DICK MERRIWELL, NAVIGATOR;

OR,

The Adventure On the Sound.

By BURT L. STANDISH.

CHAPTER I.

DOWN THE SOUND.

Eric Fitzgerald stretched his slim length luxuriously on the cushions at one side of the cockpit, elevated one disreputable canvas-covered foot to the rail, and sighed peacefully.

"This certainly beats anything I know of," he murmured lazily. "I don't know what I'd have done if you fellows hadn't taken me along. It's sizzling ashore."

"That's why we came," remarked Dick Merriwell, the varsity pitcher. He sat hunched down on the opposite seat, the lean brown fingers of one muscular hand loosely grasping the wheel, and his eyes, barely visible under the brim of the faded canvas hat, fixed on the glittering water ahead. "After chapel it was too hot to stand without wilting, and when Brad said he knew of a motor boat he could hire, I told him to do it quick before somebody else snapped it up."

Buckhart, the brawny Texan, leaned indolently against the stern rail back of the popping engine. His eyes were closed, and there was an expression of beatific content on his face.

"It's sure lucky for you, Fitzie," he drawled, "that you happened to be hanging around when we made up our minds. That's the only way you got in on this jamboree. We were in too much of a hurry to waste time hunting anybody up."

"That doesn't bother me for a cent," the slim chap returned lightly. "So long as I'm here, I don't give a rip how it came about."

He elevated his other foot to the rail and lay there at apparently imminent danger of toppling down into the cockpit at any moment.

"I wonder why a fellow always feels so much cooler on the water," he went on lazily. "The sun is broiling at the present moment, and there isn't an atom of shade, yet I'm far and away more comfortable than when before we started."

"There's always more or less of a breeze," Dick put in; "and, somehow, you don't feel the heat so much when you're togged out in old rags, and mighty few of them at that."

The three Yale men did, indeed, look extremely disreputable. Their duck trousers, stained and spotted
and torn from many a previous outing, were decidedly the worse for wear, and the thin canvas shoes had also seen better days. Buckhart and Fitzgerald had on sleeveless, low-cut jerseys, and the sleeves of Merrivell's thin cotton shirt were rolled to his shoulders, displaying to good advantage the wonderful muscular development which was at once the admiration and despair of many of his fellow students.

They had come out for a day of comfortable loafing in the open and did not propose to be hampered by clothes which were in the least dressy.

The day, even for June, was very hot. The sun glared down from a cloudless sky with sizzling intensity, and was reflected from the choppy little waves of the Sound with a glitter which was almost blinding. But, somehow, as Dick had said, they did not feel it half so much as they had on the campus. The breathless, stifling quality of the air was gone, and, though they might stream with perspiration, that fact did not trouble them in the least since there were no collars to wilt or shirt fronts to ruin.

For a time a lazy silence prevailed as the little boat popped along with a rhythmical, sleepy motion over the smooth, underlying swells. They were headed down the Sound. On their left, perhaps a thousand feet away, the green shores of Connecticut slipped past, with glimpses of carefully tended, immaculately kept country places, alternating with long, low stretches of wind-swept sand and bayberry bushes. Over everything the placid calm of a Sabbath noon rested drowsily in perfect accord with the mood of the three college men.

Presently a slight lurch upset Fitzgerald's balance, and it was only by a strenuous effort that he escaped toppling over into the cockpit.

"I'm surprised at you, Richard," he murmured plaintively. "You oughtn't to make the boat jump like that. I might have hit my head on something and dashed my brains out."

"I guess you're safe," Dick smiled. "Solid ivory is pretty hard to crack."

"Aren't you the real saucy thing!" chirped the slim chap, as he hauled the leather cushion to the bottom of the boat and sprawled out on it in comfort.

"My!" he breathed ecstatically. "This is sure enough the real thing. All I want is a nice, attractive little girl to sit alongside of me and smooth my hair."

"You don't want much," chuckled Dick. "I see you entertaining a girl in your present state of raggedness. You'd have to have a chaperon, too, or else mamma; and mammamas are sort of a nuisance sometimes."

He turned the wheel half a point, and then his clear tenor voice rang out over the water:

"When girls are ugly babies,
Their mammamas quite insist
That they by us, against our wills,
Be kissed—kissed—kissed.

"But when the girls are sweet sixteen,
Then mammamas say we shan't;
And though we'd like to kiss them then,
We can't—can't—can't."

Fitzgerald straightened up a little and pushed his hat back from his eyes.

"Oh, can't we though?" he grinned. "That's a very nice little ditty, Richard, but I like this better."

Clasping his hands about one knee, he rested his head against the edge of the seat and warbled:

"Did you ever notice this:
When a fellow steals a kiss
From a righteous little maiden, calm and meek,
How her scriptural training shows
In not turning up her nose,
But in simply turning round the other cheek?"

"Wough!" grunted the Texan, opening his eyes and stretching. "That's your kind, is it? I'm sure not keen about 'em so soft and mushy. I like the sort that don't fall into your mouth like a ripe peach the minute you shake the limb."

Fitz giggled.

"Sort of like the girl Rudolph Rose had in Boston last spring," he put in. "He met her at the Prom and got stuck on her right away. Used to chase up to see her every chance he could. Finally one night—you know Rudie isn't a bit slow—he got in a chaste peck on her cheek. They'd been pretty friendly, and I s'pose he thought it would go. But, oh, my! Didn't he get his, though! She went after him hot and heavy. Told him he was a brute and a wretch, and that she never wanted to see him again. Ended up by saying that no man had ever kissed her before.

"'Well,' says Rudie, without turning a hair—I reckon he saw it was all over with and thought he might as well have the last word—'I suppose somebody had to break the ice.'"

His two hearers chuckled.

"That sounds like Rose," Dick smiled. "I suppose he was terribly cut up over it—for about five minutes."

"Just about," the slim chap agreed. "Then he found a dame over in Hartford to rave about. Nothing bothers Rudie very long."
He dropped back on the cushion, his eyes fixed on Buckhart.

"Let's have a song, you old Texas steer," he remarked. "We've both livened up things a bit, and it's your turn now."

"Can't sing," Brad growled shortly. "Rot! Don't be so blamed modest. Give us one of your cowboy songs. They're corking, only they always seem sort of sad."

Buckhart really labored under the impression that his attempts at singing were decided failures, whereas the contrary was the fact. His voice, a powerful bass, was quite uncultivated, but it was true and musical, and when he sang the songs of the range land it was particularly effective.

The lilting, insistent refrains, rarely jolly, and often having an undercurrent of sadness about them, seemed to suit his voice especially. He loved the land and its people, and so, unconsciously, he put something of understanding and sympathy into the songs—of atmosphere and feeling—which can never be taught.

To-day he balked, as usual, and only when Dick added his voice to Fitzgerald's urging one, did he give in grumblingly.

"You fellows have sure got yourselves in for this, and you can't blame me if you don't like it," he grinned.

Then he made himself comfortable in the stern seat, fixed his eyes on the boundless expanse of gleaming water stretching out ahead, and sang:

"She called me 'dear,' an', do you know? My heart jes' skipped a beat, an' tho' I'm hard to faze, I'm free to yip, My reason nearly lost its grip She called me 'dear,' jes' sweet an' slow, An' lookin' down an' speakin' low; An' if I had ten lives to live, With everything the world can give, I'd shake 'em all without one fear, If 'fore I'd go she'd call me 'dear.'"

His voice lingered a moment on the last, long note, and then died away.

"Corking, Brad!" exclaimed Fitzgerald enthusiastically. "Somehow those songs always make me think of riding and round-ups and big stretches of prairie."

"Rot!" growled Buckhart. "You've never been west of Chicago in your life."

"Just the same, they do," persisted the slim chap.

"But, say, Brad, would you really do that?"

The Texan looked puzzled.

"What are you driving at?" he inquired.

"Why, give up ten lives cheerful like just to have her call you 'd-ear?'"

He drawled out the word in such sugary sweet accents that both men roared.

"Not on your life, I wouldn't!" exclaimed Buckhart. "That's only part of the song, kid. I never struck a girl yet that I cared a whole heap whether she called me dear or any other old thing. You hear me warble?"

"Wait—just you wait!" chuckled Fitz. "Your time'll come, and when it does, you'll get it hard. Fellows like you always do."

CHAPTER II.

THE ENGINE STOPS.

Presently the pangs of healthy appetites warned them that it was time to attack the lunch they had brought, and Dick headed the boat for a deep cove where the trees came down to the water's edge. He had been there several times before and knew there was plenty of depth at that point.

When the launch was within twenty feet of shore, Fitz hove the anchor over while Buckhart reversed and then stopped the engine. Two minutes later they had stripped and slipped into the water, which reached barely to their waists. As soon as the eatables and clothing had been carried ashore, they raced back into the water, and for twenty minutes they swam about, splashing each other, chasing one another all over the little bay, and, altogether, behaving like three boys just let out of school.

By the time they reached the shore and dressed again they were quite ready for the delayed lunch, which was soon consumed to the last crumb. A little more lazy dawdling under the trees, and they returned to the boat, started the engine, and headed once more to the eastward.

The afternoon was quite uneventful. They simply pursued their indolent, lazy way. They had no object or purpose to think of, no special destination to keep in mind. They were utterly and entirely relaxed, and after the weeks of strenuous work which had just passed, to say nothing of those even fuller ones in the near future, it was an inexpressible relief to throw aside every thought and plan, every care and responsibility, just to bask in the sun and think of nothing.

They chatted idly on all sorts of subjects, though, with a tacit understanding, each one seemed to avoid any reference to the time when the senior class would give way to another crowd and separate for good and all. It was not a cheerful thing to think of, and, any-
way, there were several precious weeks left in which
they would be undergraduates, so why talk about it
now?

Instead, they discussed the approaching Princeton
and Harvard games; the commencement exercises, the
boat race, and a host of other topics. Sometimes there
were long, dreamy pauses when they lay with faces to
the sky and said nothing at all. Between such friends
as they words are not always necessary.

Sometimes they sang, singly or in chorus, and so the
afternoon passed and the heat decreased as the great
red sun sank lower and lower in the west.

"I hate to say it, but I'm afraid we'll have to start
back," Merriwell remarked regretfully after a lengthy
silence.

"I reckon so," Buckhart agreed. "It'll be some dark,
as it is, before we make the landing, seeing as there's
no moon."

"Too bad we couldn't go a little farther and drop in
on the Minturns," Fitzgerald remarked. "Their place
can't be more than six or eight miles farther on."

"Huh!" growled Buckhart. "Right nice show we'd
make dropping in on a nifty crowd like that in our
present state of undress. They'd sure run us off the
place for a bunch of hoboes. You hear me vociferate?"

The slim chap hoisted himself to the rail and bal-
anced there precariously.

"Pshaw!" he protested. "They'd do nothing of the
sort, and you know it. That's one family who don't
give a rip how a fellow looks so long as they like him.
I've had more good times at their place than any I
know of. They're a corking lot themselves, and al-
ways have a houseful of friends that are equally good
fun."

Merriwell smiled significantly.

"Girl friends, usually, aren't they?" he inquired.
"You must be wise to who's there, Fitz. That would
account for your eagerness to call."

Fitzgerald shrugged his shoulders with affected in-
difference.

"I don't happen to know any one visiting there just
now except Victor Cowden's sister," he said carelessly.
"She's a good sort, all right."

A faint shadow came into Dick's face at the mention
of the man's name.

"I think I met Miss Cowden at the Prom two years
ago," he said, his eyes ranging out over the water.
" Didn't they lose their money shortly after that?"

"Yes, the firm went to smash," explained the slim
chap. "I reckon they're pretty hard up. Rita learned

stenography and got a good job in a Wall Street of-

fice. She's as plucky as they make 'em, that girl is.
Victor's just managing to scrape along until commence-
ment so's he can get his degree. Blamed hard luck, I
say."

"Huh!" exclaimed Buckhart incredulously. "I don't
see a heap of signs of Cowden being hard up. Seems
to me he has money a-plenty and spends it, too."

"Not at all," Fitz expostulated. "He can hardly
make both ends meet. You're wrong there, Brad."

"Am I?" retorted the Texan incredulously. "Well,
I wouldn't be so sure. There's that other matter, too.
I'll be hanged if I like to——"

He stopped abruptly, and in some confusion as he
caught Dick's eye and noticed the slight but unmistak-
able shaking of his friend's head.

"Well?" questioned Fitzgerald. "What don't you
like?"

"Why, er—I—er—never like to see a girl going to
work while her brother takes it easy in college," the
Texan finished, a bit lamely. "He ought to get out and
hustle to support her."

"She wouldn't hear of it," Fitz explained warmly.
"She said he must get his degree, since he was so near
graduating. He didn't want to keep on, but she made
him."

Dick turned the wheel, and the launch made a wide
circuit toward the west again.

"Seems to me you know an awful lot about this
young lady, Fitz," he smiled. "As I remember, she's
most attractive, isn't she?"

Fitzgerald flushed, and then a wide grin overspreads
his countenance.

"She is that," he admitted. "She can warm her
beans at my camp fire, as our Texas steer would re-
mark."

"Or sit beside you in a boat and smooth your hair," 

Merriwell suggested slyly. "Well, I'm sorry we can't
 go on to the Minturns and give you both a treat. I'd
 like well enough to see the bunch myself, but we're
 not fit for exhibition purposes, and, anyway, I've got
 a baseball meeting early to-morrow morning, so we'll
 have to get back to-night."

"Oh, I'm not kicking," Fitzgerald said hastily. "I've
 had a corking day all around. I just happened to think
 that it would be nice to drop in there before Rita's
 vacation was over."

By this time the launch was popping merrily toward
New Haven, and, relapsing into silence, her occupants
watched the sun sink slowly toward the grayish-green
streak of land in the west. Little by little the glowing crimson ball dropped downward, growing larger and more crimson as it neared the horizon. Presently a jagged bit seemed to be snapped out of its edge as it reached the line of gray and slid behind.

Quite half of it had vanished when the attention of the Yale men was suddenly diverted to more mundane things. With a spurt, a splutter, and a slight jar, their engine stopped.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS CHINAMAN.

For a moment or two the three fellows watched the spasmodically moving flywheel in silence.

“Well, what’s the matter now?” Fitzgerald inquired, when its motion had finally ceased.

Buckhart squatted in the cockpit and looked over the various connections in a puzzled way.

“Hanged if I know!” he returned. “Everything seems all right. Peters said she’d been put into first-class condition last week, and she hasn’t even missed fire to-day.”

“Been behaving too good to last,” the slim chap remarked dolefully. “I never trust the tricky things. How’s the timer?”

“All right. Anyhow, if that had been out of order she wouldn’t have stopped so short.”

“Rather looks to me as if we’d run out of gas,” Merriwell said quietly, though his forehead was wrinkled a bit with anxiety. “You had the tanks filled, didn’t you?”

The Texan looked a trifle downcast.

“No, I didn’t,” he acknowledged. “Peters said there was enough to take us a hundred miles, and I let it go at that.”

As he spoke he was hastily unscrewing the cap, and an instant later his face darkened.

“Dry!” he rasped. “If I don’t punch that fellow’s head when I see him, I’m a Pintie! This puts us in some bad.”

“Gee, yes!” exclaimed Fitz, with a hurried glance toward the shore. “We couldn’t be caught in a worse place. That’s Hallett’s Point over there, and there isn’t a town anywheres near.”

“Try the emergency,” Dick suggested.

“About half a pint!” Buckhart announced angrily, after he had made the inspection. “That fellow ought to be shot!”

“I quite agree with you,” smiled Merriwell; “but it wouldn’t help us much just now. You’d better turn on the emergency tank, and I’ll head her toward the shore. It’s the only thing left to do.”

Without further comment or delay, Brad turned the cock and let the few precious drops of gasoline trickle down. The engine started without difficulty, and in another moment was chugging briskly toward the shore.

It happened, unfortunately, that they were pretty far out into the Sound. The wind had dropped considerably toward the end of the afternoon, and only the ripple of the outgoing tide disturbed the glossy surface of the water. For a time, Dick hoped that they might manage to reach the land, but he was doomed to disappointment. It was still a good two hundred yards away when, for the second time, the engine gave an expiring cough and a flutter and ceased its pulsations. For a few minutes the boat kept on toward the shore line with ever-decreasing way. Then, little by little, it succumbed to the force of the tide and the bow swung slowly out toward the east.

Dick frowned thoughtfully for a moment or two.

“Reckon we’ll have to get busy and be galley slaves,” he remarked presently. “At this rate we’ll sight Block Island before many hours.”

For a moment the others did not see quite what he meant. Then, as he opened one of the small lockers under the seats and took out a screw driver, they realized that he was going to remove the flat board flooring, and at once started to help him.

Luckily these boards were not put in very securely, and it was not long before two of them were up. On the face of it, it would seem an almost hopeless job to attempt propelling a launch with a couple of three-inch boards, but Dick could think of no other way to prevent their being caught in the grip of the tide and carried down the Sound.

Happily the boat was a small one, and the tide had not yet begun to run out with any great force. Consequently they managed to get the head of the launch around and forced her inch by inch toward the shore.

It was slow, tedious, and fearfully tiring work; but they kept at it without intermission, each man working for a certain length of time and then taking a short lay-off.

The sun had long since dropped out of sight, tingling the western sky with a riot of golden-crimson tints. Presently these paled and faded, and shadows began to creep up, engulfing, bit by bit, the irregular coast.
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line in a mysterious haze. As the light failed the stars gained in brilliancy, seeming to pop out one after another in the darkening arch of sky, until at last the shore line vanished, leaving nothing but the spangled void above, and the darker, restlessly moving expanse of water on which they floated.

None of the three men complained of the strenuous labor or voiced the thought which must have been present in the mind of each that it was going to be futile. There was, in fact, scarcely any conversation at all, for they needed their breath for other things. Twice Fitzgerald complained rather peevishly that they were not giving him a fair share of the work, and each time Dick shut him up kindly but firmly.

The fact happened to be true, but Merriwell realized from the first that the smaller man, though he would stick it out as long as he had an ounce of strength or a breath of wind left, was not physically able to stand the strain which he and Brad could.

At last—it seemed as if hours and hours had passed since they discovered the absence of gasoline—the shadow ahead resolved itself into the irregular, bulking outline of trees. A moment later one of the boards struck bottom, and, with a shout of joy, the boat was swiftly poled forward until the bottom grated on the pebbly sand.

"Suffering catamounts!" exclaimed Buckhart, wipping the perspiration from his forehead. "No more of the briny deep for this child. I sure thought we weren't ever going to get here."

"It did look a bit doubtful," Dick agreed. "Let's get ashore."

Without delay they stepped into the shallow water and waded to land. They seemed to be on one side of a long sandy point that jutted out into the Sound. Scrub oak and stunted, wind-dwarfed pines grew thick to the edge of the sloping, sandy beach, while between them were clumps of bay of great size and thickness. Even in the dim starlight it had a wild, deserted look which was decidedly discouraging.

"Now we're here, what the deuce are we going to do?" Fitzgerald inquired pessimistically. "It don't look like a place where gasoline grows on every bush."

"Just the same, we'll have to hunt some up," Merriwell answered. "If we can't locate any, why then—— What's that?"

He was facing the water, and instinctively he threw up his arm and pointed. As the others turned eagerly, they caught a fleeting glimpse of a sudden, blinding flash from out in the Sound, which vanished instantly.

"A searchlight," Dick muttered. "It must be."

For a few moments the silence was unbroken as they strained their eyes to catch a repetition of the light. Then Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"One of the New York boats, I suppose," he said. But even as he spoke a strange thing happened. Another flash streaked across the water, cleaving the darkness for an instant like a single line of pale fire, and then went out. This time it did not come from out on the Sound, but from the shore, and seemingly from a spot among the trees on the other side of the sandy point. Moreover, the Yale men could see dimly outlined in its rays, a small steamer standing about a mile out from shore.

"Well, what do you know about that?" inquired the Texan, instinctively lowering his voice.

"There must be somebody over on the other side of the point," was Fitzgerald's rather trite observation, uttered also in a whisper.

Merriwell said nothing. His eyes were fixed keenly for a moment on the dark waste of water stretching out before him. In that single flash of light he had noticed that the vessel was almost motionless, as if she was lying to for some purpose. That purpose must, of course, be connected with the mysterious light which had been flashed from the shore.

He glanced toward the thickly tangled growth on the point in a puzzled way. It was one of the most deserted, lonely places along the Sound. He knew it well, for he had more than once come up here in the fall for ducks, and Hallett's Point had the reputation of being the best shooting ground within a hundred miles of New Haven. Half a mile back from the water ran a series of shallow fresh-water ponds where the birds found admirable feeding grounds, and which was also the reason why the stretch of tangled wilderness had been passed over in the march of cultivation and progress.

Yet here was a tramp steamer stopping off the very wildest spot of all, miles from the smallest settlement, and exchanging signals with some one along the beach. It certainly seemed peculiar, to say the least, and Dick was conscious of an overwhelming desire to find out what it meant.

"Who the mischief can it be?" Fitzgerald put in at last, somewhat impatient at the long silence.

Dick smiled a little.

"Just what I've been wondering, Fitzie," he returned quietly. "There may be a perfectly simple explanation of it, but it certainly seems a little odd."

He turned to Buckhart.
"Suppose you and I do a little investigating, Brad," he went on. "That light couldn’t have been more than half or three-quarters of a mile along the shore, and it won’t take us long to walk over there and see what’s doing."

"Sure thing," the Texan responded instantly. "I’m a heap curious myself, partner."

"What about me?" Fitzgerald inquired plaintively. "Can’t I go along, too?"

"Somebody ought to watch the boat," Merriwell explained. "I’m not a bit keen about having anything happen to her. Just at this stage of the game I’d hate awfully to have to hand over her value to the owner, in case she was swiped or injured."

"Jiminy! I’ll stay," Fitz put in hastily. "If there’s any chance of that, I’ll sit on her and defend her with my life. Don’t be long, though. This isn’t the pleasantest sort of place for solitary meditation."

"We’ll hustle back, all right. Ought not to be gone more than half an hour, I should think."

Without further delay Merriwell took the lead and disappeared into the bushes, followed by his chum. Their progress through the tangled undergrowth was decidedly slow and was not facilitated by the fact that, neither man having been on the western side of the point, they were somewhat in the dark as to the nature of the ground there.

"Be easier to strike the shore and walk along that, wouldn’t it?" Buckhart whispered, after a time.

"Decidedly," Dick answered. "But I’ve a notion that we’d better not make ourselves quite so conspicuous. There’s something queer about all this, old fellow, and it’ll be just as well to keep to the bushes until we have some idea of what’s up."

Buckhart seeing the wisdom of this, they went on in silence, making scarcely a rustle as they pushed their way carefully through the bushes with a skill born of long practice. It was quite twenty minutes from the time they had left the launch, when Merriwell caught a gleam of red some little distance in front, and stopped abruptly.

Brad evidently saw it, too, but did not speak. A momentary halt, and then Dick started forward again with redoubled precaution. He soon decided that the light came from a lantern placed on the shore in the deepest indentation of the cove, and a considerable detour was necessary to come around on it without exposing themselves.

Twice a shadowy form, passing between him and the light, told the Yale man that some one was watching it, but the intervening bushes made it impossible to see definitely anything more.

At length, however, they reached a point well to one side of the lantern and somewhat back of it. A single fringe of undergrowth ranged raggedly at the edge of the line of straggly, stunted pines, and, dropping noiselessly on his knees, Dick parted the bushes cautiously and peered out.

For a moment he crouched there without moving a muscle. Then he reached back one hand, and, catching Buckhart by the arm, drew the Texan down beside him.

Words were unnecessary. Dick could feel his chum stiffen and hear a barely audible gasp of surprise as the breath whistled through Brad’s clenched teeth.

Some little distance down the beach a red lantern had been placed on a flat bowlder, but it was not upon that which their eyes were focused. Close beside it, illumined and made strangely sinister by the crimson glow, was the face of a crouching Chinaman. He was gazing straight out on the dark water, his narrow eyes and tense, set muscles of his lean cheeks betraying unmistakably an air of eager, anxious waiting.

CHAPTER IV.
THE SMEAR ON THE ROCK.

After his two friends had disappeared Fitzgerald stood looking at the bushes and listening to the faint rustling of their progress across the point. This soon died away, however, and he turned back to the boat with a sigh.

"Cheerful spot," he muttered disconsolately. "I hope they won’t stay away all night."

An inspection of the launch showed that there was no danger whatever of her drifting away.

"If we don’t get her out before the tide goes down much farther," he said aloud, "we’ll be in a nice hole. "I guess, though, that the three of us could pretty near carry her a little ways, even if she does get left high and dry."

He whistled a bar or two as he stood looking undecidedly up and down the curving, sandy beach. Then he dragged out his pipe and tobacco, found a fairly comfortable spot near by where he could sprawl with his back against a hummock of dried seaweed, and fell to meditating on the strangeness of the situation.

Having cogitated for some little time over the mysterious light without reaching any satisfactory explana-
tion of it, his thoughts drifted to the Minturn family and their extremely attractive guest, Rita Cowden.

The Minturns were a race of Yale men. For generations they had gone to New Haven for as much a matter of course as they got up every morning and ate breakfast. For a Minturn to start out in life without a Yale degree was unheard of, and as for going to any other university—well, such a fearful heresy as that had not occurred in the memory of man.

The present head of the family, a genial, hearty banker, was a member of the class of sixty-nine. His two elder sons had been away from New Haven for five and two years respectively; the youngest was still a sophomore.

It can be imagined, therefore, the welcome accorded Yale undergraduates at the beautiful old place on the Sound, and the inordinately good times they always had there; for the Minturns were well to do, kept an open house the year ’round, and their only daughter possessed hosts of charming girl friends, some of whom always seemed to be making her a visit.

At present Rita Cowden was spending her short vacation among such ideal surroundings, and it was of her that Fitzgerald thought almost exclusively as he snuggled against the mound of sand and kelp, and pulled meditatively on his briar.

He had met her several years ago at the Prom, whither she had come with a Mintern house party, and had instantly fallen a victim to her charms, which were great. Since then they had seen one another occasionally, exchanged letters rather more often, and so come to be very good friends.

The elder Cowden’s failure, followed shortly by his death, had worried Eric almost as much as those more intimately concerned. Certainly it had been more in his mind than in that of Victor Cowden, the only son.

Rita had promptly announced her intention of going to work; and had, with equal decision, carried out those intentions in the face of family and other opposition. She alone seemed to realize that something of that sort must be done, at least until Victor graduated and was able to get a position; but the fact that she was working in an office—it was a very nice one, to be sure, with easy hours and pleasant surroundings, but still an office—while he was idling his time at New Haven, was a sore point with Fitz.

"It’s a cussed shame!" he muttered. "A girl like that ought not to work. I wish to goodness I had a little coin. I’d ask her to take me right off, but a fellow can’t marry on nothing at all. I guess it’s up to little Willy to get out right after commencement and hustle for a job."

It will perhaps best illustrate his state of mind when it is revealed that considerably more than half an hour passed before he gave up thinking of Miss Rita Cowden and realized the fact that there was no sign whatever of his friends returning.

"That’s funny," he muttered, striking a match and looking at his watch. "They said they’d be back in about half an hour, and they’ve been gone pretty near three-quarters."

Scrambling to his feet, he thrust the watch back in his pocket, and began to walk up and down the strip of sandy beach. He did not feel particularly alarmed, for there might be any number of reasons to delay the others, but he was growing more and more impatient and decidedly curious.

"Don’t suppose they’re giving me a thought," he grumbled. "They might know that I’d want to hear about it as soon as possible. What the deuce it can all mean, I haven’t an idea."

Stepping down to the water’s edge, he discovered that the tide had left the motor boat almost entirely out of water, and was still receding.

"A fine job it’ll be getting you afloat," he mumbled. "Though I don’t see as it’ll do much good if we can’t rake up gasoline. Perhaps they’ll have the sense to get some from that bunch with the searchlight. I certainly hope so."

For ten minutes or more he walked about restlessly, keeping his eyes fixed on the point where Merriwell and Buckhart had disappeared, and his ears ready to catch the faintest rustle which would announce their return.

But none came. For all the sights and sounds of life, he might as well have been on a desert island. The wind mourned eerily through the branches of the stunted pines; the bulking outline of the trees behind him seemed full of shadowy mystery; the rhythmical lapping of the inky water upon the shore got on his nerves.

"What in time’s keeping ‘em!" he muttered for about the tenth time. "It’s over an hour."

Not a great while after that his angry impatience gave place to alarm. What else could account for their prolonged absence save something unpleasant and unexpected happening to them. And yet it seemed absurd to think that anything at all could happen within a radius of less than a mile, and he remain in total ignorance.

He tried to assure himself that they had encoun-
tered the mysterious users of the searchlight, found them to be extremely commonplace and, perhaps—joyful thought!—the possessors of gasoline. They might even have to go out to the ship to get it. There were quantities of reasons why the Yale men should linger, and Fitzgerald found himself trying as hard to think of them as, a moment before, he had been striving for reasons of an opposite sort.

It was no use. As the time passed he became more and more nervous and fearful. He pictured all sorts of unpleasant things, and at last he could stand it no longer.

"I'll be hanged if I wait here another minute," he muttered decidedly. "The old boat can go to the devil, for all I care. I'm going to hunt them up."

Nevertheless, he inspected the launch once more before starting, and found that nothing short of a donkey engine could move her from the present position until the incoming tide set her afloat again.

"Which won't be for three or four hours yet," he thought; and then, turning toward the point, he began to force his way resolutely through the undergrowth.

His progress was rather more rapid than had been that of his companions, for the simple reason that he simply plunged straight ahead without any attempt at quietness. He crossed straight over the point and emerged from the bushes at some little distance from the end of the cove.

Then he stopped and looked about him.

There was not the slightest sign of any human being here. The beach was quite deserted, and the gloomy shadow of the trees as forbidding as it had been on the other side of the point. Fitzgerald shivered a little, and his forehead puckered into a knot of worried wrinkles.

"I don't understand it," he muttered. "That light should have been there at the head of the cove. Where's it gone? and where have they gone?"

He followed the curve of the beach inshore a short distance and stopped beside a flat-topped bowlder, whose irregular outline was barely visible in the starlight. Holding his breath, he listened.

The sighing of the wind among the pines, the hateful lapping of those black waves upon the shore, the rapid beating of his own heart, was all he heard. The atmosphere of silence and utter loneliness weighed upon him like a physical force. He shivered again and his nerves tingled. Then he broke the tension with a sudden yell.

"Dick! Brad! Where are you?"

There was no answer. The sound of his voice seemed suddenly engulfed and swallowed up in the narrow, desolate stillness of the spot. The Yale man's heart was thudding rapidly now, and he passed one hand across his moistened brow.

"Might think they'd never been here at all," he said, under his breath. "What has happened?"

Undecided as to what he had better do next, he stood leaning against the rock with one hand resting on the top. It seemed odd that the spray should have reached so far inland. It was a good twenty feet from high-water mark, and yet the rock was noticeably wet.

An instant later his heart gave a queer twitch and he felt hurriedly for his match box. As the tiny flame flared up, seemingly only to intensify the surrounding gloom, for a second the man's heart stopped beating and every drop of blood drained swiftly from his face, leaving it a ghastly gray pallor.

The rock had not been wet with sea water, but by something far different—something which gloowed dark and redly to his horrified gaze, and showed a brighter crimson on the hand which had unconsciously touched the splotchy smear upon the granite.

CHAPTER V.
VANISHED.

For a single instant Fitzgerald stood rooted to the spot. He did not speak, nor stir a muscle, but, as he gazed at that ominous stain, possibilities, infinite and horrible, surged through his brain like the dreadful, distorted figments of a dream.

Then the match went out and, with the sudden dropping of blackness over everything, the tension was broken. A furious, uncontrollable anger filled his soul and thrust out every other thought. A burst of curses, some terrible, others merely ridiculous, issued from his lips and testified to the stress of his emotion; for he was not in the least a chap given generally to profanity.

It was over in a moment, like the sudden, inevitable escape of steam from a safety valve. Another match was lit, and he dropped down on his hands and knees with feverish haste to examine the beach.

Then, for the first time, he saw the strange medley of footprints which filled the little open space, crowding one upon another until the surface of the sand looked as if a small army had marched over it.

There were prints of bare feet, broad and stubby, with wide-spreading toes; prints of feet incased in
rubber-soled sneakers, which might well have been made by Dick or Brad; prints of ordinary shoes—and if these he could find but a single set—thin soled, graceful, and shapely. But the great bulk of markings were strange and uncanny-looking, more as if they had been made by a rectangular bit of board flat on the bottom with smoothed-off edges.

For a time Fitzgerald could not make them out. Then all at once the solution came to him.

"Chinamen!" he exclaimed aloud. "That's what it is. Those prints were made by the darned shapeless sandal things they wear."

They certainly had that appearance, and for a moment or two the slim chap hesitated, wondering how such an impossible, absurd thing could be true. Then he hurried on with his careful examination.

He found that the prints all seemed to lead to the water's edge, and there he discovered the unmistakable mark where a boat had been drawn up on the beach.

"From the steamer, I reckon," he muttered. "But why? What are they coming here for? And what have they done?"

Again he was obliged to force himself to stop thinking. There was nothing to be gained by purposeless speculation. He must find out everything which was to be learned and then try and make his deductions.

Away from the beach the straggling footprints passed the flat rock, and then seemed to spread out all over the place. Close by the edge of undergrowth Fitz suddenly pounced on something which gleamed dully under a bush, and gave a cry of astonishment.

It was a silver cigarette case. He knew it the instant he had it in his hands, even though the match burned out and left him in darkness.

A cigarette case, and of silver! It seemed so utterly incongruous and out of place amid the imprints of bare feet and Chinese sandals that Fitz began to feel as if he were in a dream. How had it come there? Who had brought it? Dick did not smoke, nor Brad. To whom, then, did it belong?

He felt as if he were being rapidly reduced to a state of imbecility, when he suddenly remembered that single set of shapely footprints. A man with a shoe like that would be quite likely to have a silver cigarette case, and, somewhat reassured, the slim chap struck a match and examined the bauble carefully.

It was very heavy and quite plain, save for an engraved crest in the center of one side. This crest, a mailed hand holding a battle-ax, was quite unfamiliar to him. He did not remember ever having seen it, or the case, which seemed to be a new one showing very few signs of wear.

Inside were three or four cigarettes, and, as he picked one up and looked it carefully over, Fitzgerald gasped.

It was of a brand but lately put on the market, which had acquired great vogue among Yale men. The slim chap himself smoked them occasionally, and had never been able to get them except at a certain store in New Haven.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "If this doesn't beat everything! I can't make anything seem to fit."

If the person who had dropped the case was a Yale man, then what? For a moment Fitz had a feeble hope that the thing was some elaborate practical joke. He even wondered whether it were possible that Dick and Brad had brought him out solely for the purpose of having fun with him, but almost instantly he dismissed the idea. Neither of the two seniors, while they enjoyed a joke as well as the next man, was the sort deliberately to go into any practical joke so elaborate as this. Besides, nothing which had happened bore the slightest evidence of premeditation.

The gasoline had given out unexpectedly and forced them to land at just that point. Those signals from the vessel and the shore could not have been faked up. The many footprints, the Chinamen, the blood upon the rock! He shuddered, and, thrusting the case into his pocket, lit another match and went on feverishly with his investigations.

He was possessed now with a horror of finding something which would be the realization of his worst fears. He was almost afraid to enter the bushes and had to force himself by sheer will power to go on. Presently he came upon a spot showing unmistakable signs of a terrific struggle. Bushes were torn up and branches stripped of leaves; the ground was pounded flat with the thudding of many feet. Here, too, the imprints of sandals obliterated almost everything else.

Fearfully, he searched the immediate surroundings thoroughly, but quite without results. He found nothing, and the relief was infinite. His matches running low, he gathered some sticks and built a little fire in the open, from which he carried lighted branches into the neighborhood, with equally futile results.

Back under the pines and oaks it was almost impossible for a man of his inexperience at trail reading to tell whether any one had passed that way or not. But he was sure at last that nothing tangible was to be found there, and when he returned to the fire and
dropped down wearily in the sand, he felt some slight encouragement.

His friends had vanished inexplicably, but it did not necessarily follow that they had been put out of the way, as he had feared at first. Where they had been taken—he was sure they had not gone of their own free will—he had no idea. There had been numerous robberies of country places along the shore of late, and perhaps they had come upon one of these gangs unexpectedly and been seized to prevent their giving the alarm.

That theory did not account for the Chinamen, or the cigarette case, or a great many other things; but where was the theory which would take in all these inexplicable, irreconcilable features?

"I'll be hanged if I know what to do!" the puzzled man muttered desperately. "I'm miles from civilization, and it's long after midnight. But I've got to do something, and do it quick. I've got to get help somewhere. Gee! I wish it wasn't about fifty miles to Gales Ferry. I'd have the crewmen on the trail mighty quick if I could only get there."

Another moment and his face lit up with a sudden idea.

"Minturn's!" he cried. "I could make that all right. They'd do anything for Dick!"

CHAPTER VI.

A RACE OVER THE SANDS.

The idea was no sooner conceived than Fitzgerald put it into execution. The Minturn place was half a dozen miles or so up the shore, and he knew that the boys, who would do anything for any Yale man, would fairly fall over themselves to hustle when they learned that their favorite, Dick Merriwell, was in trouble.

Springing to his feet, Fitzgerald stamped out the fire and plunged into the bushes of the point. Tearing his way through them with a thorough disregard for scratches on face and hands, he pantèd out into the open where he had left the boat.

The tide was still running out, and the launch, left high and dry, had toppled over on one side. Fitz hurriedly got out the anchor, and, fastening one end of the rope firmly to the boat, carried the other back to a good-sized tree and caught the anchor around it securely. Then, without waiting an instant, he took to the beach at a brisk run.

Fitzgerald had gone in very little for athletics during his four years at New Haven. He now wished desperately that he had. He ran until his lungs seemed on the point of bursting and his muscles were so weary that he could scarcely drag one foot after the other. Then he walked a bit from sheer force of necessity, only to sprint on again the instant his wind returned.

The way seemed endless, and he wondered every now and then whether there was anything more physically exhausting than running in loose, shifting sand. Presently it occurred to him that things would be easier if he took to the shallow water, where the sand was firm and hard. He found it an improvement, but was soon drenched from head to foot.

Many times, when it seemed as if he simply could not go another step, he goaded his failing powers by the thought of all Dick had done for him, and a realization that his friend was probably in dire straits and desperately in need of help. That was all which kept him up.

At last, when he had begun to think he should never see it, the long, rambling outlines of the house he knew so well came into sight around a point. With a gasp of relief, Fitzgerald scrambled up the sea wall and raced across the lawn. To his surprise and joy, he saw that there were still lights in the lower windows, and when he dashed up on the wide veranda he was greeted by a chorus of startled exclamations from a number of people seated there in the darkness.

"Is Jack here?" he panted, looking vaguely around. A chair grated and a man sprang up hastily.

"Yes. What's the matter?" came in a clear, pleasant voice. "Who is it, anyhow?"

Another form, slight and feminine, was before him.

"Eric!" she cried. "What is the matter? Why, you look dreadful!"

In another moment the whole company had crowded around Fitz, and the contrast of their immaculate flannels and the dainty evening dresses of the women, with his soiled, torn, draggled, and dripping jersey and trousers was rather startling.

He started to blurt out his story, fairly swaying with weariness, but Jack Minturn caught him by the shoulders and almost carried him through one of the long windows into the lighted living room and deposited him in a big easy-chair.

"You're all in, you old lobster!" he exclaimed. "Now don't you people bother him until I've straightened him out a bit."

He hurried out, and the others, who crowded in after him, had scarcely time to say many words before he was back again with a glass of wine and a plate of sandwiches.
"I don’t know whether you’re starving or not," he smiled; "but the drink will brace you up. You look as if you’d been dragged through a knot hole."

"Qualifying for the ten-mile sprint," grinned Fitz, as he swallowed the contents of the glass. "Starving! Well, I guess yes! Not a thing to eat since noon. I reckon I’d better fall to while I talk. There isn’t much time."

He started a sandwich and his story at the same time, blurring the latter out in a hurried, haphazard way, but apparently coherently enough for his astonished hearers to understand.

"Dick Merriwell!" roared the banker, his face purpling. "Do you hear that, boys? He’s in danger! Ernest! Jack! Get the launch out at once. We must go after him! He’s got to be found!"

Without a word the two fellows disappeared through a window, and Mr. Minturn turned back to Eric.

"You’re drenched to the skin, boy!" he exclaimed. "James! Where is that man? Oh, there you are," as the butler hastened in. "Get a change of clothes instantly for this gentleman. Take it into the smoking room, and help him dress."

The butler vanishing, he went on in the same impetuous, energetic fashion:

"Most amazing story I ever heard. Simply dastardly! Chinamen—and a silver cigarette case! Katherine, get my cap, please. I’m going with them. Not a bit of use in objecting. I’m going, I tell you! Do you think I could sit quietly here while a man like Merriwell—one of the greatest fellows Yale ever saw—is in danger. Let me see that case, young man."

Fitzgerald paused in his consumption of sandwiches long enough to take the case out of his pocket and hand it to the banker. The others all crowded around to get a glimpse of it, and Fitz, whose eyes were resting on the face of Rita Cowden, was startled to see it suddenly blanch as she caught sight of the silver box.

"Why——" she began dazedly, and then bit her lips.

No one seemed to notice her agitation save the slim chap, who watched her anxiously. It seemed to him as if she had recognized the case and was hiding that knowledge. But how could such a thing be possible? What connection could Rita Cowden have with the man who had dropped that betraying trinket?

"H’m!" remarked Mr. Minturn. "A crest and motto. Do you know it, my dear?"—turning to his wife—"or any of you?"

His hand, holding the box, swept around the circle, and there was an eager craning, followed by slow shakings of heads and slower denials. Rita Cowden did not even look at it. She stood a little to one side, her face flushing and paling and her slim hands clenched tightly at her sides.

Fitzgerald had ceased to eat and was watching her. Suddenly from the door came the voice of James:

"Your clothes, sir."

"Hurry up and change, Fitzgerald," said the banker tersely. "Then we can get off."

Rather reluctantly Fitz obeyed. He would much rather have remained for a few moments in the living room. Things were becoming complicated, and he could not understand. He wanted a word or two with Rita, but apparently that was out of the question.

When he returned a few minutes later, dressed in some of Jack Minturn’s garments and feeling a hundred per cent better, she was nowhere to be seen. He could not very well ask where she had gone. Katherine Minturn had also disappeared, and the other girls he scarcely knew. Anyway, the banker gave him no time to ask questions.

"Come along, young man," he said, leading the way to the veranda. "We’ve no time to lose. The launch is waiting for us."

There was nothing left for Eric to do but follow him. Two other men, Grantham and Bogardus, were standing on the lawn outside; and, with a brief farewell to the women, the four hastened down to the dock, where the sharp explosions of a gasoline engine starting up came to their ears. Evidently, the Minturn brothers had lost no time.

The banker, spry and agile as any two-year-old, partered over the dock and skipped down the ladder to the float, where the launch was bobbing. Eric followed close behind, his thoughts hastily veering around to the more important subject of Merriwell and Buckhart. They all clambered into the motor boat, and the sailor, who had been routed out of his bed, was about to shove off when, from the dock, came the swift rush of feet, a swirl of skirts, and a pleading cry:

"Wait a minute."

Mr. Minturn uttered an exclamation of annoyance as his daughter and Miss Cowden fairly tumbled down the ladder and scrambled into the boat.

"What does this mean?" he demanded sternly. "Go ashore at once, Katherine."

"Oh, dad, please let us go," begged the charming and somewhat spoiled only daughter. "We’ll be still as nice and promise not to get in the way."
They had taken off their evening gowns and slipped into short-skirted boating clothes. Each carried a sweater on her arm. Miss Cowden’s face was flushed and her eyes very bright.

“Do let us stay, Mr. Minturn,” she pleaded. “We’ll be very good, and—we’re—so anxious.”

Whereupon the banker capitulated with a grudging consent, and the girls made haste to bestow themselves well forward as the boat was shoved off and the engine started.

To most of the men present it seemed simply a girlish, irresponsible freak born of the impulse of the moment. Eric Fitzgerald, however, had been keenly conscious of the note of desperate anxiety in the voice of the girl he cared for, and he sat in the stern with sullen, frowning brow.

Who was she so worried over? Was it Dick, or the mysterious owner of the cigarette case, which he felt sure she had recognized? Either one would be bad enough. If she felt that way about Dick, Fitz despaired of his own chances, whereas if it were the other man—well, that would be even worse.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO STRANGLING CORDS OF SILK.

To Merriwell and Buckhart, peering through the screen of bushes, the sight of a lone Chinaman squatting by the lantern and gazing so expectantly out to sea was weird and inexplicable enough; but they were presently to be treated to an even greater surprise.

For a couple of minutes the lean, sallow Asiatic crouched there without moving a muscle. Then suddenly he straightened up and turned his head as a voice from the fringe of shadow broke the silence.

“Do you see anything of them, Ali Sing?”

Merriwell gave a slight start. The voice was one of cultivation and refinement. It had, moreover, an oddly familiar sound, which set him to wondering where he had heard it before. The unspoken question was swiftly answered.

“Yes, they come very soon,” the Chinaman returned, rising to his feet.

Another moment and he was joined by the man who had spoken. He was tall and slim and well dressed in a perfectly fitting suit of blue serge, straw hat, and light tan shoes. But it was not these details of his appearance which made Dick clench his teeth to keep back a gasp of surprise, and at the same time give Brad’s arm a warning grip. His eyes, riveted on the man’s face, were full of an unutterable amazement, bordering on incredulity; for in this nocturnal consorter with Chinamen he recognized a Yale man and a classmate.

His astonishment was short-lived. It was really only the instinctive sort of shock one would naturally feel at the first sight of an acquaintance under such peculiarly incongruous conditions. The moment his reason began to work he remembered things he had heard about this particular Yale man which fitted in so perfectly with the present occasion that his astonishment vanished and was replaced by a grim kind of satisfaction.

Presently he leaned toward Buckhart and placed his lips close to the Texan’s ear.

“Crawl back a little way,” he breathed. “Don’t make a sound.”

Brad nodded, and they wormed their way noiselessly through the undergrowth until they were well back among the trees and out of hearing, as well as sight, of the pair on the beach. Then both rose softly to their feet.

“Victor Cowden!” muttered Brad, in a bewildered tone. “Will you tell me what in thunder he’s doing here with that Chink?”

“Can’t you guess?” Dick whispered. “Don’t you know the things which have been said of him.”

Apparently Buckhart did not know. His face expressed no enlightenment; only an intense curiosity. Dick bent closer to him and whispered a single word into his ear.

“What?” gasped the Texan. “You mean he does himself?”

Dick nodded.

“That’s what they say. Unfortunately he hasn’t stopped there; if one can believe the pretty-well-defined rumors which have been going about. It is said that three men at least have been ruined deliberately by Victor Cowden.”

The Texan’s big fists were clenched tightly and his face flushed with anger.

“The skunk!” he rasped. “He ought to be tarred and feathered and driven out of town. Suffering castaments! Why don’t somebody get after him? Down home he’d be shot full of holes for less than that.”

“Nobody can do anything, for the simple reason that there isn’t an atom of proof against him,” Dick explained quietly. “He’s been seen several times in close confab with Chinamen, but that’s no crime. The cases of those three men are known to a few about the
college, but there’s no way of connecting them positively with Cowden, even though we may be morally certain that he is to blame.”

He paused an instant, his lips straightening into a hard line and his eyes full of an intense satisfaction.

“I have a notion that we’re going to nail him tonight, though,” he went on in a whisper. “The stumbling block all along has been the question of how he worked it; but I believe we’re going to find out in a very few minutes. Once we do that, it’ll be all up with the miserable scoundrel, and I shall take the utmost pleasure in driving him in disgrace from New Haven as quickly as possible.”

He glanced toward the beach, from which came, at that moment, a confused murmur of many voices.

“Let’s get back there,” he breathed swiftly. “They’ve come, and we must not miss a single thing.”

Dropping down on the ground, he led the way back to their point of vantage, with Buckhart closely following him. Parting the leaves cautiously, he saw something of what he had expected.

A long boat, dimly visible in the light of the red lantern, was drawn up on the shore, and from it several sailors were just stepping, each one carrying small, securely wrapped parcels about eight inches square and as many in thickness. These parcels were passed to various Chinamen who were waiting to receive them, and who instantly retreated into the shadow of the trees to one side of the open space, and disappeared.

There was no bustle or stir whatever. The entire operation was conducted in perfect silence and with a readiness and dispatch which showed signs of careful organization, as well as a facility which could only have been acquired by practice. Evidently it was not the first time that the boat had landed in that lonely spot, and those square parcels had been brought ashore to disappear inland so swiftly.

Dick’s eyes were gleaming bright as they roved about in search of Cowden. He discovered the fellow at last, standing in the shadow in earnest conversation with a tall, burly man, whose broad back was toward the lantern, and of whom nothing more could be discovered than the fact that he was dressed in rough blue flannels and had his bare feet incased in sneakers. Something in his pose and the straddle of his powerful legs gave Merriwell the impression that he was a sailor of a superior sort, a mate, perhaps, or even a captain.

Cowden’s voice was so low that not a word of what he said could be heard. It soon became evident, however, that he was urging something upon the tall fellow which the latter did not seem anxious to do. Several times he shook his head, and more than once his big shoulders moved uneasily. Now and then the rumble of his deep voice came to the listening men’s ears, and, though they could not make out a single word, the tone was one of protest.

Apparently it proved unavailing. Cowden must have had unusual power over the fellow, for he continued to insist, and at last the sailor shrugged his shoulders resignedly and took a step backward toward the lantern.

At the same moment Cowden plunged one hand into a hip pocket and withdrew it with a silver cigarette case. As he opened it and selected a weed Dick noticed that his hand was trembling nervously, and while lighting the thin tube of tobacco the flame of the match showed his narrow, weak face to be rather white and set in lines of anxiety and suspense.

He held the box for an instant in his hand and then replaced it. At least, that was his intention, but, instead of going into his pocket, it dropped to the ground, striking the soft sand with no noise whatever, and lay there, half under a bush.

“He’s pretty well beside himself with fright,” Dick decided mentally.

The next instant, absolutely without a warning, a snaky, silky something flashed before his eyes, caught around his throat and tightened with a swift jerk, shutting off his wind with choking, gagging suddenness.

CHAPTER VIII.

HELPLESS.

A sudden roar from Buckhart was strangled at its birth, and then ensued a desperate struggle on the part of the two Yale men, which played havoc with their assailants and threatened for a brief space to be effectual.

Unfortunately they were overwhelmed by numbers that seemed to have sprung out of the very ground, and hampered terribly by the choking hold of the silk cords about their throats. Struggling to their feet, they hurled off the clustering Chinamen time and time again, only to have the Orientals rush back to the attack with surprising persistency and tenacity of purpose.

Back and forth among the bushes they thrashed, dragging the clinging men with them, but with fast-ebbing strength; for without air a man cannot last long, no matter how strong he may be.
Dick had a vague recollection of staggering out into the open with yellow men clinging like leeches to legs, arms, body—anywhere that they could get a hold; of striving to reach Victor Cowden, who stood cowering by the fringe of bushes; of seeing a stalwart sailor rush suddenly between them.

With a last desperate effort, the Yale man shook one arm free and landed his fist with crushing force on the sailor’s nose. The fellow tottered back against the rock, bleeding profusely, and upsetting the lantern as he did so. But Merriwell did not know or care what had become of him. He was down and out, and, with a loud roaring in his ears and everything whirling around and around before his eyes, he toppled over on the sand, momentarily unconscious.

When he came to his senses a short time later he found himself wedged into the bow of the boat with Brad beside him, breathing stertorously. For a moment or two he lay there collecting his thoughts. They were being carried off to the ship, of course. He could hear the water lapping rhythmically against the planking beside his head, and see the backs of the sailors bending in unison to their oars. He even felt a throbb of satisfaction as he saw one of them lift a hand now and then to his still bleeding nose.

“You got yours, anyhow,” he thought.

But as his brain cleared and he was able to think over the situation, he decided that their position was far from enviable. It was perfectly evident that Cowden had, in some way, discovered their presence in the bushes, and that all the time they lay there watching he was aware of the fact. That, of course, accounted perfectly for his exhibition of nervousness and fear.

How he had found it out was more of a problem. In thinking it over, Dick at last decided that there must have been Chinamen posted all about the place of landing. The number who had suddenly attacked them would seem to prove that conclusively. No doubt they had been stationed among the trees at the very beginning and were there all the time he and Brad had been talking, when they thought themselves out of sight and hearing of any one. The Yale man smiled wryly.

“That’s sure one on us,” he thought. “They caught us beautifully. But who the deuce would ever suppose they were there all the time?”

That, however, was not the vital point to consider now. They had been captured and were on their way to the steamer. What the vessel was or where she was bound, Dick had not the remotest idea. He realized quite well, however, that Cowden would exercise every influence he possessed to have them carried far away, if not quietly disposed of for good. He must know in what a perilous position their freedom would put him, and would naturally act accordingly.

Presently Merriwell’s attention was attracted from his own troubles to a wordy altercation going on in the stern between Cowden himself and the burly man in blue.

“I ain’t for it at all,” the latter growled ill-temperedly. “I tell you, I didn’t agree on any kidnapping, and I won’t stand for it.”

“You won’t, eh?” snapped the Yale man. “Well, I don’t think you’ve got anything to say about it. Just leave that to your betters.”

The sailor swore fluently.

“Just the same, I’ve got something to say,” he retorted, half rising to reach for his coat, which lay on the other side of the boat. “If I should tell all I know, some people would be in a nice pickle.”

“Oh, you think so, do you?” rasped Cowden, in a voice which trembled with rage. “You’d better mind your own business, or it’ll be the worse for you.”

“I reckon I can make this my business,” retorted the other. “You know what Hanson is when he’s stewed. He’d stop at nothing, and I ain’t going to—”

The words ended abruptly in a muffled blow, as Cowden sprang up and struck the man with all his strength in the face. Starting up from where he lay, Dick saw the tall fellow stagger under the shock, lose his balance, and topple into the water with a loud splash.

Then he went under.

With eyes blazing, Merriwell leaped to his feet.

“You miserable coward!” he ripped out scornfully, gazing at the trembling Cowden, who had hastily resumed his seat. “You’re even worse than I thought you.”

Another moment and he had taken a clean dive straight for the point where the sailor had disappeared. Some distance below the surface he struck the man’s body coming up, passed under him skillfully, and shot out of the water almost as soon as did the other.

The boat had paused about twenty feet distant, and as he came to the surface Dick heard Cowden saying:

“What are you stopping for? Leave them alone. It’s a good riddance to both.”

Merriwell had little fear that the sailors would obey him and abandon their comrade, so he turned his at-
tention instantly to the helpless man. For a moment he feared the usual senseless clutching with which so many drowning people handicap their rescuers, but apparently the man in blue, although he could not swim a stroke, knew how to keep his head. After a first instinctive grab at Dick, which the latter easily avoided, he subsided, and the Yale pitcher was able to hold him up without difficulty as he swam slowly toward the boat.

In the latter the sailors, paying no heed to Cowden’s orders to keep on to the steamer, were backing water vigorously, and a moment later two of them pulled in their oars and leaned over the side to catch hold of their comrade as they came up to him.

Relieved of his weight, Dick made haste to scramble into the bow, having his suspicions that, once the sailor was safe, the others might have little compunction in leaving him to his fate.

Buckhart was just coming to as Merriwell dropped down beside him, but the latter was so interested in what was going on aft that he did not speak to Brad for a moment or two. When the mate—so one of the sailors had just called him—was dragged in and deposited near Cowden, Dick fully expected that the big man would instantly fall upon the other and give him what he deserved. He certainly seemed capable of it, both mentally and physically.

Oddly enough, nothing of the sort happened. The big fellow sat glowering at the Yale man for a minute or two, his great fists clenched and his face so threatening that Cowden shrank away as far from him as possible. Then, seeming to get control of himself, the mate deliberately turned his back and hunched down, staring moodily at the bottom of the boat.

“Much ado about nothing,” Dick murmured to himself. “I was rather hoping he’d give that cur what was coming to him. I wonder why he didn’t?”

He found out later what a good and sufficient reason the mate had for holding his hand.

CHAPTER IX.
A SCOUNDREL FROM YALE.

Buckhart had barely recovered full possession of his senses when the steamer loomed up ahead, effectually putting a stop to any attempt on Dick’s part to enlighten his chum as to what straits they were in.

Sweeping around, the boat came to a stop where a ladder dangled over the side. There was a moment’s pause during which the sailors looked rather impa-

tently toward Cowden and the mate. Then the former spoke.

“Climb up, you fellows,” he said hesitatingly and without looking Merriwell in the eyes.

Without comment, Dick obeyed. There seemed nothing else to be done at the present juncture, so he caught the rope sides of the ladder and scrambled up, followed closely by Buckhart.

As he set foot on the deck, Dick found himself close beside a short, stocky man with a tangled, grizzled beard, and a breath which could be detected a dozen feet away. He had been standing by the rail, apparently for the purpose of steadying himself, and when Dick appeared he glared fiercely at him.

“And who are you?” he roared angrily. “What are you doing on my boat?”

Merriwell smiled placidly, though he was feeling far from happy or secure.

“Exactly what I should like to know myself,” he said pleasantly. “Perhaps you’d better ask Mr. Cowden.”

“Impudent puppy!” frothed the captain. “You think you’re smart, no doubt. I’ll show you!”

He took a staggering step forward, but, Buckhart , looming over the rail at that moment, he skipped back with equal suddenness.

“Another one,” he muttered dazedly. “The place is lousy with ‘em.”

He blinked at the glowering Texan for an instant and then leaned over the rail.

“Cowden!” he bellowed. “What’s this mean? Who in blazes are these—”

“Can’t you keep your nut on for a minute?” rasped the Yale man, who was hurrying up the ladder behind Brad. “You’re drunk, that’s what’s the matter with you,” he added, as he stepped to the deck.

“Nothing o’ the sort,” retorted the stocky man angrily. “Anybody says ’m drunk—”

Cowden grasped him firmly by the arm and led him down the deck. Some little distance away they stopped, and the Yale man began to pour his story into the captain’s ears. At least, that was what Dick supposed him to be doing, for, though he could hear nothing, the constant interruptions of the half-drunken man were sufficiently clear.

“Blazes!” he roared. “What’d you bring ’em here for? Why didn’t you throw ’em overboard?”

A few hurried, low-voiced words from Cowden, then—

“You fool! What can I do with ’em?”

Another inaudible murmur.
"Rot!" bellowed the stocky man, his face purple. "How long could I keep 'em shut up? They'd get away the first port we touched, and then what? You and I, and a lot more would be in limbo before we could say Jack Robinson."

Dick listened to these comments with a sinking heart. He knew Cowden's weak nature and foresaw quite plainly that it would be only a question of time before his milder counsels would be overruled by this roaring, blustering sailor who apparently kept himself constantly pickled in alcohol.

To a person with no moral compunctions whatever, there could be but one absolutely safe disposition of the two captives—but one method whereby their mouths would be closed for good and all. Dick's lips straightened firmly. If it came to that, he had an idea that he and Brad might be able to give a pretty good account of themselves before they were overcome.

He was somewhat surprised the next moment to see Victor Cowden turn away from the captain and walk slowly over to them.

"Look here, Merriwell," he said hesitatingly, his eyes on the deck. "I'm blamed sorry this business has happened."

"So it would appear," Dick returned. "You act as if you were."

"It's the truth," he persisted doggedly. "I'd give anything I own if you two hadn't turned up just when you did. I didn't want to bring you out here, but I had to."

"Really?" drawled Merriwell incredulously. "I was under the impression that you were boss of that shindy ashore."

"So I was," retorted Cowden, with somewhat more spirit. "When one of the Chinks told me you were in the bushes, I laid that plan to capture you, too. But you brought it on yourselves. If you hadn't snooped around and found out what was going on, there wouldn't have been any trouble. But I couldn't very well let you go and ruin me, for that's what you'd probably have done."

"It's what I'll do yet," Dick returned grimly. "I haven't any use for your sort of cattle, Cowden. This drunken skipper of yours may carry me around the world, but, the minute I can get free, I'll make it my business to see that you get everything that's coming to you. A fellow who will deliberately debauch his comrades by making drug fiends of them, isn't fit to associate with dogs, let alone men."

"I didn't do that!" Cowden flared up. "They found some opium in my room and smoked it for fun. I couldn't help that, could I?"

"You certainly could," Merriwell said coldly. "You had no right to have it in your room. You have no right to smuggle the poison into this country the way you've been doing for Heaven knows how long."

"I had to have money," the fellow said sullenly. "It was either that or leave college. My sister was sending me half of the little she earned, but I couldn't live off a woman."

"Why did you stay in college, then?" Merriwell demanded. "Better a thousand times go out and shovel coal than condemn no one knows how many human beings to a living death."

"It's all very well for you to talk that way," Cowden protested. "But— you know that if I didn't smuggle the stuff somebody else would. I couldn't tutor or do anything else to pay my way, and when I ran up against Hanson, in New York, and he gave me the chance, I took it. There's a heap more money in it than in anything else, and I've been able to get along myself, and even help Rita——"

"The less you bring your sister's name into a discussion of this sort the better," Dick interrupted shortly. "She's a great sight too good for you, and if she knew what you were up to it would break her heart."

"Just the same," whined Cowden, "she's the one who's so keen about my getting a degree."

"Don't try and shift the blame to her," Merriwell said sternly. "You're contemptible enough already."

Cowden drew himself up in an offended manner.

"Look here, Merriwell," he said querulously, "I started in to do you a good turn, and all I get is a call-down. I guess you've jawed about enough for one sitting, and we can get down to business. If you and Buckhart will swear solemnly never to reveal to any one what you have learned to-night, I'll persuade Captain Hanson to put you off at New York. Will you do it?"

"No!"

"You won't give me your word?" Cowden gasped, in astonishment.

"No, I won't. I'm going to put a stop to this thing. If it was only you, I shouldn't mind. You're so scared over this night's work that you'll probably pull out of the miserable business at once. But this precious captain of yours is a bird of another feather. He's the one who put you up to it when he found the authorities in New York were getting wise to his game. You see, I know something about this scoundrel, and I'd be
willing to stake a lot that he’s been smuggling opium into the country for more years than either of us could count. It’s about time he was put by the heels in a safe place.”

“Oh, is it?” roared the voice of the drunken skipper from behind Dick. “You crow pretty loud, my young cock. You’ll change your tune before long.”

—

CHAPTER X.

THROUGH THE STATEROOM WALL.

Turning to face him, Merriwell saw that he had crossed the deck with six of the sailors and the mate, all of whom stood quietly behind him. Evidently things were about to happen, and the two friends instinctively drew closer together.

“You think so?” Dick queried.

“I know so!” snapped the stocky man.

His face purpled, and, with a snarl of fury, he came closer, shaking his clenched fist at Dick.

“I’ve a good mind to lash you to the mast,” he frothed, “and give you a dose of the cat before I——”

“Wough!” yelled Buckhart, giving him a shove which sent him reeling against the mate. “Just try it, old soaks! You’ll get a dose of something worse than that.”

For a moment it looked as if the fellow was going instantly into apoplexy. The blood seemed fairly bursting from his veins and he was temporarily deprived of the power of speech. Several times his mouth opened and his jaws moved helplessly without any sounds issuing forth. Then, before he had recovered himself, Cowden sprang to his side and whispered something in his ear.

“Blazes!” roared the skipper furiously, shoving Cowden aside. “You’ll pay for that before I’m done with you!”

He fumbled at his collar as if it were strangling him, and his eyes rolled alarmingly.

“Take ’em below an’ lock ’em up, Jim, before I tear ’em to pieces,” he managed to gasp finally. “I’ll settle their hash good an’ proper—after I’ve had—a nip.”

The mate stepped forward without a word, and the sailors looked as if they were quite ready to take a hand.

Brad glanced appealingly at his chum. He was wild to fall on somebody and pummel them, but Dick shook his head. There was nothing to be gained now by resistance when there were enough men about the deck to overpower a Sandow, whereas much might be gained by delay. Consequently he stepped forward readily and followed the tall, burly mate toward the cabin. Brad, furious with impotent anger, came close behind, and last of all the six sailors.

In this way they descended the companionway, entered the room pointed out to them, and heard the key click in the lock outside.

For a moment neither man moved or spoke. Then Dick struck a match, lit the lamp, and dropped down on a bunk. Buckhart began to stamp up and down the narrow place, pausing now and then to stare morosely at his chum.

“I don’t see how in thunder you stay so calm,” he burst out finally. “I’d give anything I’ve got to sail into those roughnecks on deck and smash the faces off them.”

Dick smiled faintly.

“I’d like nothing better myself,” he returned quietly; “but what good would it do?”

Brad hesitated and scratched his head.

“Well, if would let off a powerful lot of steam,” he said at length.

“No doubt. But we’ll need all the steam we’ve got, I can tell you, before we’re out of this hole, old fellow. There’s no use wasting it doing foolish things. Besides, if we’d pitched into the gang just now they’d have downed us in the end and would probably have tied us up, which is something I want very much to avoid.”

“Don’t you think we could have held them off long enough to lower that boat?” Buckhart asked.

Merriwell shook his head.

“Certainly not. There were too many of them. The only thing we might have done was to make a rush for the rail, dive overboard, and swim to shore. I think I could have done it——”
"But I couldn't," interrupted the Texan. "I'm all right at ordinary distances, but a mile is some more than my limit; besides, they'd sure have started popping at us with guns. I reckon you're right, pard. I was a bit too hasty. But what in thunder are we going to do? Looks like we were in a mighty tight place."

"Tight as it is, we've got to get out of it somehow before morning," Dick returned. "I wouldn't trust that old reprobate, Hanson, as far as I can see him. He's got Cowden under his thumb, and can make him agree to anything."

He stood up and glanced about the room. It was a narrow cubbyhole with scarcely three feet between the edge of the bunk to the other wall. The only opening besides the door was a porthole through which a moderately plump monkey would have had difficulty in squeezing. Dick tried the door, and found it to be extremely substantial. The floor was laid in matched boards, and, without tools of any sort, it would be almost impossible to rip up. The only encouraging feature was the partition opposite the bunks, which investigation disclosed to be of decidedly flimsy materials.

"Looks as if it had been put in as an afterthought," Merriwell murmured, taking out his knife and driving it through one of the cracks. "I wonder what's on the other——"

He stopped abruptly and listened. The murmur of voices sounded suddenly, and without hesitation he bent and placed his ear close to the tiny opening the knife had made.

For a moment he could distinguish nothing. Then, as he became accustomed to it, he recognized the captain's raucous tones.

"It ain't safe, I tell you. They've got to be done away with, or we'll all be in the soup."

The reply came in Cowden's lighter, flurred tones, and Dick heard enough to gather that the Yale man was expostulating.

Hanson objected profanely, and for some minutes the argument went on strenuously. Merriwell was somewhat surprised at Cowden's persistency. He had supposed that the fellow would succumb without delay to the captain's dominating personality, but the fact was that he held out firmly against anything like foul play and insisted that the two prisoners be kept closely confined until the vessel put in at a remote port, where they could then be released to make their way back to New York as best they could.

Thus the argument went merrily on for ten minutes or so, and then the listening man noticed a sudden, curious change in the captain's manner and tone.

"Well, have your own way then for the present," he growled crossly. "Only don't blame me if something happens. You'd better turn in, and we can talk this over in the morning. I'll guarantee you'll come around to my way o' thinking then, if you've got any sense left."

"I don't think so," Cowden retorted. "I'll never consent to these fellows being done away with. I won't have murder on my hands."

"You might do worse," grunted the captain. "But I'm sick of jawing over it. I'm going to turn in and get some sleep."

A moment after the door closed, and for a brief space there was silence. Still Dick kept his ear to the crack. He had a feeling that Hanson had not dismissed the matter from his mind quite so readily as he would have Cowden believe.

"It ain't safe," came in the harsh voice presently. "They've got to be disposed of to-night or we shut up shop."

Dick thought he was talking to himself. He was speedily undeceived.

"D'ye hear what I said?" rasped the voice of Hanson. "To-night it's got to be done."

"I ain't deaf," was the laconic response of the mate.

It was the first time he had opened his lips. Merriwell had not thought him to be in the room. Another brief pause ensued.

"You an' me have got to do it," remarked Hanson pointedly. "There ain't no one else we can trust."

Another pause.

"Why in blazes don't you speak up?" demanded the captain wrathfully. "You've got a tongue."

"What's there to say? You're running this shooting match, not me. What d'you want me to do?"
"First of all, they got to be separated," Hanson said slowly. "They'll be easier handled apart. You go an' do that, while I think up the rest. You can say they got to go in different places for fear they'll help each other to get away. They'll swallow it, all right. Their bluff about fighting is mostly wind."

Merriwell’s lips curved in a grim smile as he straightened up and glanced at Buckhart.

“They’re going to put us in different cabins, Brad,” he remarked quietly. “They think we’ll be easier handled that way. I reckon the old fox has it in mind to truss us up and drop us quietly overboard before morning.”

“Oh, has he?” inquired the Texan sarcastically. He hitched up his belt and drew it in a hole. “Don’t figure we’ll have anything to say, I s’pose. Well?”

“The mate’s coming in now for that purpose,” Merriwell whispered. “Get ready, old fellow.”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the key turned in the lock, the door swung quietly open, and the big, broad-shouldered man in faded blue clothes stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHADOW WITH THE KNIFE.

For a moment or two he stood quietly there, his keen blue eyes glancing quickly from one to the other of the Yale men. Then he closed the door softly behind him and took a step forward.

“Thank you kindly, Mr. Mate,” Dick smiled; “but we’d a little rather keep the same room.”

The man’s jaw dropped, and his eyes widened in astonishment.

“How the mischief—” he began, and then his eyes flashed suddenly to the thin partition wall.

“Never thought of that,” he murmured. “You heard what was said in there, then?”

Merriwell nodded.

“Quite enough to know what was up.”

The mate looked somewhat aggrieved.

“An’ you really believed I’d join in with them in this dirty trick after what you done for me to-night?” he asked. “I tell you, youngster, Jim Bullen ain’t that sort. I’ve done rotten things in my life, no doubt, but that’s jest one too many for me.”

A sudden thrill of hope leaped into Dick’s breast at this unlooked-for turn in their favor. A moment before the future had seemed pretty dark, and all his cogitating had not served to hit upon a feasible plan by which they could escape from the tight place they were in. But with this man on their side the complex ion of things was decidedly altered. The only question was, could he be trusted?

“How do I know that this isn’t just a part of your scheme to separate us?” Dick asked quietly.

The mate shrugged his shoulders.

“You got me,” he answered simply. “I can’t give you no more proof than what I’m telling you. You saved my life, an’ I’m willing to do anything I can to help you out. What’s more, I’m dead sick of this boat and her captain. It’s my first voyage, and it’s going to be my last in her. I didn’t bargain for none of this opium business. I thought she was what she pretended to be, a regular coaster plying from Canada to New York, with sometimes a run down to Brazil.”

“The opium was taken on somewhere in Canada, then?” Merriwell asked interestedly.

“Nova Scotia, I reckon,” the mate returned. “I wasn’t supposed to know nothing about it. We lay off the coast above Halifax one night, an’ Hanson went ashore with them same four men. They brung them packages back with ’em, but I didn’t get wise to what they was till to-night, when the old man was too soused to land ’em an’ I had to do it.”

While the mate had been talking, Dick was watching him keenly and appraisingly. The fellow’s face was open and candid, and his blue eyes never dropped or looked away; his voice was earnest and seemed to ring true. Merriwell felt instinctively that he could be trusted. It was about their last chance, anyway, and worth risking something for.

“You’re willing to help us out, then?” he asked tersely.

“Sure.”

“Have you thought up any plan?”

The mate shook his head.
“Not unless I can lower the boat and put you off in that,” he returned.

Merriwell was silent for a moment, his brow furrowed in thought.

“Are the crew all with Hanson?” he asked presently.

“Pretty much. There’s four of ’em—the same as landed the stuff to-night—that’s in with him hand and glove. I reckon they get a share of the profits. The rest is a kind of bum lot that I wouldn’t trust very far, though I don’t guess they’re wise to what’s going on.”

“How many are on deck?”

“Two. One at the wheel and one for’ard.”

“And the others?”

“Below.”

Bullen’s eyes suddenly gleamed with comprehension and mingled with it was not a little concern.

“Say,” he asked hurriedly. “You’re not thinking of taking the ship, are you?”

“That’s what I had in mind,” Dick answered quietly.

“But that’s mutiny or piracy, I don’t know which,” the mate objected. “I’d get jugged the minute we made a port.”

“Nothing of the sort. You’d be helping to land a notorious smuggler, and the authorities would give you a vote of thanks.”

“You sure about that?”

“Perfectly. Look here, Bullen. If you know anything of what a curse this opium habit is, you’ll understand the menace Hanson is to the whole country. For years he’s been running the stuff in, and it’s high time he was put where he’ll be harmless for a while. I mean to do just that thing if it’s possible, and you’ll be aiding a good cause if you help me. There isn’t a particle of danger for you in it.”

“All right, if you say so,” Bullen agreed. “What’s your plan?”

“Truss up the captain first and make him safe. Are there any guns aboard?”

“The old man’s got a couple of revolvers in his cabin.”

“Good. We’ll tie him up, get the guns, and then proceed to bring the crew to reason. They can be locked up below, except a couple of stokers and the engineer. I can take the wheel while you and Buckhart go down to the engine room and make sure these fellows don’t play any tricks. Just the sight of a loaded revolver is wonderfully persuasive, you know. Then we’ll turn about and make straight for New London, where the vessel can be turned over to the authorities. Get the idea?”

“You bet! Gosh, young feller! You’ve got nerve.”

He hitched up his trousers with a businesslike air.

“Well, I’m ready,” he went on. “The sooner we get started the sooner it’ll be over. I sure never thought I’d turn pirate, but I reckon it’s in a good cause.”

He turned to the door and then paused, one hand on the knob.

“You two can handle the old man, I guess,” he remarked a bit sheepishly. “I’d jest as soon not butt in on that deal unless I have to. He’s a hot one, all right, and I’d a bit rather he didn’t know I was in this. Look out for squalls, though, when you tackle him. Them guns is kept in the locker to the right of his bunk.”

Dick nodded understandingly. The door was opened softly, and they stepped out into the narrow, dimly lit passage. Two minutes later they pushed open the door of the captain’s stateroom, and, entering, closed it behind them. Hanson was standing by the bunk, a bottle uptilted to his mouth.

“Well, Jim,” he growled. “About time you was back. Everything all——”

His voice broke abruptly, and for an instant he stared at his unexpected visitors in unbelieving wonder. His eyes opened wider and wider until it seemed as if they would pop out in another moment; his ruddy face grew purple, and the flask slipped from his fingers and smashed on the floor.

“Everything’s perfectly all right, captain,” Merriwell returned suavely.

With a roar like that of an angry bull, the stocky man rushed at them furiously, wild, incoherent sounds issuing from his parted lips. Dick caught him by one arm, twisted him around, and, before the bewildered man knew what had happened, he was lying face downward on the bed.
"Not unless I can lower the boat and put you off in that," he returned.

Merriwell was silent for a moment, his brow furrowed in thought.

"Are the crew all with Hanson?" he asked presently.

"Pretty much. There's four of 'em—the same as landed the stuff to-night—that's in with him hand and glove. I reckon they get a share of the profits. The rest is a kind of bum lot that I wouldn't trust very far, though I don't guess they're wise to what's going on."

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"The old man's got a couple of revolvers in his cabin."

"Good. We'll tie him up, get the guns, and then proceed to bring the crew to reason. They can be locked up below, except a couple of stokers and the engineer. I can take the wheel while you and Buckhart go down to the engine room and make sure these fellows don't play any tricks. Just the sight of a loaded revolver is wonderfully persuasive, you know. Then we'll turn about and make straight for New London, where the vessel can be turned over to the authorities. Get the idea?"

"You bet! Gosh, young feller! You've got nerve."

He hitched up his trousers with a businesslike air.

"Well, I'm ready," he went on. "The sooner we get started the sooner it'll be over. I sure never thought I'd turn pirate, but I reckon it's in a good cause."

He turned to the door and then paused, one hand on the knob.

"You two can handle the old man, I guess," he remarked a bit sheepishly. "I'd jest as soon not butt in on that deal unless I have to. He's a hot one, all right, and I'd a bit rather he didn't know I was in this. Look out for squalls, though, when you tackle him. Them guns is kept in the locker to the right of his bunk."

Dick nodded understandingly. The door was opened softly, and they stepped out into the narrow, dimly lit passage. Two minutes later they pushed open the door of the captain's stateroom, and, entering, closed it behind them. Hanson was standing by the bunk, a bottle uptilted to his mouth.

"Well, Jim," he growled. "About time you was back. Everything all——"

His voice broke abruptly, and for an instant he stared at his unexpected visitors in unbelieving wonder. His eyes opened wider and wider until it seemed as if they would pop out in another moment; his ruddy face grew purple, and the flask slipped from his fingers and smashed on the floor.

"Everything's perfectly all right, captain," Merriwell returned suavely.

With a roar like that of an angry bull, the stocky man rushed at them furiously, wild, incoherent sounds issuing from his parted lips. Dick caught him by one arm, twisted him around, and, before the bewildered man knew what had happened, he was lying face downward on the bed.
He still continued to roar madly, however, but, while Merrigwell held him, Buckhart, with much enjoyment, proceeded to gag him effectually with strips torn from the bedding.

"Don't strain yourself, little one," he chuckled. "You'll sure burst a blood vessel if you don't take care. Save a little of that wind. You'll want it later."

In five minutes the man was helpless, bound hand and foot, but still squirming and twisting in the furious rage which possessed him. Leaving him on the bunk, Dick secured the pistols, locked the door on the outside, and pocketed the key. That done, they joined Bullen at the companionway and crept softly on deck.

The sailor forward was instantly reduced to a state of lamblike docility by the sight of a revolver poked into his face, and consented with enthusiasm to accompany them below to the crew's quarters.

Here matters were adjusted satisfactorily in an absurdly simple manner. Brad, revolver in hand, took up his position by the entrance, and the few sailors roused by the bustle, who came forward curiously to see what was up, instantly decided that they were content to stay where they were, and retreated hastily.

Dick and the mate then descended to the engine room, where they speedily convinced the engineer, a canny Scot, that he would be wise to succumb to the inevitable. There had been little fear of his not doing so, since Bullen was sure that he had no idea what had been going on in the ship.

"All the same," Dick remarked, in a low tone, after things had been adjusted satisfactorily, "you'd better take the gun and stay here. We don't want to run any chance of things slipping up after they've progressed so nicely."

"But what'll you do without it," inquired the mate. "There's that lad at the wheel to settle with yet, and Cowden."

"I don't think we need count on the latter," Dick smiled. "He's a pretty weak sort, and, when he finds how things have gone, he won't put in his oar. I expect I can manage the sailor all right, too. He'll be ready to surrender when he finds there's no one to back him up."

This proved to be the case. When Dick appeared in the pilot house and calmly informed the man at the wheel that he could give up his job and go below, the fellow was so dumfounded at the coolness of the request, and so bewildered at seeing Merrigwell free and apparently in command of the ship when he thought him locked up in the cabin, that he obeyed instinctively.

When he had departed, Dick grasped the wheel, and, ringing for the engine to slow down to half speed, threw it hard over. The steamer swept around in a graceful curve, and was presently headed back on her course. After that there was comparatively little to do save keep her on the course for New London. The chart was pinned up on the wall beside him, and, anyway, Dick was so familiar with the waters of the Sound that he could have navigated the boat without it.

As he stood behind the wheel, the wind stirring his hair and the pulsing throb of the engines under his feet, he smiled. The contrast between their present position and what it had been a short hour before was so great as to be almost unbelievable.

"Looks as if we were going to come out of it all right," he murmured. "That Bullen's a decent sort. There are not many men who would help capture their own ship the way he's done. I'm sure that, even now, he's quaking in his boots at the thought of what'll happen to him. It certainly was a lucky thing I jumped into the briny after him."

And so his brain went on, turning over the events of the night and planning for the morrow—or, rather, today, for it was long past midnight. Now and then he glanced down at the silent deck below him, but there was little to fear there, with the crew confined and under guard. The only individual who possessed his freedom was Victor Cowden, and he was probably still deep in slumber.

Had he been able to get an unobstructed view of the whole deck, including the cook's galley, Merrigwell might not have been so perfectly at ease. In his calculations, Bullen had unfortunately neglected to consider the individual who had awakened with the first movement on deck and taken in every subsequent detail through a crack in the door with his keen, glittering almond eyes.
With the patience of his race he waited until everything had quieted down. He saw the sailor descend slowly and dazedly from the pilot house and disappear below. He knew that there was but a single man left to contend with, and, when the ship curved about and was headed once more to the eastward, he arose from his crouching position and selected a long, keen-edged knife from the rack against the wall, a slow, cruel smile rippling for a moment the impassive calm of his sallow face.

"Forget Lee Chong," he murmured.

A few minutes later the galley door opened slowly, and, without a sound, a black shape crept out and slid swiftly into the shadow of the rail. From that moment it was almost invisible, but never still. Along the rail it crept noiselessly and presently disappeared into the cabin. In a minute or two it reappeared again and continued its stealthy progress forward.

Up the ladder it crawled, taking each step with such infinite care that not a rustle betrayed its presence to the man in the pilot house. The door stood open, and a single bound would take the Chinaman the length of the narrow place.

Slowly he rose to a crouching position, his beady eyes fixed upon the broad back of the Yale man, choosing the exact spot in which he meant to bury to the very hilt the knife his lean fingers clutched so tightly.

A moment’s hesitation, and then, like a cat, he leaped forward.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR THE SAKE OF A GIRL.

Unfortunately for the success of Lee Chong’s plan, he had overlooked one thing: The pilot house was surrounded by heavy sheets of glass set in wooden frames. Most of them were open, but it happened that one, just to the left of dead ahead, had somehow become wedged so tight that it could not be lowered.

In that glass, backed by the starry blackness of the night, Dick caught a single, shadowy glimpse of the Chinaman as he launched forward, knife uplifted, and like a flash he dropped flat on the floor.

The Oriental crashed against the wheel, felt a grip of iron on one ankle, and sprawled heavily. Another moment and his wrist was seized and twisted with a wrench which brought a howl of pain from his thin lips and effectually loosened his grasp on the knife, which clattered to the floor.

"Not this time, my friend," Dick said quietly, as he picked up the blade and tossed it through one of the side windows into the water.

He gripped the wheel again and pulled it over a point.

"Get over in the corner!" he commanded sharply.

"Now stay there!"

Lee Chong made haste to do as he was told, and crouched back of the wheel, nursing his aching wrist, his black eyes blinking rapidly with the amazing unexpectedness of what had happened to him. He had never seen a man like this with fingers of iron and eyes in the back of his head. Surely he must be a magician. Lee Chong did not care for magic at all; it frightened him. So he was very still, hoping that thus he might not again attract the attention of this amazing person who could have thrown him into the water, as well as the knife.

Merriwell did not trouble himself further about the fellow. He was harmless now and evidently thoroughly scared. It was rather annoying, to be sure, to think of their having neglected to take the cook into consideration. But for that providential windowpane, it might have resulted seriously. But Dick did not waste much time thinking about it, for the sky was already streaked with signs of approaching dawn, and, before it was really light, Victor Cowden appeared.

Merriwell saw him emerge from the cabin and glance about in a bewildered manner. Captain Hanson believed on getting the utmost possible amount of work out of his men, and usually they were up long before this scrubbing the decks and doing various other chores.

Cowden glanced at his watch, and then discovered in what direction the vessel was headed. He was still in the throes of this petrifying discovery when he happened to glance up and saw Dick looking amusedly at him from the pilot house.

That completed his demoralization, and, after look-
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ing about the deck again in a vague, bewildered manner; he walked forward and slowly mounted the ladder.

"Wha—what's this mean?" he gasped from the doorway. "Where's Hanson?"

"In his cabin," Merriwell smiled. "Trussed up like a fowl, and the door locked. The key's in my pocket. Look here, Cowden, the game's up, and you may as well get used to the notion. Buckhart is below with a revolver looking after the crew; Bullen is doing the same thing in the engine room. I'm taking the steamer back to New London, where I propose to turn her over to the authorities."

Cowden staggered back against the casing, his face deathly pale.

"You're going to give us all up?" he gasped.

"I certainly am. The sailors probably won't be held, but I'm going to see that Hanson juggled, or perish in the attempt."

"But—what—about me?" faltered the Yale man.

"You'll have to take your chances with the others," Dick returned shortly.

"But I'll be ruined!" wailed Cowden. "Think of the disgrace! My mother—Rita—"

Dick frowned.

"Why didn't you think of them before?" he asked.

"Somehow he did not like to think of what this exposure would mean to the two innocent women. They would feel it even more than the criminal himself. He wished he might let Cowden off in some way, but the thing was not possible. Under the law, the man was quite as guilty as Hanson, though in reality there could be no comparison between the two. Hanson was the ringleader, the moving spirit. He it was who had persuaded Cowden to play the part of go-between, passing the smuggled opium on to agents in New York. If Hanson were released he would, without question, continue his nefarious practices, whereas the Yale man—— Well, he was so thoroughly cowed and frightened that he would fly from smuggling as he would the plague. At the same time, Dick could see no way in which he could justly distinguish between the two, and, though the groveling fellow begged and pleaded piteously for the next hour, he remained firm.

The harrowing business might have continued much longer had not Merriwell's attention been attracted to a couple of motor boats which at that moment turned from their course in by the shore and headed straight for the steamer. The one in the lead looked familiar, somehow. A slim fellow was steering, and close beside him sat a girl. In the stern another girl sat beside the man who was looking after the engine. The second boat contained five men.

Nearer and nearer they came. Then, all at once, Merriwell recognized the chap in the first boat.

"Fitz!" he exclaimed incredulously. "If that don't beat the Dutch!"

Cowden followed the direction of his glance, and, as he saw the girl in the forward part of the boat, his face blanched and his eyes were full of horror.

"Rita!" he gasped. "She's coming out!"

He looked wildly around.

"She mustn't find me here! For God's sake, don't tell her, Merriwell! I'll hide—she mustn't see me! I'll do anything you want after she's gone, only don't let her see me or know I'm here!"

Without waiting for a reply, he flung himself down the ladder, and, rushing aft, dived into the forecastle and disappeared.

Dick bit his lips and frowned. He, too, realized that a horrible shock it would be to the girl to find her brother in the ship and with such companions. It was most annoying to have her turn up this way. Fitz must have gone to the Minturns for help, and found her there. Merriwell foresaw that he would have to be extremely diplomatic to handle the situation.

By this time the foremost motor boat was within a few hundred feet of the steamer, and Dick thrust his head out of the pilot house.

"Hello, Fitz!" he yelled, waving one arm.

The slim chap started as if shot, sprang to his feet, and waved one arm frantically in response.

"Bully for you, Dick!" he shouted joyously. "Can we come aboard?"

The girl said nothing, but her attitude was one of tense, eager expectation.

"Sure," called Merriwell. "I'll slow down and get the ladder over."
He rang the bell for half speed, and then looked for the first time at the crouching Chinaman.

"Get the ladder over and help those people aboard," he said tersely. "If you try any monkey tricks, I'll throw you overboard same as I did your knife. See?"

Lee Chong ducked his head.

"Me savvy," he answered.

He made haste to obey the orders, and Dick stopped the engines altogether, letting the steamer lay to as one after another of the passengers from both launches scrambled up on deck. One man, apparently a sailor, remained, and presently he fastened the two boats together with a rope and started slowly toward the shore. Evidently the visitors were there to stay.

In another moment Fitzgerald raced up the ladder and tumbled into the pilot house.

"You old lobster!" he exclaimed fondly. "You certainly had the bunch guessing. What’s it all about, anyhow? Where’ve you been, and where’s Buckhart?"

Before Dick could answer one of the questions, the other men began to appear, Mr. Minturn in the lead.

"Well, young man!" he exclaimed, grasping Dick’s free hand. "It looks as if you’d come out of your scrape, whatever it was, with flying colors. We needn’t have wasted such a lot of worry about you, after all. I haven’t put in such a night in a good many years."

"Great Scott!" Dick gasped, his face flushing. "You don’t mean to say you’ve been looking for me all night, Mr. Minturn?"

"You just bet he has!" grinned Jack Minturn. "You couldn’t keep dad away with ropes when he found out you were in trouble."

The flush on Merriwell’s face deepened.

"You people are awfully good to do that," he stammered.

"Tut, tut!" clicked the banker. "We’ve done little except hunt through bushes, expecting any minute to come upon your dead body. Drop that, Merriwell, and relieve our curiosity. What’s it all mean? Whose steamer is this, and where in the world are you taking her?"

"And us?" put in Fitzgerald, with a grin.

"Exactly," the banker agreed. "You see, we’re a very trusting crowd."

Dick smiled.

"Luckily we’re only bound as far as New London," he explained, and proceeded to add a brief but comprehensive account of their adventures, which was listened to with the greatest possible interest and astonishment.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the banker, when he had finished. "I never heard of such a thing in all my life. Smuggling opium at our very doors. Outrageous! Dastardly! I shall do my best to see that the villains are punished as they deserve. Well, well! Why, it sounds like a fairy tale, or ‘Treasure Island’ or something like that. You have them well trussed up, I hope."

"They’re quite safe," Dick smiled. "The captain is the principal criminal, and he’s tied hard and fast with a gag in his mouth."

He had purposely omitted all reference to Victor Cowden. He could not bear the thought of that girl on the deck below learning what her brother was.

"Take the wheel a few minutes, Fitz," he went on quickly. "I want to slip down and tell Brad and the mate about it. There’s no use in keeping guard any longer with this bunch on deck."

He managed to evade the two girls and disappear into the forecastle before they could stop him. Cautioning Buckhart to say nothing of Cowden, he repeated the same advice to Bullen and added that they might as well both come on deck. He hoped in this way to keep the knowledge of her brother’s presence from the girl, at least until they had left the steamer at New London.

Miss Cowden was waiting for him as he came out and laid her hand swiftly on his arm. Her face was anxious, and her lips quivered a little.

"Mr. Merriwell," she said hurriedly, "just one moment. Victor—where—is he?"

"Your brother, Miss Cowden?" Dick asked, in apparent astonishment. "Surely you didn’t expect to find him here? He didn’t come out from New Haven with us yesterday."

She hesitated, a look of sudden hope striving with the worry in her face.
“I knew,” she persisted. “But the cigarette case Eric found? I thought——”

“The case was Victor’s?” Merriwell asked.

She nodded.

“I’m sure of it. He had a new one given him not long ago, and it was engraved with our crest. We have two, you know. One we have scarcely ever used, but Victor liked it best. The others did not recognize it, but I knew.”

Dick frowned a little.

“It’s very strange,” he mused. “Do you suppose he could have loaned it to any one? Surely you don’t think that your brother would be mixed up in an affair like this?”

There were tears in her eyes as she looked up at him.

“I didn’t want to think it,” she almost sobbed. “But I’ve been so worried about him lately. It all seemed to fit in, too. That’s why I made Katherine come along with the men. I couldn’t stand the suspense of waiting and wondering whether it was true.”

Merriwell’s eyes were very gentle as he looked into the tear-filled brown ones of the charming girl.

“I shouldn’t worry any more if I were you, Miss Cowden,” he said reassuringly. “I feel sure that Victor will be able to explain about the cigarette case when you see him.”

“You really think so?” she asked, in a tone of relief.

She smiled tremulously through her tears.

“What a dreadful person you must think me, Mr. Merriwell, to suspect my brother of a thing like that! But it wasn’t only the cigarette case; there were other things. I can’t tell you how thankful I am that there is nothing in it.”

“Hang it all!” Dick muttered, a little later. “I can’t give him up. It would break that girl’s heart. I don’t care whether it’s right or wrong, I’m going to let him have a chance.”

He found time presently to go below. By the time he had returned the steamer was entering New London harbor. The sailors, released from surveillance, had ventured on deck and were gathered in little knots discussing the amazing situation.

Buffen was at the wheel, and presently he made a skillful landing at one of the docks, where Dick at once went ashore and telephoned the authorities about the case. That done, he returned to the boat, where the others were waiting for him.

Some of the men asking if they might go ashore, Dick gave permission, except for the four whom the mate supposed to have knowledge of the smuggling operations. He thought it better to detain these for examination. The captain remained locked in his cabin, though Merriwell had gone in some time before and removed the gag.

In this wise the group of men, with the two girls, stood chatting by the gangway, waiting somewhat impatiently for the officials; for most of them were beginning to feel the need of breakfast. Dick joined in the jesting and laughter, at the same time keeping an eye on the sailors who now and then passed down to the dock.

Finally one appeared alone, his canvas hat pulled well over his eyes, and Merriwell instantly turned and engaged Rita Cowden in conversation until the fellow had passed. She had quite recovered her spirits; her cheeks were slightly flushed and her eyes sparkled in the intensity of her relief. The tragic droop was gone from her sensitive mouth.

Presently Dick took a hurried glance after the solitary sailor walking swiftly down the dock with a decidedly unautical gait.

“Well, he’s gone,” he muttered. “I ought not to have done it, I suppose, but I’ll be hanged if I’m sorry!”

THE END.

Another corking good baseball story for the next issue. It is called “Dick Merriwell’s Good-fellowship; or, The Man with the Wrong Idea.” It is chiefly a baseball story, but there are others factors in it which stand out in strong relief. A clever and diabolical plot is hatched to discredit Dick as an amateur athlete and sportsman, and he falls for a trick that is so simple that no one ever thought of it before. What he does after discovering the trick, and what happens to the man with the wrong idea will furnish you some very agreeable hot-weather reading on June 4th. It is No. 793.
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THE RIDE OF DEATH.

My name is Morgan Grenoble, and to-day I have reached the turning point of my thirtieth year.

People say that I look "odd," with almost snow-white hair, and wonder how it came thus to one so young.

They do not know the story I am about to tell.

Eight years ago, come the twenty-ninth of this very month, I stood at the hymn-slate altar with Laura Comstock.

It was in Stockton, now quite a city in the heart of a great Western State.

I was a telegraph operator, and was stationed at Wayburgh, a station twenty miles from Stockton, and at the terminus of the then D. G. & C. R. Railway.

Returning from our honeymoon, I left my wife in Stockton, and proceeded to Wayburgh, intending to remain at my old post until relieved, which I thought would be in a few days, as my offered resignation had been accepted at headquarters.

The engineer on the "up" train was Mark Moore, a rather handsome young fellow, who had been my rival for the hand of the woman I called my wife.

He was piqued at my success.

When the train stupidly reached Moreland's, I alighted from the passenger coach and walked forward to the engine.

Mark was busily engaged oiling the machinery.

"How are you, Morgan?" he said, as he espied me, and held out his hand.

His disappointment seemed to have left him, and he was very pleasant.

I told him that my health was never better.

"Going to Wayburgh?" he asked.

"Yes.

"Just get in with me, then," he said.

I replied that I would do so, and when the train moved away, I was occupying a seat in the engine, chatting with the engineer.

"It is a long way up this grade," he remarked.

"Yes," I answered, "fifty-four miles."

"One hardly notices the ascent," he went on, "but the descent is an entirely different thing. I was thinking, Morgan, what a terrible thing it would be if an engine, with full power on, were to become unmanageable at the top of the grade, and dash away."

I pondered.

"And if a man bent on revenge were to place a fellow creature bound on the engine, what a terrible death he would hasten to, with almost lightning rapidity."

Again an icy chill went to my heart at his words, and I said:

"Suppose the engine should encounter the C--passenger?"

"Then death would spread his wings over the spot of the collision."

I had no desire to pursue the conversation further; but he persisted in it, and I was greatly relieved when the train ran into Wayburgh.

The following night was dark and tempestuous, and I alone occupied the station, watching the little machine before me.

That day a new engine had arrived, and Mark Moore had been put in charge of it.

From two o'clock in the afternoon to five, I saw him moving about the engine.

Up to ten I watched the little machine.

Then Mark opened the door and stepped into the small apartment.

"Are you receiving a dispatch, Morgan?" he asked.

"No, Mark; why do you ask?"

"Because, if you are not, I wish you would leave the clicker a bit, and come and look at my Red Bird by lantern light."

"Had I not better wait till morning?" I asked.

"No; she looks prettier at night—with steam up."

"With steam up?" I said, not a little astonished. "What for?"

"I am going to take a trial trip," he smiled. "I'm going to run downgrade to Chalmers, reverse the engine, and run back. The train will not be due here for an hour, and I can go to Chalmers and return within twenty minutes."

"But will not the authorities stumble?"

"Let them, and be hanged. Are you not going to come out and see me off?"

"To be sure, Mark," I said, rising and putting on my greatcoat.

We walked into the great temporary shed where the new and beautiful engine stood, ready to run off at the command of its master.

By the lantern I saw that it was a model piece of mechanism,
and in a short time I had mastered the whys and wherefores of the multitudinous parts of its machinery.

"You see," said Mark Moore, "I have attached only the tender. I have left no inscription, no lighted lantern, and come back like a bullet. Can you not accompany me, Morg?"

"I dare not be so long absent from my post at this hour, Mark," I answered.

"Boo! Man, there's no danger. You must go with me."

"But I cannot, Mark."

He put his lantern in the ground, and then sprang erect.

"Do you think I'm Morg Grenoble?" he cried, and before I could answer him, he dashed me to the earth and plucked his knife on my breast.

"Not a word out of you, Morg," he said fiercely, producing a rope. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. You know we were discussing the consequences attending the rush of a maddened engine down the grade. I reckon I won't go to Chalmers and will send you clear to the bottom of the grade."

"Mark Moore, you are mad!" I said. "Would you murder me in cold blood, and others who are coming up on the eleven-o'clock passenger?"

"Yes," he said coldly.

"Think of the woman you would make a widow," I went on, picturing my sweet wife in Stockton. "Think of her. Do not cast a cloud over the bright sun of her existence. Spare me for her sake, Mark, and she will bless you."

"No, Morg Grenoble, I am going to send you on a ride to death."

"A delightful ride, too, for it is down the grade. You got Laura Comstock and I didn't. I'm going to have my revenge now."

In his excitement he buried himself in tying my hands and feet, and as he finished his last sentence, I was securely bound.

I might have resisted, but resistance would have availed me nothing for I was constitutionally weak while he was a lion.

"Now for the ride to death!" he cried, lifting me up, and bearing me into the little engine room.

The night being so inclement, no one was stirring about the station, and I could not even hope for assistance.

Again, when he was securing me to a rod on the engine, I pleaded for mercy; but as well might I have pleaded to stone, for he met my prayers with taunts.

"What will it profit you, Mark," I asked, "to wreak your vengeance on me? The hounds of justice will run you to earth, and you will suffer for your crime."

"What care I?"

I spoke no more, for I knew he would not retract his steps, and I watched him toss the wood into the glowing furnace.

"Nebrashezrarrheasted his furnace seven times hotter, so I will heat mine," he said, in a low voice, as he tossed the wood in.

"There!" he said, at last, as he closed the furnace door. "Everything ready for your ride. You'll go right through Stockton; but I reckon you won't have time to stop to speak to loving Laura Grenoble, Morg; write when you get to the foot of the grade."

The engine was moving, and he leaped off.

"May Heaven have mercy on your soul, Mark Moore!" I shouted after him.

I heard a devilish cackhination pass his lips, and then sank back with a despairing groan.

The grade between Wayburgh and Chalmers was quite steep, and before I reached the little town, the speed of the "Red Bird" and its tender seemed to rival that of the electric telegraph.

On, on—faster, faster.

The towns, with their glittering lights, appeared and were gone in a flash.

I knew we would soon be in Stockton.

The manner in which I was bound permitted me to look out of the window.

I did so, and Stockton, the home of my wife, greeted me with its many lights.

Alas, I saw many people waiting for the eleven-o'clock passenger.

The next moment I was carried past them.

I saw their astonished faces, and heard a piercing shriek.

"I recognized the voice as my wife's."

I sank back unnerved, and, half-unconscious, I was borne on.

"Such was my piteous plight."

In a short time I would meet the southern train, and then—

I shuddered at the horrid thought.

There was nothing for it but to go.

Perhaps the operator at Stockton had telegraphed down the grade, and thus warned, the coming train would switch, and save its passengers from death.
balance of his life. He thinks he is a hero, and so does everybody else.

"But no one looks at drivers and firemen as heroes, although they are. And we feel that they are. It is the danger that makes the business attractive, and the swifter the run, the sharper the curves, the better the run in the railway man's eyes. They despise yard work or suburban trains or anything that isn't fast and risky.

"To the railway man the engine and train is a ship, and the run is a voyage. There is danger in every turn of the wheels, there is the feeling that this tremendous thing rushing along is under the control of human agency, that it has to be coaxed, as well as driven, and when the engine comes to a standstill at the station the train hands feel as if they had conquered the monster that might have hurled them to death."

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Sometimes in mid-ocean when the wind blows a hurricane it tends to level the water—to blow it smooth, in fact. Instead of the monstrous seas which roll so high after a storm, the wind blows the tops of the waves clean off, and these, forming together as one would start a snowball in soft snow, accumulate in a ball of water which rolls with tremendous speed.

The writer once saw one of these terrible phenomena on a trip in a sailing bark. A hurricane was blowing, which swept the deck clean of gear.

On the horizon the water ball looked as large as a rising moon, but as it came nearer, with the rapidity of an express train, whirling, roaring, sending out clouds of spray like a Niagara, it looked like a mountain. Whirlpools and waterspouts I have seen, but they were nothing to compare with that wonderful ball of translucent water, bounding over the surface like a comet and leaving a windling trail of foam.

It came close with the leap of a racehorse, filling our ears with the roar. It clipped our vessel's bows, crunched the bowsprit as a lion would grind a toothpick between his jaws, and was off with the speed of the wind.

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A German authority on forestry announces the discovery, in the most primeval forests of India, of a tree with the most curious and inexplicable characteristics.

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Friend: "Don't look so blue. You have a good case.

Jinger: "Use up lots of real money. I know. It is the loss on that jury either rented or bought a house of me when I was an estate agent."

This is the "Get Together" Department. Here, every week, the "Tip Top" friends chat with the editor and with each other. The "Tip Top" family knows no geographical boundaries; all over the great round earth, from North to South, the members stand shoulder to shoulder with Burt L. Standish for truth, honor, strength, courage, and clean living. Many letters are received—letters of comradeship, praise and friendly criticism—and while we have not sufficient space for their immediate publication, they are all welcomed, in turn, to their place by the fireside.

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I have been a reader of Tip Top for a long time. We all read it here, old and young. And think it is fine. I have been looting my Tip Top to my friends, and now they are all taking them. I think they are the only kind of books for boys and girls to read. I close with best wishes to Street & Smith, Tip Top, and Mr. Standish.

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John J. Oringer.

3747 North Richmond Street, Chicago, Ill.

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Schenectady, N. Y.
So many inquiries reach us from week to week concerning the various manuals on athletic development, which we publish, that we have decided to keep a list of them standing here. Any number can be had by mail by remitting 10 cents, and 3 cents postage, for each copy, to the publishers.

**Frank Merrwell's Book of Physical Development.**
**The Art of Boxing and Self-defense,** by Prof. Dobovan.
**U. S. Army Physical Exercises,** revised by Prof. Donovan.
**Physical Health Culture,** by Prof. Pournen.

---

**Endurance.**

**Prof. Pournen:** I am not satisfied with my measurements. Will you kindly criticize them and tell me how to overcome my weak points? I will be 15 years old next month. My measurements are as follows: Height, 5 feet 7 1/2 inches; weight, 130 pounds; neck, 13 inches; chest, 33 inches; waist, 28 inches; thigh, 19 1/4 inches; calf, 14 1/2 inches. How can I get more endurance for running? F. M. D'Krup.


Your measurements are much more satisfactory than you seem to think. Your chest might be four or five inches larger, but as a whole your measurements show a very fair development. You can best gain endurance in running by keeping at that exercise steadily, without overdoing it. Run short distances at an easy pace every day, and you will find that you can increase the distance gradually after a while without taxing your endurance injuriously.

**Fruit Farming.**

**Prof. Pournen:** I intend to learn fruit farming, and go out West, so I want to know if you would encourage me in it. I would like you to give me some advice as to what I'd better do, and tell me if there is any money made in that line of work.

Chicago, Ill.

**Frank Daniels.**

You will find much encouragement in your ambition in the newspaper and magazine reports of the present conditions among the leading industries of the country, and many men are moving to the Northwest and the Pacific Coast to take up this interesting work. It would undoubtedly be most advisable for you to go West at once and familiarize yourself with the conditions in that section, and start in at once to gain practical experience in the business.

**Bicycling.**

**Prof. Pournen:** I am a constant reader of the Tip Top Weekly. I have taken the privilege of asking you a few questions. My measurements are as follows: Height, 5 feet 1 inch; chest, 33 inches; waist, 32 inches; calf, 12 inches; neck, 13 inches. I would like you to tell me the way to become a little stronger and taller. I am 17 years old. I am taking violin lessons, and have progressed fairly so far. I am working, too. Sometimes I do not feel like practicing the violin on account of my ill health. Would a bicycle harm me any? J. J. B.

Cambridge, Mass.

You should have stated your weight, but as they stand, your measurements are excellent. Your waist is about three inches above the standard, and that would indicate that you may have put on too much flesh. A young man of your age should not give up to the idea of ill health. Instead of worrying about yourself, you should get out and take part in all the good sports and games. A man with your general health should enjoy the very best of health if he abstains from stimulants and tobacco, and has a watchful eye upon his diet. By all means get a bicycle.

**Properly used, there is nothing better for good exercise and pleasure. Do not round your shoulders over the handle-bars and try the injurious practice of "sorching," but use the wheel for pure pleasure and health, taking rides of moderate distance through the open country at a reasonable pace. The rules of health are simple and easy to follow when taken up with the proper spirit, and if your life is regulated in the proper way, you will find your violin practice a keen pleasure and relaxation.**

**Smoking.**

**Prof. Pournen:** As I have been a constant reader of the Tip Top Weekly for over four years, I would like to ask you about my measurements and what you think about them. I am 15 years old; height, 5 feet 7 inches; weight, 157 pounds; neck, 14 3/4 inches; waist, 31 inches; thigh, 20 inches; chest, 35 1/2 inches. Do you think smoking a pipe will hurt me? I smoke a good deal.

Troy, N. Y.

**Harry Germain.**

Your measurements are excellent, and you need nothing more than careful attention to exercise, diet, and habits to keep you in prime condition. Of course the excessive smoking of a pipe will hurt you. There is no smoker in the world whose lungs are not in some way affected. The injury may not be noticeable on superficial examination, but the smoker is invariably the physical inferior of the man who rigidly abstains. And it is a hard and fast rule that no one should use tobacco, in any form, under the age of twenty-one. It retards the growth and robs the body of the high privilege of attaining a normal, healthy maturity. Cut it out!

**To be a Chauffeur.**

**Prof. Pournen:** I would like to become a chauffeur. Do you think this a good thing to do? I like to work around a car. Can I learn through the mail?

Fayetteville, Tenn.

**W. J. C.**

The coming of the automobile into general use has furnished lucrative work for many men who previously worked at various trades for very low wages. The work is comparatively healthful and very congenial to a man with a taste for mechanics and active out-of-doors life. It is not necessary to depend on a correspondence course of training. Almost every city has training schools for chauffeurs in connection with the large garages, and by serving a short period of apprenticeship one may acquire a thorough knowledge of the work in all its branches. The proprietor of almost any garage would give you advice as to the first steps to take.

**Eating.**

**Prof. Pournen:** Kindly answer a few questions. I am 16 years 7 months old. I live in the country on a truck farm, and have a good deal of open-air exercise. Is it necessary to take dumb-bell exercise to keep in trim? Also will it make my waist large if I eat enough to satisfy my appetite, not gorging myself?

South Jacksonville, Fla.

**L. S. Wannamaker.**

A man often allows his appetite to deceive him. Those who eat rapidly and heartily take about twice as much food as the body requires, because it is not properly assimilated. A small quantity of food thoroughly chewed is taken up by the system and used in the process of tissue building as nature intended. The craving for food is much less keen when the bodily functions are properly active, and the appetite demands only what the body really needs. If you eat voraciously at the unnatural call of the appetite your waist will certainly grow large, and you will suffer in loss of energy and activity. The open-air work on a farm should keep a man in prime condition, without the use of gymnastic apparatus, if his habits and modes of life are properly studied and regulated. But if you find that certain foods are insufficiently developed you should use the dumb-bells and chest weights, at the same time giving attention to your diet and habits.
TIP TOP CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENT OF 1911

One chance for glory and the TIP TOP Pennant
Two chances for a complete equipment of uniforms

BEGIN NOW! TOURNAMENT CLOSES OCTOBER 15th

FIRST—The team that plays the greatest number of games, scores the most runs and loses the fewest games will be declared the TIP TOP CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM OF 1911, and will receive A HANDSOME CHAMPIONSHIP PENNANT OF FINE SILK, bearing an appropriate inscription. In addition, the team will receive A COMPLETE EQUIPMENT OF NINE HIGH-GRADE UNIFORMS, consisting of cap, shirt, breeches, belt, stockings and shoes. The suit will be of gray, trimmed with the colors of the club, and lettered with the insignia of the club. The shoes will be of fine black calfskin with steel spikes.

SECOND—The team showing the next highest average will be declared the winner of second place in the tournament, and will receive a prize of the same equipment of uniforms.

CONDITIONS OF THE CONTEST

For each game played during the season by a competing team the manager must fill out a certificate, like that below, sign it, obtain the endorsement of his postmaster or a reputable news dealer, as provided in the certificate, and mail it to this office. In addition to this, newspaper accounts of the game should be sent with the certificate if possible. THE LAST CERTIFICATE OF THE SEASON MUST BE MAILED ON OR BEFORE OCTOBER 15th.

In the event of a tie between two teams, the batting and fielding average of the teams will be considered. The captains of competing teams are therefore advised to preserve the detailed score of each game, but not to send it to this office unless requested to do so.

TIP TOP BASEBALL TOURNAMENT OF 1911

CLUB CERTIFICATE

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<th>Name of Team</th>
<th>Name of Opposing Team</th>
<th>Winner</th>
<th>Final Score</th>
<th>Manager</th>
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MEMBERS OF TEAM

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EARLY NUMBERS OF THE
TIP TOP WEEKLY
WILL BE FOUND IN THE NEW MEDAL LIBRARY

A few years ago we were obliged to disappoint thousands of readers who wanted the stories of the early adventures of Frank and Dick Merrwell which were published in Tip Top, because we did not have copies of the numbers that contained them. It was impossible for us to reprint Tip Top Weekly, so we made the stories up in book form and published them in the New Medal Library at intervals of about four weeks beginning with No. 150.

Here is a list of these splendid books which contain Nos. 1 to 509 of Tip Top Weekly. Our experience with these books has taught us that thousands of boys are overjoyed at this opportunity to secure their favorite stories in a more compact and permanent form. Price, Fifteen Cents per copy.

190—Frank Merrwell's School-days. 362—Frank Merrwell's Auto.
189—Frank Merrwell Down South. 374—Frank Merrwell's Temptation.
193—Frank Merrwell's Bravery. 377—Frank Merrwell on Top.
197—Frank Merrwell's Hunting Tour. 390—Frank Merrwell's Luck.
205—Frank Merrwell at Yale. 396—Frank Merrwell's Reward.
217—Frank Merrwell's Bicycle Tour. 395—Frank Merrwell's Victories.
239—Frank Merrwell's Daring. 401—Frank Merrwell in Kentucky.
249—Frank Merrwell's Champions. 410—Frank Merrwell's Set-back.
244—Frank Merrwell's Return to Yale. 413—Frank Merrwell's Search.
251—Frank Merrwell's Danger. 419—Frank Merrwell's Trust.
260—Frank Merrwell's Vacation. 428—Frank Merrwell as Coach.
276—Frank Merrwell in Maine. 437—Dick Merrwell's Support.
280—Frank Merrwell's Struggle. 440—Dick Merrwell at Fardale.
300—Frank Merrwell on the Road. 455—Dick Merrwell's Racket.
304—Frank Merrwell's Own Company. 458—Dick Merrwell's Revenge.
308—Frank Merrwell's Fame. 461—Dick Merrwell's Ruse.
312—Frank Merrwell's College Chums. 464—Dick Merrwell's Deliveries.
316—Frank Merrwell's Problem. 467—Dick Merrwell's Wonders.
332—Frank Merrwell's Stage Hit. 479—Dick Merrwell's Dash.
336—Frank Merrwell's Great Scheme. 482—Dick Merrwell's Ability.
359—Frank Merrwell's Confidence. 500—Dick Merrwell's Backstop.
503—Dick Merrwell's Western Mission.
506—Frank Merrwell's Rescue.
509—Frank Merrwell's Encounter.
512—Dick Merrwell's Marked Money.
515—Frank Merrwell's Nomads.
518—Dick Merrwell on the Gridiron.
521—Dick Merrwell's Disguise.
524—Dick Merrwell's Test.
527—Frank Merrwell's Trump Card.
530—Frank Merrwell's Strategy.
533—Frank Merrwell's Triumph.
539—Dick Merrwell's Grit.
539—Dick Merrwell's Assurance.
542—Dick Merrwell's Long Slide.
545—Frank Merrwell's Rough Deal.
548—Dick Merrwell's Threat.
551—Dick Merrwell's Persistence.
554—Dick Merrwell's Day.
557—Frank Merrwell's Peril.
560—Dick Merrwell's Downfall.
563—Frank Merrwell's Pursuit.
566—Dick Merrwell Abroad.
569—Frank Merrwell in the Rockies.
572—Dick Merrwell's Pranks.
575—Frank Merrwell's Pride.
578—Frank Merrwell's Challengers.
581—Frank Merrwell's Endurance.
584—Dick Merrwell's Cleverness.
587—Frank Merrwell's Marriage.
590—Dick Merrwell, the Wizard.
593—Dick Merrwell's Stroke.
596—Dick Merrwell's Return.
600—Dick Merrwell's Resource.
602—Dick Merrwell's Five.
606—Dick Merrwell's Tigers.
608—Dick Merrwell's Polo Team.

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611—Frank Merrwell's Pupils.
Published about April 4th, 1911.
614—Frank Merrwell's New Boy.
Published about April 25th, 1911.
617—Dick Merrwell's Home Run.
Published about May 16th, 1911.
620—Dick Merrwell's Dare.