

FRANK  
MERRIWELL'S  
SET-BACK



BURT · L  
STANDISH



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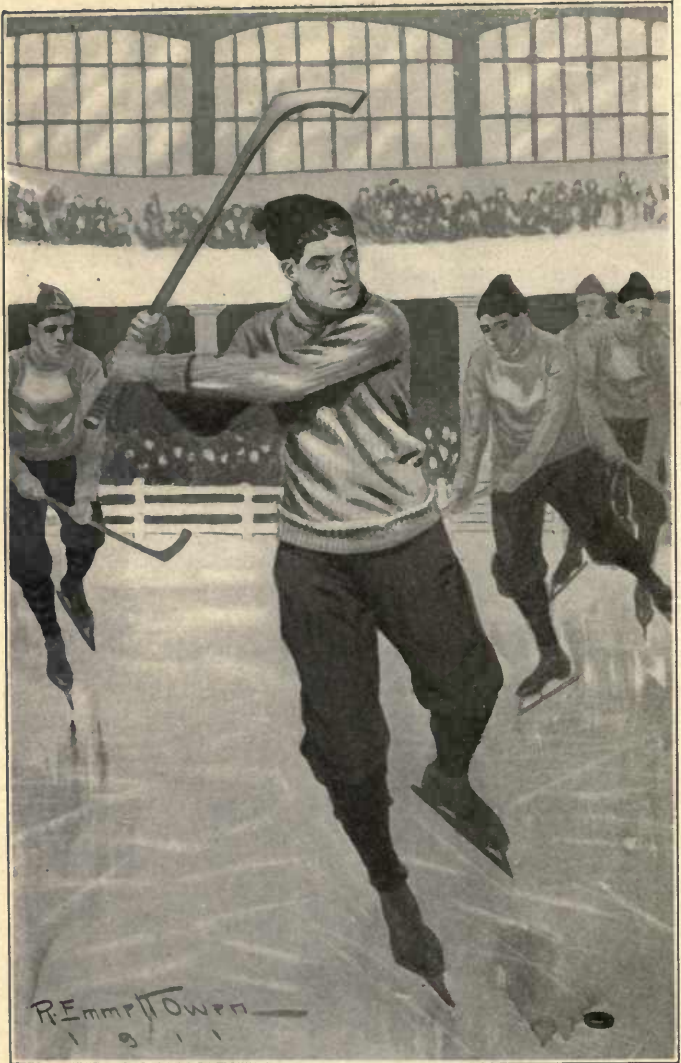
IN MEMORY OF  
EDWIN CORLE

PRESENTED BY  
JEAN CORLE









Finally Merriwell found the opening he was seeking and drove the puck  
between the goal-posts.

# FRANK MERRIWELL'S SETBACK

A STORY FOR BOYS

BY

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"The Merriwell Stories"

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**Frank Merriwell's Setback**

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# FRANK MERRIWELL'S SETBACK.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE GIANT OF THE WHEEL.

In its various forms it was an old trick, and it ought not to have worked on Starbright, who had come from the famous preparatory college at Andover. But by some chance, Dick had never heard of it, and the sophomores, discovering this, prepared to "work" him with it.

It was a principle with the lordly sophomores to annoy freshmen, and the towering young giant, who had already made himself so famous at Yale, suffered as much at their hands as less noted mortals.

There is a streak in human nature which causes those who have been "through the mill" to want to put others through. This spirit accounts for "hazing," in all its forms.

Jack Ready started it by offering to bet Dick Starbright ten dollars that he could not ride a bicycle from New Haven to Guilford and back, a round-trip of thirty-two miles, in three hours. Starbright snapped him up quicker than a wink, for though there were many things he could do better than bicycling, Dick knew that he could do this, and the trip to Guilford,

along the pleasant shores for a great part of the way, was an attractive one.

The bet was made one Wednesday evening, and Dick was to do the riding the next Saturday afternoon. Starbright told his friend Dashleigh about it.

"Of course you can do it!" Bert declared.

"Dead easy! Why, I could do that trip in two hours, even if the roads are sandy. But three! I don't know what Ready is thinking about. He must fancy that I can't ride a wheel. Perhaps it is because I started in to take part in the relay race and Merriwell pulled me out of it and put me at other work. But that was only because you are a faster rider than I am, and my size and strength made me a promising candidate for the shot-putting and hammer-throwing."

"And you did your part well, old man. You covered yourself with glory!"

"And I'll show these duffers that I can ride a wheel. I'll see how quickly I can do the trip, and I'll make their eyes bulge out when they see me back."

Dick did not get an opportunity to see Merriwell, but he told Browning; and Browning, who had been "let in on the ground floor," assured Dick that he could make it "dead easy," and that Jack Ready was a fool for offering such a bet.

"It will be a good way to open up Merriwell's entertainments," said Ralph Bingham, when Starbright chanced to speak to him about it. "I'd do it, if I were you."

Bingham was a sophomore, but Dick did not think of that.

Carker, alone of the sophomores, objected, urging that he disliked to see so good a fellow as Starbright toyed with in that way.

"Well, you aren't going to chip into the thing and spoil the fun, just because it doesn't suit you, are you?" demanded Bingham. "We sophomores must hang together. Ready is an especial friend of yours, and he is managing the thing. Don't you think it would be rather a scaly trick to give the snap away?"

"If Merriwell should hear of it?"

"He'll not hear of it. He has his hands full of other matters just now. And he wouldn't interfere, anyway, for he's no milk-and-water kid. He had to go through the mill when he was a freshman, just as we did, and it did him good. I like Starbright. He's a fine fellow. But he's a freshman, and he's in great danger of coming to think that he is 'it'! He has boomed right up, and he'll be wearing frills of great importance round the gray matter of his thinking machine the very first thing we know. Already he believes that he's better than any sophomore that ever trod the campus or sat on the fence. This thing won't hurt him. It will do him good, and tend to make a man of him."

This sort of logic, directed to a fellow classman, was irresistible.

Ready was not at all sure that Merriwell would interfere; but, fearing that he might, for Dick was

recognized as his protégé, he contrived to keep the two apart most of the time, managing to be with one or the other whenever they met, and to so skilfully direct the conversation that no opportunity presented for a discussion of Dick's proposed ride. As for the other students of all classes, they shut up mum on the subject whenever Frank came into their midst.

There was a lowering gray sky and a hint of a change in the weather on that Saturday afternoon when Dick wheeled up in front of the New Haven House for his start. He rode a very high frame to accommodate his great height. It was a heavy roadster, not adapted to racing, but Dick had been able to crack it up for good speed on more than one occasion.

As for his attire, Dick was comfortably clothed in a woolen bicycle-suit somewhat the worse for wear, and wore a visored cap. Like most Yale men, the cut and quality of his clothing were of secondary consideration, his only demand being that it would suit his needs and be comfortable.

Jack Ready was there, to lead the cheer with which Dick's departure was greeted, swinging his cap and yelling, after a preliminary offer to double his bet, which offer Dick would not accept. He was sure he would win Ready's money, and for that reason he did not want the bet raised.

Dashleigh was there, too, and other freshmen. There were some juniors and seniors, also. But the larger number gathered in front of the hotel were sophomores.

Starbright liked a bicycle, though he was too large and heavy to become a crack rider. He was a good wheelman, though, and he swung away with cheerfulness through the level streets of the college city and out toward the road that leads close along the shore of the Sound, following as closely as he could the railway line.

He found the wind heavy as he began to wheel over the Sound route. The breeze was off the water and he was forced to bore into it quarteringly, which, with the character of the road, made the wheeling rather too heavy for pure pleasure.

Nevertheless, Starbright "hit it up" at a good gait, bending forward over the handle-bars and thrusting his visored cap into the wind like the sharp prow of a racing yacht.

Now and then a farmer stared curiously at him as he slipped by. This grew so frequent as he neared the first of the half-abandoned summer resorts of that part of the Sound that he dismounted from his wheel, feeling that something in his personal appearance caused these men of the hoe to inspect him in that way.

Having looked his wheel over and found it all right, Dick took off his coat and inspected that. There was no legend pinned or chalked on its back, and nothing about him which could draw so much attention.

"The fellows act as if they had never seen a bicycle!" he grumbled, as he replaced his coat and remounted for the continuance of his journey. Yet that this could not be so seemed to be proved by the proximity

of the summer-resort hotels, which poured out scores of wheelmen for these roads every season, to make no mention of the bicyclists of New Haven.

On reaching the first of the summer resorts, Dick was surprised still further to find a number of men and women, chiefly composed of the class who get their living in the winter from the waters of the Sound or by taking care of the abandoned caravansaries, standing grouped on a corner as if awaiting his coming, and staring at him with undisguised curiosity as he wheeled by.

"Don't think much o' yer wheel!" one of them shouted. Then added: "No; I don't think I'll buy one of 'em next summer!"

Stopping by a spring for a drink, he leaned the wheel against a fence, and a country youth came forward to look it over. Dick would have thought nothing of this if the young fellow had not asked him if he thought he received enough pay for that kind of work.

"Not doing it for pay," said Dick.

"Y'ain't racin' ag'in time, then?" was the bland question.

"Not exactly."

"Can't say that I want to buy the wheel!"

"I haven't any notion of selling it."

Then the countryman stared at him.

"You ain't Jimmy Michael?"

"Jimmy Michael, the famous bicyclist? No. What made you think so?"

"And ain't you advertisin' a new kind of wheel that's a world corker?"

"Nothing of the kind."

The country lad flushed and moved away with explanation.

"What's the matter with the fellow?" Starbright thought. "Jimmy Michael? Nobody could mistake me for Jimmy Michael!"

Still the farmers stared at him as he wheeled by. Sometimes, when they beheld him coming, they came close down to the road, often the whole family, and stared after him as he passed on.

Once a young woman waved a handkerchief roguishly at him from a kitchen window. Dick began to feel red and uncomfortable; and then, at the next village, he was asked by a member of the mob that was apparently gathered to see him, what the make of his wheel was, and if it was to be sold cheaper than other makes of good wheels, he inquired why the question was asked.

For answer the man pointed to a large placard on a wall:

"Richard Starbright, the world-famous giant of the wheel, will this afternoon make a race against time from New Haven to Guilford and return for the purpose of advertising our new make of record-beater roadsters. Starbright has beaten the record of Jimmy Michael, and our wheels beat the world. He has circled the globe in the interest of our wheels. Wait for him! You cannot afford to miss seeing him!"

"You look a good deal like a Yale guy, but yer size made us think mebbe you was the man," the citizen explained.

"Yes, I am the man!" said Dick hotly flushing. "I'm a guy all right, too!"

"What's the make o' the wheel?" another queried, walking round as if to inspect its fine points. "Looks like you've rid it a lot. I should think they'd have sent you out on a shinin' new one?"

"What countries have you ridden through?" queried a vinegary woman in spectacles. "I do hope you've been through Tibet. But if you have, the natives didn't treat ye as bad as they do some folks. I've got some real good buttermilk, and if you'd like to drop into my house a minute to rest and tell me about Tibet I'd take it kindly. I'm so interested readin' 'bout Tibet that I can't hardly sleep o' night sometimes. It's the first house on the corner as you go down—a little white house with green winder-blinds."

Starbright was in a profuse perspiration.

"Thank you!" he said. "You're very kind. But I must really hurry on. I've stopped too long now."

Then, feeling that the only way to get away from these people was to mount his wheel, he hopped on it and fled through the village, giving a glance at the little white house with the green blinds as he swept by, and thinking that perhaps the proper thing would have been to stop there and talk Tibet to the inquisitive, spectacled lady and sip her buttermilk while he thought out some plan for outwitting his tormentors.



"This is Ready's work!" he panted, as he wheeled down the road. "I'll have to murder that fellow! I see there is no help for it! I shall have to take him between my two thumbs and squash his life out as I would any common bug!"

He tried to smile when the village was behind him.

"It's a good joke, anyway, and it's on your Uncle Richard! Of course, the whole college knows of it now, and New Haven will know it before night. Heavens! If it should get into the newspapers!"

Dick wheeled on so fast, hardly knowing now that he was speeding, that he found himself approaching the next little village almost before he thought it possible. He saw the inevitable crowd gathered on the principal corner of the street, through which he must pass unless he elected to make a wide *détour* and avoid the village altogether. Some boys raised a cheer as he drew near, swinging their hats with an urchin's delight.

"I'll not stop!" Dick grunted, shrinking from the thought of again encountering some one who would ask him about his world-wide travels. "They'll want to know if I've been in China, likely, and if I've fought the Boxers, and how many I've killed!"

So he put on extra speed, lowered his visored cap, bent over the handle-bars, and went through the street like a streak of lightning. The boys yelled and whooped, and he could not help hearing one citizen remark that "Jimmy Michael ain't in it with that feller!"

"Here comes the bikeist!" a boy was shouting to

another group at the lower corner. "Come quick, Sammy, 'er ye'll be too late!"

"Geewhiskers! ain't he a snorter?" another boy yelled.

The group broke into a wild cheer as Dick swept past, pedaling as if he were racing for life. When he had escaped from these innocent tormentors, he began to think over the situation and to ask himself if he should go on to Guilford or stop where he was and retrace his way to New Haven by another route. To do that would be to lose his bet. Not that he cared so much for the money or for the mere winning, but that would give Ready and the sophmores a perhaps coveted opportunity to guy him for cowardice.

No, he was in it, and there seemed to be no way out but to make the ride according to plans and schedule and win out, so far as that part was concerned. So he rode on, wondering if there were no means by which he could yet defeat the sophomores.

"Yes, this is the beginning of Frank Merriwell's entertainments!" he rather grimly thought. "I didn't know that I would be chosen to open the show in this way, though! Merry doesn't know anything about it, I'm sure."

Merriwell was planning some festivities of an athletic character with which he and his friends and other students were to celebrate the many victories won by Yale that season. The college had been wonderfully fortunate and triumphant on the gridiron, not having lost a single game during the entire season. Never

had a Yale team equaled the performance of the football eleven of that year under the leadership of the redoubtable senior. And not only in football, but in many other ways had Yale won honor with the victorious teams Merriwell had trained and led.

There was a grim humor in Starbright which made him appreciate the situation in which he found himself, even though he was the victim. At first he had paid no heed to anything placarded on the walls, but now, looking out for those glaring signs, he soon found one stuck against the side of a barn. It was on the side of the barn that was invisible to him as he came toward it.

So this had been Ready's plan! These glittering advertisements of the performance of the "Giant of the Wheel," produced, no doubt, by some New Haven printing press, had been skilfully plastered up along the roadside and in the villages in such a way that the wheelman approaching them could not see them. And the chances were small that he would look back and discover them after he had whirled by. This accounted for the fact that Dick had not for a time observed the notices which drew out the curious villagers and farmers.

In the next village, which was also of the summer-hotel variety, though there was a substantial element of people who resided there the year round, a larger crowd than ever stood in the street to await his coming.

The crowd broke into a cheer as he came in sight

and wheeled up to the corner. He had resolved to ask some questions.

"When were these placards stuck up?" he inquired.

"Yisterday. Say, mister, when's yer book comin' out?"

"What book?"

"Why, the feller that come along yisterday stickin' up the bills said that you was about to put out a book tellin' about yer wonderful adventures with the Toltecs while you was coastin' down one of them old Peruvian roads in South Ameriky."

"What sort of looking fellow was he?"

"Well, about so high and so wide. He was a sort of stocky chap with bright eyes and red cheeks. Come to think of it, when he got off his wheel to stick up the sign, I noticed that he toed in with one foot."

"That was Jack Ready."

"Was it? I didn't know! I believe he did say somethin' 'bout bein' always Ready."

"Aw! that feller's a Yale man!" a boy was heard to sneer. "He ain't never been in South Ameriky ner nothin'. I know them fellers soon's I see 'em."

"Be you a Yale man?" an old man growled, not relishing the idea of being drawn out and fooled in that way by a mere college student. He had walked nearly a mile to see the "Giant of the Wheel" go by, and he wanted his money's worth.

Dick was saved from answering this disconcerting question by a young man with a pale face and large nose, who crowded forward to inspect the wheel, say-

ing that he intended to purchase a bicycle the coming season.

"I thought, mebbe, when I heard that feller talkin' yesterday, that it was one of them headless wheels made in Indianapolis. D'y'ever see one of 'em? You sort of set in the handle-bars as if they was the arms of a rockin'chair. I didn't know but I'd like to have one of 'em. I'm sure the feller said somethin' 'bout headless!"

Dick thought it quite likely that the irrepressible Ready had referred to the rider of the wheel as "headless," or something of like character, indicating that he was "easy."

"Well, perhaps I am easy," he thought, as he wheeled on, glad to be past another inquisitive village.

Branford Point, a favorite watering-place, turned out a good-sized crowd to see the "Giant of the Wheel," but Dick concluded that he did not care to ask further questions or make the acquaintance of the curious people, so he flew through the place as rapidly as he could pedal.

He was making good time, even though the road was not of the best, in spots, and the wind blew cold from the leaden clouds in the northeast. He was warm enough, in spite of the wind, and sometimes, when he reflected too strongly on the condition in which he found himself, and of the laughing sophomores in the campus, he grew altogether too warm.

There were other groups to meet and pass, other farmers who hurried down to the road to look and

wonder, other boys who whooped and yelled and told each other to "git onto de legs of de Giant," and other things equally uncomplimentary to the bicyclist.

But Dick, having resolved to take the whole thing good-naturedly 'and philosophically, smiled back at them; and, whenever he dismounted, he answered the rain of questions as best he could, without revealing that he was the victim of a sophomore joke.

But when he reached Guilford, the end of his route—Guilford, celebrated as the birthplace of the poet, Fitz Greene Halleck—he met a surprise that took away his breath. In front of a conspicuous hotel was a brass band, surrounded by Yale sophomores, with Jack Ready prominent in their midst. They were waiting to give the "Giant of the Wheel" a right royal reception; and, as Dick wheeled up, almost too disconcerted to know what to do or say, the band struck into "See the Conquering Hero Comes!" and the sophomores gave a yell that shook the building and almost rattled the curbstones.

But Dick Starbright was quick-witted, and he pulled himself together, so that he was able to dismount with a smile and a bow.

"What sort of fool circus are you idiots trying to make of yourselves?" he blandly demanded, walking forward, pushing his wheel.

Ready wiggled his fingers characteristically.

"An immense one, old man, and you have been the clown of the show. We'll take supper at your ex-

pense to-night. In the meantime, you will find refreshments in the house of this publican."

He gave his fingers another wiggle and jerked them toward the hotel proprietor, who stood by with red face expanded in a grin.

"It's one on me!" Starbright admitted smilingly. "But the end hasn't come. Before Frank Merriwell's entertainments are over you Smart Aleck sophomores will acknowledge that the freshmen know a thing or two, and are more than your masters. And we'll not resort to deceit to win our victories or to give us a chance to 'holler'."

## CHAPTER II.

### TO THE AID OF DADE MORGAN.

Jack Ready and the sophomores had rushed to Guilford by train with their band, after Starbright's departure from New Haven, and had easily beaten him there, with plenty of time to spare. They returned by train, feeling supremely joyous over their success.

Dick, however, in accordance with the terms of the wager, was forced to wheel back to New Haven over the route he had come, again stared at and questioned by the curious people along the road.

The leaden clouds thickened and darkened, portending a northeaster; but, with the wind for a large part of the trip at his back, Dick sped swiftly along, approaching New Haven well ahead of time.

On the outskirts of the city he came upon a sight that stirred his blood. Dade Morgan, who had been out on a wheel accompanying Rosalind Thornton, found himself confronted by a rough-looking man whose brutal face was somewhat familiar to him, and who planted himself in the center of the street as if to intercept him.

Dade was not particularly afraid of the man, but rather scorned him.

"Out of the way!" Dade roughly commanded.

He rang his bell furiously. Rosalind paled.



Seeing that the man did not mean to step aside, and having no desire for an altercation with him in Rosalind's presence, Dade veered his wheel to pass. The man leaped at him, thrust a foot out in front of the wheel, stopping it, and Dade was thrown heavily over the handle-bars.

Rosalind, who was close at his side, was also thrown to the ground, though she saved herself from injury and skilfully alighted on her feet.

When Starbright saw this he set his pedals in still swifter motion, all his chivalrous instincts aroused.

Dade scrambled up; but the man struck him a heavy blow which knocked him backward.

"Dis is me time I git even wid you fer dat insult. See!" the ruffian growled. "Ye insulted me t'other night, when ye hadn't no call. Now I pays ye back!"

Rosalind gave a scream of fright. Starbright, swinging forward like a whirlwind, saw Dade dodge the next blow and grapple with the ruffian and saw them begin a furious fight.

Dade, who was a good, hard fighter, had been weakened by his fall, so that it was evident at a glance that he was no match for his burly adversary. He struck savagely, however, and managed to release himself from the man's grip.

The tough now struck at him, using a big doorkey as brass knuckles, with the amiable intention of cutting open the face of the "college dude." Morgan evaded this and landed a blow, but the fellow tripped him and kicked him heavily as he fell.

Rosalind, screaming for help, ran to one side of the road. Dade jumped to his feet again, and, managing to fasten on the tough, the two went down together.

Then the whirring wheel stopped beside the struggling couple; and, as the rough pulled loose and tried to strike Dade in the face with the heavy brass key, a blow from Starbright's big fist sent him reeling.

"Anodder college dude!" growled the ruffian, wheeling about. "Ye'll wish 't ye'd kep' out o' this!"

His hand went to his hip-pocket, but he found no weapon. Then he gathered himself and made a spring at the newcomer. As a result, he ran his face into the big fist on the end of a long, straight, stiffened left arm. At the other end of the arm were something like two hundred pounds of hard-trained muscle and over six feet of young manhood.

A feeling of jarring surprise penetrated to the evil brain. It was not often that he ran against anything quite like that. He paused a moment to stare his surprise; and Dick saw that he was a big, brawny fellow, with heavy jaw, small head and piggish, wicked eyes, the type so often found in the lowest slums of great cities, but seldom seen in New Haven.

The effect of that blow rendered the man cautious.

"Dis ain't your cut in, young feller!" he snarled.

Then, thinking to take Dick by surprise, he struck out suddenly, with the force of a piledriver. But his maul-like fist did not connect with Dick's face, and the force of the blow almost threw him to the ground.

Crack! Dick's hard right fist sounded like the smack

of a board striking a house. The fellow reeled, but recovered. His head was like iron.

"W'en I gits me fingers onto ye, ye'll wilt! See!"

He dodged Dick's next blow and rushed in with the ferocity of a bulldog. Dick stepped lightly aside; and the hard, white fist pounding the ruffian on the jaw threw him senseless to the ground.

Dade Morgan, having regained his strength somewhat, was on the point of coming to Dick's assistance, but drew back when he saw the man senseless on the ground.

"That was handsome of you, Starbright!" he acknowledged. "I'll try not to forget it."

Rosalind tried to stammer her thanks, but the presence of the ruffian, even though he was insensible for the moment, made her wildly anxious to escape from the vicinity. Some people were approaching, those in the lead seeming to be of the same type as the fellow knocked out.

Before their arrival the man was stirring into consciousness, making Rosalind more than ever wildly anxious to proceed. So she and Dade remounted and wheeled away.

"Perhaps the fellow is your friend," said Starbright, speaking to the man who arrived first. "If he is, look after him. He interfered with that young lady and her escort, and got what he deserved!"

Then he, too, rode on into the city.

Having reported his return, Dick put away his wheel, and, feeling tremendously hungry, went to a

restaurant and had something to eat. It was not until long after nightfall that he went to his rooms. The sophomores had returned to New Haven by rail long before.

"Gone out nagging signs!" was the scrawl left for him on the table by Dashleigh.

Dashleigh had not heard of what had befallen his chum on the trip to Guilford, for the joke had been kept from the freshmen. The sophomores had feared Starbright would learn of it through his freshmen friends; and, besides the sophomores had other plans in store for making it interesting for the men of the lower class.

After changing his clothing, Dick went out to give instructions for the "dinner" he meant to give to Ready and other sophomores that night. When he returned he encountered Dashleigh as the latter was about to ascend to their apartments.

"What have you got tucked under your coat?" Dick asked.

"'Sh!" Bert warned. "It's a sign."

"Nagging," or stealing, signboards is, for some inexplicable reason, one of the standard forms of amusement for freshmen. No one can tell just where the fun comes in, unless it is found in imagining the stormy anger of the storekeepers and others when they find their signs gone.

"Had a great time!" Dashleigh panted, as he and his chum hurried up-stairs. "Never had more fun

in my life. Ready was with us. Say, that fellow is a corker!"

"What time did he get back?"

"Back where?"

"New Haven."

"I didn't know he was out of town. Anyway, he didn't say anything about it. We nagged a lot of signs this evening. Ready went along to put us onto the thing right, you see. I hardly thought he'd favor freshmen that way, but he was just as jolly about it; said he'd been a freshman not long ago himself, and that he hadn't forgot it."

"What kind of a sign did you get?" Dick asked dryly.

He had cause to fear the "friendliness" of Jack Ready for unsuspecting freshmen.

"The dandiest in the lot. It's a new blacksmith's sign, or a blacksmith's new sign, and it has a picture of a horse on it that is a real work of art."

They had arrived at their rooms, and Dashleigh carefully unbuttoned his overcoat and took from under it the sign. He stared at himself and the sign in comical amazement.

The sign had been freshly painted, and his clothing was coated with the paint. In addition, he had slapped the picture of the horse up against his dark new coat as he tucked the outer coat over it, and the impression of the horse had been transferred to the coat. Starbright could not help laughing.

"Seems to me it is literally a horse on you! That is more of Ready's work."

"Why——"

Dashleigh looked from the paint to the red face of his friend.

"Jack Ready?" he gasped. "Say, did Jack put up a job on me?"

"He certainly did, and he put up another on me this afternoon."

Dashleigh daintily put down the sign, stripped off his overcoat, and sat flat down in a chair.

"Well, say, when I meet that fellow I'll kill him! Don't you suppose there was a mistake?"

"Biggest kind of one!"

"What?"

"When we let ourselves forget that Jack Ready is a sophomore and we are only freshmen."

Dashleigh looked ruefully at his clothing and at the fresh red paint of the sign. Then the humor of the situation came to him, and he smiled, though the smile was somewhat ghastly.

"I'm an idiot!"

"Of course you are. We're a pair of idiots!"

"What did he do to you?"

"Tell me about the sign first."

"Well, you see, I've been wanting to go out nagging for several nights. Jack heard of it, and he told me that he could give me some pointers. So I spoke to some other fellows."

"All freshmen?"

"Yep."

"So I thought."

"And Ready piloted us to-night. He showed me this beautiful sign in front of the blacksmith's, and told me that it had been up there only a short time, and it would be a lovely one to nag."

"It had been up there only a short time!"

"Confound him! I see it had. I thought it felt damp as I pulled it off the hooks, but we had a few drops of rain this evening, and I supposed that was the reason. Then I clapped the thing under my coat and fled hitherward. And there the thing is. And my beautifulest suit is ruined. Well, when I meet him I'll kill him!"

"It will give a good job to some coat-cleaner. Better tackle the thing yourself, while the paint is fresh. There is some benzine over on the shelf."

Then, while Bert Dashleigh tried to remove the paint from his clothing, Starbright told of his race to Guilford and of the advertisements and greeting given to the "Giant of the Wheel."

"Say, we'll have to murder that villain!" Dashleigh whispered. "I feel to-night fit for treason, stratagem, and spoil."

Nevertheless, after laboring with the suit and benzine for an hour, he hung the sign against the wall, went out again, and, meeting Ready, greeted him with great cheerfulness.

"Thanks for the sign!" he murmured. "I've hung

it on our wall, and intend to have it framed as a memento of our adventure."

Ready grinned.

"That blacksmith will be tearing mad in the morning. His sign hadn't been hanging there long."

"Confound you! Don't I know it hadn't? That blacksmith never saw that sign in his life, and he never will!"

"It had a beautiful steed on it!" Ready purred.

"A sort of transfer picture! I transferred it to my coat!"

Then they adjourned to Traeger's and buried the hatchet, after which Ready betook himself to the dinner which Starbright was giving to the sophomores.



## CHAPTER III.

### SPORT WITH THE LASSOS.

The first of the "entertainments" was given that night in the gymnasium. It was a roping-contest between Bill Higgins, of Badger's ranch, and Tom Bludsoe, a cowboy from the neighborhood of El Paso, who had been traveling with a "Wild West" exhibition and had somehow become stranded in New Haven. Drink may have had something to do with Bludsoe's loss of position and his consequent poverty; but he was a fine roper, nevertheless, and in arranging to put Higgins against him for the amusement of the students, Merriwell was not at all sure that his friend from Kansas would be able to win out and cover himself with glory.

Perhaps because Merriwell had seemed in some of the class contests to side with the freshmen, Tom Bludsoe was enthusiastically backed by the sophomores, while the freshmen took Higgins for their champion.

"It chills the corpuscles of my sporting-blood to have to turn your picture to the wall to-night, Higgins," said Ready, ambling into the gymnasium, after his "feed" at the expense of Dick Starbright; "but the sophomores have taken up Bludsoe, and I'm a soph."

"Oh, that there is all right!" Higgins grinned, as he strung his riata across the gymnasium floor, to make sure it was in good condition. "This hyer ain't fer blood, ye know! Jist a little fun, to please Merry and t'other fellers! I hear tell there's another feller that's got a picture he'd like to turn to the wall."

"Dashleigh?"

"Picture of a hoss!" grunted Higgins, critically examining his rope and working at it with his fingers to take out an incipient kink which he fancied he had found. "I'm going to hold that agin' you!"

"He held it against himself!"

"Yes, so I heerd. But I'm a lover of hosses, and I don't like to have even a picture of one fooled with. That makes me willin' to champion these pore freshmen fellers to-night, and I'll string ropes fer 'em fer all I'm wu'th."

Indeed, Higgins was going into the contest with "blood in his eye." He believed that he was a better roper than the man from El Paso, even if Bludsoe had been engaged in giving public exhibitions of his roping proficiency, and he was glad of this chance. Higgins delighted in keeping himself in the public eye. Though he was a noble fellow in many respects, he was as vain as a peacock, and he "felt his oats considerably" that night, as he stretched his riata across the floor and walked round in his new cowboy clothing, with his great spurs musically clinking and jingling on his heels.

Bludsoe was a lithe, wiry man, younger than Higgins and smaller. He wore a smooth face, which was as bronzed as a copper mask. It was a sharp, hatchety face, keen and shrewd—the typical face of the cowboy of the plains, whose intense activity, combined with the dry, sap-extracting climate, tends to keep down all superfluity of flesh.

The opening feature of the contest was an attempt to pull down a tin cup hung by its handle on a nail against a post. A large roping-space had been cleared in the gymnasium by removing some muscle-strengthening machines and horizontal bars.

The room was filled to overflowing, the pushing, laughing crowd seemingly the more jolly because the night without was windy and inclement.

“Makes me think of the plains,” chirped Higgins, as, in a lull of the noise, he heard the singing of the wind round the building. “A feller that’s lived with the wind as I have sort o’ likes to hear its mournful whistle. I’ve heerd it sing that way, wrapped in my blanket, with the stars shinin’ brighter’n diamonds; and oncet I remember it had that wail when me and some other fellers was lying in a sod house, with the Pawnees creepin’ onto us through the grass.”

It was amusing to notice how the Chickering set and all the enemies of Merriwel invariably became champions of whoever they thought was opposed to him and his friends.

When Bludsoe pulled the tin cup from the post in two throws and Higgins took three throws for the

same feat, the Chickering crowd clapped their hands and stamped the floor in their glee.

"Say, I will have to go over to the freshmen side if this keeps up!" Ready moaned in Merriwell's ear. "It plants an ache in my heart and a desire in my foot to kick somebody. Yet I seem doomed by fate to howl with the Chickering set. Don't jot it down against me in your book of remembrance!"

The next attempt of the ropers was to catch and hold the corner of a swinging trapeze-bar, and as Higgins turned to get his rope, which he had dropped on a seat while talking with some friends, he roared with rage.

His new rope, in which he took such pride, had been split and ripped and cut in a dozen places by a keen knife. Higgins reddened under his tan as he surveyed the work of the unknown hand.

"If I kin lay my paws on the skunk 't done that, I'll try to see if they's enough of the rope left to hang him with!" he exploded.

He turned slowly round, with blazing eyes, and looked over the sea of excited faces.

"Gents, is this hyer Yale? A man mean enough to be a hoss-thief wouldn't do that on the ranges! All I asks is fer the scalawag that done it to step up to the counter and let me look at him oncet."

There was no forward movement, and every one seemed to glance at his neighbor. Bludsoe sneered.

"I don't reckon that any of yer friends did that to keep ye from bein' beat?"

Higgins turned on him with those blazing eyes. He saw that, in spite of the sneer, Bludsoe had no knowledge of the author of the outrage, and his hot heart relented. He remembered that Bludsoe was a brother roper of the plains, and that plainmen in a strange land ought to be friends and not enemies.

"I won't hold that again' ye, pardner. If you beat me, I'll know that you wouldn't do it by a trick like that. Some skunk that never set eyes on the peraries done that!"

Merriwell knew that another riata could not be had in New Haven, and he was about to suggest that something be substituted for the roping-performance, but Higgins asked if a common rope could be had.

"But a common rope won't give you much show!" Frank insisted. "I'd like to have you win in this thing if you go on with it."

"I'm goin' to win, b'jing!" Higgins vowed. "I'll win now if it kills me! Send fer a rope!"

Then he gave more explicit directions; and while some one hurried away for the rope, Starbright came upon the scene, and was asked to amuse the crowd by trying to beat the gymnasium freshman record for hammer-throwing and putting the shot, which he did.

When the hemp rope ordered by Higgins came he amused the students by showing them how to make a riata from an ordinary hemp rope. To make the "loop" he spliced an end back on the rope, wrapping it with shoemaker's wax, also securing the ends from

fraying by wrapping them tightly with this wax. Not a knot was used.

"The thing ought to be soaked in water fer two or three hours," he explained, "and then stretched with weights, but it'll haf to do as it is."

"If you can win out with that rope, you will show yourself to be a much better roper than if you had used your own lasso," Merry whispered encouragingly.

Then the rope-kings went at it again, catching the trapeze-bar as it swung from side to side, roping students who volunteered to run before them for the purpose, pulling caps and gloves from pegs and doing other roping-feats.

Though the rope so hastily prepared was clumsy and inclined to kink in an aggravating way because it had not been stretched, Higgins succeeded in doing some remarkably good work with it, duplicating every feat of Bludsoe.

The applause was pretty equally divided between the ropers, for the freshmen, feeling that their champion had been foully dealt with by some sophomore jealous of his ability, cheered every throw of Higgins with wild delight.

"Try the trapeze again," said Merriwell. "Then we'll try the cane, and those two things ought to settle it. Higgins is handicapped, but we're banking that he will beat Bludsoe anyway."

The first throw at the trapeze fell to Bludsoe. He stepped forward, holding the free end of the lasso in his left hand and the big swinging noose trailing in his

right. He took a keen look at the swinging trapeze, then threw and caught the end of the bar.

The Chickering set went wild with joy.

"That's all right!" grinned Higgins, getting on his feet. "I dunno 'bout this hyer rope, but I'll make my try."

Merriwell asked that the trapeze be given a quicker movement. It dropped like a bird with a broken wing, and Higgins' noose flew up to meet it.

The rope kinked and seemed about to fall short, but it caught the tip end of the bar, hung and tightened, and the descent of the trapeze was stayed.

Merriwell had secured a cane, round whose center he wrapped a white handkerchief to make it more conspicuous.

"I want Gene Skelding to throw this cane whirling through the air in that direction!" he requested, indicating the direction. "Let him throw for both Bludsoe and Higgins."

Skelding flushed and colored. Merriwell had made some of the throws, and Skelding had been claiming that the throws made by Merry for Bludsoe were not as fair and easy as those made for Higgins.

He would have backed out, but the sophomores pushed him forward, and he took the cane from Merriwell's hand, and sent it spinning end over end, as directed.

This was one of the most difficult roping-feats that could have been chosen, for the object was to put the

noose of the lasso over the flying cane, and so bring it down.

Bludsoe's noose struck the whirling cane, but simply sent it on faster.

Then there were shouts for Higgins, and he rose in all his cowboy dignity.

"Gents, I ain't a-sayin' that I'm goin' to do this, but I'm goin' to try. I reckon I couldn't do it every time with the best rope ever strung acrost a floor. But I'm goin' to try!"

Skelding saw that Merriwell was watching him closely and that the eyes of others were on him, so that, in spite of his desire to make an unfair toss, he did not dare to.

The wrapped cane flew out again, a whirling white streak, and Higgins' rope shot after it. He had nerved himself to make the throw of his life, and he made it. The stiff hemp rope swept through the air with the sinuosity of a serpent, and the noose, dropping over an end of the cane, brought the cane to the floor.

There could be no question that Higgins had won, and won fairly; for not only had he won this trick handsomely, but throughout the contest he had shown that, even with the handicap of the stiff hemp rope, he could do as good work as Bludsoe with his smooth, supple riata.

"Curse the luck!" Skelding growled to his friends, the Chickering set, some time afterward, when all were in Chickering's rooms. "Do you suppose that Merriwell knew I cut that rope?"



"Did you cut it?" Chickering gasped.

"Of course I did. I wonder if Merriwell knew it?"

"Well, it wath the handthometht thing I've known done in many a day!" purred Lew Veazie. "Chummieth, we'll have to dwink thome wine on that! That wath gweat!"

"But the fellow won, anyhow!" Skelding snarled. "And what I did only made his victory seem the greater. It was a regular boomerang! And my plan was to claim that some of his friends cut the thing for him to prevent him from going to the defeat they foresaw. I can't make that claim now, confound it!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### AN APPARENT CHANGE OF HEART.

Sunday afternoon Dade Morgan received a call from Donald Pike. The northeaster had turned to a snowstorm. Pike shook from his coat the feathery flakes as he came into Dade's room.

"There is to be a snowball battle in the campus in the morning, before college hours, between sophomores and freshmen. I'm told that you're to lead the freshmen."

"That's the plan now," said Dade. "Have a chair."

Pike hung up his coat as if he were at home, and seated himself. Dade closed the door, for he had a feeling that Pike desired to say something that ought not to go beyond the walls of the room.

"There's only one thing in this whole business that I don't like," Pike began.

"You mean of the entertainments?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Merriwell!"

"There are others I like myself better than Merriwell."

"That sounded funny. 'I like myself better than Merriwell!' Of course you do."

"You know what I mean"

"It seems to me that these 'entertainments,' as they're called, are planned solely to cover Merriwell with glory. That's the thing I don't like. He proposed them, of course. Some way, he always proposes everything, and then the rest fall in like a flock of sheep following their leader. We're not celebrating Merriwell's victories, but the victories of Yale. Yet the fellows are already calling them 'Frank Merriwell's Entertainments.'"

"You're warm!"

"I'm hot as a cake of ice!"

"I think I've seen you in that frame of mind before!" commented Dade, with the utmost coolness.

"Another thing I don't like, and which I should think you wouldn't like, is the way he has of pushing Starbright forward. He seems determined to make Starbright the king of the freshmen."

Dade's face darkened, and Pike saw that he had struck a vulnerable spot. Yet Dade only said coldly:

"I don't need to be told that!"

"And you haven't anything to say about it?"

"I've had a good deal to say about it, at one time and another."

"You're the real king of the freshmen, Morgan, and you know it. All your friends know it. It's for the freshmen to say who shall be their leader. Yet here comes a senior to dictate who the freshman leader shall be!"

"I'd like to help it if I could. I don't see any way to help it just now."

Pike was silent for a moment.

"Perhaps not. Merriwell seems to have the whip-hand at present."

He glanced toward the door.

"No need to fear that you'll be heard outside of this room!"

"Well, about that snowball battle in the morning?"

"We'll do up the sophomores, all right."

"I hope so. But that wasn't it. You ought to be able to do up Starbright, also, while you're about it."

There was not the encouragement in Dade's face that he hoped to see, but he went on.

"I've heard of soldiers being shot accidentally by their own men! Stonewall Jackson was killed that way!"

Dade looked at him earnestly.

"You want me to do that work?"

"Well, I thought you might thank me for a suggestion. You hate Starbright. There's your opportunity. When the fight is on, a snowball with a rock hidden in it would bring that big freshman down like a bullet if it was thrown right."

Dade flushed, and, getting up, took a turn round the room.

"I'd do it myself if I were one of the freshmen fighters. As it is, I give you the suggestion for what it is worth."

He began to feel that Morgan would accept and act upon the suggestion. Dade came back and sat down.

"I ought to thank you for that, Pike," he said in a low tone. "I'm no better than I ought to be, and I presume that if you had come to me yesterday, I should have thanked you for this. But I don't think I'll try to do what you say."

Donald Pike stared.

"Getting goody-goody?"

"No, it's not that!"

"Just the same with all of them!" Pike snarled under his breath.

"I don't think I understand you if you meant that for me."

"Well, you are just like all the others!" Pike asserted almost fiercely. "I don't know why it is, for it hasn't worked on me that way, but nearly every fellow who has started in here at Yale to down Merriwell has done one of two things: He has either become afraid of Merriwell and practically dropped out of the fight, or he has gone over to Merriwell."

Dade's face was again flushing.

"There was Buck Badger! I've told you of him before. He was the bitterest enemy Frank Merriwell had for a while, and he ended by becoming a Merriwell maniac. He thinks now that there never was another such man on earth. Why, I've been told that even Browning and Hodge, two fellows who can't think unless Merriwell first gives them license, were once his enemies! You're traveling the same road. I was Badger's chum and saw how he went over to Frank Merriwell, and you're struck with the same

symptoms. What in thunder is the matter with all you fellows, anyway?"

"It was Starbright you wanted me to strike with a rock, I believe?" said Morgan, not pleased with this lecture.

"Yes."

"Starbright isn't Merriwell."

"But he's Merriwell's protégé, and when you can't strike Merriwell himself, the best way to get at him is to strike Starbright, or some other of his friends. But you needn't do it if you don't care to. It was merely a suggestion."

"I'm still against Merriwell. Don't let yourself forget that, Pike!"

"But you won't be at the end of the year."

"And I'm still against Dick Starbright."

"I don't think so."

"I've a reason for not trying to do what you suggest. It isn't because I've suddenly grown too good. Perhaps I have a little honor left, Pike, though you mightn't think it. Not enough to boast of, I presume!"

"You haven't heard of it, but yesterday Starbright saved me from being half-killed by a tough that I met while out wheeling. The place was a lonely one in the suburbs, and I was wheeling with Miss Thornton. I met the tough in a drinking-den a few nights ago, and struck him with a beer-glass, after we'd had some words. When he saw me yesterday he came at

me for revenge, tripped me off my wheel, and then, while I was too shaken up by the jar of the fall to be able to do much, he set on me, and would have pounded and kicked me to a jelly. Starbright happened along at that moment. He took a hand in the game—and I'm here to-day, instead of being in the hospital."

Both were silent for a moment after the completion of the story.

"He did you a good turn, and maybe you're right. But really, I didn't think you had any soft spots about you."

"You thought such a thing wouldn't make any difference?"

"Yes, honestly, that's what I thought."

"And you thought I had no heart at all?"

Pike was quite blunt.

"I thought you had something like a gizzard doing duty for that organ. But it's all right, of course! I suppose I'd feel the same way if any fellow should stand up for me in such a fight."

"It wasn't a fight on my part. I was clean knocked out. I would have been hammered to pieces."

"Let the thing drop, then!" Pike begged. "And say nothing about it to any one. I didn't know you had changed in your feeling!"

The sneer stung Dade Morgan.

"I thought I should never let an opportunity go by to strike at Starbright or Merriwell. I'll get over this

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in a day or two. But I can't forget quite so quick. Starbright will do or say something soon that will make me forget his favor, and then I presume I'll be ready to hammer him up. But to-morrow, in that battle, I'm going to play fair, so far as he's concerned, at least."

"Good-by!" snarled Pike, rising. "You can keep your face closed about this, anyway!"

"See here, Pike!"

The voice was so hard and commanding that Don Pike stopped.

"I'm a fool! Don't fancy for a minute that I would mention such a matter. You've stood by me, even though you're not a freshman, and I don't forget it. Some other time I'll be likely to strike at Dick Starbright. Just now I feel a little queer about that matter, and I can't. That's the truth of it."

"I'm going!"

"Just remember that. And if you've any bets to lay, put them on the freshmen."

"If they win, Starbright will get most of the glory! It doesn't matter to me, though. I'm not trying to beat him in the race for the freshmen leadership. You are."

Dade Morgan sat for a long time in silence after Donald Pike's departure. Finally he roused himself.

"I wish the fellow hadn't come to me with that!" he thought, rising. "Either that, or I wish that it hadn't been necessary for Starbright to come to my



help yesterday afternoon. I wonder what Rosalind thinks about it? I fancied she was somewhat cool to me after it. No doubt he is her hero now, and I'm nothing. Well, if he wants her again, he can have her!"

## CHAPTER V.

### STARBRIGHT SHOWS HIS LEADERSHIP.

The crisp air that blew across the famous Yale quadrangle was filled with flying snowballs. The freshmen, under the leadership of Dade Morgan, were battling with the sophomores, under the command of Jack Ready.

At one end of the quadrangle a snow-fort had been built. It was held by the freshmen, and the sophomores were allowed twenty minutes in which to take it.

The plan of the battle, of Merriwell's devising, contemplated after that the rebuilding of the fort and a change of sides, permitting the sophomores to hold the fort and the freshmen to become the assaulting party.

Behind the snowy walls of the fort and out in the open where the sophomores were collected were great piles of snowballs, the artillery, grape-and-cannister of the contending forces. The snow was in the best of condition for the purpose, balling readily under pressure into light yet compact missiles.

Ready had directed his men to begin with a fierce "rifle-fire" of snowballs, and then charge the fort before the freshmen could recover from the hail of balls; and the sophomores were doing their best to follow his instructions.

Nothing was to be used, however, but snowballs and snow. Tackling with the hands, and all rough work, such as kicking or striking or the use of other than snow missiles, was strictly barred, and every offender was to be summarily ejected from the fight, with the loss of his services to his side.

Merriwell stood with his old friends Browning and Hodge at one side of the quadrangle, all interested spectators. Merriwell was the umpire to decide on fouls of all kinds, with the power of expulsion from the play of every offender.

The freshmen behind the walls met the rain of freshmen snowballs with a counter-fire that was as hot as they could make it.

“Better save our ammunition for closer quarters!” Starbright advised, venturing to speak to Morgan.

The interference stung Morgan to the quick.

“Who’s commander here?” he snarled.

“You are. I only make the suggestion.”

Morgan moved away, and, as if to show that he disliked the interference, he gave commands that caused the freshman fire to grow even hotter. Seeing that this was the order, and determined to be in the front rank, Starbright flew to the nearest opening, and, with an armful of snowballs, rained them on the sophomores.

He had scarcely done this when he felt a crushing blow on the back of the head which tumbled him half-senseless on his face. As he rose, staggering,

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and felt of his head, he found blood trickling down over his fingers.

The ball that had struck him had "exploded," and, noticing it at his feet, he saw that in its center there had been a ragged rock.

The air was filled with flying snowballs. Nevertheless, feeling wofully faint and dizzy, he turned squarely round, cowering meanwhile behind the snow embankment, and looked over the freshmen.

"Morgan did that!" he thought. "I'd bet anything Morgan did that!"

Yet it seemed strange that a commander should want to knock out one of his own men.

Starbright picked up the rock and looked at it. Then he thrust it into his pocket and again felt of his cut and bleeding head.

"Hello!" said Dashleigh, seeing blood on Starbright's fingers and the stain of it on the snow.

"Hit with this!" said Dick, producing the rock. "It came near laying me out."

The big fellow was reeling sick, but he tried to conceal it. And as there was no possibility of telling who threw the stone, he gathered himself together, tied up his head with his handkerchief, and again went into the fight.

Dade was now in front of him, at the head of his men, though a short time before, as Starbright knew, he had been in the rear.

As Dick straightened up and reentered the fight he

saw a ball strike Morgan in the back of the head, saw the ball split open, and, as it fell, saw a ragged stone drop out of it.

Dade went down on his face insensible.

Dick half-wheeled to ascertain from what point the treacherous missile came, but at that moment he collided with Dashleigh and fell.

"Pardon!" Dashleigh bellowed, racing to a point that he thought needed defense.

The fire of the attacking party was slacking, and Dick felt sure that an assault was to come.

Morgan lay insensible, and Dick saw a red stain on the snow.

"Was that an accident?" was his thought. "Were they both accidents? If so, some of our men aren't fighting fair, but are putting stones in the snowballs."

It was so contemptible a trick that his blood boiled and he felt ashamed that such men could be among freshmen.

But there was no time for thought. There seemed to be no time for anything, for, under the lead of Ready, the sophomores were advancing to the charge.

Outside, the students and other spectators were wildly shouting and whooping. The rain of snowballs had been so thick that the fall of Starbright and Morgan had not been perceived even by the keen eyes of Frank Merriwell.

"Take care of him!" Starbright commanded, speaking to two of the freshmen.

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These two were not in the fighting-line, but had been detailed, with two others, by Morgan to manufacture snow ammunition.

The freshmen had been weakened by Morgan's fall, and now were wavering and undecided. But the instant that Starbright sprang into position at their head and began to utter sharp, quick commands, they recognized his natural leadership and gave him instant obedience.

"Hold them back!" Starbright roared.

Fierce as the fight had been, the ammunition was not all exhausted; and the two men left for this purpose began to heap a great mound of balls at the feet of the fighters.

"Charge 'em!" came in the shrill voice of Jack Ready; and, with their arms filled with snow, the sophomores came on in a mighty, sweeping rush.

"Now, give it to 'em!" Starbright roared back.

Ready, in the lead, was right against the walls, with a dozen of his men at his heels.

"Snow! snow!" Starbright bellowed.

It was a signal agreed on, having been issued by Morgan before the beginning of the fight.

The snowballs in the hands of the freshmen were thrown; then great armfuls of snow were picked up and dashed into the faces and eyes of the advancing sophomores.

Ready mounted the wall and fell over on the inside. His men tried to emulate his example. Four of them

came over with Ready, but the others were beaten back and almost smothered.

Then Ready and Starbright found themselves face to face. At it they went, each digging up snow by the armful and hurling it at the head and face of his opponent.

Ready fought blithely and chirpingly, pushing the snow out of his mouth and eyes. But a great armful fell on him out of the arms of the giant freshman, and Ready fell under it.

As if in a frenzy, Starbright danced about, heaping snow and still more snow on the prostrate freshman leader, until, from beneath his snowy covering, Ready was willing to confess his defeat.

"Let up!" he begged. "I'm not an Esquimaux! My maux is full now, clean down to my twinkling toes."

The other sophomores had been overthrown, and the assault had failed.

The time was so nearly up that it was seen to be impossible for the sophomores to take the fort in the few minutes remaining. So there was a truce.

Two of Ready's men had been hurt, and another of Starbright's; but not by snowballs containing pieces of rock.

Morgan was so weak from the effect of the blow that it was seen he could not again assume the leadership of the freshmen.

Sitting on a heap of snow, white and weak, he

looked up at Starbright, as the latter walked over to inquire about his injury.

"You did that, you sneak!" he hissed.

Starbright grew red.

"If so, who did that?"

Dick showed the wound in his own head.

"I was knocked down by a snowball just before you were, and my head was split open. I saw the ball strike you."

"You were behind me, then?" said Morgan.

"Yes, and I saw the ball strike you, and saw that it held a stone. Here is the delightful piece of granite that struck me!"

Starbright produced it.

"Well, you know I didn't throw that!"

"I thought you did, until I saw you get one of the same kind. Now I don't know what to think!"

"Oh, I guess you threw it, all right!" Morgan grunted. "You were mad because I told you to mind your own business."

Starbright walked away.

"I don't know who did it," he said to Merriwell, explaining the whole matter. "Dade thinks I threw the stone that struck him, but I wouldn't be fool enough to bang up my own head in this way."

"I'll try to look into the thing," was the promise. "Dade is too weak to go on with the play. It was a rascally piece of business, and I'm tempted to call off the battle because of it. The freshmen want you for



captain during the continuance of the fight if it's to go on. But you're looking pretty weak."

"Oh, I'm all right!" Dick earnestly asserted. "Give us another man in the place of Morgan, and we'll take the fort from the sophomores, or know why!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### CAPTURING THE FORT.

The snowball battle was raging again, with Dick Starbright captain of the freshmen and Jack Ready of the sophomores.

There had been some hasty preliminary work given to the manufacture of an abundant supply of ammunition. Now, with great heaps of snowballs near each man and deposited along the line of advance, and with other snowy heaps inside the reconstructed fort, the conflict was on once more.

“Don’t throw away your ammunition. Take time to aim, and throw to hit something whenever you throw. It don’t do any good to hammer the walls of the fort. Aim at the openings and at the men behind the walls!”

These were Starbright’s instructions, and his men were trying to carry them out. The balls for this reason, did not fly so thick and fast as when the sophomores were the attacking force, but they did quite as much execution.

Starbright intended to make the preliminary “rifle-fire” and “cannonade” comparatively short, and charge suddenly, in the effort to take the sophomores by surprise. But when his forces quickly ceased raining snowballs on the white fort and swept forward, they

found themselves confronted by the sophomores leaping the walls and coming at them.

Ready had ordered a sortie in force, for the purpose of surprising the freshmen. In the front of the walls of the snow fort the contending parties came together.

Unfortunately for Ready's plan, some of his men, seeing the freshmen coming, did not leap over the walls, but remained behind them; and these, now beginning to shoot snowballs at the enemy, rained their missiles alike on friends and foes. Within less than a minute it was hard to tell sophomores from freshmen, for each party, in attempting to shower and beat down the other with armfuls of snow, found its members transformed into snowy images of men, in which clothing and features were hidden under the white coating.

Again Starbright and Ready came face to face. For a moment they stopped, looking at each other as if trying to measure strength. Ready tossed back his hair with a flirt of his right hand that at the same time cleared the snow out of his face.

"I'm coming for you!" he panted.

"Here's where the Giant of the Wheel evens the score!" Starbright laughed back.

Then, with armfuls of snow suddenly snatched up, they dived at each other, and the hottest fight of the whole field began.

Starbright had the advantage by being taller; yet Ready was as supple, lithe, and active as a panther.

The air was filled with snow. Other sophomores

and freshmen were struggling almost as fiercely on every side, the sophomores trying to keep the freshmen out of the fort, and the latter desperately struggling to walk over the opposition and enter the enclosure.

Ready went down under Starbright's assault, but clung to one of Dick's legs, as this could not be considered, he thought, a violation of Merriwell's rules.

But Starbright, not to be thus impeded, sprang for the fort, dragging Ready; and the latter, letting go with extraordinary suddenness, Starbright fell over the wall upon the inside.

A half-dozen other freshmen had scaled the wall, beating back the opposition, and these now engaged with the defenders of the fort within.

In less than ten minutes from the time of the beginning of the struggle the fort was in the hands of the victorious freshmen.

Dick seized the flag which had at first been planted on the wall, but which had been knocked down, and, mounting to the defences, swung it over his bandaged head and led the almost breathless freshmen in a cheer.

It was not loud, for the freshmen were too spent to give the cheer volume; but an exploding roar was added to it, coming from the throat of Bill Higgins, the cowboy, who had watched the fight with great interest at one side of the quadrangle, out of the way of the snowy bullets.

"Whoop!" Higgins howled, yelling again when the

freshmen yells subsided. "I'd never believed so much fun could be got out o' a little snow. B'jings, that's a sport I'll 'naugurate on the ranges soon's I git back there. If I don't wallop and throw down and bury Saul Henderson so deep that a badger can't dig him out, I'm a liar! That's the sport fer the short-grass country!"

He was speaking to Merriwell.

"Which Badger?" Frank quietly asked.

"Which badger? Why, ye don't reckon I know the names of all the badgers of Kansas, do ye?"

Then, seeing the pun, he roared again.

Starbright came up to them, digging the snow out of his hair.

"How is your head?" Bruce asked.

Starbright put a hand to his bandage.

"Oh, I was so determined to do up Jack Ready that I forgot I had a head!"

"You didn't fight as if you'd forgotten your head, anyway," said Browning. "You kept it on your shoulders pretty well, I'm thinking."

"Yes, that was a great fight, Starbright!" Merriwell declared warmly. "And you showed good leadership. I want to congratulate you."

The words and the handshake that followed were more to honest Dick Starbright than had been the winning of the battle.

That evening Dade Morgan received another call from Donald Pike.

Dade's head was bandaged, but he had otherwise

entirely recovered. The blow of the stone hidden in the snowball had been a heavy one, sufficiently heavy to temporarily knock him out, but, with the exception of the cut on the head, which promised to heal readily, he had already thrown off its effects.

"Nice little souvenir of the fun of the morning!" said Pike, nodding at the bandaged head. "I guess you know you have Starbright to thank for that?"

"I did think so at first, but I don't know now. He denies it."

"Of course he denies it! He'd be an idiot to confess, wouldn't he?"

"Then who struck him? I didn't. How do you account for the fact that he was also hit on the head with a stone hidden in another snowball?"

"You're easy, Morgan!"

"What do you mean by that?" Dade queried, flushing.

"Just what I say. You're dead easy. Starbright threw that snowball. How do I know? Jimmy Seldon saw him!"

Dade straightened in his chair, while the dark look on his face deepened.

"Did Seldon tell you that?"

"Oh, I'm giving it to you straight! You were so soft that you declared you'd play fair in that battle, and the man you were to play fair with gave you that."

"Then who hit Starbright?"

"He wasn't hit. He fell as he was rushing toward the walls of the fort, and was kicked on the head by

accident. The kick laid open his head; and he made a great fuss about it for the purpose of making you think that he, too, was hit on the head. That's all there was to that. Seldon was in the rear at the time, and saw the whole thing!"

"Why didn't Seldon come and tell me, then?"

"He's ready to tell you now!"

Don Pike pushed the door open, and a stripling, with a pale, nervous face, entered. He came in hesitatingly and stood with hat in hand till Dade asked him to take a seat.

Morgan knew Seldon well, and did not highly regard him, though the fellow had been one of the twenty freshmen selected to take part in the snowball battle.

"We've talked it over, and Seldon is ready to tell you all about it," said Pike, as Seldon dropped into a chair.

"Yes, I saw it!" Seldon avowed. "Starbright was behind you, and he aimed that snowball straight at your head, while pretending to be aiming it at the sophomores. I was so close to him that I'm sure I couldn't be mistaken."

"Did you see Starbright when he was struck?" Dade asked, his heart flaming again against Dick.

"No. I don't think he was struck. He fell, and one of the fellows kicked him. I think so, anyway, for I saw a fellow stumble over him. A moment later I saw there was blood on Starbright's fingers. But I'm sure he wasn't hit by a ball."

"Why didn't you make a report of it to Merriwell, or to me?" Morgan demanded.

"Well, to tell the truth, I was afraid to."

"Afraid to?"

"Afraid of Dick. He would say it was a lie, and perhaps try to take it out of my hide. So I kept still."

"And only told Pike?"

"Yes. Pike and I have been pretty good friends, and we got to talking about the fight, and I told him."

"And I insisted that he should come and tell you," said Pike. "I thought you ought to know it."

Morgan looked at Seldon.

"This is all right!" he declared. "I'm glad you came to me with it. You needn't think I'll blab and get you into trouble. It's not my way."

"I assured Seldon that it would be perfectly safe for him to tell you, though he was doubtful at first."

"No, I won't say anything about it. But I'll get even with Dick Starbright!"

When Seldon had gone, Pike sat talking with Morgan for some time, trying to fan into fiercer energy the anger which Dade again felt toward the big freshman. Starbright was Merriwell's friend, and Pike had come to hate Merriwell so much that he wanted to injure whomever Merriwell liked, though Frank had never done anything to win such enmity from Donald Pike. There are some natures, however, which increasingly hate the man they try to injure, and their hate grows more and more bitter with each failure.



Pike really feared to test strength with Merriwell, hence resorted to the use of tools to accomplish what he feared to attempt himself.

Scarcely was Pike gone when Roland Packard came in with Gene Skelding. With Don Pike, they formed a trio who seemed to live on hate of Merriwell. They were no sooner seated than they began to talk of the snowball fight of the morning, and of the blow which Morgan had received.

"It was Starbright who did that," said Skelding. "I know, because I saw it. I was standing near one of the monuments where I had a good view of all that was going on. I thought, when I saw him lift his hand to throw, that he was aiming at the sophomores, but when I saw you drop as if you were hit by a rifle-bullet, I knew whom he had aimed at."

If Dade Morgan had doubted the story told by Jimmy Seldon, this would have driven away his doubts.

"It's all right, fellows, and I'm obliged to you. I shall remember that little blow against Richard Starbright. You needn't be afraid that I won't. He did me a good turn the other day, and I was feeling a bit soft toward him, but I shall not hold back now."

"I don't know how you are going to even the score with him," Packard craftily suggested.

"Oh, there are plenty of ways," Morgan snarled. "I'll find a way."

"Or make one?"

"Or make one!"

“Well, you know that you can count on our aid in anything you want to undertake.”

There were times when Dade Morgan despised these tools. He saw their innate cowardice, but often he felt forced to use them, for he knew he could not fight the battle he had undertaken against Merriwell alone.

When his pretended friends had departed, he sat for a long time alone, lost in thought, trying to plan some means to “even the score” with the big freshman.

“I wish Hector King were here!” he muttered finally, as he prepared to turn out his light. “But he has disappeared since Merriwell unmasked him. Given up the fight, probably. Well, I haven’t given it up! I’ll have to be careful, though, and strike in the dark. Merriwell and Starbright are too dangerous for me to fight them in the open.”

Then he extinguished his light and crept into bed, where he lay awake a long time, discarding plan after plan as impossible or impolitic, and listening to some freshmen singing in another part of the building.

The silver moon crept aloft in the cold sky and looked down on the snowy and deserted campus.

Dade’s heart burned when he heard the deep, rich voice of Dick Starbright join in the rollicking college songs. Bert Dashleigh was with the singers, gleefully thumping his mandolin.

By and by Dade slept.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ON LAKE WHITNEY.

The change in the weather had brought a change in the character of "Merriwell's Entertainments." Down by the famous fence on many a recent evening the "senior committee of three," fresh from the gymnasium or athletic field, had discussed and laid plans for the merrymaking. The "committee of three" consisted of Merriwell, Browning, and Hodge, into whose hands everything had been committed. Their first plans had contemplated field-contests, burlesque football-games, and similar sports, but the freezing weather suggested something new and different, and they promptly accepted the hint of the weather-clerk, and made the change.

When, on Wednesday morning, it was reported that Lake Whitney would bear skaters, the "committee of three" decided instantly that races on ice-skates would be the proper thing for the half-holiday entertainment of the students that afternoon.

Except in spots, the ice was found sufficiently thick and firm, and the new attraction drew an immense crowd to the shore of the lake that afternoon. Huge bonfires were built, for the air was sharp and the ground still covered with snow, and a prettier picture can scarcely be imagined than that of the rosy-faced

girls and young women clad in winter garments gathered round these bonfires, while they watched the skaters cutting figures and writing the names of themselves and their sweethearts in the glassy ice with their skates.

Inza and Rosalind were there, Inza having come out with Merriwell, and Rosalind with Dade Morgan.

There was no prettier skater on the lake that afternoon than Dade Morgan. His movements were as graceful as those of a bird, and Rosalind watched him with pleasure, now and then casting a sly glance at big Dick Starbright, as if for the purpose of reading his face. She wondered in the depths of her heart if Dick were very jealous of Dade, and told herself that surely he must be.

As Jack Ready had boasted that he could beat Morgan in a mile race, and Dade had accepted the challenge, that was the first thing on the program.

"Oh, you can beat him!" Rosalind urged in the ear of her escort.

"Of course I can beat him!"

Dade made good his boast. Jack Ready had chirped of himself as a "winged wonder," but Morgan beat him in at the finish more than twenty yards.

"Well, you see, it was this way," Ready explained, stepping up to Rosalind as Dade moved to meet her. "I knew how you felt about it, and that took away my heart. No one can skate well with the wishes of a handsome young lady against him."

"Oh, come off!" Morgan snarled. "I beat you fair and square, and you know it."

Somehow, Morgan had never appreciated the humor of the fellow of the apple-red cheeks.

Ready wiggled his right hand in his bland way.

"There's a fellow over there you can't beat!"

"Who?"

"Dick Starbright."

Rosalind's dark face grew warm, for the words had been caught up by Dashleigh and some other of Dick's friends.

Finding himself growing angry, Morgan assumed a smile.

"It's all right! I don't care to race with Starbright!"

At the same time he was anxious for the race, for he fancied that he would be able to defeat Starbright more easily than he had Ready. His face showed nothing of the anxiety and plotting that had recently harassed him, and as for the wound on his head, the effects of it had entirely passed away, though there was a scar concealed by the hair and the cap.

As Dick was nothing loath to meet his enemy in a skating-race, the matter was quickly arranged, with Beckwith for the starter and one of the athletic-trainers for the timekeeper.

As the contestants skated away, Morgan remembered that Rosalind had not insisted that he could defeat Starbright, as she had that he could defeat

Ready. He wondered about it, and his heart grew hot.

"I'll beat him, all the same!" he determined, and started in with clean, quick strokes, remembering to skate handsomely at the same time, for the eyes of the spectators were on him.

To all appearances, the big freshman did not seem to be so good or so fast a skater as his slighter rival, but the way he went over the ice was surprising. His stroke was longer, though not so quick, and it took him forward with astonishing speed.

Morgan tried to draw ahead of him, but found Starbright hanging doggedly at his heels.

Away they went like birds down to the half-mile point, and, turning there, came flying back, with about the same relative distance still between them, Morgan skating with all his strength and skill, and Starbright, seeming slow, but still right at Morgan's heels.

The crowds on the shore began to cheer. Dade heard it and increased his efforts. Then he heard Starbright's stroke quicken, and, to his dismay, saw the big fellow go by him.

The fight to the finish was pretty. Starbright still seemed to be skating slowly, and Merriwell, who was watching him, saw that the giant freshman had a lot of reserve force, and that he was not doing all that he could.

Dashleigh danced up and down and almost broke the ice through, so jubilant was he when he saw his big chum in the lead.

Rosalind was paling and flushing by turns, and even Frank, who glanced at her occasionally, could hardly determine whether she favored Starbright most, or Morgan.

In the final twenty-five yards Starbright seemed to lift himself and fly, and crossed the line easily and neatly the winner.

The smile was still on Morgan's face as he returned to Rosalind's side.

"My skates are dull," he said. "I think I could beat him with another pair. But now we'll see what Merriwell will do!"

One of the interesting things of the afternoon was to be a race between Frank Merriwell and Jack Simmons, a junior, who was everywhere noted as the "Skate King."

The enemies of Merriwell were jubilant. They had openly boasted that Frank would never dare to meet Simmons in a race on ice-skates, though they were forced to concede that in nearly every form of athletics Frank was the best man who had ever been seen in Yale. But Frank, though he had defeated Jack Ready and some others, had never laid any claims to be a wonder on skates.

He had not wanted to enter a race against Simmons, for, in arranging the "entertainments," his idea was to give others an opportunity to show what they could do. Therefore, he had no desire to exploit his abilities. But he had finally consented, when Simmons

came to him and told him that he personally wished to make the race.

The excitement over the previous contests was tame compared with that now witnessed.

Frank came on the ice wearing the winged skates which had been given him by Inza Burrage the previous winter. They were as handsome as were ever turned out by a skate-maker, and on the heels, as ornaments, were pairs of tiny metal wings, in imitation of the winged sandals of Mercury.

Jack Simmons wore racing-skates of the most approved pattern. He believed that he was really the king of skaters, and he was anxious to prove his superiority to Merriwell in this great winter sport.

The cheering ceased when the skaters moved forward side by side for the line, which they crossed together. It broke out again as they sped away, and was renewed as the racers neared the half-way point.

"Merriwell is fooling again!" growled Hodge, who was standing with Inza.

The skaters neared the half-mile turn, with Simmons slightly in the lead.

"He will win, you may be sure," said Inza. "Frank always wins!"

"Well, I've known him to fail, and often to come near failing by being altogether too generous. It's not my way!"

Inza smiled sweetly and serenely.

"Oh, I know it isn't, you fire-eater! You want to



murder everybody who comes against you in a contest!"

"Well, if I could beat them, you bet I'd beat them, without any monkey-business!"

There was no "monkey-business" as Frank came down on the home-stretch. He walked away from the skate king with marvelous ease, the winged skates bearing him on as if they were truly winged.

Simmons spurred in an effort to lessen the widening distance, but found it impossible; and Frank shot across the line far in advance of him, with Inza clapping her hands in delight, and Hodge growling that he knew Merriwell had "monkeyed" in the first half of the race.

There were other races; between Beckwith and Browning, which Bruce won, between seniors and juniors, and between sophomores and freshmen; races of all kinds, from singles to team-races. Combined with all of this there were many exhibitions of fancy skating.

Some boys came down to the shore drawing their sleds.

"A sled-race!" said Inza.

Rosalind heard it. Inza was talking to Starbright, and Rosalind's jealous heart was flaming.

"Starbright beat you before," she whispered to Morgan. "Perhaps you can beat him in a sled-race."

"How?" Dade asked.

"Why, don't you know? When I went to school in our village the boys used to skate races, drawing girls

on sleds. Every fellow was anxious to draw his sweetheart in such a race, and to win, of course. You can do it!"

Something in Dade's heart made him rebel against the proposition; but looking at Starbright, and feeling keenly the rankling sting of his recent defeat, he determined to offer the challenge. So he walked over to the big freshman and proposed the sled-race.

"If Miss Burrage doesn't object," said Dick, his fair face flushing. Inza did not object. She had seen and read the jealous look of Rosalind Thornton, understood its meaning, and was willing that the race should take place, believing firmly that Starbright could win.

"I think it would be delightful," she said. "Only, if I should fall off while you are going so fast, your skates might run away with you, Mr. Starbright, and take you into the woods."

Merriwell might have objected if he had been consulted, but this was outside of the program, and he had no wish to interfere. At the same time, he did not quite like the look in Morgan's eyes.

The race was to be across to the opposite point of land and back; and as there were to be no official starters and timekeepers or red tape, the arrangements were quite simple.

The sleds were brought forward, the girls seated themselves, and Starbright and his enemy were away, each dragging his fair load in the race across the ice.

Rosalind now and then gave Inza a stab out of her dark eyes, but the other dark-eyed girl affected not

to notice this as they were whirled on almost side by side.

The character of the ice made a divergence from the direct line necessary, thus increasing the distance to be skated.

Dick, who was not "playing" with Dade Morgan, even if Frank Merriwell had been "playing" with the skate king, reached the opposite point first, and turned to retrace his way.

Looking back as he carefully swung the sled round, he saw the crowd on the opposite shore waving handkerchiefs and caps, and heard their encouraging cheers. Then an increased desire to defeat Dade Morgan by as great a margin as possible came to him.

When Morgan turned the point, more than twenty yards behind Dick, his face was white and set. This second defeat meant much to him. He had not thought when he entered into it so readily that its result might mean his permanent defeat for the freshman leadership by his rival, but now his heart told him this was the peril before him.

To be twice defeated in one afternoon by Starbright might bring about the enthronement of the big freshman as the undeniable leader of the freshmen athletic forces.

"I will beat him!" he hissed. "He shall not defeat me again!"

"I'm not afraid!" Rosalind encouraged, feeling also the sting of defeat. "Go as fast as you can!"

Thus urged, Dade swept forward on the home-stretch

with all his might. He saw that an advantage could be gained by pressing nearer the dangerous ice, and to get that advantage he swung inward.

"We're going so fast that there isn't the least danger!" he told himself. "At this speed, one could safely pass over the thinnest ice."

Then he swerved still more.

Suddenly Starbright, who, taking the safe course, and was losing by this device of his opponent, heard the cracking of ice and a scream. He stopped, turning his skates sidewise, and almost being thrown by the sled, which ran against his heels.

Then he saw a sight that chilled his blood. The ice had given way under Rosalind's sled, and she had been thrown into a yawning opening.

She was struggling wildly in the icy waters.

The momentum had carried Dade across in safety, and the dropping of Rosalind from the sled had pitched him headlong.

Before he could recover, Starbright had skated back past him, and, without hesitation, seeing that nothing but prompt action could save the imperiled girl, had leaped into the water to Rosalind's assistance.

The lake was instantly covered with skaters hurrying to the scene of the disaster, among the foremost being Merriwell and Hodge.

Starbright secured a grip on Rosalind's jacket, and though the icy waters seemed to strike a chill to his bones, he succeeded in holding her head up, and swam slowly with her to the edge of the broken ice.

A half-dozen fellows threw themselves on the ice in a line, with Merriwell in the lead, crawled to the dangerous and crumbling brink, and thus drew Starbright and Rosalind out to safety.

Fortunately, carriages were in waiting, and into these the soaked skater and the equally soaked and half-drowned girl were quickly placed, and the drivers lost no time in getting their charges into the city.

"I'm awfully sorry!" said Inza, as she and Frank returned to town. "It was partly my fault. But I didn't think Morgan would be such a fool."

"There is no telling what a fellow will do when he is angry or jealous!"

"Or a girl, either," said Inza. "I could see that Rosalind was both when she saw me talking with Starbright."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DONALD PIKE'S PLOT.

There was no more disgusted individual in New Haven that night than Donald Pike. All his scheming and lies seemed to have come to naught. Morgan had not only done nothing to Merriwell or Starbright, but had been badly worsted in every way.

He met Gene Skelding, and they talked it over, but could get no cheer out of the situation. Roland Packard came along, in an equally unamiable mood, and after walking round a while together, the worthy trio climbed up to Chickering's rooms.

They found Rupert and some of his friends trying on various sorts of costumes for the masked-ball of that night.

This was another of Merriwell's "entertainments," and it seemed that nearly everybody who had a right to go was going.

"You fellows make me sick!" said Pike.

"What troubles you now, Donald?" asked Chickering.

"Loht on the watheth thith afternoon, I've no doubt!" lisped Veazie.

"A plague on the races!" Pike growled.

"Why do we fellows make you sick?" queried Julian Ives, looking at himself admiringly in the long mir-

ror. Julian had arrayed himself in a glittering imitation of chain armor, and was going to the ball in the character of a Knight of the Round Table.

"For thinking of going to that ball."

"Oh, I wouldn't mith it for anything!"

"You're just like all the rest of the fools, Veazie!"

Veazie looked immensely fierce for a moment; then concluded to change his attitude, and mildly inquired:

"I don't underthand you?"

"You're just helping Merriwell out! Can't you see it? Now, look here! Yale wins a lot of victories—beats Carlisle, Princeton, Harvard, and everything else that comes its way. The claim is made by Merriwell's friends that Yale's glorious victories of this season were made possible because Merriwell had the running of things. Merriwell sits back and smiles and fans himself and believes that he is 'it'!

"Then the idea is conceived that it would be the proper thing to celebrate the victories of Yale. Immediately Merriwell is put in charge of that, as if the other things were not enough. He and his two inseparable chums, Hodge and Browning, are the committee of arrangements. They are called the 'committee of three,' and they proceed to run things to suit themselves and favor their friends. Again they contrive to cover Merriwell with glory. Everything is Merriwell. Will you kindly tell me if we are celebrating the victories of Yale or the victories of Merriwell?"

"And here, now, I find you fellows arraying your-

selves in chain armor and other togs, for the sole purpose of going to Merriwell's mask-ball, that you may help it out with your presence and commendation. After it's over you'll come home, saying what a tremendous success it was, and so help to stick another star on the gilt crown of Yale's little tin god. I'm sick of it!"

Julian Ives drew his long sword, and, holding it in hand, stood posed before the mirror.

"Too late to help it now," he said, "even if all you say is true, and I guess it is. The way the fellows are talking, that ball is going to be a howling success, and it will be that whether I stay or go. So I'm going!"

There was small likelihood that Julian would lose any opportunity to put himself on exhibition.

"Well, you're a set of fools! That's all I've got to say!"

Don Pike was too uneasy in mind to remain long in Chickering's, and strolled out shortly, leaving Roland Packard and Gene Skelding still there. As he went away a thought came to him.

"Just the thing!" he said.

"What is?"

Bertrand Defarge clapped him on the back.

Pike started and bit his lip.

"I didn't know I was talking to myself!" he said. "It's a bad habit, and I shall have to break myself of it. Going to the ball?"



"Certainly. There will be hosts of pretty girls there, and I shouldn't want to miss it."

"Another fool!" Pike growled, as he and Defarge separated. "No matter what Merriwell plans, not only his friends but his enemies turn in to make a success of it. Is it dead luck, or is the man positively a genius?"

Hurrying away now to a costumer, Pike hired a cowboy-suit as nearly like that worn by Bill Higgins as he could get, and, with the long lasso that went with it, sneaked back to his rooms.

"Higgins has been drinking a little," was his thought, "though the fellow has been awfully mild for a plainsman. He wasn't drinking any to-day, to be sure, but who's to say that he didn't fill up this evening? He's made himself a general nuisance here, whooping things up for Merriwell. He's Merriwell's protégé quite as much as Dick Starbright is. If I can bring him down and roll him in the gutter of disgrace, it will be a little something."

The trick he contemplated was a small one, worthy of a smaller brain than Pike was usually supposed to possess.

In an angle of the wall near the steps which he had seen Professor Warburton ascend but a few moments before, Donald Pike crouched in his cowboy garb. Hiding his face was a mask which he had also obtained of the costumer.

"If I can just rope Warburton, and make him think

it the playful work of Bill Higgins, I couldn't ask anything better. Warburton is a fellow who would hate a creature like Higgins by instinct.

Warburton was, indeed, a man of considerable pomposity and self-importance, whose dignity would have been outrageously offended by such a thing as Pike contemplated.

"If I can do it, and Warburton makes a row over it, as he surely will, Higgins will be in such bad odor that Merriwell will feel precious small. If the thing gets to the faculty, or into the courts, so much the better. I'd like to have the newspapers of New Haven make a few roasting comments on Merriwell's dear friend from the Western ranches."

Don Pike had taken roping-lessons from his former chum, Buck Badger, and could throw a rope reasonably well, though he could not be called an expert. He felt sure, though, that if Warburton came down the steps in his customary leisurely way that there would be no difficulty in getting the noose over his head. Even if it only struck him, that would answer, for it would show what Higgins' intentions were and serve to prove, also, that Higgins was intoxicated.

Pike expected Warburton to come out as he went in, but the man who appeared on the steps five minutes later was masked and wore a cowboy-suit which looked, in the rather dim light, identically like the one worn by Pike himself.

"That costumer lied to me!" was Pike's thought.

"He said I had the only cowboy-suit anything like that. And I had no idea that Warburton would think of attending that ball! He's masked close and tight, and does not intend to reveal his identity."

If Pike had been given time for thought, he might have reached radically different conclusions. He was not given time, and thinking that if he made a mistake he could run away and the thing would not be serious, he let fly with his rope at a venture, and caught the supposed Warburton round the neck, giving, at the same time, a sharp jerk on the rope. Then he turned to run.

The roar that went up was disillusioning; but not more so than the noose that now dropped over Pike's own neck.

"What in time d'ye mean by that?" came in the voice of Bill Higgins himself.

Then Higgins began to draw in on the rope, pulling the startled youth toward him. Pike tried to cast the noose off, and, failing in that, sought for his knife.

All the while Higgins was drawing the scared student toward him, making the air blue with his exclamatory questions and objurations.

"I'll learn ye some sense!" Higgins howled. "I'll wring yer neck fer ye, b'jings! I'll hang ye up on one o' these hyer trees fer the crows to eat! That's what! Why, you stepfather to a hoss-thief——"

He almost fell to the ground as the rope parted under a cutting slash from Pike's knife, and, having

freed himself, Pike darted away, with Higgins bel-  
lowing at his heels.

Merriwell and Browning came down the steps, hav-  
ing heard the outcry.

"What's up?" Frank demanded.

Higgins turned back, finding Pike too light-footed  
for him. He brought with him the rope which Pike  
had dropped in his flight.

"Some feller slammed this hyer round my neck as  
I come down the steps!" Higgins declared. "One o'  
yer dinged student friends, I reckon, fer no real cow-  
boy'd do another cowboy sich a measly trick as that.  
Playin' cowboy! Well, if I git my hands onto him,  
he won't monkey no more with yer Uncle William!"

\* \* \* \* \*

The mask-ball was the success Don Pike had known  
it would be. Everybody praised it and its excellent  
arrangements.

Three nights later Merriwell's "entertainments"  
concluded with a banquet at the New Haven House,  
which witnessed a crush.

When the toast came round, "To Yale!" Merriwell  
responded in his usual happy way.

"There was one thing I should have been pleased to  
say in that little speech," he remarked to a number  
of friends later, "but it wasn't the time and place."

"What was that?" asked Browning.

"It's a bit of news which I must convey to Star-  
bright and Morgan. As the result of an investigation,

I have discovered who threw the rocks in the snowball battle which struck those two fellows."

Hodge was at once interested.

"It was Jimmy Seldon! I ran the thing down, and then confronted him, and he confessed. The fellow has fancied from the start that he is an athlete, and that he ought to be the real leader of the freshmen. It was a case of unappreciated and unobserved genius! He brooded over it. Perhaps it turned his head. Anyway, he went into that fight determined to knock out the men he fancied had without merit been chosen above him. When the opportunity came, he threw his prepared snowballs."

"You'll report it?" Bruce asked.

"As he left Yale and New Haven this morning, and isn't coming back, it isn't worth while!"

"You told him he would have to go?"

"Well, I talked with him! He said he was going, anyway, for he has failed in his examinations. Perhaps that was one of the things that made him desperate. He is better out of Yale than in it, and Yale is better without him than with him."

"And who roped Higgins?" asked Hodge.

"I don't know about that, but I think it was Don Pike. He is likely to go out of Yale, too, very suddenly, unless he mends his ways!"

"A few other villains came near being unmasked in this series of entertainments!" droned Browning. "I'm keeping my weather-eye on Dade Morgan."

"If it will show that scoundrel up in his true light, we'll have another series!" said Hodge.

Then he arose and proposed this toast:

"To the confusion of the few enemies of Frank Merriwell! To the success of his legion of friends!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### ROSALIND'S REWARD.

"I should like to know what you mean by that, Mr. Morgan?"

Rosalind Thornton stood before Dade Morgan, her pretty lips trembling.

He had made an evening call on her at the residence of her aunt, and was now on the point of taking an early leave. They were standing together at the foot of the stairs, under the red globe of the swinging hall-lamp near the outer door.

"You don't know how pretty you are in that mood, Rose! But perhaps you do know? It tempts me to steal a kiss."

Rosalind Thornton was, indeed, a pretty girl, and never more so than at that moment. A flash of hurt pride made her winsomely attractive—so attractive that Morgan almost relented from the purpose he had formed in his heart.

She drew back and put out a little hand.

"You have no right to say such things to me!"

There was a glow of fire behind the unshed tears. Morgan laughed in his usual reckless, nonchalant way, and hurt Rose by saying roughly:

"Well, I didn't call to take you out riding this

afternoon, as I promised to do—because I didn't care to!"

How handsome he was as he stood there looking at her with eyes as dark as her own. She was as fully alive to his good looks as he was to hers. There was a mysterious something in his strong, athletic form; in the resolute face, smiling mouth, and white, even teeth. Dade Morgan was undeniably a handsome youth, aside from a trick he had of dropping his lids down over his eyes, to shut out the strange glitter that occasionally took the beauty out of them.

It was the magnetism of his beauty and strength that had made pretty Rosalind Thornton willing to hurt the honest heart of big Dick Starbright—had made her willing to turn from him and accept the pleasant company of this man, who was his confessed and deadly enemy.

Rosalind's affections were warm and womanly, but they were not of an enduring type. She was, besides, of a petulant, jealous disposition. She had at first accepted Dade's attentions in the thought that this would bring Dick Starbright to her feet as a willing and devoted subject. Then she had suddenly found herself captivated by Dade's good looks and winning smile, and wavered in her affection for Starbright, telling herself that, if Dick did not care to come back, Morgan would be as acceptable, perhaps more so.

"I suppose I'm a fool, Rose!"

He again moved toward her. Once more she put out a detaining hand.



"Yes, I think you are; but do not call me Rose, please!"

"Rosalind!"

"Nor that!"

He laid his hand on his heart in mock gallantry.

"Miss Thornton, any fellow is a fool who doesn't fall in love with you!"

"Thanks!"

The laughing smile which he so admired and which he hoped to coax back to her eyes did not make its reappearance.

"You are quite angry?"

"You didn't care to keep your word this afternoon!"

Her lips again trembled as she thought of it—thought of the pride and pleasure with which she had gowned herself—the triumphant pride, which had made her desire to sweep in Dade's carriage in grand style past her former lover, Dick Starbright, whom she was still anxious to draw after her, as a conquering captor draws a captive.

Dade laughed and dropped the lids over his eyes.

"Well, to tell the truth, I came up here to-night principally to say that I don't care to go out driving that way any more."

The girl's cheeks paled.

"You're an awfully pretty girl, Miss Thornton——"

She put out her hand again, but he went on.

"I don't need to tell you that, for you know it. But there's no use of keeping this thing up, you see. You

might begin to think that I—I care for you. To be frank, I don't. I suppose you'll say that's brutal."

She dropped into a seat on the stairs. Dade looked at her a moment, still handsome and smiling.

"I hope you aren't crying," he said, crossing to her side. "When you seem so distressed, you know, it makes me—makes me almost lo—care for you!"

He tried to take her hand. She dashed it away, and turned toward him. She was undeniably crying now. A strange thrill came to his heart. He began to think he had been blunt and harsh. His pride was flattered. It was something to make a pretty girl cry—it evidenced the fact that he was attractive to women. And he began to ask himself why he had not been content to go on and make her believe that he cared for her? His vanity was lashing him, not his conscience.

"I don't think you care to talk to me any longer," she declared, in a low, icy voice. "At least, I don't care to continue the conversation. I thought you something which you are not—a gentleman! You were going, I believe?"

"But perhaps I don't care to go. Perhaps I—perhaps I prefer to stay. If we can go on with the understanding that what we're doing is just for fun, just for a jolly time and to make Dick Starbright——"

"You were going, I believe!" she icily repeated.

Her eyes were very bright now, and, with the exception of a red spot glowing in each cheek, her face was white. The tears had dried.

A step was heard on the outer step, making Dade

start. He stood in a listening attitude and heard footsteps departing. Some one had been on the piazza, and was now going away. Morgan stood a moment in silence, then opened the door and looked out. The electric light was more than half a block distant, and the light in front of the house was not good. Yet he saw a tall form moving down the street.

"If I didn't know that he couldn't be guilty of such a thing, I should say that our good friend Starbright had followed me here this evening and had been eaves-dropping," he said, as he withdrew his head and shoulders from the doorway and closed the door.

"I don't want to leave until we have settled this matter!" he continued, still feeling that perhaps he had acted too hastily, and that Rosalind was altogether too pretty and winsome a girl to be thrown over in that manner, even if he did not care for her.

"It is settled, I think!" she declared; then turned from him and began to mount the stairs.

He looked after her, flushed and angry. He had come to the house with the deliberate intention of telling her that he did not care to take her driving any more, or to continue their further intimate acquaintance, and had half-broken down in it because of her beauty and evident distress. Dade Morgan loved himself better than anything else in the world, and his self-pride had been hurt. Some way he did not feel as care-free about the matter as he had fancied he would. He had never cared for Rosalind Thornton, and had used her merely as a weapon with which to strike

Starbright, but this was somewhat like the weapon striking back at him when he sought to discard it.

Yet he did not try to speak to her again, though a strange and fiery light came into his eyes, which, through force of habit, he besought to conceal. Then he put on his hat, opened the door without saying "Good night!" and was soon trailing down the street after the person he had fancied was Dick Starbright.

"Well, she's off my hands!" he reflected, as he hurried on. "I guess it's better that way, though she is deucedly handsome, and I might come to like her in time, if I could ever like anybody! But that finishes it, unless I really want to go back. I think I can do that, if I care to try the trick. Likely I sha'n't care to try it. I wonder if that was Starbright? It would be a joke if she's been playing double, and Starbright has been calling here all the time. But, no, he wouldn't do that. Starbright isn't a chump, whatever else he is!"

He failed to see Starbright or any one resembling him.

"Taken an electric for down-town, I suppose!"

Then his thoughts went back to Rosalind.

"'Umph! Women cry easily; but crying sometimes makes them pretty!"

Hurt, angered, humiliated, Rosalind had rushed into her room, thrown herself on her bed, and was crying as if her foolish little heart were about to break.

## CHAPTER X.

### HAZERS IN MERRY MOOD.

The youth who had stood for a moment on the steps of the residence of Mrs. Virgil Throckmorton had indeed been Dick Starbright. He had chanced to pass along the street, and a sudden impulse had taken him to the door. His friend, Bert Dashleigh, had told him that Rosalind was soon to leave New Haven. A desire to see her and have a few words with her before she went away sent him up the steps, where he became an unwilling listener to some of the words spoken by her and Morgan, for Morgan had spoken louder than he knew.

"I guess I've made a mistake!" he had grumbled to himself, his heart flaming against the conduct of the youth whose words he had overheard; and he had beaten a quick retreat to the street, mentally raging against Morgan, and assuring himself that he had been an idiot for yielding to the temptation to speak again to Rosalind.

His thought, as he went down the street toward the car-line, was to wait for Morgan and demand an explanation; but he did not do this, and, flinging himself into the first electric that came along, he rode back to the campus. The recent snow had passed away in a

rain-storm, which had been followed by a return of sharp, frosty weather.

He found the famous quadrangle filled with college men, who seemed to be having a high old time about something. Dashleigh caught him by the arm.

"What's up?" Dick demanded.

"I don't know. They're roping in the freshmen. Perhaps we'd better make ourselves scarce."

But Starbright had already been sighted.

"Oh, Starbright! Come bow to the golden image!" was shouted from the crowd.

Dashleigh started to run, but he found himself opposed by Bingham and Jack Ready, who cleverly tripped him as he put his nimble legs in motion.

"Refuse me!" said Ready, thrusting out his right hand in a wiggling way as he planted himself before Starbright. "Will you go of your own 'cord, or shall we cord you?"

He had an arm linked through one of Dashleigh's, while Bingham was holding Dashleigh up on the other side.

"What's up?" Dick calmly asked.

"We are! It isn't late, you see!"

He saw other sophomores gathering round him, but made no attempt to run. Down near the fence was a howling mob of students, mostly sophomores and freshmen, who seemed to be dancing a war-dance about a captive.

"There was a fellow in the Scripture——" Ready began.

"Oh, there was!" Dick interrupted.

"No impertinence, freshman!" cried Ready, blowing out his red cheeks. "There was a fellow in Scripture who was commanded to bow before the image of Somebody-or-other, and he refused, and awful things happened to him!"

"Yes; I remember that he came out all right in the end!"

"Oh, did he? I'll have to quit quoting Scripture, or go to studying it. But you'll not come out all right in the end."

Dashleigh tripped Bingham and tried to break away.

"Oh, gentle friend, why dost thou try to flee?" Ready purred, holding onto Bert with iron grip. "Dost thou not see that the enemy surrounds thee?"

"What's up?" Starbright again asked.

"Morgan! Morgan!" came as if in answer; and it seemed strange to Starbright, too, for he was thinking more of Morgan at the moment than he was of what Ready was saying, or of the antics of the rollicking sophomores near the fence.

For the sophomores, he cared little enough, having long ago made up his mind that the only way to deal with them was to let them have their way, if it was not too rough, and so get rid of them in the shortest order.

Morgan, following Starbright toward the campus, had been suddenly surrounded by a lot of sophomores who seemed to be lying in wait near the entrance to capture straggling freshmen. Morgan was in an ugly

mood, because of the events of the evening; and, instead of gracefully submitting, he began to fight, using his fists freely. In consequence of this he was roughly thrown down, tied snug and tight with a stout cord, and then carried bodily toward the rioting mob near the fence, who seemed to be waiting for just such obstreperous victims.

"I guess I'll go along and see the fun!" said Starbright good-humoredly, though his heart was panting against Dade Morgan. Then to himself, as he moved on with Dashleigh and another freshman who had been caught in the sophomore net, he said:

"I'll see Morgan after this thing is over, whatever it may be. I'll see him, ask him some questions, and get the answers, too!"

The howling mob gave way, and Starbright saw a large picture of the rotund proprietor of "Billie's," the freshman inn. It was a mere daub on wood, displaying the round stomach and the shining, bald head of the genial proprietor. It had been painted by some humorous student and placed in front of "Billie's" one night in lieu of a sign-board which some other student or students had stolen. The proprietor, knowing the ways of college youths, had smiled his benediction on it and set it up over the show-case between his two front parlor windows.

And now this gem of art had been surreptitiously extracted from the tavern, and all the freshmen caught in the sophomore drag-net that jubilant, crisp evening



were being made to go down on their knees before it and affectionately kiss the bald head.

Morgan was hurt and indignant. He somehow fancied that, because he was conspicuous as a leader of the freshmen and had done many things to draw about him a circle of adherents, he should not be forced to do so humiliating a thing as to kneel on the frosty sand and plant an unctuous kiss on the pictured bald head.

"Oh, you didn't half-salute Billie!" Bingham declared, giving Morgan a push that almost drove his nose through the wood on which the portrait was drawn. "If you should plant a kiss like that on the ruby lips of your best girl she would have odious opinions of you."

"Oh, let up!" Morgan growled. "This is too silly for anything!"

"Except freshmen!" said Bingham. "Salute the bald spot of the human billiard-cue in a respectful manner, or——"

Two or three sophomores caught Morgan by the neck and shoulders and forced his lips to the picture, and held him there, in spite of his protestations, while he kissed Billie's bald head over and over again. When released he was mad clean through.

Starbright was pushed up to the daub, murmuring, though he was known never to drink:

"Oh, thou human punch-bowl, thou concocter of that nectar of the gods! How I love thee!"

He appeared to want to take the picture to his bosom in a rapturous embrace, but was dragged back.

"Thou varlet!" cried Ready, pleased with Starbright's apparent nonchalance, which was in such marked contrast to Morgan's fuming rage. "Avaunt, there! A dog is not privileged to embrace a king!"

"The dog was merely trying to bite him!" chattered Bingham.

"Your pardon!" said Starbright. "The dog mistook his baldness for a link of sausage!"

"And thought he recognized a kinship!" laughed Greg Carker.

At which sally from the solemn and philosophical Carker the boisterous sophomores cackled with glee.

The twang of a mandolin was heard, as Bert Dashleigh was made to waddle forward on all fours and kiss the shiny pate of the pictured host. It was Dashleigh's own mandolin, produced by a student who had hastily invaded Dashleigh's room for the purpose.

"How did you get in?" Bert coolly asked, stopping in the midst of his osculatory adorations.

"Fell through the transom," said the student. "Why the dickens do you always keep your door locked? That transom is so contracted that I sprained my wish-bone."

"Good thing if you had sprained your neck!" Bert flung back; and was then dragged away, lest in his fervent kissing he should lick all the paint off the wood.

Two stools were produced from some invisible source, and, while other freshmen were compelled to

bow before and kiss the picture, Dashleigh and Starbright were made to sit on the stools and sing :

"Oh, who will smoke my meerschaum pipe, meerschaum pipe?  
Oh, who will smoke my meerschaum pipe, meerschaum pipe?  
Oh, who will smoke my meerschaum pipe, when I am far away?"

"Oh, who will go to see my girl, see my girl?  
Oh, who will go to see my girl, see my girl?  
Oh, who will go to see my girl, when I am far away?"

"Oh, who will kiss her ruby lips, ruby lips?  
Oh, who will kiss her ruby lips, ruby lips?  
Oh, who will kiss her ruby lips, when I am far away?"

"Oh, who will squeeze her snow-white hand, snow-white hand?  
Oh, who will squeeze her snow-white hand, snow-white hand?  
Oh, who will squeeze her snow-white hand, when I am far away?"

It was one of those popular college songs which can run on forever, like Tennyson's brook, and never get weary; and while Dashleigh thumped away on the mandolin and he and Dick bawled out every variation and every verse they had ever heard of or could think of, the captured freshmen were, one by one, forced to crawl reluctantly forward and honor the proprietor of "Billie's."

It was all very funny—to the sophomores, and to students who, like Dick and Bert, could take the thing coolly and good-humoredly. To others it was gall and wormwood. Morgan was brought back three times and made to moisten the top of "Billie's" head with his "roseate spoon-bill," as Jack Ready facetiously

termed Dade's lips, and Dade grew madder and madder, until he was in a fighting-mood.

When released at last he stumbled blindly away, vowing vengeance on the whole tribe of Yale sophomores. As he pitched on in the semigloom, almost too blind to see which way he was going, he heard his name called, and, turning about, beheld what he took to be one of the tormenting sophomores.

"If you follow me any farther, I'll spread your nose all over your face!" he threatened.

Whereupon the supposed sophomore drew nearer, laughing in a silent, mirthless way.

"My dear Dade, you are losing your customary calm!" came the warning in a familiar voice.

The supposed sophomore was Hector King.

## CHAPTER XI.

### SETTLING A SCORE.

Hector King's disguise was so very superficial that Dade wondered at the daring of the man. Yet it was more effective than an elaborate disguise would have been. His face and hands were darkened, his hair cut short, and his dress was that of one of the numerous "sweeps" who take care of the rooms of the Yale students. The disguise had served so well that King had been able to hover on the outskirts of the sophomore mob without detection or question.

The last time Dade Morgan had seen the man whom he had come to call Hector King, the latter was in the disguise of a Hindu juggler. The pretended juggler had been unmasked by Frank Merriwell, to whom he stood revealed as Brandon Dood, alias Dion Santenel, the hypnotist, the deadly enemy of Frank and his father, whose ruin and disgrace he sought with a bitterness and tenacity almost beyond comprehension. Dade had dragged him from the room in which Merriwell had hypnotized him, and forced from him an important confession—Frank having overthrown him by his own methods, in his chosen field, and on his own battle-ground—had dragged him away, and thus prevented Frank from

making him a prisoner and taking steps for his punishment.

"You are losing your customary calm!" Santenel cynically repeated.

"And it seems to me you are losing your customary caution!"

"I can look out for myself!" Santenel answered somewhat tartly. "You lost your temper and made an ass of yourself. How long do you suppose you can hold your influence in Yale by acting in that way? A man who would be a master of others must learn first to master himself. That is the very primer of the whole thing—the first lesson."

"Oh, well!" Dade snarled. "That stuff made me sick!"

He was about to say more, but ceased when he observed that they were being followed.

"That's a student, sure! Yes, and it's Dick Starbright!"

"Let's move on!" said Santenel. "I don't care to make intimate acquaintances among your student friends."

He emphasized the word "friends" in a way that made Dade writhe, for he knew how Dade hated the big freshman. Though they walked on, it was soon apparent that Starbright was following them. They did not like the lighted streets, so they turned into the green, but Starbright sauntered after them.

"I'm going to halt and see what the scoundrel

means by that," Dade declared, stopping. Santenel did not object, but walked on.

Dade waited impatiently and angrily by the side of the path.

"You've been following me!" he cried curtly, when Starbright came up.

"Yes," said Dick; "I've a settlement to make with you."

Dade coaxed the smile to his face.

"I'm not a bone, to be followed and sniffed at by a dog like you!"

Starbright angrily reddened.

"You've been following me all evening!" Dade continued.

"That's a lie."

Dade clenched his fist.

"You followed me to Mrs. Throckmorton's this evening. You stood on the steps, eavesdropping, trying to hear what I might say. You're a sneaking puppy!"

He was white with wrath, and found it impossible to keep that famous smile on his face.

"Go on!" said Dick coldly. "The more you say, the more occasion I shall find for thumping you to my complete satisfaction when I begin on you. I did not follow you to Mrs. Throckmorton's. I went there to make a call on Miss Thornton, hearing that she is to leave the city soon. I was a fool for going, I'll admit. When I mounted the steps——"

"Crept up like a sneaking dog, you mean!" inter-

rupted Dade, holding himself in readiness for the blow which he expected.

"When I mounted the steps I overheard you talking to Miss Thornton, for you were speaking so loud that I couldn't help hearing. You know what you said to her. I caught only a few words, but enough to understand the whole thing. I have seen it all along, but have had no proof of it till now. You went with her simply because you thought it would hurt me and make me jealous. You thought me weak enough to throw myself into the saloons and make a fool of myself generally. You have seen that I did nothing of the kind, and now, having failed in your object, you throw her over with no feeling whatever, showing you to be a thoroughbred cad!"

Dade was trembling, but fear of the big freshman's fist made him cautious. In spite of his bluster and sharp words he had learned to respect that fist and the man behind it.

"Is that all?" he sneered.

"No. It won't be enough until I have taught you to respect women. I regret that I have been compelled to mention Miss Thornton in this matter. She is a lady, and has had the misfortune to become acquainted with a conscienceless villain and to be made his tool. I shouldn't have mentioned her name, but I want you to understand just what I mean."

He slipped up his sleeves.

"There is no other way to redress such things, and, as Miss Thornton doesn't happen to have a brother to



do this for her, I shall take the pleasure. Put up your hands, you scoundrel, or I'll knock you down!"

There was no mistaking the tone of Dick Starbright's voice. Morgan glanced round. The place was isolated and poorly lighted, and Dion Santenel had disappeared.

"Defend yourself!" Dick hissed.

Dade backed away, but he put up his hands, for he saw that Starbright meant to strike him.

"Why, you puppy!" he snarled.

The freshman's big fist caught him on the cheek and almost lifted him from his feet.

The blow drove away every atom of fear from the heart of Morgan and filled him with inconceivable wrath. Gathering himself, he rushed at Starbright with the ferocity of a mad dog. But again that huge fist met him and knocked him backward.

"Come again!" said Starbright, as coolly as if he were merely sparring in the gymnasium. "I want to hammer that villainous smile off your face. Your friends won't think you so handsome in the morning!"

Morgan tried to calm his raging heart. He saw that if he did not he would be knocked out in short order. So, instead of making another mad rush, he called to his aid all his undoubted skill, and began to circle slowly about Starbright, looking warily for an opening.

Twice Starbright lunged at him, and twice Morgan dodged out of the way. Then, with a quick leap, Morgan sprang in and landed a resounding blow.

Dick, finding an opening, then drove his terrible right with such weight that Morgan went down on the grass with stunning force.

Thud! A club in the hands of Dion Santenel fell on Starbright's head, blinding and stunning him. The club was lifted again and hung poised in the air.

Then there was a swish of a rope, which was preceded by light, springy footsteps, and the club, while poised in mid-air, was plucked from the hand of Santenel.

"No, ye don't!" came in the roaring voice of Bill Higgins, the cowboy. "Fair play's a jewel, and I'm the jeweler that sees 't gits a proper settin', b'jing!"

Santenel knew that voice only too well. He had met Higgins while posing as the Hindu juggler, and knew that Higgins was the friend of Merriwell. Visions of a capture and unpleasant interview with Frank, and other disagreeable consequences, flashed through his mind. The club had been torn from his hand, and he was weaponless. So, without stopping to further take the part of Dade Morgan, who was struggling to his feet, Santenel hurried off and disappeared behind the trees, Higgins looking after him, as if he did not know whether to follow and rope him or let him get away.

Dade rose to his feet, his face distorted with anger, pain, and baffled hate. He dared not again face the fist of Dick Starbright.

"I don't care to fight you further, when you've

got help!" he sneered, his words trembling and his whole form shaking. "But I'll settle with you yet, Starbright!"

"Any time!" said Dick, pulling down his sleeves. "I've more where that came from!"

Though his head was throbbing and he felt a trickle of blood on his face, caused by the blow of the club, he stood erect again, firmly facing Dade Morgan.

"I'll settle with you for this!" Morgan slowly repeated, as if his brain were in a whirl and his mind still incoherent. Then he flung the cowboy a look of hate and disdain, and walked away in the direction taken by Santenel.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Who was that there feller? The one that hit ye with the club?" asked Higgins, staring in the direction Dade was taking. "I 'low I was a fool to let him go."

It was a question that Dick could not answer.

"There was only one thing I clearly understood about that business, and that was that you ran up against a bigger man than you could handle!" said Santenel, when they reached Morgan's room.

"Oh, don't say anything more about it!"

Santenel took a seat by the fire, while Dade applied liberal douches of hot water to his battered head.

"But I want to know about it. I stood behind one of those trees while you were engaged with that big two-fisted cyclone, and I had my curiosity aroused. My advice to you is to keep away from him. He's

too much for you. What did he tackle you about? I couldn't just make out!"

Dade dropped the hot towel he had been holding to his face, walked to a drawer, drew out a photograph and threw it into Santenel's lap.

"That!"

"Quarreling about this girl?"

"Yes, if you must know. I didn't care anything for her—not a thing! and I only went with her to spite him and make him jealous. I was fool enough to think it might drive him to drink. Either he didn't care for her as much as I supposed, or that story of his all-absorbing appetite for liquor is a fairy-tale. I found out that I was wasting my time, and I threw her over. He heard about it, and he—well, you saw what he did!"

His face crimsoned; not with shame for his treatment of Rosalind Thornton, but because he had been worsted so completely by Starbright, and the memory of it stung him to the quick.

"A handsome girl!" commented Santenel. "Well, you failed!"

He seemed in a lenient mood, and tossed the photograph back. He remembered that he, too, had met with a bitter failure some days before, when he thought he had Frank Merriwell completely under his hypnotic control, only to discover, when too late and after he himself had been hypnotized by Frank, that Merriwell had been playing with him all along for the purpose of getting him in his power and unmasking him. The

recollection was quite as irritating as that which so stung Dade Morgan.

Dade gave the photograph a savage kick, which landed it in the fire. Santenel watched it leap into flame and crisp and curl to ashes. A cynical smile sat on his cold lips, and the leaping flame seemed to light up kindred fires in the depth of his black eyes. They were peculiar eyes; and, as he sat staring into the grate, the pupils appeared to contract and expand somewhat like those of a cat.

"You are wondering why I am here again?" he said, at length, to Dade, who had gone back to his hot towels. Dade affected a show of indifference.

"I knew you would tell me after a while—when you got ready!"

"I'm back here because I never give up. I never yet was defeated at anything which I seriously undertook, and I never will be. You know my purpose?"

He spoke in a low, droning tone, seeming to direct his words to the dim face of a girl which he fancied he could still see in the ashes of the photograph—spoke in so low a monotone that, though the words were clearly heard by Dade, they could not have been overheard by any one with less alert ears or beyond the room.

"You have told that to me scores of times!"

"You're no more likely to forget it than I am. But you thought I failed and abandoned the field. You were mistaken. You don't know me yet as you ought. I can still crush Merriwell and his father, and I shall

do it. That's what I'm here to talk about—to plan for.”

Dade did not answer, though he stood with a hot cloth to his face, staring at Santenel in a fascinated way. There was so strong a bond between them, and the capabilities of the greater villain were of so sublime and audacious a character that Dade felt drawn to him, as an inferior mind to a superior.

Santenel was thinking, as he looked at the face in the ashes of the photograph—thinking first of a face somewhat like that, which he had known and loved so many years ago, then of his life since those distant days, and particularly of his connection with the elder Merriwell, whom he had deeply wronged—Merriwell, who had hounded him throughout the world, and whom he was now determined to crush at once and forever in the most humiliating way that his fiendish inventiveness could suggest.

“You want to get even with the young fellow who knocked you out a while ago?” he asked, at last arousing himself, but speaking in that same low monotone, as if addressing the picture. Dade, who had not taken his eyes off the strange man, started at the sound of his voice.

“Be careful, or you will be heard!”

Santenel sat more erect, shrugged his shoulders, passed a hand half-dreamily over his darkened and stained face.

“I've studied something of acoustics,” he answered.

"You couldn't have heard that yourself if your ears hadn't been on edge."

"I hate him!" snarled Dade, speaking of Starbright. "I shall never rest until I've wiped out the insult of those blows to-night."

"You can't do it by going at him face to face and fist to fist. He would simply knock you out again. You must try another way. Only fools and pugilists resort to slugging-matches to settle real or fancied wrongs. A man who is a mere bulldog fighter is only a bungler and blunderer. There are other ways, surer ways, safer ways."

Dade had crushed the towel in his tremulous hand and was still staring at Santenel, as if the reserved and unseen power of this terrible man enchained him.

"There are two things!" Santenel droned on, dropping his shoulders and sinking lower in his chair, as he again seemed to talk to the fire. "I want to strike Charles Conrad Merriwell, and you want to even your score with Dick Starbright. Both can be done at the same time."

Dade leaned forward, his face working with hate against Starbright.

"How?" he whispered. "Only tell me how?"

"I had Charles Merriwell in my power a short time ago, and his son broke my grip and got him away. I must get him in my power again. I can't do it while Frank Merriwell is here in New Haven, for his father will not leave the place now for a number of days,

and it may be weeks and months. He fears me too much since that. Frank must be lured out of the city."

"How are you to do it?" Dade demanded.

"Get him away on a ball-game, or some kind of game."

"The football season is over."

"There is a polo-team at New London."

"Merriwell might play them if they would come here."

"He must play them there."

"He won't do it."

"He must be made to do it."

"How?"

"That's for you to answer. Perhaps I can help you. But it must be done. Starbright is on his team?"

"Yes."

"That's what I thought. They must play the New London polo-team in New London. And while they are over there I will work my plans to get Charles Conrad Merriwell again in my power. But Frank must be out of New Haven. Must be lured out, I say. I can't cope with him, and I must have a clear track here if I am to win. I know I can win if he can be led away. I don't care how you do it, so it is done. Perhaps I can help you."

He sunk his head deeper between his shoulders, and his eyes blazed as brightly as the fire.

"And Starbright?" Dade anxiously and tremulously



asked, for he was, at the moment, more interested in the overthrow of Starbright than of Merriwell.

"A polo-game is a rough game, and a polo-stick may be a dangerous weapon in the hands of the right man. If there is not a man on the New London team who will do the work for you, scheme some way to get a man on that team who will. I have heard of men having their arms broken in such games. I see no reason why a man mightn't be killed in such a game!"

He spoke as coldly as if his eyes were not flames of fire and his heart a seething volcano. Dade flushed and paled, while his breath came panting hot from between his lips.

"I'll do it!" he said, gasping out the promise. "I'll do it, somehow. I'll need money to work the trick, maybe, and a lot of it. Money can do anything, if a fellow only has enough of it."

Santenel turned on him those awful eyes. The pupils had shrunk to a pin-point in size and Dade shivered, for they seemed to shoot out at him points of fire.

"You're a devil!" he half-gurgled to himself, but the words caught the keen ears of Santenel.

"Only a villain, with the purse of Fortunatus! How much will you need? I'll help you out of what I won from Frank Merriwell in those poker-games with him, when I was trying to conquer him and he conquered me. There will be an added pleasure in fighting him with his own money. The battle isn't lost, Dade; the fighting has only begun!"

He felt in an inner pocket, and taking out a roll of bills, threw it to Dade.

“That’s a good deal more than I obtained from Merriwell. But take it. We can’t afford to count the cost. Spend it like water. A thousand dollars will buy half the thugs in New York. Get the right men on that New London polo-team, and do what you please with Starbright; just so you secure for me a clear field here in New Haven. We’ll have money enough after we have won out!”

Dade took the roll, looked it through with paling and flushing face, for he saw that Santenel had been more than generous, then he tucked it away in his pocket.

“I could buy up the police force of New Haven with that!” he laughed. “Don’t be afraid but that I’ll put it where it will do the most good!”

## CHAPTER XII.

### MORGAN SETS THE BALL ROLLING.

“Seen yer friend goin’ away!” said Bill Higgins, catching hold of Starbright’s arm, the next morning. “I reckon ’t you thumped him so that he’s goin’ to cut out. Anyway, he looked like a critter that had pulled his picket-pin and was stampedin’ from the range.”

“Oh, you mean Morgan?”

Starbright had been walking up the street from the station toward the college when overtaken by the cowboy.

“Yep! You give him sich a thumpin’ last night that I reckon he’s lit out. ’Feared you’d tell of it, and he hain’t the sand to face the laugh that the fellers will give him.”

Starbright also had been at the railway-station, though he had not been observed by Higgins.

“Didn’t know but there mought be an elopement, first off!” grinned Higgins. “Durn purty young woman come trippin’ ’long at the same time he did, goin’ to take the same train, and he waltzed toward her and offered her his wing, er ruther I thought ’t he was goin’ to offer it to her. But dinged if she seen him at all! Mighty queer, too, for he was big enough. But she didn’t see him—didn’t notice him, when he tuck off his cap and scraped his foot across

the floor like a nigger fiddler at a dance, ner nuthin', but jist sashayed right by him 'thout lookin' at him, and hopped onto the car steps all by her lonesome! Say, ye don't reckon she done that there fer a blind, and that they was really goin' away together, do ye?"

Starbright had observed the same performance—had seen Rosalind Thornton come down to the station and cut Dade Morgan dead when he came forward to assist her to the platform of the car.

"No elopement!" said Dick. "I guess she wanted to cut his acquaintance."

"Well, the manners of this hyer effete East goes ahead of me," said Higgins. "Out on the ranches when ye want to cut an acquaintance ye do it with a knife. But I reckon I'll ketch on bimeby. Had a notion hoppin' on that there train myself, only it was goin' the wrong way. I'd 'a' gone if't hadn't been fer Merriwell. Say! I tie to that feller! I never seen another like him. Hyer I come fer a day er two, and I've been hyer I don't know how long, a-stayin' jist on account of him. If them Yale perfessors would let a feller read their books with a lasso and write with a picket-pin, I'd enter the blamed old college myself, jist to stay with Merriwell. Never seen no sich man on this hyer earth. Treats every feller like a king! And 't don't make no difference to him whether a man stepped out of a bandbox er come straight off the ranges. All he asks is that a man shall be a man!"

Dick Starbright was quite as willing, ordinarily, to

sing the praises of Frank Merriwell as any one, but just then his thoughts were too much engrossed with the departure of Dade Morgan and Rosalind Thornton from the city. He did not know that Dade was on his way to New London, with scheming brain filled with plans for the carrying out of the wishes of Dion Santenel, but he knew that Rosalind was on her way home after her prolonged visit in New Haven.

He made rather a poor companion for Bill Higgins, as he and the cowboy walked together up the street, almost forgetting Higgins' chatter while thinking of all that had occurred since Rosalind came to New Haven on a visit to her aunt. He and Rosalind were confessed sweethearts then; now she had gone away, and he had not even said good-by to her.

It had been his intention to at least say "good-by" as she took the train, if a favorable opportunity came, but Morgan had loomed into the foreground at the wrong time, and the words had not been spoken. He had not even gone forward, and he did not believe that Rosalind had observed him as he stood in the crowd at the station.

"It's just as well, no doubt!" he thought, with a little ache in his big, generous, manly young heart.

Yes, it was just as well. Rosalind had shown that she had a jealous, narrow, spiteful disposition, which was certain to bring trouble to any young man who really cared for her. But Starbright knew that she was, in spite of all this, a lovable girl in many other respects; and, though the dream he had cherished con-

cerning himself and her was shattered and gone, and he felt that it was better so, he could not quite cure that ache in his heart—yet.

Starbright and Higgins separated on reaching Chapel Street. They met again in the gymnasium late in the afternoon, where Merriwell and some others were skimming round on roller-skates engaged in roller polo practise.

“Oh, he won’t accept the challenge!” Bertrand Defarge was sneering. “He never jumps at anything that isn’t dead sure.”

“Who ye talkin’ ’bout?” Higgins asked, for he saw that Defarge was looking toward Merriwell.

“Merriwell!” the French youth answered, not abashed by the presence of the cowboy, who was known to be a “Merriwell maniac.” Higgins’ hand went into his pocket and drew out a bulky wallet, from which he produced a roll of bills.

“Bet ye any amount you’re minded to name that he will!”

“Will what?” asked Starbright, stepping forward; whereat the Chickering set, who had been grouped round Defarge, drew back as if they feared his bulk or the weight of his fist.

“Durn if I know!” Higgins admitted. “But he seems to think that Merriwell’s afraid, and I’m backin’ the general proposition that Merriwell ain’t afear’d of anything! So there’s yer money. Put up er shut up!”

"I don't care to bet with a man who doesn't know what he's talking about!" sneered Defarge.

"I know Merriwell! That's what I'm talkin' 'bout and what my money's talkin' 'bout! Put up er shut up!"

"Oh, come away!" begged Chickering, the professed peacemaker, tugging at Defarge's sleeve. "We don't care to bet about this thing, you know."

"Put up er shut up!" bellowed Higgins; but Defarge and the Chickering set moved away.

"He shut up!" Higgins observed, grimly tucking the money back. "That's what I intended. I dunno a durn thing what he was talkin' 'bout, but I don't 'low nobody to slander Merry."

They soon discovered what Defarge had been talking about. A challenge by wire had been received by Merriwell's polo-team from the polo-team at New London, asking Frank to set a date for a game, but insisting that the game should be played in New London. This was of interest to Starbright, for he was a member of the polo-team which Frank had organized and was training.

Defarge came back after a while, and this time he had a roll of bills which he had obtained from Dade Morgan. Roland Packard and Don Pike also appeared on the scene with goodly sums of money, which they were willing to wager that Merriwell's team would not dare to accept the challenge of the New London men.

"Why do you want to bet against Yale?" Rupert Chickering hypocritically protested, when Gene Skelding also appeared, clothed with funds and renewed confidence. "Loyalty to Old Eli, you know!"

"Rot!" said Skelding. "It isn't a question of Yale and Old Eli. Merriwell has organized a team of his individual friends. They represent nothing but Merriwell's swelled head. They are trying to make themselves and every one else believe that they can wipe up the earth with everything in the polo line. We intend to prick the bubble. We're going to show that they won't dare to meet any team that can play."

"You're sure of the New London team?"

"Yes; but it isn't the regular New London team. It's a private team, just as Merriwell's is; but it holds some crack players. They are willing to meet Merriwell. If he was at the head of a regular Yale team he could refuse by saying that he would only meet college teams. But as it is, he won't have a leg to stand on if he refuses. We're going to make him play or take water." /

That night Hodge met Merriwell in a troubled mood. He was a member of Frank's team, and the bets that were being freely offered more than irritated him, and he did not hesitate to say so.

"You'll have to meet them, Merry, just to take the wind out of these gas balloons!" he argued. "They say that you won't accept the challenge, and that if you should you would insist on playing the match here. Those New London fellows demanded that we



should go over there because they say they wouldn't have a fair show in a New Haven rink."

"I don't know that I shall pay any attention to the challenge. Whoever heard of those fellows before, anyway?"

Dick Starbright talked the matter over with Bert Dashleigh that night in the seclusion of their room. Dashleigh sat in an easy chair, toying with his mandolin, which he now and then thumped when the conversation lagged. There was a rap on the door, and when it was opened Ready came in.

"Going into the thing?" he queried, squatting on the arm of a chair.

Dashleigh had risen, and now put down his mandolin. Though Ready had hazed and annoyed him in common with other freshmen, he had great respect for him.

"Camp down!" Ready requested, then repeated his question.

"Into what thing?" Dick asked, wondering if Ready was setting another sophomore trap for him and his friend.

"Oh! Then the news hasn't floated hitherward? I'm to be congratulated. Thanks! I think I'll shake hands with myself."

Which he did, very solemnly.

"Chance for a fortune!" he said, winking owlshly. "Merriwell's polo-team, of which you and I are the most important members"—bowing toward Starbright—"has been challenged by a little upstart-team from

hinky-dinky New London. Now, I'd like to go to New London. Acquainted with a young lady over there, you know. I should like to wear my beautiful polo-suit and show her that I am a Pole. Merriwell won't go. At least, he says he won't. Now, we're getting up a sort of combination jack-pot. Every Merriwell enemy is walking around the streets of this great and glorious city with his pockets turned inside out and his hands bulging with great rolls of greenbacks, saying that Merriwell won't go. So we're collecting a fund for the needy, which is going to say that Merriwell will go, and that his team will knock the tar out of the boasters at New London. I was sure you'd want to get into the game; hence trotted my feet hitherward. Subscriptions to this fund unlimited; repayment guaranteed with one hundred per cent. interest immediately after the New London match."

Then, seeing that Starbright hesitated, he continued, as if the information was all that was needed:

"Bill Higgins heads the subscription-list with fifty dollars, which he says he already owes for board, but which he is willing to stack up on Merriwell. Bart Hodge goes Higgins ten better. Browning has roused himself long enough and sufficiently to stop smoking and draw a check for a pretty little sum. Yours truly, the undersigned, is into it so deep that I'll have to shave myself for the next five years or grow Pfeffer whiskers if we lose. And there are likewise others and some more. So, I thought——"

He took out a square of legal cap, on which the signatures of various students appeared, with figures set opposite their names. This he tossed to Starbright.

Dashleigh was going down into his pockets.

“Oh, I’m always strapped!” he grunted. “I’m spending my allowance faster than it comes to me. But if Starbright will lend me twenty-five, I’ll wager it.”

Starbright passed him the paper.

“Why, you’re bound to lose!”

Ready winked another owlish wink of wisdom.

“Milord, why sayest thou so?”

“Because, as you say yourself, Merriwell has declared that he won’t accept the challenge.”

Ready rose, reseated himself, wiggled the fingers of his right hand from the armhole of his vest, and winked again.

“What makes you so confident?” Dick demanded, while Bert was looking over the list.

“I have been commanded to tell it not in Gath, to publish it not in the streets of Askelon, yclept New Haven; but in these rooms——”

He arose, walked solemnly about as if peering for a possible eavesdropper, peeped under the lounge and under some chairs, and came back.

“Put all you can beg, borrow, or steal on this proposition. It’s a dead sure thing. The bet isn’t that our team will win the game, but that our team will play. We’re going to clean out the boasters that have been tantalizingly shoving their money under our noses——

clean them out so slick that they won't have enough to take them home for the Christmas holidays. Why do I know?"

He looked around again, lowered his voice and funneled his hands.

"I know, because Charles Conrad Merriwell has himself bet a little roll with a New London man that Frank will accept the challenge and will beat the New London challengers!"

Both Starbright and Dashleigh stared. The thing was unbelievable.

"Are you sure?" Dick asked.

"Sure! The fellow came to the New Haven House to-night, made the offer in the presence of a dozen men, shook the cold cash under Charles Merriwell's nose, and Merriwell, like the true sporting man and gentleman that he is, promptly covered the money."

"Oh, say! let me have a hundred, somebody!" Dashleigh begged.

"The New London man was a fool to offer such a wager!"

"I think so myself; and a 'fool and his money' are likely to be soon parted. But the idea is out, somehow, that Frank is afraid to accept the challenge and will not accept it under any consideration. They say he values his reputation as a successful leader of athletic-teams more than he does his father's money; that five thousand dollars is nothing to Charles Merriwell, and a defeat of his polo-team, made up as it is of his close friends, would be everything to Frank. So, the

fools are silly enough to think Frank won't play, and that they've got a cinch."

"You're sure, then, that Frank will accept?"

"Why, of course he'll accept! If I didn't know him so well I'd think he was holding off this way on purpose to get big bets out of the proposition. He will accept the challenge to please his father. Nothing else would make him do it, probably; but that will."

"Say! somebody lend me two hundred dollars!" Dashleigh begged. "If I thought my folks would do it, I'd telegraph them to forward me two or three months' allowance in advance. But they wouldn't. You're going to put up money on the game, too?"

"Sure!"

Jack Ready did not go away from the rooms of the chums empty-handed; and not long after, when all arrangements had been made and other sources laid under contribution, Bertrand Defarge, Don Pike, Roland Packard, Gene Skelding, the members of the Chickering set, and many others who had been flashing their "rolls" under the nose of every friend of Frank Merriwell, found their offered bets covered, and were bantered to lay wagers on the game.

It was a night of excitement, for in all the places of resort for students, and in many other places as well, the challenge of the New London men and the probable action of Frank Merriwell, together with the bets that were being offered and made, were almost the sole topics of conversation.

Dade Morgan went to his rooms smiling and elated.

He had worked out the plan given to him by Dion Santenel.

To his surprise he found Santenel sitting before the grate, awaiting his coming.

These mysterious appearances and disappearances of the man he obeyed, loved, and feared were often quite puzzling to Morgan. Time and again he had walked into his rooms, after carefully unlocking the door, and found sitting there the strange man of mystery; and often, after leaving the man there, he returned in a very few moments to find Santenel gone for an absence of a week or more. Santenel's abiding-place seemed to be as changing and unsubstantial as that of the Wandering Jew; and where he stayed while in New Haven Dade had never yet been able to learn.

"Waiting for your report," said Santenel. "I heard a few things myself, but I thought it unwise to appear too publicly."

"Everything has gone on swimmingly!" was Dade's jubilant preface. "Things worked right from the start. I found two men at New London who played right into my hands. One of them I knew before, and that made the thing easy for me. He had done dirty work for me before, and he's all right. They had been talking of organizing a polo-team out of some fellows who had been rejected or expelled from the other team, and they organized it on the spot, and wired their challenge."

Then he gleefully told of the bets that had been

made, dwelling especially on the bet which Charles Conrad Merriwell had made with one of Dade's tools from New London.

"The challenge will be accepted, and the game will be played," was Santenel's satisfied comment. "I'll see that Charles Conrad Merriwell stays in New Haven that day and meets me. You must have the game early in the afternoon—Saturday afternoon. Not a night game! I want plenty of time to do my work. Have the New London men stand to that."

He rubbed his fingers joyously, and, sinking into the chair, stared into the grate with his burning eyes.

"Merriwell will accept the challenge!" he declared, as he rose to go.

He was a true prophet. Frank accepted the New London challenge the next morning.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE POLO KING.

Saturday morning the Yale forces trooped to New London. The number of persons who went that morning, or said they were going later in the day, was really surprising. That such a mob should be drawn to New London to see a polo-game between Merriwell's team and an unknown team of New London was, on the surface, unaccountable; yet Merriwell's friends accounted for it by the fact that Merriwell and the men who composed his five were wonderfully popular, and that a tremendous interest had been aroused by the sky-rockety character of the betting.

But there was something below the surface that they did not see; the crafty hand and brain of Dade Morgan, and the mysterious man who was standing behind him urging him on. Santenel wanted the mob bound for New London to swallow up every Yale man who was likely to interfere with his plans concerning Charles Conrad Merriwell. Hence Morgan sent all of his friends and adherents, and all the enemies of Merriwell he could muster, knowing that this would cause a counter rally of the friends of Merriwell and take them to New London, also.

But the elder Merriwell himself was not going. He could not go, he told Frank, because he had re-



ceived a telegram from a broker who was handling Western mining stock for him, and who was coming on from New York that day for a business interview.

The importance of the occasion seemed to demand music, and Dashleigh's mandolin club invaded the New London train, loaded down with cases containing mandolins, guitars, and various other musical instruments. The crowd was very jolly and very musical, and bellowed such classics as "Good-by, Lady!" and "Good-by, My Lover, Good-by!" until many of the passengers who were not interested in such things, and particularly some Boston drummers on their way to Providence, who were investigating the mysteries of a jack-pot at the other end of the car, wished that mandolins had never been invented, or that musically inclined students had all been born dumb.

Dashleigh and his fellow musicians were supremely satisfied with themselves, however, and with the world in general, proving it by bubbling over with exuberant spirits. Dashleigh and Starbright had taken the first train, in order that they might get ahead of the crowd and secure good hotel accommodations. When New London was reached, and, finding there a great crowd assembled, Starbright put his bulky weight in the advance, with Dashleigh and the mandolin club trailing after him, and plowed a wide furrow through the crowd and escaped to a hotel in time to get the desired rooms and accommodations.

"There's only one thing that can save my mandolin," said Bert, when he and Dick were ensconced in com-

fort and security. "You'll have to lend me another tenner. And, then, it may not save it."

"What's that?"

"Well, I haven't money enough to liquidate for this gorgeousness."

Starbright frowned.

"Been betting some more?"

"Well, you see, I couldn't help it. And I've about bet the mandolin."

"How was that?"

"Well, you see, Rol Packard shook a fiver under my nose, and I told him I hadn't any more money, but would put my mandolin against it.

Starbright sighed.

"Dashleigh, you'll bet the coat off your back next!"

"There are others! And I'll be all right as soon as I get the money I've already won."

Indeed, there were "others" of Merriwell's friends who were as wild in their betting as Bert Dashleigh.

The game was to be called at half-past two o'clock. Before that hour the polo-rink was crowded with men and boys, Yale students and pretty girls, who were interestedly watching a preliminary match-game between two New London teams of amateurs.

Dashleigh's mandolin club was there, in seats at one end of the big rectangular "surface," thumping away in the intervals of play.

The blue colors of Yale were everywhere conspicuous, as if to refute the assertions of Merriwell's enemies that Frank's team was not an accredited Yale

institution. More blue would not have been displayed if a regular Yale college five was about to meet a five from another great university. The crowd grew denser and denser, as the watches showed the approach of the hour.

By and by the amateurs concluded their playing, and the New London team, which was a New London team in name only, came upon the "surface" for a warming-up before meeting Merriwell's men.

While they were engaged in this, Frank and his five entered the room, their entrance immediately attracting attention. They came in, clothed in their roller-polo costume, with roller-skates on their feet.

Then more than half the crowd seemed to rise up; and, led by Bill Higgins, who swung his big sombrero and yelled like an Indian at a horse-race, they gave Merriwell and his men a rousing cheer. Dade Morgan whitened with rage.

"Hear the fools!" he inwardly snarled. "When will they ever get done worshipping Merriwell?"

The difference between the two teams was marked. Two of the opposing team looked like New York toughs, which they were, and the captain was a truculent-looking fellow, with eyes set close together.

When the New London team gave way for Merriwell's, and Frank led his men on the floor for practise, the difference between the teams was so noticeable that Higgins again started a cheer which seemed to rock the building.

"I should like to get that fellowth wope awound

hith neck and choke him!" Lew Veazie disgustedly lisped to his chums of the Chickering set, as he listened to the cowboy's bellwing. "It maketh me thick!"

"You'll be sicker before the game is over!" said Beckwith, the big guard of the Yale football-team, who chanced to overhear him. "It makes me ashamed to know that you fellows are Yale men."

"But Merriwell's isn't a Yale team!" snarled Skelding.

"Oh, it isn't? Well, the best men in Yale think so. Listen to that yelling, if you don't believe it! Look at those blue ribbons, if you don't believe it! Merriwell is the king of Yale, and you know it, you miserable puppies!"

"If he wathn't tho big I'd thump him!" Veazie gasped, when Beckwith had pushed on. "Why, the audathious villain!"

Merriwell's team finished its practise. Silence reigned; even Dashleigh's mandolin club ceasing its efforts when the hour arrived for the match-game on which so much was staked.

The referee came upon the floor, or "surface," with the ball, and the teams grouped in front of the goal-cages. This was the line-up of the teams:

YALE.	POSITION.	NEW LONDON.
Merriwell.....	Rush.....	Crowder.
Starbright.....	Rush.....	Gates.
Ready.....	Center.....	Mehan.
Hodge.....	Half-back.....	Weathers.
Browning.....	Goal.....	Bascom.

The referee placed the rubber-covered polo-ball on

the spot in the middle of the floor. The members of the teams, who had been standing in front of their respective goal-cages, straightened up and leaned strainingly forward, ready to dash for the ball when the whistle sounded.

The referee stepped to one side of the surface when he had placed the ball, and put his whistle to his lips. Crowder, who was captain and rush—he of the narrow eyes and truculent face—was in motion before the sharp blast cut the air, but the referee did not send him back, and the whistle blew almost immediately. Then Frank went down the floor like a shot, and from under Crowder's outstretched stick uncovered the spot and sent the ball bang against the planking at the back of the New London cage.

Bill Higgins opened up again with the roar of a buffalo, and the Yale men yelled.

Weathers, the New London half-back, got the ball and sent it flying toward the middle of the surface, where Ready blocked its passage with his feet and shot it again toward the New London goal. Bascom was in front of it, however, and kicked it away with a savage snarl, as if he were kicking at an enemy's head. He was big and fat, with an enormous face and an unwholesome form.

Then Weathers struck the ball; but it was stopped by Hodge, and there was a furious mix-up near the center of the floor, from out of the midst of which the ball was shot by Starbright.

Mehan now took a hand and skipped the ball toward

the Yale end; and Gates, getting in ahead of Starbright and Merriwell, shot it for the Yale goal.

Big Bruce Browning was there, however, with legs and stick ready for duty, and he blocked the play, driving the ball to one side.

Gates, who was a fast skater, got behind it with his stick and again sent it toward Bruce. It missed the goal, however, going behind it; and a struggle for its possession ensued between Crowder and Starbright, Crowder roughly trying to shoulder Dick out of the way; but in the attempt he was hurled against the planking, and the ball, dragged by Starbright's stick away from the wall and from behind the goal, was caromed by him to Ready, who ran with it down the floor and shot it toward the New London end of the surface.

Here another fight ensued for its possession, the ball being batted and banged about, stopped by clubs and feet and sticks, until it was flirted out of the *mêlée* by Bart Hodge and again flew toward the New London goal.

Bascom was in place. He kicked it out of the way, and, lunging for another kick, uncovered the ball, and Merriwell shot the ball into the cage.

The first goal of the play had been made.

The teams now changed goals; and, while this was being done and they were getting in readiness for the next play, Dashleigh's mandolin club began to "discourse sweet music," which was drowned, however, by the yells of the Yale men, led by Bill Higgins.

The yelling and the music ceased as the referee advanced again toward the middle of the floor with the ball. The contesting teams crouched in readiness while he put the ball on the spot. Then, before walking aside, the referee made his announcement:

“First goal, Yale; made by Merriwell. Time, two minutes and twenty seconds.”

He put the whistle to his lips, having walked aside while concluding the announcement, and Crowder started. The referee waved him back; then sounded his whistle, and the rushers darted out.

Again Merriwell got the ball and sent it flying down the floor. It was stopped by Mehan, the New London center; but Ready took it away from him and sent it again toward the New London goal, where it was stopped by the fat goal-end, who knocked it back with his stick. Then Hodge succeeded in getting the ball and started down the floor with it, driving past Mehan and Weathers. But Gates, who had skated round in a half-circle, stopped the ball with his stick before it reached the goal-end.

Bang! Weathers drove it straight and hard to the Yale end of the floor and against the planking, Starbright and Merriwell drove it from the vicinity of the Yale goal, Merriwell running it down to Starbright and the latter passing it around Crowder by a handsome carom against the wall and on to Hodge, who again tried to drive a goal.

But in doing so he slipped and came down with a thump on the floor. One of his skates had broken.

The referee's whistle blew and time was given for Bart to put on other skates.

Dade Morgan, who had secured a good seat in one of the side galleries, which enabled him to look down on the surface and observe every movement of the players, found it difficult to keep the smile on his face. He fiercely wanted the New London men to win—not because of the bets which had been made, but because he fancied the loss of the game would humiliate Merriwell and Starbright.

He was watching Mehan and Bascom, who, with others, were walking about the floor near their goal with their skates skewed to the sides of their feet, in this interval of play. Bascom and Mehan were the men from New York who had been hired by him to knock out Dick Starbright, by breaking his arm, or otherwise seriously injuring him before the end of the game.

Dade was thinking, too, as he looked at them, of what he fancied was transpiring in New Haven at that time, and rejoicing in the probably successful result of the efforts of Dion Santenel to snare Charles Conrad Merriwell.

"I'm afraid that Merriwell's men are the better players," he was forced to confess to himself. "But only one goal has been made, and there are plenty of chances. Anyway, if one of those fellows knocks out Starbright satisfactorily I shall be satisfied, whichever way the game goes."



Again the game was on, the skaters flying here and there, after the elusive sphere, swooping down on it from all quarters, as it skipped back and forth under the constant strokes of the sticks.

It was clearly to be seen that Merriwell's men were the more scientific players. They did not hammer at the ball constantly, as if trying to smash it into dust, as the New Londoners did, but made team plays, gliding the ball from man to man around opposition players, caroming it against the walls and skilfully shooting it for goal.

The playing of the New London men was of the slugger type, as befitted their appearance. Bascom, their goal-tend, was savage and fierce as a chained wolf, hopping about in front of the cage, kicking at the ball, striking at it, and frantically warding it off when it was shot at the cage. Now and then he lifted his club and glared at the Yale men as they swooped on him, as if he desired to hammer their heads. More than once Mehan caught a Yale player round the shoulders and pushed him about, yet the referee did not announce a foul.

Mehan tried this once too often, jamming with terrific force into Dick Starbright, who was skating in the opposite direction. The result was disastrous to the New London man, who was hurled from his feet by the force of the impact, being literally lifted by Starbright's greater weight and strength. He fell with a crash, striking his head on the floor, and lay for a moment stunned.

The referee blew his whistle; and, as if to cover up the confusion, Dashleigh's band began to play.

"I'll git even with ye for that!" Mehan growled viciously, as he crawled to his feet.

Then it was found that in the fall he had broken his skate, and a wait was occasioned.

"Look out for that fellow, Dick!" Frank warned. "He has been acting ugly toward you ever since the game began. Once, when he struck at the ball in the air, as if his stick were a baseball bat, and missed it, I thought he really struck at you. I believe now he did!"

"Oh, I saw the rascal!" Dick smiled. "I've been watching him ever since. But I don't fancy he will care to run into me again, as he did just then."

The fierceness of the New London men seemed to increase when the play began again, and within two minutes they had caged the ball, catching Browning off his guard and shooting the sphere between his legs.

Then how the friends of Dade Morgan cheered, in spite of the fact that the goal had been won from Yale!

"They're fools!" Morgan snarled to himself. "I warned them against making such a show of themselves; but lots of fellows haven't any more tact than to exhibit themselves in that way."

Yet he was so pleased that the smile came to his face without any effort on his part.

Dashleigh's band was again twanging away, but its strains could not soothe the heart of Morgan, who,

in that moment of temporary victory, felt that he hated Merriwell and Starbright more than he had ever hated them.

When the playing recommenced it was fast and furious, and within less than a minute Starbright made a goal. Then Crowder drove a goal for New London, the score was again tied, and the referee's whistle blew, announcing the end of the first period of the match.

When the referee's whistle blew again and the game recommenced, Merriwell reached the ball first and sent it flying for goal. Bascom stopped it with his padded shins, kicked it away, and a fight for its possession took place near the middle of the floor.

Then Starbright secured it and drove it again toward the New London goal; but Weathers, the half-back, blocked it with his feet, and it shot to one side of the hall, with four or five men diving after it. Ready was there, and drove it into the New London goal, but it bounded out; and another struggle for its possession ensued, right in front of the cage, yet far enough away to prevent the calling of a foul. Hodge now got the ball and shot it into the cage, and it stayed there.

There was a transference of goals, and the game was renewed. Again Merriwell drove the ball for the cage; but Bascom, the goal-tend, stopped it with his foot. Weathers skipped it back to the middle of the floor, where there was a struggle for it, and such hot

work that the spectators were brought up standing with a yell.

The New London men secured the ball and fought their way toward the Yale end. But Browning was there, and, though they made a desperate effort to put the ball in the cage, he prevented it.

Starbright drew the ball out of the mix-up, but lost it; and, to keep it from being caged, Ready shot it behind the goal. It caromed against the wall, flying to Merriwell's side, and before Crowder could get to him, Merriwell shot it for a goal.

It went across the room like a streak of light. Bascom jumped to prevent it from going into the cage, but missed it; and another goal was added to the score of Merriwell's side.

Again goals were changed, but before another score was made by either team the referee's whistle blew, announcing the end of the second period of the game. The work had been so hot and fierce that neither spectators nor players had realized the quick passage of time, and the sound of the whistle came as a surprise.

Bascom, the fat goal-tend of the New London team, who had worked with such savage energy, was dripping with perspiration, and all of the men were more or less blown.

Whizz—plunk! The game was on again, and Merriwell had again driven the ball into the New London cage. Morgan's face looked black. He had forgotten to smile. He saw that Merriwell's men were playing now, and that the New London sluggers, though

they were fierce fighters, were really no match for the Yale five.

The goals were changed, and the battle raged anew. Crowder was furious. At the sound of the whistle he tried to take the ball off the spot ahead of Merriwell, a thing he had not yet been able to do. But Frank took the ball, as before, and shot it past him, bang against the netting of the cage. It bounded out, was caught up by Weathers' stick, and danced to the middle of the floor. Then Mehan sent it along, and there was another tussle near the Yale goal.

In the struggle that ensued, Mehan struck savagely at Dick Starbright's head. Dick saw the blow coming and dodged, and the stick, swinging over and banging against the floor, was broken short off.

The ball had been in the air at the time, and Mehan, profusely apologizing, declared that the blow had not been aimed at Dick, but at the ball; and, after another stick had been given to him, the game was renewed.

"See here!" Dick hissed, when he was skating by the fellow, "if that happens again, I'll know it's no accident, and I'll thump you as soon as the game is over. See?"

Mehan whitened, but made no answer.

The New London men, appearing now to realize that if they were not to be defeated badly they must make a fierce fight, began another effort to cage the ball on the Yale side. But Merriwell's men pushed the ball away from the neighborhood of their goal out into the center of the floor. It came back, however,

and Bruce time and again stopped it, in a way to win admiration from the spectators.

"They can't get it past him!" Bill Higgins bellowed, hopping up and down in his excitement and waving his big sombrero, while his great spurs tinkled and jingled.

Two more skates were broken, and stops were made. Then Bruce, trying to stop a ball, pitched forward headlong on the floor, and Crowder, who was striking at the ball, deflected his stick and struck Bruce heavily over the head.

"It was an accident," was the verdict of the referee.

Bruce's head was bandaged, and, though he felt so dizzy from the effect of the blow that he could hardly stand, he remained at his post.

Then Ready drove another goal, and Bill Higgins whooped.

"Them New London fellers'll never git another!" he yelled.

But they did. The New London men rallied, and in less than two minutes made two goals, setting their sympathizers wild with excitement.

"I ought to have prevented that," Bruce apologized. "If I do that again, Merry, take me off the team."

But Frank knew that New London would not have made those goals if Bruce had been in his usual condition, and he kindly told the big fellow so. The pain seemed somehow to go out of Bruce's head after that, so that, when the next time the ball came skipping toward him, he blocked it promptly with his padded

shins, and sent it flying back to the other end of the room with his stick. Again the battle was forced out into the middle of the rink.

Two goals were made, one by Starbright and the other by Merriwell. The New London men, growing more and more furious, tried again and again to cage the ball; but Bruce Browning was seemingly himself again, and each time cleverly blocked it and kept the Yale cage empty.

"Beat 'em out of sight!" Higgins yelled from his seat in the balcony; and Merriwell seemed suddenly to resolve to do this, and show the spectators what real polo-playing looked like. He was angered, too, by the dastardly blow which had been given Bruce and by the attempt against Starbright.

There were not many minutes more of play, but in that time Merriwell proved his worthiness of the title of Polo King. Again and again the New London men came charging down the room with a clanking roar, for a struggle for the ball, but Merriwell's men, seeming to be imbued with the resolution which had come to Frank, met them firmly, took the ball from them easily, and, shooting it from man to man in beautiful team play, caged it again and again. Ready caged a goal, being followed by Bart Hodge, and he by Dick Starbright. Each time, when these goals were made, it was Merriwell who sent the ball to the one who made the goal, sending it at just the right time and in just the right way to enable the player to do the work.

Then Merriwell himself took a hand at the work

of goal-making, and caged the ball twice in less than two minutes of play.

The New London men found that they simply were not in it, though they tried to pull themselves together and prevent this furious goal-making on the part of the Yale team. Bascom hopped up and down and to and fro in front of the cage, like the proverbial chicken on the proverbial pan of live coals. He lunged, kicked, flounced, and writhed; but he could not prevent the goals, for they seemed to shoot from Merry's stick past his lunging feet, over them, under them, and between them.

Everybody in the big barnlike building was standing up in mad excitement, as the game thus drew toward its close, and Bill Higgins was whooping as if he meant to take off the roof.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE BLOW OF THE HYPNOTIST.

While the polo-teams were battling at New London, Dion Santenel was not idle. Charles Conrad Merriwell, sitting up-stairs in his pleasant front room at the New Haven House, looking over a paper, heard a knock on the door, and a colored boy came in bearing a card.

"Fisher Stokes, stock-broker and mining-agent, Denver, Colorado," was what Mr. Merriwell read on the card.

"Been waiting for you," said Merriwell, smiling pleasantly, when "Stokes" was shown into the room.

"Detained by a little business down-town," the man explained suavely, giving the apartment a comprehensive, sweeping glance out of the corners of his dark eyes before sinking into the chair which Merriwell politely placed for him.

The furnishing was substantial and old-fashioned. In the center of the room was a round-topped table covered with a heavy slab of marble. Between the two windows which looked out on Chapel Street and the green was a long pier-glass. A green velvet carpet covered the floor, and the room was furnished with an abundance of comfortable chairs and a sofa. An

alcove bedroom opened off from this main room, its doorway half-concealed by curtains. In addition to this there was a bathroom. The apartments were the best and most expensive in the house, and the house the best that New Haven afforded.

As Fisher Stokes took all this in, he came to the quick conclusion that the white-haired man who had been waiting for him, seated at the round marble-topped center-table, was comfortably situated, to say the least.

"As I had to come on to New York, I wired you that I would call here this afternoon to see you about the shares in the Anaconda group in the Cripple Creek district," he continued, beginning to open a case which the colored boy had brought into the room. He looked now with his keen, dark eyes at Merriwell pretty much as he had looked at the room and its furnishings.

"I knew you were Merriwell as soon as I saw you. I think I should have known you, even if I had met you by chance in the street, though we have never met before. You see, I had a man in my office who once worked for you in Arizona in a minor capacity. When he found out that I was handling stocks for you, he became so interested that he gave me a complete description of your personal appearance and told so many things concerning you that I have felt for months as if we were personally acquainted. Some of this business might have been conducted by mail and wire, but I thought, as I was so near in New York,

that it was a duty I owed to myself and you to run up and see you."

There was nothing in the man's appearance to indicate to Merriwell that he was Brandon Drood, alias Dion Santenel, his old and bitter enemy, from whose power he had escaped so short a time before, through the aid of Frank. "Fisher Stokes," who was evidently past middle age, was almost Frenchy in appearance, with well-waxed mustache and imperial that hid the lines of his thin lips and cold, cruel mouth. His thin, straight form was encased in a dark-gray business suit. A diamond blazed on the middle finger of his left hand and another shone in his scarp-pin. The fiery gleam of the eyes had been subdued and almost banished; and, as he talked, Merriwell noticed that his voice was soft and well modulated. It held nothing of the real accents of Brandon Drood, nor of the droning tones of the pretended Hindu. In all things "Fisher Stokes" seemed to be what he professed to be, a prosperous, alert, rather self-important mining-broker of the West. And, as Mr. Merriwell had never seen the real Fisher Stokes, who was handling Western mining-shares for him, he was the more easily deceived.

"What was the name of the man?" Merriwell asked, at once interested in Drood's statement; for, like many men who have made themselves immensely wealthy by a lucky turn of fortune, Merriwell was sometimes garrulously fond of recalling and dilating on the past and on the days of his hardships and misfortune.

“Byron Macomber.”

“Ah, yes!”

Mr. Merriwell's face lighted.

“Macomber was one of my most trusted clerks while I was in Arizona. So he is with you now? I am afraid that I failed to reward him properly for his services to me. Tell him so, please, and that at any time if he needs aid I shall be glad to extend it.”

Santanel had taken the papers from the leathern case and placed them on the table.

Then the fiery gleam came into Santanel's eyes—those terrible, fascinating, serpentlike eyes—and they glowed and burned, contracting and expanding their pupils, as they eagerly studied the face of Charles Conrad Merriwell.

“So soon!” Santanel mentally croaked. “So soon I have him in my power! And I feared it might be the work of hours. Yes, he is already under my influence and does not know it. I have him again. Ah! Charles Conrad Merriwell! You, who hounded me over the earth until at length I turned at bay, determined to crush you instead of permitting you to crush me, I have you again in my power, and you shall not escape!”

The reflective light began to fade out of the eyes of Mr. Merriwell, to be replaced by a look of vacancy. Then he made a struggle to arouse himself, but the struggle was weak and ineffectual. Santanel's mysteri-

ous power was already over him, holding his will in subjection.

And Frank, who had saved him before, was far off in New London, battling with the New London polo-team!

In a little while Santenel began to talk in a low, soothing monotone, still stabbing Merriwell's face and eyes with his terrible eyes.

"In those days I was not known as Dion Santenel," he droned, as if seeking to strengthen a memory that he sought to stir in the mind of the man he was subjugating. "Then I was called Brandon Dood. You struck me, you know—struck me like a dog, for cheating you at cards; and I planned a revenge, a sweet revenge. I discovered, as I lay on my bed where your blow had placed me, that I was able to hypnotize you—made the first discovery of the fact that I have that mysterious power over other men. I used it. I made you imprison yourself in that tunnel in the Ragged Queen Mine, where I supposed you would die. But you found a way out. You regained possession of what I thought a used-out mine, which you named the Lost Man, and from which you dug a fortune. Then, with that wealth at your back, you began to hound me, pursuing me everywhere, dragging me down when I climbed to affluence and striking at me without mercy. But now my time has come! The worm has turned. I have studied and plotted and planned for this hour. For this hour I have made myself all men—coming and going with the silence of night and like

the changing characters on the theater boards. All for this hour! What have I not suffered, endured? For this hour! For this hour!"

The dilating and contracting pupils seemed miniature furnaces with their shooting flames, and the words lulled Merriwell as the crooning lullaby of a mother lulls to sleep the babe.

"You are in my power, and you will do as I wish!" Santenel said at length, ceasing that low droning.

He arose and locked the door, turning the key in the lock and hanging a cloth over it to keep out any penetrating gaze, though the position of the door made it most unlikely that any one could see where Merriwell sat, bolt upright now in the chair.

Coming back, Santenel made a pass with his hands over Merriwell's face, commanded him to rouse up, and Merriwell sat up yawning as if he had been aroused from a nap. He looked at Santenel with vacant curiosity.

"Now as to that business," said Santenel, spreading out some blank paper on the marble-topped table and producing pen and ink.

"Oh, yes," said Merriwell. "Let me see, I forgot what it was?"

"This is the last day of your life, you know! When the sun rises to-morrow, Charles Conrad Merriwell will have ceased to exist. Aye! before the sun goes down in the west to-night—goes down where the Ragged Queen was and the Lost Man Mine now is—you will be gone from this world!"

"Yes, yes!" Merriwell assented, without a note of fear or regret in his voice. "That was what brought you here? I had forgotten, but that was it."

"But before you go I want you to write a statement, which will show the world why you go and what is to become of some of your property—a great deal of your property."

"Yes, yes!" Merriwell again assented.

Santenel produced a book of bank-checks which he had previously filled in. There were many of them, all for large amounts, and bearing various dates, some as much as six months before.

"You are not so wealthy as the world thinks you, when your debts are paid! My commissions for kiting the Blue Bird mining-stock for you were one hundred thousand dollars. It was no fault of mine that the Blue Bird was a worthless hole in the ground. You knew that, and I was only pushing your ventures. You lost, but you gave me two notes of fifty thousand each for my commission."

He pushed out two notes, which Merriwell merely stared at.

"Then I took up and developed the Golden Nugget, at a cost to you of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, every cent of which I paid out of my own pocket, though for business reasons we permitted the world to think you advanced the money yourself. The Golden Nugget had no golden nuggets in it, and you lost; but, of course, I must have my money, and you

gave me two more notes for that, each of seventy-five thousand dollars."

He pushed them over, properly filled out, bearing interest, and a date of five months previous.

"Then there was that big deal in Rocky Mountain coal land, and all those other deals which you so readily remember. The whole of it amounts to eight hundred thousand dollars, and I should make it two millions if I wasn't afraid of the courts. Sometimes a man's desire to suddenly enrich himself bumps him up against the courts, and he loses all that he hoped to gain and more, too. Your son Frank is a fighter!"

These last remarks seemed to be directed to himself and not to Merriwell, and Merriwell appeared not to hear them.

Santenel slowly pushed the prepared notes across the table and reached out the pen to Merriwell, the latter taking it without hesitation.

"You will sign these notes; after which you will prepare a written statement of the reasons which led you to take a sudden departure from this earthly sphere!"

Merriwell drew the notes to him, not noticing that they were drawn payable to another name than that of "Fisher Stokes," and, dipping the pen in the ink-well, he proceeded to append his name.

Santenel dried the ink of the signatures with a blotter and placed the notes in a little heap on the marble



table. Then he shoved a sheet of paper to Merriwell and commanded him to write.

"This is what you are to say," commanded Santenel, and Charles Conrad Merriwell set his pen to the paper:

"TO MY SON FRANK.

"DEAR FRANK: The only regret I have is in leaving you, for I know that you love me and that you will be shocked and grieved at my death, the death of a suicide. But life has become unbearable to me. I can stand it no longer. I have studiously concealed this from you, though I fear sometimes that you have read it in my face. I am in good mental health; but I have ceased to have any desire to live. You have sometimes noticed idiosyncrasies in me. The attempt to hide from you my real feelings and my heart-sickness of the world will go far toward explaining them. I hope that my body will not be cast up by the waves, and that if it should be, it may lie unburied, though this last I know you will not permit. Pay all my debts. I have some notes outstanding, among others some heavy ones occasioned by wildcat mining speculation. These I must ask you to meet. The rest of my fortune is yours. So good-by; don't think too hard of me, and do not grieve, for I am not worthy of it.

"Your unfortunate father,  
"CHARLES CONRAD MERRIWELL."

This was properly dated.

"We will leave that here on the table—or, rather, you will; and then you will do what I tell you. Just a plunge, and it will all be over. Any man might crave so easy an exit from the world!"

He was again fixing his terrible eyes on the now almost vacant face of Frank's father, thinking at the same time of the steps he must now take to carry out his plan to its conclusion and secure his own safety.

"You will do all that I tell you?"

"Yes," Merriwell answered. "Everything!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### INZA TO THE RESCUE.

Spat—whiz—plunk! The game was still on at New London, and Frank Merriwell drove and caged a ball.

The referee's whistle blew, denoting the close of the last period of the game; and he followed this with the announcement of the scores:

“Goals made by Yale, fifteen; by New London, four.”

Dade Morgan was gnawing his smiling lips, in his seat in the balcony.

“Curse the fellows, they have failed me!” he was thinking.

Then he saw Bascom jostle heavily against Dick Starbright! saw a sudden altercation, and beheld Bascom's polo-stick flash through the air. When it fell, Dick Starbright fell with it.

The crowd was rising and streaming out of the building. Bascom dived to the nearest netting, which he cut away with furious slashes of a knife, leaped through the opening thus made, pushed aside the men who were there, and sprang for a small door, the position of which he had previously ascertained. Before the extent of Starbright's injury could be known or a pursuit organized Bascom was gone.

Frank Merriwell was the first to reach Starbright.

He lifted Dick and saw that the polo-stick had struck his head. There was a small gash and some blood. But Frank saw almost immediately that, though the blow had knocked Starbright senseless, its effects were not likely to be of a serious character.

A doctor came out of the crowd, and an excited group soon gathered in the "surface."

Bart Hodge and others were trying to discover what had become of Bascom. The other members of the New London polo-team pushed into the crowd and expressed their sympathy, and were free in their declarations that Bascom must have acted in a fit of anger on the impulse of the moment and without any malice.

Dick Starbright did not long remain unconscious. The blow had been aimed well enough, but Dick's up-thrust arm had deflected it and it had fallen glancingly, producing only temporary concussion.

"Oh, he's all right!"

The doctor said it, and the doctor laughed encouragingly. A boy pushed toward Frank with a telegram. Frank tore open the envelope and read:

"Man here with your father. I think D. S. Come quick. Will meet you at wreck with automobile.

"INZA."

Inza Burrage had sent it from New Haven.

Frank, after a cheering word to Dick Starbright, jumped out of the room, hurrying toward the street without changing his clothing. As a short cut, he took the little door through which Bascom had fled.

He was about to emerge into the light from a small and unused side entrance, when he heard a rustling and became aware that a man who had been about to leave the place ahead of him had drawn back and was now apparently in hiding.

“Bascom!” was Frank’s thought.

Before the man knew that his presence had been observed, Frank was on him, pouncing down like an eagle.

It was indeed Bascom, who had succeeded in hiding in the building, and who, fancying that the coast was now somewhat clear, had decided to venture forth and try to get out of the town before a more thorough search might reveal his place of hiding.

Frank clutched him by the throat, bore him backward to the floor, calling for assistance. Before it came, however, he had found a rope and tied Bascom up ready to turn him over to the authorities.

Then he relinquished him to Hodge, who had come with others in answer to his call. After a few words with this most faithful friend, Frank hurried away for the railway-station and telegraph-office.

There he learned that a freight had been wrecked on its way from New Haven, and that the track would not be open for some time.

Then he fully understood Inza’s message. It would be impossible for him to get through to New Haven by rail, because of this wreck; and she would be at the place where the wreck occurred, with the automo-

bile, ready to take him on into New Haven at the highest speed of the auto, as soon as he reached her.

"Brave and quick-witted as ever!" was his thought. "I wonder what she has learned of Dion Santenel now? I thought the rascal would abandon his attempts and be afraid to return to New Haven. But I will get there, and I will thwart him in his scheme, whatever it is."

Frank might not have been so confident if he had known just what Santenel was doing, and how he was succeeding.

"When will there be a train through to New Haven?" he asked of the agent.

"All trains abandoned," was the answer.

"What about a wrecking-train?"

"It won't take passengers, and it will go no farther than the wreck."

Frank did not ask anything more, except the distance the wreck had occurred from New Haven. He heard two men talking, and from their conversation learned that the wrecking-train would be along in ten or fifteen minutes, from some city down the road, and that the chances were it would go through New London without making a stop.

Frank's mind was at once made up. He would try to get on that wrecking-train, even if he had to make a flying leap for it at great risk from the New London platform. Then he sent a message to Inza.

"Ten minutes to spare, anyway!" he reflected. "I'll make a change in my clothes."

Hurrying back to the polo-rink for this purpose, he thought over the message from Inza. There was a possibility that she might have been deceived as to the identity of the man who was with his father, but Frank knew that her eyes were keen. The chances were that she was not deceived. In that case, there could be no doubt that the elder Merriwell was in serious peril.

The thought that he might be too late made Frank wish for a special train for the scene of the wreck; but that could not be had in New London. Nor was anything to be gained by trying to hire a special engine. He decided that if he missed the wrecking-train he would try to get a special engine by wire.

When he returned to the station, having been stopped on the way by crowds of enthusiastic men who insisted on shaking hands with him over the great fight he and his men had made in the polo-game, he sent a telegram to Selton Dirk, the little New Haven detective whom he had more than once employed, asking Dirk to call on his father at the New Haven House and do what in his judgment he thought proper.

"Dirk is quick and he'll catch on," was Frank's thought, as he gave this message to the operator and asked him to hurry it through. The message went through; but Frank did not know until later that Dirk was out of the city and that it could not reach him.

The whistle of the engine of the special wrecking-train was heard at this moment. Its character told him that the train was not to stop.

Frank remained close against the wall of the station until the engine whirled in sight, then walked toward it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Five miles out from New Haven, at the scene of the wreck, Inza Burrage sat in Frank Merriwell's automobile, with smiling confidence. She had received his message, which said he would reach that point on the first train through, and she believed he would do so, even though the men who were plowing round the wreck with spades and picks told her that the big wrecking-train, whose coming they anxiously awaited, would not stop at New London, and that her friend could not possibly come through on that.

When the train came and stopped at the wreck Inza found her faith in Merriwell justified. He was in the caboose of the wrecking-train; and, leaping down the clay embankment, he extended his hands to her, climbing at once into the automobile.

"I knew you'd be waiting for me!" he said, starting the machine.

"And I knew that you would come, even though the men at the wreck told me you couldn't. You always do the things that other men can't do, or are too timid to do, and I knew it would be so this time."

"It was very simple," Frank answered. "There were some empty flat cars on the New London siding. I climbed upon these, took a good run along them as if I was going at a hurdle when the wrecking-train came along, and jumped from them to a flat car of the



train. It was a lively jump, but I made it. The conductor didn't want me there, and said I oughtn't to be there, and some other things, but he was in too big a hurry to stop and put me off, as I knew he would be, and I came right through at a double quick, without further trouble."

He gave the lever a touch and sent the automobile forward at its highest speed.

"Father?" he questioned simply.

"I'm sure that Santenel is with him! I shouldn't have thought anything about it, if you hadn't told me that awful story of the Hindu. I saw this man, and some way I was sure he was the Hindu, for you'll recollect that I saw the Hindu at the charity fair. Well, I followed him along Chapel Street, saw him enter the New Haven House, and heard him ask to have his card taken up to Charles Conrad Merriwell! Perhaps I was a bit bold in following him into the New Haven House, but I thought it a thing I ought to do, and there was no time to get any one else to do it.

"Before venturing to send you the telegram I hired a boy on the street to go again to the New Haven House and ask the proprietor if Mr. Merriwell could be seen, and he came back and said that Mr. Merriwell was busily engaged and was to be seen by no one. Then I sent you the telegram, and as soon as I got your answer I started for this point with your automobile."

For a time there was nothing heard but the br-r-r-r of the automobile, as it took the straight road before it like a racer under Frank's manipulation. He had

an inner feeling that Inza's keen eyes had seen and perceived the truth, and that his father was in the greatest peril of his life.

\* \* \* \* \*

The feeling that makes a cat love to toy with a mouse which is helpless in its power and half-unconscious filled the soul of Dion Santenel.

"If Frank Merriwell should learn that I am here he could not reach me, unless he has the wings of a bird!" the villain chuckled, as he looked at Charles Conrad Merriwell. "If he should telegraph Selton Dirk, Dirk is in New York City, sent there on a mission by one of my trusted agents. If any ordinary policeman should attempt to touch me, I should simply laugh at him and make the fellow go away feeling worse than a sneak for having suspected me. Everything has worked to my hand. Frank is away, and can't even dream of the plot that sent him away, and I am free to work my will!"

Then he began again to talk to the elder Merriwell, speaking in the droning way he sometimes delighted to affect, again playing with the helpless man like the cat with the mouse. By and by he took up the statement which Merriwell had prepared at his dictation, smilingly read it, and placed it on the table in a conspicuous manner, with a paper-weight to hold it down.

After that, he looked through the notes bearing the signature of Charles Conrad Merriwell, ascertained

that they were all right in every way on their surface, and tucked them away in an inner pocket in a leather wallet.

"Come! It's time to go!" he said, speaking to Merriwell.

Merriwell aroused.

"Yes?"

"You will take the electric car at this corner for the boat landings. There you will hire a boat or steal one, row out a half-mile from shore, and throw yourself overboard and sink. This letter on the table will explain to the world why. This is my command. You will do it. You obeyed me in the mine and fired the blast that shut you in; you must obey me as implicitly in this. I will it, and my will is now your law. Go!"

His face had assumed a wolfish look, and his eyes were again shooting out their red gleams.

"Yes!"

Merriwell made the promise and rose to his feet to carry it out, as completely subjected to the will of the man before him as if he were an automaton.

"But I will go first," said Santenel, speaking to Charles Merriwell. "Ten minutes after I am gone you will leave this house and carry out my instructions. Good-by!"

"Victory is mine!" chuckled Santenel, as he turned to leave the room.

At that moment there was a whirr of wheels and the br-r-r-r of an automobile in the street, which stopped

in front of the house. A second later and a knock sounded on the door.

Santenel muttered a malediction, but walked to the door and opened it.

The colored boy stood there, and with him Frank Merriwell.

Before Santenel could recover from his surprise and mentally resume his pretended character of "Fisher Stokes," the broker, Frank crowded through the doorway and stood before him.

"You scoundrel!" Frank hissed, and with a swoop of his hand he tore away the false mustache and imperial.

With a cry of defeat and fear Santenel leaped at Frank, and was stricken to the floor, where he lay in a senseless heap.

Frank Merriwell had come in time!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE FALL OF SANTENEL.

With difficulty Frank Merriwell held himself in check. He was in a towering rage, and the impulse was strong in him to hurl himself on the prostrate form of Dion Santenel. He felt an awful thirst for the life of the wretch who lay on the floor before him, sent there by a mighty blow of his fist. Twice before had such a feeling come to him—once when he struggled with Sport Harris on the rotten bridge in England, and again when he overthrew Santenel in Louisville and held his life, as it were, in the hollow of his hand.

“You miserable whelp!” he panted, looking with loathing and contempt into the face of the man who had sought his father’s ruin and death.

He cast a quick glance at his father, who had dropped down, crouching, into the chair by the marble-topped center-table.

Though Santenel had now entirely recovered consciousness, he lay cowering on the floor, in deadly fear of the young athlete whose wrath he had felt. The fierce fire had gone out of his shining black eyes, to be replaced by a gleam that was full of subdued and cowardly hate.

Then he recollected that he had come to the room,

not in the person of Dion Santenel, or Brandon Drood, or even of Hector King, but as "Fisher Stokes," the mining speculator and stock-broker of Denver.

"You are making a mistake!" he cried quickly. "I don't know why you knocked me down as you did. I'd have you know, sir, that I am Fisher Stokes, of Denver, stock-broker and mining speculator. And I shall have you arrested for this insult and for your unwarranted blow!"

"Bah!" Frank sneered. "Put these on, will you?"

He snatched up the false mustache and imperial which he had torn from the man's face but a few moments before, and flung them at him.

Santenel sank back, pale and trembling. He saw that further lies and threats would not serve him. The fire died out of his eyes, to be replaced by a look of pleading. He glanced toward the door.

Frank turned to the colored boy, who stood dumb with amazement, and sent him with a hasty message to Inza, who was waiting below. The boy vanished, diving for the elevator with comical speed.

Santenel rose to his feet and looked longingly at one of the closed windows.

"You can't go out by the door," said Frank, "and if you pitch yourself out of that window it will be pretty sure to save the hangman an unpleasant job."

Santenel groped weakly to a chair.

"You are making a great mistake," he quiveringly urged. "On my honor, Mr. Merriwell, you are making a dreadful mistake!"

"Release him from that spell!" Frank ordered, in so commanding a tone that Santenel fairly leaped in his chair.

"Yes, yes!" the hypnotist replied, though he wanted to deny that the elder Merriwell was under any spell. But he did not dare to do this; and, with a word and a few passes of his long, thin hands, he removed the strange influence under which Charles Conrad Merriwell had been laboring.

The change produced was remarkable. The face resumed its accustomed appearance and the eyes held their natural light, except that Mr. Merriwell seemed to be stupefied by what he beheld. He recognized Frank, but it was clear that he did not recognize the man who was retreating from him and who soon again crouched uncomfortably in the chair.

"It's all right, father. This is our mutual friend, Santenel."

Frank said this with an unnatural and bitter laugh.

"Our mutual friend has struck again, and again he has failed!"

The elder Merriwell could hardly credit the words. He recalled the entrance into the room of "Fisher Stokes," the pretended stock-broker. The man who crouched and whined in the chair wore the same clothing, yet the mustache and imperial and the jaunty business air were gone. What had occurred after the man's entrance and their talk of a few moments Charles Merriwell could not remember. The interval was now a blank to him.

Yet, with eyes enlightened by Frank's words, he perceived that this was really "Fisher Stokes," minus the mustache and imperial, which he now saw on the floor; and Frank had assured him that the man was his bitter and deadly enemy, Dion Santenel.

Charles Merriwell's brain whirled when he tried to comprehend this transition and the peril he had been in. A sense of terror filled him, giving to his face, under its crown of white hair, a pitiful look.

"It must be as you say!" he managed to articulate.

Santenel was racking his clever brain for something that would stand him in stead now, and trying at the same time to still the trembling of his limbs and subdue the fear that filled him.

"I am Santenel," he gaspingly confessed. "But there is a great mistake."

He saw the "confession" which he had forced Charles Merriwell to write, lying, as he had meant to leave it, on the marble-topped table. He put out his hand, hoping he might be able to secure it unobserved.

Frank Merriwell saw the movement, and, advancing to the table, secured the writing, his face darkening as he read it over, for it revealed in all its details Santenel's cruel plan against his father. Nevertheless, Frank put it quietly in his pocket. He had regained control of himself.

Santenel sat with fear-filled face and blue lips, staring at him.

"What do you intend to do with me?" he asked,



seeing that further efforts at evasion and concealment were useless.

There was a rap on the door, followed instantly by entering footsteps.

"This!" said Frank.

Two officers had come in, sent by Inza in response to the request conveyed to her by the colored boy. Santenel rose, after another hesitating glance at the closed windows. Then his coolness returned to him. He advanced toward the officers.

"I am informed that you have been sent for to place me under arrest. I demand to know with what I am charged, for I have committed no crime. You have no right to seize me without a proper warrant, merely on complaint of this person!"

The smaller officer smiled and produced a paper.

"We have a warrant," he said. "It was sworn out by a young lady, Miss Inza Burrage, who charges that you cut the balloon-rope on the day of the Yale-Carlisle football-game, with the intention of causing her death and the death of Charles Conrad Merriwell, who was in the balloon with her. You will see, therefore, that we can do nothing but go ahead, and we place you under arrest."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### FORCING HIS ENEMY'S HAND.

Frank Merriwell took his way thoughtfully toward the rooms of Dade Morgan, whither Dade had gone but a moment before. Dion Santenel lay in prison, having been committed to jail that afternoon.

When Frank rapped on the door of Morgan's room, the freshman calmly invited him to come in. He was sitting on his trunk, with various articles scattered about in confusion. Appearances indicated that he had contemplated a hasty flight from New Haven.

"Not going to leave us?" Frank asked, dropping into the chair to which Morgan pointed.

"No! What made you think so?"

"This array, or, rather, disarray."

"Merely getting some things together for the laundry."

He smiled in his pleasant way and really was so cool that Frank could not help admiring him.

"I think I'll close the door," said Frank, stepping over and shutting it. "I came up for a little talk."

Dade did not get off the trunk.

"It is a bit cool in here. I ought to have done that myself. You'll pardon me."

"Perhaps you can guess what I want to say?"

"I suppose it's something about that polo-game.

I'm free to admit that I wanted the other fellows to beat, Merriwell, chiefly because I don't like certain members of your team. I hope the fact that I bet on the other team doesn't stick in your crop?"

"No; I didn't intend to talk of the polo-game. As for that rascally goal-tend who struck Dick Starbright on the head and laid him out, the law will take care of him. Of course, you had nothing to do with that?"

Dade flushed.

"It's an insult to insinuate such a thing, Merriwell!"

"I beg your pardon, then, if I am wrong. I have no means of knowing; but I'm fully aware of the fact that you don't like Starbright—and you would do such a thing!"

Dade lowered his eyelids and turned over a pair of golf-stockings which lay on the trunk-lid beside him. He feared what was coming and shrank from it.

"I didn't come up here for polite talk, Morgan," Frank went remorselessly on. "We're alone here?"

"Quite alone."

He had thrown down the stockings and now turned squarely toward Frank.

"You know that Hector King is in prison!"

Dade paled and perceptibly weakened.

"I don't know the man, I heard that you had sent somebody to jail this afternoon, but I thought it was another name."

"We want to be quite plain, Morgan. A man was

jailed here to-day. He is your friend, Hector King, alias Dion Santenel, alias a dozen other things probably. What you and he have plotted against me and my father I don't know; but I know of some things—enough to send him 'up,' I am sure. As I said, I will be quite frank with you. It is my way. I can't prove it, but I am sure that all that skyrockety betting, on money which I believe you furnished, was done to get me and my polo-team out of New Haven to-day. I can't prove it, and may not be able to prove it, unless Santenel makes a confession that you did that to give him opportunity to work his plans against my father."

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about!" Dade protested.

"I can't prove those things, but I think I have collected enough evidence of various kinds against you to convince the faculty that you are not a proper person to be a student in Yale. Perhaps I can't put you in jail, but I can send you headlong out of college."

Dade whitened still more.

"And that is what you intend to do?" he demanded, almost fiercely.

"I don't know. I have as yet reached no conclusion. But I am here now to ask you to tell me why you have struck at me? I see that there is a connection between you and Hector King, alias Santenel. When you entered Yale, at the beginning of this year, you had not, so far as I know, ever seen me before. At once you became my bitterest enemy. These things

are not done without reason. You had some powerful reason."

"I——"

Merriwell cut short the protest.

"You told me once, you will remember, that you were my enemy. I did not ask why, at the time. I can see why enmity might grow up between you and such a man as Starbright—might grow up, I say. Yours against me did not grow up; it was full grown at the start, and without apparent reason. As to whether or not I use the proofs against you which I have, and force your expulsion from Yale, depends in a great measure on your answer to my question: Why are you my enemy?"

Dade Morgan sat still, but waited a moment before replying.

"If I tell you, Merriwell, you will not believe me!"

"If you tell me the truth, I will believe you. When I hear your story I shall know whether it is the truth or not. You won't be able to deceive me in the matter."

"Why, you have a multitude of enemies in Yale!"  
Dade evaded.

"But not one who was my enemy before he knew me or saw me; not one who came to the college and was my deadly enemy with no seeming cause whatever. It has not been jealousy on your part, for there can be no real ground for jealousy between a senior and a freshman. Most of my enemies dislike me

merely because of jealousy. It hasn't been so with you."

Again Morgan began to evade and shuffle. Frank took his watch from his pocket and consulted it.

"I've a good many things to attend to this evening. I have asked my question. Suit yourself about answering it. I will not say that any answer you can give will keep me from putting my proofs in the hands of the faculty. Perhaps it will. I haven't yet made up my mind."

"There isn't much to tell, but if I tell you all, will you keep mum?"

"I haven't any promises to make. I hoped that you would be able to say something in defense of yourself which would incline me to let the matter drop. Your sins have been largely against me, Morgan. In other respects you have been a capable, even an admirable college man. You have, I'm told, made good progress in your classes. You have, for a freshman, won wonderful distinction in the field of athletics. You have gathered round you many friends—not of a class I admire—yet a numerous following. You are recognized as a freshman leader. This shows that you have uncommon abilities. If you should use your undoubted abilities in a proper way, a great future may lie before you. It might be a great wrong for me to set anything in your pathway. I have asked you a question. You may be able to show that you are not so black as appearances indicate!"

Morgan saw that "confession and avoidance," as

the lawyers phrase it, was the only safe course left open to him.

"Well, it isn't much, Merriwell," he said, assuming a show of frankness.

"Whatever it is?" Frank invited.

"I did come to Yale as your enemy—your enemy before I ever saw you! That sounds strange and even mysterious, but you'll see that there is no mystery about it; for the man you have put in prison is my uncle!"

Frank showed his surprise.

"I thought you were in his pay!" he admitted.

"Not in his pay. If I disliked and even hated you, he taught me to. He taught me, schooled me to hate you and your father—your father far worse than you. For, as perhaps you know, your father pursued my uncle nearly over the world, trying to ruin him or kill him. When he made a fortune in New York, speculating, your father took it from him by counter-speculations which were aimed solely at him. He lost the Ragged Queen Mine, and your father has taken an immense fortune out of it. But for your father he would to-day be a wealthy man, and I, as his only heir, would be the heir to a splendid fortune. As it is, he has but a beggarly pittance. He has been forced to save and scrimp in many ways to get money. He borrowed the money with which he sent me here to Yale, and I am now living on money which he furnishes me. He has been able at times to get hold of and make use of considerable sums, but mostly by

borrowing. If the truth were known and payment forced, he would to-day be a pauper."

Frank could see that Dade was telling the truth in the main. He believed that the story contained exaggerations, and some concealments, but he saw that its thread was true.

"That makes a good many things plain that were quite dark to me before," Frank admitted.

Dade was quick to catch at the hope thus held out.

"If our positions had been reversed, Merriwell, I think you would have been as bitter against me as I have been against you. It isn't pleasant to feel that money and fortune which rightfully are mine are in the possession of some one else."

"That will do, Morgan. I haven't said that I accept your story without reservation, and you will not be able to win me to your way of thinking by slandering my father. I know the history of that case much better than you do."

"No offense intended," Morgan urged. "I have given you the story as it was told to me. It explains why Mr. Santenel is so bitter against you, and why I have done the things that you complain of. But I have never struck at you criminally."

Dade's face was firm as he made the claim, even though it was under Frank's searching glance.

"You look as if you don't believe that, Merriwell; but it is true, every word of it. I have tried to injure you, I will admit, but in legitimate ways."

"Are there any legitimate ways of injuring a man?"



"Well, you understand what I mean! I tried to organize Yale sentiment against you. You were flying pretty high when I came here, and I thought to take you down."

The smile had come back to his face, and with it an air of almost defiant courage.

"And failed!" said Frank.

"Well, yes; I suppose I shall have to admit that I didn't accomplish just the things I intended."

"Perhaps you think that the things you attempted against me were allowable; but the faculty will not think so, if I go before them with the proofs."

Dade wavered again.

"I hope you won't do that."

"It will depend on you somewhat. I understand the situation now, even though I don't accept everything you have said as absolute truth. I will say quite frankly that the villain back of you is a greater villain than you are. He has reached the end of his rope. Perhaps his fall will serve as a lesson."

"You're too hard on me!" Morgan insisted. "I have failed in my efforts against you. Santenel has even charged me with being your friend and playing into your hands. Well, there are things about you, Merriwell, that I like, that any one must like! I'm willing to call it a truce, if you say so?"

Merriwell arose to go.

"As I said at the first, I haven't much time to spare. If you understand your own interest, there will be a truce on your part. As for myself, I have never done

anything to injure you. What I may do hereafter will depend on you."

Dade Morgan scowled at the door after Merriwell's departure.

"It's a good thing that he's squeamish. If he had the disposition of some men, he would kick me out of Yale without a word."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### DASHLEIGH IS LATE AGAIN.

The snow came again, covering the levels and the hills and the icy expanses of the lakes. The morning after its fall, Bert Dashleigh appeared in the campus on skies, and was promptly challenged by numerous freshmen friends for various races.

"Hello, old ski-zicks!" said Ready, coming on the scene. "I'll race you on those things. No, I don't mean just that, for you'll want to wear those. I mean I'll race you on another pair."

"You'll wear the other pair?"

"Yes. I'll wear a pair and you'll wear a pair, and we'll race. The instructor told me yesterday that my exuberant English needed pruning. He seemed to think that was what I came to Yale for. And that's strange, for I thought I came here to study football."

He was examining the skies as he talked.

"I thought you came here to torment freshmen!" Bert mildly ventured.

"Well, yes, come to think of it, soph life would hardly be worth living if it wasn't for you freshies. But I'll take pity on you and overlook the wide difference in our stations and condescend to race with you on skies this afternoon, or this morning, or any other old time. I've a pair in my room. The fellow who

took them up there thought they needed pruning by the time he got them through the doorway, and stacked them up against the wall."

There are few more attractive winter sports than a run into the country on Norwegian skies, especially if the snow is in good condition for the sport, and there are hills for swift descent.

Ready and Dashleigh made a ski-ing trip that afternoon which yielded sport, pleasure, and healthful exercise.

"I thought likely you had something up your sleeve when you challenged me this morning," Dashleigh chattered, as they were on their homeward way. "I thought if you were with me, though, it would be hard for you to duplicate any such trick as you sops played on Starbright the other day. Say, that was too bad, billing him as the 'Giant of the Wheel,' when he made his bicycle trip to Guilford!"

"A freshman has no right to presume to criticize a sophomore," said Ready.

But Ready was not like most of the sophomores. He was so different from the other members of his class that, in spite of the fact that he was an inveterate practical joker, so far as the freshmen were concerned, the harassed freshmen liked him surprisingly well. In their eyes he stood among the sophomores pretty much as Frank Merriwell stood among the seniors, though the two were as unlike as is imaginable.

There was only one incident on the trip that seemed worthy of an afterthought, and it was after-events

that caused it to be remembered. Not far from the suburbs, as they were ski-ing slowly in, being somewhat tired, a slightly built young man, with a handsome face and dark eyes, approached them and asked about the ice-hockey game which was to be played on Lake Whitney soon.

"Oh, that's the match Merriwell is getting up!" said Ready.

Then he gave the desired information, and the fellows on skies continued on their way.

"Had a great time!" Bert declared, when he invaded the rooms and found there his chum, Starbright. "Ought to have been along. Ready is a corker!"

"No freshman tricks, then?"

"Not a trick!"

He threw himself down on the lounge.

"I'm to wind up the day by attending that 'feed' to-night at Mrs. Whitlock's on Whitney Avenue. I wish you'd received an invitation, for we could go together."

"You mean I'd go first, and an hour later you would come tagging along behind."

"Now, see here! Don't throw that at me any more. I know I'm slow, but the fault hasn't always been mine. When I was late at Thurlow's, it was the fault of my watch. The confounded idiot who overhauled it for me ruined it."

"And that other time at Mrs. Throckmorton's?"

Bert picked up his guitar and began to strum it. Finally he put it down.

“Confound you! Why do you look at me that way? If reasons were as plenty as blackberries, I wouldn’t give you a single one. I know I’ve been late a good many times, but it will not happen this evening.”

Dashleigh was fast earning for himself the reputation of being the champion procrastinator of Yale; not because he desired to be slow, but through laziness and his inability to tear himself away from the particular enjoyment in hand. For this reason, whenever he began to strum and sing, which was often, he was likely to forget there were such things as lessons and classes. When talking to a group on the campus, he was slow to tear himself away, if the subject of the conversation was interesting. If he made a call which he enjoyed, he was almost sure to prolong it beyond endurance. Yet he was withal so light-hearted and jolly, so genuinely unselfish, and so pleasant a companion, that he was universally liked.

“I’ll be on time this evening,” he said; then he put away the guitar and dived into some books, suddenly remembering that there was a great quantity of unlearned lore which it behooved him to stow in his brain without delay if he did not want to be dropped or get an awfully low rating.

Then he proceeded to forget all about the “feed” at Mrs. Whitlock’s, and did not remember it again until nearly eight o’clock that evening. It is probable he would not have recalled it then but for a remark made by Jeffreys.

Jeffreys was a freshman, who, with other freshmen, had dropped into Bert's rooms for a jolly hour or so that evening, after Dick Starbright had gone out. Jeffreys was "a jolly dog," and so likewise was each of his companions, and Bert was having such a good time that the minutes and the hours slipped by almost unnoticed.

"They'll have a bang-up time at Whitlock's!" Jeffreys casually remarked.

Dashleigh fairly jumped out of his chair.

"Gee!"

"Who stuck a pin into you?" Jeffreys asked.

"Why, I'm billed for that entertainment to-night—myself and the mandolin!"

"Well, if that's so, old man, you'd better get a move on!" Jeffreys assured.

But Bert was not listening to him. He had thrown aside the instrument and was dragging out a dress suit.

"If you will excuse me!" he panted. "Forgot all about that affair. By Jove! what will they think of me? And I told Starbright I'd be on hand to-night on time or break something. Well, there, I've kept my word; for I've broken that button!"

Then Bert began to "pitch himself into his clothes" in a hurried manner, talking all the time and bemoaning the fate that made him so forgetful. When he was dressed in what he considered a proper manner, he had his friends "look him over" to see that he was all there; bade them a hasty good night, and,

with mandolin-case in hand, went out of the room like a shot.

Finding no carriage in waiting on Chapel Street, or the neighborhood, he hurried on and was soon in a car. Suddenly it occurred to him that he was somewhat hazy as to the street-number. He thought he had written it down and had put it in his pocket, and began to search for it, until he remembered that he had just made a change of clothing.

"It was surely 113," he reflected. "Yes, that was it."

So he alighted from the car in the neighborhood of what he supposed was the right number, and, after a search, approached a house which he had figured out must be 113. To his amazement, it was wrapped in darkness. Not a light gleamed in it. To make sure that the house was 113, he entered the yard, and, climbing up the steps, struck a match and looked at the number. It was 113.

"Could it have been 131?" he asked himself, and set out hastily for that number.

Having reached it, he stood on the street and listened. There were lights in the house, but no sounds of merriment, such as he fancied befitted such a gathering as he expected to find.

"I'll bet my next month's allowance this isn't the place!" he groaned; then climbed the steps and timidly pulled the bell.

After a little wait the door was opened by a servant,



and in answer to his inquiry he was told that Mr. Remy lived there, not Mrs. Whitlock.

"No, I can't tell you where the Whitlocks live," was the answer to his next question. "Perhaps they can tell you at the store on the corner."

Dashleigh began to feel desperately uncomfortable. Nevertheless, he sprinted with his mandolin across to the store on the corner.

"Which Whitlock?" asked the proprietor, somewhat gruffly.

"Whitlock, of Whitney Avenue."

"Well, there are a lot of Whitlocks on Whitney Avenue."

Seeing a New Haven directory, Bert pulled it down and began feverishly to consult its pages. He stood aghast. There surely were a "lot" of Whitlocks on Whitney Avenue. He tried to recall the first name of his hostess.

"Marcus, Marcellene, what in the deuce was it? Seems to me it began with an M!"

But there were no Whitlocks on the avenue whose first names began with M. He looked for 113, 131, 213, and 231, and everything else he could find with the combinations of the figures 1 and 3. When he had done this he consulted his watch. The time was eight-thirty, and the dinner was to be given at eight.

"I'm up against it!" he groaned, while the perspiration began to pour out on his face. "Mrs. Whitlock told me personally that she wanted me to be there, and it doesn't help the matter to think that she wanted

the mandolin worse than she did me. They depended on me chiefly for their music, and here am I and the mandolin lost in the deserts of New Haven, with not an oasis in sight."

Then he attacked the directory again, emerging from its pages more confused than ever. He even began to think that perhaps Mrs. Marcellene Whitlock did not live on Whitney, but on some other thoroughfare, which he had somehow got inexplicably mixed with that of the well-known avenue.

"I'll begin to think soon that perhaps the name wasn't Whitlock, and that mine isn't Dashleigh!"

He slammed down the directory and hurried into the street.

Fortunately, he found a cab there.

"Take me to all the Whitlocks on Whitney Avenue," he begged. "And be quick about it."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### WHAT DASHLEIGH SAW.

The cab-driver stared.

"Well, it's this way, you see," Bert tarried to explain. "I'm overdue at some Mrs. Whitlock's—Mrs. Marcellene Whitlock's, I think—for dinner this evening. Big feed and all that, you understand. I was to have been there at eight sharp, and it's now hurrying along toward nine. I don't know where they live—forgot the number—and can't find it in the directory. The best way, I suppose, is to take them in turn and chase the right one down in that way. Slow process, but I don't know anything better."

The driver grinned.

"P'r'aps 'twasn't Whitlock!" he ventured. "I heard that there was to be a big dinner at Mrs. Warlock's, on Whitney Avenue, this evening."

"Warlock? Well, that may be the name. Hanged if I know! Drive me to Mrs. Warlock's, as fast as you can."

He tumbled himself and his mandolin into the vehicle, and the driver springing to the box, they were soon rattling away.

There was a "party" at Mrs. Warlock's; Bert could not doubt that, for when he jumped out in front of the

house he heard the unmistakable sounds of merriment and music.

"Wait a minute!" he asked of the driver, and darted up the steps.

In answer to his rather nervous ring, a white-aproned servant appeared.

"Yes, we have a party here to-night," was the answer to his question.

Bert felt so much better that he was about to pass into the house, when the driver called to him:

"Forgot something, didn't you?"

Bert reddened again; and, dropping his mandolin on the steps, rushed down to the street and paid for the use of the cab. Then he tore up the steps again, and, hurrying past the wondering servant, left his coat and hat and mandolin in the hall, and, without further questions, strode into what he took to be the dining-room.

He stopped on the threshold in amazement. Some couples were on the floor dancing. But they were all strangers to him. Not a face there had he ever seen before. The hostess came forward with a gracious smile.

"I guess I have made a mistake," Bert stammered. "I am due at a dinner-party at Mrs. Whitlock's."

"This is Mrs. Warlock's."

"Yes, yes, I know; but I—I——"

He was retreating, covered with confusion.

"I beg your pardon!" he managed to stammer, then

dived for the outer air, picking up his hat, coat, and mandolin as he ran.

The cab was a third of a block away, but it stopped in answer to the bellowing hail which he gave as he jumped down the steps, and turned round and drove back.

"Wasn't the place!" said Bert, in some confusion, as he met the cab. "We'll have to make another try. It was a Whitney—no, I mean a Whitlock where the party is that I am trying to reach. That was Warlock's."

"I told you it was Warlock's."

"I know you did. Take me to a Whitney Avenue of Whitlocks, I mean to a Whitlock's of Whitney Avenue."

He looked at his watch again and saw that the hour was nearly nine.

"Heavens! I won't dare to tell Dick of this!" he thought, as he again stowed himself in the cab.

The driver took Bert to the first Whitlock's of that avenue, and it was not the place.

"Go right ahead," Bert commanded, as he descended from his fruitless search. "We've got to find that old number, if it's in New Haven. I'm going to swear off on accepting invitations for myself and the mandolin after this."

The cab tore away again, finally stopping in front of a house which Bert felt sure could not be the place.

"Yes, it must be," he thought, "for there goes Amos Belton, of the juniors."

A dark-complexioned man, who looked young and springy as he mounted the steps, had drawn Bert's attention.

"Just wait a minute till I know that I'm right," Bert begged of the driver, for he had learned caution. "I'll be down in a minute, whether it's right or wrong!"

Then he made a dash for the house that he hoped was Mrs. Marcellene Whitlock's.

The young man whom he took to be Amos Belton disappeared in the building; and Bert, following closely after him, gave the bell a tug.

It was evidently out of repair, for no ring could be heard. Time was too precious to wait long in uncertainty, and when no one appeared in answer to his rap, he pushed open the door and looked in.

He saw a light in a room at the farther end of a long hall; and, thinking to gain information, if nothing else, Bert put down his mandolin and advanced toward the illumination. As he walked along the carpeted hall, his feet making little noise, he reached a point which enabled him to see a large part of the interior of the room.

He stopped in bewildered surprise. In the room was one whom at first sight he took to be Inza Burrage. In a bewildering way there came to him a memory of some talk he had heard that Amos Belton, the junior, was madly in love with Miss Burrage. Then it occurred to him that this must be Mrs. Whitlock's, and that Inza was one of the guests. Perhaps Merriwell was there?

He was about to advance and speak, when the person whom he took to be Inza turned round from the mirror, and he had a good look at the face. It was surprisingly like Inza's, so much so that at first he was sure it was Inza; but he saw a moment later that, while the face looked so much like that of Miss Burrage, there was a distinct difference. It was as if some girl had tried to "make up" to look like Inza.

Then his bewilderment increased, for it came to him that the face on which he was looking was that of the young man who had inquired of him and Ready in the suburbs that afternoon when the hockey-match was to be held.

"It can't be, though!" Bert gasped, beginning to feel that he must be dreaming. "Perhaps this is the fellow's sister. Yes, that must be it."

He had unintentionally made a noise, whereupon the girl—if it was a girl—turned, saw him in the hall, and, immediately drawing back, disappeared.

A moment later he heard voices; then all was still.

"I guess I've lost my head completely this evening!" thought the astounded freshman. "Anyway, this isn't Mrs. Whitlock's; and, as no one has hurried to give me the glad hand, I'll get out as quickly as I can."

His watch told him that it was after nine when he again reached the street, where he found the cabman patiently awaiting his return.

"Wrong place again?" questioned cabbie.

"Yes. Make another try!"

Again the cab containing Bert and his mandolin rattled away.

"I'll be arrested soon as a lunatic or dangerous person!" he groaned. "Makes me want to go home and manufacture some lie that will let me out of the thing easily. I might say that I had a touch of fever or something. Well, I'm in a pretty pickle! And who in thunder could that have been? That couldn't have been Inza, and it couldn't have been the fellow that Ready and I saw this afternoon. I shall have to tell Ready about that."

Two other houses which the driver said were occupied by Whitlocks were visited. At the last of these unhappy Bert secured a clue.

"Perhaps you are looking for the people who moved into 141," suggested the lady of the house. "I think that's the name—Whitlock, and as I came by there this evening I heard sounds which indicated that they were having some kind of a party."

"Just moved in?" Bert gasped. "Then that's it. That's the reason I couldn't find the name in the directory."

Then he made another dive for the cab, asking himself why folks who had just moved into a new neighborhood didn't say so on their cards, or in some other manner notify people.

"No. 141," he said to the jehu. "We'll try that; and, if we don't dig up the right place this time, we'll give it up as a bad job."

But it was the right place; and, although he was



"desperately late," as he admitted, he was graciously received. After he had feasted as well as could be expected at that late hour, he found that there was still an hour or more in which he and his mandolin would be very welcome.

When Bert reached his room that night he found Dick Starbright just turning in, and he hastily told his chum his story, for he had decided that he must ask him what he thought of the counterpart of Inza Burrage he had beheld in that house on Whitney Avenue.

"I knew you'd be late," said Starbright. "You always are."

"But I wouldn't have been if I hadn't forgotten the number," Bert insisted. "But I don't want a sermon; I want to know what you think about that young woman who looked so much like Inza Burrage that at first I could have sworn it was she?"

Dick sat down and deliberately looked his chum over.

"You haven't been drinking?"

"Honor bright, not a thing, except a glass of wine at Mrs. Whitlock's. But I hadn't even smelled the wine when I saw that girl."

"I shouldn't think anything about it if it hadn't been for Amos Belton," declared the big freshman. "His presence there makes the thing a mystery to me, though, of course, there is no mystery in it. Perhaps he called on some young lady there who remarkably

resembles Inza Burrage. You say yourself it was not Inza Burrage, but only looked like her."

"That doesn't explain anything."

"No, perhaps not. But, as you know, it's been reported that he is wildly in love with Inza. She doesn't care anything for him, of course, for she's crazy about Merriwell."

"Lucky dog, too!" nodded Bert.

"Yes, that's what I think myself. Well, now, does it strike you as possible that Belton, being unable to get any encouragement from Inza, may have turned to this girl, who looks so much like her? Seems to me there may be your explanation."

"But what made them disappear so strangely when she discovered me?"

"You scared her, probably," grinned Dick. "Perhaps she took you for a burglar. I've an idea that you looked rather wild-eyed about that time. You were excited, and, no doubt, your face showed it. Seeing a man standing in the hall, which she supposed unoccupied, she was naturally frightened. Any girl would have been."

"But what became of Belton?"

"Well, now, ask me something easy. How do I know?"

Dashleigh sat down in a chair. He was not satisfied.

"I heard the other day that Belton is soon to quit Yale," Dick volunteered.

"That doesn't explain anything!"

"Who said it did? I merely made the remark. He has fallen so low in his exams that he can go no farther. Seems to me that was what I heard. Either that or money matters forces him out of Yale. But probably it isn't money matters, for he could find something to do to keep himself up."

"Yes, if he was willing to work like a horse and live like a hermit. That's about the only way for a fellow to go through Yale, or any other college, without money."

"And wasn't it Horace Greeley who said that if a man is to succeed in anything he must live like a hermit and work like a horse? Anyway, he said something like that."

"Belton is from the South, isn't he?" Dashleigh asked. "Scarcely probable he'd work like a horse to get through college."

"From Washington, I think. Do you know, that fellow looks almost like a negro to me. I don't wonder that Inza Burrage has never given him any encouragement."

"I believe you're getting struck in that direction yourself," Dashleigh laughed.

Starbright flushed and looked uncomfortable.

"You're off! But there aren't many nicer girls than Inza."

When Dashleigh fell asleep, his dreams placed him in a cab, in which, throughout the remainder of the night, he pursued Mrs. Whitlock, of Whitney Avenue, with the relentlessness of a detective, suddenly to find

her standing before him in the person of his instructor in mathematics, who naively assured him that what he had really been searching for was the elusive.

"Get up!" came in the voice of Dick Starbright. "You're flouncing there like a fish."

"Is it morning?" Bert asked, suddenly rousing.

"Yes, and a beautiful day. A better one for that hockey-match this afternoon couldn't have been made to order!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### FRANK MERRIWELL'S DILEMMA.

When Starbright and Dashleigh appeared on the campus they were greeted with a sensation. Dion Santenel was no longer a prisoner. He had escaped from the jail the previous evening.

Merriwell, Browning, and Hodge were talking about it over by the senior fence; and though the mass of the students had no knowledge that Dade Morgan was in any way connected with the man who had been placed in jail by Merriwell, the escape of the prisoner was being discussed by little knots of Yale men gathered here and there.

"Will it interfere with the hockey-match this afternoon?" Bert asked.

"I don't see why it should," was the answer of the student of whom Bert had inquired.

"On account of Merriwell."

"Oh, yes; I forgot that you're one of the fellows who think the sun can't rise of mornings unless Frank Merriwell pries it up with a lever. That hockey-match can be played without Merriwell!"

"You're joining the Chickering set!" said Bert.

"Oh, no! Only I happen not to be insane over Merriwell!"

There were others who asked themselves and their

acquaintances that question, but all conjecture was set at rest by an announcement from Frank that the game would be played.

When Frank returned to his room he found Dade Morgan awaiting him in the corridor.

"I thought I'd like to have a few words with you," said Morgan.

Frank showed him into his apartments.

"I didn't know how you might feel?" Morgan queried.

"I don't know that I understand you?"

"About the hockey-match."

"It is to be played this afternoon on Lake Whitney. The ice is being cleared of the snow now for the game."

"Yes, I knew that. But I wanted to know if you'd be willing for me to play. I'm down as one of the opposition players, you know, and after what has happened I didn't know how you might feel. I'd like to play in that match, but——"

Morgan's manner was subdued and almost penitent.

"I have had no thought of objecting to your playing in that match, Morgan. I've been wondering, though, how much you know about that escape of Santenel."

"No more than you do," Morgan declared. "I was afraid you might think I had a hand in that, though you'll see that I couldn't."

"Some one got a file to him, and he cut through the bars," said Frank, watching Dade closely. "He es-

caped early last evening. No one seems to know how he secured the file, and some of the prison officials affect to believe that he had it concealed about him when he was put in jail. Any way, he is out. If he'll steer clear of New Haven and let me and my father alone hereafter, I shall not care much. You don't know anything about it?"

"Not a thing."

"You've asked me about the hockey-match. I'll say this: It won't be healthy for you to attempt any underhanded work in that game. I shall discover it if you do."

Morgan began a protest.

"Ever since I've known that you and Santenel were connected, I've been in a dilemma," Frank went on. "You understand what I mean."

"I've cut loose from all that, Merriwell. I don't expect you to believe me until you've had the proof. But I've cut loose from work of the kind you complain against."

"If you had any hand in helping Santenel to escape, I shall discover it by and by. I'm talking plain to you, Morgan. It's not my style to beat around the bush in a matter like this. You have tried your best to injure me here at Yale. I haven't forgotten it, and I'm not likely to. I have, as I told you, proofs enough to force you out of Yale. Perhaps I shall use them. If I find that you had a hand in that escape, I shall certainly use them."

"Just give me time to show you that I'm all right,"

Dade begged. "I'm going to play fair hereafter. By that I don't mean that I've any notion of joining your flock."

"No one joins that who isn't invited."

Dade flushed.

"What I meant was that I can't expect to become your warm friend and supporter right off. I shall retain the privilege of kicking against things you do, and of working against you in an honorable manner. But I have cut loose from everything else. I'll prove it in time; and as for that game this afternoon, I'll promise you that you won't have a man on your team who will fight harder to win."

"You're a star in athletics, Morgan. For that reason alone I have put you on various teams. But I have never trusted you, and I do not trust you now. So you may look out, for I shall be watching you."

Dade was rather pale as he went down from Vanderbilt. He realized that he had never been in quite so close and ticklish a place. One false step might hurl him out of Yale in disgrace.

"You bet I'll play fair this afternoon," he thought. "It stands me in hand to play fair just now, and I'm the boy to do it when it's necessary. But I wonder how Santenel got out and what's become of him? He'll hang round New Haven, no doubt."

So strong was this feeling on Dade that he almost expected to see Santenel crouching over the fire in the grate when he returned to his room, but the hypnotist was not there.



Hodge passed Morgan on the stairs as the latter was descending, and entered Frank's room with a displeased look.

"I wouldn't trust that fellow an inch!" he growled.

"I'm not trusting him," said Frank. "I'm merely watching him."

"Of course. I've protested so much that you're not likely to listen to anything I say," Hodge grumbled. "But I wouldn't even permit the scoundrel to come into these rooms. He'd do anything. When I come in here and know that he has just left you I find myself looking round in search of an infernal machine or something of the kind. That fellow has no more honor than a rattlesnake."

"I'm not trusting him," Frank repeated quietly.

"Yet you will let him play on that opposition team this afternoon. You haven't said so to me, but I know that you will do it, simply because he is a good player."

"I have no right to say who shall be on the other team. Then, I've another reason, Bart," Frank explained. "I can watch him better while he is there than if he were somewhere else. I am sure he will not try to do anything risky, for he knows that he dare not. I've told him just how the land lays, and, understanding that, he will hold himself in. I shall take steps which I hope will bring about the recapture of Santenel. Dirk is working on the case. The police officials feel chagrined, and they will do all they can."

"And of course you'll let Morgan remain in Yale?" said Bart, with curling lips.

"I don't know. I'm in a dilemma about it. You see, it is this way: Morgan is such a capable fellow that if he could be brought round right, he would make a man worthy of Yale. With, possibly, the exception of Starbright, he is the most promising freshman here. If I'm lenient with him, it may bring him to realize just how he stands. He may turn short about and make a man of himself. While, on the other hand, if I should brand him with the disgrace of an expulsion from the college, he might go headlong to the bad. That's what makes me hesitate. I'd like to give him a chance to become something more than a brilliant villain."

"Well, he will never be anything else."

Hodge had been quite mild in his protest against Morgan, but he said this last very positively. When he was gone Merriwell sat for a long time thinking. Usually he could not agree with Hodge in such matters; but he was not sure that in this instance Hodge was not right.

"I'll give Morgan a chance, any way!" was his conclusion. "I'll let him play in that match, and I'll watch him."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### OLD FRIENDS.

A large crowd hastened out to Lake Whitney that afternoon to witness the match between the two Yale sevens.

The snowfall had spoiled the ice for skating, but a space sufficiently large for an ice-hockey match had been cleared of the snow, revealing a surface to please the eye of the most critical hockey-player.

Not only was Yale well represented, but a number of New Haven people added their presence to the crowd, being anxious to see the playing, chiefly because Merriwell was on one of the teams.

Frank Merriwell and Inza Burrage drove out. They had been much together recently, but Inza was to leave New Haven that night for an indefinite absence.

As Frank descended from the carriage and assisted Inza to alight, a sleigh, the only one there, came up with the horse at a dead run. Out of the sleigh proceeded a roar, and tumbling out after the roar fell Bink Stubbs and Danny Griswold.

"Whoop!" squealed Danny, making a dive for Merriwell.

"Wow!" squeaked Bink, diving after his chum.

Ready puffed out his cheeks and leaped toward them with the "glad hand." Dozens of others appeared to

forget all about ice-hockey and gravitated toward the two little fellows, who were now hopping up and down, chattering out their delight and shaking hands with every one who came forward.

"We were afraid we wouldn't be in time," Danny explained. "Bink came up with me on the train this afternoon——"

"Don't believe him, gentlemen!" Bink begged. "He came up with me. Why, you don't suppose I'd be caught dead chasing that thing around, do you? If he hadn't come up with me——"

"You mean if you hadn't come up with me!"

"If you hadn't come up with each other?" Merriwell put in.

"Why, we wouldn't be here, of course. Say, Ready, heard the last joke on Danny?"

Bink turned to his old friend.

"I never expect to hear the last," Ready averred.

"It's fortunate that Ready knows what a liar you are!" Danny said.

"We were coming by the gym when Danny saw a man buying some lunch out of that old lunch-cart stationed there, 'Say,' he whispered, and he took hold of my arm as solemnly as an astronomer announcing the discovery of a new comet, 'I've discovered something! I know what they mean now when they talk about dinner à la carte.' And, gentlemen, if you'll believe me, the ignoramus meant it."

"When it comes to lying, you're like the moon," Danny declared. "Nothing on earth can touch you."

"Oh, yes, I'm a warm baby, but not so warm as you were the other evening when you were singing 'A Hot Time.'"

"Rats! I never sing it."

"Don't you remember when those boys heated that old watch and laid it nicely down on the pavement, and you picked it up, thinking you'd struck a find?"

"Well, I didn't sing 'A Hot Time.' I simply remarked that all the hot springs were not in Arkansas. Now, you slanderer, I'll make it cool for you!"

He grabbed an armful of snow and dashed it into Bink's face.

"'And I'll follow suit,' as the Jew said when he began to chase the stolen clothing down the street."

They were at it, and for a little while there was a whirling mass of snow, arms, and legs, with a head bobbing out now and then. Ready stood by and serenely whooped his encouragement.

"It seems good to have the little idiots back again," Jack remarked to Merriwell.

"Idiots?"

"That's my pet name for them. Yale has seemed lonesome, somehow, without them."

The pair of snow images into which Bink and Danny were transformed had ceased fighting and were again joking. Danny came over to Inza and again shook her hand.

"Bink is staying in New York now, you know. You haven't any idea of how foolish and sentimental he has become. Why, he's actually fallen in love with

an heiress down there. The other day he went to the father of his honeysuckle and asked the old gent for the hand of his daughter."

"Of course he instantly consented," was Inza's smiling comment.

"Well, he wasn't in a hurry, and I don't think he'll give his consent now. He told Bink that before he answered his question he'd like to know a little more about him, and asked him what was his station. And will you believe it, the idiot said that he usually got off at Hyde Park!"

"You'll get off the earth in a little while!" Bink squeaked, catching the last words.

"We'll have to get into the hockey-match," said Frank, looking at his watch. "We're nearly an hour late."

The teams were taking their places on the ice amid the hand-clappings of their supporters. They were merely individual teams, one led by Merriwell, the other by Beckwith, the big guard of the football eleven. The names and the positions occupied were as follows:

MERRIWELL'S.	POSITION.	BECKWITH'S.
Browning.....	Goal.....	Beckwith.
Carson.....	Point.....	Harlan.
Dashleigh.....	Cover-point.....	Bingham.
Starbright.....	Forward.....	Ned Silver.
Ready.....	Forward.....	Roll Packard.
Hodge.....	Forward.....	Defarge.
Merriwell.....	Forward.....	Morgan.

"I'd like to play that game," cried Danny, waving his short arms encouragingly.

"You'd hoodoo the whole thing," was Bink's uncharitable answer.

"Hood-doo it?" Ready mildly asked, as he struck at an imaginary puck.

"They're doing it!" Bink shrieked. "See that drive! Oh, Sally!"

The puck had been "faced" in the center of the field between the sticks of Merriwell and Morgan, the referee had uttered the word "Play!" and Morgan scooped the puck back to one of his men with a dexterous movement that caused Bink to yell.

The smile appeared on Dade's face. Since his last severe defeat by Merriwell he had almost forgotten the winning smile that he sought always to wear; but it came back now.

"Oh, say, that fellow's a wonder! Did you see that?" Bink demanded.

"I see that you're a fool!" Danny snarled. "Just wait till Merriwell gets into gear. I think he could have prevented that."

"Oh, that's the way with you fellows, always!" sneered Gene Skelding, who chanced to be standing by. "Whenever Merriwell wins, it's an indication that he's the greatest player in the world; and when he loses it is because he is so generous that he does not wish to hurt the feelings of an opponent by defeating him."

The little fellows turned on Skelding with flashing eyes.

"Oh, don't fight!" Inza smilingly begged. "You'll miss some interesting playing while you're at it."

"It's a good thing you interfered," said Bink, speaking to her a moment after. "We'd have eaten the fellow up."

"I knew it, and so I interfered. I was like the little boy who ate up the piece of pie belonging to his little brother."

She smiled sweetly. Bink stared.

"How was that?"

"I took the weaker one's part."

Bink fell over gurgling in the snow, and Danny gave him a kick to "drive some sense into him," as he said.

"You're missing it all," Inza urged.

"And we came down from New York on purpose to see this great and glorious game!"

Bink would have tackled Danny, but the cheering of the spectators warned him that he was indeed losing some good playing.

Beckwith's forwards had the puck and were forcing it toward Merriwell's goal. Silver pushed it to Packard and Packard to Defarge, and the latter drove it toward Merriwell's flags.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Danny yelled.

"Oh, he's doing it!" shrieked Bink. "That's right, Browning, old boy! Drive it back!"

Browning was a capital goal-keeper. He not only blocked Defarge's play, but he sent the puck skipping



back along the ice toward the goal of the opposing team.

There were yells of "off-side," from the spectators as the members of the opposing teams came together, but the play went on.

Silver tried to carom the puck against a board at the side of the natural rink, and so shoot it toward Merriwell's goal, Merriwell being in front of him; but Merriwell's stick caught it, deviated it, and sent it between the goal-posts of his opponents.

The puck was again faced in the center of the field between the sticks of Morgan and Merriwell. Dade had secured it before, and he was alertly watchful for this advantage again.

Morgan was a handsome fellow, and as he and Frank stood in position for the beginning of the play their pose was worthy of the genius of a sculptor. There was a silence, broken by the "Play!" of the referee.

Morgan scooped at the puck as he had done before, but to his surprise he found his quickest movement too slow. The puck was moved by Merriwell's stick and shot across the ice.

Packard stopped it and sent it flying back, where it was caught by the stick of Jack Ready, who dribbled it forward, skating easily and gracefully; then, seeing it was in danger of being taken from him, he managed to pass it to Merriwell. Starbright was in a better position than Merriwell to receive it, but to have sent it to Starbright would have put Merriwell off-side, and

Ready believed that Merriwell could handle it better than any one else.

The result justified his judgment, for Merriwell promptly drove the puck between Beckwith's goal-posts, and another score was added to his side.

"Second blood for Merriwell!" shrieked Bink, throwing up his cap and catching it on his head. "I'm betting my little wad on Merriwell!"

"'Rah for Merriwell!" Danny squealed.

The play was on again, and Merriwell's team was working for another drive. Frank had selected and disposed his men to the best advantage, as was shown by their playing. But it was quickly seen that Beckwith had been equally clever, and that he had in his team some of the very best hockey timber in the college. Morgan was a veritable wonder on skates.

Though Starbright on a previous occasion had beaten Morgan in a race on skates, thus proving himself the faster skater, he was not as nimble and sinuous as Morgan, who seemed to have the twisting powers of an eel and the quickness of a wildcat.

And Morgan was playing for all that was in him. He was playing fair, too, for he knew that Merriwell was watching him. He had greatly feared that Frank would object to his continuance on Beckwith's team. Now he was setting himself to do two things: To prove his superiority as a hockey-player and thus endeavor to recover whatever ground he had lost in the estimation of the freshmen, and to show Merriwell that he had entered on a course of square dealing.

Morgan was the real leader of the Beckwith team, even though Beckwith had made up the team and was nominally its captain. Every one soon saw this, even Beckwith himself. But Beckwith was a big, generous fellow, who did not care where the honor went so long as his team made a good showing, and possibly managed to win the game.

Now, getting possession of the puck, Morgan, assisted by the other forwards, pushed it down the ice, and, in spite of the exertions of Merriwell's men, shot it safely for goal.

The play was renewed, and within two minutes this was repeated.

"Hold 'em! Hold 'em!" Bink and Danny were bellowing to Bruce. "Oh, thou lazy giant, hold 'em!"

The fight was on again, with the puck once more going toward Merriwell's goal. Some enthusiastic Morganites began to bellow:

"Morgan, Morgan, you are true!  
 You're an honor to the Blue!  
 Make a dive  
 And let her drive,  
 We will pin our faith to you.

"On your team is Silver, white,  
 And old Beck, so golden bright.  
 Bingham true,  
 And Harlan, too!  
 Hold 'em down, and make 'em fight.

"Defarge, Packard, paste away!  
 If the Merrys get too gay,  
 You've the team,  
 To make them dream!  
 You can show them how to play."

The playing became so brilliant that the most sated Yale man was awakened to active interest, and soon found himself yelling like mad for the side he favored.

Morgan secured the puck.

Biff!

It flew toward Merriwell's goal, but Browning, the goal-keeper, cleverly stopped it. Merriwell's stick caught it up and it went sailing toward the opposite end of the ice. The forwards tried to get it as it whizzed past them. The cover-point and cover tried to stop it. But it did not get between the goal-posts, for Beckwith was there—Beckwith, who as a goal-keeper was a match for any goal-keeper in Yale, not excepting big Bruce Browning.

The puck skipped to the middle of the cleared space, and another fight took place for its possession.

Suddenly Morgan was declared off-side in a play, and the puck was taken back to the center of the rink, where it was faced again for a renewal of the game.

The off-side play had been unintentional on Morgan's part, due to excitement; but his dark face flamed, nevertheless, for he had lost an advantage, and he fancied that Merriwell would believe he had been trying trickery. Then the game again raged.

Again Merriwell drove the puck toward Beckwith's goal; but it was stopped by Ned Silver, who, in trying to send it back, made a quick play which merely skipped the puck off the cleared ice. There was a little delay while it was brought on; then the fight for a goal recommenced.

The puck came once more beneath Merriwell's stick.

"Now, drive it!" yelled Bink, who, with Danny, had been hopping about through it all in the greatest excitement.

"Drive it!" squealed Danny.

Merriwell drove it straight as an arrow between the goal-posts of his opponents; and the score became three for the Merriwells, with two for Beckwith's men.

"That's right!" Bink piped. "If you'll just obey the orders of your uncle, you'll always do the right thing!"

When the play was resumed Beckwith's team began again their tactics of rushing the puck headlong, and with volcanic energy, toward Merriwell's goal. They came near making a goal in less than a minute, too; for Dashleigh, who had been doing excellent work, slipped in, making a quick turn to drive, and, falling headlong on the ice, left the puck uncovered for a moment. Defarge skated in with lightning speed, and, taking the puck, drove and dribbled it toward Merriwell's goal.

He tried to send it through between the goal-posts, but Starbright blocked it, and sent it flying back.

"Hooray!" yelled Bink, for he thought Starbright had made a goal.

But Beckwith had stopped the play; and Morgan now drove the puck between the Merriwell flags, and the score was tied.

The whistle of the timekeeper sounded. The first half of the game had come to an end.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### HOT WORK.

Bink and Danny locked arms at the conclusion of the first half of the game and walked up and down like crowing bantam roosters, bellowing college songs, in which the name of Merriwell figured largely.

"What are you bawling about?" Defarge demanded. "Your favorites haven't won the game. You've heard of the fools who 'hollered' before they were out of the woods?"

"Oh, go use some salt!" Danny flung back at him.

"What in the dickens did you mean by that?" Bink asked, when an opportunity offered. "Use some salt!"

"I meant for him to get off the ice," Danny chuckled. "Salt or ashes, either one. I simply happened to think of salt first."

Then the two marched on, singing:

"Oh, our Merry is the lad, boys!  
Rally round him true!  
Beating the battle-drum of Eli.  
He's the best that Yale has had, boys,  
Rally round him, do!  
You'll never see another at Old Eli.

"Oh, Merry forever,  
Hurrah, boys! hurrah!  
Oh, Merry forever,  
The king without a flaw!  
We'll sing his praises true, boys,  
For the honor of the Blue!  
For Merriwell, the glory of Old Eli!"

The teams again went on the cleared space, the puck was faced, and the referee sharply called "Play!"

Again, as in the beginning, Morgan secured the first scoop of the puck. He sent it toward Merriwell's goal-posts and the Beckwith team again tried to rush it on.

Browning was in place, blocked it with his feet, and skipped it off to one side. But it was in position for another drive at Merriwell's goal in a surprisingly short time. Starbright tried to get it, but Packard drove it past him, making a perilous lunge that came near pitching him on the ice. But Hodge's stick caught the puck, cracked heavily against it, and the two teams rushing after it, the fight for its possession raged at the other end of the surface.

Then Merriwell secured the puck, shooting it back to Ready, who boastingly claimed that he was always "Ready" for anything. Jack proved his worthiness of the name and drove the bit of rubber between Beckwith's flags.

Morgan was determined to win the game from Merriwell, and when he and Frank again faced each other with the puck between their sticks, awaiting the word of the referee, this determination was increased by the fact that Merriwell's team was now one goal ahead.

But in spite of his determination, Merriwell's stick was the first to move the puck. But he could not drive it for goal. It went down to Bingham, the opposing cover-point, who whirled it back. Then Hodge's stick cracked against it, and it skipped once more toward

Beckwith's goal-line. Harlan stopped it here, and an exciting scrimmage occurred.

Out of the welter it flew back toward Merriwell's goal, against the stick of Harlan, who began to dribble it down the ice. Fearing to lose it, he sent it back to Bingham, who shot it to one side to Ned Silver, who drove it, amid cries of "off-side," for Merriwell's goal.

Carson and Browning both tried to stop it, but they failed. Another goal was added to Beckwith's side, and the score stood four to four.

"Oh, this isn't easy work!" squealed Bink. "This is the kind of playing that turns a fellow's heart into a force-pump!"

"Hang it! I'd hate to have Merry beaten after all our howling," Danny grumbled.

"You base skeptic!" said Inza, turning on him. "Doubters have no place in Merriwell's camp!"

"I ain't 'doubtin' him,' as the old country woman said when told that her husband was having an awful fight with a bear. 'I ain't doubtin' him a mite; but I'm kinder oneasy!'"

Morgan was fighting now with great coolness, but with a sort of fierceness under it all that was wonderful to see. He was marvelously skilful. He was as quick as lightning, and as he was able to skate fast or slow, he was not easily thrown off his feet by the body-checking, blocking, and interference of an opponent.

He could dodge and twist as cleverly as Merriwell himself, and he could stop with a suddenness that was



startling. Nearly every other player had at some time during the game been thrown from his feet, some receiving jarring falls, but nothing apparently could overthrow Dade Morgan.

In the next two minutes of play Beckwith's men secured another goal through the fine work of Morgan, making the score five in their favor to four for the Merriwells.

Then how the friends of Morgan yelled! Bink and Danny tried to lift a song of encouragement for Merriwell's men, but it was drowned in the roar that went up for Morgan.

Dade's face was darkly flushed, his eyes were shining brightly and the smile had deepened. He began to see the possibility of defeating Merriwell's men. If he could do that, he felt that it would reinstate him in the good graces of all his former friends, and perhaps give him the unquestioned leadership of the freshmen. That would, he fancied, humiliate both Starbright and Merriwell.

The game had begun nearly an hour late, and the short day was rapidly drawing to a close. But none of the players, none of the spectators, noticed this, so great was their interest and excitement. The spectators had come out expecting a good game, but not prepared for such bulldog and wildcat style of hockey-fighting. It was worth going miles to witness.

Again the play was on, with the groups round the cleared space crowding as close up as they were per-

mitted, and all howling for their favorites and vociferously applauding.

Now and then through the uproar could be heard the shrill squeals of Bink and Danny as they piped for Merriwell.

After a fierce struggle Merriwell secured the puck in the open and made a rush of the entire length of the rink, dodging three opponents and scoring a beautiful goal, tying the score, which was now five to five.

In the next play Beckwith's men forced the puck to the flags of their opponents and made a desperate effort to get another goal. But they failed to get by Browning. Time after time his wonderful lifting and stopping sent the puck from his goal.

Then Beckwith's men made another effort, and sent the puck between the flags with a high shot which was instantly protested. It had been made by Ned Silver, and no one thought that Silver had tried to cheat; but the rules provided that no player should raise his stick above his shoulder, and Silver had done that.

The goal was not counted; and with the match still a tie, the fight for goals was renewed.

Silver might have been ruled off the ice, but, the referee believing no infraction of the rules had been intended, this was not done.

Merriwell now began to push the work toward the other end of the rink, twice sending the puck for goal, but each time the disk was stopped by Beckwith, whose agility was remarkable for a man of his size. Beckwith was a great football-player, and he showed that

he was equally good as a goal-keeper in a hockey-match.

The position of goal-keeper is a hard one, and often thankless. Though Beckwith frequently gained possession of the puck he was never given time or room to pass it down the rink, but was forced to shoot it off to one side, thus preventing another try-for-goal until the rubber could be worked back into favorable position.

Finally Merriwell found the opening he was seeking and drove the puck between the goal-posts, and the score became six for his team to five for Beckwith's.

"Fellows, we can beat them!" Morgan urged, before the beginning of the next play. "We'll do it."

The response was all that he wished, so far as effort went. But Merriwell seemed now to have struck the winning streak. The puck went toward Beckwith's side, and then farther along by clever lifting and dribbling.

The musical ring of the skates and the sinewy movements of the skaters were inspiring. Bink and Danny lost their heads completely and yelled and squeaked until they were hoarse.

Every inch of the way was hotly contested, and the puck skipping back and forth, the excited spectators could hardly tell for a time in which direction it was really progressing.

Several times there were cries of "off-side," but Frank saw that his men were doing no off-side play, and the infractions of the rule by other players seemed

inconsequential. Once, however, he saw a skater—it was Roland Packard—advance the puck with his skate. Merriwell would have protested against this if the puck had not been checked and sent on toward Beckwith's goal. The officials did not see the trick of Packard.

Starbright secured the puck and was about to drive it for goal, when it was "biffed" away by Morgan's stick. Morgan shot it to Silver, who attempted to send it farther along.

Then Ready secured it and started with it down the rink, dribbling it just ahead of him. He tried to "lift" it over the heads of the cover-point and others, but it was stopped, and came whizzing back again.

Dashleigh obtained it and sent it bang against Beckwith's shins, and Beckwith shot it to one side.

After some more quick work it came into Merriwell's possession. Morgan skated in with the speed of lightning to prevent Frank's play; but, swift as he was, he was too slow. Frank's stick pushed the puck with a quick flirt past Morgan and between the posts, and another goal had been added.

The score was seven to five when the timekeeper's whistle blew.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE ABDUCTION OF INZA.

As if it were an echo of that whistle, a scream came from the lips of Inza Burrage. Having grown tired, she had seated herself in the sleigh which had brought out Danny and Bink.

Merriwell turned and beheld an astounding sight. A man he believed to be Amos Belton, the junior whom rumor said had fallen wildly in love with Inza, was driving rapidly down the road in the sleigh, holding Inza to his side in a clutch she could not cast off. He had thrown something over her head, and this smothered her further screams, and also rendered her helpless in his hands.

The spectators, who but a moment before had been wildly cheering the playing of the hockey-teams, stood as if frozen with astonishment. While they hesitated, out of their midst leaped Merriwell, running on his skates.

For the first time he observed the extreme lateness of the hour. The delays caused by falls and the protest of Silver's play had wonderfully lengthened out the playing time. The sun had set and night was fast coming on.

Bink and Danny were aghast.

"Our team!" Danny squalled. "Did you ever?"

As they were not aware of Belton's infatuation for Inza, they had nothing on which to build a theory.

Merriwell's leap for the nearest vehicle set the whole crowd in motion. Starbright and Dashleigh sprang toward a horse. Dashleigh's mind was in a whirl, as it went back to what he had seen in that house on Whitney Avenue while he was searching for the "party" given by Mrs. Whitlock. He could not help feeling that what he had beheld there was in some way connected with what was now happening. Yet he could not see the connection. The girl seen in that house was not Inza Burrage. He knew that, though she had looked so much like her.

"I don't know what to think!" he stammered to Starbright.

"You can see what Belton is doing!"

"Yes, but——"

"Hello!" cried Starbright in dismay. "The harness is cut!"

Merriwell made the same discovery concerning the horse to which he had run. The harness had been slashed with a sharp knife, which had cut through the leather in several places, rendering it useless.

Merriwell darted to the next horse. The harness of that horse was also severed. He saw beyond this horse a sleigh which had recently been driven up, as was evidenced by the fact that the horse seemed blown. This animal was unblanketed, and all those brought to the lake earlier in the afternoon had been heavily blanketed to protect them from the wind and cold.

"The fellow came out in that sleigh!" he thought.

Seeing that the harness was intact, he sprang toward the vehicle, at the same time glancing down the road where the sleigh holding Inza and her abductor was vanishing.

Hodge and Browning had jumped toward carriages with the intention of taking the first they came to and joining in the chase, but the harnesses were so cut and slashed that they could not be used.

Merriwell leaped into the sleigh and turned the horse toward the road. Then he reached over, took the whip, and gave the animal a cut. It started down the road at a speedy gait.

Frank's mind was in as much of a whirl as Dashleigh's. He did not know what Dashleigh had seen on Whitney Avenue, but he had heard of the infatuation of Amos Belton for Inza. He had learned, too, that Belton had dropped behind in his studies and was likely to be forced out of Yale on that account. The report which had reached him accounted for Belton's low grade on the theory that the junior's mind was so taken up by thoughts of Inza that he could not study.

But Merriwell had never dreamed that Belton would do what he now seemed to be doing, and the only theory on which he could build for a possible solution was that the junior had suddenly become insane.

Filled by this fear, Merriwell gave the horse another cut, and sent it down the road at a racing gallop.

With the horse going at top speed, Merriwell gave

a moment to the removal of his skates; then again took up the whip.

Back by the lake students were engaged in frantic efforts to tie and splice the cut harnesses, while most of the great crowd was streaming on foot down the road. In the midst of these ran Danny and Bink, whose shrill voices Merriwell could hear amid the din.

Then Starbright loomed out of the crowd, mounted bareback on a horse which he had cut loose from a buggy. But he was far in the rear of Frank, and his chances of aiding Inza seemed poor indeed.

The sleigh containing Inza and the miscreant who had seized her was flying along straight for New Haven, a good distance in advance of Merriwell.

Suddenly Frank noticed that his horse was losing speed and beginning to limp. He applied the whip, rendered heartless in his treatment of the animal by the fear that possessed him.

But the limping increased and the speed became slower. A half-dozen times the horse stumbled and almost fell. Then it stopped, doggedly refusing to make another effort. It was dead lame.

Frank realized now why this horse had been left and the other taken. Probably Inza's abductor had not meant to take the other horse as he drove out, but his own horse falling lame, he had seized the one driven by Bink and Danny. Fortunately for his plans, Inza was seated in that sleigh, making the work easier for him.



Seeing that it was useless to depend further on this animal, Frank sprang out of the sleigh.

He would have continued the chase on foot, but glancing back, he saw Starbright coming on the horse cut loose from the buggy. Behind Starbright, at varying distances, streamed the students and the spectators.

"Let me have your horse!" Merriwell commanded, as Starbright came up, for Dick seemed about to ride by.

Starbright reined in with a jerk and slipped to the ground.

"You're lighter than I am," he said, "and can get more speed out of the beast. Take him and welcome. You must get Inza out of the clutches of that rascal. He must be crazy!"

Frank vaulted to the back of the big black and was away. The horse was fleetier than the other at his best, and Frank's hopes began to rise. Yet so much time had been already lost that it began to look impossible for him to overtake the sleigh before it reached the tangle of city streets, if it could be done at all.

"Crazy as a loon!" was Frank's thought as he tore along, a terrible dread at his heart. "It's singular that he drives straight toward the city!"

The lights were beginning to glow in the streets when Frank, still a considerable distance behind, saw the sleigh turn down a side avenue and disappear behind some buildings.

He had ridden his horse at such high speed that he had greatly decreased the distance separating him from the sleigh. Riding hard for the avenue down which the sleigh and its occupant had vanished, Frank saw them again at the crossing of another street.

Then the houses shut them from sight, and when he again beheld the sleigh it was returning to the principal street. When he reached that street, however, it had again vanished.

"It is singular that Inza doesn't cry out and attract attention."

His heart was chilled by the answering thought:

"No doubt she is unconscious. The villain has choked or smothered her. She is not a girl to faint easily otherwise. He must be crazy. This zigzagging back and forth shows it."

Frank seemed to be chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. At one moment he would see the sleigh, then the driver would send it down some side street, after which it would appear again, to repeat this maneuver.

Observing a policeman at a corner, Frank leaped from his horse, called the bluecoat's attention to the sleigh; then, leaving the horse to be cared for by other hands, he dived into the nearest cab and instructed the driver to follow the sleigh, and on no account to let it get away from him.

"He'll be a good one if he slips me!" was the driver's assertion, which he began to make good by sending the cab forward at a swinging pace.

Frank, looking from the cab door, beheld the sleigh

again. It had reentered a street running parallel with Chapel and was flying on.

"I never saw anything quite so queer," was Frank's conclusion. "If the man isn't crazy, it looks as if he wants me to follow him."

"There it goes!" called cabby. "Shall I just follow it, or try to catch it?"

"Try to catch it!"

"Ga-ed up!"

The whip cracked, and the hackney stretched out at a gallop.

It was a strange chase through the New Haven streets—a chase that began to draw attention. The sleigh was keeping to the less-frequented thoroughfares, apparently for the double reason of attracting less notice and of getting better, and therefore faster, sleighing. On Chapel Street the wear of travel and traffic had well-nigh dissipated the snow.

The darkness of fast-gathering night had deepened, but the streets were fairly well lighted, and the cabman found no great difficulty in keeping the sleigh in view, though he could not overtake it.

Frank's alarm increased. There were no indications that Inza was calling to any one for help, and this strange silence could mean nothing to him but that she was unconscious and unable to call.

More and more he was convinced that Amos Belton had suddenly become a raving maniac. He had always been considered somewhat peculiar. He was

dark and taciturn, making few friendships and seeking none.

The fact that he had some time before fallen wildly in love with Inza Burrage was a matter of common report. Belton had not taken pains to conceal his passion, and on more than one occasion he had annoyed the girl by thrusting himself into her company.

"Overtake the sleigh!" Frank called to the driver. "I will pay you well for it."

The command was easy to give, but not easy to carry out. The driver had been doing his best.

Now and then people ran out of their stores or gathered in groups on the corners as pursued and pursuer tore by. Not another policeman had Frank seen, and no one made an attempt to stop the sleigh, which was now approaching the waterside and the wharves.

The ride across the city had been made in an incredibly short time, in spite of the zigzagging character of the route.

Frank kept the cab door open most of the time, ready to spring out if there was any advantage thus to be gained. The part of the city they were now in was not as well lighted nor as thickly populated as that they were leaving.

Again the sleigh took a side street and Frank obtained a look at the occupants. The man was sitting bolt upright, holding the reins, and the girl was apparently leaning against his shoulder. Her long silence had greatly increased Frank's alarm and anxiety.

Inza would not remain in so passive a state unless she were unconscious.

The cab flew round the corner, taking the side street with the wheels tipping. Again the sleigh shifted its course, going straight toward one of the wharves. The driver was evidently familiar with the streets and locality.

“He has some desperate plan in his crazy mind,” was Frank’s conclusion, “and he has studied the thing out in advance with all the cunning of insanity. But he will not be able to go much farther in this direction.”

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE FATE OF SANTENEL.

There was no light on the long wharf down which the sleigh was driven.

"We've got him now!" said the driver, twisting round on his seat and speaking to Frank, who was again looking out of the cab door.

"Unless he goes into the water!" was Frank's startled thought. "A lunatic may be expected to do anything."

He saw the sleigh reach the end of the wharf and come to a stop at the side of the wharf building, then beheld the driver alight.

A scream came as the driver roughly pulled the muffled figure out after him.

Frank leaned half out of the cab, ready to jump to the ground. The cabman gave the horse an extra cut when he heard the scream, and the cab tore along like mad.

But the man who had been in the sleigh was quick of movement. He dragged the reeling figure toward the water.

Then for the first time Frank saw a large steam-launch tied up at the wharf. Toward this the man hurried. The place was so dark that Frank could not see the faces of those he was pursuing, and when the

cab reached the spot occupied by the sleigh the cabman drew in, fearing to risk his horse farther.

Frank sprang out like a flash and pursued the man on foot, leaping across the wharf with reckless bounds.

“Stop!” he called. “Stop, you villain!”

Again that scream came to urge him on; and, turning the corner of the low building, he saw the man roughly bundle his half-inanimate burden into the steam-launch. The man tumbled in also, and both instantly disappeared.

It looked clear to Frank that Amos Belton had previously placed the launch there to aid him in his crazy scheme. Without a moment's hesitation, he sprang from the wharf to the launch. The summer awning had been removed, and the little deck was like that of a small yacht.

A door, seeming to lead into a companionway or cabin, was open before him, and into this Frank pushed, sure that Inza and her abductor had vanished through it.

He found himself in total darkness, except for the light that came in through the door. Outside on the wharf he heard the trample of horses' feet and the voice of the cabman shouting some question after him.

Not taking time to strike a match, Frank pushed straight ahead, feeling out before him with his hands. In a moment he came against a wall, which seemed to bar his farther progress in that direction.

“Inza!” he called. “Inza!”

There was no answer. He heard the voice of the

cabman again, then felt a footfall jar the launch. Apparently the cabman had leaped to the deck. The next instant Frank found himself in total darkness.

To his astonishment, he also heard the exhaust of a steam-pipe, and felt the launch tremble as it began to get under way.

He stood stock-still, with wildly beating heart. Apparently the crazy student had made him a prisoner and was putting the launch in motion, with the intention of running it out of the harbor.

"Well, he can't hold me in here!" was Frank's fierce declaration. "And I can't risk any delay in getting out."

He again shouted Inza's name, and heard only the exhaust of the pipe.

"That was not the cabman who leaped on deck," was his conclusion. "It was Belton, who came round there to shut me in. I hope the cabman will lose no time in giving the alarm!"

Realizing that he was quivering with excitement, and that he needed a cool mind now if ever, Frank stood still in the darkness, gathering together the tangled thread of conjecture and evidence.

Then he coolly took a match from his pocket, struck it, and looked about the room. It was very small, with a door leading toward the stern of the launch.

"Perhaps Inza is beyond that door!" was his thought as the match flamed up and then burned out.

He stepped to the door, rapped heavily on it, and called Inza's name. As before, there was no answer.



The launch seemed to be tearing through the water at a rapid rate, presumably moving down the harbor.

Frank struck another match, took a good look at the door, and kicked on it heavily. It sprung inward with quivering timbers, but withstood the assault. Again and again he kicked on the door, throwing himself also against it with his shoulders. He was becoming desperate now, for his prison walls were stronger than he had at first supposed.

No better results came from an attack on the other door; and, returning to the one he had first tried to force, he flung himself at it with so mighty a leap and so irresistible an impetus that it yielded.

The door flew from its hinges, and he was flung out into another dark little room—flung with such heavy force that he was almost stunned.

Before he could get up, he was set upon in the darkness by a man, who seemed to rise up beside him. Presumably he had been waiting to attack him if the door yielded.

Believing that he had come in contact with Belton, Frank struck heavily at the man in the gloom, thinking the best way to fight the supposed maniac was to knock him out at once and render him incapable of further mischief. The man dodged the blow and struck back with an enraged snarl, exclaiming:

“If you go out of this boat it will be to drown!”

For a moment Frank felt weak and dazed. The blow had not reached him, yet he fairly reeled against the wall.

He was not fighting Amos Belton, but Dion Santenel!

Could the man who looked so much like Amos Belton be Santenel, the hypnotist? The thing seemed impossible, yet Merriwell believed it true.

Another conviction came to him. Santenel had not abducted Inza for the purpose of carrying her away or harming her, but to draw him into this trap, knowing that he would follow Inza to whatever point she might be taken.

"You again, Santenel!" Frank hissed, lunging at the dimly seen form of his enemy.

"So you know me?" screamed Santenel. "You triumphed the other day; it is my turn now!"

The struggle that followed was fierce in the extreme. Santenel's catlike eyes seemed able to penetrate the gloom. Raging like a madman, he bounded to and fro, striking with the quickness of a rattlesnake. Twice his fist found Frank's face, each time Santenel dodging back and ducking in the darkness in time to escape a counter-blow.

The launch was speeding through the water.

"Where is Inza?" Frank demanded, as he leaped in between these blows. "Tell me, you scoundrel, or I'll choke the life out of you!"

Santenel's laugh was almost maniacal.

"Food for fishes!" he cried. "What you will be mighty soon!"

Then the hypnotist, again ducking and dodging, re-

newed the fight with a vindictiveness which Merriwell had never seen equaled.

Notwithstanding that the gloom seemed to favor Santenel, Frank at length succeeded in landing a blow that knocked the hypnotist against the wall. He went against it with a thud, dropped downward as if falling in a limp heap, then straightened half up and pitched toward a door which opened to the little deck.

Before Frank could take advantage of his successful blow Santenel had drawn his thin body through this door and was scrambling out of the place.

Frank lunged and caught the man by the coat as he gained the deck. But the hypnotist slipped out of the garment, leaving it in Frank's hands.

Merriwell sprang after him, intending to catch him and force him to tell what had become of Inza. He did not believe that Inza had fallen or been thrown overboard, in spite of Santenel's horrible declaration that she had become "food for fishes."

Santenel tried to dive into and through the other door, the one Frank had first entered, but it stuck fast or was locked. Before the hypnotist could get it open Frank was again on him, and the struggle that had raged below deck was again renewed.

"Tell me what you have done with her!" Frank hissed, getting Santenel by the throat and pushing his head backward. The fiend tried to wriggle away. Failing in this, he struggled to trip his assailant, in which effort he threw himself from his feet, and, fall-

ing with his head against the deck, was knocked into temporary insensibility.

Seeing that he was unconscious, Frank glanced about for a rope with which to tie him. Finding none, he retraced his way across the little deck toward the stern of the launch.

A hasty glance at the lights of the city showed that the launch, no doubt with wheel tied, was steaming straight out toward the channel. Already it was far from the wharf it had so recently left.

"Inza!" Frank began to call, as he kicked about with his feet for a rope. "Inza! Inza!"

There was no answer. A horrible fear weighted him down. He wanted to begin an immediate search for her, but he dared not until Santenel was safely secured; for the desperate hypnotist was capable of doing anything as soon as he recovered.

When no answer came to his cries, Frank was about to strike a match and descend into the interior of the launch and make a search, regardless of Santenel. But at this moment the man recovered consciousness and began an effort to get on his feet.

Frank rushed toward him.

"Stop!" he shouted, for he fancied he saw Santenel drawing a weapon.

For reply, the villain hurled a heavy iron bolt at him. Seeing this had missed, for Frank rushed straight on, the hypnotist, with his mind apparently muddled by his fall, gave a shriek, climbed to his feet, and leaped over the rail into the water.

Frank stood still.

"Retribution!" he muttered. "Food for fishes! It is the hand of outraged justice, and it has fallen at last!"

For one brief moment he saw the dark face tossed to the top of a wave; then it disappeared. The launch plowed on through the water.

"The last of Santenel!" was Frank's hoarse exclamation.

In spite of his fears concerning Inza, he stood staring at the spot where the man's head had vanished, though the darkness hid everything in that direction now.

Then the memory of Inza dragged at his heart-strings and pulled him away from the launch's side.

"Inza! Inza!" he called again and again.

There was no response. The sweat came out on his face and his limbs trembled.

"Heavens! Can it be possible the man spoke true?"

He groped his way into the vessel in search of a lamp. Then, remembering that the launch was steaming out toward the bay, he stopped this hunt, made his way to the tiny engine, slowed it down and turned the boat about with a whirl of the wheel.

Having done this, with a lantern he had discovered he resumed his search for Inza. But she was not to be found. What he had thought two cabins proved to be a tiny cabin and a bunk-room. These seemed to be the only rooms or semblance of rooms in the vessel.

Sick at heart, with that awful fear stunning his brain, Frank now took charge of the launch and sent it back toward the wharf, but guiding it so that it would pass over or near the spot where Santenel had thrown himself into the water.

The gloom on the water was so great that he could see nothing but the waves, which were black and oily. There was no sign of Santenel.

Then, with his fears for Inza driving him almost frantic, Frank began to zigzag the launch so as to cover a greater area of surface. There seemed a bare possibility, if Inza had fallen overboard or been thrown overboard, that she might have caught hold of something and sustained herself in the water.

"She couldn't hold on long, though!" he groaned. "The villain told the truth! She is dead!"

He grew cold at the thought, his heart seeming to turn to ice. But a little while before, Inza, handsome, spirited, joyous, had been applauding the playing of the hockey-teams on the lake. Now, as he believed, she had passed suddenly from the land of the living.

"And her murderer has gone with her. Yes; he was her murderer, even if he did not throw her overboard."

Frank sat as if frozen, his eyes staring almost blankly at the lights on the wharf toward which the launch was now moving. He heard nothing of the voices rising on the wharf.

As he drew nearer he became conscious that Bink and Danny were dancing about in the glow of a lan-

tern, howling and exclaiming. Usually the little fellows amused him. Now he felt that he did not want to see them or hear them. Their seeming levity jarred on him.

As in a dream, Frank guided the launch up to the wharf. He scarcely observed the group of friends who had gathered there, nor the cab and cabman in the background. Nor did he notice the questions and exclamations that were being shouted at him.

But as the launch grated against the wharf he pulled himself together by a great effort and looked with wild eyes at the crowd.

The blood which had seemed to be congealed round his heart rushed back in a hot wave.

Inza Burrage stood in the forefront of the crowd, alive, well, unharmed!

The last plot of Dion Santenel had been extremely desperate—such a plot as the brains of a madman alone could devise.

Bert Dashleigh had come near revealing it when he blundered into that house on Whitney Avenue and beheld the youth disguised as a girl and made up to look like Inza.

Santenel had carried Inza in the sleigh from Lake Whitney into the city; but, having choked her into insensibility, he dropped her out in an alley, at which point the youth dressed to resemble her took her place in the sleigh. It had been Santenel, disguised as Amos Belton, and this youth whom Merriwell chased through the city streets.

Without doubt the disguised youth concealed himself somewhere in the darkness of the old buildings on the wharf.

Santenel's plot was no doubt murderous, inspired by feelings of baffled hate and a desire for revenge.

Three days afterward a body identified as his floated to the wharf where the launch had laid, and was found there by a boatman.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I have decided not to try to force Dade Morgan out of Yale," said Frank, talking over the situation afterward with Bart Hodge. I have been in a dilemma about it. The fellow is almost a genius in some lines. He might go headlong to the bad if I should move against him, while a little leniency and kindness may let him see where he stands and turn him in the right direction. With Santenel dead, I see no reason why he should attempt anything further against me."

"I guess you are right," Hodge admitted. "There seems to be no reason why he should strike at you again. But it's awfully hard for a rattlesnake to forget that it is a rattlesnake."



## CHAPTER XXV.

### IN FRANK'S ROOM.

"I say, Merriwell," cried Jack Ready, strolling into Frank's room, his hat set rakishly over one ear and his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, "do you know what they call a young black cat in England?"

"Why, I've been in England," said Frank, rising from his open trunk, which he was packing, "but I don't believe I can tell what they call a young black cat over there."

"Why," chuckled the visitor, with great satisfaction, "they call her 'kitty, kitty,' just the same as we do on this side of the water. Oh, Merry, you're a good thing!"

Frank laughed heartily, Ready's jovial mood being contagious.

"You're steadily growing sharper and sharper, old man," said Merry. "You're becoming dangerous to fool with of late."

"Oh, yes," nodded Jack, striking a pose, with one hand thrust into the opening of his vest. "The mantle of Bink Stubbs hath descended upon me and I am 'it.' I am making enemies in a merry way with my persiflage. Sprung that on two other fellows this morning. One told me it was so old it had whiskers, while the other got his back up and wanted to t'ump me in

my mild, blue eye. This being a practical joker is getting to be a great responsibility, and I feel the strain. I am glad vacation is at hand, as it will serve to give me a short breathing-spell. Packing your paper collars and pajamas? Leave to-morrow, I suppose? Whither do you fly?"

"Yes, I leave in the morning," nodded Frank. "Got to run down to New York to attend to some business concerning my play, 'True Blue.'"

"Which way after that?"

"Well, Starbright has invited me to visit him."

"I'm another. Going to accept?"

"I may."

"Then, by all the eternal gods of Olympus! I'm going to try to get round there myself. You hear me chirp! You catch the silvery cadence of my voice!"

"He invited you?"

"Did he? Why, he fell on my neck and wept like a brother at thoughts of parting. We mingled our weeps, and we spilled brine enough to start another ocean. It was sad, and touching, and sloppy. He said, 'Ready, old man, I hate to leave you—alive.' I said, 'Starbright, my baby, you're the only freshman for whom I entertain the slightest feeling of affection, and I've always felt for you—with a brickbat.' It was a strange, weird spectacle—a soph and a freshie weeping in each other's arms. Any minute I expected he would toss me down and jump on me, but he did nothing of the kind, and it has dawned on me that the fellow really likes me and really meant it when

he invited me to run over and visit him with the rest of the gang during the holidays."

"Did you accept?"

"Not on the spot; but now—now I know you are going—I may. Who's going?"

"Well, I understand Browning is one—and Hodge."

"Browning's all right, but Hodge—well, he's a good fighter when that is necessary, but he doesn't add much jolliness to a gathering. A joke always seems to rub him the wrong way."

There came a sound of many feet and voices outside, the door was flung open, and Bruce Browning came in, followed by Bart Hodge, Dick Starbright, Bert Dashleigh, and Greg Carker. Bruce made straight for a comfortable couch, on which he dropped, brought forth a clay pipe and began to fill it. The others greeted Merriwell, Hodge saying:

"Thought we'd come up, Frank, just to get the crowd together for a little while before we separate for the holidays. You don't mind?"

"Fellows, I'm delighted to have you come in just like this," declared Frank. "Make yourselves at home, every man of you."

"That's right," said Ready, "if you can't find chairs, sit right down on the carpet; it won't hurt it much. What's that thing you're filling, Browning—a clay pipe? Ye gods and little fishes! How have the mighty fallen! I didn't think you'd come down to that! How did it happen?"

"Well," grunted Bruce, getting into a comfortable position, as he lighted the pipe, "you see even a clay pipe has its advantages."

"What are they?"

"Why, if you let one fall on the pavement or a hard floor, you don't have to bother to pick it up," exclaimed the laziest man in Yale, causing a laugh at his expense.

"That surely is a bad case of ennui," said Carker reprovingly.

"What's that?" yawned Browning. "How do you define ennui?"

"I can define it," declared Ready, at once. "It's when you're tired of doing nothing and too lazy to do something."

"That's what's ailed Bruce ever since the football season closed," nodded Frank. "I had begun to fancy that Bruce had reformed—that he'd put laziness behind him forever. Why, he trained like a slave, and he worked like a fiend to reduce flesh. He was in the very pink of condition the day he went onto the field in the Harvard game. Looked healthy and handsome."

"Thanks," rumbled the lazy giant. "Bow to the gentleman for me, please, Ready. It's too much of a job for me to rise. I know I was a perfect Apollo, but the task of being an Apollo was too great a strain. I had to throw it up."

"But not till we had downed Harvard beautifully,"

said Starbright, his fair, handsome face glowing. "Oh, they thought they had us! They came mighty near it in the first half, and——"

"Gave me heart-disease," put in Dashleigh. "I'll never get over it. Sometimes I wake up nights now, yelling, 'Three yards more and Harvard'll have a touch-down! Hold 'em, boys—hold 'em!'"

"That was Bart's constant cry," said Browning. "He begged us separately and collectively to hold 'em, but the only thing that saved the day was Merry's appearance on the field at the close of the game. They had us going all right in that half, and they'd have scored in another minute."

"But you made a gallant fight," said Frank, his eyes flashing—"a fight to be remembered always. I am proud of every man on the team."

"Yah!" muttered Hodge sourly. "Are you proud of that dog Morgan? I don't believe it!"

"In a certain way, I am proud of him," asserted Merry positively.

"But you were ready to wring his everlasting neck a short time ago. You announced your intention of kicking him out of Yale."

"And you could have done it, all right," put in Carker. "He heard the rumbling of the approaching earthquake, and he——"

"Oh, choke that earthquake business!" cut in Ready. "Don't use the expression; reserve it for your socialistic lectures."

"Fellows," said Frank, "I admit that I was ready and resolved to crush Dade Morgan a short time ago."

"But you have not crushed him," spoke Hodge. "Why was it? Tell us. We want to know."

"I cannot explain everything, for it will take too much time if I do; but I will say this much, I discovered that Morgan was not wholly responsible for his actions toward me. Another will than his own controlled and directed him. This may seem too remarkable to be true, but it is a fact. The one who controlled him hated me with a hatred that only death could terminate. If Morgan rebelled, this monster put on the screws and forced his tool to perform his work. Mind you, I do not claim that Dade Morgan naturally would be perfect or even a fine fellow; but he was led to the very verge of murder by the wretch who impelled him to his acts. Morgan in his right mind and being his own master would never have gone that far."

"Perhaps not," muttered Hodge; "but I believe he'd do anything."

"I think," Merry pursued, "that there came a time when Morgan was anxious to cease troubling me. I have thought the whole matter over, and I have decided that I know when that time arrived. Then it was that the monster behind him put on the screws and forced him forward against his will."

"And, if you do not wind Morgan up," said Dash-

leigh, "may not this same monster continue his dirty work?"

Frank shook his head, with a strange, grim smile of satisfaction.

"Neither Morgan nor myself will be troubled by him any more," he declared. "That man is dead."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WHAT ELSIE SAID.

"Say, old fellow," said Ready, edging up to Browning, "lend me fifty, will you?"

"Fifty what?" grunted Bruce.

"Why, fifty dollars. I——"

"Quit your joking."

"I'm not joking. I need the money. I'm broke."

"My dear boy," said Browning, "you're not broke; you're cracked. Lend you fifty dollars! I see myself!"

"I am desperate," asserted Jack wildly. "There is no telling what a man will do when he needs money."

"That's so," admitted Bruce. "Look at all the fellows who get married."

"Ah!" sighed Dashleigh, "you know they say love is blind."

"But as a rule," put in Carker dolefully, "marriage is an eye-opener."

"I," laughed Starbright, who was sprawling on a Morris chair, "shall refuse to be mercenary when it comes to marriage, I shall marry for beauty."

"My dear boy," said Frank, "the fellow who marries for beauty is usually the victim of——"



"A skin game," interrupted Ready. "The dollars are good enough for me."

"Speaking about dollars," said Bart, "do any of you believe that old story about George Washington throwing a dollar across the Potomac River?"

"Why, of course," nodded Merry immediately. "It's a very likely story."

"I fail to see it in that light. He couldn't do it."

"Why not? Washington was a powerful man, and, besides, a dollar would go twice as far in those days as it will now."

Ready gasped and dropped with a crash upon a chair.

"Fan me!" he said faintly. "Merriwell takes his place at the head of the class. I think I'll have to touch him for the cold cash."

"Why is it," questioned Carker, "that people always speak of money as cold cash?"

"I suppose," said Merry, laughing softly, "it's because so many human beings have a way of freezing to it."

"What—again?" howled Ready, popping bolt upright and staring at Frank. "How do you dare, sir! In my presence, too! I am the only one who has a right to do such things. But, really and truly, I've got to borrow some spondulicks before I leave for vacation. Got a bill from my tailor. He wrote on the bottom: 'Dear sir, if you pay the enclosed bill, you will oblige me; if you don't, I shall oblige you.' Now, wouldn't that bump you!"

"Don't talk of tailors!" grumbled Browning. "You've got a regular hand-me-down suit on."

"Bah!" retorted Jack instantly. "That suit of yours reminds me of an unripe watermelon."

"Why?"

"Because it's so different. One isn't fit to cut, and the other isn't cut to fit. Refuse me! Wouldn't let me have a small loan, eh? Well, you shall repent in sackcloth and ashes. Yea, verily!"

Carker began whistling mournfully to himself.

"Listen to that," murmured Frank, nudging Ready. "I wonder if he whistles to himself when he's alone."

"Prithee I cannot tell," answered Jack. "I've never been with him when he was alone."

"Fellows," said Starbright soberly, "I know a scheme whereby we can all make money."

"Unwind it to us!" cried Ready.

"Let's hear it," urged Hodge.

"We're listening," said Dashleigh.

"Go on," urged Browning.

"It's simple," assured Dick, still with perfect gravity. "All we have to do is perfume our paper money."

"Hey?" said Carker, who had stopped whistling.

"What?" grunted Browning, ceasing to puff at his pipe.

"What are you giving us?" muttered Hodge.

"That's right," declared the fair-haired freshman. "You see by perfuming our paper money we can add a scent to every dollar."

Frank laughed again, while Ready thumped himself behind the ear with his clenched fist.

"Another rival!" he groaned. "This is driving me to suicide. And still I need that money."

"Why, my dear boy," smiled Frank, "I heard that you won some money from Skelding last night."

"Oh, no!" Jack hastened to deny. "No money; I merely won a few bets from him."

There came a rap on the door.

"Come in," called Merry.

But every fellow in that room, Browning included, sprang to his feet when the door opened and they saw Inza Burrage and her father just outside.

"Perhaps we're intruding?" suggested Mr. Burrage apologetically.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Merry. "Come right in!"

He sprang forward and greeted Inza warmly with outstretched hand. She never before had looked so stunning and dashing. At least, Frank thought so.

"We thought we'd come round and call a moment before you left, Frank," she said, in her well-modulated, musical voice. "You go——"

"To-morrow. I was packing my trunk when the fellows strolled in. I'm glad you came, Inza."

He drew her into the room, and the boys bowed, greeting with enthusiasm the former mascot of the crew. She spoke to them all, but it seemed that even a little more color mounted to her flushed cheeks when Starbright, the handsome giant freshman, bowed low before her.

And keen eyes might have seen that Dick was not quite at ease, though he made a desperate effort to appear thus.

Mr. Burrage shook hands with the boys, having a pleasant word for each one, but the arrival of Inza put an end to their free-and-easy badinage and joking. They gathered about her in an admiring circle, listening to every word she uttered, each feeling in his heart that she was a most bewilderingly handsome and adorable young lady. In her presence, even Carker forgot to be pessimistic and melancholy, and not once did he speak of the "rumble of the approaching earthquake."

But Starbright hung on her words in a breathless way, and his heart leaped when she turned toward him with one of her dazzling smiles, or spoke to him directly, and he felt that he was being robbed of his just due, if for a little time she gave him no special attention.

Dick Starbright knew that Frank and Inza were fast friends, he knew they were almost sweethearts, he knew Inza would not be there but for Merry; yet since the day he first saw this dark-eyed, black-haired radiant queen of a girl something he could not hold in check had been growing in his breast—growing, growing, growing. He sought to tell himself that it was no more than mere admiration for an unusually handsome young lady, and he sought to believe that he could readily and easily forget her; but she crept into his dreams with her stately grace, her dark, be-

wildering eyes, her laugh that thrilled the blood, her mouth that seemed made for kisses.

And now, sitting in Merriwell's room, with Inza near, his blood throbbed in his big, strong body with all the full flood of healthy, robust youth.

"Why shouldn't I win her for my own?" he mentally cried.

Then he looked at Frank Merriwell, and he believed he had found his answer. Contrasting himself with Frank, he seemed very immature, despite his size, and there was something of greenness about him that must count against him. How dared he think for a single moment that he, the raw youth, could win from this clever and experienced young man of the world! He was crushed and abashed.

Coming out of his trance, Dick found Frank was telling Inza of some photographs he had taken. She wished to see them, and he said they were in an adjoining room. She rose at once, and they passed beyond some portières.

Though he still could hear her voice through the open door, it seemed to Dick Starbright that something went out of the sunshine, leaving it dull and somber, and there was a strange sensation like a pain in his heart.

Frank and Inza chatted over the pictures, which consisted of a group of the Yale football-team, with Merry the central figure, and a number of snap shots of the team in practise and at play. The smell of

Browning's pipe pervaded the rooms, and Merry threw open a door leading into the hall, which gave a draft.

"I suppose you are glad the holidays have come?" said Inza.

"I don't know," he admitted. "You see, it is different with me than with other fellows. They have homes, and fathers, and mothers, and brothers, and sisters to which they go. Their fathers and mothers are waiting to greet them with affection, while their brothers and sisters will regard them with admiration and pride. They are going to pleasant firesides, Christmas trees and merry times. I have no home, no mother, sisters, or brothers. True, I have a father, but he is worn and old and strange to me, for I've never seen much of him. But I love him, just the same. Poor old man! He has suffered much, and now, with no enemy to harass him further, I trust he may have peace and happiness."

Inza was touched by Merry's words. For the first time, it seemed, she fully realized his unfortunate position in the world.

"I'm sorry, Frank," she said, looking into his eyes. "But your play has given you money so that you might purchase a home of your own, and your father has a fortune. He could buy a mansion."

"He might," admitted Merry; "but he cannot get over the feeling that the ghost of his enemy may rise to haunt him as of old, and he is the most restless person I ever saw. Were he a younger man, I'm sure

nothing could keep him from traveling constantly. Even now, I worry for fear he may take a freakish notion to strike out suddenly for parts unknown."

"Are you sure his mind is just right?"

"I think it is—now. A short time ago I was not so sure; but never again will he fall beneath the spell of Brandon Drood. Drood is dead, and his wicked career is ended."

"He was a dreadful man!" exclaimed Inza. "Think how he tried to bury your poor father alive! He should have been punished for his awful crimes."

"I am willing to leave his soul in the hands of One who doeth all things well," came solemnly from Merry's lips.

"Where do you expect to spend the most of your vacation?"

"Starbright has invited me to visit him in his home, and I think I shall go there. Then I am to meet father in New York. Several of the fellows are going to visit Starbright."

"Isn't he a splendid fellow!" exclaimed the dark-eyed girl enthusiastically. "He is so big and grand! It was magnificent to see him tear through the enemy's line in the football-game. And he's handsome, too!"

"Here! here!" cried Merry reprovingly. "This will never do! Why, I believe you are interested in him, Inza!"

His heart was smitten by a pang of jealousy, for he was like other fellows in this respect, and no one

is flawless. She laughed when she saw him looking at her almost accusingly.

"I am," she boldly declared. "Why shouldn't I be? He is your friend, and you have told me what a great, big-hearted chap he is. You want me to like all of your friends, don't you?"

"Oh, yes; but there are different ways of liking a fellow, Inza."

"I like him as I might a big, handsome brother."

"Oh, well! that will do. I can't object to that."

"Do you think," she said teasingly, "that you could object under any circumstances? If I really and truly fell in love with him, could you object?"

She had him cornered, and he knew it.

"Oh, I don't suppose I'd have a right to object!" he laughed, though that pang of jealousy still gnawed at his heart.

"Surely not!" Inza exclaimed. "According to your own tell, Dick is one of the finest fellows in the world, and were he to take a fancy to me, you ought to be glad and happy. It would be your duty to help it along."

He felt that she was teasing him, but still it was a tender spot, and it made him squirm a bit.

"Inza," he said sincerely, "once I did my best to keep you from marrying a man your father had selected for you, but a man you told me you did not love."

"For which," she admitted, "I owe you much. I can see now that it would have been a fatal folly."



"I felt that way about it, dear girl, and that was why I did my best to keep you from taking the false step. Had I known you really and truly loved him, I should have remained silent. In this case it is different, for Starbright is worthy of a fine girl; but he is young yet—even younger than you, Inza."

"Not much younger. A year cannot make much difference."

"No, not much. If I knew Starbright loved you and you cared for him more than any one else, whatever I might feel in my heart, I would do my best to bring you together, and would say, 'Bless you, my children.'"

She laughed in her merry way.

"I believe it, Frank," she said. "But I was jolly-ing, that's all. There is no danger that Starbright will ever care for me that way, and perhaps I'd not care for him if he did. I am waiting to be one of the bridesmaids when you are married to Elsie. I shall live and die an old maid."

She made this final declaration in the most solemn manner possible. They were standing by a window, now, looking out upon the bare elms and the ground lightly covered with snow, which had fallen the previous night.

"I'll wager something you do not!" he exclaimed, leaning over her shoulder.

"What will you wager?"

"A kiss," he breathed softly. "And, as I know I'll win, I'll take it now."

“Oh, no! don’t be so hasty, sir! I’m not willing to confess that I shall lose the wager.”

“But still,” he pleaded, “for old times, Inza. You remember the far-away days at Fardale? You remember the night we leaned on the gate before your home, with the moon hidden for a moment behind a cloud? You remember what happened then, Inza?”

She grew strangely pale, and then the blood rushed to her cheeks in a burning flood.

“I’ll never forget, Frank!” she whispered, a tremor running over her. “Never!”

Memory took her back to that sweet summer evening of her girlhood days. It seemed that she could see the peaceful, moonlighted village street and could feel the touch of the fragrant breeze that fanned her cheek. Then Frank was a handsome cadet at the little military academy, and she had loved him with all the depth of her impulsive girlish heart. He had kissed her over the gate in that masterful, undeniable way of his, and a million times since then she had thought of the joy of that moment.

But years had wrought a change in them both. Between them had risen a pretty, sweet-faced, golden-haired girl. That girl was Inza’s dearest friend, and sometimes her heart had cried out in rebellion against Elsie, who had caused Frank’s thoughts to stray from her.

“Those were happy days,” said Frank gently.

“Yes,” came faintly from her lips; “happier than I have ever known since.”

She felt his arm slip across her shoulders, and, for a moment, she permitted it to remain there, little dreaming that she had again come between Frank and Elsie.

Outside the door that opened into the hall—the door that Merry opened to permit fresh air to sweep through the room—stood a blue-eyed girl, rooted to the floor, gazing in upon them, her heart throbbing madly and painfully in her breast. It was Elsie, who had mounted the stairs, and she saw Frank bending over Inza, heard the murmur of their voices, beheld him put his arm around Inza's waist—then turned and fled noiselessly down the stairs, not pausing until she had reached the street; and everything that had looked so bright but a moment before suddenly seemed to change.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### ELSIE'S STRANGE FLIGHT.

Buck Badger and his wife, former Winnie Lee, were in New Haven, having come on to visit Winnie's relatives during the holidays. Coming up the stairs in Vanderbilt Hall, they saw through the open doorway Frank and Inza talking by the window. At that moment, Frank turned, saw them, uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, and sprang forward with outstretched hands.

"Buck!" he cried. "Is it possible? And Winnie! Excuse me—Mrs. Badger."

"But Winnie still, Frank," laughed the handsome young wife, her face suffused with color.

Frank had Badger by the hand, while Winnie and Inza rushed into each other's arms.

"Well, if this isn't great!" cried Merriwell.

"That's whatever!" came from the lips of Badger, who quivered through all his sturdy frame.

"Talk about surprises! I'm overjoyed to see you!"

"And I," said the young rancher, "am just roaring glad to grip the hand of the best friend I ever had in all my life! I can't say more, Merriwell; but I mean that—I mean it! You were my best friend. I've had time to think the old days here at Yale all over and over a hundred times, and I allow I've come to see

things in their right light. I was an onery coyote, but you were my friend, and you kept me from going to the dogs. You gave me Winnie," he whispered, "the best and truest little wife a man ever had! I can never repay you for that, Frank!"

"Don't talk about paying for anything," said Merriwell. "I am paid a thousand times for anything I did for you by seeing your happiness, old man. But I think you're giving me credit for doing altogether too much. I don't know that I ever did much of anything for you."

"Yes, you did!" insisted the Kansan, with intense earnestness. "Nobody ever did so much for me besides you. You made a man of me! You might have kicked me into the gutter and turned me into a dog, but you held out your hand and pulled me up to the top of the heap, even after I'd done you more than one onery, mean turn. That's whatever! Nobody but a white man all the way through would have done as you did, partner. You might have had me expelled from Yale in disgrace, and that would have turned my old man against me; but, instead of that, forgetting all the bad things I'd tried to do to you, you helped me get started on the right trail. I was pretty weak in those times, Merriwell; I know it now. I thought I was strong, but I was right ready to go wrong. A little push from you would have sent me wrong. And you helped me win Winnie! That was the greatest thing you ever did for anybody, partner!"

In that moment Frank Merriwell was rewarded for

all he had endured at the hands of this repentant young man, who had once been his enemy, and his heart was filled with thankfulness because he had never permitted his resentment and desire for revenge to get the best of him and induce him to push Badger down.

With this thought came another. He had been lenient toward Dade Morgan just when he might have destroyed the fellow at a single stroke. It had seemed like weakness, after all Morgan had tried to do to him; but now Merry was happy in the knowledge that he had given Morgan another opportunity and had not thrust him down.

"I've learned one thing," said Badger, who seemed determined to reveal to Frank all that his heart had taught him since the happy day of his union with Winnie. "It's the coward who tries to kill his enemies; the brave, strong man turns his enemies into friends. That's whatever!"

In the meantime, in ways peculiar to budding young womanhood, Inza and Winnie were expressing their delight over the meeting.

"I didn't know we should find you here, but we were speaking of you," said Winnie. "You are handsomer than ever, Inza."

"And you, Winnie," said the dark-haired girl, gazing at her friend with love and admiration, "why, you're simply wonderful."

"Oh, it's the West and the air out there!" laughed Buck's wife, in blushing confusion.

"Well, I think I'll have to try that air."

"You don't need it, Inza; you're handsome anywhere, and you require no air tonic. But how does it happen you are here. Why, just before we reached the steps, Elsie said it would be just lovely to find you in New Haven."

"Elsie?"

"Yes."

"Why, is Elsie—— Where is she?"

"Yes," cried Frank, who had noted Winnie's word. "Where is Elsie?"

"She was with us," explained Badger. "Winnie and I paused a moment on the steps to look around, while she ran up-stairs ahead."

Frank and Inza looked at each other in amazement.

"She's not here," said Merry breathlessly.

"No," said Winnie. "She came back quickly, meeting us just as we were entering. I don't know what ailed her, but she was very pale and said she was ill."

"Never saw such a change come over anybody in a minute," declared Buck. "I don't understand it now. Why, a little while before she was all life and happiness, and her cheeks were like two sun-kissed peaches, and she——"

"That will do, sir!" cried Winnie, frowning. "You may talk like that about me, but not about other young ladies. Don't forget that you are a married man."

Then Buck and Winnie laughed, but neither Frank nor Inza joined them.

"It's very strange," said Frank slowly.

"She seemed trembling, too," explained Winnie. "I asked her what was the matter, and she said she was ill."

"Quickest fit of sickness I ever saw strike anybody," muttered Badger.

"I urged her to come up to your rooms," Winnie went on; "but she said she couldn't climb the stairs."

"I'd brought her right up in my arms, if it hadn't been for the looks of the thing," asserted Buck.

"She said she must have some air," Winnie continued. "We wanted to stay with her, but she wouldn't hear to it. Said it would attract attention. Said she'd walk about down there."

Again Frank and Inza glanced at each other, and then both of them glanced toward the door, which remained open. From the point where they had stood by the window the head of the stairway could be seen. The same thought came to each of them.

"Frank," said the dark-eyed girl, "go right down and find Elsie. Bring her up here at once."

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed, springing through the doorway, without pausing to take a hat.

Down the stairs he bounded, out into the court he rushed; and there, bareheaded and eager, he looked around for Elsie.

She was not to be seen. From the court he rushed out through the gate to the campus, where the light fall of snow had been trodden by hundreds of feet.

A little group of fellows lingered by the fence, some with the collars of their coats turned up, some with



their hands thrust deep into their pockets, some with overcoats buttoned about them. Their heads were close together, and they were talking earnestly about some topic of deep interest. A few students were hurrying across the campus, their appearance seeming to indicate that they were making haste to reach their rooms and pack up that they might get away for the holidays. But nowhere could Merry see a thing of Elsie.

"Where the dickens could she have gone?" he muttered. "I wonder if she saw us from the stairs!"

He was seized by a feeling of guilt and a sensation of wrong-doing. Something told him the time had come when he must choose between Inza and Elsie, and that he could not longer entertain more than friendly relations with both of the girls. The thought that Elsie had seen him with Inza by the window, and had fled, her heart throbbing with pain, made him desperate and wretched.

"I must find her!" he muttered hoarsely. "Not even for the memory of old times should I have permitted what happened to-day! Elsie! Elsie!"

He seized by the arm a hurrying student and asked if he had seen anything of a young lady without escort. No such person had been seen by the one questioned. Then Merry went straight to the group by the fence. Yes, one of them had seen Badger and the two girls go over to Vanderbilt, and then, a few moments later, had seen one of the girls hurry away alone.

"Which way did she go?" asked Frank, repressing his eagerness so that he attracted no particular attention by his manner. Being told, he hurried over to the street. A few cabs and trucks were there. In a moment Merry had learned that such a girl as he described was seen taking a cab a few minutes before.

"She's gone!" he huskily muttered, as he turned back. "I must find out where she is stopping, and I'll call on her without delay. The time has come for me to choose and make my choice known. I'll do it!"

When he again entered his rooms, he found Inza had taken Buck and Winnie into the study, where all were chatting with Frank's friends who had gathered there.

Merry lost little time in drawing Buck aside and asking where Elsie was stopping, explaining that he had not found her.

Buck did not know, nor did Winnie, who told how she had corresponded with Elsie, who had been in New York, thus informing her when she would arrive in New Haven. Elsie had called soon after their arrival, and the trio had set out for a visit to Merry.

"But she is coming to my house to dinner this evening," Winnie explained. "You may see her then, for I want you to be there, Frank. You'll come?"

Of course Merry accepted the invitation. Winnie added that it was to be a little party of college friends, and that Inza would likewise be present.

Frank glanced toward the dark-haired girl, dis-

covering that she was engaged in earnest conversation with Starbright, the big fellow standing in an attitude of absorbed attention, while his blue eyes devoured her with an expression of intense admiration in their honest depths. Winnie noted Frank's look, and she pinched his arm, whispering:

"That looks very, very bad—for you. She told me he is your friend, and I invited him to dinner tonight. If you're still sweet on Inza you want to be careful that your friend Richard Starbright doesn't cut in and take her away from you. He is just the sort of fellow a dark-eyed girl like Inza is liable to get struck on."

Again that strange pang of jealousy smote through Frank Merriwell's heart, but he calmly said:

"I do not believe Inza could find a finer fellow in the whole wide world."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A DINNER-PARTY.

That evening a jolly party gathered at the home of Fairfax Lee, Winnie's father. Browning, Hodge, Starbright, Dashleigh, and Merriwell were there. Winnie and Inza, together with two girl friends, sought to entertain them. But one person was missing; and in vain they waited for Elsie Bellwood, who did not come.

Frank tried to conceal the agitated state of his feelings as best he could, and he succeeded so well that the others enjoyed themselves. Not till dinner-time came and passed and it was impossible to wait longer did Merry give up hope of Elsie's arrival. At last he whispered to Winnie, telling her that it was useless to wait longer, and they went down to the dining-room, which was beautifully decorated with flowers and college flags and trophies.

Badger sat at the head of the table, and his beautiful little wife smiled at him from the foot. Inza was placed between Frank and Dick Starbright, Winnie having slyly whispered to Merry that he would have a fair chance to hold his own against the big freshman.

Winnie's girl friends fell to Browning and Dashleigh. Bert was the soul of ease and politeness, but

big, lumbering Bruce was restless and awkward, although he did his best to be entertaining.

Bart Hodge, alone, did not seem to enter fully and heartily into the spirit of the occasion, though it was evident that he did his best to make Badger and Winnie feel that all old animosities had been buried and forgotten.

In course of time the little party grew very merry, chatting of things that interested them, from football, baseball, rowing, and kindred sports, to ranch life and the glorious freedom of the plains and mountains. Badger was supremely happy. He seemed to radiate good nature.

"Look here, Hodge!" he exclaimed, suddenly shaking his finger at Bart, "be careful down there! That's my wife! You and I have tried to lift each other's scalps before this, but I'm willing to bury the hatchet if you don't flirt too hard with Mrs. Badger."

Hodge started a little, but Buck broke into a hearty laugh, and Bart smiled a little.

"Don't mind him," said Winnie. "I suppose you'll marry, Mr. Hodge, when the golden opportunity offers, won't you?"

"Well," answered Bart deliberately, "that will depend on how much gold there is in the opportunity."

"Oh, you mercenary wretch!" Winnie gasped, while Frank stared, wondering to hear Hodge crack a joke.

Browning was heard saying to the girl at his side:

"I wonder why it is that the most beautiful girls are the stupid ones?"

"Sir!" she exclaimed, giving him a cutting look; "am I to understand that you desire to cast reflections on my mental capacity?"

"Oh, no!" gasped the big fellow, wishing to put himself right in her eyes; "I think you are one of the brightest girls I ever met."

Then, realizing he had said the wrong thing, and could never straighten it out, he hemmed and hawed and nearly exploded in consternation and confusion, causing the entire party to break into a shout of laughter. As the merriment subsided, the jolly girl exclaimed:

"You flatter me, sir! After all, though, beauty is but skin-deep."

"Just so," gurgled Bruce, "but just think what a host of girls there are who haven't it half that deep."

"That lets you out, Browning," said Merry. "You were in so deep that I thought you'd go under sure."

"The trouble with me," explained the lazy giant, "is that I'm bothered with sleepless nights, and I sometimes talk in my sleep daytimes. Now, what is a good thing for sleeplessness?"

"A shotgun," replied Badger.

"Shotgun?"

"Yes. I was troubled that way till I shot five or six cats. Now I am completely cured."

"What troubles me more than anything else," put in Dashleigh, "is thoughts of the coming exams. It's a constant horror to me."

"Do the questions bother you?" asked Badger.

"Oh, no!" declared Bert. "The questions are quite clear. It's the answers that bother me."

They could not restrain their laughter, for Dashleigh had said this in a most mirth-provoking manner.

So, with joking and laughter, the feast progressed; but for Frank the one person who would have made the occasion a perfect one was absent; and, although he tried to conceal the fact, his thoughts were turning to Elsie. At length Inza spoke of her.

"Why do you suppose she is not here, Frank?" she asked, in a low tone, under cover of the chatter of conversation. "I do not understand it."

"I'm afraid," confessed Frank, "that she has been hurt or offended by something."

"How?" whispered the dark-eyed girl. "I don't understand——"

"You know she ran up-stairs ahead of Buck and Winnie."

"Yes."

"And one of the doors to my rooms was open."

"Yes."

"We were in that room, looking at some pictures by the window."

"And she saw us; that may be true," said Inza. "She is a sensitive little soul. Frank, you must find her—you must bring her to me. She is somewhere in New Haven. Find her to-night. Just because we happened to be speaking of the past, which is gone forever, is no reason why we should make Elsie unhappy."

I'll give her cause for happiness, Frank. Bring her to me."

"I will!" he exclaimed, with suppressed earnestness. "I'll make my excuses and leave as soon as dinner is over."

Badger was on his feet, making a speech in his blunt, straightforward way. He extolled Yale and Frank Merriwell. He spoke of the grand victories of the eleven under command of Merry. Then he told how much he owed to the friendship and influence of Merriwell, till, at last, Frank laughingly entreated him to stop.

"Well, I'll stop," said Buck, "but I want everybody here to drink with me to the health of Frank Merriwell, the squarest, whitest, manliest man that ever lived!"

The glasses had been filled with punch, and they all rose to drink the toast. Frank bowed his thanks, feeling his face grow warm, despite the fact that he had seen much of the world and been greeted with applause and admiration in many places.

"My friends," he said, "nothing could touch me more than such a tribute of esteem from a Yale man, one who has been an open and honorable foe in the past and is now just as enthusiastic in his friendship toward me. From the lips of any other man the compliment could not mean as much."

"When Buck says a thing he means it," declared Winnie, with a look of admiration toward her husband.



Then Merry made a brief speech, in which he referred to the days of toil and struggle and ambition at college—happy days, now nearly over for him.

“One of the greatest and proudest achievements,” he asserted, “something I prize above all things, is the fact that I have made here at Yale so many stanch, true friends.”

When dinner was over, they returned to the parlor, where Dashleigh tuned up his mandolin, and there were music and singing and a good time generally. Winnie sat down to the piano, and the others gathered round. The old college songs were sung one after another, Starbright joining in with his magnificent bass voice.

Frank had excused himself to Winnie, telling her why he was going to leave, and, in the midst of the singing, he went out quietly with Buck, who helped him on with his coat in the hall, gave him a hearty hand-clasp, and wished him luck in his search for Elsie.

As he was about to leave, Merry glanced back on the happy party in the parlor. He saw Starbright bending over Inza to look through some music, saw her smile up at him when he said something in a low tone; and, with this picture in his mind, he went out into the frosty December night.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### FRANK MERRIWELL'S HEART.

Frank's quest for Elsie was vain, but he found she had been stopping at one of the hotels. Her name was on the register. When he asked for her, however, he was informed that she had left that day. The clerk could not tell him whither she had gone, save that her trunk had been taken to the railway-station. But this was enough to make him feel certain she had left New Haven.

There was a pain in Frank's heart when he turned toward his rooms in Vanderbilt. Quite alone, he paused by the fence. There were lights all about him in the windows of the college buildings. A few were dark and unlighted, but it was the gleam of the lighted ones that gave him a feeling of sadness and desolation. He knew many of the students had started for their homes that night, while to-morrow there would be a grand exodus. Going home! The thought thrilled the vibrating chords of his heart. He had no home to which he could go.

The sky was thickly studded with stars, gazing down upon him like a million gleaming eyes. He leaned on the fence and gazed up at them, and he fancied they gave him their sympathy.

"Elsie!" he murmured; "where are you? Why did you leave me without a word?"

Many, many times, he had lingered there at the fence, with stanch, true friends about him. It was there he had discussed football, baseball, sports of all kinds, and talked over the gossip of the college. Now he was alone!

Finally he turned toward Vanderbilt and climbed the stairs to his room. This was his only home, but now it seemed lonely and deserted.

He lighted the gas in his study and stood there looking around. It was a pleasant room, yet the time was approaching when it would know him no more. The walls were adorned with pictures, flags, photographs, and the many curios he had gathered in his wanderings about the world. His desk was standing open, the pigeonholes stuffed with the various things which were of value to him alone. There were papers and letters upon it. Before it stood the office chair, with an easy rocker close at hand.

In a window alcove was a long, easy seat, piled with cushions. Over the window in big white letters was the word, "Yale." Magic word, dear to the heart of every loyal lover of Old Eli! Near the window was the well-filled bookcase, containing many well-thumbed volumes. Through the portières he could look into the adjoining room and see the square table on which lay the photographs he had inspected in company with Inza.

Frank sat down in the rocker and fell to thinking of many things, but his mind would always revert to Elsie and her strange and hurried flight from New Haven.

"The time has come!" he finally exclaimed. "This is my last year at college, and soon I must go out into the world for myself. I must choose between Elsie and Inza. Perhaps I have done wrong not to choose before, but the friendship of both girls has been very dear to me."

He paced the room, his mind filled with thoughts of both the charming girls. He saw before him Elsie's sweet, smiling face, crowned with golden curls, he felt the touch of her soft, sympathetic hand, heard the music of her voice, and his heart yearned for her. Then came Inza—dark-eyed, dark-haired, dashing, handsome, self-possessed, and magnetic. He felt the spell of her powerful influence, and it seemed that she was trying to crowd gentle, modest Elsie out of his heart.

Then he remembered her as he had last seen her, smiling up into the face of Dick Starbright. He shrugged his broad shoulders and continued to pace the room. There was a knock on the door, and a messenger-boy stood outside.

"Been here twice before, sir," said the boy. "Lady said I must give the letter to yer to-night, sure."

Frank took it and gave the boy a quarter. Then, having closed the door, as the messenger had said there would be no reply, he hastened to tear open the

envelope. His fingers trembled a little and his heart pounded violently in his throat. He saw his name written on the envelope.

"From Elsie!" he murmured hoarsely. The message was brief, and this is what he read:

"DEAR FRANK: I know you will think it strange that I changed my mind so suddenly about seeing you, and have left New Haven. I meant to come to you and tell you that in the future we were to be nothing but friends, but my heart failed me at the last moment. Not because I changed my mind on that point, but because I knew it would be very unpleasant for us both. I have been contemplating this for some time, as I have a very good reason for it. I know you do not care to claim me as anything more than a friend, if such a tie would be obnoxious to me. Good-by, Frank! I wish you all the happiness you deserve, and that is all the world can give you. I shall write to Inza.  
ELSIE."

He stood and stared at the writing for a long time, now and then lifting a hand to brush back his hair. He read it over and over, seeking to discover a hidden meaning in the words. Finally he crushed the sheet of paper in one hand and flung it from him.

"It is her choice!" he exclaimed. "I would not force her to care for me against her will—I could not if I would! I believe I understand what is back of this. She has met some one else for whom she cares more than for me. She speaks of a closer tie than mere friendship between us being obnoxious to her, and there is no other explanation. All right, Elsie!

I suppose it is as it should be. You wish me happiness! I'll have it—with Inza!"

His mind was made up in that moment. Elsie was thrust from his mental vision, and Inza, radiant and beautiful, rose like a queen before him.

"Inza!" he murmured. "Perhaps it is best. You—you were the sweetheart of my boyhood days. Fate must have intended you for me."

Up and down the room he strode, his breast heaving, his cheeks flushed.

"Starbright," he laughed, "you'll have to stand aside, old fellow! I can't have you take her from me! You know, and I hardly think you'll object. I'll find her at your home, and, during these merry holidays, I'll win her promise to be mine forever."

He fancied the struggle was over, and he flung open his window to admit the cold night air. It fanned his hot forehead, and he drank it in with long, deep breaths. Leaning on the window-sill, he looked out upon the campus, where a solitary student walked hastily along, the frosty ground seeming to creak and complain beneath his feet.

Then he turned back into the room, closing the window. A moment he stood looking down at Elsie's crumpled note. Suddenly a quiver ran over him, and he stooped, picked up the paper, smoothed it out, and thrust it into a pocket near his heart.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### DICK STARBRIGHT'S HOME.

On the southeastern shore of Seneca Lake, not many miles from the little village of Burdett, stood the handsome home of the Starbrights. Old Captain Starbright had purchased this splendid country place, intending to settle down there some time, far from sight and sound of the grim and restless ocean, to spend the latter part of his life in peace and quietude. But his dream of peaceful old age in the bosom of his family had never been realized, for he died in the cabin of his vessel far from his native land. Gossip said he drank himself to death.

However, he had made a comfortable fortune, and the home he left to his widow and children was an ideal one. He had enlarged and remodeled the old country house till it was regarded by the neighbors as a veritable palace. He had spent large sums on the surrounding grounds, and his landscape gardening was the wonder and awe of the plain people of that section of the country. Not a few of them declared he was determined to bankrupt himself by his foolish extravagance in these matters; but the result of his labors was pleasing to the eye, to say the least.

The homestead was situated on a hill that sloped gently westward to the shore of the lake, where the

captain built a handsome boat-house. From Watkins, on the south, to Geneva, on the north, Seneca Lake is fifty miles long, and there is plenty of yachting to be had, for which purpose the old mariner purchased a handsome sloop, and Dick had been taught to handle her with the skill of a veteran.

There were rowboats and canoes, and both Dick and his younger brother, Phil, had built up the muscles of their arms and backs pulling at the oar and paddle. But now the lake was frozen over from end to end by the week of cold weather before the holidays, and sailing and boating could not be enjoyed. There was plenty of skating, however, and Phil had an ice-boat, which he had constructed with his own hands.

Dick's mother was a handsome, kind-faced lady, refined and sad in her manner, although her face could light up with a smile that was like a golden sunburst. She was very proud of her two boys, and of big, manly Dick in particular. He was so much like her husband as she had known him in his younger days. Yes, Dick was like him in many respects, yet she could see that he was finer-grained, for the old sailor had been somewhat blunt and bluff in his ways.

No wonder Dick was finer-grained, for it were impossible for him to be otherwise with such a mother. Her influence had been over him always, and she was to him the type of perfect womanhood. She liked to think of him as like her husband in his youthful days, and yet that thought brought to her sometimes one great fear.



Captain Starbright had been beset by one great weakness—his love for strong drink. All his life he had fought against it, but it had conquered him at last and cut short his days. The one great fear that haunted Dick's mother was that some time her elder son might fall beneath the ban of intemperance; but from the time little Dick knelt at her knee to lisp his bedtime prayers she had sought to instil in his mind a loathing and repulsion for the demon of strong drink.

Phil Starbright regarded his brother as just about "the proper thing" in every way. Phil was slenderer and more like his mother, and Dick seemed to him a marvel of strength, courage, and energy. At school there had never been a fellow who could whip Dick, and whenever Phil was in trouble Dick could easily and readily be summoned to help him out.

Phil, also, was fitting for Yale. At Andover he had read with breathless interest the accounts of the Yale football-games in which Dick had taken part; and his pride swelled and grew when report after report told of the marvelous playing of the young freshman giant who was known as the protégé of Frank Merriwell.

Frank Merriwell! Phil had heard of him many times before Dick went to Yale; he had talked of him to Dick, and he had longed to see the most famous college man in the country. When Dick wrote to Phil, telling of his meeting with Merriwell and how kind

Merriwell had been to him, the younger brother felt like turning somersaults and yelling with joy.

And then, just before the holidays, Phil received a letter, in which Dick said he had invited Merriwell and a number of his friends to spend a portion of the vacation at the Starbright home, which invitation had been accepted. Phil came near having a fit. At last he would see Frank Merriwell! The day that he had dreamed of was coming!

With a bounding, eager heart the Andover lad packed up and started for home, for he could get off a day sooner than Dick, and he wished to have everything ready to receive his brother's guests in the proper manner.

Thus it came about that Merry, Browning, Ready, and Dashleigh were warmly welcomed at the fine old country place on Seneca Lake. And Phil's heart ceased to beat for a moment when Frank Merriwell pressed his hand and said he was glad to know Dick's brother.

Mrs. Starbright was so happy that the sad look had fled from her face, and she quickly made them all feel quite at home.

"You must blame Dick for bringing such a crowd along, Mrs. Starbright," said Merry. "He would make us come."

"And I am very, very glad he did," she earnestly declared, in a way that left no doubt of her sincerity. "He has written me about all of you, particularly of you, Mr. Merriwell. I think I've hardly ever received

a letter from him in which he has not made some reference to you. You were very kind to him, and I have much to thank you for."

"And I," said Ready, "I have been very kind to him, also. He will tell you how I have entertained him as a sophomore should entertain a freshman. Oh, I have labored with him many a night."

"Thank you, too," she said, "for helping him nights with his studies. I am sure I appreciate it, Mr. Ready."

"With his studies!" gasped Jack, taking care she did not hear. "Oh, my! Wouldn't that kill you! Think of a sophomore helping a freshman with his studies! I've helped him do a jolly turn at Billie's; I've marched him about the campus in his pajamas, and I've trained him through the streets with his left trousers leg rolled to the knee and a broom on his shoulder for a gun; but helped him with his studies—oh, Laura!"

"But these are not all, mother," laughed Dick. "There are more coming. To-morrow two young ladies and two gentlemen will arrive. One of the gentlemen is the father of one of the young ladies, while the other gentleman is the husband of the other young lady. The old house will be filled, and we won't do a thing!"

"I think we'll be able to find room for everybody," she said. "The holidays are to be very happy for me, I'm sure."

"I hope she's provided plenty of fodder for the

herd," whispered Ready to Browning. "I'm hollow as—as your head."

"Now, don't try to get funny at my expense," warned the big senior. "I'm hungry myself, and I don't feel like being made a fool of."

"It would be hard to improve on what nature did for you in that respect," murmured the irrepressible sophomore.

The boys were shown up to large, pleasant rooms, which had been prepared for them. Frank and Bruce were given a room together, but there were two old-fashioned beds in it, and it opened into another and smaller room that was designated for Ready.

"Thank goodness!" said Jack, when he found he was to have a room by himself. "I'll not have to sleep in the same apartment with Browning. If I did, by the gods of Olympus! I'd get a clothes-pin and place it straddle of his nose to keep him from snoring. His snore is one of the most frightful things I ever encountered. Yea, verily! I know, for I've listened to it in the stilly hours of many an awful night, and it has filled me with despair and an intense desire to do murder."

"Oh, shut up and get into your own quarters!" growled Bruce. "Your mouth must be tired. It's been going yawp! yawp! yawp! ever since we left New Haven. You're the worst case of talk-and-say-nothing I ever knew."

"Refuse me!" chirped Ready, bowing low. "I hap-

pened to be built that way. It soothes my nerves to work my jaw."

"But it tears up the nerves of everybody within hearing," declared Bruce.

"Well, here we are, fellows," said Frank cheerfully. "Starbright has a splendid home and a beautiful mother. I'm glad I came."

"Wait till I get down to the supper-table and I'll tell you better whether I'm glad or not," said Jack. "I wonder if they've really got enough for us to eat. Even a railroad sandwich would have no terrors for me now."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A BILLIARD-MATCH.

Winnie and Inza, with Buck and Mr. Burrage, arrived the following day and found an enthusiastic lot of young men there at the Starbright homestead. Frank was the first to meet Inza, and he gave her hand a warm pressure, while telling her how glad he was that she had come.

"We'll have a glorious time here," he declared. "The finest old place in all New York! A billiard-room, a bowling-alley, a regular gymnasium—oh, but old Captain Starbright knew how to lay out his money to make an ideal home! And Dick's mother—one of the gentlest mothers in the world. She'll make you welcome, you may be sure."

She did; she took the girls to her heart and said those things which only a woman like her would know how to say to make them feel how glad she was to see them. In a moment they were at their ease.

She shook hands with Buck and Mr. Burrage. Something she said to the young Westerner, giving Winnie a glance, brought the color to Buck's face and made him throw back his shoulders and look very proud.

Browning, with his hunger abated, smoking a pipe,

was comfortable and at his ease; but not even the sating of Ready's hunger had toned him down. He was the same happy-go-lucky, talkative, joking chap.

"The happy family has assembled at last," he proclaimed. "We're all here, Mrs. Starbright, and now we'll proceed to eat you out of house and home. Oh, we'll have a good time reducing you to poverty! My! my! but I'm glad I came. Badger, you should have seen the old-fashioned plum pudding we had for supper last night. It was a peach! But I only got about half of it before Browning annihilated the other half."

"Huah!" grunted Bruce. "Don't try so hard to be funny."

"Oh," said Dashleigh, "some of Ready's jokes last night were really and truly funny. They would have made a donkey laugh. Why, I actually laughed till I cried."

Then Bert grew furiously red when everybody shouted, nor did his confusion abate when afterward Ready seriously addressed him as "The Donkey."

Mrs. Starbright took charge of the girls. Mr. Borage was very weary and retired to his room for a brief rest. After washing his face and hands and brushing his clothes, Buck was ready to be shown about the place, and Dick took charge of him.

That afternoon Dick challenged Frank to a game of billiards, and the party assembled in the billiard-room to witness the match.

"Oh, Richard, my boy, you are up against the real thing now," chirped Ready. "Going to play a hun-

dred points, eight-inch balk? He'll beat you fifty points, or I'll eat my hat! But you should see me play! I'm the bird at that game. Why, I've often run two points without stopping."

"I'll tell you what," laughed Starbright, his eyes flashing, "let's play for something to make it interesting. Will you do it?"

"Well, say a thousand dollars," suggested Ready carelessly. "I'll offer that sum as a purse. It's a mere nothing to me."

"I do not mean that we are to bet on the game," explained Dick. "But if there were a prize of some sort——"

He paused and looked at Inza.

"Can't you suggest something?" he asked.

She smiled back at him, and then, roguishly, she said:

"Oh, I might suggest something—if it would be worth struggling for."

"Name it!" cried Frank and Dick in a breath.

"To-morrow we are to have a sleighing-party."

"Yes."

"Well, I will go in the sleigh of the one who wins this match. What do you say to that?"

There was a brief pause, then both fellows cried:

"Done!"

"Oh, say!" cried Ready; "let me into this! With such a prize in view, I can wipe you both off the map! Give me a cue."

"Your cue is to keep quiet," rumbled Browning,



who was seated in a big, easy chair, placidly looking on.

The balk-lines were freshly drawn, Frank was given his choice of cues, and then the contestants prepared to "string" for the start.

"Frank," murmured Dick, "I'm going to beat you if it is in me. You will have to play your best. I give you fair warning."

"All right," Merry nodded. "It is a battle to the finish."

They sent the ivories rolling down the table to rebound from the lower cushion and come gently back, side by side. All waited anxiously for the balls to stop. They rolled up to the head cushion, against which they lodged and "froze."

"Tie," declared Bruce. "You'll have to try it over."

They did so, and on the second trial Dick obtained a slight advantage, which gave him the lead. Frank was wondering just how skilful his antagonist would prove to be, and he watched closely the manner in which Starbright made his first shots.

Dick studied the positions of the balls a moment, and then made a skilful draw that brought them together in a group. Immediately, Merry understood that he had no easy task before him. He saw on Dick's face a look of resolution and determination, and he knew the big freshman would play as if for his very life.

"He means to win the privilege of having Inza in his sleigh—if he can," thought Frank. "That's plain

enough. A careless stroke or the least let up on my part may mean defeat."

He knew now that he must be on his mettle to the very finish. Glancing toward Inza, he saw her dark eyes fastened on Dick, and she was watching the play with breathless interest that seemed anxiety.

"Is it possible she wishes him to win?" Frank asked himself. "It almost seems so. If I thought it, he should win, even were I able to defeat him."

But his heart rebelled against the thought, and again he resolved to play the match at his best.

Having the balls together, Starbright proceeded to nurse them in a skilful manner, running thirteen points, and then missing an easy *massé*.

"Oh!" exclaimed Inza, with a catch of her breath. "You stopped at thirteen! That's an unlucky number."

Then, in a moment, she laughed merrily, warning Frank to take care to make as many as thirteen.

Merry started in. Fortunately, the ivories lay well for him, and he ran off point after point with care and still with swiftness till he had made thirty-one. Then he missed on an effort to gather them in a corner.

"That is thirteen turned round," he laughed; "but it may be just as unlucky."

"I'd rather take my chances on it," declared Dick.

Starbright seemed to have the balls in a good position, and again he began playing with care—too much care, perhaps, for he missed with his third shot.

"Oh!" again came from Inza's lips. "I don't believe you're even going to make it interesting."

"I'm afraid not," admitted Dick, with a tone of the utmost regret. "But you may be sure I shall do my best."

Frank ran seventeen more points before missing, making him forty-eight in all, while Dick had only fifteen.

There was a look of grim determination on Dick's face as he began again.

"Get into the game and make a touch-down," urged Ready. "What are we paying our money for! With such a prize in view, I could run a hundred—feet. Oh, you should see me dally with the ivories! It is a sight to make the gods weep."

Dick took pains. He studied his shots, and got the balls across the line at one corner and worked them there with great skill, beginning to pile up point after point. His playing brought applause, Merry giving it as readily and honestly as the others.

Ten—twenty points he ran without a break. It was a grand exhibition of skill. Inza was watching with intense earnestness, and again Merry fancied she might be anxious for Dick to win. Then, at a critical point, came a miscue, and Dick's run came to an end with him just three points behind Frank.

"You gave me a shock, then," confessed Merry, as he made ready to play. "You had 'em going, and I didn't know that you were ever going to stop."

"It was my opportunity," declared Starbright regretfully. "If I had not made that miscue!"

"That's the way in this world," philosophized Ready. "Just as we have the balls rolling our way and everything looks bright and radiant, we slip a cog and fall down with a slam. It's sad and disgusting, but true—alas!"

"Will somebody be good enough to smother him," mumbled Browning. "Makes me think of Dismal Jones."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Jack, with his old flippant air. "Refuse me! Let's be merry. Why does a chicken cross the road? Don't hit me! My fingers are crossed."

Frank had seen enough to know now that Starbright was a brilliant billiard-player, and more than ever he was determined to do his level best. Nevertheless, Merry was somewhat rusty, and thus it happened that he missed his fifth shot.

"Now's your chance, Dick!" exclaimed Dashleigh, who was acting as marker. "You can get the lead right here."

The shot was a very hard one.

"You can't make that, Starbright," asserted Browning. "I don't believe it can be made."

"Oh, there is a way to make any shot on the table," Frank asserted.

But Dick was not so sure of succeeding in this case. He took great pains, and succeeded. It was a hand-

some shot, and Merriwell gave a cry of admiration and approval.

"That reminds me of my playing," murmured Ready. "It is so different, you know."

Inza gave Dick a smile of admiring approval, which did not escape Frank's keen eyes. But the balls remained separated, and Starbright's success and the applause that had greeted the feat seemed to rattle the big freshman, so that he missed the very next shot.

"I must get them together and hold them," thought Frank. "No fancy playing in this. The fellow might run forty or fifty any minute, and that would be my Waterloo."

However, his effort to bring the balls together caused him to miss the very first attempt, and left the ivories for Starbright, everything being favorable.

Thinking of the prize for which they were contending had made Dick nervous, despite the fact that he had always fancied his nerves were like iron. The glances he had received from Inza had added to his nervousness, so that he discovered his hand was shaking a trifle.

Immediately he braced up, not wishing any one to discover that he was in that condition. He was deliberate in his movements, though inwardly eager and in haste.

The first shot attempted was made by a rank scratch, although he made no sign that he had not tried for it in that manner. Instead of rattling him more, the shock of getting the point after he thought

he had missed it served to steady his nerves. He looked toward Inza as he came round the table. Their eyes met, and he fancied she was urging him to do his best.

"I will!" he resolved. "I am going to win! I'll beat Frank Merriwell at something!"

Dick's brother was looking on with breathless interest, being more excited than the big college man, if possible. He longed for Dick to come off victor, yet fancied such a thing could not happen, with Frank Merriwell for an opponent.

That look from Inza aided in giving Starbright courage. He swung into the work with remarkable skill, making another beautiful run, reeling off point after point.

Phil Starbright could scarcely keep still. He wanted to dance and shout when Dick passed Frank and took the lead. Browning looked on in amazed silence, while Ready gasped:

"What's this? what's this? I fear me much the result is to be a surprise. Be still, my fluttering heart, be still!"

"I believe Mr. Starbright is going to beat Frank!" whispered Winnie to Buck.

"None whatever!" returned the Westerner. "Don't get that idea into your head, girl. I've seen Frank Merriwell before, and he's never beaten till the game is ended. He has nerves, while the big fellow is unsteady and liable to go into the air any minute. You hear me!"

Starbright ran eighteen points, which gave him a lead of twelve.

"Now, Merry, old man," urged Buck, "get into gear and do your pretty work. We know you're a bit out of practise, but just show us how you can play at any old game when you have to play."

Not a word did Frank say, though he smiled faintly at Badger. He began by making three difficult shots, the third one bunching the balls. Then he played in splendored form till he had added nineteen to the three, making a run of twenty-two, which turned the tables on Starbright, leaving Merry ten in the lead.

Dick missed his first effort, and Frank was given the balls again. He sought to get them together for a run, and the attempt caused him to fail to count with his second shot.

"You want only eleven to tie, Dick!" palpitated Phil. "You can get 'em. I've known you to run thirty."

Once more Starbright tried to steady his nerves and play with the coolness that was a feature of Merriwell's work. Somehow that coolness made the big fellow feel sure that under ordinary circumstances Frank would completely outrank him at billiards. But the prize lured Starbright to do his best. That Christmas sleigh-ride with Inza was something worth working for.

Click, click, click—the big freshman tapped off the points, Dashleigh counting the buttons as he slid them along the wire. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven

—ha! at last the ivories rolled hard and lay in an extremely difficult position.

Pausing to study the shot, Dick heard Badger whisper to Winnie that he must surely miss.

“I won’t miss!” he mentally cried.

Then, with his utmost skill and nerve, he played a cushion-carom shot and counted.

“Good!” exclaimed Frank, promptly leading the applause.

Dick wiped the perspiration from his face. Not even the strain and thrill and excitement of a football-game could set his nerves on edge like this.

Inza’s laugh caused him to thrill with pleasure.

“She’s glad I made it!” he told himself. “Now I know I’m going to win!”

Having succeeded at that critical point, Dick soon brought the balls together, astonishing himself by his skill in this respect. Never before had he made so many hard shots with absolute confidence, and the witnesses of his work were breathless with suspense.

“He is going to win!” breathed Winnie, clutching Buck’s arm.

“Don’t you believe it!” returned the Westerner stiffly. “Frank won’t let him win.”

Ten points, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five—no, he failed on the twenty-fifth.

“Eighty-eight points to Merry’s seventy-five,” announced Dashleigh. “You’re just thirteen ahead, Dick.”



"Thirteen?" exclaimed the freshman, with a start of annoyance.

"The fatal number again!" exclaimed Inza, but she laughed.

"Here's where you have to do it, if you're going to do it at all, Merry," said Browning. "Twelve more points lets Starbright out, and you'll ride with me tomorrow, instead of with Inza."

Frank needed twenty-five, and he started in to make them, but the balls persisted in running hard, despite his greatest care. Time after time he came near missing, but not till he had scored ninety-four buttons in all did he fail to count.

"Hard luck!" growled Browning.

"Now, Dick!" cried Phil; "this is your chance, and you must do the trick."

Starbright did not dare to glance toward Inza again; but, fancying she was watching him and wishing for his success, he began the task of trying to run out.

The first shot was a close shave, the cue-ball barely brushing one of the object balls. Indeed, Browning fancied Dick had missed, but Frank promptly declared he had plainly seen the shot, and it was a fair count. Dick thanked him and proceeded with the play. However, he was extremely anxious and excited, and his anxiety increased as he passed ninety, crept up to ninety-five and then found himself drawing close onto the end of the string.

The silence was intense. Indeed, it was so great

that it began to oppress Dick, and he longed for the spectators to talk, laugh, or do something. He was tingling from his head to his heels.

Ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight—only two points to make.

“I told you!” whispered Winnie to Buck, in disappointment. “He has beaten Frank!”

“Not yet!” returned the unshaken Kansan. “If he beats Merry, he’ll be the first galoot to do the trick in a long time. He won’t!”

Ninety-nine!

One point more to be made!

“Nobody can beat Frank Merriwell!” huskily whispered Buck to his wife. “He’ll miss this shot, and Merry will win.”

The silence was so great that Starbright heard Badger’s words just as he was on the point of trying to score the final button. He was struck with the conviction that he must miss—that it would be a marvel for him to defeat Frank Merriwell.

He missed!

“Well,” said Merriwell quietly, as deep breaths were heard on every side, “you made a handsome try for it, and that was a case of hard luck. I’ve got to make six, and I may slip up on doing that.”

Starbright’s failure at the critical point left him shaking all over. His last faint hope was that Merry might fail, but Frank played with care, precision, and coolness, and slowly but surely scored the six points he needed, winning the match.

“Miss Burrage,” cried Frank, “remember your promise.”

Her merry laugh rang out.

“I’ll not forget it,” she said; “but there was a time when I thought I’d surely ride with Dick.”

That laugh cut Starbright, for it seemed full of satisfaction and relief.

“I guess it’s all right!” he thought. “She wanted to ride with him all the time, and she thought he’d beat me more than he did. She is glad I lost!”

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### BOWLING.

A merry Christmas it was there at Starbright's. The sleighing-party was enjoyed by all who took part, and never had Inza seemed merrier and brighter than on that occasion. She laughed, and sang, and joked; but Frank observed that she was not in the least sentimental, and she took pains to turn the conversation into another channel when it approached a dangerous point. She seemed to enjoy talking of Dick, his home, and his beautiful mother. Somehow these thoughts did not please Merry, but he betrayed nothing of the sort, and he spoke words of highest enthusiasm about Starbright.

The dinner-party that night was one never to be forgotten. The table was decorated with flowers and evergreens, the lights were softened and shaded, and Jack Ready declared the turkey was a "feast for the woozy old gods."

Ready came out with a new batch of jokes, some of them fresh and some "wearing whiskers." Merriwell made a happy speech, and Browning ate till his ravenous hunger was completely satisfied.

Then there was singing and music and a good time generally. There was no Christmas tree, but the surprise came in the form of a table-load of presents

found in a room to which all were finally invited by Mrs. Starbright. Everybody had been remembered, and all declared they received just what they wanted more than anything else in the world, which probably was an exaggeration in many instances.

On entering the room, Frank had observed a bit of mistletoe suspended from the chandelier. At last, Inza innocently paused directly beneath it, and, in a moment, Merry had her in his arms, claiming the privilege of a kiss.

But Dick had been equally observant, and he was on hand at the same instant. Quick as a flash, she held them both off, laughing merrily.

The others shouted and told her she could not escape paying the forfeit.

"But what am I to do?" she asked, blushing crimson. "Both these rude chaps seized me at the same moment, and both claim they were first."

"Oh, but I'm slow!" exclaimed Ready. "Why didn't I have my eyes open and get into that? It was ever thus! I'm getting to be a retired number."

"I don't see but you'll have to surrender to both, Inza," laughed Winnie.

"Oh, I can't do that," she protested. "They must settle it between them somehow. Till they do, let both keep their distance."

Then she skipped away from them, leaving them standing there, face to face. Dick looked straight into Frank's eyes, smiling a bit, but there was a challenge

in his aspect and look. More than ever Merry realized that this big, fair-haired youth was a rival at whom it were folly to scoff.

"How shall we settle it?" asked Merriwell pleasantly. "I'll let you name the manner, Dick."

"Another game of billiards," suggested Ready. "That's the trick! Ah! it takes me to solve these little difficulties. I'm a handy chap to have round."

"No," said Starbright. "I have another way."

"Name it," urged Merry.

"We'll bowl a string of candlepins. The one who makes the highest score wins the privilege given by the mistletoe."

"Done!"

Winnie clapped her hands and Inza laughed.

"To the bowling-alley!" cried Ready, with a flourish. "I'll be pin-boy, and every little candle shall be on its post to a fraction of an inch. Forward the Light Brigade! Charge for the pins!"

So down to the alley in the basement of the house they went. The lights were turned on by Phil, and soon everything was ready for this second match between Frank and Dick.

The entire house was heated by steam, and the spectators could look on in comfort. The alley was regulation length, well built, well kept, and handsomely polished.

It fell to Frank to lead off. He examined the balls, finding them all of a size and in fine condition.

"I am going to beat you at this, Merry," asserted

Dick. "I know you are too much for me at billiards, but I'm better at this business."

"That being the case," smiled Merry, "I must take care to begin strong and hold out. Here goes."

He sent the first ball skimming down the alley, and it cracked into the pins, striking them fairly in the center and splitting them, taking out three, which left four standing on one side and three on the other.

"Oh, Laura!" exclaimed Ready, from his position beside the pins. "This doesn't look much like a strong start. Seven soldiers will be good work for that break."

"Look out for that hole, Frank," warned Browning. "Keep away from it."

Merry obeyed the injunction to the letter, and he swept off the group of four pins with his second ball, leaving three standing.

"That's clever," nodded Dick. "Let's see if you can clean them up."

With moderate speed, Frank sent down a curve for the little line of pins, but he barely missed the head one, clipping off the last two.

"Nine for Merriwell in his first box," announced Dashleigh, who had been selected to keep the score.

Ready set the pins up with care, while Starbright prepared for his first effort. He stood on the left side of the runway, took a slow start, and sent a swift ball into the bunch of pins, striking them on the quarter and tearing them up as if they had been hit by a cyclone. Only the head pin was left standing.

"Refuse me!" gasped Ready. "It's dangerous down here. Oh, but that was a soaker! Methinks I smell a spare."

He was right, for Dick drove the second ball straight and true at the single pin, which went flying against the padded end of the alley with a sodden thump.

"Spare in the first box for Starbright!" cried Dashleigh, in great delight. "It's your turn now, Dick! He did you at billiards, but this is different."

"This is only the beginning," smiled Dick. "I'm not liable to keep that work up right along."

"I should hope not!" exclaimed Frank.

Frank came up for the second box, trying a wide curve, which missed the head pin and swept down one side of the bunch. His second ball was sent straight down the middle of the alley, but it took a slight shoot just before hitting the pins and left two standing, one on the center and one on the corner.

"Spares are scarce on this side," he smiled, apparently not a bit disturbed.

"Hard luck!" growled Browning.

"No," said Merry, "poor bowling."

Instead of trying to get just one of the two pins left, he used a curve to the right for a billiard-shot, hoping to make them both, but the head pin was missed by a fraction of an inch, and neither fell.

"Eight pins," cried Dashleigh. "Seventeen in all."

"Starbright is bound to have a big start," said Badger. "In this kind of a game, every pin counts."



"Don't forget this first ball counts on your spare, Dick," warned Dashleigh.

Dick did not forget. He whistled the ball down the alley, struck the pins prettily, and tore down six of them.

"That gives him sixteen in his first box," said Bert. "And he has a splendid chance for another spare."

Dick took the chance, too, for he got into the pins finely, cleaning the alley, which caused the spectators to utter cries of applause.

"This is hot!" muttered Frank. "You seem to be keeping it up, old man."

"He's making me lots of work," observed Ready, as he deftly stood the fallen pins on the spot.

Frank changed his position on the alley, but again he split the pins, leaving two standing, one on each corner.

"No spare there!" cried Dashleigh.

"No poor bowling in that," growled Bruce. "It should have been a strike."

Frank clipped off the two remaining pins with two straight balls, which gave him ten in his third box, making twenty-seven in all.

Starbright got into the bunch again, but secured only five on his spare, which left the pins in a difficult position. He did well in raking down nine with three balls; but his lead on Frank was great, the second spare having given him thirty-one in the second box, and on even rolls with Merry he had forty.

"Up against the real thing now," chirped Ready.

"This Starbright has played the game before, my friends. You're buncoed, Merriwell."

On his next roll Frank was able to make but nine pins, obtaining a total of thirty-six, while Starbright cleaned the alley, which gave him a lead of fourteen pins.

Merry had been trying different kinds of balls and different positions on the alley, seeking to discover just where he could do his best work. Now he opened with a cross-ball, which struck the bunch on the quarter and swept them down clatteringly. A shout went up, for it was seen that but one pin remained standing, and that one was tottering and swaying.

"Go down, you scoundrel!" roared Browning.

But it refused to obey the command, settling into position.

"Robbery!" declared Starbright. "You should have had it, Frank. All the same"—with a quick glance at Inza—"I'm very glad you didn't get it."

Merry made no complaint, but sent the next ball true as a bullet from a gun, clipping down the pin and making a spare.

"Here's where you gain," said Browning.

But Starbright seemed on his mettle, and he proceeded to duplicate Merry's performance, making a particularly difficult spare.

"He refuses to let me overtake him!" exclaimed Frank.

"Gentlemen," cried Ready, "have you no pity for

a poor working boy? Please leave a few standing once in a while!"

Frank had decided that the cross-ball was the one to use, and now he made ready to get all he could on his spare. There was a hush as he picked up the first ball and sent it spinning anglewise down the alley.

Crash—clatter!

"Seven pins!" shouted Ready.

"Good work!" muttered Browning.

But the remaining pins were left in such a way that it seemed impossible to get them all with a single ball. Frank studied them a moment and did his best, but his best left one standing. This one he removed with the third ball.

"Fifty-three on your half," said Dashleigh. "Sixty-three in your sixth box."

Starbright struck the head pin too full, which cut out four, leaving standing two wings of three pins each.

"Four pins with his spare ball," said Bert. "Sixty-four on his half. That's all right."

"But Frank gained three pins there," murmured Inza.

"Frank will win," asserted Badger, speaking so low that Dick could not hear. "I tell you he can't be beaten! That's whatever!"

"But he has a hard task before him," whispered Winnie. "Mr. Starbright is a wonderful bowler."

Dick took pains and smashed down one of the standing wings with his second ball. His third, however, left a pin standing, and Frank had gained another.

In the sixth box Starbright had seventy-three, with Merriwell just ten pins behind him.

By this time Frank had the range of the alley, and now he sent a strike-ball tearing into the pins, mowing them all down in a twinkling.

"I knew it!" said Browning, with intense satisfaction.

"Oh, mercy!" whooped Ready. "Did you ever in your life! Wasn't that a bird!"

"Here is where he gets right into it," said Buck to Winnie. "I knew he would."

But Starbright was not shaken in the least, and he came near duplicating Merry's feat, for, with his first ball, he smashed down every pin but one.

"Now, that was genuine hard luck!" exclaimed Frank sincerely. "That ball was just as good as mine, but the pins did not happen to fall just right."

Dick looked grim and determined, and he went for the single pin, getting it easily, which gave him a spare.

"You may get as many with your spare as he does with his strike," said Dashleigh, encouragingly.

"But I'd rather have the strike," confessed Dick.

Frank cut only two pins out of the bunch with his first ball, and it began to look bad for him; but he placed the second ball perfectly, sweeping off all the

remaining pins but one, which gave him a score of nineteen in his seventh box, the total being eighty-two. He knocked down the last pin with his third ball, which added ten more for his eighth box.

Strangely enough, Starbright did precisely the same thing with all three balls, getting only two on his spare, which left Merriwell but three points behind in the seventh and eighth boxes.

"This is too close for comfort, Dick," palpitated Dashleigh. "You have let him come right up on you. You must hold your lead in the last two boxes."

Frank was in fine fettle. He had a "good eye," and his hand was steady, while his aim was perfect. Again he put a ball into the heart of the bunch, striking the head pin on the quarter, and again he cleaned the alley.

"Wow!" whooped Ready, dancing about. "Wouldn't I cut a cake of ice in this game! My! My! I don't know a thing about bowling!"

"It's the first time in all your life that you ever told the truth," flung back Browning.

"Frank will win!" murmured Inza, and somehow Winnie fancied that she seemed disappointed.

Starbright did not smile now. His strong, handsome face looked grim and resolute. He sent a straight, true ball shooting down the alley, and, like a flash, every pin was swept off clean. Then what a shout went up! Both had made a strike in the ninth!

Dashleigh leaped to his feet and danced with joy, while Phil wished to hug his big brother.

"He'll keep his lead now!" declared Bert to Phil. "Don't you fear about that!"

Merry was not smiling. He knew that overconfidence might prove a great mistake, and yet he was determined to win if possible. However, his first ball slipped from his fingers and barely knocked down a single pin on the corner.

Dashleigh wanted to whoop again, while Browning felt like thumping somebody. Only Buck Badger remained perfectly unshaken in his belief that Merriwell could not fail to win.

Frank was deliberate in his movements, and he placed the next ball to a fraction of an inch. The result was the complete collapse of the pins and a spare for him in his last box!

Dashleigh's heart went into his boots, while Phil Starbright simply sat down on a bench, gasping.

"Twenty in the ninth; one hundred and twelve total," said Bert huskily. "I'm afraid that does the trick!"

The pins were up, and Starbright prepared for the last effort. His first ball brought everybody to his or her toes, for it went straight and true into the proper place, and down crashed nine pins.

"Hooray!" yelled Phil, leaping up. "He's going to do the same thing! He'll get a spare, too!"

But now Starbright found himself shaking a bit. In this respect he lacked Merriwell's nerve, for Frank was always the coolest and steadiest when the critical moment came.

"I must do it!" thought Dick, but in his heart there was a faint fear that he might fail. He sent the ball straight toward the pin, and several cried:

"He's got it!"

But the ball curved the least bit, brushed the pin, caused it to move off the spot at least half an inch, but left it standing.

Dashleigh collapsed and seemed disheartened until he made a sudden discovery.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "Merriwell has but one ball left! He should have rolled that one off before Dick. There is a bare chance left if Dick gets that last pin."

"I fail to see it," grunted Browning.

"Why, it's plain enough," declared Bert. "Frank has one hundred and twelve in his ninth box, hasn't he?"

"Sure."

"And he's made ten with two balls."

"Right."

"That ten goes into the last box, together with what he gets on the next ball."

"Correct."

"What if he gets only one? He'll have one hundred and twenty-three. Dick has that already. If Dick gets that pin, Merriwell must have two to tie and three to win. It often happens that a man doesn't get but one or two on one ball. Get that pin, Dick!"

Dick got it, making his total score one hundred and twenty-four.

"That's enough to win any bowling-match," muttered Phil.

"Any but this one," said Badger. "You'll see that Merriwell is a hard man to beat. I found it out some months ago."

Frank now took up his last ball and sent it at the pins which Ready had placed on the spots. It struck them, sent them whirling and crashing, and left but a single pin standing.

"That does it," admitted Dashleigh, at last. "He makes one hundred and thirty-one."

This is the score kept by Bert:

MERRIWELL.		STARBRIGHT.	
9	9.....	1.....	16
8	17.....	2.....	15
10	27.....	3.....	9
9	36.....	4.....	10
17	53.....	5.....	14
10	63.....	6.....	9
19	82.....	7.....	12
10	92.....	8.....	10
20	112.....	9.....	19
19	131.....	10.....	10
<hr/>		<hr/>	
Total 131		Total 124	

Frank had won the privilege he sought to claim beneath the mistletoe.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### DEFEAT AND SUCCESS.

Indoor sports were not the only kind enjoyed at Starbright's. There was skating on the lake, and Phil took them out for a spin over the ice on his ice-boat. The day after Christmas, however, an accident happened that made the girls afraid of the ice.

It is a well-known fact that, even in the coldest weather, any large body of water that is frozen over has weak or open spots in the ice; "breathing-holes" they are sometimes called.

In this respect Seneca Lake was like other lakes, and so it chanced that, skating together, with hands clasped, Inza and Winnie struck one of those places. Before they could turn about, the ice broke beneath their feet and they found themselves struggling in the chilling water.

Several of the fellows were skating near-by, and they were startled and horrified by the shriek that came from the girls as they broke through. In a moment, every youth was dashing toward the spot.

Starbright was nearest. His heart sprang into his throat, for he realized the terrible peril of the girls, knowing they were liable to clasp each other about their necks and go down immediately.

Frank was only a short distance behind Dick, but

Starbright reached the spot first. As he came up, he saw Inza's head disappear beneath the surface, and straight into the water he plunged, clutching at her in the wild hope that he might be successful.

Fortunately, Dick was able to grasp Inza before she sank beyond his reach, and he dragged her back to the surface. Then the others came up.

Badger was there almost as soon as Frank, and they pulled Winnie out on to the solid ice. Immediately Merry turned his attention to Inza.

"Take her!" Starbright chattered. "Get her out quick, Merriwell! I thought she was gone!"

"Guess she would have been if you hadn't plunged in after her as you did," said Frank.

The ice was solid close to the dangerous spot, so there was little trouble in drawing Inza out, after which Starbright was helped from the water.

Then the girls, wrapped in the coats which the boys stripped off and threw about them, were hurried away to the house, where they were doctored and given warm drinks and placed in bed.

Some hours later, when the boys were all together again, Winnie and Inza appeared and thanked their rescuers. Frank observed that Inza first went straight to Dick, giving him her hand.

"I thought I was gone," she said. "I was stunned when I went into the water, and I couldn't seem to do a thing to help myself, though I knew I was sinking. Then I felt a strong hand grasp me, and you pulled me back to the surface. I know I owe my life to you!"

Dick's face was crimson, and his heart thrilled as she gave his fingers a warm pressure, looking straight into his blue eyes.

"We all did what we could," he stammered. "Frank was on hand to pull you out."

"But Starbright was the only one who really saved you," said Merry, with perfect generosity. "There can be no doubt of that."

After a little time, he slipped away unobserved and retired to his room, in the solitude of which he sat a long time, pondering over the things that had happened since his arrival at the home of the Starbrights. Once more in his heart throbbed the pain of loneliness that had seized him in his room the night he received the brief message from Elsie.

"I will delay no longer," he finally murmured. "I'll seek Inza, and come to an understanding with her."

Then he went down-stairs, having first looked into the billiard-room, where Ready and Dashleigh were indulging in a game. In the library Browning was stretched on a Morris chair, reading a book. Through the house Frank searched, but he found nothing of Inza till, at last, he heard the crash of falling pins in the basement.

"They are bowling," he said, and descended the stairs.

Dick and Inza were there. He had been instructing her in bowling, and neither of them heard Frank, who paused on the stairs.

"It was just too bad he beat you!" Inza was saying. "I don't believe he could do it again."

"I don't know about that," laughed the big fellow. "But I don't think I ever wanted to win anything more in all my life than I did that string of candlepins."

"Did you?" she murmured, idly marking on the score-board.

"I did!" he declared, getting close to her and watching her write. "And I've felt ever since that I was robbed of something."

"Perhaps," she murmured—"perhaps somebody else wished you to win."

"You?" he breathed, all atremble—"did you wish that—Inza?"

"Perhaps so."

"I didn't know—I thought you might want Frank to beat me. What are you writing—my name?"

"Yes—and mine."

Having written her own name beneath Dick's, she began to strike out such letters as she could find in both names. He watched her with interest.

"Let's see," he said, "how it is done? You take the letters that are left, and how do you say it?"

"Love, hate, marriage; love, hate, marriage," she explained.

"There are seven letters left in my name," he declared. "It's love for me, and never anything in this world came truer!"

His voice betrayed his emotion.

“There are four letters left in my name,” said Inza, her face turned from him.

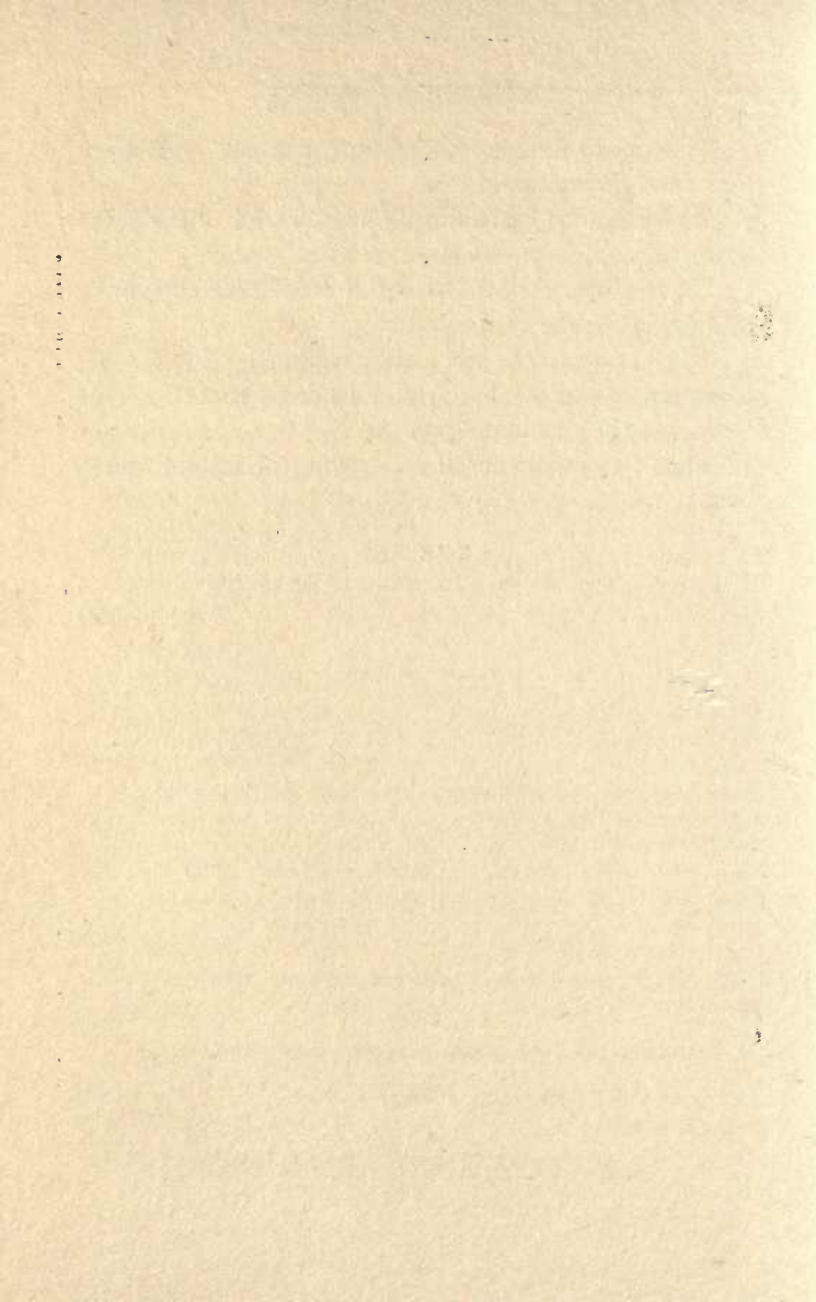
“Love again!” exclaimed Dick softly. “Love for both of us! Inza—is it—can it be—true?”

“Didn’t I say I was sorry Frank defeated you at candlepins?” she murmured.

“By Heaven!” he hoarsely exclaimed; “he has not defeated me after all. And I’ll not be robbed of the privilege the mistletoe gave me!”

Then he caught her in his strong arms and kissed her.

THE END.



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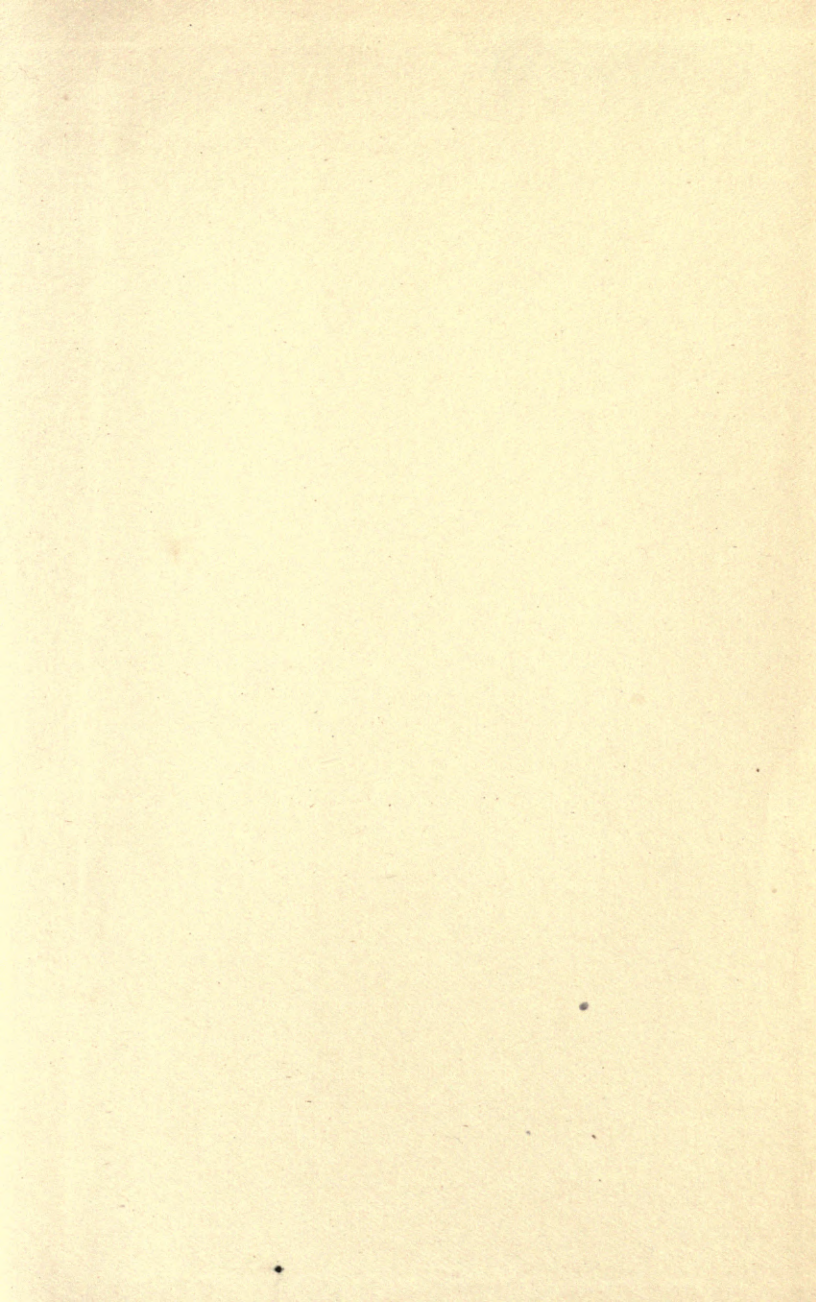
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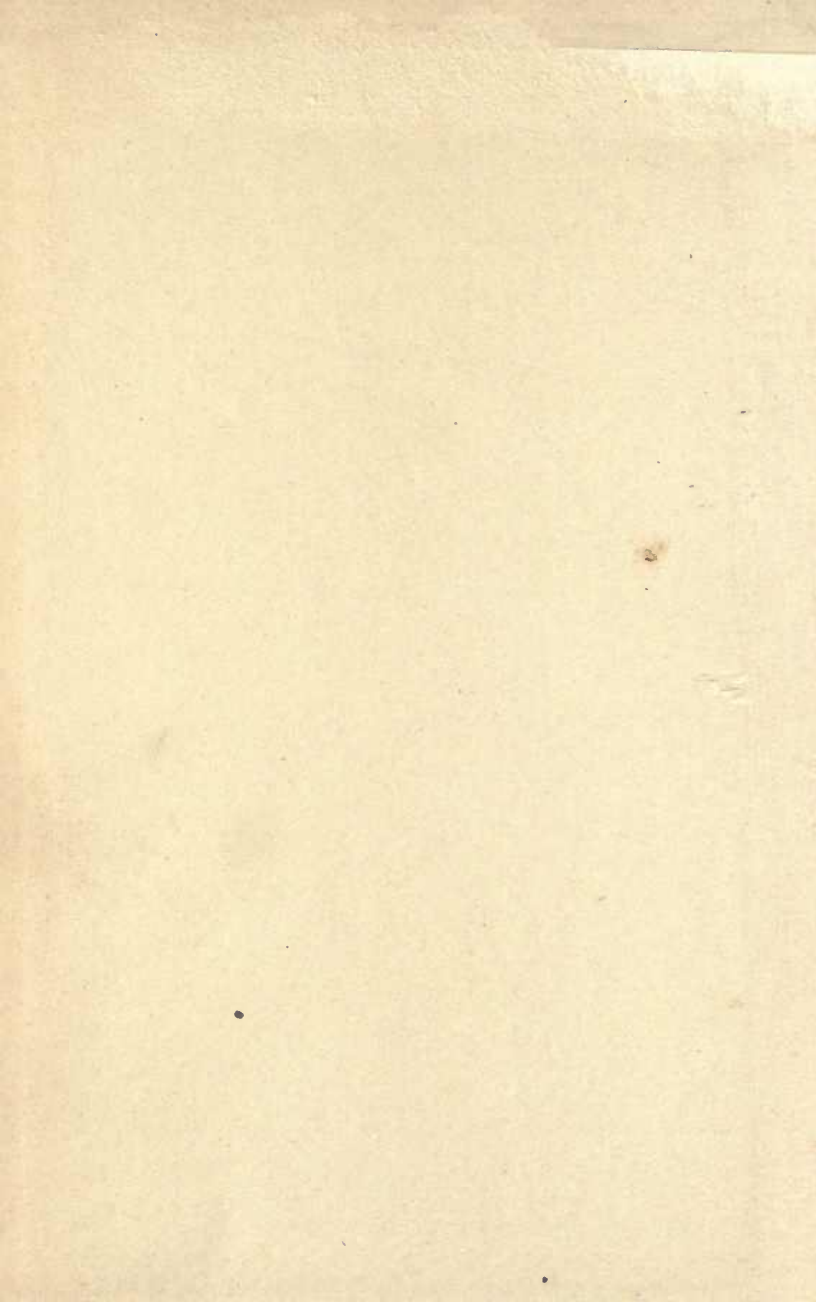
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