Dick Merriwell's Ginger;

OR,

A CHECK FOR THE CRIMSON.

By BURT L. STANDISH.

CHAPTER I.
A SONG OF GIRLS.

“I've got a girl in Boston town,
She dresses neat in a modest gown.
Wears her specs where'er she goes,
And wears them right upon her nose.”

Thus sang Tommy Tucker, perched upon the study-table in Merriwell’s room, strumming an accompaniment upon a guitar.

“Great, great, Tommy!” laughed Dick. “How long did it take you to compose that?”

“Why, sir,” returned Tucker, with a great assumption of dignity, “I composed it on the spur of the moment—also on this table.”

“And it came to pass,” said Jones solemnly, “that in those days there were many liars with exceeding nimble tongues.”

“Oh, I don’t think Tommy was lying,” laughed Dick, as he took the guitar from the little chap’s hands. “I’ll compose another stanza, if you’ll promise not to execute me for the crime.”

“Go ahead, go ahead,” they urged.

Smilingly Dick picked the accompaniment upon the strings and sang:

“I've got a girl in New York town,
She dresses swell in a Paris gown,
And the style she has just makes them say:
“She's the dashing queen of old Broadway.”

“Ye-e-e!” squealed Tommy. “What do you think of that?”

“That's going some, pard,” observed Brad Buckhart, bestowing an admiring look upon his roommate and chum. “I sure didn't opine heretofore that you were cut out for a poet.”

“Well, you'd better not opine anything of the sort hereafter,” chuckled Dick. “The poetry in that doggerel would make a real poet turn in his grave if it were charged up to his account.”

“You gentlemen are ver’ clever,” drawled Rob Claxton, the Virginian—“very clever, indeed. I’m almost staggered by your exceedingly remarkable talents. Nevertheless, if yo' will kindly let me have that guitar I'll try a crack at this doggerel composing.”

The guitar was promptly handed over by Dick, while
every one in the room gave full attention to the Southerner, who, smiling the least bit, sang as follows:

"I’ve got a girl in Baltim’o’,
You never saw her match belo’;
She’s a darling and a dream,
Among those peaches she’s the cream."

They clapped their hands and sent up a shout of admiration and applause. Tucker leaped down from the table and shook the Virginian’s hand.

"Finest yet, old fel," he declared. "I don’t see how you did it."

"My dear Tucker," murmured Claxton, "how could I help it considering my inspiration, the girls of Baltimore, the handsomest girls to be found in this great country of handsome girls?"

"You certainly had a right to feel inspired, Claxton," nodded Dick. "They surely can show some queens in Baltimore and no mistake."

"I never made a rhyme in my life," said Rossmore laughingly; "but, like Claxton, I have an inspiration. If some one will play the accompaniment, I’ll take a chance of escaping with my life, and perpetrate the horror. If any one present is threatened with nervous prostration he may leave the room until I have finished."

Claxton surrendered the guitar to Tucker, who once more perched himself on the table and indicated that he was ready, whereupon Rossmore warbled:

"I’ve got a girl in Philadel’;
Of all the girls she is the belle;
She isn’t fast and she isn’t slow,
But if they beat her much they’ve got to go."

They shouted again.

"Why, this crowd could fake up a minstrel show in no time," he cried. "I never dreamed I belonged to such a talented circle of lobsters."

"Come, Bouncer," said Dick, singling out Bigelow, who had been working his chair back into a corner to escape observation; "it’s your turn now."

"Oh, gug-gug-go on!" stammered the fat fellow. "I couldn’t do anything like that.

"Of course he couldn’t," sneered Tucker. "When he sings it sounds like a buzzsaw, and he would rhyme ‘slop’ with ‘mud’ and think it was all right."

At this Bigelow bristled resentfully, straightening up and glaring at his roommate.

"Oh, you think you’re the whole blooming show, don’t you?" he wheezed. "You think you’re so smart and so brilliant that any one else can’t come anywhere near you. I—I’ve been trying to think up a stanza, but I couldn’t get one anywhere near as good as the other fellows’, so I made up my mind I’d keep silent. But now, just to prove that you’re a slanderer and a prevaricator, I’m going to let ‘er rip."

He pulled himself to his feet and advanced ponderously to the side of Tucker, at whom he glared as he added:

"Strike right up with your old guitar. I’m all ready. Go on, now."

Tommy began at once, but Bouncer was not ready, and he made two or three false starts before he launched forth:

"I’ve got a girl in Buffalo,
Where the sweetest girls in the country grow;
If the Falls you ever want to view,
Keep away from her for she’ll dazzle you."

Tucker dropped the guitar, leaped down, seized Bigelow, and tried to waltz around the room with him. But he could no more move the huge fellow’s ponderous weight against Bigelow’s will than he could have moved a brick block.

"Get out! get out! Take your hands off me!" wheezed Bouncer, pushing him away. "You forced me to do it. I wash my hands of all guilt."

"Big, your effort was first-class," laughed Dick. "You needn’t feel so bad about it, Where’s Jones? Oh, there you are, Blessed. I think—"

"Verily I say unto you, you have another think coming," interrupted Jones. "I never did it in my life, and I’m not going to commence now."

"There’s Buckhart," suggested Rossmore. "We haven’t heard from him."

"Stand forth, you son of the Lone Star State," commanded Tommy—"stand forth and deliver. It’s up to you."

"Say! whatever do you gents take me for?" demanded the Texan, with an expression of indignation. "I’m no Bobbert Burns! I’m no Ella Wheeler Wilcox! I never slapped two lines of original poetry together in my life."

"Then it’s time you made the effort," said Dick. "Go ahead, Brad."

"I didn’t think it of you, pard," came resentfully from Buckhart. "I sure regarded you as my friend; you’re proving yourself my worst enemy. I can’t sing! Me sing an original song—one of my own composing? Say! if I ever tried anything like that out in the Pecos country they’d present me with a hemp necktie. They’d have me doing an empty-air jig from the limb of a tree, you bet your boots."

"But you’re not in Texas now. Look here, you’ve told me the Texas girls were the greatest to be found
anywhere. Your honor, your manhood, your gallantry should prompt you to sing their praises. The thought of them should be inspiration enough to spur you on to accomplishment.”

“Well, see here,” muttered Brad. “You’re trying to make it seem as if I was going back on Texas girls, confound you! They’re all right, they are,”

“Well, reel it off,” urged Dick. “Give us a stanza about them.”

“I’ll do it if Jones will follow suit,” promised Buckhart. “I’m not going to expose myself to general contempt without some company.”

“Lo and behold,” droned Jones, “I’ll make a stagger at it. I promise this just for the sake of hearing your effort.”

“Give me that guitar, Tucker,” said the Texan, taking it away from Tommy, who had resumed his place on the table and secured the instrument again. “I’ll do my own accompanying. I’m not much at it, but I’ll manage to rip it off somehow. Here goes.”

Breathlessly, ready to shout with applause or laughter, they listened.

“I’ve got a girl in Texas state;
Rides and shoots; it’s simply great!
She’ll bust a bronc or rope a steer,
She plays and sings all by her ear;
But when she talks Browning to me,
I always want to climb a tree.”

“Hey, there! you’re working overtime!” shouted Tucker.

“Gents, as long as I was roped into this business, I propose to give you full measure,” growled the Texan, handing the guitar over to Tommy. “If you’re meditating a sudden attack on me, I want to give you warning that I have a habit of carrying a gun some, and I shall try to defend myself.”

Although they applauded him and made various expressions of admiration, he continued to pretend that he regarded all this as sarcasm and was standing on defense lest they should attack him suddenly with the intent to shed his gore for what he had done.

Some one opened the door softly, and, with a shout, Dick leaped across the room and seized Jones just as he was trying to sneak out.

“No, you don’t!” laughed Merriwell, dragging the lank, solemn fellow back. “You can’t get off in any such a dastardly, contemptible way. You’ve got to take your medicine.”

Jones actually looked frightened. Finally, after gulping down a lump in his throat, he straightened up, observing:

“Well, if you can stand it, perhaps I can. Get ready for the slaughter, Tucker.”

Tommy strummed the strings of the guitar, and Jones caught his breath and launched forth:

“I’ve got a girl in old Chicawg.
Her father made his cash in hog.
She’s just as sweet as potted ham,
If her father was poor I wouldn’t give a tinker’s continental.”

Then, one and all, with the exception of Jones himself, they had convulsions. No printed words can convey an idea of the ridiculous nature of that climax, nor give the slightest impression of the ludicrously sad and solemn manner of the singer. They laughed and laughed until nearly all of them shed tears. And when they had stopped from exhaustion and want of breath some one started it again, and they went off into another shrieking uproar of merriment.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT YALE NEEDED.

“If I ever contemplate composing the book of a musical comedy,” said Tucker, “I’ll engage this entire bunch as collaborators. Gentlemen, your sentiment, without exception, is remarkably delicate and refined. I’ll not even except Jones, with his little ditty about the maiden’s dad who made his shekels in hog.”

“I’m just beginning to realize,” said Rossmore, who had filled and lighted his briarwood pipe, “what brilliant company I’ve been thrown into by a freak of fortune. Just think, fellows! it was only a short time ago that I was totally unaware of what I was missing by not being a member of this select circle. And isn’t it queer that my desire to help an opponent of our highly respected friend, Merriwell, was the cause of my butting into this classical company? By the way, I heard from Corliss to-day. He will be back next week as well as ever. Lucky dog, too. That French fire-eater, Durandal, certainly came near being the finish of Corliss.”

“That’s right,” nodded Tucker, with unusual gravity, “and there was one time I certainly thought Dick was going to be the finish of the frog-eater.”

“He had us all worried,” nodded Rossmore.

“I’d like to know what about that affair, anyhow,” said Jones. “All I’ve been able to find out was that some sort of a scrap took place, in which Corliss got
wounded in the side and Durandal’s right arm was
injured so he has been wearing it in a sling.”

“And you’d never found out that much from any
one present who was a witness of the affair, Blessed,”
laughed Dick. “Goodness knows how the matter
leaked at all. Luckily it hasn’t reached the ears of
the faculty, and I’m rather anxious, for my own part,
that it sha’n’t.”

Dick had good reasons to be anxious, for he was
the one who had given Durandal that sword-thrust
in the forearm, having caught up the blade dropped
by Bob Corliss when Corliss fell in a duel out at
West Rock Park. In the gloom of a waning stormy
winter afternoon Dick had failed to observe that the
fallen man was not Paul Rossmore, and through a
misunderstanding on Tommy’s part he had been led
by Tucker to believe it was Rossmore who had gone
out there to fight the Frenchman. Paul was simply
the second of Corliss in the encounter, and this he
had become after many expostulations and protesta-
tions on his part.

Rossmore and all the others had been spellbound
when Merriwell came rushing through the grove,
carried up Corliss’ weapon, and went at Felix Duran-
dal with the fury of a tornado. Getting a glimpse of
Dick’s face and eyes, Rossmore had cried out that
Merriwell meant to kill the Frenchman.

For all of his resentment and rage, however, Dick
refused to take advantage of Durandal when he had
twisted the sword from the fellow’s fingers and had
him disarmed and at his mercy. Instead of that, he
savagely bade him pick up the weapon and stand on
defense, a thing which the Frenchman promptly did.

Although he had boastingly called himself “the
Prince of the Foils,” Durandal was no match in such
a contest as this for Richard Merriwell. Before those
startled and faltering spectators could interfere, Dick
drove his blade through Durandal’s forearm, which
brought the encounter to a sudden termination.

Corliss and Durandal, both wounded, but neither
in any serious danger from their injuries, readily
pledged themselves to silence. The others who were
present likewise swore that they would keep mum
about the affair.

But the cabman who had brought Merriwell and
Tucker to the Circle near Judge’s Cave was not taken
into consideration. He it was who told enough to
arouse gossip and lead some astute students, finding
out about the injuries of Corliss and Durandal, to put
this and that together until it was whispered that a
genuine duel between those men had taken place. The
cabman likewise told of receiving ten dollars for car-
rying Merriwell and Tucker as fast as his horses
would take them from the New Haven House to the
Circle near Judge’s Cave, and therefore it was known
that Dick had taken some part in that encounter.

Deciding that it was best to turn the course of
conversation, Rossmore addressed Dick, saying:

“I’ve been wondering why you haven’t gone in for
basketball, old chap. You’re such a deuced energetic,
restless fellow, that it has surprised me to see you
relax the way you have since the football season
ended.”

“I forced myself to do that,” explained Dick. “I
decided that I was going it on too high pressure.”

“You played basketball on your freshman team?”

“Yes.”

“If I remember, you were the fastest man on the
freshman five. I’m afraid the Yale five is going to be
easy fruit for Harvard this year.”

“What makes yo’ think so, suh?” cried Claxton, a
bit resentfully. “I don’t know any particular reason
why yo’ should hold such an opinion.”

“Pardon, Claxton,” said Rossmore. “Really, I’d
forgotten that you were a member of our basketball-
team. Having made that statement, however, I’m not
going to modify it. Thus far the five has done noth-
thing particularly noteworthy, nor has it given proof
that it is as fast as the crimson team. Perhaps I’m not
qualified to criticize, but I should say that Harvard
had a great captain for its basketball-team in that
fellow Sparkfair. He’s level-headed, yet full of dash
and ginger. He’s just the sort of a man to inspire
his teammates. Now, it appears to me that our team
lacks ginger. Somewhich, Jim Glaze doesn’t seem to
fire the fellows and get them keyed to the proper
pitch. Glaze is a fine fellow, no doubt, but I don’t
think he’s adapted for the position he holds as cap-
tain of the basketball-team. I hope, however, no one
here will feel like repeating this for the public ear.”

“Captain Glaze is cert’ny a good, heady player
and a gentleman,” asserted the Virginian. “His stead-
iness and coolness is just the thing to hold some of the
too excitable players in check.”

“I presume you refer to Darrell? I understand he’s
been taken onto the five. I didn’t mean him in par-
cular. There’s Jack Sharon. That fellow has never
taken part before in basketball or any other game, yet
all of a sudden he is regarded as good enough to play
on the five that represents Old Eli.”

“I know Sharon very well, Rossmore,” said Dick.
“I admit I was somewhat surprised when he went in
for basketball, but I see no reason why he shouldn't be a good man for the team."

"Verily I believe that is true," nodded Jones. "He was raised amid the aromatic pines of the Adirondacks, and he's put up just about right."

"Which necessarily does not make him a basketball-player," said Rossmore. "Rance Stockton is another man who is certainly too slow for the team."

"What would you have, old carping critic?" asked Tucker.

"If I had my way," answered Paul, with a faint smile, "Dick Merriwell would have to play on the five. He ought to be captain of the team. We've lost as many basketball-games as we've won, up to date. Meanwhile Harvard has been trouncing every one. They have a right to believe they'll find us easy fruit at that game."

"They've thought such things before," said Bigelow. "They were betting their money they would find us easy fruit at football this year."

"Cert'ly, I'd like to see Dick on the five," said Claxton at once. "If he would play I'd resign in a minute and give him my position."

"The five could better afford to lose any other man upon it," said Rossmore.

In a moment the Southerner's touchiness and resentment over Paul's criticism of the team was dissipated by this complimentary statement.

"Thank you, suh," he said, with some confusion; "but I reckon you do me altogether too much honor."

"Not at all," said Rossmore quietly. "I've seen a couple of games, and you're just about the only man I would retain in that bunch."

"But don't you think Darrell will strengthen the five?" asked Dick.

Rossmore seemed doubtful.

"I can't say," he finally answered. "It's hard to tell whether Darrell will strengthen or weaken the team."

"He surely did some brilliant work for the eleven."

"He surely did. On the other hand, I can recall instances of the dumbest sort of football I ever saw any man play, and Darrell was responsible for them all. At one time he was the marvel of the team. They called him the whirlwind of the back-field. In the very next game he went to pieces. He was anything but a whirlwind."

"I happen to know the reason for that, Rossmore," said Dick, "and I feel confident that nothing of the kind will again happen to disturb him and ruin his playing."

Paul regarded Merriwell curiously.

"You're a queer fellow," he murmured. "Why, this man Darrell was rankly bitter against you at the time he sought admission to our little club of supporters for Corliss. Still, I must admit that he puzzled me then, for, in spite of his bitterness, he maintained that you were a man of honor. I've been told that at a certain stage of the season Darrell was so fierce against you that he longed to seriously injure you."

Although Dick knew this was true, he laughed at the statement and ridiculed it as being preposterous.

"No man is that rattle-headed in these days, Rossmore," he said. "Darrell is of a rather passionate and resentful temperament, but he's not daffy. I feel sure that he will prove to be an addition to the five."

Buckhart had remained silent, and now Dick turned to him and asked his opinion on that point.

"I reckon you're right, pard," nodded the Texan. "Darrell certainly can help the basketball-team a heap if he gets into the game with his whole heart and does his level best. All the same, I will admit that, like Rossmore, I never feel absolutely certain whether he's going to play brilliantly or rottenly."

"And the substitutes are not strong men," said Paul. "Gentlemen, I could pick out a team right here in this room that would give our five a hard go."

Tucker hopped down from the table and made a bow to the speaker.

"Evidently you know what a wizard I am at basketball," he said.

"I don't quite understand," said Claxton, "how it is that the Harvard team is so ver' fast. I admit that Sparkfair is a right good man. I'm acquainted with Brill Perkins, another man on the team, and he ought to be all right. I'm likewise acquainted with Lemuel Eason, and it's certainly marvelous that he should be a member of the team."

"What?" shouted Tucker. "Easy Lem playing on the Harvard basketball-team? Oh, say! when that fellow was up in the Adirondacks he was too lazy to draw his breath."

"Eason was certainly a tired specimen of humanity during his vacation days in the Adirondacks," nodded Dick. "It is surprising that such a fellow would be a member of the crimson five."

"Then there's Herbert Grace," said Rossmore. "He played basketball with Harvard last year, and I think him weak. Kirk Doyle is a fairly good back, but even he's no wonder."

"I must say it's ver' remarkable," laughed Claxton,
“that this Harvard team should be winning right and left while Yale is having difficulty in taking half the games she plays. Accordin’ to your own statement, Mr. Rossmore, Harvard is no stronger than Yale. Accordin’ to your own statement, suh, we ought to be able to hold them even play, and we stand an excellent chance of defeating them.”

“Is that the way you took my words, Claxton?” laughed Paul. “Perhaps they may have sounded that way, but I’m judging by results and not by the individual records of the men on the teams. Yale has failed to secure satisfactory results; Harvard has had everything her own way. Sparkfair has written some friend in college, I’ve been told, that the crimson proposes to atone as far as possible for its defeat at football by doing us up at basketball. That fellow is the secret of Harvard’s success. As captain of the five, he’s made his team unusual. Take him off that team and it might not be anything at all remarkable. Why, let Sparkfair and Glaze change places, give each a week to get used to his new position, and I’d bet my money on Yale. What I contend is that we need some one to put life and gingerness into our boys. Dick is the man for it. It’s his duty. Old fellow, why don’t you do your duty?”

“My dear Rossmore,” laughed Dick, “what would you have me do? Would you have me walk out and demand a position on the five? I haven’t been invited to play.”

“Would you play if you were invited?”

“Well, now, that depends. Really, I’d rather not. A man can’t go into everything, you know. A fellow’s got to have some time for studies and lectures.”

“But if you felt that you could aid in preventing Sparkfair from making his threat? You don’t want to see them trim us when we play in Cambridge next week, do you?”

“I should dislike very much to think that such a result is at all certain,” admitted Dick.

“Then,” said Paul, “you’d better get ready to play basketball if you’re asked to do so.”

CHAPTER III.

THE LETTER.

“One thing I can’t understand at all,” said Tucker solemnly, “is how they came to overlook my special qualifications for the team. Now, here I am with any amount of time on my hands and nothing doing. Say, Dick, what’s a good way to kill time in winter?”

“Sleigh it,” answered Merriwell instantly.

Everybody laughed but Tommy. Tucker stiffened up like a ramrod and glared at Dick in his fiercest manner.

“How dare you make such a brilliant pun?” he demanded. “I’m the only man in this room who has a right to make a pun. I’ve got Bouncer so that he doesn’t dare do such a thing. The last time he tried it I went at him red-hot. I struck him one right plumb in the dining-room.”

“Say! speaking of dining-rooms,” said Bouncer, “I’ve had to give up that little restaurant where I used to eat occasionally. Couldn’t stand it any longer. It was all right one time, but it kept getting worse and worse. Last week the proprietor discharged a waiter for giving me a steak with some meat on it. Then I quit.”

“Well, you put the place out of business,” said Tommy. “It’s closed.”

“It came near putting me out of business,” declared the fat youth. “While I was sticking to it from sentiment I began to lose flesh frightfully. Had to see a doctor at last, and he advised me to go to a warmer climate.”

“Then why didn’t you commit suicide?” suggested Tommy instantly.

“Yah! Smarty! smarty!” wheezed Bouncer. “I suppose you think that’s wit?”

Tucker yawned and looked at his watch.

“Great Scott!” he said. “What’s the matter with this old turnip? It’s stopped. I’ll take it right back to that jeweler who cleaned it last week.”

“Let me see your watch, Tommy,” requested Dick, taking it from the little chap’s hands. “Why, there’s nothing the matter with it, only it hasn’t been wound.”

“Is that so?” muttered Tommy. “Well, perhaps you’re right. Come to think of it, the jeweler told me to wind it just before I went to bed, and I haven’t been to bed for three nights.”

“Really and truly, gentlemen,” said Rossmore, “I hear that Sparkfair has boasted that he’s going to put it all over Yale at basketball.”

“That’s like Sparkfair,” laughed Dick. “If you ever heard him bragging once, you’d understand that two-thirds of it was pure joshing. When his words are repeated by some one else, however, they sound decidedly egotistical.”

“Isn’t he an egotist? Isn’t he conceited?”

“I don’t know how to answer that question, Ross-
more. He's the most complex individual I ever met. One time you might think him a conceited prig, and the next time you met him you'd conclude that you were a fool for taking him seriously."

"I am fain to admit," came from Jones, "that I never could quite fathom the man. He's too volatile, too changeable, too whimsical for me."

"Oh, Spark is a gay bird," chirped Tommy. "The girls like him, anyhow. There's no getting around that. Why, up there in the Adirondacks he simply sailed in and carried off a selected charmer without half-trying, and certain Yale gentlemen I could name were left far in the lurch."

Claxton colored a bit, but pretended he was not listening to Tommy. Dick laughed outright.

"I'll admit," said Merriwell, "that Sparkfair has a way with him that catches the girls, all right; but I've heard him confess himself that they grow tired of him—that he can't hold them after he catches them. While most girls like a chap with a lively, jolly temperament, they become weary of joshing and jokes and empty-headed remarks after a time. When they do weary of such a chap, they naturally turn to a fellow with a more serious disposition."

"Oh, that's all right," cried Tommy. "Rub it in, if you want to. I know I've never been able to catch a girl and keep her. I admit it. Some dastardly, double-dyed scoundrel always sails in and cops her away from me just when I'm beginning to think I've got her hooked fast. Why, that old funeral, Jones, can win 'em out if he tries. The only trouble with him is that he's scared to death of a girl, and he climbs a tree the minute he sees one coming his way. But I wasn't talking about myself; I was talking about Sparkfair. It's different with him. I've got reason to believe that he can win 'em and keep 'em. Anyhow, I hear that he's still got a taut line on the charming little lady who interested him so much last summer."

Claxton had picked up a copy of "Roderick Random" from the shelf and was pretending to be greatly interested in Cruikshank's illustrations of the story. Nevertheless, the color in the Virginian's cheeks had mounted still higher, and he felt like boxing the ears of the prattling rascal upon the study-table.

"I declare, girls are fickle, anyhow," persisted Tommy maliciously. "They'll vow that they think you the real thing, and the next minute you know they're telling the same tale to the other fellow. There's only one way to cure them. There's only one receipt that will have any effect on 'em. If a fellow really and truly has a girl going some and he finds she's beginning to let her affections stray, it's up to him to get busy with another girl, and if he's wise he will pick out the one she dislikes most. Say! won't that make 'em sit up and take notice! You bet!"

"Wahg!" laughed Buckhart. "Listen to Old Wisdom."

Eben Lamb looked into the room.

"Hi, Rob!" he called as he entered. "Trying to find you. By gum! it was careless of me. I swam to man! I s'pose you'll be madder'n a hornet. How d'ye do, everybody. 'Scuse me for buttin' in this way, but I've got a letter for Rob. Been carryin' it in my pocket for three days, too."

Lamb was the Virginian's roommate. A peculiar and remarkable combination they made, one being from the South, while the other was a typical New Englander, with the drawl, the dialect, and a touch of the nasal intonation supposed to be peculiar to genuine down-easters. Almost any one would have fancied that these two men had few tastes in common which would draw them together and make them congenial, and yet, to the surprise of all who knew them, they seemed to get along swimmingly without a single clash or a note of genuine discord.

Claxton dropped the book and rose, stepping out to meet Eben as the Yankee youth fished around in his pockets for the delayed letter.

"Well, confound my carelessness!" he spluttered. "I'll be dashed if I don't believe I've left it in my other coat!"

"Was it anything important?" inquired the Southerner.

"I dunno," answered Lamb. "Mebbe 'twas."

"Business letter?"

"Didn't jest look like it, Rob."

"Oh, was it from—"

"Girl's handwriting on the envelope," grinned Eben. "Looked mighty fo-miliar to me. I've seen several letters of the same sort addressed to you, or else I'm awfully mistook. There was a peculiar perfum about the envelope, too—sort of a violet smell. Guess you know who 'twas from."

"Oh, say, Eb! do produce that letter!" cried Tucker. "If there's anything I love it's that violet odor! Just let me smell of it. I won't look at the writing on the envelope—only once."

"I presume the letter was from my sister, gentlemen," said Claxton, somewhat stiffly.

"No, 'twan't from her," said Eben, shaking his head and pawing around in another pocket. "She
allus uses blue envelopes and writin'-paper. This was cream-colored."

By this time the entire gathering was smiling. The Virginian realized this, although he refrained from lifting his eyes to their faces.

"Never mind, Eben," he said, "I'll get the letter by and by; but I wish you wouldn't take my mail and carry it around this fashion. How did you happen to do it?"

"Oh, found a bunch of letters waitin' for us and looked them over. They ev'ry one was for me except that one. I calculated I knowed where to find you, so I stuck that letter in my pocket, and took it along, 'cause you allus seem so 'tarnal anxious to git hold of letters like that, and you seem to read 'em with such all-fired eagerness. Why, when you git one of them letters and set down ter read it your face jest beams and your eyes—"

Then he looked around in wonderment, for the boys had burst into a shout of laughter, and he could not understand the cause of it. Tucker was convulsed and having spasms behind Claxton's back.

"What in thunder's the matter with 'em?" muttered the down-easter.

"Oh, keep on talking!" whispered Claxton. "You've made a mess of it already."

And then, to cap the climax, Eben produced the letter, somewhat wrinkled and crumpled, and handed it over triumphantly.

The Virginian took the missive and slipped it into his pocket.

At this Tucker betrayed still further evidences of spasms.

"He doesn't dare read it here!" cried Tommy.

"Oh, quit your joshing, Tucker," said Rob. "It was simply a matter of politeness. You know it isn't good manners to read letters in company."

"We'll excuse you, we'll excuse you," cried every fellow in the room, with the exception of Lamb.

"Oh, ver' well, gentlemen," bowed the Southerner, as he retired to his chair. "If yo' see fit to excuse me, I'll cert'nly read my letter."

Saying which, he reproduced it and proceeded to open it.

Lamb took his departure.

Evidently the letter was very brief, for it took Claxton only a moment or two to glance through it. They saw a shadow come to his face, even though he seemed to make an effort to wear an unchanged expression. Beyond question there was something unpleasant in that brief message. It almost seemed as if his hands quivered the least bit as he refolded the sheet of paper and slipped it back into the scented envelope.

"Short and sweet, eh?" laughed Tommy. "Doesn't she ever write longer letters than that?"

"Oh, sometimes," answered Rob coolly; but the caliber of his voice was altered in spite of his artificial self-possession.

Dick divined at once that the letter had contained something decidedly unwelcome and unpleasant to the Virginian, and, therefore, he now took occasion to turn attention from Rob.

"There's a good show on at the Hyperion," he said.

"Who's for taking it in? It's not too late now."

"What sort of a show is it?" inquired Rossmore.

"Musical comedy, and lively, too. The 'Bird of Paradise'—who's seen it?"

"Oh, wow!" cried Tommy enthusiastically. "That's hot stuff. I saw it when it was running in New York. It's got everything else on the boards beat a mile. Lulu Barrington is the star, but, take my word for it, Elfie Larkin has got her trimmed to a finish. Why, Elfie's got her backed off the map. She's a peach. Why, if she would suggest matrimony to me I'd give up all hopes of a brilliant career and freeze to her on the spot. Come on, everybody, let's take in the 'Bird of Paradise.'"

The others seemed agreeable, and they made preparations to strike out for the theater. Suddenly, however, they noted that Claxton was sitting still and glaring steadily at a corner of the Turkish rug.

"Come on, Rob," said Dick; "we're all going out to the theater. Are you with us?"

Claxton did not stir. Apparently he did not hear MerriwELL's words.

Dick stepped over and dropped a hand on Rob's shoulder.

"We're going to the theater, old chap," he said.

"Won't you come along?"

The Southerner drew a deep breath and looked up slowly. There was in his eyes something suggestive of a great and bitter disappointment.

"What did you say, Merriwell?" he asked. "I beg yo' pardon. I was—I was thinking."

"We're going to take in a show, old man—a good, lively show. Won't you come with us?"

"Why, I—I don't know. I don't think I will. I've got to do some grinding; and—"

"Better come, Rob," whispered Dick; "it will do you good. You know you haven't got to study to-night."

Don't give Tucker a chance to chaff you further. Come on.”
He slipped his arm through the Southerner's, and Rob permitted himself to be led away.

CHAPTER IV.
THE ACTRESS.

A clean, healthy, happy-looking bunch of fellows they were as they crossed the campus, laughing and jesting on their way. At the corner near the New Haven House a shivering, ill-clad boy stood offering some roses for sale to the passers-by. The wind whistled up College Street and around into Chapel, causing the lad's teeth to chatter behind his blue lips.

“Who'll buy my roses? Please buy my roses!” he entreated.

Dick stopped short.

“Oh, come on,” cried Tommy. “We’ll be late. We don't want to miss anything. It’s a rattling old show, I tell you.”

“Go on if you're in such a desperate hurry,” said Merriwell.

Then he addressed the boy:

“How much do you want for your flowers, all you have?” he asked.

“There are just thirteen left, sir.”

“An unlucky number, Merriwell,” cried Tucker.

“Better not buy them.”

“I'll take fifty cents for them,” said the boy, “though I—I ought to have twice as much. But it's getting late, and nobody seems to want flowers to-night.”

“I'll take them,” said Dick. “Never mind the change.”

He thrust a bill into the boy's hand. When the lad saw the denomination of the bill he was electrified, and he cried:

“Oh, thank you—thank you, Mr. Merriwell! It has been a poor day for me, but now—now I'm all right.”

“There's fame for you, fellows,” laughed Tucker, as the boy hurried away and they moved on toward the theater. “Even the street urchins know the great Merriwell by name. What are you going to do with your bouquet, Dick? Going to chuck it over the footlights at Lulu Barrington?”

“No,” said Dick, “I'm going to divide it up, and we'll wear these roses on our lapels. Too bad there are not enough so we can all have two apiece, a red one and a white one.”

“Never mind that,” said Tommy. “Give me a red fellow. They're the kind for me. You remember the line in 'Lady Wyndemere's Fan,' ‘I wish you dreams of red, red roses?’ If I only dared express such a sentiment to Elfie Larkin!”

“Woof!” blurted Buckhart. “Let up some on Elfie. You've never seen her off the stage, have you?”

“No.”

“Well, maybe she's homely as an ewe-necked cayuse. Wash the paint and powder off her and it's a ten-to-one shot she would scare a bull-terrier into fits.”

“Not on your life!” cried the little chap fiercely. “I don't believe she has to make up at all. I tell you she's a peach; and ginger—oh, jinks! hasn’t she got ginger! Such a pair of eyes! Such lips! Tell you what, she can sing, too. They do say Lulu Barrington was dead sore when the show first started out and she tried to get the management to fire Elfie. She didn't have the pull, though, and when she found she was going to get dropped if she kept up the scrap and that Elfie would get her part, she quit. All the same, I hear that she hates Elfie worse than poison, and she would knife her in the back if she dared. You just wait till you see my Elfie!”

“Well, I wish you would wait some until we do see her,” growled the Texan. “We're willing to form our own judgment about her.”

Dick had been distributing the flowers. Tucker accepted only one, but Claxton got two, a red rose and a white. They paused beneath a street-lamp to fasten the flowers upon their lapels, and then continued their short journey to the theater.

At the box-office they were informed that everything was taken except one of the proscenium boxes, and that box had been engaged, but the party had not arrived to claim it, and, therefore, the ticket-man was willing and glad to sell it to some one else.

They purchased the box and were escorted to it. The curtain was up and the piece in full swing, a good part of the first act having been already presented.

“Too bad,” whispered Tucker, as they found seats in the box. “Elfie's made her first appearance. She doesn't come on again until near the end of this act; but she sings one of her prettiest songs then. She dances, too. Can she dance—can she? She's got Geene going some.”

The piece was not remarkable for originality of plot or cleverness of construction, but it contained a number of excellent specialty actors, and it had been rehearsed and the different choruses drilled until everything moved with snap and vim and with the smoothness of clock-work. The girls of the chorus were
pretty and graceful, which seemed rather unusual in these days of raw-beef and cord-wood choruses.

The boys plainly enjoyed themselves, with the possible exception of Claxton. Rob, against his wishes, had been given a chair near the rail of the box, and, knowing he was beneath the eyes of his comrades, he maintained an appearance of interest in what was transpiring on the boards. Nevertheless, Dick Merrinwell was aware that the Virginian really knew little of what was taking place. At times it was evident to Merrinwell that Rob's mind wandered, although he roused himself and laughed with the others and joined in their applause when they applauded.

Dick wondered what the letter had contained to upset the fellow in this fashion. Knowing Rob as he did, he was aware of the man's sensitiveness and keen emotions. To the core Claxton was a man of honor, a fine fellow, and one who felt all the phases of life with an intensity that was rare in such a well-balanced person.

He was a handsome fellow, too, having the true aristocratic Southern cast of countenance, and bearing, even in his moments of idleness and relaxation, the unmistakable atmosphere of a gentleman. His one great fault was that he was too inclined to take everything seriously. Not that he was habitually somber and moody, not that he could not relish a joke; not that he lacked a keen sense of humor, but he was inclined to magnify trivial things into matters of serious importance.

No longer regarded as a "fire-eater" by his college acquaintances, every man who knew him felt absolutely certain that he would fight in a second for a point of honor. With his friends he relaxed until he was free-and-easy and hail-fellow-well-met; with strangers or those whom he knew but casually, he was still reserved, dignified, and distant.

Whenever the low comedians came forth and rattled off their jokes and catch-lines Tucker was observed making notes upon his cuffs with a lead-pencil.

"What are you doing, Tommy?" asked Rossmore curiously, in a whisper.

"Oh, just getting a fresh fund of original wit and repartee, you know," answered the little chap honestly. "I'll spring all these things on the fellows, and they'll look at me in admiration and say, 'How cute!' Oh, it's easy to be a humorist if you've got the price to chase up shows of this sort, and don't forget to take a lead-pencil with you."

At length the time drew near for Elsie Larkin to appear, and Tucker's excitement rose to fever-heat.

"Now, watch, everybody—watch out!" he hissed. "She's coming! Here she comes! Here she is!"

Miss Larkin danced onto the stage as light as a fairy and as bright and welcome as a summer sunbeam. She was just a bit petite, with a suppleness and grace that seemed wholly natural and untaught. She had teeth which gleamed like pearls and eyes that flashed mischief one moment and drooped languishingly the next. She knew how to use those eyes, too.

"There she is!" breathed Tommy rapturously. "Oh, isn't she a dream!"

Rob Claxton straightened up a little and gave Elsie Larkin his full attention. There was nothing assumed about this, either; for the first time since taking his seat in the box he was genuinely interested in some one on the stage.

The actress wore some flowers twined into her dark hair—hair which seemed to have many strange changeable effects, appearing black, then brown, then tinged with red, and anon giving forth a suggestion of beaten old-gold.

She danced and sang, accompanied by a chorus of flower-girls. Her voice was not powerful, but it had a fine, tender, sympathetic, heart-touching quality, and was strong enough to reach to the farthest portions of the house. Her dancing was indeed the poetry of motion, and there was about it something original, something which escaped from the conventionality of stage-dancing which has become boresome to the great mass of theater-goers.

The house gave her a tremendous burst of applause, and every Yale lad in that proscenium box did his part. Rob Claxton, a flush of color in his cheeks, clapped his hands until they tingly.

"By Jove, Merrinwell," he said, turning to Dick, "she is a little queen! It has been a long day since I've seen her equal on the stage. There's nothing stagy about her. She's just as fresh and natural as she can be. I thought Tucker was exaggerating when he went into raptures, but he failed to give us a real idea of her. What do you say, old fellow?"

Dick laughed.

"Why, Claxton," he whispered, "I haven't seen you so enthusiastic as this—I don't know when. The girl is charming, I admit that."

"Charming! She's absolutely ravishing, suh. She's the handsomest girl I ever saw across the footlights."

It almost seemed as if Miss Larkin heard this superlatively complimentary remark, for suddenly her eyes met those of Claxton and she gave him a smile. A smile that made his heart leap and brought the color
rushing to his face. She had been encored by the applause of the delighted audience, and she sang again.

Claxton leaned forward on the rail, breathlessly drinking in every liquid note that flowed from Elifie Larkin's lips. Two or three times her eyes flashed upon him, but only for a fleeting instant, giving him no chance to feel that he had succeeded in conveying to her the slightest message by the means of his own intense glance. Still, something told him that she had taken note of him, and that even those fleeting, instantaneous looks were cast in his direction to make sure that he was giving her complete attention.

She danced off the stage with the flower-girl chorus, and again the applause was tumultuous. When she reappeared alone and bowed, retiring at once from view, the audience expressed its determination to bring her forth to sing again by redoubling its applause.

She came out laughingly, shyly, yet with the pleased expression of a child who is delighted because it has done something well that met with approval. The applause continued until she had reached the center of the stage, where she paused, quite alone, drawing a deep breath that made her bosom heave and sweeping those eyes quickly around until they once more found Rob Claxton and lingered on him for a moment. In that moment Rob believed he had at last conveyed the message with his own eyes.

And now, instead of singing one of the songs of the libretto, the little actress sang an old-fashioned Scotch song, "Charlie, Machree":

"Come over, come over,
The river to me,
For ye are my laddie,
Bold Charlie, machree.

"Here's Mary McPherson
And Susie O'Lynn,
Who say ye're faint-hearted
And daren't plunge in.

"But the dark rolling water,
Though deep as the sea,
I know willna scare ye,
Nor keep ye fain from me;

"For stout is yer back,
And strong is yer arm,
And the heart in your bosom
Is faithful and warm.

"Come over, come over,
The river to me,
For ye are my laddie,
Bold Charlie, machree."

With the singing of the last stanza her eyes found Claxton once more, and there was in them a look of invitation so luring that the Virginian felt like rising and vaulting over the rail of the box to the stage. Instead of that, he tore the flowers from the lapel of his coat and flung them at her feet.

With a laugh she caught them up, lifted them to her lips, and was gone.

Instead of abating, the applause was even more tremendous then before. It brought her out bowing and kissing her hands and laughing her acknowledgment. And then, ere she vanished again, one flitting hand snatched a red flower from her hair and tossed it straight at Claxton, who caught it deftly and surely.

CHAPTER V.

INFATUATION.

"Oh, you rascal—you heart-breaker—you deceiver!" palpitated Tommy Tucker, glaring at Rob. "You've cut me out! I ought to murder you. I feel like it. Every time she looked toward this box I thought she was looking for me. Now I find out my mistake. Oh, it's just my usual luck!"

"Kindly refrain from making us more conspicuous than possible, Tucker," requested Rob, who seemed to have little of the usual foolish inclination of a raw youth to plunge himself over his conquest.

"Why, what are you giving me?" rasped Tommy furiously. "Here you sit out in the front of the box and just palpitate with admiration for Miss Larkin until everybody in the auditorium gets next to it. You flirted with her outrageously right before the eyes of this entire audience, and then you request me not to make us conspicuous. Well, wouldn't that bump you some!"

Rob had drawn back as far as possible now, seeming to realize for the first time that the audience must have observed with interest and amusement the little affair between himself and the actress. Some of the others in the box were inclined to chaff the Virginian a bit, but not so with Merriwell, who somehow felt a keen disappointment in this new and unusual phase of the man's character.

"Well," thought Dick, "I suppose it's no more than natural. They say every college fellow has to take his turn at it. They all fall in love with actresses sooner or later. Even I have felt the temptation."

Nevertheless, Claxton had seemed to be so much different, so enwrapped in his lofty ideas which lifted
him above the common herd, so situated by circumstances and fully aware of his situation, that Dick had never fancied he would permit himself to descend to the customary folly of light-headed collegians.

The curtain finally dropped on the first act with the star holding the center of the stage and the entire company grouped artistically around and behind her, Elfie Larkin being second to the star herself in prominence. And, as the curtain drifted noiselessly down, the eyes of the vivacious little actress once more shot a meaning glance toward that prosenium box, and again Rob Claxton returned the look with one of equal significance.

During the intermission between acts Claxton was both preoccupied and restless by turns. He gave little heed to the joking, laughing conversation of his companions, and yet occasionally he would start and shake himself in a queer manner, as if trying to fling off something that was annoying him.

Throughout the second and final act Rob seemed waiting only for the appearance of Elfie Larkin, and the only time he was intensely absorbed in the performance was when she was upon the stage. Finally he rose and excused himself, saying he would return in a few moments, and left the box.

Going to the rear of the theater he wrote a note, which he gave to an usher, along with a two-dollar bill, with the request that the message should be delivered to Miss Larkin at once.

Then he went back to the box and waited—waited with a nervous excitement which made his blood tingle in his face and seemed to render it impossible for him to sit still. He twisted and turned and writhed in his chair like one enduring tortures of suspense or uncertainty.

Elfie Larkin made two more appearances upon the boards that evening. The Virginian was tingling with electric thrills at her next entrance. Breathlessly he watched her during the brief space of time that she was in view, and when she finally vanished without giving him so much as another flitting glance his heart dropped like lead in his bosom. To his distorted imagination it seemed as if she had deliberately and wilfully declined to look in his direction. He even fancied that her piquant face wore an expression of mingled amusement and disdain, the significance of which he felt with intense keenness.

“She was playing with me!” he mentally exclaimed, in great bitterness; “that was all. She didn’t mean it. She only did it to amuse herself—possibly to amuse the audience. It was cert’nly a cruel thing to do, and it doesn’t seem possible that a girl with her innocent face could do it. I don’t care; I won’t give up. I’m going to meet her. Perhaps she felt insulted by my proposal. Perhaps she is so much of a lady that she demands an introduction in the regular manner. That must be it! That is it! Ah! now I admire her all the more!”

And so his heart rose again, filled with relief, hope, and renewed admiration for the little actress.

Elfie made her last appearance as the principals and supernumeraries were grouping for the final stage picture. She had a line or two to speak and a bit of dancing to do; but that was all, and the moment it was over her eyes sought the prosenium box occupied by the Yale men. Rob Claxton was the one they singled out, and he nearly uttered a shout of joy when she gave him a smile. Not for an instant until the curtain descended and the play was over did he remove his eyes from her.

“Come, Claxton, old chap,” said Dick, touching him on the shoulder, “are you going to stay here all night?”

Rob looked up in surprise to see that nearly all of his friends had left the box, Dick alone lingering to rouse him. The orchestra was playing the audience out of the auditorium. Without a word, Rob rose, slipped on his top-coat, seized his derby and followed Merrwell.

They were soon packed amid the slowly moving people who were working out toward the doors. Ahead could be seen the lofty figure of Jones, with Buckhart and the others following. Dick made some haste to work his way through the drift of people in order to join his friends.

They came out upon the sidewalk together and paused to make sure they were all there.

“Where’s Claxy?” inquired Tucker. “He must have got lost in the shuffle.”

“He’s coming,” assured Dick. “He was right at my heels, but I put on steam and left him, I fancy. Just watch out for him, Jones.”

“I’ll do so,” promised Blessed, peering around over the heads of the crowd.

“Bet we’ve lost him,” said Bigelow. “Bet he’s skipped us. Tommy, he’s gone to meet your divinity.”

“Well, I wouldn’t-blame him if he had,” said Tucker. “I hate him. I hate him with a deadly hatred for his success in winning a smile from her. But I’ll bet she’s fooling him. She’s up to snuff, she is. She’s a perfect little flirt.”

Tommy’s admiration for Miss Larkin was fully as
great as that of Claxton, but his opinion of her differed materially from the opinion formed by Rob.

There they waited until the last of the audience came drifting out scatteringly and the music of the orchestra ceased within the empty auditorium, which was now growing dark as the lights were turned off.

"By Jove!" laughed Rosmore, "I’m beginning to think Claxton has skipped us to meet the lady."

"Come hither," commanded Tucker, flourishing his gloved hand as if sweeping a sword through the air above his head. "I know the location of the stage entrance. Follow me and we’ll hike ourselves hence to seek the scoundrel. If I betray a furious inclination to hurl myself upon him and shed his gore, hold me—hold me—"

Dick hesitated, but, as the others betrayed no scruples about accompanying Tucker, he fell in behind and was thus led to the stage entrance of the theater. As they approached that entrance they beheld a cab waiting near and saw a dark figure standing within a step or two of the doorway. The place was lighted by a distant lamp, which cast its rays through the narrow side-street. By the light of that lamp they saw a slender, graceful female figure appear, issuing from the stage entrance. She was dressed in furs, and she paused as the waiting man stepped forward, lifting his hat.

"Wow!" hissed Tucker. "That’s Claxton, sure! There he is! Well, say! but he’s got nerve! I tell you to hold me! Grab me quick, before I stretch him dead at her feet!"

"No need to hold you, Tucker," laughed Rosmore softly. "Your would-be victim has vanished already."

It was true. Claxton had hastily handed Miss Larkin in through the open door of the waiting cab, following her immediately and closing the door. The driver clucked to the horses and the cab rolled away, leaving that group of students laughing and shivering there on the street, through which the raw, biting wind swept piercingly.

Not all of them were laughing. Dick Merriwell was soyer and disturbed with regrets.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FOLLY OF IT.

"Aw, forget it, ‘pard," said the Texan, rousing Dick, who had fallen into a reverie in the big chair before the open fire, which was still smoldering on the hearth when they returned to their room. "Forget it and come to bed. Claxton has got to have his fling, I opine. He’ll take care of himself, you bet your boots. You can’t act as his guardian. Why, I don’t know as I blame him so much. She was the real thing, but I opine she’s a little imp. I’ll guarantee she’s got claws, all right, and they’ll scratch some when she unsheaths them. That was a pretty good show. I’ve been some tired of these hodge-podge musical affairs, and so I haven’t chased ‘em up much of late, which I judge made this one seem a trifle better than usual. I say, come on to bed."

"All right, Brad," said Dick; "I’ll turn in directly."

Merriwell had been amazed by the Southerner’s behavior that night. To begin with, Dick knew the fellow could not afford to spend his money on actresses. Although Rob came of an aristocratic Southern family who still retained a large estate and a fine old home- stead, his people were practically “land poor,” and it was only by frugality and deprivation that Rob’s mother had been able to send him to Yale.

This situation, not being understood at first in New Haven, had caused many college men to regard Claxton as niggardly and penurious. Supposing him to be the son of a Southerner who had left his family in affluent circumstances, it was natural that the men of Claxton’s grade in college should expect him to be fairly liberal, and generous in the way of spending money. Not until it became known for a fact that he was forced to be prudent and economical did he escape from the odium of meanness which had been cast upon him.

Even Rob’s sister, Claudia, had sought to lighten the burden and help as much as possible by shifting for herself. Having learned stenography, she sought a position which enabled her to take care of herself, and eventually fortune brought her to New Haven, where she secured a fine place. Now, however, she was back at Claxton Hall, for her mother’s health was failing and it was necessary that some one should look after her. Of late Merriwell had felt that the Southerner had more reasons than ever for being careful and prudent in money matters.

That Rob had formed a great admiration for June Arlington, Dick was well aware. He likewise knew the Southerner had been extremely anxious for him to admire his sister. There was no need for such anxiety on Rob’s part, however, as Dick’s admiration for Claudia was of the sort that time could not alter or change. Still, knowing that in his prep school days Merriwell had taken more than a passing fancy for Doris Tem-
pleteon, it was but natural that the appearance of Doris in New Haven should give Claxton some moments of disturbance and uncertainty. This was heightened by the knowledge of Hal Darrell's intense jealousy of Dick. Furthermore, Claxton had seen Doris and been forced to admit that she was a remarkably pretty, vivacious, sweet, bright-appearing girl.

One day, shortly after the opening of the fall term, Claxton had sought a private talk with Dick and had spoken of June Arlington. In that interview he had asked point-blank if there was any reason why it would seem traitorous on his part should his attentions toward June assume a serious aspect, and Dick had assured him that June was heart-free and unbound to any one, as far as he knew. In this manner, the Southerner had practically served notice that he recognized the possibility of becoming so interested in June that time might lead him to propose to her.

And now, of a sudden, the fellow had undergone a tremendous and startling change, seeming to be madly smitten at first sight of the little actress, Elfie Larkin. As he thought about this, Dick recalled the letter which Eben Lamb had brought Rob that evening and which had seemed to disturb and upset the Southerner upon perusal. The possibility that June and Rob had disagreed seemed to leap almost instantly into a conviction.

By this time Buckhart was breathing heavily in a manner which indicated that he had found no trouble in courting slumber.

"Well, I suppose I am a chump to worry about Claxton," muttered Dick, stretching his arms and yawning. "If I were to interfere or attempt to advise him, he would resent it. Perhaps he'll quickly tire of this flirtation. At any rate, she'll go on from here in a day or two, and that will give him a chance to recover his equilibrium. It's not likely she will care a fig about him. If he was worth a lot of money the girl might regard him as a good catch and lay a snare to marry him; but when she learns that he's simply the son of a ruined Southern plantation-holder, she'll be likely to throw him over. I presume it's best to let him alone. I presume it's the only thing to be done. He must be permitted to work out his own destiny. I'll go to bed."

But ere he was ready to retire some one tried the door and followed with a soft knock on finding it locked.

Tucker was there, his cheeks red from the crisp, biting outer air.

"I found the dastard," announced Tommy, as he stepped into the room. "I trailed him to his lair—if that's the right name for it."

"Well, just speak a bit lower," suggested Dick. "Buckhart is asleep."

"I bet you couldn't wake him with a cannon. Say! Claxy is certainly doing it up brown to-night, Dick. My goodness! but I don't believe he ever blew himself like that before! He's got Elfie—my Elfie—at Hubblein's, and he's been opening champagne—opening champagne, Dick! Oh, he's blew her off to a swell feed! I don't believe she's struck anything like that since the company left New York. I got a look at them. He didn't see me. My heavens! but that man is dead gone! He was the soul of attention, and you know what a Southerner can be when he gets attentive to a lady. Why, he's got a Northerner beaten a mile and a half without even trying."

"Weren't you mistaken about the champagne, Tommy?" asked Dick. "Weren't they drinking something else?"

"Mistaken? Me mistaken? Not on your life. Don't I know Mumm's when I see the label on the bottle? I give you my word of honor that they were drinking Mumm's. I don't know what they were eating, but it looked like quail-on-toast. I don't know what they were saying, but I'll guarantee that Claxton was telling Elfie that he was ready to die for her. Anyhow, he told her something that she regarded as a great joke, for she laughed over it until she almost cried. Oh, say! but hasn't she got a way of laughing! Oh, say! but isn't she the owner of the finest stock of teeth you ever saw exposed by ruby lips! And the way she looks at a fellow just makes him ready to commit murder at her command. She's just about the——"

"Never mind raving over her, Tucker. So Claxton is blowing himself like an ass, is he? Wonder where he got his money?"

"Just what I'd like to know. I've never seen him flourishing any immense wads of long green. I hope he hasn't got money to pay the bill for the supper. I hope he dies of heart-failure when he sees the check. I hope they call the patrol and take him to a dungeon cell. Those are my best wishes for Mr. Claxton."

"You're vicious, Tommy," said Dick, forcing a laugh. "I'm going to bed. Good night."

"I'm going to bed," said Tommy; "but I am so mad and jealous that I don't believe I'll be able to sleep. Good night."
CHAPTER VII.

RECKLESSNESS.

The “Bird of Paradise” remained in New Haven to the end of the week, and every night during the remainder of its stay Rob Claxton kept late hours.

On Saturday evening the Yale basketball-team played Holy Cross in New Haven. Yale fully expected to win that game, although it was known that Holy Cross had a fast five.

Imagine the disappointment of the blue when the visitors outplayed Yale in the first half, securing double the points the Elis were able to make. It was true that the home team lacked snap and dash. The vim of the visitors proved too much for the Elis, who were swept off their feet.

Nevertheless, it was a fact apparent to every one that one weak spot on the Yale team was responsible for the pitiful defense made against the rapid, rushing, shifting assaults of Holy Cross. Rob Claxton seemed to grow worse as the game progressed, and hitherto he had been one of the fastest and most reliable men on the five. When there could be no question but that his poor playing was directly responsible for more than one goal secured by the enemy, Captain Glaze finally decided to make a change. But the first period ended with Claxton still in the game.

When the team came out for the next period, however, Rob’s place was filled by a substitute.

Claxton had been told some very plain things by Captain Glaze, and he was abase with anger when notified that another man would be substituted in his place. He lost no time in getting out of his playing suit and into his street clothes, and he was outside the building directly after the second period began.

He did not arrive at his room that night until long after the clock had boomed the hour of twelve. He came in wearing his full dress suit, his silk lined topcoat thrown open, his cheeks flushed, his eyes bright, his step unsteady.

Eben Lamb was waiting for him to appear.

“Hello, old fell!” cried the Virginian in surprise, as Lamb rose to face him. “Why, I supposed you were wrapped fast in the arms of Morpheus. Eben, you’re losing your beauty sleep. I must chide you, my boy. Consider yourself chid.”

The New Englander looked Claxton over in mingled astonishment and disdain. He had never seen Rob in that condition before; he had never heard him speak like that.

“You’ve been hittin’ it up some, ain’t ye?” said Lamb scornfully.

“Who? Me? Why, Eb, I’ve just been having a little supper with a lady friend—the most charming lady, I swear, who ever graced this deceitful, wretched old earth.”


“Now, hold hard, Eben,” warned Rob, bracing himself and lifting an expostulating hand. “We’re comrades—bosom comrades; but even permit your lips to speak one harsh word of her and I’ll have to demand retraction.”

“How much did you drink, Rob?”

“Ask me something easy, Eben. Indeed, I couldn’t say. I pledged my charmer again and again in the bubbling wine-cup.”

“Well, you’ve got jest enough all you can carry. You’d better go to bed. I set up to tell ye what I thought of ye, but it ain’t no use to talk to a critter in your condition. I’d jest be wastin’ my breath.”

“Eben, I’m just beginning to live. Hitherto I’ve never understood the full joy of life. Why, my boy, you’re like a poor old cab-horse, while I’m a high-stepper, a two-minute trotter. A short time ago I was trying to make a cab-horse of myself, too. I thought it my duty. Bah! it’s a man’s duty to live—to live and enjoy life, Eben. If we don’t get a little sport as we go along who knows if we’ll ever enjoy anything? Only dreamers live for the future. I’ve been a dreamer; but hereafter I live for to-day and let to-morrow take care of itself. Say, Eben, you should see Elise, the girl I mean to marry. Oh, she’s——”

“Don’t tell me anything about her,” interrupted Lamb. “Why, in your condition any old piece of calico would look pretty good. You make me sick, Rob.”

“Indeed, you’re exceedingly plain-spoken, my friend. Were it not that I admire and respect you vastly, your words would offend me to the point of great indignation. Look at this flower in my button-hole. Ah! sweet flower, you rested in her hair only such a short time ago, and now your perfume is doubly delicate, for you bring me the odor of——”

“If you don’t stop I’m goin’ to git sick to my stom-ach!” snarled Lamb. “By gum! I’m turnin’ kind of floppy a-ready.”

“Can’t expect a man like you to have any sentiment, old fellow,” murmured Claxton, as he tossed aside his topcoat and flung himself gracefully astride a chair,
his arms resting upon the back of it, while he smiled up at the grim and disapproving New Englander.

"If you had less sentiment and more sense it would be a 'tarnal sight better for ye," retorted Lamb.

"Your language is a trifle irritating, my friend," said Rob, the smile fading somewhat. "Did I not hold you in high esteem, I might be aroused to a point of resentment. Yo' know I'm a man who is right liable to resent an insult. As long as it is you, old chap, we'll let it pass. How did the basketball-game terminate?"

"Oh, Holy Cross won, of course. Consarn it, you lost that game, Rob! What's the matter with you, anyhow? You've gone all to pieces in the last few years. This actress has been the ruination of ye. Ding gast her——"

"I wouldn't say it if I were you!" rang out Claxton's voice sharply. "Miss Larkin is a lady, and I shall resent any improper language you may use concerning her."

"Well, I ain't goin' to git into a fight with yer now," muttered Lamb; "but if I don't say anything, you can bet yer life I'm thinkin' a whole lot. Do yer know what's goin' to happen to yer? I'll tell ye. You're goin' to make yerself the laffing-stock of the whole college. I'll hate you git kicked right off the basketball-team. It'll serve yer right, too."

"Deed, you are irritating, Lamb," said the Southerner. "Never knew yo' to be so exceedingly exasperating."

"That's because I never had occasion to tell ye the plain truth before. I'm yer friend, Rob Claxton, and sometimes it's the duty of a friend to speak out plain and square to another friend, no matter if he does git mad as a hatter. I never s'posed you was one of the kind of fellers to go crazy over a chorus girl."

"Miss Larkin is not a chorus girl, I'd have yo' understand, suh; she's one of the principals in the 'Bird of Paradise' company. She sho'ly ought to be the star, for she's got Lulu Barrington distanced. If you knew her better, my boy, you'd understand the situation. I tell yo' she's——"

"Oh, cut it count! cut it count! I refuse to listen to your ravin' about her. You know you'd be fired off the team quicker'n scat if this thing was made public. You're breakin' all rules and regelations. Gosh hanged if I don't cal'late you'll be dropped, anyhow; and when you're in condition and playing your best game you're the fastest man on the five. It's a 'tarnal shame, that's what it is. I feel pritty blame' sore."

"This is Miss Larkin's last night in New Haven. To-morrow the company goes on to that frosty town of pork and beans, Boston. But I'll see her there, Eben—I'll see her there. We play Harvard in Cambridge next Saturday. Still, it's a long time from now until then—a ver' long time."

"Unless you brace up like thutteration you won't go to Boston with the team next Saturday."

"Even if that is true, I can go jest the same, can't I?"

"Oh, I s'pose you can. I s'pose you've got hay-dooings of money to spend chasin' round after an actress; but I don't know where it comes from. Here-tofore I've understood that you didn't have a great deal of superfluous cash to blow in. You told me so yerself. We sort o' fixed it up to git along together as economically as we could. Sence you've met this actress you've been burnin' the long green jest as if you was the son of a millionaire. "Tain't right, Rob—tain't right. Your folks have had ter——"

The Southerner arose, a dark frown on his handsome face.

"I'll thank you not to discuss the financial affairs of my family, suh," he said harshly. "It's a matter that doesn't concern yo' in the least."

"Oh, all right," snapped Lamb. "I'm done. I'll close up like a dam. I'll let you go ter the dickens jest as fast as you want to."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE AGREEMENT.

Returning from a brisk walk on Sunday afternoon, Merriwell found Eben Lamb waiting for him. The New Englander wore a troubled expression, which led Dick to make inquiries when Eben had followed him into his room.

"I don't know whether or not I'm doin' right in comin' to you," said Lamb; "but I thought it all over and decided it was the best thing to do. I want to talk about my roommate."

"Claxton?"

"Yes."

"What about him?"

"Merriwell, he's actin' like a confounded jackass. I've always thought him a feller with a lot of good hoss-sense, but I've sorter changed my mind."

"What's the matter with Claxton?" asked Dick, although he was certain that he knew the answer to his own question.

"Why, he's gone woozy over an actress. She's got
him gazazzled. It will be the ruination of him. Everybody can see something's the matter with him. Why, jest look what a mess he made of it in the basketball-game last night!"

"He did play a poor game."

"Poor? It was rotten! Only for his miserable playin' we'd won. And it's no wonder he played bad. Why, he's been stayin' out every night for 'most a week. He's been comin' in between twelve and one o'clock right along reg'lar. That's breakin' all rules and reglerations for a man that's in trainin'. That's enough ter git him kicked off the five if Cap'n Glaze knew it."

Dick nodded.

"It is most unfortunate that Claxton should make such an idiot of himself just at this time," he said. "I didn't look for it in the man."

"Nor I. I tried to talk to him last night, but t'wan't no use. He come in all geared up with champagne, and he wouldn't listen to sense. Every time I tried to drive a little reason inter his head he riz right up on his dignity and was full of fire. It's a blame shame, Dick. Rob ain't no boozor. He's always seemed temperate and decent; but last night he had a terrible skate on. Told me he'd been openin' wine for that girl. Now, wa'nt that a fool trick for a feller like him that ain't got no money to waste?"

"It was," nodded Dick. "Still, Eben, every last one of us plays the fool sooner or later. We've got to take our turn at it, and this seems to be Claxton's turn."

"That's all right, Dick; but if he keeps on he'll ruin himself. I know for a fact that he's blew a whole lot of money he'd saved ter pay his way through the next term, and I'll bet he's writ home for more money as soon as this. I don't know what sort of a yarn he's cooked up as an excuse for wantin' more, but I s'pose his mother and his sister will find some way to scrape together the dollars for him. It can't keep up though—that is, if I've been told the truth about their financial situation. If he keeps on this way it won't be long before they can't send him no more money, and that'll mean his finish at Yale."

"But the 'Bird of Paradise' Company has departed, and the girl who infatuated Claxton has gone with the company. This will end it."

"Don't you believe it, Dick?"

"Why not?"

"He went to the train to see the Larkin girl off, and he told me he was goin' to meet her this week in Boston. Why, I wouldn't be s'prised a bit if he tried to chase her up every time she played anywhere within reachin' distance of this town. That'll cost him something. He'll have to pay car-fare and hotel bills, besides settlin' the bill for wine-suppers. He won't last no time, Dick."

"I think you're right, Lamb; but when he reaches the end of his rope he will have to quit."

"And maybe before that time comes he'll do something to disgrace himself. When he has to quit mebbe he'll have to leave college. I say it's a confounded shame, Dick, and I think somebody ought to try to do something with the crazy loon. That's why I've come here to you. You and him are good friends, and I know he thinks a heap more of you than he does of anybody else in college. You're the one to git hold of him and pshuffle some sense into his head. Can't you do it?"

Dick meditated doubtfully.

"I have observed," he finally said, "that most men may gracefully accept advice about any of their affairs except one of this sort. Ninety-nine out of a hundred resent it if you try to advise them in an affair of the heart. Opposition to such matters is almost the surest way to perpetrate them. Such opposition seems to fan the flame. Hosts of unfortunate and hasty marriages have been brought about solely because of opposition."

"Gee whiz!" cried Eben excitedly. "You don't call late Rob is thinkin' of marryin' that girl, do ye?"

"No telling," answered Dick. "You know it's not an unusual occurrence for some college man to get smitten on an actress and marry her. The most of them do it secretly, of course, but the facts usually leak."

"Great hubbard squash!" gasped the New Englander. "Wouldn't that be a staggerer! Why, if he done a thing like that it would surely be his finish."

"I'm inclined to think, however," said Merriwell, "that Miss Elfie Larkin will be too wise to hitch up with Claxton, even if he proposes such a thing. You'll observe that most of these actresses who marry college men take care to nail the sons of rich parents. They're mercenary, and they look out for the main chance, you may be sure. Miss Larkin will be liable to investigate concerning Claxton in case this matter between them grows serious, and if she investigates the chances are a hundred to one—yes, more than that—that she will turn Rob down."

"And if it ever goes as fur as that it will be his finish, anyhow," asserted Eben. "If it goes as fur as that and she turns him down he'll jest make a bee-
line to the dogs. Dick, we’ve got to find some way to smash this business up. You’re clever, and you always manage to work these things out pretty slick. I don’t b’lieve you’re goin’ to stand back and let Rob Claxton ruin his life.”

“T’d be a poor friend,” said Dick, “if I didn’t try to intervene somehow.”

“That’s right, that’s right. Neow, ain’t you got no kind of a plan in your head?”

“Not at present,” admitted Dick. “I must have time to devise a plan.”

“Then you’ll do it—you’ll try to hook up some kind of a scheme to put an end to this fool business, and bring Rob to his senses?”

“Yes,” promised Dick, “I’ll do all I can.”

This promise sent Lamb-away in better spirits. Less than two minutes after the departure of the New Englander there was a knock at Dick’s door and Jim Glaze, captain of the Yale five, entered when invited to do so.

Dick was surprised at the appearance of this visitor, to whom he offered a chair, which was accepted.

“Merriwell,” said Glaze abruptly, “you play basketball, and we need you.”

“Oh, but I haven’t been practising, you know,” returned Dick, in surprise. “I’ve only played two practice games this year.”

“And I saw your work in both those games. I know about your playing last year. There’s no question but you would have made the five had you come out at the call for candidates.”

“But you know how my time is taken up. Football——”

“Is over for this year. Basketball is just beginning in earnest.”

“A fellow needs some rest, Glaze.”

“Merriwell, the team isn’t satisfactory to me. I’ve worked hard to get it into condition, and I’m not the only one who has worked hard. It lacks something, and I’ve arrived at the conclusion that it’s the spirit which should be instilled into it and could be instilled into it by the proper man. Of course, there are plenty of men ready to fill Claxton’s place, but——”

“Ready to fill Claxton’s place?”

“Yes; we’ve decided to drop him.”

Dick could not express surprise over this, but his face betrayed regret.

“When he’s at his best,” he said, “he’s one of the fastest basketball-players I know of. I regarded him and Darrell as two of your best men.”

“Darrell’s all right, or will be when he steadies down a bit more. Claxton was a most promising forward; but you saw his poor work in the Holy Cross game, I presume? He’s been going backward for some days now, and that game seemed to settle it definitely that he was no longer fast enough for the five.”

“Have you dropped him yet?”

“Not yet, but I shall do so to-morrow.”

Dick rose and paced the floor, watched by the visitor. Suddenly he paused in front of Glaze.

“I wish you’d do me a favor, Glaze,” he said.

“What is it?”

“I wish you wouldn’t drop Claxton to-morrow.”

The captain of the five looked surprised, and then said:

“Oh, I know he’s one of your particular friends, Merriwell, but you wouldn’t wish me to keep a friend of yours on the team after he was no longer of any use, would you? You wouldn’t wish me to keep such a man on the team when he was a positive detriment?”

“I’m not asking you to keep Claxton with the intention of using him in any critical game, and I would not have you retain him or any other friend of mine merely because of friendship. I have a deeper reason. I can’t explain it fully, but I will say that I believe it will do Claxton no end of damage if he’s dropped just now. Later on, if you see fit to drop him, you’ll not hear a word of protest from me.”

Glaze drummed on the back of a chair with his fingers, frowning meditatively. Merriwell permitted him to think it over without seeking to carry his point by further words. Finally the visitor said:

“I don’t see as it will make any difference to the team whether he’s retained and not used or whether he’s dropped at once.”

“Not a bit,” said Dick.

“Therefore, I’m ready to make a contract with you,” said the captain of the five shrewdly. “If you’ll come out for practise to-morrow and agree to do your level best to get in condition for the Harvard game next Saturday, I’ll take all the time you wish about dropping Claxton. I’ll let him practise regularly and keep him with the substitutes when we play.”

“Let it be understood that I’m not pledging myself to play regularly throughout the season, Glaze; but I will try to get into form, and do all in my power to brace the team up. I will play next Saturday, in case I can fit myself for it in that length of time.”

“Well, that’s all I ask,” cried the visitor triumphantly, as he rose to his feet. “I know your enthusiasm and spirit, Merriwell, and I feel sure once we’ve got you into the game you’ll stick by us as long as you
may be needed. I've been anxious to give Harvard a check when we meet her, but you can see that I feel hardly hopeful of doing it now.

"Your friend, Sparkfair, is captain of that team, and they say he's turned out the fastest five Harvard has produced in years. They've trimmed everything they've met thus far. On the other hand, we've had hard work to take half the games we've played. It has been dully discouraging, and it became absolutely disheartening when Claxton, one of our most reliable men, suddenly flunked. I'm not a jealous or envious man, old chap. Although I'm captain of the team, I shall regard it as a favor if you take hold and work hard to put snap and ginger into those men. They're too slow, Dick, and I can't seem to liven them up."

"I'll do all I can, Glaze."

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CHAPTER IX.

THE CHARM AND THE CHARMER.

Naturally, Claxton was somewhat surprised when he discovered Dick ready to practise with the team and the substitutes on Monday. The Virginian was not feeling in first-class condition, however, and he avoided entering into conversation with Merriwell. Although he worked hard in practise, Rob was still far below his normal form.

On the other hand, Merriwell seemed to step into the work as fresh and snappy and skillful as if he had been at it from the very beginning of the season. It was noteworthy, too, that his rapid work, his vim, his certainty and go seemed to have an effect on every other man upon the floor, with the result that practise was far more satisfactory than it had been for some time.

If Claxton suspected there was any intention of dropping him and filling his place with Merriwell he kept still about it and waited for the notification to come from the regular channel. Possibly it surprised him that it did not come.

Indeed, Glaze was a generous fellow, for many of those men heard him openly express his appreciation for Dick's assistance in livening up the team. Claxton likewise heard this, and wondered if that was the only reason why Merriwell was on the floor. It seemed possible that Dick had been taken in more for his coaching and example than for use as a regular member of the team. The Southerner was aware that Dick had not contemplated playing basketball during the season.

On Friday morning, as he was coming from a lecture, Merriwell encountered Glaze, who stopped him and said:

"Your friend, Claxton, has gone on ahead of us."

"Gone on?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"To Boston."

"Really?"

"Yes, he's gone."

"When did he leave?"

"First train this morning. Notified me last night that he would have to go—that business made it necessary."

Glaze smiled in a knowing way as he said this, and Dick decided the man had heard something about the affair between the Southerner and the actress.

In a moment Merriwell said:

"Glaze, I'm going to Boston to-day myself."

"Eh?" exclaimed the captain of the five. "You are? Why, there's practise this afternoon, and—"

"I also have business in Boston," said Dick significantly. "Where will the team stop when it arrives?"

"At the Brunswick."

"I'll be there."

"Oh, very well," said Glaze. "I presume you're going on account of your friend, Claxton? Better let him alone, old chap. It never does any good to interfere in such matters. I didn't know what ailed the fellow, but I've lately heard that he's had his head turned by a lady of the footlights."

Dick made no retort to this. He had determined upon his immediate course of action, and, therefore, he lost no time in getting ready, packing his big leather grip, writing a note for Buckhart, who was absent, and hustling to catch a midday train.

He registered at the Brunswick shortly after four o'clock that afternoon.

Glancing over the register, he sought in vain for the name of Claxton.

"But I know where to find him," he thought.

Before dinner he strolled down Boylston Street to Tremont and applied for a seat at the box-office of the Majestic.

He was informed that every seat in the house was sold. Standing-room only remained to be purchased.

As Dick left the theater he was accosted upon the sidewalk by a speculator, who had a bunch of tickets representing the very best seats in the house.
"So these pests are getting into Boston," thought the Yale man disgustedly. "They have full swing in New York. Even the managers who would give the public a square deal are prevented by the fact that the speculators are licensed by the city and can't be stopped from plying their business. From their standpoint, the business is legitimate; but it's an imposition on the public, and the managers who permit it, or who are concerned in the plot to raise more money for their seats than the scale of prices would bring, should be boycotted. It's been rather agreeable not to find these fellows here in Boston, but evidently they're getting a foothold."

Returning to the hotel, he purchased a seat through the regular outside agency for theater tickets.

The curtain was up when he arrived at the theater that night. Barely had he been conducted to his seat and settled himself when he discovered Claxton in a box. The Virginian was wearing full 'dress, which became him handsomely. He was indeed a fine-looking young man whom almost any girl must have admired.

Merriwell was satisfied that he had not been observed by Claxton.

The Southerner betrayed very little interest in the play, which was now more than familiar to him, and not until Elifie Larkin danced upon the stage did anything behind the footlights receive his full attention. She knew he was there and smiled upon him.

"It's all very fine," thought Dick; "but if June knew what a chump Rob was making of himself I'm sure she would be thoroughly disgusted with him. He certainly has got what Stevenson calls, 'a fine, whirling, weather-cock of a brain.'"

When Elifie had sung and danced and was recalled, Claxton flung her a gorgeous bunch of immense red roses.

"And those cost him the price of a good supper if they cost a cent," thought Dick. "By Jove! he certainly is going the limit while his cash lasts; but it can't last long at this rate."

Sitting through the performance, Merriwell made a study of the little actress who had infatuated Claxton. He noted every peculiarity of her looks, voice, and manner. He sought to dissect her character, and when he had finished he was forced to confess that she really possessed a sort of piquant, innocent charm which was not even marred by a single token of that blase atmosphere which is characteristic with almost all women of the stage. There was not about her a single trace of that boredom with life which many actresses betray in spite of all efforts to hide it. She was, in truth, just a charming, lively, bewitching girl, whose delight in her work and whose natural endowment for it made her an actress who succeeded without resorting to the usual artificial expedients of the stage. Really, she did not seem to be acting at all; she was simply herself. Her singing indicated that she was a person of sentiment, as well as emotions. Her dancing seemed to proclaim that she was naturally and truly an artist.

"By Jove!" thought Dick, "it's going to be hard work to break the charm this girl must have cast upon Claxton. There's only one way to do it. She herself must disillusion him."

He left the theater and walked to Schollay Square, seeking to formulate some plan of action. Returning, he finally reached the Thorndike Hotel, and, observing some fellows who looked like college men entering the English Room, he followed them.

His ears were smitten by a burst of music as he pushed through the big revolving door. He handed his top-coat and hat to a checker and followed the head waiter down the aisle between two rows of booths, which were filled with gay, after-theater parties. Being alone, there was no thought of conducting him to a booth, and he was finally placed at a small table in the large, open section of the dining-room. The place was well filled, and the booths were all occupied.

 Barely had Dick taken his seat when he gave a start of surprise.

In one of the nearest booths sat Claxton and Elifie Larkin.

CHAPTER X.

A WASTED EFFORT.

The little actress was tastily and stylishly dressed, with none of the peculiarity of costume or effort at effect which usually marks the woman of the stage; and yet about her there was something which denoted that she was such a woman. She wore few jewels, and evidently was careful about making any ostentatious display of them. She was talking and laughing between courses, while Claxton hung on her every word as if the sound of her voice was the sweetest music that had ever greeted his eager ears. His eyes were fastened upon her changeable mobile face, and he appeared utterly oblivious of anything and everything outside that booth.
By chance Miss Larkin observed Dick as he settled upon his chair and gave that start of surprise at seeing her there with his college friend. In a moment she spoke quietly to Claxton, calling his attention to Dick and inquiring if he knew him.

"Know him?" breathed Rob. "By Jove, I should say I did! That's Merriwell—the great Dick Merriwell. He's a particular friend of mine, Miss Larkin—a ver' particular friend. I'm surprised to see him here."

"Bring him over and introduce him," commanded the girl.

Rob frowned and hesitated.

"Now, look here," he objected, "I don't know about this thing. You seem ver' anxious to meet him. All the girls have a way of getting smitten on Dick."

"Oh, then he's a regular master, is he?"

"No, no; 'deed he's nothing of the sort, Miss Larkin. He's a gentleman and the ver' soul of honor. He can't help it if the girls go daffy over him, can he?"

"My dear fellow, you make me a hundred times more eager to meet your remarkable friend. I insist that you bring him over at once."

"But he will spoil our little tête-à-tête, Elfie. I've come all the way from New Haven to——"

Her eyes were beginning to flash, and he detected signs of trouble, which brought him to an abrupt pause and caused him to rise directly saying:

"Oh, ver' well; I'll bring him over."

And so it happened that, in a brief space of time, Merriwell was bowing before Miss Larkin, who gave him a pleasant smile, saying with the utmost frankness:

"I insisted that Mr. Claxton should bring you over and introduce you, Mr. Merriwell. He told me that you were one of his most esteemed college friends. Won't you join us here in this booth? It's much more cozy, I'm sure, than to sit out there all by your lonesome in the midst of a lot of strangers."

Dick consented to join them, not a little to Claxton's dismay and chagrin, although Rob mildly united with the girl in urging him.

And so it happened that Merriwell accomplished a part of his already well-defined plan, for he became acquainted with Elfie Larkin, whom he had that night resolved to meet ere another day elapsed. He found her quite as interesting off the stage and at short range as she had seemed to be behind the footlights. To his surprise, she had little of that vapidness and person-of-the-world atmosphere which he had expected to discover in her on the briefest acquaintance. To be sure, she was wrapped up in her profession, but she would not have "talked shop" had not Merriwell himself persisted in following up the subject.

He found that, instead of being satisfied with her present fame and accomplishments, she was genuinely ambitious to rise higher, to get away from musical pieces and burlesques and to achieve attainments in the legitimate. She did not boast and she did not "knock." It was probable she had been told a hundred times that she ought to be the star of the "Bird of Paradise" company, yet she spoke not only with kindness but with enthusiasm of Lulu Barrington, who held that position. Again and again she sought to talk of other things, telling of her delight in college sports, such as football and baseball, and deploring the fact that since adopting a profession she had always been obliged to work so hard that she had never yet seen one of the great football-games between teams representing the leading colleges of America. She likewise said that she was filled with regret because it would be impossible for her to see the basketball-game between Yale and Harvard, in which Claxton was to take part.

"Something of which I'm not wholly certain," put in Rob, giving Dick a quick glance. "Somehow, I have a feeling that I'm not to be in that game."

When the waiter came with a cooler containing a quart bottle of champagne Miss Larkin gave Claxton a significant look which he understood and which led him to smile and shake his head.

"It's no use," he declared; "he won't touch it."

Here the waiter politely murmured something about bringing another glass, which forced Rob to turn to Dick.

"You know I don't drink champagne, old man," said Merriwell.

"Yes, I know it, and I suppose you're thinking rather unpleasant things of me because I'm drinking it just now."

"I think you have no right to be drinking wine while you're supposed to keep in condition for basketball."

Miss Larkin opened her eyes in surprise.

"Oh!" she said. "Is that right? Is there a rule against it? Why didn't you tell me, Mr. Claxton? You never said a word about it."

"Oh, it's a nonsensical rule," said Rob, as the waiter poured a bit of wine into his glass and then filled that of the actress to the brim. "I know Merriwell doesn't agree with me, and I beg yo' not to stir him up by arousing a discussion. No person can succeed in an
argument with him. He always gets the best of it, he’s so exceedingly clever.”

But Miss Larkin did not heed this warning. Instead of that, she fixed her eyes on Dick, asking:

“Do you really think that drinking a little wine is injurious for a man who plays basketball?”

“Whether I think so or not, Miss Larkin, I know it’s against rules. When a man eats late suppers and drinks champagne he’s breaking three rules of training. He’s eating wrong, he’s drinking wrong, and he’s keeping late hours. Such conduct can have only one effect on him—it causes him to deteriorate in his playing. If he keeps it up he goes to pieces sooner or later.”

“But you’re breaking one of the rules,” interposed Claxton swiftly. “You won’t eat anything to harm you, but you’re keeping late hours, and to-morrow Yale plays Harvard.”

“My dear fellow, I’m not yet a regular member of the team. It is true I’ve been practising with it this week at the request of Captain Glaze.”

As skilfully as possible, Dick avoided acknowledging that he had broken the rule in regard to hours solely because of his interest in Claxton and his determination to do something to prevent the fellow from continuing in a course which might mean the ruin of his whole career.

Miss Larkin turned to the waiter, who was on the point of moving away.

“Waiter,” she said, “you may remove the wine.”

“Eh?” exclaimed Claxton, in surprise. “Remove the wine?”

“Take it away, waiter,” directed the actress.

“Is anything the matter with it, miss?” asked the attendant.

“Nothing at all; but we don’t want it. It’s all right; it will be paid for, but you may take it away at once.”

In vain Claxton protested. She had her way, and the wine was removed untouched. Then she turned to Rob and asked him a bit sternly why he had not told her the truth and let her know that he was breaking rules and doing things which might prove of injury to him.

Inwardly Dick Merriwell was saying:

“Now I’m sure of the proper course to follow. Now I feel certain I can succeed with her.”

Finally he sought to pay his portion of the check, declaring that he must go. Claxton would not permit him to settle for anything, a course in which he was silently supported by Miss Larkin. So Dick, having learned that Rob was registered at Young’s and the actress at the Touraine, bade them good night and left them there.

In his room at the Brunswick he spent half an hour in meditating on a plan to pursue, and then went to bed and slept soundly.

Near eleven o’clock the following forenoon Miss Larkin received Merriwell’s card in her rooms at the Touraine. At the time she was attended by her maid, having finished breakfast a short time before.

Dick, waiting below, was a bit surprised when the boy returned and informed him that Miss Larkin would see him in her rooms. He took the elevator and was conducted to the door of the actress’ rooms. Miss Larkin rose to greet him with a smile as he entered. She introduced him to a plain, dowdy, middle-aged woman, who played one of the female comedy parts in the “Bird of Paradise.”

“Really, you’ll excuse me for not coming down, Mr. Merriwell,” she said; “but I’m a trifle indolent in the morning, and Mrs. Rider is a most efficient chaperon.”

Dick did not permit her to rest under any illusion as to the cause of his visit. Without delay, and yet with a certain polite deftness, he came to the point and told her he had called to speak of Rob Claxton.

“Oh, I presume you’re going to scold me because I’ve been permitting him to drink wine with me,” said Miss Larkin. “Honestly and truly, I’m conscience-stricken. He’s such a nice boy, too. You know if he wasn’t a college man I’d really feel guilty if I permitted him to buy wine for me at all. But these college men are such gay fellows that they seem different from just ordinary boys.”

“By which I presume you mean that you think it all right for a college man, simply because he is a college man, to drink wine and live faster than any young man should live?”

“Well, really, I don’t know; but I—I—anyhow, they do live faster, don’t they?”

“Perhaps some of them do. A great many of them live altogether too fast, it must be admitted. Miss Larkin, I’m here to speak of a mighty delicate subject, and I hope you will not be offended, although I seriously fear that you may. Rob Claxton is one of my most intimate friends, and he’s a fellow in whose welfare I take the greatest interest. That’s why I’m butting in now. That’s why I’m doing something that makes me writhe, and fills my soul with a feeling of repulsion against what I’ve decided to do. I’ve chosen my course, nevertheless, and I shall not turn
back. I'm going to appeal to you, Miss Larkin, to do something that I'm sure will seem mean and despicable. And yet, it's the only thing that can be done to save Rob Claxton from ruining himself."

By this time she was keenly interested, although filled with wonderment and apprehension. Dick continued swiftly, outlining his plan. At first he appealed in a most subtle and clever manner to her better nature and her interest in the handsome Virginian. He led her to declare that not for the world would she do anything that she knew might permanently injure Rob. When she seemed a bit inclined to laugh and chaff him, Dick found a method of checking this inclination and holding her attention.

"He told her of Claxton's interest in June Arlington, but he saw that this made little impression. Next he spoke of Claxton's home and the fact that he was really poor, even though a large estate remained in the possession of the family. He told of the ambition of Rob's father to have his son graduate from Yale and of the efforts of the boy's mother, after his father's death, to get together enough money to take Rob through that college like a gentleman. He told of Claxton's recent economy and of his sister's struggle to help by crushing her own pride and going forth into the world as a stenographer. By this time he had the most intense attention of his listener, and he fancied his truthful narrative was bound to have the desired effect.

"Miss Larkin," he said, continuing without a pause, Claxton is a man who cannot afford to spend his money as he has been spending it for some time past. But he's also a man of such pride and temper that even I, his best friend, can't appeal to him and reason with him now that he has become so deeply infatuated with you. Already he has ruined his basketball-playing so that the captain of the team would have dropped him last Monday only for me. That would be the beginning. If he kept on as he has been going, within two months he would find himself out of college.

"I'm sure his sudden infatuation for you has led him to forget that very young lady of whom I spoke. If he's suspended from college or forced to get out from lack of funds, having squandered the money he should have husbanded, his father's dying wish will have been useless and his invalid mother's heart may be broken. I know it must seem to you as if the fellow is old enough to look out for himself, and so he is. In most things he's as manly a chap as ever stepped. Since I met you last night and talked with you I've understood how it happens that he's so crazy over you, for it is sheer lunacy. You can't afford to have this man make the mistake of his life on your account. I don't believe after listening to what you were saying about your profession and your ambitions that you would give up the stage for a poverty-stricken young gentleman of Virginia."

She forced a laugh, shrugging her shapely shoulders a wee bit.

"Dear me!" she murmured, "what a desperate woman I am! Why, I'm a perfect wretch, am I not? Isn't it dreadful that I should come so near ruining this young man! Isn't it fine that he has such a guardian as you, Mr. Merriwell?"

At last he saw her claws unsheathed the least bit.

"I'm sorry you're going to take it this way, Miss Larkin," he said quietly. "I can't appeal to the cool judgment and reason of Claxton, for since he met you he has no such qualifications. His fate is in your hands."

"Well, what would you have me do, sir?"

"I hoped I might induce you to drop Claxton at once. It's the only way. He must be given to understand that it's all over between you and him. There must not be left in his mind a shadow of a doubt or a gleam of hope. It will upset him dreadfully at first, but it should bring him to his senses and make a man of him eventually."

The girl rose and stood before Dick. There was no posing, no effort for effect, no declaiming or lifting of the voice. In the quietest way imaginable, she said:

"You'd have me give him to understand that I'm just a brainless, heartless, cold-blooded creature, would you? That's what you ask of me, is it? Are you aware that I like Rob Claxton? Are you aware that I like him better than any young fellow I ever met in all my life? It's true I wouldn't think of marrying him, yet I want him to remain my friend, and I wouldn't for the world have him believe me such a heartless wretch as you desire. It's an insult for you to come here and propose such a plan. You have my answer."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN WHO WON THE GAME.

The rink was crowded, and the spectators saw a game between the crimson and the blue that kept them keyed to the highest pitch of excitement from start to finish. Harvard had fully expected to walk away
with the game in a hurry, and Sparkfair went onto the
floor with his men literally bubbling with confidence.
The few Yale rooters who had chased the five up from
New Haven pretended that they likewise were filled
with confidence and cheered lustily as the men put in a
bit of snappy practice before the trouble commenced.

The fact that it was generally believed Merriwell
would be in that game had really given the Yale sup-
porters a little heart to make the journey to Cam-
bridge. They were not disappointed. Dick was there
as right forward for Yale, and Rob Claxton was one
of the substitutes.

The instant the whistle shrilled and the ball
was tossed into the air Harvard went at it with a panther-
ish rush. Sparkfair actually beat Dick to the ball and
batted it into the hands of Rance Stockton, playing
right back for Yale. Stockton shot it across to Shar-
on, who passed it instantly to Dick, and Dick sent the
ball into the hands of Darrell, the left forward, who
had only Lemuel Eason, Harvard's right back, be-
tween him and the basket.

Darrell attempted to make a quick cast, fantas-
ing he could whip the ball to the basket before Eason
could wake up; but, to his surprise, the "lazy man of
Cambridge" was equally as quick as himself and
seemed to know precisely what he meant to do. Eason
shot up his full, long, lank length and blocked the
ball with both hands.

A rush and a scramble followed. A Yale man
stooped for the ball, but a Harvard man shot his hands
from the rear between the legs of the Eli and snapped
the sphere away, at the same time giving the repre-
sentative of the blue a shoulder that tipped him for-
ward.

In another moment Harvard was hot after Yale's
goal. Sparkfair and Doyle were working together
down near the Yale basket, and they kept Sharon and
Stockton on the jump. Glaze, playing center for his
team, attempted to get in, but seemed to battle Sharon
instead of the enemy, and suddenly Sparkfair made a
snappy, sidelong, swinging cast that dropped the ball
perfectly into Yale's basket.

Harvard had scored the first goal, and to the great
crowd it seemed as if she was certain to secure many
others in rapid succession.

Although the game was swift and fierce and, there-
fore, now and then a foul was made, there was no
genuine roughing it and not the least symptom of
slugging. It was likewise apparent that most of the
fouling was purely unintentional. Nevertheless, Har-
vard grew exasperated when minute after minute sped
on and Yale played with such ginger and go that the
 crimson could not secure another goal. It was true
that Harvard was keeping the blue on the defensive
most of the time, but one basket was anything but a
safe margin, and those men knew it.

From his position beyond the field of action Clax-
ton looked on with his blood throbbing and his heart
filled with disappointment because he was not in that
game. Still, he realized that his playing in the last
game had provided Glaze with an excellent reason for
trying a change.

Finally Merriwell and Darrell took a splurt which
seemed to liven the whole team, and eventually Har-
vard became aware that she was having all she could
do to keep the ball away from her basket. Dick's
swift, heady playing was the very thing that made a
new team of the Yale five. Before long it began to
worry Sparkfair a bit, although he did not betray it.

It was Merriwell who first dropped the ball into the
crimson basket.

The score was tied.

With the next play Harvard came back with a fear-
ful rush, and almost before Yale's backs could get into
gear Doyle had snapped the ball past Rance Stockton
with a twisting, spinning, forward toss that landed
it on the rim of the basket, from which it squirmed
into the receptacle.

Again before the half ended Harvard scored.
Therefore, intermission found the score 3 to 1 in
favor of the crimson; but not even the most enthusi-
astic Harvardite was now inclined to declare that it
had been an easy snap.

Claxton had little to say during the intermission.
Glaze talked to his men and urged them to fight still
harder for the glory of the blue.

The second half opened with Harvard getting into
it again in that same swift, fierce, pantherish way; but
Yale was equally swift and pantherish, and a full min-
ute of terrifically exciting playing ensued. Then, in
a clash within tossing distance of the Yale basket, Jack
Sharon twisted his ankle and put himself out of the
game.

Claxton was ready, but Kirby was the substitute
called to fill Sharon's place. The brief pause seemed
to incite Harvard still more, for resumption of play
found the crimson at Yale in a most terrific fashion.
The spectators went wild with excitement, and the
building literally shook beneath the tremendous volume
of Harvard cheers.

Something caused Rob Claxton to get into a posi-
tion where he could look up at the great crowd in the
balcony, and suddenly he seemed turned to stone, for up there amid the Harvard colors he saw a girl waving a blue pennant. He knew her, although he could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes.

It was June Arlington!

"June!" he breathed. "She's here—she's here to see him! Still—still, she's carrying Yale colors."

So enraptured was he that he failed to hear Glaze calling him until his name had been repeated a number of times. Then he saw Merriwell, who had walked off the floor with a lamed shoulder that prevented him from lifting his arm, which dangled uselessly at his side.

"Get in there, Claxton," said Dick; "get in there and play for your life! My shoulder is hurt, and they've driven me off the floor. Harvard hasn't won this game yet. We've got a chance for it. Show 'em what you're made of, Rob, old man."

The next thing Claxton knew he was out there playing right forward, and the game was on again. For a moment or two he seemed dazed beneath that whirling rush around him, and something caused him to lift his eyes to the balcony where, in the very first row, sat June Arlington. She smiled and waved her pennant.

The ball came at Rob. He caught it, whirled, passed it. From that instant on he was in the game for all he was worth, and never before had he played as well. Even though that girl in the balcony was waving a blue pennant, he fancied she was there to watch Dale Sparkfair play, and fiercely he vowed that he would show her there was some one Sparkfair's equal.

Dick Merriwell's ginger had put life into the team, but that team did not lose its snap and go with the loss of Merriwell, for Claxton was equally swift and apparently equally as skilful. He was like a cat upon his feet, and he always seemed to be in the right place at the right time. It was Claxton who foiled Grace and got into position to take a beautiful pass from Darrell before making a cast for the basket. The fortunes of Yale rested in the sure eye and steady nerves of the lad who held the ball. He lost not a second, yet he dropped the ball into the basket as accurately as if he had spent any amount of time in the effort.

The small crowd of Yale men cheered in the balcony.

Claxton did not forget June Arlington, but not once more did he lift his eyes in search of her. He paid strict attention to the game and worked as if his life depended on it. Glaze himself was astounded and delighted by the wonderful playing of the Virginian.

With two such forwards as Darrell and Claxton, Yale became more and more aggressive. At last Darrell took his turn and dropped the ball into the wicker for the point that tied the score.

The still cheering but disconcerted Harvard men in the balcony noted the time and prophesied that the game would go into an extra period. But Yale was fighting as she often fights in the last moments of a great game. She had confidence now, while the confidence of Harvard was somewhat undermined.

Claxton was the man who turned the trick. In the midst of a play that drew the attention of Grace, the Virginian slipped under the Harvard man's arm and was behind him when the ball came straight into his fingers. Eason, however, had noted the danger, and he leaped across in haste to plant himself in position to block the shot at the basket.

Claxton seemed to take a little too much time, and the Yale men groaned as they saw tall, long-geared Harvard chap fling himself, with his feet wide apart and his hands outstretched, between Rob and the goal. Eason was close to Claxton, so close that there was no chance for the Virginian to cast past him or over him.

Like a flash, Rob stooped and snapped the ball with a long, forward reach right through between Eason's legs. It was a two-handed, upward cast, and the oval sailed up and over into the basket in the handsomest manner imaginable, alighting in the receptacle and remaining there for the final and decisive goal just as the whistle shrilly announced the end of the game.

Jim Glaze nearly shook the arm off Claxton.

"You never before played such a game in all your life, old man," he said. "It was simply marvelous. That last goal was a corker. You won for us!"

Rob had not a word to say. He walked off the floor without lifting his eyes to the place where he knew June Arlington sat. His ears seemed deaf to the fact that the little Yale squad above was cheering him like mad. He scarcely heeded Dick Merriwell when Dick spoke congratulations in the dressing-room. With all possible haste, he got out of his clothes and prepared to leave.

It was some time before the crowd of spectators left the floor; and, therefore, when Mr. Arlington reached the Yale dressing-room and inquired for Claxton Rob had found time to change his clothes and depart.

CHAPTER XII.

A PART WE r WELL PLAYED.

Claxton saw a portion of the final act of the "Bird of Paradise." He did not hurry about making his way around to the stage entrance, because he felt certain he would have to wait there a while for Elsie Larkin if he did hasten. Arriving at the door, he lingered and saw various members of the company come out and depart. The night was chilly, and he shivered a bit from the effects of the relaxation after the game. The members of the chorus passed him, and he saw a few of them meeting and departing with waiting friends. Finally the old door-keeper
came out, smoking his pipe, and looked Rob over a bit closely.

"Waiting for any one?" he asked gruffly.

"Yes," answered Rob, "I’m waiting for Miss Larkin."

"Then you needn’t wait any longer, young man."

"Why not?"

"She’s gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes. Been gone half an hour. Young man called for her and took her away."

"What?" cried Claxton incredulously. "You must be mistaken. She had an appointment with me."

The door-keeper laughed.

"All right," he said, "just you hang around and wait as long as you want to. Soon as the stage-hands and two three more of the company git out I’m going to close up for the night."

Claxton turned away bewildered.

"What the dickens does it mean?" he muttered.

"Why, she knew I’d be here. It was agreed between us that she should wait for me. A young man called for her! Why, confound it, there’s some misunderstanding. I don’t suppose she can be at the Touraine."

Nevertheless, he hastened over to the hotel, and his impatience would not permit him to send up to see if she was in her rooms. Instead of that, he took the elevator and quickly reached her door.

That door was standing open, and there were three persons inside. One was Mrs. Rider, the comedy woman chaperon, another was Elsie Larkin, and the third was—Dale Sparkfair!

Claxton stood frozen in his tracks as he saw Elsie laughing roguishly into Sparkfair’s eyes and beheld Dale regarding her with undisguised admiration. He started to knock and was standing with his hand uplifted when Mrs. Rider said:

"There’s Mr. Claxton at the door, Elsie."

The little actress turned to Rob, the smile swiftly changing to a look of annoyance and a frown.

"Oh, Mr. Claxton!" she exclaimed. "Yes, I’d quite forgotten about him."

"Yes, you wholly forget me," said Rob hoarsely, as he stepped in, his eyes on Sparkfair instead of her.

"You forgot that you had an appointment with me, didn’t you, Miss Larkin?"

"Really, I believe I did," she confessed. "That was rather stupid, wasn’t it? But then, you see Dale and I have made it up. We’re old friends, you know. We had a little quarrel—a foolish little quarrel—but I was to blame, and so I sent for him to-day, and now it’s all right again, isn’t it, Dale?"

"Oh, sure, Elsie," answered Sparkfair carelessly. "It’s all right."

"But it isn’t all right with me, Miss Larkin," said Rob, still glaring at Sparkfair as if he could murder the fellow on the spot, a fact which did not seem to disconcert Dale in the least. "You may have forgotten me, but, now that I’m here, I presume you’ll keep that supper engagement?"

"Indeed, no, Mr. Claxton. I hope you’ll excuse me. Really, I’ve come to the conclusion that late suppers and champagne are very bad for you. I’d advise you to cut them out. Mr. Sparkfair tells me that you won the basketball-game for your team to-night, but I’m sure you won’t be able to play that game much longer if you hit it up as you’ve been doing of late."

"Then you did think of me—you did remember our engagement?" came from Rob. "I’m sorry—ver’ sorry—Miss Larkin, that you should choose to tell me a falsehood."

"Oh, don’t talk to me in that way!" cried the little actress. "You tire me exceedingly, Mr. Claxton. I’ve grown quite bored with you. You were amusing for a time, but even amusing children become wearisome eventually. Good-night, Mr. Claxton."

Although Rob longed to throttle Sparkfair, he was far too gentlemanly to make a further scene there. His last glance at Dale, however, was replete with a threat. He bowed courteously, politely, hat in hand, bade them all good night, and left the room.

Like one in a trance, he permitted the elevator to take him down to the office floor. Like one in a trance, he scarcely heeded when Mr. Arlington seized his arm and marched him into the waiting-room, where June rose and came forward, her face rosy, her hands outstretched to congratulate him on his wonderful playing in the game.

And in the room above, which he had lately left, Elsie Larkin stood quite still, staring toward the open door, her lips parted as they had opened to call him back. Sparkfair looked at her and said:

"Miss Larkin, you’re pale! You look faint!"

She laughed shortly, harshly.

"Do I?" she said. "Well, don’t worry, I’m not going to faint. I’m too heartless and cold-blooded for that! When you see your friend, Richard Merriwell, just tell him that I took his advice. Tell him I hope he’s satisfied, now that he’s made me look like a wretch in the eyes of the finest boy I ever knew!"

THE END.

The Next Number (664) Will Contain

Dick Merriwell’s Driving:

OR,

"THE TERROR FROM TORONTO."

Claxton Redeems Himself—The Girl in the Balcony—

—The Hold-up—The Canadian—Claxton Gets His Eyes Opened—A Disturbing Situation—Plain Talk

—The Suspended Sword—Apprehension—The Thread is Cut—A Double Triumph.
WRECKED ON A WHALE.

It is well known that whales frequent meet with strange and exciting adventures in the course of their voyages, but probably few men who have found themselves in the position of Thomas Saunders, the bowman of the larboard, or chief mate, boat of the Druid, have survived to tell the tale.

"The Druid," a vessel of about one hundred tons, was a schooner of "sixty-barrel bulls" on what was known to the initiated as the "Middle Ground" between Australia and New Zealand. The chief mate's boat made fast to one of the whales, a lively fellow who led them a pretty dance to leeward of the Druid before they succeeded in giving him his death-wound.

Meanwhile, the captain had struck another whale, which went in the opposite direction. The second mate kept near the captain, and when the first whale went in his "barry," which was not until nearly sundown, those on board the chief mate's boat perceived, from the maneuvers of the ship, that the two boats were well to windward of her. At such a distance they were, of course, invisible to the leeward boat; but those on board the Druid, one of whom remained constantly at the masthead, could keep them all in sight, at least so long as daylight continued.

The sun was just dipping by the time the first boat's crew were ready to tow their prize to the ship, a hole cut in the whale's nib end and a strap rope for towing. But a dark cloud-bank was settling down in the weather horizon, out of which a strong wind might be expected at short notice. To attempt, therefore, what land we did of that whale to windward would be sheer folly; there was nothing to be done but to abandon the whale or to await the movement of the ship. They saw her stand on until she was hull down, then tack, and soon after haul the courses up and swing the head-yards abaft, a signal that she was just taking the captain's whale alongside.

The mate looked anxiously at the ship, and at the threatening aspect of the weather; then at the "sixty-barrel bull," the prize that he had fought so hard to win, and seemed unable, for a time, to make up his mind what course to pursue.

"What do you think of it, Beers," said he, at last, to his boat-steerer, a veteran whaler, old enough to have been the father of his superior officer.

"Well, I d'no, sir; it looks kind o' jubious to hang on here. There'll be a change of weather within an hour, and it'll be dark in less than that," added the mate. "If there was a prospect of fair weather I wouldn't care for the drugged shore, but I'd like to keep the run of each other's lights; but as it is I think we'd better 'waif' the whale and get to the ship while we have daylight."

A hole was cut in the body of the whale, and the "waif"—a flag attached to a slender spruce stick—inseted; the line was cast off from the towing-strap, and the order given to pull ahead, the boat's head being laid to windward, on a bee-line for the ship, then some four miles off.

"I don't know what the captain will think of our judgment in leaving the whale," mumbled the mate, using the word "our" as a salve to his conscience, like most people in similar circumstances, though he had acted for himself, except in so far as his judgment had been fortified by the hints of old Beers.

Nevertheless, he was somewhat ill at ease. It was very early in the voyage, and no similar emergency had occurred before. Besides, the captain had already shown himself very strict in all matters concerning the success of the voyage; consequently, the mate, a very young officer, felt a keen responsibility and an equally keen anxiety to know whether his action would meet with approval.

It was quite dark when they pulled up under the lee of the Druid; the black squall still hung threateningly in the sky, and the had driven hard in the weather that had happened. "Boat ahoy!" roared the captain sharply, as soon as he perceived their approach. "Who is there—Mr. Andrews?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"What is the matter with the whale?"

"Two points forward of your lee beam—four miles off."

"What did you leave him for?"
WEEKLY.

TIP TOP.

of the line under the whale's fin, until it brought up firmly at the "knuckle." Saunders was thus enabled to secure himself from again sliding off the whale's body. All this while he had secured the rest of the crew or of the boat, and had come to the conclusion that they must have all been lost.

Fortunately for the castaway, within half an hour after he had landed upon his floating island, the squall ceased, and the weather became calm, the wind now blowing to the north of west, and the heavens were clear overhead, and it was as light as it could well be on a moonless night.

Lightly and swiftly did the man hang out instinctively, as his eyes rested upon a bright light directly in front of him. Then there was a blinding flash, and the report of the Druid's gun thund'-ered forth, so close as to be quite startling. Nearer and nearer came the welcome glare, until the anxious watchful could make out the whole outline of the stout old craft.

With the energy of despair, he shouted his loudest to attract their attention before the ship swept past him. For well he knew that once left afloat without being perceived his last hope of safety was gone.

But sharp eyes and ears were on the alert; his cries were heard, and the ship brought rapidly up in the wind, while two boats were dropped into the water and manned as quickly as eager men could accomplish it. In less time almost than it takes to relate, Saunders was rescued from his perilous position, and the man in strong arms into the boat of Captain Gibbs, who, seemingly excited almost to insanity, had come himself on this errand of rescue.

The whole story excited him still more. With all speed they shot alongside the Druid, and Saunders was helped to the deck, the captain, meanwhile, never ceasing to issue his orders regarding the search to be made for the missing ones.

All three boats were soon down, with directions to "spread their chances," and to search thoroughly every foot of "ground" or sea as they went. A set of signals between the boats and the ship were rapidly agreed on, and the captain sprang down the side again into his boat. As he did so, those near him heard him muttering, in a low, bitter tone: "Heaven help me! Why did I do it?"

But all's well that ends well. Within an hour the reports of three muskets from the boats gave notice that the lost ones were found; and, strange to say, all were alive, though well-nigh exhausted. The boat had filled and rolled bottom up, but the crew had all succeeded in climbing upon her bottom, through the superhuman efforts of Mr. Andrews, who appeared to have but little regard for his own life, so long as he could save the others.

The strong supported the weak, and kept them upon the boat's bottom; but, nevertheless, the safety and preservation of the whole crew was little less than a miracle. Indeed, the old boat-steeerer, Beers, was almost gone, being quite insensible when help arrived.

When the first excitement was over, the captain took Mr. Andrews aside, and told him that no one could overhear, but his voice seemed choked with emotion, and the two stood grasping each other's hands for some little time. But from that hour a bond of brotherhood was established between them, which was broken only with the close of their lives.

And the whale? Fortunately, it was found and secured the next day; and in the excitement attending an unbroken series of successes for the rest of the voyage, most of those concerned in this yarn forgot the perilous adventure.

But upon Captain Gibbs, anyhow, the lesson taught by that stormy night was not lost.

DENTISTRY AMONG THE CHINESE.

Notwithstanding their skill in various of the mechanical arts, the Chinese dentists are far behind in their profession, though the Celestial cannot complain on the score of cheapness with regard to artificial teeth.

That a nation which practised the insertion of artificial teeth for scores of years before the art was introduced into Europe should be so crude in its method of extraction strike one as an explanation somewhat miraculous.

Among the middle and lower class Chinese, great trickery is resorted to by the often not bona-fide dentist, some of which is very cleverly performed. A case of tooth extraction is attributed by the Chinese in many cases to the gnawing of worms, and therefore the dentists' duty very often is merely to remove these worms, which they profess to be able to do. This operation is performed by means of a clever trick, the modus operandi of which is explained as follows:—

If the tooth is firm in the socket, the gum is separated from it with sharp instruments, which probe the gum and make it bleed. While this operation is proceeding, the cheek is held on one side by a bamboo tube, both ends of which are similar. When everything is ready, this is quickly turned and put into the mouth; the paper at the end, becoming moistened quickly, tears when rubbed against the other teeth; the worms, which were placed beforehand in the tube, consequently mix with the saliva, and when the dentist removes them with his forceps, the patient has never failed to state that the cause of the pain has been removed.

Should the patient not be satisfied by reason of the pain still continuing, this operation is performed again, which is generally satisfactory to the most obdurate Chinese.

These worms, however, are merely artificial, and so cleverly manufactured that they seldom fail to delude the patient, who, if not satisfied, is shown some live worms, which are kept in stock for the purpose. This deception, it must be stated, is only resorted to when the tooth is solidly fixed in the jaw.

To deceive a patient into the belief that his teeth or tooth was drawn without pain—caused by the operator—a powder is mixed by the patient with some water and applied to the tooth, whereby the tooth becomes loosened, and may be removed by thumb and forefinger. The only other means open to the operator, if the tooth be firm, is to cause the patient to be done surreptitiously; for unless a dentist makes it known that he extracts teeth without pain his services will very seldom be required.

Another article necessary to a Chinese dentist is a flat piece of iron with a hole at one end, which he uses to hook onto the end of the canine teeth when they are irregular, a sudden upward jerk causing their removal.

When the tooth is not sufficiently loosened, a tightly twisted piece of paper is adjusted in the mouth, so that when the patient closes his mouth it presses hardly on the partly loosened tooth. The operator then gives the paper a sharp pull and brings the tooth with it.

Artificial teeth are composed of either bone or ivory, and the tooth, having been sawn into the exact shape, is fastened to the adjoining teeth by copper wire or catgut string. If more than one tooth is required, they are made in one piece, and a hole having been drilled through it, a double string or wire is passed through it, and looped over the natural tooth at one end and tied to the teeth at the other. The process is not artistic in design, but it sufficiently answers the purpose.

The price of one of these teeth is generally from five cents to ten cents, and for half a dozen eighteen cents to twenty-five cents.

PICKING UP A LIVING.

You haven't doubtless heard of people picking up a living in the streets of New York. Of this class there is a curious species of whom we know but little. Where they come from and where they go is a mystery. They come out in the first gray of the morning, and operate to best advantage while the great metropolis world is asleep. For their occupation is to find out in what has been lost or thrown away.

The finder goes forth to find with the first tint of dawn. He follows the curb and delves along the theater-fronts and gutters fronting the swell restaurants and all-night houses, patrols the precincts of the roisterers and the pavements of the retail shopping-districts. He turns over every bit of paper, and searches no accumulation of rubbish behind the dust, for he has learned the knack of finding eyes, long accustomed to the search, are as sharp as a ferret's. What others would see only by chance he sees by instinct and from afar off. Now it is a cent, now a bit of silver fallen from some vest pocket, now a nickel, and then a piece of gold, and at unfrequently a pocketbook or diamond stinging in the mud, or golden watch-charm, or a pair of eye-glasses, or a horseshoe. The latter he never passes—and if it be well worn so much the better brings him back. He moves rapidly, for he is not alone in this business, and the more ground he can cover before the rest of the city is on its feet the better for him. His trained canines discover at once that which ten thousand pairs of other eyes have passed unheeded.
I loan them mine after I am done reading them, and they all love it dearly.

I attend the Millville high school, and every week I have orders to bring my friends each a copy. I have interested them all in "Tip Top," and they always look forward eagerly when Thursday comes for me to bring it.

From an ardent "Tip Top" admirer, JACOB AARON.

You are certainly proving yourself a staunch friend of "Tip Top," Jacob, and we think it will not be long ere you find your way into our Honor Roll. Let us hear from you again.

(A letter from Indiana.)

I have been an enthusiastic reader of the "Tip Top Weekly" for some time. Although I am a girl, I enjoy reading them the same as my brother, who purchases weekly copies.

My favorite characters in the "Tip Top" are Bart Hodge, Frank Merriswell, Dick Merriswell, Bruce Brown, Jack Diamond, Toots, Harry Rattleson. I also admire Elsie Bellwood, now Mrs. Hodge; Inza Burridge, now Mrs. Frank Merriswell; June Arlington, and Rose Sharon.

I just purchased two new copies of "Tip Top" today, and soon I'll get some more.

If this letter is published, I'll write another praising "Tip Top," as I think they are ideal literature for Young America. I think every boy and girl should read them.

HELEN BATES.

Thank you.

Last winter, as I was looking in at the magazines in our bookseller's window, I noticed a publication called "Tip Top Weekly." On the cover was a picture of the annual boat race between Yale and Harvard. Being, as I am, a lover of sports, I purchased the magazine and read it. From that day until this I am a reader and "booster" of "Tip Top." It's the same old thing, only this year a reader always a reader.

How can you help it? If more boys read "Tip Top," I don't think there would be so many street festivities as one sees and reads about. "Tip Top" tells many sensible things to boys, and they should pattern themselves after the Merriswells, Dick and Frank.

What I would like to know are some Yale college songs and yells. Would you please tell me how I could secure these, or could you print a yell or song, from week to week, through the Applause columns. I think they would be very much appreciated by others except our club.

Wishing Street & Smith, B. L. Standish, and all the readers of "Tip Top" success, I remain a loyal friend to "Tip Top," Buffalo, N. Y.

T. J. GOODWILL.

There are collections of college songs published. You should make inquiries at your leading bookstore. For a small sum you can get them all in a single volume.

I have long felt a great desire to express my views concerning this magazine. I have not been reading it very long, but I must say I think it one of the purest, cleanest pieces of literature I have ever seen.

If the boys, and the girls too, for that matter, would read "Tip Top" carefully, and read it for the good that can be gotten from it, instead of reading so many of these sensational stories, I believe we would have more such characters as Dick, Brad, Claxton, Frank, June, Mabel, and Claudia. Yes, and Joe Crownfoot, too. Who has shown more mirth and principle than he, in giving up his best and brightest hopes to go back to his people?

B. L. STANDISH.

That is just what we keep on saying, frind, week in and week out. Suppose each purchaser of a "Tip Top" made one convert this month, what a task it would give us to print six edition large enough to go around. But we'd like to work the job, nevertheless.

(A letter from Ohio.)

Not having written you since I started reading "Tip Top," which has been two years now, I have kept delaying it until...
to-day. When I finished reading No. 40, and came to where Joe C. made that spell on the past and present of the Indians' famous "Tip Top" I was not surprised that the Wrangell made the boom. He had always said, you always have a feeling that you are wanted and welcome every place you go, and you are at peace with yourself. Others who want to boast that they have been at the New York, we have wished many times B. L. Standish was with me; he could see enough in one day to keep his readers in fever-heat for another year. And to see them dance some of the old Wrangell reels. Say, boys, that would set even the most jaded spirits a-trembling. All the boys would like to see B. L. S., but we know that is impossible; so boys, let's see if we can't get him to have his photo come out on the front of the "Only Book, "Tip Top." One often wonders what kind of a looking man it is who can hold hundreds of thousands of minds spellbound an hour or two out of each week. I will close, wishing long life to Burt L. Standish and Street & Smith. Yours, W. H. RUNYAN.

Mr. Standish is one of the most modest of men. We have thus far failed to influence him to let us print his photo in "Tip Top." As you say, Virginia is one of the most delightful countries on the face of the globe—many people declare it is the only Paradise on earth.

(A letter from Massachusetts.)

I have been a constant reader of the "Tip Top" for five years, and would rather lose all my other weeklies than one copy of it.

It certainly is rightly called the "king of weeklies," and has helped me a great deal in athletic sports; and to give up cigarettes before they had harmed me. I like the stories because they are true and bright, and combine athletics, love, and adventure into one fascinating whole.

I think Burt L. Standish has done more to make boys temperate and clean in athletics than any other writer in the country, and I have already secured seven new readers of this weekly, and hope to secure enough to form a "Tip Top" club.

With three cheers for "The Merriest" and Burt L., I remain yours truly,

STUART R. WARD.

You are doing nobly, and we send you our most hearty thanks. Write again, Stuart, when the spirit moves.

(A letter from New Jersey.)

I have been very sick, laid up seven months with rheumatism, and have read "Tip Top" every day. "Tip Top" was my companion, and I think it a first. I know who the boys are, and I would say to him: "Somebody who reads cheap stories is a coward." I used to think they were stories like Jesse James. He didn't tell me to read one and find out for myself how interesting the stories were.

The first one I read was "Frank Merriwell in Bulldog Tunnel." Well, after I read that I asked my brother to forgive me for saying anything against so good a story. I then read every copy in the house. I was sorry I had not started to read them sooner, and also regret that they only come once a week. I have a sister twelve years old, and we two have a friendly scrap almost every Friday to see who reads it first. We both have favorites. They are Frank and Frank, Jr., Inza, and Dick. I think if we were a fellow I would be jealous of Dick, but I think he is like Jesse James. I know who the boys are, and I would say to him: "Somebody who reads cheap stories is a coward." I think he is the best, and I have read them ever since.

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9½ inches; forearms, 10½ inches; expanded, 12½ inches; wrists, 6½ inches. I would like to know the quickest way of building strong muscles in the arms. Records: 34 mile, 23 seconds; throw baseball, 115 yards.

Westville, Nova Scotia.

In weight and chest you are indeed fine, but if you can cut down waist measurement to 27 inches it would add to your command and make you a better runner. Only regular and systematic exercise of the muscles can strengthen them. Observe the muscles of the wings of wild ducks, gulls and all birds that fly a great deal; constant work makes the muscles as "hard as nails." Then take the penguin, that does not use wings to any extent, and note the difference.

PROF. FOURMEN: I have been a steady reader of "Tip Top" for about two years. Following are my measurements; please criticize. Age, 17 years; height, 5 feet 10 inches; weight, 162 pounds; neck, 14 inches; chest, normal, 33 inches; expanded, 38 inches; biceps, 11 inches; flexed, 13½ inches; wrist, 7 inches; waist, 31½ inches; thigh, 21½ inches; calf, 14½ inches. I am always healthy; am a good runner, jumper, and a fair ballplayer. Hoping to see this in print, I remain, yours, Nick Moore.

Weight 7 pounds over; chest 6 inches under, and of course, under the circumstances, as I expected, you measure too much about the waist, which should be 29 inches. You may be healthy, John, but you would be in a far better condition to accomplish things if you could but add inches to your chest.

PROF. FOURMEN: Will you kindly answer the following questions? 1. How are my measurements? Age, 13 years; weight, 103 pounds; shoulders, across, 14 inches; height, 5 feet 3½ inches; chest, normal, 29 inches; expanded, 32½ inches; waist, 20 inches; wrist, 6 inches; ankle, 9 inches; calf, 12 inches; biceps, 9 inches. What are my weak points? What must I do for them? Hoping to see this in print, I remain, yours respectfully, J. A. D. Birmingham, Ala.

Chest should be nearly 33 inches, normal, so you see where you lack. You can afford to lose an inch about the waist, easily enough.

PROF. FOURMEN: Kindly let me know what exercises I should take, for my bones are displaced. Many people say that I ought to take exercises and some not. I am tall and strong. My height, 5 feet 2 inches; weight, 119 pounds; age, 15 years. I have one bone sticking out at my left side near my heart. The other is on my right side by my shoulder. Yours truly,

M. N.

You should consult a reputable doctor. I would not venture to advise you.

PROF. FOURMEN: Would you please take time to answer a few questions and consider a few measurements? Age, 14 years 3 months; height, 5 feet; weight, 91 pounds; across shoulders, 15 inches; neck, 12 inches; chest, normal, 28 inches; expanded, 33 inches; biceps, normal, 9 inches; expanded, 10 inches; forearms, 9 inches; wrist, 6 inches; waist, 26 inches; thigh, 18 inches; calf, 11½ inches; ankle, 8 inches. Am I below or above the average 14-year-old boy? Is candy good for the system? What are my weak points? Thanking you in advance, I am, Denver, Colo.

Weight just right; chest lacks only an inch of the average, which you can easily gain if you care. Waist is a couple of inches too large, and, while this does not detract from your bodily condition, or act as a detriment to health, it does prevent you from attaining physical perfection. Taken in moderation, candy is good.

PROF. FOURMEN: My measurements are as follows: Age, 17 years; weight, 162 pounds; height, 5 feet 7 inches; wrists, 6½ inches; chest, normal, 30½ inches; expanded, 33½ inches; calves, 11½ inches; thigh, 18 inches; neck, 13½ inches; waist, 27½ inches; shoulders, 17½ inches; biceps, 9½ inches; expanded, 9½ inches; forearm, 10½ inches. 1. How are my measurements? 2. What are my weak points? 3. Are my dumbbells too heavy? 4. How can I improve my weak points? 5. Is tea harmful? 6. How can I get rosy cheeks? 7. How long must I exercise every day, and when? 8. A kid I smoke occasionally. How am I to quit? Hoping to find this in print, and thanking you in advance, I remain, yours truly.

Jack B. St. Louis, Mo.

1. Weight 10 pounds shy, chest 6 inches ditto.

2. Chest.

3. You would do better with lighter dumb-bells.

4. Deep breathing and various exercises for the chest will add inches to your girth; and make it a point to sit and stand erect.

5. Not if taken in moderation, though boys are better without either tea or coffee.

6. By exercising.

7. Stop before you feel very tired.

8. Simply resolve to give it up until you reach maturity at 21.

(A letter from California.)

PROF. FOURMEN: I take this opportunity of asking you what my measurements should be, and to show me my weak points, and what I can do to be very strong and large. Age, 17 years; weight, 146 pounds; chest, normal, 36 inches; expanded, 38 inches; neck, 14 inches. I wonder if I can develop a large neck? I can jump farther than most boys and run very fast. How should I develop myself to be a very strong and heavy football-player? Will I increase any in my weight before I am grown? Thanking you in advance, I remain, yours truly,

Hugo T. Johansen.

P. S.—Where can I get an athletic training-book?

Keep right on exercising. You are in good shape now—weight all right and chest only a couple of inches shy. You can increase the neck muscles by daily work with an exerciser, placing the strain upon the neck. Of course you will increase in weight as you grow, if you live a clean, healthy life and take liberal exercise. See the head of this department with regard to our athletic books.

(A letter from Arkansas.)

PROF. FOURMEN: I had a discussion with a friend not long ago as to whether or not letters written to you were the ones published in the "Tip Top." He said they were fakes, and wanted me to write my measurements to you and see if they were published. My measurements are as follows: Age, 14 years; height, 5 feet 3½ inches; weight, 110 pounds; chest, normal, 29 inches; expanded, 33 inches; calves, 10 inches; expanded, 10 inches; calf, 12 inches; thigh, 16½ inches; forearm, 9½ inches. My records are as follows: Running broad jump, 14 feet; standing broad jump, 8 feet; high jump, 4 feet. I would like very much to see what you think of these and please tell me my weak spot and also what athletics I am best suited for. A loyal Tip Topper,

Keene Lewis.

You see that the letters are every one genuine, and on file at this office. They come in so fast that we cannot begin to print all we receive, and even now yours bears a date of months back. Your weight is good, chest 4 inches short. You seem to be doing pretty well at jumping.

PROF. FOURMEN: Being a staunch friend of Dick and Frank Merrifield and a lover of "Tip Top," I ask you to please answer me a few questions. I am 15 years 1 month of age; height, 5 feet 5½ inches; weight, 115 pounds; chest, normal, 30 inches; expanded, 33 inches; calves, 13 inches. What am I lacking in? Can run a 100 yards in 15 seconds; 50 yards, 7 seconds. Would I make a good sprinter? If so, please inform me what book you publish on sprinting. I would also like to be able to throw farther. Thanking you in advance, I remain, respectfully yours,

Kansas City, Mo.

Frank Merrifield's "PAL."

You should have a chest measuring about 35 inches, normal. You need to build up your lungs in order to make a good sprinter with staying power. Any of our manuals will give you good advice on running.
THE TIP TOP WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY FRIDAY  
HANDSOME COLORED COVERS

For the benefit of the boys who want to read back numbers of the TIP TOP WEEKLY, we give herewith a list of all titles now in print. Do not miss this opportunity to get your back numbers, boys, at five cents per copy. We invite particular attention to the later numbers, for Burt L. Stanish has never written in better form at any time in his entire career. TIP TOP stories are big value at five cents, so do not fail to recommend them to your friends.

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NUMBERS 1 TO 360

TIP TOP WEEKLY

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