. "I'm just certain sure that I wasn't out of bed, but both you and Spud saw someone."

"Yes, and I'd say it was a burglar, only it isn't likely a burglar would parade around in night-clothes, is it? Of course, it might have been one of the other fellows in there for some joke or other. Maybe when he heard about the money being missing he didn't like to fess up."

"I'll bet that was it!" cried Cal with relief. "Only—only where did the money get to?"

"Well, I've been saying lately that I thought I'd just naturally put it somewhere and forgotten about it, and now I'm beginning to think that's what really happened, Cal. Only where the dickens did I put it? I've looked all over the shop."

"You're quite sure you didn't spend it?" asked Cal.

"Of course I am. Gee, if I spent eight dollars I guess I'd have something to show for it, wouldn't I?"

"I hope so," laughed Cal. "Unless you blew it all in on sodas and candy."

"Even then I'd have a jolly good tummy-ache to remember

it by!”

“Well, I hope you’ll find it some time, Ned.”

“So do I. Say, how’s your chin?”

“Hurts sort of. So does my head, I cal’late I’ve got some lumps back there.” Cal felt and nodded gravely. “Dandies,” he added.

“I’m sorry,” Ned said. “But I want you to know that I’ve got a bunch of sore knuckles here, too.” He viewed them aggrievedly. “I guess we’ll have to fake up a yarn to tell the fellows at the house.”

“Say we were scuffling and fell,” said Cal. “That’s true, isn’t it?”

“True enough, I guess. Though I don’t just see how you managed to fall on the side of your chin.”

“I cal—guess we won’t have to give any details,” answered Cal. “What time is it? I’m fearfully hungry.”

Ned looked at his watch and they hastened their pace, reaching West House a quarter of an hour before dinner time. At table Cal’s chin didn’t go unnoticed, and although the explanation tendered was accepted without protest the rest of West House knew very well that Ned and Cal had had more than a scuffle. But whatever had happened had cleared the air. That was very evident. The occupants of the Den now seemed as unwilling to lose sight of each other for an instant as before they had been unwilling to remain together. Dinner was an excited function that day, for everyone’s thoughts were on the football game at two-thirty and the coming contest was talked of over and over.

“We’ll get licked worse than last time,” declared Sandy.

“Then there won’t be any third game?” asked Clara disappointedly.

“Oh, yes, there will. We play three games anyhow,” The Fungus reassured him. “And it isn’t very often that the third game isn’t the—the crucial one.”

“Great talk, Fungus,” Dutch applauded.

“Yes, that’s a peach of a word,” agreed Spud. “Got any more like it, Toadstool? I like to use ’em when I write home. Makes folks think I’m really learning lots.” Then, seeing his opportunity to engage Sandy in dispute, something that Spud loved above all things, he turned to the House Leader. “You’re all wrong, though, Sandy, about our getting licked this afternoon. Can’t be did.”

“I hope I am wrong,” answered Sandy pessimistically, “but I can’t figure it out that way.”

“Well, I can. For one thing, you know mighty well that House has improved about fifty per cent. in team-play this last week.”

“It’s improved, yes, but not any fifty per cent. And what do you suppose Hall has been doing? Standing still? Young Hoyt told me this morning that they’ve come on like anything.”

“So have we,” said Spud stoutly. “Our backs are every bit as good as theirs, while as for the line, why, I can’t see but what we had it on them a bit last game.”

“If only we had a couple of good ends,” lamented Hoop.

“Oh, you dry up and blow away! Say, Hoop, is it true that

Brooksie is going to let you carry the water pail today?"

"If I do you won't get any of it!"

"And you won't be able to carry it if you don't stop eating pretty soon. Better speak to him, Sandy. That's his third dip in the mash."

"That's a whopper," growled Hoop. "I've only had potatoes twice; haven't I, Marm?"

"I don't know, Hoop, but they won't hurt you, surely. Potatoes never hurt anyone. Vegetarians always eat lots of potatoes."

"So do Episcopalians," murmured Spud. "Pass 'em this way, please, somebody."

"You'd all better go slow on eating," cautioned Sandy. "The game will be called in an hour and a half."

"Pshaw, I'll be hungry again by that time," said Dutch.

At half-past one they set out for the gymnasium, all save Clara, who had promised to take Molly over to see the game and who went over to the Curtis's to get her. Even Mrs. Linn was going, but couldn't leave her house yet. As the first contest had taken place on the Hall gridiron, today's was scheduled for the House field. On each side settees from the gymnasium were being strung along for the accommodation of the audience, a small and select one. The faculty, in order to avoid any appearance of partiality, distributed themselves on both sides of the gridiron. Today Doctor Webster and his family were seated amongst the Hall supporters, while Mr. Spander, Mr. Kendall, and Mr. Fordyce, although residents of the Hall, were mingling with the wearers of the red. Mr. James,

attired in a pair of gray trousers and an old Dartmouth sweater, was to referee. The umpire was a man from the village. The afternoon was bright and fairly warm, with a mild westerly breeze down the field. The scene was a very pretty one, the red and blue of the players scattered over the green field and of the substitutes on the side-lines supplying spots of vivid color.

Clara and Molly reached the field only a few minutes before the game began. The rival teams were already practising and footballs were arching up and down against the blue of the autumn sky. They found seats near the middle of the gridiron on the House side amongst a scattering of non-combatants. Molly had plenty of attention, for by this time she had become acquainted with most of the boys of the two Houses and not a few Hall residents. Young Hoyt, a substitute back for the Hall Team, joined them and tried to persuade Molly to substitute a blue arm-band for the red streamer she wore. But Hoyt was in the enemy's country and was speedily driven away, laughingly defiant.

"You'll wish you had this when the game's over, Molly," he warned her. "Get your winning colors!"

Mrs. Linn arrived on the scene, flushed and out of breath, just as Frank Brooks and Pete Grow were tossing for choice of goal. Mrs. Butterfield, matron at East House, made room for her beside her and a discussion of the art of preserving began at once and lasted practically all through the game. Marm declared afterwards, however, that it was the most interesting football game she had ever seen. Grow won the toss and took the west goal, thus getting the wind in Hall's favor, and the teams arranged themselves while House and Hall cheered their warriors.

It was evident even from the first moment that Brooks had succeeded in working a big improvement in his team, for after getting the kick-off House worked the ball well past the middle of the field, making two first downs before losing it by an on-side kick that went wrong. And when placed on the defensive House still showed improvement over last week's form. But Hall had been coming too, and Sawyer, the big full-back, made good gains through the red line. But Grow realized that with the wind favoring him his game was to punt and so get the ball within scoring distance. In the middle of the field Grow himself dropped out of the line and sent off a long high spiral that the wind helped considerably and The Fungus caught it on House's ten yard-line and dodged back to the twenty before he was downed. Boyle and Ned, alternating, took the pigskin back to the thirty-five yards and there M'Crae punted. The ball was Hall's on her fifty yards, and after two plunges that fell short of the required distance Grow kicked again. This time the ball went over the goal-line and M'Crae touched it back.

House elected to put it in scrimmage on the twenty-five yards, but was soon forced to punt once more. This time luck favored the Red, for Hall's right half misjudged the ball, tipped it with his fingers and was then pushed aside by Spud, who fell on it on the Hall's forty-five yard-line. The handful of House supporters cheered wildly. But House lost the pigskin presently on downs and Hall tried an end run that worked beautifully around Miller and landed the oval just inside House territory. Sawyer was thrown for a loss and again Grow punted. M'Crae didn't do that punt justice, for he misjudged its distance sadly and had to chase back to almost his goal-line after it. Luckily he was afforded good protection from the Hall's ends and was able to scoop it up and dodge back to his fifteen yard-line

before he was smothered.

House set to work then and uncovered a couple of new plays that caught Hall off her guard and advanced the ball to the forty yards. There, however, Hall's line tightened, an end run lost ground and House was set back five yards for being off-side. M'Crae therefore was forced to kick. It was a poor attempt and went out near the center of the field. Hall worked Miller's end once more and again tore off a good gain there. A second attempt, however, was spoiled and Hall tried a forward pass. It succeeded nicely and it was first down for the Hall near the side of the field on House's thirty-five yards. Hall tried a skin-tackle play toward the center of the gridiron, but House was expecting it and Hall was piled up for a scant gain of a yard. Sawyer tried a plunge straight through center and found an opening that suited him beautifully and would have made his six yards a touchdown had not House's secondary defence been on the alert. With three yards to go on third down Grow decided to try a drop-kick at goal, although the angle was a difficult one. Very calmly he stepped back and held out his hands and along the side-lines substitutes and spectators held their breath. Center made a good pass and although House came tearing, jumping through with up-stretched hands, the pigskin sailed away in a low curve toward the cross-bar. But the wind which so far had aided Pete's fortunes now favored the adversary by turning the ball's flight to the left so that it passed a scant foot outside the post.

House capered with glee and the wearers of the Red along the side-lines expressed relief in cheers. That was the last time either goal was threatened in the first half and when the twenty-five minutes of playing time had expired the pigskin was almost in the exact center of the field, just about where it

had started, which, when you come to think of it, must have been a trifle discouraging to the pigskin, whatever the players thought about it!

"If we can do as well in the next half," said Spud to Sandy as they trotted back to the gymnasium, "we'll stand a good show of scoring."

"I think the wind is going down," answered Sandy gloomily.

"Going down fiddlesticks! You're an old grump, Sandy!"

Back on the field Molly had a very good time during the intermission, for the Second Juniors of House and Hall were very attentive. Mrs. Linn discovered her, too, and she was presented to Mrs. Butterfield and Mrs. Kendall, the latter matron at the Hall and wife of the mathematics instructor. When Mrs. Kendall invited Molly to come and see her at the Hall Clara scowled. To visit at the Hall savored to him of high treason, especially during the football season! Molly also met Mr. Kendall. Grouch, as the boys called him, could be very pleasant on occasions and this proved to be one of the occasions. The boys looked on in amazement while he laughed and conversed with Molly, for so much amiability on the part of the teacher was unprecedented in their experience.

House began the second half of the game with the breeze at her back, and Brooks's kick-off went over the goal-line. From the twenty-five yards Hall worked back to near the center of the field and there lost the ball on a fumble. The Fungus got a nasty whack on the head in this melee and had to be doctored up a bit before play could go on. A few minutes later Brooks sent him off and H. Westlake took his place. M'Crae kicked on second down from Hall's forty yards and the ball was caught on the five yard-line. House cheered mightily at that, but Hall

started in to rip things up and tore off twenty yards by a bewildering variety of smoothly working plays before House got together and stopped her. Then over-eagerness cost House five yards for off-side and after another attempt at the line Hall kicked. Westlake, at left half, ran the pigskin back fifteen yards by excellent dodging, and House started for Hall's goal. For the first time in that period House got thoroughly together and the plays went off like clock-work. Across the fifty-five yard-line the teams went, Hall retreating stubbornly, and across the forty-five, Ned and Boyle making good gains through the left of Hall's line. There, however, the Blue tightened up. A plunge by Ned netted a scant two yards and Boyle could do no better. M'Crae went back to kick, but for once Hall broke through, and the quarter, finding himself besieged, dodged off to the left with the ball under his arm. But although he ran half-way across the field, throwing off tackler after tackler, he was unable to find a place to turn in and was at last brought down on the side-line. House had failed of her distance by a couple of yards and Hall took the pigskin.

For the next ten minutes play was confined between one forty yard-line and the other. M'Crae and Brooks took turn at booting the leather, but their gains on kicks were not great, for Hall's backs always managed to run the ball in five or ten yards before being stopped. Spud showed himself a good end that day, but Miller was slow and uncertain and it wasn't long before Welch was given his place. Hall made two changes. Harris substituted McDonald at quarter because of his greater kicking ability and Barnes took Borden's place at left half. Already fifteen minutes of the twenty-five had expired and the spectators were beginning to reconcile themselves to a scoreless contest. But there is no telling what is to happen in a

football game.

It was House's ball on her own forty-five yards. Boyle plunged at center and secured three yards. Then M'Crae dropped back as though to kick and the ball went at a side pass to Ned who ran wide into the field, with good interference, and found his chance of turning in. Apparently a run of any distance was out of the question, for the blue-stockinged youths were all about him. But Westlake spilled one, Ned dodged a second, Spud put a third out of the way, and almost before anyone realized it, Ned had a practically clear field before him. Behind him came friend and foe alike, stumbling, falling, going down together often enough, and in front of him were quarter and left half. Ned feinted near the forty yards and shook off the clutch of the half-back, but quarter was wary and in a moment that run was over and Ned was down, thrown out of bounds on the thirty yard-line. But it had been soul-stirring while it lasted and House cheered from the side of the field.

In came the ball fifteen paces and it was House's first down. If she could only work nearer the center of the field, a goal from placement or drop-kick would be practicable. But naturally Hall was expecting such an attempt and Westlake's try around Smith's end lost House a yard. But the ball was in front of the right-hand goal-post, and Boyle, on second down, smashed through left-tackle for a dozen feet. It was now House's chance to win the game if win she could. Brooks and M'Crae consulted hurriedly. The ball was near the twenty-five yard-line and a placement kick was more certain if the House line could hold. But it had given way once today and Brooks feared that it might again. So M'Crae was directed to try a drop-kick. The little quarter-back turned and walked to his place behind the thirty-five yard-line, held out his hands and

gave the signal.

"Now hold them!" called Brooks.

Back went the ball, straight but too high. The lines heaved for an instant and then the blue jerseys broke through here and there and sprang toward the path of the ball. M'Crae's foot swung forward and the ball sped upward and away, barely missing one eager, frantic hand. Down went M'Crae, with the Hall center on top of him. There was one tense instant of suspense, an instant in which it seemed at first that the kick would fall short of the bar. But M'Crae had counted on the wind and the wind did its duty. Down settled the pigskin, turning lazily over and over and for a brief moment something obscured it. That something was a wooden cross-bar. House had scored!

Eleven red-shirted youths leaped about like maniacs. Spud did a series of hand-springs and Boyle, only one generation from the Ould Sod, jumped into the air and cracked his heels together gayly. On the House side of the field Molly stood on a settee and shrieked shrilly, small juniors shouted and capered, substitutes waved blankets and sweaters and members of the faculty smiled and clapped their hands approvingly. Across the gridiron the Hall supporters cheered earnestly in the face of defeat.

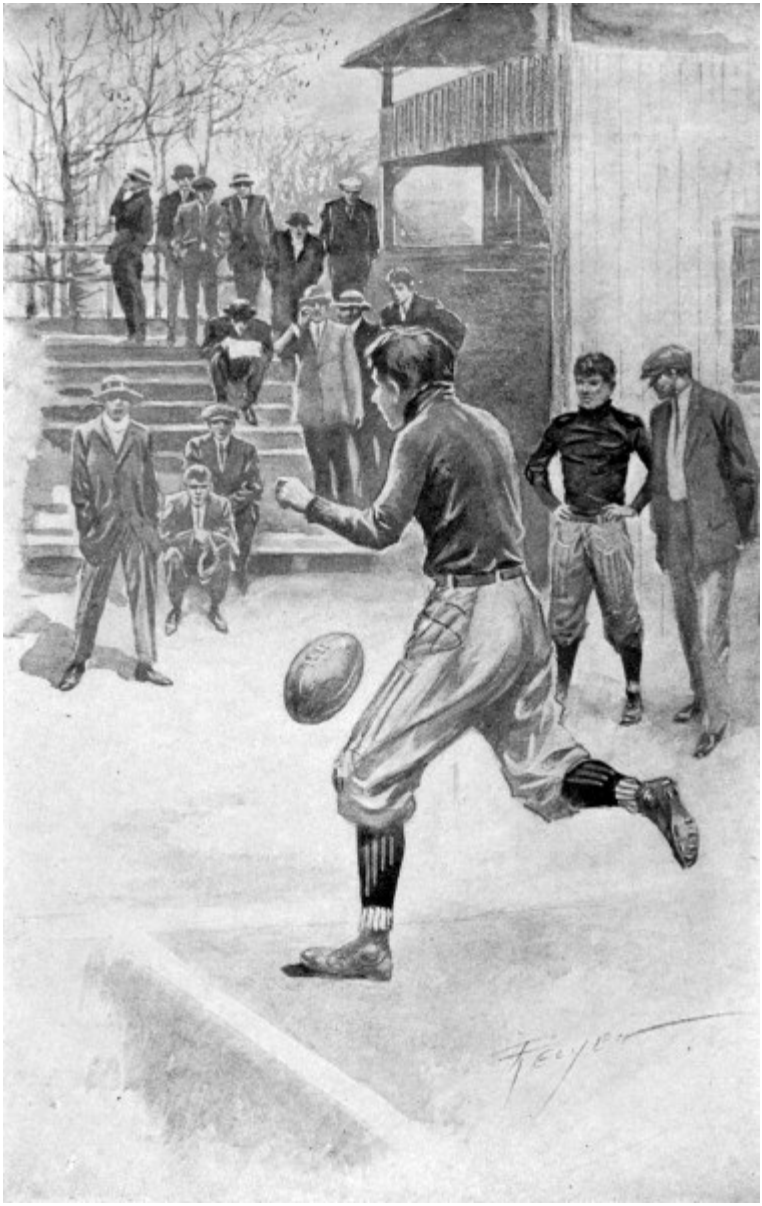
Three to nothing was good enough if only House could keep the score at that. With seven minutes of playing time left she started in again with every effort bent on defence. Hall now had the wind in her favor again and Harris put all his strength into his kicks. Slowly House was forced back. But the sands were running and there was but five minutes remaining. And now, with the ball in House's possession under the shadow of

her own goal, but four. A plunge at left guard; two yards. A slide off right tackle; two yards more. Brooks, tired and panting, stepped back under the cross-bar.

"Hold them hard, fellows!" he cried hoarsely.

Back came the ball, but with it, alas, came half the blue team! Yells and grunts; the crashing of bodies; confusion and pandemonium! The whistle shrilled. Behind the goal-line was a writhing mass of blue legs and red, but where was the ball? Into the pile dived the referee.

"Get up! Get up!"



Cal had his first baptism by fire

Off tumbled one player, Williams of Hall. Another, that was Sandy, and a third, that was Pete Grow. It was like pulling sacks of meal from a pile. A blue player and a red, a red player and a blue, until, finally, the bottom was reached and Jim,

squirming through with his hand, found the ball. “Get up, I tell you!” he demanded. And there at the bottom, with every breath crushed out of him for the moment, lay Dutch with the ball clutched to his breast in a death-like grip.

“Safety,” said Mr. James. “Look after that man, Brooks.”

House players slapped each other on the back and grinned joyfully. Hall had scored a safety, but it had looked for a moment like a touchdown. House was still in the lead, the score three to two. Dutch was sponged with cold water and his arms were pumped up and down, and presently he rolled over and drew a dozen good long breaths and then was pulled to his feet.

“You go off,” said Brooks. “Send in Boland.”

So Cal had his first baptism by fire in the succeeding two and a half minutes that remained, a time all too short for him to get over his stage-fright. Luckily the enemy didn’t assail his position very strongly and none discovered what a state of nervousness he was in. A few flights of the ball, an end run that was nipped in the bud, a half-dozen hopeless, desperate plunges at the red line and the game was over, and House ran joyously off the field, victory perched on her banners.

CHAPTER XX
RUMORS AND EXCITEMENT

The Houses celebrated that night. There was no telling what might happen a week hence and it was well to make the most of the opportunity. There was a bonfire down in the corner of the field, a place sacred to such occasions, and West House and East House cheered themselves hoarse, while Hall, standing apart, jeered and tried to drown the sounds of triumph. Heroes had been made that day and their names were William L. M'Crae and Otto Zoller. Brooks made a speech. He said he didn't want to throw cold water on the joyous occasion but wanted to remind them that there was another game coming.

"Cheer and shout all you want to, fellows, but while you're doing it make up your minds to go into the next game and do a whole lot better. If you do we'll have a celebration here next Saturday night that will make this look like a flash in the pan. Remember that there's something hanging in the living-room at the Hall that must come down from there. Play for the Silver Shield, fellows, and the Houses!"

Even after West House was home again nobody was able to quiet down, and when bedtime came the boys went down in a body and secured an extension of time from Mrs. Linn. "Just a half-hour more, Marm," pleaded Sandy. "You know we don't win every day, and I dare say we won't again for a while."

"Well," said Marm. "But I declare I don't know what the Doctor would say!"

“If you behave very nicely, Marm, we’ll never tell him,” Spud assured her.

So they went back to the Ice Chest and talked it all over again for the twentieth time and were very excited and jubilant. And Cal, who had played in his first game, was football-mad and couldn’t hear enough of it. And the next day, even had they been ready to talk of something else, which they were not, Molly wouldn’t have let them. The Pippin Club met in the club house on Apple Avenue after dinner and Molly had to hear the personal experiences of each of the players.

“And, oh, Dutch,” she exclaimed rapturously, “how did you ever manage to get that ball so wonderfully.”

Dutch shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

“I didn’t,” he said. “The ball was bobbing around on the ground there and someone came along and gave me a shove that sent me sprawling on my nose. Then I happened to see Mr. Ball rolling along near-by and a Hall chap trying to snuggle up to it. So I reached out and got it just in time. He didn’t want to let go, but I pulled it away somehow and worked it under me. Then they began falling on my head and back and I didn’t know much more until they turned me over.”

“Modest youth!” murmured Spud admiringly.

“Anyhow, you saved the day,” insisted Molly beamingly. “And Ned made a beautiful run, didn’t he?”

“I’d have made it beautifuller,” grunted Ned, “if I hadn’t turned my ankle when I started. That lost time, you see.”

“It was a very good run,” said Spud judicially. “I’ll say that, Ned. But you all realize, of course, that it was only made

possible by my excellent assistance."

"Why, Spud," said Molly, "I didn't know you helped."

"You didn't? Why, I was the interference. It was this way, Molly. 'Spud,' said Brooksie, 'what shall we do now?' 'Give the ball to Ned,' said I, 'for an end run. I'll look after him.' 'Good stuff,' said Brooksie. 'I wish you would.' So Ned took the ball. 'This way, Ned,' I called, and started off around the end. 'Just a moment,' said Ned. 'I've turned my ankle.' 'Well, I wouldn't stop too long,' I told him, 'for I think I see the enemy in the offing.' So Ned rubbed his ankle a bit and then we started off again. 'Bear to the right, Ned,' I called, and Ned bore. About that time a few of the Hall team sauntered madly up. The first one I gave the straight-arm to and he turned over twice—no, thrice. It *was* thrice, wasn't it, Ned?"

"Oh, dry up," laughed Ned. "How about the apple crop, Molly?"

"Ned," went on Spud, getting warmed up to his narrative, "was now running strong at my heels. The enemy surrounded us. One—two—three! I pushed them aside. 'Come on!' I shouted in a clarion voice. 'Never say die!' So Ned came on. The enemy fell about us like ten-pins. We crossed the thirty yard-line, the twenty-five. The goal was in sight. But poor Ned's strength was ebbing fast. Finally he called to me faintly. 'I can go no further—farther!' Did you say further or farther, Ned? Anyway, defeat stared us in the face. The hungry horde of Hall desperadoes snapped at our heels. What to do? There was not a minute to spare. Seizing Ned in my arms I staggered on and fell fainting across the goal-line. The day was won!"

"I don't see," laughed Ned, "that there was anyone on that team but you and I, Spud."

“They didn’t count,” said Spud. “Who said apples?”

“I’ve got something lots nicer,” said Molly. “Do you like cookies? I got cook to make a whole panful yesterday. Shall I get them?”

“Shall you get them!” cried Hoop. “What an absurd question.”

“Cookies for mine,” said Spud, smacking his lips. “What kind of cookies are they, Molly? Have they got sugar sprinkled on top of them?”

“Of course. Cookies always have sugar on them. I’ll get them. And there are plenty of apples if you want them.”

“I think,” said Sandy, as Molly disappeared, “that the—the *cuisine* at our club is very satisfactory, fellows.”

“Yes,” drawled Spud, “the new French chef is doing very well. I think the house committee should be complimented. Oh, see who’s here!”

Molly returned with a big yellow bowl filled with golden brown cookies and passed them around.

“I can smell the granilla,” said Spud. “Granilla’s my favorite scent. Say, they’re simply swell, Molly. You tell that cook that she’s the best cookie cook I ever listened to.”

“Cut it out, Spud,” commanded Sandy. “You talk too much.”

“All right. You talk for a while. I’m going to be too busy.”

The club continued in session until the last cookie had vanished and the afternoon shadows were slanting across the lawn outside. Then West House, surfeited with cakes and

apples, said good-by to their hostess and went home to supper!

Neither Cal nor Ned were very demonstrative and so their reconciliation was a seemingly matter-of-course event attended by no outward manifestations of satisfaction. Boys of their age haven't much use for what they call "gush," and the nearest approach to this occurred on Sunday night when, returning to their room after the usual Sunday night concert in the Tomb, Ned "squared off" at Cal, feinted and then landed a vigorous punch on his chest that sent him reeling backward on to his bed.

"You old chump," said Ned affectionately.

But the next instant he evidently concluded that even that might be construed as "gush" and so thrust his hands into his pockets, turned his back and whistled carelessly. Cal grinned and picked himself up.

"Remember the night you woke me up, Ned, and I thought you were a robber?" he asked.

"Yes, you nearly killed me. Bet you knew it was me all the time!"

There was no lack of conversation nowadays, and instead of avoiding each other they seemed hardly satisfied out of each other's sight. West House saw and marvelled.

"They're like the Siamese Twins," commented Spud, "sort of stuck on each other, what?"

But if they hadn't much to say about their quarrel or their renewal of friendship the mystery of the missing money was often discussed. Monday night they went to work systematically and ransacked the Den from end to end. But

they found nothing; or, at least, nothing they were searching for. They did discover what Ned called “a disgraceful state of affairs.” In his lower bureau drawer, under a top covering of underwear, lay about a half-bushel of apples of which many were in the last stages of decay.

“Gee,” said Ned, “I’d forgotten all about them. Don’t they smell awful? I’ve thought for a week or so that this place smelled a good deal like a cider mill. Roll the waste basket over here, Cal, and I’ll throw out the rotten ones.”

“You’d better not do that, Ned. Marm’ll see them and wonder.”

“That’s so. What’ll we do with them?”

Cal smiled wickedly. “Don’t ask me. They aren’t my apples!”

“You’ve got a disposition just like that,” said Ned, holding up one far-gone apple. “I guess I’ll leave these until tomorrow and then lug them outside somewhere. Have one?”

“Not one like that,” answered Cal. “If you’ve got a good one —”

“Oh, there are plenty of good ones left. I wonder how long they’ve been here. I guess it’s too warm for them.”

“Yes. Why don’t you take them over and let Spud keep them for you? They wouldn’t be too warm in the Ice Chest.”

“Oh, I don’t want them frozen,” laughed Ned. He closed the drawer again and they went on with their search. In the end they had to acknowledge defeat, although as Ned pointed out, their search had not been fruitless.

“I’ve got over five dollars myself,” said Cal. “I cal’late I’d better hide it somewhere or it may disappear too.”

“You can put it in my collar-box,” suggested Ned with a grin.

But Cal declined. “That box is a hoodoo,” he said. “There’s something wrong with it, Ned. I don’t want my money collared too.”

Ned laughed, but Cal didn’t see the joke until his unintentional pun had been explained to him.

“I’ve got it in my trunk now,” he went on, “but it isn’t locked because I’ve lost the key somewhere.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t worry,” said Ned. “Lightning doesn’t strike twice in the same place, they say.”

There had been only light practice that afternoon, but on Tuesday Brooks held their noses to the grindstone with a vengeance. He had decided to discard two plays which had been tried and found wanting and to substitute two others which, he believed, were more likely to succeed against Hall. Besides this, several of the players were sent back to the dummy for some needed eleventh-hour instruction in tackling, and the effort to perfect team-play went on unceasingly. The weather turned suddenly cold Tuesday night and when Wednesday dawned there was a heavy white frost on the ground. After breakfast that morning Cal found Sandy standing in the Tomb gazing at the wall over the mantel.

“I was looking for a place to hang the Silver Shield,” Sandy explained, “that is, if we get it.”

“Do you mean,” Cal asked, “that it will come here to West

House if we win it?" Sandy nodded.

"Yes, East House had it last time we won and now it's our turn. I guess I'd get Marm to take down that picture there. I never did like it, anyway. Maybe she'd let you have it for your room, Cal."

"Thanks," Cal laughed. "That's thoughtful of you, Sandy. I'll take it, though, if it's to make room for the shield."

If Oak Park had been football-mad before, it was hopelessly and violently afflicted with the mania this final week. Excitement succeeded excitement. Now rumor had it that Pete Grow was very ill with tonsilitis or something and wouldn't be able to play. Now it was said that Andy Westlake, the House Team center, was in trouble over studies and had a week's work to make up. Another day Will M'Crae had sprained his ankle, if reports were to be credited. As it happened none of these direful things had really taken place, but the news of them served to add frenzy to the excitement. The nearest approach to a catastrophe affecting either team came when Barnes, a substitute back for Hall, hurt his knee in practice on Wednesday and said farewell to football for the rest of the season. But Barnes was hardly necessary to Hall's success and so his accident didn't create the commotion it might have. Even Molly became hysterical and talked football whenever she could find someone to listen to her. She spent several days making a House flag. She could easily have bought one in the village but she preferred to fashion it herself. It was of white silk with a red W. H. on it. She worked madly, but on Thursday it looked very much as though the flag would be still unfinished when the game began on Saturday.

"It's a perfectly lovely affair," said Spud when she exhibited

it to him that noon, “but why does the W look so rakish?”

“It doesn’t, does it?” she asked anxiously, holding the banner at arm’s length and observing it critically. “Well, maybe it is a little crooked. But the H is all right, Spud?”

“Yes, it’s a dandy H. I wish, though, the two hadn’t quarrelled, Molly. It seems so sad. Aren’t you going to—what do you call it—hem it around the edges?”

“Of course, but I wanted to see how the letters were going to look first. I ought to have a stick for it, oughtn’t I?”

“I’ve got one you can have. It’s got a flag on it now but I can take that off. I say, if we win Saturday I think you ought to give us that for a trophy.”

“I will!” Molly clapped her hands delightedly. “And you must put it over the Silver Shield. Will you? Hoop says the shield will hang in the parlor.”

“Why does the W look so rakish?”

“All right. Now I have something to fight for. What I’ve needed right along, Molly, was an incentive. ’Tis there! Consider the game won!”

Oddly enough it was Cal, practical, matter-of-fact Cal, who

had entertained a vast contempt and hearty dislike of football a few weeks before, who, of all the West House fellows, lost his appetite toward the end of the week and had what Spud called "the jumps." Cal's short taste of battle had left him with a wild, impatient desire to return to the ranks and match his strength and skill with the enemy once more. He pestered Ned for days asking whether the latter thought he would get a chance in the last game.

"I wish Brooks would put me in," he said wistfully. "I guess, though, he won't while Dutch or Griffin hold out. Gee, I'd like to get in and do something fine, Ned; make a run such as you made or kick a goal like M'Crae did!"

"You'll get in for a while, anyway," Ned assured him on Thursday for the twentieth time. "Griffin's the fellow who'll come out, though, and not Dutch. You'd have to kill Dutch to make him quit. Of course he might get sick, I suppose."

"He—he's looking pretty well, isn't he?" asked Cal.

"Fine," laughed Ned. "So you needn't hope for that, Cal."

"Oh, I wouldn't want him to be sick," said the other hurriedly. "Only—if he *was*—"

"Just so; you'd get his place. I'm going to tell Dutch to watch out carefully. You may try putting poison in his food."

Cal laughed apologetically. Then, "I suppose you couldn't say anything to Brooks, Ned?" he asked. "Just sort of mention my name to him. You see, I sometimes think he forgets about me!"

"No, he doesn't. Don't worry, you old chump. You'll get a show. But you mustn't expect to make a blooming hero of

yourself, ’cause when you play in the line you don’t have much chance at that sort of thing, Cal. You just plug away and do your little best and then after it’s over you read about how wonderful the backs were. Perhaps you might read that ‘Boland at left tackle proved steady and effective, and held his own with his opponent.’ The only way a line player ever breaks into the hero class is when he blocks a kick, I guess. And that’s more luck than science.”

“How do you block a kick?” asked Cal thoughtfully. Ned grinned.

“I’ve never heard any receipt for it,” he answered. “I guess it’s by playing your level best and getting through on defense. Thinking of trying it?”

“Yes, if I get a chance,” said Cal seriously. “I cal’late I could get by that fellow Dixon, Ned. Anyway, I’d try mighty hard!”

CHAPTER XXI
A MYSTERY IS EXPLAINED

Thursday was the last day of real practice, although on Friday there was a short session of signal work, the fellows jogging through the plays and Brooks explaining and propounding. After supper that night West House made its annual pilgrimage to East House and was entertained with lemonade and cake. It was a very merry and enjoyable evening. Cal was privileged to sit for a while in Frank Brooks's room and hear football discussed by masters of the game; Brooks, M'Crae, the Westlake brothers, Ned and Joe Boyle. Brooks proved that he hadn't forgotten Cal's presence on the substitute list.

"How are you, Boland?" he asked. "Feeling ready for trouble tomorrow?"

Cal assured him that he was fine and wanted terribly to insinuate some little hint to the effect that a place in the team on the morrow wouldn't be unacceptable.

When half-past nine came West House took its departure, but not before it had cheered East House and East House had returned the compliment and both Houses had cheered loudly for the Team. It had been a busy and exciting day and sleep didn't come readily to either Ned or Cal that night. Even when Ned did finally drop off to slumber he was the victim of disturbing visions, and so, when, hours later, as it seemed, he awoke with the vague impression that someone was stirring in the room, he was unable at first to determine whether he was

really awake or still asleep and dreaming.

But he finally convinced himself of consciousness. The room was fairly light, for in the November sky the remains of what had been a full moon was sinking westward. There was plenty of light to make easy recognition of the white-clad figure. Ned blinked a moment and then stared. Cal was lifting the lid of his trunk. Ned wanted to ask him what he was doing, but he was very sleepy. Cal fumbled about the trunk till a moment, then closed the lid again and arose. Ned expected to see him get back into bed, but he did nothing of the sort. Instead he walked leisurely around the end of the two beds, knelt in front of Ned's bureau and opened the bottom drawer.

"Great Scott," thought Ned, "he's after an apple! What a joke if he got a rotten one!"

He could hear Cal pushing the apples about and grinned as he recalled the fact that, after all, they had forgotten to sort the bad ones out. Presently Cal stood upright again, turned and retraced his steps toward the farther side of his own bed. If he had found an apple to his liking, at least he was not eating it. Ned lifted himself on one elbow.

"Couldn't you find a good one?" he asked with a chuckle.

There was no response.

"Oh, I saw you, Cal," he said. "You'll have tummy-ache if you eat apples at this time of night."

Cal stepped silently into bed and pulled the clothes up. It was then that Ned realized that his roommate had been walking in his sleep! How he knew it he couldn't have told, for he had never seen a performance of the kind before. Perhaps it was the deliberation of Cal's movements about the room that gave him

the hint. At all events, he was positive that Cal was a—a somnam—well, whatever it was! It was a little bit uncanny at first and Ned felt a creepy sensation along his spine. By that time Cal's breathing was long and regular and Ned's first impulse to awaken him passed. It would be a shame to spoil a sleep like that; besides, Ned had an idea that he had once read that to awaken a—a somnambulist—that was it; somnambulist!—was dangerous; dangerous to the somnambulist, that is. No, he would let Cal slumber on and tell him about it in the morning. Besides, he was sort of sleepy himself! He yawned, turned over and was soon back in dreamland.

The morning dawned bright and crisp and the breeze that stole in the open window tingled the nostrils. Cal's bare feet—as usual he was the first out of bed—pattered hurriedly across the floor and the window closed with a crash that awoke Ned. Cal returned to his couch, sat down on the edge of it, shivering, and tried to remember what it was that he had dreamed during the night. It was a very unpleasant dream; something about burglars. That came of keeping so much money on hand, he reflected; it was enough to make any fellow uneasy and give him bad dreams! Of course that money was all right, but he cal'lated he'd have a look. So he thrust his feet into a pair of slippers and went over to the trunk.

"Hello," said Ned, with a sigh, "what sort of a day is it?"

"Bully," answered Cal, lifting the lid of the trunk. Ned looked across and recollection of last night came to him. He chuckled.

"I've got a dandy joke on you, Cal," he announced. There was no reply for a moment. Cal was pawing anxiously at the

contents of the till. At last, though,

"Is it—is it anything about my money?" he asked.

"No. What about your money?"

"It—it's gone!"

"Oh, get out!" exclaimed Ned, sitting suddenly upright. Cal nodded, frowning perplexedly at the till.

"I'm sure it was here, Ned," he said. "And last night I dreamed of burglars again. It's gone where yours went, I cal'late."

"But that's—that's piffle!" cried Ned. "Burglars couldn't come in here and—" He paused, a light breaking upon him. Then he threw his feet into the air and subsided backwards on the bed, laughing at the top of his lungs. Cal stood up and viewed him at first with alarm and then with disgust.

"Mighty funny, ain't it?" he demanded. "There was 'most six dollars there!"

"Look—look in the apple drawer!" gurgled Ned between paroxysms.

"Huh?"

"Look in—the apple—drawer, I—tell you!"

Cal viewed his writhing friend bewilderedly a moment, but then strode to Ned's bureau and pulled the drawer open. Ned stopped laughing by a supreme effort, crawled to the foot of the bed and looked over Cal's shoulder. Cal stared at the apples.

"What—what about it?" he asked.

“Look underneath,” advised Ned. “Pitch the apples one side.”

Cal obeyed and then gave a cry.

“Here it is!” he exclaimed.

“Sure,” said Ned. Cal was holding a little wad of bills in his hand.

“But—but—” he stammered.

“What’s wrong?” asked Ned.

“It ain’t mine!”

“Not yours! Whose is it, then? Let’s see. Gee, it’s mine, Cal!”

Ned’s grin gave way to amazement, and then for an instant suspicion returned.

“You put this in there last night, Cal,” he said soberly.

“*I* did! What do you mean?”

“What I say. You’re a somnambulist.”

Cal stared, doubtful.

“What—what did you say I was?” he demanded ominously.

“A somnambulist; a sleep-walker; I saw you last night! You went to your trunk and rummaged around and then came over here, opened that drawer, and I heard you fussing with the apples. I thought you wanted one to eat. Then you went back to bed and I spoke to you and you didn’t answer. I spoke twice. Did you know you were up? Do you remember it?”

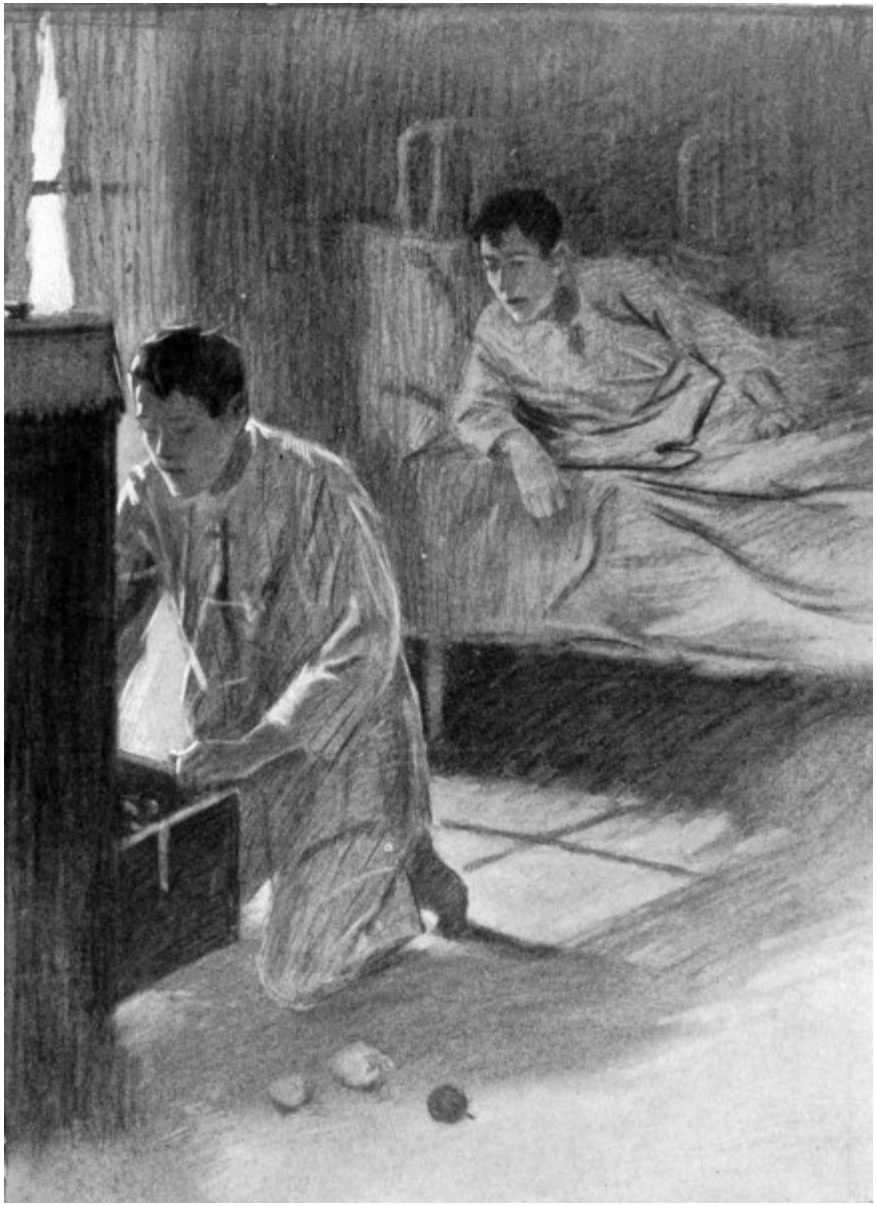
“No.” Cal shook his head, his eyes wide with surprise. “I

never did that before, Ned," he said wonderingly. "Are you—sure? You didn't just dream it?"

"Of course not! Besides, there's the money."

"But I didn't have it," said Cal, flushing. "I—I told you so, Ned."

"By Jove, that's so! Of course you didn't. But where—how—"



Cal knelt in front of Ned's bureau and opened the bottom drawer

The two boys stared at each other bewilderedly. Then, with an exclamation, Ned leaped from the bed and began fumbling amongst the apples, and a moment later there was a cry of triumph from both and Ned was holding a second folded

package of money in his hand. From it a coin fell and rolled across the floor.

“That’s mine!” cried Cal.

“Yep. Take it.” Ned got to his feet and sat down on the edge of his bed, frowning thoughtfully.

“I don’t see,” began Cal. But Ned interrupted him.

“I do. It’s as plain as daylight now, Cal. Listen. Do you remember when I told you that I had eight dollars in my collar-box you said you thought it wasn’t safe there?”

Cal nodded doubtfully.

“Well, the night we went for the apples you dreamed of burglars; remember that? You were the burglar, just as you were last night. You had it on your mind that my money was in the top drawer, so you got up in your sleep, took it out of the collar-box and put it here under the apples. You probably thought that the burglars wouldn’t look there; and I guess they wouldn’t! It was you, don’t you see, that Spud saw that night standing at the bureau!”

“But—but I never knew that I walked in my sleep!” objected Cal. Ned shrugged his shoulders.

“Can’t help it, old man; you certainly do. Then last night you had another one of your burglar dreams and so you got up and saved your own coin, and put it in the same place with mine. I guess that explains that mystery, Cal.”

Cal considered a moment. Then,

“I cal’late—I guess it does,” he agreed. “But I never knew —”

“You said that before,” laughed Ned. “Well, I’m glad to get it back, Cal, but I’m a lot gladder to have it explained. Isn’t that the funniest thing you ever heard of? And won’t the fellows have a fit when they hear about it?”

“I suppose so,” muttered Cal. “Only—I wish you wouldn’t say anything about it, Ned. You see, I don’t really intend to walk around like that in my sleep and do funny things.”

“You’d rather the others didn’t know? Oh, all right. Only it does spoil a mighty good story, Cal.” Ned looked at the bills in his hand. “This is like finding money. What’ll we do with it?”

“I’m going to get a new key for my trunk,” answered Cal, “and lock mine up.”

“And I’m going to town and buy things. Only I can’t today, I guess. You can’t play good football on nut sundaes and college ices. I suppose,” he added regretfully, “I’ll have to wait until Monday. Then you and I, Cal, will go down and have a regular feast!”

“Do you remember,” asked Cal, “how Molly dreamed about me and apples that time? That was sort of—sort of funny, wasn’t it?”

“It surely was! I don’t suppose you’d like me to tell even Molly, Cal?” Cal shook his head.

“If you don’t mind,” he said apologetically.

“All right. But what shall I tell the fellows? Just say I found it? That’ll do, I guess. None of their business, anyway. Gee, what time is it getting to be? We’ll have to get a move on, chum!”

CHAPTER XXII
MOLLY WAVES A FLAG

If Ned wished to avoid explanations regarding the recovery of his money he could have had no better time to make his announcement than at the breakfast-table that morning, for everyone was far too interested in the event of the afternoon to do more than express congratulations. Brooks had instructed the players to spend the morning in whatever way was customary, but not to tire themselves. Molly was on hand soon after breakfast. The silk flag was finished to the last stitch and looked very well even if, as Spud insisted, the W was woozy.

"We shall be very proud to have that, Molly," said Sandy, "but there's something else I think we ought to have as a reward for winning—if we do win."

"Something else? What?" asked Molly.

"That pillow-case!"

"You shall! If House wins I'll give it back. Now, isn't that generous of me, Sandy? For after I give that up I'll have no hold over any of you any longer and you'll all treat me just shamefully."

"You try us," said Hoop.

"Besides, Molly," remarked Spud, "'tis better to rule by love than through fear."

"Oh, listen to that!" jeered The Fungus. "Sounds like the top line in a copy-book. What's the matter with 'Honesty is the

best policy,' Spud?"

"There's a better one yet," Spud reminded him gravely. "'Silence is golden,' Fungus."

"What are we going to do this morning?" asked Hoop moodily.

"Let's go for chestnuts," said Molly. "Don't you like them? I know where there are lots and lots, bushels and bushels! And we'll have them boiled."

"They'll do for our club luncheon tomorrow," suggested Dutch. "Where are they, Molly?"

"Never mind. You come with me and I'll show you."

"Not far, I hope," said Spud. "I mustn't get tired. I've got to run the length of the field this afternoon for a touchdown."

"Gee, you'd have to run about ten miles before you'd ever make a touchdown," said The Fungus unpleasantly.

"Is that so?" asked Spud. "The rest of you can hunt chestnuts if you like; I'm going to hunt toadstools!"

Whereupon he made for The Fungus. But the latter was not caught so easily and they had it around the house several times before The Fungus was finally driven to bay. Spud was valor itself as long as The Fungus fled before him, but when the adversary put his back to the house and invited closer acquaintance Spud held off and viewed him dubiously.

"Huh," he said finally, "you're too hideous to touch!"

They followed Molly to the woods and found that she had not exaggerated so greatly after all. The nuts were plentiful enough and the frosts had started the burs opening. Of course

most everyone had trouble with the stickers and Dutch actually sat down on a bur with uncomfortable results. But they had a good time and returned at half-past ten with nearly two quarts of nuts. After that they sat on the porch, in the sun for a while and ate as many as they wanted. Then Molly took charge of the rest and agreed to have them boiled for the morrow's meeting of the Pippin Club.

Dinner was early today, at twelve o'clock, in order that the players might have time to get over its effects before the game started at two. But no one ate much, Cal especially being extremely chary of food. He was much too anxious and excited to eat. At one the fellows left West House and went through the park toward the gymnasium. They were all rather silent, even Spud for once finding little to say. Clara alone was absent as he had agreed to wait and conduct Molly and Mrs. Linn to the field.

"Well," said Ned once on the way over, "when we come back we'll either be feeling a lot better or a lot worse."

And Sandy, who grew more pessimistic and hopeless as the crucial hour drew nigh, answered:

"We'll feel a heap worse, I guess!"

The final game drew many friends of the school to Oak Park that day and the seating accommodations were quite inadequate. Long before two o'clock the gridiron was edged with spectators. On the Hall side, reposing on a little table, lay the Silver Shield, the trophy for the possession of which some

forty-odd boys had toiled and moiled day after day for nearly two months. The sun shone brightly and there was almost no breeze when the two teams faced each other for the kick-off, but there was a sharp wintery nip in the air that made the watchers along the lines turn up coat-collars and stamp about. The whistle piped and the final game began.

I'm not going to tell you of that first half in detail for more reasons than one. In the first place nothing happened. In the second place it was poorly played. Both teams, House and Hall alike, were too eager. They missed all sorts of opportunities, fumbled, played off-side, held in the line and proceeded in the most futile, headless manner imaginable. It seemed as though House was politely doing its best to hand the game to Hall, while Hall, determined not to be outdone in courtesy, was resolved to present the contest to its adversary. All during that half Cal sat on the side of the field, wrapped in a gray woollen blanket with vivid red borders, and groaned in spirit as he watched the teams tramp back and forth between their respective thirty yard-lines. For neither eleven had the remotest chance to score. When the thirty minutes was up Cal joined the others and trotted to the gymnasium.

Fifteen minutes later he was back in his blanket, the teams had changed goals, the air was colder and the shadows longer and it was now or never. A ray of sunlight, dodging past Doctor Webster's shoulder, burned ruddily on the Silver Shield. Perhaps it was meant as an omen.

Cal wondered if Brooks would let him on. He had been wondering that for days and days. Now there was only a half-hour left and his chance seemed wofully slim. Both Dutch and Griffin were as strong as ever. Five minutes passed. Hall had

the ball on House's forty-two yards. Two plays with no gain, an attempted forward pass and House had it. A slow advance to Hall's forty-eight yards and again the pigskin changed hands. Hall kicked on the second down and M'Crae ran the ball back fifteen yards before he was thrown. An end run by Ned gained four yards and Boyle slammed through center for three more. M'Crae kicked. Ten minutes had gone. Cal's heart grew leaden. Time was called and Brooks turned toward the little group of substitutes.

"Hooper!" he called.

Hoop jumped up and threw aside his blanket. Cal helped him peel off his sweater, envy in full possession of him. Sandy, white and weary, crept up and wrapped himself up.

"We're playing simply rotten," he groaned. "We ought to have them licked by now."

Fasset, of Hall, got away for a long run around Spud's end that took the ball to House's twenty-eight yards and Hall shouted its joy. Two tries at the left wing netted but six yards and Grow fell back as though for a placement. McDonald knelt to place the ball for him. But when the ball came he jumped up and raced along the line, seeking an opening. The trick failed, for the quarter was thrown for no gain, and on the second play M'Crae kicked out of danger. The half was fifteen minutes old. Then came another pause and Turner went in for A. Westlake at center and the Hall made two changes. Cal, watching Dutch and Griffin as a cat watches a mouse, thought that the latter was at last showing signs of wear. Back up the field toiled Hall, trying desperate things now; runs around end from trick formations, forward passes that seldom worked, charges at the line from strange angles. It was after one of these that Cal saw

Griffin being lifted to his feet. Cal's heart leaped into his throat and throbbed there uncomfortably until Brooks turned and held up his hand and called.

What was he saying? Cal strove to hear, but his heart was making too much noise. It was Sandy who prodded him.

"Go on in, you duffer! Brooks wants you!"

A minute later Cal was looking into the pale, perspiring face of Dixon. At last he was in! The first few minutes passed as though in a dream. Cal did mechanically what he had been taught to do. Once someone thumped him heavily on the back and a voice screeched:

"Lower, Boland! Get down there!"

Then it was House's ball again. The signals came, Cal leaped into his opponent and Ned went twisting through with a rasping of canvas and the panting of many breaths. Cal went down with someone on his head. A hand reached and yanked him to his feet.

"Second down!" called the referee. "Seven to go."

"Kick formation!" called M'Crae hoarsely. "Twenty-two, twenty-six, fourteen—"

Dixon plunged at Cal and Cal threw himself in his path. There was the sound of boot against ball and he was racing down the field. Ahead of him a Hall back was signalling a fair catch. Then came a shout. The back had missed the ball. Pandemonium broke loose on the House side. Cal, racing up, found Spud snuggling the ball to his arms, with half a dozen players above him.

"House's ball!" cried the referee. "First down!"

“Line up, fellows! Get into this now! Here’s where we score!”

That was Brooks, ecstatic. The ball was on Hall’s thirty-two yards and there remained eight minutes of time; plenty of time to win or lose. Brooks went down the line, thumping backs, encouraging, entreating.

“Play hard, House! Here’s where we win! Play hard, *hard*, HARD!”

“Watch for a forward pass!” shouted Grow as the quarter knelt. Cal could hear Brooks panting like a steam-engine beside him. Dixon, his opponent, shifted warily, his eyes flitting from Cal to the ball. The signal came. Cal wondered if he had got it right, but there was no time for speculation. The lines clashed. Dixon pulled him in and went through. But the play was safe, Boyle, whirling like a Dervish with the oval tightly clasped in his arms, getting past tackle on the other end.

“Second down! Seven to go!”

“Signal!” piped M’Crae. “Signal! Sixty-two, forty-one, thirteen, twenty-eight—”

Cal shot across at Pete Grow, Brooks in advance, and Ned slammed by tackle for two yards more. But there was still five to go and the backs eyed M’Crae and their captain anxiously as the teams lined up again. Brooks had been playing for a touchdown, but now it seemed that a try at a field-goal was all that remained, for five yards was more than they could hope to tear off at one try. But the ball, although well inside the thirty yard-line, was near the side of the field and the goal angle was extreme.

“Kick formation!” called M’Crae, and trotted back.

But when the signals came Cal knew that there was to be no kick, and so did Pete Grow.

"*Fake!*" he shouted. "*Fake!*"

But the warning was late, for a House player stood almost on the side-line on the short side of the field and after swinging his foot as though kicking, M'Crae made a nice pass to him. It was caught before the Hall left end saw what was up. But the gain was short, for the man with the ball was forced over the line at the twenty-two yards. Still, it was first down again and House still had the ball. In came the pigskin fifteen paces and again the teams faced each other. The Fungus squirmed through for four yards, and Boyle slammed the Hall center for three more.

"Third down!" called Brooks. "Only three to go. Come on now, you House! Get into this! Make it go!"

And make it go they did, although it was necessary to bring the chain in and measure the distance before Jim decided that House had again won a first down. The Red was almost on the ten yards now and the Blue was desperate. Grow threatened and pleaded. Cal, the light of battle in his eyes, gave Dixon all that youth wanted to do. Once he and Brooks made such an opening that Boyle, who carried the ball, might have driven through in coach and four. But the backs stopped him for a short gain. Then The Fungus writhed past left tackle for a good four yards and there was less than three to go, and the ball was almost on the five yard streak. Pandemonium reigned about the field. Jim stopped the game while the crowd was pushed back from the goal-line. Brooks thumped an open hand with his clenched fist.

"We've got to do it, fellows, we've got to do it!" he kept

repeating. “They can’t stop us now!”

It was two and a half to go for a first down, five for a score. It was the height of impudence to select Grow as the victim of the next play, but he had been put effectively out of it a moment before and M’Crae thought he might again. There was a fake pass to Ned and Boyle grabbed the ball and dashed past Brooks. But Hall had sized up the play and the secondary defense leaped forward to close the gap. For an instant the line wavered. Cal, fighting with every ounce of strength, felt it give and a fierce exultation seized him. But despair followed after, for the tide turned. He felt himself going back. Beside him Boyle was grunting and panting, the ball held tight. The House backs threw themselves into the melee, but it was no use. The whistle blew and the referee pulled them away. They had lost first down and the ball by a full yard on the very threshold of victory! M’Crae, casting one despairing look at Brooks, turned and trotted up the field. Brooks, white and miserable, croaked encouragement.

“All right, fellows, we’ll take it away from them! How much time, please?”

The time-keeper trotted up, watch in hand.

“Four and a half minutes,” he called.

Hall, grinning and happy, settled into line. The first plunge netted her six yards right through House’s left wing. Brooks scolded and stormed.

“Hold them! Hold them! Can’t you hold them?”

Hall’s quarter started his signals, but Grow stopped him. There was a whispered consultation and Grow walked back behind his goal-line and held his arms out.

"Kick!" shouted Brooks. "Block it, block it, block it!"

Block it! Cal remembered Ned's words. Here, then, was his first and final chance to show his worth! Could he get through? And if he did could he get near the ball? He eyed Dixon stealthily. That youth looked pretty solid and formidable. To get inside of him seemed hopeless. The only chance was to coax him in and then get through between him and end, and after that there was a long way to go. But he would try it.

He edged close to Brooks and Dixon followed him. Grow raised his arms. Center shot back the ball. Cal feinted to the left and then sprang past Dixon to the right. A back stood in his way, but Cal sent him staggering. All was confusion and cries and rushing players. Cal saw Grow swing his long leg and heard, or thought he heard the sound as boot met ball. And then he was leaping sideways, arms up-stretched. Something struck him fair under the chin, something that staggered him and then went bouncing erratically back past Brooks, who was stumbling under the attack of the enemy.

For what seemed a long minute to Cal he couldn't get started. When he did he dodged a frantic pair of blue-clad arms and ran like the wind. The ball was trickling along the turf far back from the goal-line. Half a dozen players, red and blue, were after it, but Cal was ahead. A Hall player came tearing along behind him and Cal knew that if he missed the ball on the first attempt his chance was gone forever. He didn't wait until he was fully up to it, but dived for it as a cat pounces at a mouse. The distance was more than he had thought and he came to earth with the teetering pigskin an arm's length away. But he got it, reached it and grabbed it toward him just as the pursuing foe fell upon him and drove all the breath from his

body. Others followed, falling and scrambling. Someone tried to wrest the prize away from him, but Cal, although there was scarcely a gasp left in him and his eyes seemed popping from his head, hung to it tenaciously, striving hard to snuggle it under his body. Then somewhere a whistle blew and little by little the awful weight lifted and he could draw a full breath again.

"Let me have it, Boland."

That was M'Crae's voice and he was pulling at the ball. But Cal only shook his head and held on.

"It's—mine!" he gasped.

Then someone turned him over on his back and tore the ball from his hands and began lifting his arms up and down. But Cal was all right now. Brooks, grinning, his face as white as a sheet of paper save for two disks of red in the cheeks, pulled him to his feet and hugged him.

"O you Boland!" he gasped huskily. "O you Boland!"

Cal smiled embarrassedly.

"I cal'late that was a touchdown, wasn't it?" he asked.

There was no goal kicked, but what did that matter? House didn't care and Hall could get but slight satisfaction from the fact. Two minutes later the game was over and House, victor by 5 to 0, went cavorting and dancing off the field, tired, aching, bruised and happy.

An hour later, after House had cheered itself hoarse in front

of the gymnasium, the West House eight marched back across the park, Sandy striding ahead with the Silver Shield held proudly before him. The West House eight did I say? Rather the West House nine, for beside Sandy tripped Miss Molly Elizabeth Curtis, the Obnoxious Kid, waving triumphantly her red and white banner!

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes:

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 *Team-Mates* by Ralph Henry Barbour]