The Rover Boys in New York

Arthur M. Winfield

Table of Contents

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or

Saving Their Father's Honor

by Arthur M. Winfield

INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: This volume is a complete story in itself, but forms the seventeenth in a line issued under the general title of "The Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

As I have mentioned several times, in other volumes, this line was started with the publication of "The Rover Boys at School," "On the Ocean" and "In the Jungle." The cordial reception afforded the stories called for the publication of the next volume, "The Rover Boys Out West," and then, year after year, by the issuing of "On the Great Lakes," "In Camp," "On Land and Sea," "On the River," "On the Plains," "In Southern Waters," "On the Farm," "On Treasure Isle," "At College," "Down East," and then by "In the Air," where we last met them.

The boys are not as young as they once were— indeed, in this book, Dick, the oldest, gets married and settles down to business. But all are as bright and lively as ever, and Tom is just as full of fun. When they go to New York City they have some strenuous times, and all prove their worth in more ways than one. Their father is in deep trouble and they aid him, and clear up quite a mystery.

Up to this writing, the sale on this line of books is but a trifle short of one million and a quarter copies! This is to me, of course, tremendously gratifying. Again, as in the past, I thank my many readers for their interest in what I have written for them; and I trust the perusal of my works will do them good.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

Arthur M. Winfield.

CHAPTER I. THE BOYS AT BRILL

"Boys, what do you say to a trip in the Dartaway this afternoon?"

"Suits me, Sam," replied Tom Rover.

"Providing the breeze doesn't get too strong," returned Dick Rover, as he put up his hand to feel the air.

"Oh, I don't think it will blow too much," went on Sam Rover. "I don't mind some air."

"But no more storms for me!" cried his brother Tom, with a shake of his head. "That last old corker was enough for me."

"Where shall we go?" questioned Dick, with a queer little smile creeping around the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, my, just to hear Dick!" cried Tom, with a grin. "As if he would go anywhere but to Hope Seminary, to call on Dora!"

"And as if you would go anywhere but to call on Nellie, at the same place!" retorted the oldest Rover boy.

"Now, children, children'" came sweetly from Sam. "You mustn't quarrel about the dear girls. I know both of you are as much gone as can be. But——"

"And how about Grace, Sam?" said Tom. "Didn't I hear you making up some poetry about her yesterday, 'Those limpid eyes and pearly ears, and'——"

"Rats, Tom! I don't make up poetry— I leave that to Songbird," interrupted the youngest Rover boy. "Just the same, it will be nice to call on the girls. They'll be looking for us some day this week."

"That's right— and maybe we can give them a little ride," put in Dick Rover.

"Do you remember the ride we gave Dora and Nellie, when we rescued them from Sobber, Crabtree, and the others?" asked Tom.

"Not likely to forget that in a hurry," answered his big brother. "By the way, I wonder when the authorities will try those rascals?"

"Not right away, I'm thinking, Dick," answered Tom. "The law is rather slow up here in these back counties."

"Never mind— they will get what is coming to them sooner or later," was Sam's comment.

"Abduction is rather a serious offense."

"Right you are," answered Dick. "And I'll be glad to see Crabtree, Sobber, and our other enemies behind the bars. Then they won't be able to bother us any more."

"That will he the end of Sobber's efforts to annex the Stanhope fortune," mused Sam. "How hard he did try to get it away from Mrs. Stanhope and the girls!"

"I shouldn't have minded that had he used fair methods, Sam," returned the big brother. "But when it came to stealing and abducting——"

"Hello, you fellows!" shouted a voice from behind the Rover boys. "Plotting mischief?"

"Not just now, Stanley," answered Dick, as his college chum caught him by the shoulder and swung him around playfully.

"Want to go for a row on the river?" asked Stanley Browne.

"Not just now, Stanley. I've got a lecture to attend, and this afternoon we are going over to Hope in the biplane."

"Wish I had a flying machine," said the student, wistfully.

"Better swap the boat for one," suggested Sam.

"No, I think rowing is safer. Some day, if you are not careful, you'll get an awful tumble from that machine."

"We try to be as careful as possible," answered Dick. "Seriously, though, Stanley, I don't care for flying as much as I thought I would."

"Is that so? Now, I thought you were planning a honeymoon trip by aeroplane. Think of the novelty of it!"

"No, a steamboat or a parlor car will be good enough for me, when I go on a honeymoon trip," answered Dick, and for a very good reason he blushed deeply.

"Hello, William Philander Tubbs!" cried Tom, as a tall, dudish−looking student crossed the college campus. "What's the price of eggs this morning?"

"What is that, Tom?" questioned the stylishly−dressed youth, as he turned in the direction of the others.

"I asked what was the price of eggs?" said Tom, innocently.

"The— er— the price of eggs? How should I know?" stammered William Philander Tubbs" in astonishment.

"Weren't you in the chicken business once?"

"Gracious me! No, Tom, no!"

"Funny I made the mistake— and I want to know the price of eggs the worst way," went on the fun−loving Rover, innocently.

"What do you want to know the price of eggs for?" questioned William Philander, curiously.

"Why, you see, we've got a new problem in geometry to solve, and the price of eggs will help out," continued Tom, looking very serious.

"What is it, Tom?"

"It's this, Tubby, my boy. If the diameter of an egg ten degrees west of its North Pole is two and eleven−tenths inches, what is the value of the shell unfilled? I thought you might help me out on that."

"Tom, you are poking fun at me!" cried the dudish student, as a snicker went up from the other youths. "And please don't call me Tubby, I beg of you," pleaded William Philander.

"All right, Billy Gander," murmured Tom. "It shan't occur again."

"Billy Gander! That is worse than Tubby!" groaned the dudish youth. "Oh, you are awful!" he added, and strode off, trying to look very indignant.

"Poor Tubbs, I wonder if he will ever be sensible and get over his dudish ways," was Dick's comment.

"I doubt it— for it seems to be born in him," returned Sam.

"But he's a good sort with it all," ventured Stanley Browne.

"First−rate," agreed Tom. "But I— well, I simply can't help poking fun at him when he's around, he's such a dandy, and so lordly in his manner."

"Here comes Songbird!" interrupted Sam. "And, see, he is writing verses, as usual. I wonder——"

"Look!" exclaimed Dick. "Oh! There's a collision for you!"

William Philander Tubbs had started across the campus with his head high in the air. He was looking to one side and did not notice the approach of another student, who was coming forward thoughtfully, carrying a pad in one hand and writing as he walked. There was a sudden meeting of the pair, and the pad fell to the ground and with it the fancy headgear the dudish student was wearing.

"Oh, I— er— I beg your pardon, really I do, don't you know!" stammered William Philander.

"Great Hannibal's tombstone!" spluttered the other student. "What are you trying to do, Tubbs, knock me down?"

"I beg your pardon, Powell, I didn't see you coming," answered the other, as he picked up his hat and commenced to brush it off with care.

"You must be getting blind," growled John Powell, otherwise known as Songbird. "Confound the luck— you spoilt one of my best rhymes," he added, as he stooped to pick up his writing pad.

"Sorry, upon my honor I am," returned William Philander. "Can I help you out on it?"

"I don't think you can. Did you ever try to write poetry— real poetry, I mean?"

"No, my dear boy, no. I'm afraid I would not be equal to it."

"Then I don't see how you are going to help me," murmured Songbird, and he passed on a few steps, coming to a halt presently to jot down some words on his pad.

"Hello, Songbird!" called out Tom. "How is the Muse to−day, red−hot?"

For a moment John Powell did not answer, but kept on writing. Then his face broke out into a sudden smile.

"There, that's it!" he cried. "I've got it at last! I knew I'd get it if I kept at it long enough."

"Knew you'd get what, the measles?" asked the fun−loving Tom.

"'Measles' nothing!" snorted the would−be poet. "I have been writing a poem on 'The Springtime of Love,' and I wished to show how——"

"'The Springtime of Love!'" interrupted Tom. "That must be a second cousin to the ditty entitled "Tis Well to Meet Her at the Well.' "

"I never heard of such a poem," answered Songbird, with a serious air. "How does it go?"

"It doesn't go, Songbird; it stands still. But what have you got on the pad?"

"Yes, let us hear the latest effusion," put in Sam.

"But not if it takes too long," was Dick's comment. "I've only got about ten minutes before that lecture on 'The Cave Dwellers.'"

"I can give Songbird six minutes," said Stanley, as he consulted his watch.

"This is— er— something of a private poem," stammered Songbird. "I wrote it for a— er— for a personal friend of mine."

"Minnie Sanderson!" cried Sam, mentioning the name of a farmer's daughter with whom all were well acquainted, and a young lady Songbird called on occasionally.

"Read it, anyway, Songbird," said Dick.

"Well, if you care to hear it," responded the would−be poet, and he began to read from the pad:

"In early Spring, when flowers bloom
In garden and on fields afar,
My thoughts go out to thee, sweet love,
And then I wonder where you are!
When pansies show their varied hues
And birds are singing as they soar,
I listen and I look, and dream
Of days when we shall meet once more!"

"Grand! fine! immense!" murmured Tom. "Byron couldn't hold a candle to that, Songbird!"

"I listen to the tiny brook
That winds its way o'er rock and sand
And in the running water see
A face that— that— that——"

"Go ahead, Songbird!" cried Sam, as the would−be poet stumbled and halted.

"I— er— I had the last line, but Tubbs knocked it out of me," grumbled Songbird. "And say, he knocked something else out of me!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I was going to tell you an important bit of news."

"You were?" cried Dick. "What?"

"The word just came in over the telephone, from the weekly newspaper office. Doctor Wallington said you would want to know about it."

"But what is it?" demanded Sam, impatiently.

"Josiah Crabtree has escaped from jail."

"Escaped!" ejaculated Tom.

"Why, we were just talking about him!" put in Dick "When did this happen?"

"Last night, so the newspaper man said. It seems there was a small fire at the jail— down in the kitchen. There was great excitement, for supper was just being served. In the excitement three of the prisoners, who were out of their cells, escaped. Josiah Crabtree was one of them."

"Too bad!" murmured Sam. "And we thought he was safe!"

"This spells Trouble for us," was Tom's comment, and Dick nodded his head, to show that he was of the same opinion.

CHAPTER II. ABOUT THE PAST

"Did you get any more particulars?" asked Sam, of the college poet.

"No. The newspaper man was busy, so the Doctor said, and didn't have time to go into details," answered Songbird.

"Did he say who the other prisoners were who got away?" asked Dick.

"Yes, a tramp who was up for robbing a man on the road and a bank clerk who took some money from the bank."

"None of the crowd we are interested in," said Tom.

"I'm glad of it," returned his older brother. "It is bad enough for Crabtree to get away. I hope they keep a strict guard over the others after this."

"Oh, they will, rest assured of that," came from Stanley Browne. "The head jailer will get a raking over the coals for this, mark my words."

"The Stanhopes and the Lanings will be sorry to learn that Crabtree got away," said Sam. "I wonder if they aren't searching for him," mused Sam.

"Oh, they'll search for all of them," put in Songbird. "I think the newspaper man said the sheriff had a posse out."

"Too bad!" said Dick, shaking his head gravely. "And just when we felt sure old Crabtree wouldn't be able to give us any more trouble!"

"It beats the nation, what that man can do!" cried Sam. "Maybe be hypnotized one of the jailers— just as he hypnotized Mrs. Stanhope years ago.

"He'd be equal to it— if he got the chance," answered Tom; and then all of the students had to go in to their classes.

To those who have read the previous volumes in this "Rover Boys Series" of books, the lads we have just met will need no special introduction. For the benefit of my new readers, however, let me state that the Rover boys were three in number, Dick being the oldest, fun−loving Tom coming next, and Sam being about a year younger still. When at home they lived with their father, Anderson Rover, and their Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha on a beautiful farm called Valley Brook, in New York State.

Years before, and while their father was in Africa, the three boys had been sent by their uncle to Putnam Hall Military Academy, as related in detail in the first volume of this series, called "The Rover Boys at School." At the Hall they had made a number of friends, including Songbird Powell and the dudish student, William Philander Tubbs. They had also made some enemies, who did their best to bring the Rover boys to grief, but without success.

A term at school had been followed by a short cruise on the ocean, and then a trip to the jungles of Africa, whither the lads went to find their father, who had disappeared. Then, during vacation, the boys took a trip West, and then another trip on the Great Lakes. After that they went in the mountains, and then came back to Putnam Hall, to go into camp with their fellow cadets.

This term at Putnam Hall was followed by a long journey on land and sea, to a far−away island of the Pacific, where the boys and their friends had to play "Robinson Crusoe" for a while. Then they returned to this country, and, in a houseboat, sailed down the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers. After leaving the Mississippi they took an outing on the plains, and then went down into southern waters, where, in the Gulf of Mexico, they solved the mystery of a deserted steam yacht.

"And now for home and a big rest!" said Dick, and they went back to the farm. But here something very unusual occurred, and the boys had as lively a time as ever.

While at school the three Rover boys had become well acquainted with three girls, Dora Stanhope and her cousins, the two Laning sisters, Nellie and Grace. Dora was the only daughter of Mrs. Stanhope, a widow, and soon she and Dick became the warmest of friends, while Tom was quite taken by Nellie, and Sam often "paired off" with Grace.

In those days Josiah Crabtree had been an instructor at Putnam Hall. He was very dictatorial, and none of the

cadets liked him, and the Rovers liked him still less when they learned that he was trying to practically hypnotize Mrs. Stanhope into marrying him, so that he could get control of the fortune which the widow was holding in trust for Dora. They foiled the teacher's efforts to wed the lady, and in the end Josiah Crabtree had to leave Putnam Hall. Later still he was arrested for some of his misdeeds and given a short sentence in jail.

The Stanhope fortune, as a part of the money coming to the Stanhopes and the Lanings was called, had come to Mr. Stanhope in a peculiar way, and some outsiders claimed the treasure, which, at that time, was secreted in a spot among the West Indies called Treasure Isle. There was a lively chase to get there first, but the Rovers won out, and because of this their enemies were more bitter than ever.

The boys had finished their term at Putnam Hall and on their return home became students at Brill College, a fine institution of learning of the Middle West. At the same time Dora, Nellie, and Grace became pupils at Hope Seminary, located not many miles from Brill. At the college the Rovers made many friends, including Stanley Browne, already introduced, and Will, otherwise known as "Spud," Jackson, a lad who loved potatoes, and who also loved to tell big yarns.

A term at college had been followed by a trip down East, taken for a peculiar reason, and then, while on a visit home, the three lads had become the possessors of an up−to−date biplane, which they named the Dartaway. In the biplane, as related in the volume before this, called "The Rover Boys in the Air," our heroes made a somewhat spectacular trip from the farm to the college campus, much to the amazement of their fellow collegians and their instructors. Later they made a trip through the air to Hope Seminary, and at that time Dick was delighted to place upon Dora's finger a diamond engagement sing.

A short while later an alarming thing occurred. The boys were out in the Dartaway when they met Grace on the road and learned that Dora and Nellie had been abducted by Josiah Crabtree, Tad Sobber, and some of their other old enemies. They gave chase in the biplane, and, after several adventures, located the girls in a lonely mansion in the country, where they were prisoners, in charge of Sobber's aunt The boys at once went for the authorities, and, after something of a fight, the rascals were made prisoners, and the girls were rescued and taken back to the Seminary.

"You will appear against these scoundrels?" asked the sheriff, Jackson Fells, of the Rover boys, as they were about to leave the sheriff's office at Plankville.

"We'll appear all right enough," Tom had answered. "Why, Mr. Sheriff, you couldn't beat us away with a club!" And so it had been arranged that the Rover boys should appear in court against the evildoers whenever wanted. Then Crabtree, Sobber, and the others had been put under lock and key in the old−fashioned country jail; and there, for the time being, the matter had rested.

"I wish we could learn more about Crabtree's escape," remarked Tom, as he and his brothers entered the main building of the college.

"So do I," added Sam. "Can't we telephone over to Plankville, to Sheriff Fells?"

"More than likely the sheriff is out, hunting for Crabtree and the others," answered Dick. "But I'll tell you what we might do— if the weather stays good," he added, suddenly.

"Sail to Plankville in the Dartaway?" queried both of the others.

"Yes, if Doctor Wallington will give us permission."

"He ought to— since we are so much interested in this case," returned Tom.

"We'll find out, as soon as the morning session is over," said the eldest Rover boy; and then all hurried to their classes, for the final bell had ceased to ring.

It was hard work for the boys to keep their minds on their lessons. Dick, especially, was very serious, and for a good reason. Something was worrying him greatly— something of which Tom and Sam knew little. What it was we shall learn later.

The boys had a quarter of an hour after classes before going to lunch, and they immediately sought out Doctor Wallington, whom they found in his private office.

"Yes, it is too bad that that rascal Crabtree escaped," said the head of the college. "I can well imagine that you are worried— since he has caused you and your friends so much trouble in the past. Let us hope that the authorities will quickly recapture him."

"Have you had any further word, sir?" asked Dick.

"I had word at eleven o'clock, from the newspaper office. Up to that time he had not been located."

"We wish to ask a favor," went on Dick, and spoke about the proposed trip to Plankville.

"Very well, you may go, and in your biplane if you deem it safe," said the worthy doctor. Secretly he was quite proud of the students' success with the Dartaway, as it had advertised Brill College not a little.

"Possibly we won't be able to get back until to−morrow," said Tom. "We may be detained, or it may storm

"Take your time on the trip. Only be careful that you have no accidents."

"We'll try to be careful," answered Dick, with a grim smile. "We don't want a tumble if we can help it."

"It is a grand sport," answered the head of the college. "Before long I expect to see aeroplanes in constant use."

"Wouldn't you like to go up with us some day, Doctor?" questioned Tom, slyly.

"Well— er— perhaps, Thomas. But not just yet. I wish— er— to see them more in general use first." And then the doctor bowed the students out.

The boys lost no time in preparing for the trip to Plankville. After a somewhat hasty lunch they put on their flying suits and then went down to where the Dartaway was housed, in one of the buildings attached to the gymnasium.

"Looks to be all right," remarked Dick, after an inspection of the flying machine, and while Sam and Tom were filling the gasoline tank and the oil distributor.

The engine was tried out for a minute, and found to be in perfect order. As usual, as soon as the explosions of the motor were heard, a crowd commenced to gather, to see the start of the flight.

"Wish you luck!" cried Stanley.

"Say, look out that you don't forget how to stop and sail to the North Pole!" sang out Spud Jackson.

"As if that could really occur!" murmured William Philander Tubbs, with a lofty look of, disdain.

"Sure it could happen," returned Spud, good−naturedly. Why, I heard of an airman who went up once and forgot how to turn his machine down, and he went around and around in a circle for sixteen hours. And then he dropped ker−plunk right on top of a baker's wagon and smashed twenty−six pies— all because his gasoline gave out."

"Ridiculous!" murmured William Philander.

"Absolute fact, Tubbs," responded Spud, earnestly. "Come with me, some day, and I'll show you where the pies made a dent in the street when the flying machine struck 'em." And then a general laugh went up, and the dudish student stepped back in the crowd, out of sight.

"All aboard!" sang out Dick, as he hopped into the driver's seat and took hold of the wheel. "Start her up, somebody!"

Sam and Tom got aboard and willing hands grasped the propellers and gave each a twist. Bang! bang! bang! went the explosions, and soon the propellers were revolving swiftly, and then with a swoop the Dartaway ran over the campus on its wheels and suddenly arose in the air. A cheer went up, and the students threw up their caps. Then Dick swung around in a quarter circle and headed directly for Plankville.

It was an ideal day for flying, not too hot or too cold, and with very little breeze, and that of the "steady" kind, not likely to develop "holes"— the one great terror of all airmen.

"Wish we had the girls along," remarked Sam, when they were well on the way.

"Not for this trip, Sam," answered Dick, grimly. "We have got our work cut out for us."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"If old Crabtree hasn't been caught yet me must see if we can't round him up."

CHAPTER III. A USELESS HUNT

"Say, that's the talk!" cried Tom, quickly. "I hadn't thought of that,— but it's just what we ought to do."

"It won't be easy, Tom," said his younger brother. "The chances are that Crabtree has made good use of his time. He may be hundreds of miles away— bound for the West or the South, or Canada or Europe."

"Well, we can have a try at finding him, anyway," put in Dick. "Someti a criminal sticks close to the jail until the excitement is over, Look at those fellows who escaped from jail in New York City not long ago. The detectives thought they had gone to Chicago or St. Louis, and all the while they were on the East Side, right in New York!"

"Oh, my! but wouldn't I just like to land on old Crabtree!" muttered Tom. "I think I'd be apt to put him in the hospital first and jail afterwards! He certainly deserves it— for all the trouble he has caused us and our— er— friends."

"'Friends' is good, with Dick engaged to marry Dora and you as good as engaged to Nellie," snorted Sam "Precisely, and you and Grace making goo−goo eyes at each other," added Tom, with a wink at his younger brother. Then he quickly changed the subject. "Dick, do you think you can strike a straight course for Plankville?"

"I'll try it," was the answer. "I don't think I'll go much out of the way."

The Dartaway had a powerful motor, and once on the right trail the eldest Rover advanced his gasoline and spark, and they went rushing through the air at express−train speed. The boys were provided with face guards, so they did not mind this. They did not fly high, and so kept the railroad and other familiar objects fairly well in view. They passed over several villages, the inhabitants gazing up at them in open−mouthed wonder, and finally came in sight of a big church spire that they knew belonged in Plankville. Then Dick slowed down the engine, and soon they floated down in an open field close to the main street and not a great distance from the sheriff's office and the jail.

"Well, it certainly didn't take long to get here," cried Tom, as he consulted his watch.

A man who lived close by was approaching and he readily agreed, for a small amount, to guard the biplane.

"Have they caught those men who escaped from the jail?" asked Sam, of the man.

"Got two on 'em," was the reply. "Dacker and Penfield."

"What of Crabtree?" asked Dick.

"Nuthin' doin', up to an hour ago. The sheriff is out with about ten men, lookin' fer him."

"Then there is no use of our going to the sherif's office," said Dick to his brothers "We'll go right to the jail."

"Will they let us in?" asked Sam.

"In the office, yes. We won't want to go to the cells," answered Dick, with a short laugh.

When they reached the office of the jail they found several men present, including the head keeper and one of the State detectives. The keeper had seen the Rover boys at the time of the capture of Crabtree and the others and he smiled a little as he shook hands.

"Bad business," he said, in answer to a question Dick put. "But I can't exactly blame my men for what happened."

"Weren't you here at the time?" asked Tom.

"No, I was out of town— calling on my mother, who is very old and quite sick. There was a fire in the pantry off the kitchen, and for a few minutes it looked as if the old jail would burn to the ground. Of course the guards got excited, and all they thought of was to put out the blaze— and it's a good thing they did that. That's how the prisoners got away. I suppose you've heard that we rounded up two of them."

"Yes," answered Dick. "Have they any idea what became of Crabtree?"

"I haven't. If the sheriff knows anything he hasn't told it. By the way, boys, I'll tell you something, now you are here. That man is a hypnotist!"

"We know it," said Dick "I thought I told you."

"He tried to hypnotize one of the men one day,— almost got away, doing it!"

"Did he hire any lawyer to defend him?" asked Tom, curiously.

"I don't know about a lawyer. He had a man out to see him, several times. The two were very friendly."

"They were?" cried Dick. "I never knew Josiah Crabtree had any friends, outside of the rascals he associated with. Who was the man?"

"He gave his name as John Smith. But I guess that was false, for he acted as if he didn't want to be known."

"What kind of a looking man was he?" asked Sam.

"Why, he was a tall, thin fellow with a very pointed chin, and bushy black hair and heavy black eyebrows. When he spoke his voice had a regular rumble to it."

At this description the Rover boys shook their heads. They could think of nobody they had met who would fit the picture.

"When was that man here last?" asked Dick.

"A couple of days ago. I didn't like him for a cent, but as the prisoners haven't been convicted of any crimes as yet I had to let 'em see their friends," explained the jail keeper.

"What of Sobber, Larkspur and the others?" questioned Tom.

"All safe enough. Nobody else is going to get out of here if I can help it," and the keeper shook his head decidedly.

The boys remained at the jail for a while longer, and heard the particulars of how the fire had originated and of how the prisoners had gotten away. Two of the men had kept together, but Crabtree had gone off by himself, and the last seen of him was when he was running for the river, which flowed some distance back of the jail.

"Let us go down to the river and take a look around," suggested Dick, at last, and bidding the jailer good−bye, they hurried away.

Along the river bank they found several men and boys, all looking for Crabtree, some thinking there might be a reward offered for the capture of the criminal. The Rovers joined in the hunt for the best part of an hour, but without success.

"It's worse than looking for a pin in a haystack," grumbled Tom, presently. "We might as well give it up."

"Let us walk around the town and see if we can learn anything," suggested his big brother.

They walked down the main street of Plankville from end to end, questioning several people they knew. At last they got word that a mysterious automobile had passed through the town about midnight of the day Josiah Crabtree had broken from jail. But who had been in the touring car nobody could tell.

"He may have escaped in that," declared Dick.

"And if he did, that man who came to see him at the jail had the car," added Sam.

"Just what I think," cried Tom. "Well, if he got away in an auto there is no use of our looking for him here," he added, with a sigh.

Nevertheless, the boys hung around Plankville for an hour longer. Then they got aboard of the Dartaway, and with Tom at the wheel, and Dick with a pair of field glasses to his eyes, swung in several circles about the neighborhood.

"No use," declared the oldest Rover boy, at last. "It is getting late. We might as well return to college. We can do nothing here."

"Haven't we got time to go to Hope?" asked Sam, a bit wistfully.

"Well, I don't know," answered his big brother, just as wistfully.

"Let us take time— Doctor Wallington didn't want us to hurry back," put in Tom. "I think the girls ought to know about this, so as to be on guard, in case old Crabtree tries to molest them again."

As the lads were all of one mind, the biplane was headed in the direction of Hope. As before, the flying machine swung through the air at a good rate of speed, and half an hour before sundown they came in sight of the Seminary buildings.

"Wonder where they are?" mused Dick, as the biplane came to earth at the spot where they had landed before.

"If they are around they must have heard us," answered Tom. "The engine makes noise enough to wake the dead." And this was well expressed, for the motor, like many of the flying machine kind, had no muffler attached, and the explosions were not unlike the firing of a gatling gun.

Some girls had seen them come down, and presently the boys saw three figures hurrying towards them.

"Oh, what made you come so late?" cried Grace, as she rushed up and shook hands with Sam and then with the others.

"We thought you might come to−day," put in Nellie, as she beamed on Tom, and extended both hands.

"I heard the machine first," declared Dora, and came straight to Dick, who did not hesitate to give her the hearty kiss to which he thought his engagement entitled him.

"We have been to Plankville," came from Tom and Sam, in a breath.

"Have you heard the news?" questioned their big brother, and he looked anxiously from Dora to her cousins.

"What news?" cried Dora, quickly. "We have heard nothing unusual."

"Josiah Crabtree broke out of the Plankville jail and ran away."

"Oh, Dick!" and Dora grew suddenly pale. "Do you really mean it?"

"When was this?" demanded Nellie.

"Tell us all about it," supplemented Grace.

"We can't tell you any more than what we have heard," answered Sam. "We just got word ourselves this morning."

Then the boys told their story and answered innumerable questions which the girls put to them.

"This will be bad news for mother," said Dora, to Dick. "She is afraid of Josiah Crabtree, and always has been— because of his strange hypnotic power."

"I don't think he will dare to show himself— at least, not for a while, Dora," he answered. "He knows only too well that the jail is waiting to receive him."

"That strange man with the bushy eyebrows and the pointed chin must have helped him to get away," was Nellie's comment.

"So we think," answered Tom.

"But who was he?" questioned her sister.

"That's a conundrum we can't answer," returned Sam. "I think he was waiting around with that auto, and as soon as the fire started Crabtree saw the chance he wanted and got out."

"Maybe Crabtree started the fire?" suggested Dora.

"No, that was purely an accident— so the jailer says. The wind blew a curtain against a lamp and the burning curtain fell into some excelsior in a box of new dishes. The excelsior made quite a blaze and a lot of smoke, and everybody in the jail was badly frightened for a while."

After that the talk became general, and quite unconsciously Dick and Dora strolled off by themselves, down towards a tiny brook that flowed past the campus grounds.

"You must be very careful, Dora, now that Crabtree is at liberty," said the eldest Rover boy. "I wouldn't have him run off with you again for the world," he added, tenderly.

"I shall watch out, Dick,— and I'll make the others watch out, too." And then, as he squeezed her hand, she added, in a lower voice: "How is that other matter coming along?"

"Not very well, Dora," and Dick's face became more serious than ever.

"Can't your father manage it?"

"I don't think so. You see, he isn't in very good health— he breaks down every once in a while. Those business matters worry him a great deal."

"Can't your uncle help him?"

"No, Uncle Randolph means well, but he is no business man— he showed that when he allowed those men to swindle him out of those bonds," went on Dick, referring to an event which has been related in detail in "The Rover Boys on the Farm."

"But what can you do, Dick?" questioned the girl, earnestly.

"I think I'll have to quit college and take up the matter myself," answered Dick Rover.

CHAPTER IV. THE END OF THE "DARTAWAY"

"Quit college? Oh, Dick, do you want to do that?"

"Not exactly, Dora— and yet I don't think I am exactly fitted for a professional career. That seems to be more in Tom and Sam's line. I like business, and I'd enjoy getting into something big, something worth while. I think I could handle those matters, if father would only let me try. And then there is another thing, Dora," went on the youth, looking squarely into his companion's face. "Perhaps you can guess what that is."

She blushed deeply.

"What?" she whispered.

"I want to marry you, and take you some place where I know you'll be safe from such creatures as Crabtree and Sobber and Larkspur— and I want the right to look after your mother, too."

"Oh, Dick!" And she clung tightly to his arm.

"Aren't you willing, Dora?"

"Yes." She looked at him frankly" "Yes, Dick, whenever you say."

"And your mother——"

"Mamma depends upon me in everything, and she has told me to do just as we thought best."

Dick gave a swift look around. Nobody was in sight at that moment. He pressed Dora to him.

"You best and dearest sweetheart in all the world!" he cried, in a low tone. "Then I can depend on you? We'll be the happiest couple in the whole world!"

"Indeed, yes, Dick!" And Dora's eyes fairly beamed with happiness as she snuggled closer to him. "But about your father," she continued, a moment later. "I am selfish to forget him. Then he is not so well?"

"He is fairly well, but he gets a bad spell ever so often, and then to attend to business is out of the question. But that isn't the worst of it. He has gotten tangled up in some sort of financial scheme with some brokers in New York City and it is worrying him half to death. He has told me something about it, but I don't know half as much as I'd like to know."

"Then you must find out, Dick, and help him all you possibly can," declared the girl, promptly.

"I'm looking for a letter from home every day— I mean one telling about these financial affairs. As soon as it comes I'll know what to do."

All too soon the boys' visit to Hope Seminary had to come to an end. Sam and Tom returned to the biplane and gave the motor a brief "try−out," which noise reached Dick's ears just as he was trying to break away from Dora. He gave her a last hug and a kiss and then ran to join his brothers.

"The best of friends must part, as the hook said to the eye!" sang out Tom, merrily.

"I believe you are anxious to leave us!" returned Nellie, teasingly.

"Sure thing!" he retorted, promptly. "I planned to get away an hour before I came." And then she playfully boxed his ear, at which he chased her around the biplane and gave her a hearty smack just below her own pretty ear.

"Tom Rover!" she gasped. But, somehow, she looked pleased, nevertheless.

"A11 in the family!" sang out the fun−loving Rover, coolly. "As the lady said when she kissed her cow."

"Who is going to run the Dartaway back?" questioned Sam. "I think it's my turn at the wheel."

"It's rather dark, Sam," answered Dick. "But you can try it— if you want to."

"All right— I think I can see as much as you or Tom," responded the youngest Rover. "If I get off the course, and you find it out, let me know."

Darkness was settling down when the boys finally bid the girls good−bye and flew away. "Beware of old Crabtree!" sang out Dick.

"We'll watch out!" answered Nellie.

"Indeed we will!" came from Dora and Grace.

"If you catch sight of him, have him arrested!" yelled Sam, and then the biplane sailed out of hearing.

Sam knew how to handle the Dartaway almost as well as did Dick and Tom, and as there was but little wind, and the flying machine appeared to be in good condition, the others did not doubt but what Sam would make a

fine flight of the trip.

"Keep a little to the south," called out Dick, after Hope had been left behind and when they were sailing over some broad fields. "If you do that you can follow the old turnpike for quite a distance."

"I thought I'd run for the railroad tracks," answered the lad at the steering wheel.

"You can do that later— after we pass that big farmhouse with the four barns."

Running along in the air is a different proposition from running on the ground, and the air−man has to be careful about the lay of the land below him or he will soon go astray from his course. The earth looks altogether different when viewed from the sky from what it does when looked at from a level, and when an air−man is five or six hundred feet up he has all he can do to make out what is below him.

It had begun to cloud up a little and this made it darker than ever. After following the turn−pike for nearly two miles, Sam veered slightly to catch the railroad tracks and the gleam of the signal lights.

"I can follow the lights best of all!" he shouted, into Dick's ear. "It's too dark to see the road."

"All right, follow the railroad right to Ashton," answered the oldest Rover boy, naming the town that was the railroad station for Brill College.

The cloudiness increased rapidly, and long before Ashton was gained it commenced to blow, gently at first, and then stronger and stronger. Evidently a storm was in the air.

"We are going to catch it!" was Tom's comment.

"Oh, I don't think it will storm just yet," returned Sam.

"Watch yourself, Sam!" cried Dick, warningly. "If the wind gets too strong bring her down in the first field we come to."

"I will," was the answer.

They were now flying close to the railroad tracks. Presently they saw a glare of light illuminate the rails and a long line of freight cars, drawn by a big locomotive, passed beneath them.

"Wish that was going our way— we could follow it with ease," said Sam, as the train disappeared from view, leaving the landscape below darker than ever.

The youngest Rover boy now had to give the Dartaway all of his attention. The breeze was coming in fitful gusts, sending the biplane first to one side and then to the other. They struck a "bank," and he had to use all his wit and courage to bring the flying machine to a level keel once more.

"Better go down!" cried Tom. "This is getting dangerous."

"Don't go down here!" sang out Dick. "There are woods on both sides of the track!"

Sam had been working the horizontal rudder, to bring the biplane down, but at Dick's words he shifted again and they went up.

"I'll tell you when we reach an open field," went on the oldest Rover. "Say, this sure is some blow!" he added.

Another fitful gust struck the Dartaway and for one brief moment it looked as if the biplane would be turned over. Had this occurred the machine would have dropped like a shot and most likely all of the boys would have been killed.

But Sam was on guard, and worked his levers like lightning. As quickly as she had tipped, the Dartaway righted herself, and then they shot upward on a long slant.

"Phew! that was some escape!" muttered Tom. "Dick, can't you see any open field where we can land?"

"Must be one ahead," was the answer. "I fancy——"

Dick did not finish, for at that moment came a blast of air stronger than any that had gone before. The Dartaway spun around, left the railroad tracks, made a semi−circle, and then came back again. As it made the final turn there was a crack like that of a pistol.

"What was that?" cried Tom. "Was it the engine?"

"No, it was one of the stays!" answered Dick. He glanced around. "The right plane is giving 'way! Sam, let her down, as quick as you can!"

"On the tracks!" gasped the lad at the wheel.

"Yes— anywhere— before we tumble!"

The biplane was already out of control. Sam manipulated the rudders as best he could, and likewise the ailerons, and the machine dropped in several wild dashes.

"The train!" yelled Tom. "Look out for the express!"

There was another gleam of light along the railroad tracks. The evening express was approaching, running at topmost speed, to make up some lost time.

The biplane was coming down swiftly. It veered towards the woods beside the railroad tracks. Then it took another wild turn and hung directly over the railroad. The boys were speechless, not knowing what to do. The light of the express train kept coming closer and closer.

Crash! the biplane had struck the earth, directly beside the railroad tracks. One end of the machine rested across the rails, the other end hung in the bushes bordering the tracks.

As they struck Tom and Dick were thrown out— the former into the bushes and the latter on the tracks. Sam kept at the wheel, the force of the intact smashing the landing wheels beneath him.

For the instant all three boys were too stunned to do anything. Then, as the gleam from the express train came closer, Tom let out a wild cry.

"Jump! Jump for your lives! We haven't a moment to lose!"

"Dick!" screamed Sam. "Save Dick! He is on the tracks!"

"Where?"

"There!" and Sam pointed with one hand, while he clambered down from his seat. The seat was broken and his coat got caught in the splinters, and it was several seconds before he could release himself.

Tom looked to where his brother pointed and saw Dick lying in a heap, face downward. The fall had been sufficient to stun him and he was thus unable to help himself.

Tom did not hesitate over what to do. Dick was very dear to him and never for an instant did he consider the risk he was running in going to the rescue. He made a flying leap from the bushes to the tracks and took another leap to his brother's side.

"Get up, Dick" he yelled. "Here, let me get you off the tracks! The train is coming!"

Only a faint groan answered him. Dick was still too dazed to think or to act.

Tom caught hold of his brother and raised him up, and commenced to drag him to the other side of the tracks, away from the wrecked biplane. As he did this there came a shrill warning shriek from the locomotive whistle. The engineer had seen the obstruction on the tracks and had put on brakes, in a vain endeavor to stop the express.

As Tom commenced to haul Dick across the tracks, Sam came bounding to his assistance, the shreds of his torn coat flapping behind him. He caught his big brother by one arm.

"Hurry!" he yelled, hoarsely. "The express is almost here!"

Both boys made a wild leap to the edge of the railroad, dragging Dick between them. Tom got his foot caught in the rails and almost pitched headlong. They fairly fell into the bushes, and Dick went down with them.

Then the express thundered up, the whistle shrieking loudly and the sparks flying from the wheels where the brakes gripped them. The locomotive struck the Dartaway, and the next instant the biplane was smashed to pieces, the broken parts flying in all directions!

CHAPTER V. TWO VISITORS

"That's the last of the Dartaway!"

"Are you hurt, Dick?"

"My, wasn't that a narrow escape!"

"A minute later and it would have been all up with us!"

"I— I guess I'm all right," stammered Dick, putting one hand to his forehead, where a lump was rapidly rising. "I got some fall though!" he added, grimly.

"Look what hit me!" cried Sam, picking up a section of a bamboo stick— one which had supported one of the planes of the flying machine.

"I'm glad we weren't closer to that smash−up!"

Having plowed through the biplane, the express train had come to a halt with the last car standing not a great distance beyond the scene of the collision. Already the trainmen were hurrying out, some with lanterns, to learn if anybody had been killed or hurt.

"Why, it's an airship!" cried the conductor. "How in the name of Adam did that get here?"

"Here are three fellows!" cried the engineer, as the rays of a lantern revealed the Rover boys. "Were you in that flying machine?" he called.

"We were," answered Tom, grimly.

"Anybody hurt?"

"My brother got a bad tumble and is partly stunned."

"We didn't hit anybody, did we?" questioned the engineer, anxiously.

"Nothing but the biplane," answered Sam. "You made mince−meat of that."

"How did you happen to land on the track?" asked the fireman.

"The wind put the machine out of control and we came down quicker than we wanted to," explained Sam. "Then you came along— before we had a chance to drag the biplane off the tracks."

"Well, I'm glad I didn't hit anybody," said the engineer, in tones of relief.

"We had a close shave," returned Tom, and then he and Sam told of how they had struck, and of how Dick had been dragged out of the way. By this time the oldest Rover boy was feeling more like himself and he managed to stand up, even though somewhat dizzy.

"Well, we're losing time," said the conductor, consulting his watch by the light of his lantern. "We'll have to get into Ashton and report this."

"And somebody has got to pay for the biplane," said Tom.

"I don't see as it is our fault," answered the trainman, and then he gave the order to go ahead— after it had been ascertained that the track was clear.

"We'll ride to Ashton with you," said Dick. "No use of staying with this wreckage," he added, to his brothers. "We can drive down to−morrow and look it over. I don't think it is worth much."

"Never mind— I am glad nobody was seriously hurt," returned Sam.

"I guess we all feel that way," added Tom.

It was a run of only a few minutes to Ashton. On the way the conductor of the train took the Rover boys' names and address.

"I don't see how you can blame us for smashing the flying machine," he said. "You had no business to come down on the track."

"We might have gotten our biplane off the track, if you had halted the train," returned Dick. "We could have dragged it into the bushes."

"I don't know about that."

As soon as the train rolled into Ashton the bays alighted. The only other passenger to get off was one of the local storekeepers.

"You were lucky boys," said the man, pleasantly. He knew them by sight, for they had traded at his shop.

"That's true, Mr. Striker," said Dick. "But we don't seem to be lucky just now."

"How's that?"

"There isn't a conveyance of any kind here to take us to Brill, and I must say I don't feel like walking."

"You go around to Carson's livery stable. He'll take you over to the college," answered Mr. Striker.

The livery stable was but a short distance away and they found the proprietor on hand, reading a newspaper and smoking his pipe.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't have a rig over at the depot, to meet the main trains," grumbled Tom.

"'Twouldn't pay," answered Neal Carson. "I tried it once, and earned two dollars and a half in two weeks. Folks that want me can come here for me."

"Well, we want to get to Brill College," said Dick.

"All right, but it will cost you fifty cents each."

"Very well."

The livery stable keeper hustled around and soon had a team ready. The boys were glad enough to take it easy in the carriage, and on the way to college but little was said.

"Rather late, young gentlemen," remarked Professor Blackie, sharply, as they entered.

"We had an accident, Professor," returned Dick.

"An accident?" and the instructor was all attention.

"Our biplane got smashed up," put in Tom.

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear that. Are you hurt?"

"Got a shaking up and a few scratches," answered Sam.

Then their story had to be told in detail. Soon it became noised all over the place that the Dartaway had been wrecked, and before they could get a mouthful to eat the three Rovers had to tell the story over and over again.

"I'm sorry the biplane was wrecked, but glad you escaped," said Songbird, earnestly. He cherished his old friends as if they were brothers.

"Just what I say already," cried Max Spangler, a German−American student. "You can buy a new flying machine, yes, but you can't buy a new head or a body, not much!" And he shook his head earnestly.

Even while the lads were eating they had to give further details of the disastrous flight. Doctor Wallington congratulated them on their escape.

"You had better leave flying alone after this," he remarked.

"I think we shall— for a while, at least," answered Tom, dryly.

As soon as it was possible to do so, the boys sent a message to the girls and to their folks, telling about the accident and of their escape.

"It's bound to get in the newspapers," said Dick. "And if we don't send word the others will be scared to death."

The oldest Rover boy was right about the affair getting in the newspapers. The local sheets gave the accident a column or more and some city sheets took it up and made a "spread" of it, with pictures that were truly thrilling even though they were inaccurate.

"Humph! look at this picture!" cried Sam, showing up the supplement to a New York Sunday newspaper. "Looks as if we hit the smokestack of the locomotive and sailed along on that for a mile or two! Phew! what an imagination that artist must have!"

"And here is a picture showing the train climbing over the biplane!" returned Tom. "Say, it's a wonder we didn't wreck the Express instead of the Express wrecking us!"

On the day following the accident the boys were told, after class hours, that some gentlemen wished to see them. They went to the reception room, to find two men there— a lawyer and a doctor.

"You are the— er— the young gentlemen who were in the— er— the flying machine smash−up?" queried one of the visitors, sharply.

"Yes," answered Dick.

"Mr. Rover?"

"Yes, Richard Rover."

"Just so. Glad to know you. My name is Fogg— Belright Fogg. This is Doctor Slamper. We represent the railroad company, Mr. Rover. The doctor came along to see if you had been hurt."

"I got this," answered Dick, with a quiet smile, and pointed to the lump on his forehead.

"Ah, yes, I see," put in Doctor Slamper. "Not very serious, I take it."

"Oh, it didn't kill me."

"Ha! ha! Good joke, Mr. Rover! Feel pretty good otherwise, eh?"

"Oh, I'm able to sit up."

"And these other young gentlemen are all right, of course," went on the doctor, smoothly.

His manner was such that the boys were disgusted. Evidently he had come to smooth matters over, so that they would not put in a claim for personal injuries. And the lawyer had come to ward off a claim for the loss of the Dartaway.

"No, I'm not all right, Doctor— far from it," cried Tom, before the others could say another word. And then the fun−loving Rover went on: "My knee is sprained, and my back twisted, and I have a pain in one of my right teeth, and my brothers both got their arms wrenched, and one got his left big toe out of joint, and none of us can see extra good, and I think my big brother's right ear is out of order, and my digestion is not what it should be, and I fear——"

"Stop! stop!" interrupted the doctor, in amazement. "Do you mean to say——"

"And the back of my neck feels out of kilter somehow," continued Tom, "and Sam's left hip isn't just as straight as it should be, and when I hit my elbow I have the funniest sensation crawl down my shoulder blade ever was, and we all think we ought to go to a sanitarium for at least six months or a year; don't you think so, too, Doctor?"

"Well, I never!" gasped Doctor Slamper, falling back against a center table. "Why, my dear young men, I think——"

"And the Dartaway is gone— our dear old flying machine!" groaned Tom. "The machine we hoped to fly in to Washington, to the next inauguration. Why, don't you know that the planes of that machine were covered with the autographs of most of the big men of this country? Whenever we sailed around to visit our friends or the big men we had them write their autographs on the canvas wings of the machine. Those autographs alone were worth about a million, more or less!"

"What's this?" put in Belright Fogg, quickly. "A flying machine valuable because of the autographs on it? Preposterous! If you think the railroad will stand to pay anything on such a thing as that, you are mistaken."

"But how are we to get those autographs back?" whined Tom. "Some of the men who gave them may be dead now!"

"See here, let us get down to business," cried Belright Fogg. "You don't look to be knocked out— at least, not a great deal anyway. Am I right, Doctor?"

"I— I think so. Of course they may be— be shocked a little," returned the physician. "Probably they are— from the way this young man talks— little nervous disorder." And he pointed at Tom, while Dick and Sam had to turn away, to keep from bursting into laughter.

"Um! Nervous, eh? Well, a few days of quietness will remedy that," answered the lawyer. "Now, see here." He looked wisely at the three Rovers. "Our railroad disclaims all responsibility for this accident. But at the same time we— er— we want to do the right thing, you know— rather do that than have any unpleasant feelings, understand? Now if you are willing to accept our offer, we'll fix this matter right up and say no more about it."

"What is you offer?" questioned Dick.

"Three hundred dollars— one hundred dollars each."

"You mean for our personal injuries?" questioned Sam.

"I mean for everything."

"Nothing doing," returned Dick, promptly, and with a bit of pardonable slang.

"You will not accept?"

"We might accept three hundred dollars for the shaking up we got— although we don't know if our nerves are all right or not. Sometimes these things turn out worse than at first anticipated. But the railroad has got to pay for the biplane it smashed."

"Never!"

"I think it will."

"You got in the way of the train— it was your own fault."

"Your track isn't fenced in— I have a right to cross it where I please. If I had a wagon and it broke down, you

would have no right to run into it. The law might not hold you criminally liable, but it would hold you liable for the worth of the wagon and contents.

"Say, are you a lawyer?" queried Belright Fogg, curiously.

"No, but I know my rights," returned Dick, promptly.

CHAPTER VI. THE MISSING BIPLANE

For a moment there was silence. The lawyer and the doctor who represented the railroad company looked from one to another of the Rover boys.

"Pretty shrewd, aren't you?" said the lawyer, finally.

"We have to be— in dealing with a railroad company," answered Dick, bluntly. "Now let us get to business— if that is what you came for," he continued. "We might put in a big claim for damages, and I think a jury would sustain our claim. But we want to do what is fair. The question then is, Do you want to do what is fair?"

"Why, yes, of course," returned Belright Fogg, but he did not say it very cordially.

"Very well then. That flying machine cost us twenty−eight hundred dollars new and we have spent over two hundred dollars on improvements, so when she was smashed she was worth at least three thousand dollars."

"But you can save something, can't you?" gut in the lawyer.

"Perhaps we can save the engine, and a dealer in second−hand machinery may give a hundred dollars for it. Now what I propose is this: You pay for half the value of the biplane and we'll call it square."

"Preposterous!"

"Very well then, Mr. Fogg, we'll consider the interview closed."

"If you sue, you won't get a cent, Mr. Rover."

"That remains to be seen."

"I am willing to give you five hundred dollars in place of the three hundred first offered."

"No, sir— it is fifteen hundred or nothing, Mr. Fogg."

"But you have not been hurt."

"Yes, we have been hurt. I have been to our college doctor about this lump on my head, and my brothers have been to him, too. We were badly shaken up— not as much as my brother made out, but enough. If we have to sue we'll put in our claim for personal injuries as well— and maybe for time lost from our studies."

"But fifteen hundred dollars! I— er— I can't see it," and the lawyer began to pace the floor.

"Maybe we had better sue," suggested Sam. "We might get the full amount of our loss— three thousand for the Dartaway and some for our injuries."

This did not suit the lawyer at all, for he had been instructed to settle if possible and thus avoid litigation, for the railroad authorities had heard that the Rovers were rich and might make the affair cost a good deal.

"I will— er— make my offer an even thousand dollars," he said, after some more talk. "But that is my limit. If you won't take that, you'll get nothing."

"All right— we'll sue," said Dick, and he made a move as if to close the interview.

"See here, are you of age— have you authority to close this matter?" demanded Belright Fogg, suddenly.

"I can close the matter, yes," answered Dick. "My father will be perfectly satisfied with whatever I do. I transact much of his business for him."

"Ah, well then, let us consider this thing a little more, Mr. Rover." And thereupon the lawyer went all over the matter again. Presently he offered twelve hundred dollars. But Dick was firm; and in the end the lawyer said he would pay them fifteen hundred dollars the next day, provided they would sign off all claims on the railroad.

"We'll do it as soon as we see the money," answered Dick.

"Can't you trust me, Mr. Rover?" demanded Belright Fogg.

"I like to do business in a business−like way," answered Dick, coolly. "When you bring that check kindly have it certified," he added.

"Very well!" snapped the lawyer; and then he and the doctor got out, Belright Fogg stating he would return the next morning.

"Dick, you ought to be a lawyer yourself!" cried Tom. "You managed that in fine style."

"Tom helped," added Sam. "He nearly scared that doctor into a fit, talking about our aches and pains!"

"Wait— perhaps the lawyer won't come back with the money," said Dick. "He may reconsider the offer."

"You didn't say anything about the wreckage," said Sam. "Who gets that?"

"We do, Sam. They are to pay us for damages, don't you see? If they pay only that, they can't claim the

wreckage."

Promptly at the appointed time the next day Belright Fogg appeared. He was a bit nervous, for the railroad officials had told him to settle at once— before the Rovers took it into their heads to bring suit.

"I have the check, certified," he said, producing the paper. "Here is what you must sign, in the presence of witnesses," he added, and brought out a legal−looking document.

"We'll call in two of the teachers," answered Dick.

The oldest Rover boy read the document over with care. It was all right, excepting that in it the railroad claimed the wreckage of the Dartaway absolutely.

"Here, this comes out," cried Dick. "The wreckage belongs to us."

At this there was another long discussion. But the Rovers remained firm, and in the end the clause concerning the wreckage was altered to show that the Dartaway must remain the boys' property. Then the three brothers signed the paper and it was duly witnessed by two teachers, and the certified check was handed to Dick.

"Very sharp young man, you are," was Belright Fogg's comment, as he was about to leave. "You ought to be a lawyer."

"Perhaps I will be some day," was Dick's answer.

"Better get that check right in the bank!" cried Sam, when he and his brothers were alone. "That fellow may stop payment on it."

"He can't stop a certified check, Sam. I'll put it in the school safe for the present. What we want to do is to look after the Dartaway. She may not be worth much, but what there is of her belongs to us."

"Right you are. Let us get permission to go after her right away. For all we know, somebody may have carted her off already!"

The boys readily obtained permission to see to their property, and walked down to the college stables to get a horse and carriage to take them to the spot where the accident had occurred. Just then came a toot of an automobile horn, and a fine five−passenger car rolled into view, with Stanley Browne and a stranger on the front seats.

"Hello, you fellows!" cried Stanley, as the auto came to a stop. "Come over here! I hoped I'd see you!"

The Rovers hurried across the campus and were introduced to Jack Mason, Stanley's cousin, the driver of the car. He was passing through Ashton on the way to join his folks in the White Mountains.

"Jack wants me to take a ride with him this afternoon," said Stanley. "And I can invite three others to go along. Will you come with us?"

"That is kind," answered Dick. "But we have some business to attend to," and he related what it was.

"Say, let's take a look at the wrecked biplane!" cried Jack Mason. "I'd just as soon go there as anywhere."

"So would I," added Stanley.

"Very well— that will suit us down to the ground!" cried Tom.

"We were going to drive over in a carriage," explained Dick. "We can get there much quicker in the auto."

The boys piled into the tonneau of the car and they started off.

"Got to show me the roads," said Jack Mason. "All I know around here is the regular auto road to the White Mountains,— and I don't know that any too well."

"You can't lose us on the roads!" cried Tom. "We'll keep you straight."

Jack Mason loved to run fast and soon they were bowling along at a forty−mile−an−hour rate. Stanley and Tom told the driver what turns to make, and almost before they knew it they had passed the outskirts of Ashton and were approaching the locality where the fast Express had dashed into the crippled biplane.

"Here we are!" cried Tom, presently. "We can't go any further on the road. We'll have to walk through the woods to the tracks."

"I see a wood road!" exclaimed Jack Mason. "If the ground isn't too soft I'll try that."

He went on and passed in between the trees, and soon they were within a hundred feet of the railroad tracks. As the car came to a stop the Rover boys jumped to the ground and ran forward. Then, of a sudden, all three set up a shout:

"The biplane is gone!"

"Gone?" queried Stanley, who was close behind them.

"Yes, gone," returned Tom.

"Are you sure this is the spot where it was struck?"

"Of course I am."

"There are the marks where we landed and where the locomotive hit the Dartaway," said Sam. He looked around. "Wonder who took her, and to where?"

"That's to be found out," answered Dick, seriously.

"I don't see any airship," said Jack Mason, as he came up, having shut off the engine of the touring car.

"Somebody has hauled it away," answered Dick. He looked on both sides of the track. "This is queer," he added, presently. "I can't see any marks in the sand or mud or bushes. She'd make marks if anybody hauled her."

"I've got it!" cried Tom. "They hoisted her on a flat car! The railroad people have taken her!"

"But she is our biplane!" cried Sam, stubbornly.

"Maybe they took her to the freight house in Ashton," suggested Stanley.

"We'll soon find out— if you'll take us there in the auto."

"Sure!" answered Jack Mason, promptly.

The boys were about to leave the neighborhood when they heard the strokes of an axe, ringing through the woods.

"There's a wood chopper!" cried Dick. "Maybe he knows something about this. I guess I'll ask him."

They soon located the man— an elderly individual who worked for the farmer who owned the woods.

"Yes, I see 'em hoist the airship on the flat car," said he, in answer to their questions. "Had quite a job o' it, too."

"Did they take it to Ashton?" queried Dick.

"No. They was goin' to fust, but then Jimmy Budley— the section boss— said it would be better to take it up to the freight yards at Rallston."

"And they took it there?"

"I 'spect they did. They went off that way, anyway," replied the old wood chopper.

"To the Rallston freight yards!" cried Sam. "What a nerve!"

"I'll make 'em bring it back!" cried Dick, firmly.

"How far is it to Rallston?" asked Jack Mason.

"About nine miles."

"Pooh! that's nothing. Jump in and I'll take you there in no time— if the road's any good."

"The road is O. K.," answered Dick.

The automobile was backed out of the woods, and turned in the direction of Rallston. Jack Mason was in his element, and in less than twenty minutes they came in sight of the town and turned into a side street leading to the freight yards.

"There she is!" cried Sam, a minute later.

He pointed to one of the tracks in the yards and there, on a flat car, the boys beheld the wreck of the biplane. A small crowd of curious men and boys surrounded the remains of the Dartaway.

"What yer going to do with her, Jimmy?" asked a man in the crowd, of a burly individual on the flat car.

"I guess the railroad is going to sell her," replied the section boss.

CHAPTER VII. THE SALE OF THE BIPLANE

"Did you hear what that man said?" demanded Sam in a whisper, of his brothers.

"I did," returned Dick. "But he isn't going to sell our property," added Tom, warmly.

"Hardly," responded Dick. He pushed his way through the crowd and walked straight up to the flat car.

"Who is in charge here?" he demanded.

"What's that?" came in some surprise from the section boss.

"I asked who was in charge of this flat car with this flying machine?"

"What business is that of yours, young fellow?"

"This is our biplane— it belongs to me and my brothers here," and Dick waved his hand at Tom and Sam.

"Oh! Are you the Rover brothers?"

"Yes. And I want to know what business you had to bring that flying machine here?" went on Dick sharply, for he saw the kind of a man with whom he had to deal.

"Say, look here, if you've got any kick coming you go to the office with it," cried Jimmy Budley.

"Very well, I will. But I want to know who ordered you to bring that biplane here."

"Never mind; you go to the office and find out."

"You brought it here, didn't you?" asked Tom, who had now come up to Dick's side, along with the others.

"I ain't answering questions when I don't have to," returned the section boss, with a sneer.

"Sure he brought it here— on this flat car!" cried a man in the crowd. "Why don't you answer the young fellow straight, Jimmy?"

"This biplane belongs to my brothers and me," went on Dick, as sharply as before. "You had absolutely no right to touch it. If I wished to do so, I could have you arrested for this," he continued.

"Say, I don't allow nobody to talk to me like that!" growled the section boss. "You git out of here and see the men at the office."

"We'll not get out!" put in Tom. "This flying machine is ours and we want it."

"You'll take it right back to where you found it," added Sam. "And be careful that you don't break it worse than it is, or you'll foot the bill."

"I won't listen to you!" stormed the section boss, who was of an ugly disposition naturally and not liked in the neighborhood.

"Very well then," answered Dick. He turned to Stanley. "Will you go out and see if you can find a policeman?" he asked, loudly.

"Sure," returned the college youth, readily.

"Wow! he's goin' to have Budley locked up!" exclaimed a small boy.

"See here, don't you get fresh!" stormed the section boss, eying Dick angrily.

"We'll have a policeman settle this," answered the oldest Rover boy. "This is our property, and we can easily prove it. You had no right to touch it."

"I had orders," said Jimmy Budley, doggedly.

"Why don't you telephone to the office, Jimmy?" suggested a friend. "Maybe there was some mistake."

"Wasn't no mistake," growled the section boss; nevertheless he hopped down from the flat car and hurried in the direction of a shanty wherein was located a telephone. Dick followed him.

"You can tell them what I said," said the youth; "And they may find it to their interest to call up Mr. Belright Fogg before they give you orders."

"Have you seen Fogg?" demanded the section boss.

"Yes."

"Did he say you could take the machine?"

"He said nothing about our taking it. He settled for what damage the railroad did to the biplane. We went to get our property and found it gone. Nobody had a right to touch it, excepting to take it from the tracks."

"Huh!" grumbled the section boss, and shot into the shanty, banging the door behind him. Dick heard him shout something into the telephone, and quite a lengthy conversation ensued.

In the meanwhile Stanley had gone off for a policeman and presently came back with a bluecoat who did duty in the streets beyond the railroad yards.

"Well, what have you got to say about it?" demanded Dick, when the section bass came from the shanty and while Stanley and the policeman were approaching. "Do we get our property or not?"

"It's yours," returned the railroad man, and his voice was much milder than before. "They had no right to give me the orders they did."

"What about taking it back?" went on Dick.

"I've got orders to take it to any place where you want it," answered the section boss, and he looked anything but happy as he made the confession.

"Then you can run it down to Ashton," answered Dick. "Will you do it right away?"

"I guess so— I'll see," was the answer.

"What do you want me for?" asked the policeman, as he came up.

"I don't believe you'll be needed— now," answered Dick.

"It's all right, Murphy," put in Jimmy Budley, quickly. "We had a misunderstanding over orders, that's all."

"This young man told me a flying machine had been stolen," said Murphy, and nodded towards Stanley.

"It was a misunderstanding. I wasn't to blame." The section boss turned to Dick. "I'll get a freight engine to run the car with the machine down to Ashton inside of an hour."

"Very well," answered Dick. "And be careful that the biplane isn't damaged in unloading."

"She ain't much but kindlin' wood now," and the section boss smiled a trifle.

"Well, the engine is all right— and that's the valuable part of her," returned Dick. "I'll look for her at Ashton in an hour."

"Want to ride down on the flat car with her?"

"I'll see about that."

The matter was talked over, and in the end it was agreed that Dick and Sam should ride on the flat car, while Tom went with Stanley and Jack Mason in the automobile. Then the section boss went off to get the freight engine to haul the flat car.

"Got out of that better than I expected," whispered Sam to his big brother.

"It pays to put on a front, Sam," was the answer. "If I had been weak−kneed about it that fellow wouldn't have done a thing."

"Oh, you've got a head for business, Dick— I can see that," said the youngest Rover, admiringly.

"I hope so, Sam— for I think I'll need it soon."

"You mean for helping Dad?"

"Yes,"

"It's too bad he has these weak spells, isn't it?"

"Yes. What he needs, I think, is a good, long rest."

The others went off in the touring auto, and Dick and Sam made themselves at home on the flat car. Soon a freight engine backed up, the car was attached; and off they started, in company with the section boss and two track laborers, in the direction of Ashton.

As the Rovers could readily see, the Dartaway was a complete wreck, beyond the possibility of being repaired. But the motor looked to be in good order, and the stays and turn−buckles would, of course, be worth something.

When Ashton was reached Sam and Dick found that the automobile and its party had gotten there ahead of them.

"I've found a place where we can store the biplane— or what's left of it," said Tom. "In that barn," and he pointed to a structure directly beside the tracks.

"Good enough!" cried Dick. "That will save the trouble and expense of hauling it any distance."

The flat car was stopped in front of the barn, and after some trouble the remains of the biplane were transferred to the structure. Then the section boss brought out a receipt which Dick signed.

"Next time I move a flying machine I'll make sure that orders are O. K.," he remarked, grimly.

"It might save a lot of trouble," answered Tom, dryly.

"Tell me— didn't you act on orders from that lawyer, Fogg?" questioned Dick, curiously.

"I did— if you want to know."

"I thought so. He's too sharp for his own good."

"You're right— and maybe he'll catch it for this," answered Jimmy Budley; and then he and his men rode away on the flat car, leaving our friends to themselves.

"Well, now you've got the wreckage, what are you going to do with it?" questioned Stanley.

"Offer it to the folks who build flying machines," answered Dick. "I'll write the letters to−night."

With the biplane off their minds, the Rovers rejoined their friends in the automobile, and took a run through the country for fifty miles or more. They stopped at a country hotel, and there Dick treated to cake, ice cream and other refreshments.

The letters to the flying machine manufacturers brought various replies. Several did not care to buy the wreckage at all, while others offered a ridiculously low price.

"This doesn't look encouraging," was Dick's comment. "Boys, I guess we'll have to pocket our share of the loss."

The next day, however, came another letter, one from a young aviator of Worcester. He wrote that he had heard that they had the wreckage for sale and if it was still on the market he would come and look at it.

"Maybe he'll give us a little more than those manufacturers offer," said Sam, hopefully.

The letter was answered, and the young aviator came on the next day, going first to inspect the remains of the Dartaway and then coming up to the college.

"Pretty well smashed," said he, to the Rover boys. "About all that is good is the motor and fittings."

"But that engine is a dandy," said Tom.

"How much do you want for the outfit as it stands?"

"I don't know," answered Dick. "The biplane cost us about three thousand dollars."

"Yes, but she's a complete wreck. All I can use is the engine— and maybe a few other things."

"Well, make an offer," put in Tom.

"I might pay three hundred dollars."

"Make it double that and the machine is yours," returned Dick.

No, it wouldn't be worth six hundred dollars to me," answered the young aviator.

A discussion lasting the best part of half an hour ensued. The aviator went up to four hundred dollars and then to four hundred and fifty. Finally, Dick said he would accept five hundred dollars cash; and the bargain was concluded at that figure. The money was paid over, and the Rover boys gave the purchaser a bill of sale, and he departed without delay, stating he wished to make arrangements for shipping the wrecked biplane away.

"Not so bad, after all," declared Dick, when the brothers were alone.

"It's very good," put in Tom.

"That's the end of the Dartaway," came from Sam, mournfully. "Well, we had some pretty good times in her while she lasted."

CHAPTER VIII. A BOX OF CANDY

"Say, I've got to have some fun or bust!"

It was Tom who uttered the words. For over a week everything had run along smoothly at Brill College. The boys had settled down to their studies. They had sent letters home, and to the girls, and had received several communications in return. They had been congratulated on their escape from the wrecking of the biplane, and Dora had written to Dick urging him to give up flying.

"I'm going to give it up for a while, at least," Dick had answered. During those days the search had been kept up for Josiah Crabtree, but so far nothing had been heard of the fugitive from justice. That the man had left the neighborhood was quite probable.

"What sort of fun do you want, Tom?" asked Sam, throwing down the book he had been studying.

"Oh, anything," was the answer. "I feel as if I was getting musty and rusty, and I've simply got to do something. Wish there was a hazing on, or something like that," and the fun−loving Rover gazed moodily out of the window.

"Now don't you get yourself into trouble, Tom," warned Dick. "Better get at that theme you've got to write on 'Educational Institutions of the Revolutionary Period'."

"Hang the themes, Dick! I've got to have some fun— and I'm going out for it!" answered Tom, and catching up his cap he passed out of the dormitory.

"Guess I'll go, too," added Sam, and quickly followed. Soon Dick came also, not wishing to be left behind if anything unusual was to take place.

In the lower hallway the boys found several men at work, cleaning and oiling the hardwood floor. They had a box of wax polish with them, and this immediately gave Tom an idea.

"I'd like to buy a little of that," he said, to the head workman, and a bargain was quickly struck, and the fun−loving Rover walked away with half a box of the wax polish.

"What are you going to do with it?" asked Sam.

"Don't know yet— but I'll do something," was the reply.

"Looks like maple sugar candy," said Dick, gazing at the wax.

"Wait! I've struck it!" cried Tom. "Just the thing! Hurray!" And his face brightened.

"What is it, Tom?" asked both of his brothers.

"I'll make William Philander Tubbs a present of this," was the reply. "Come on, and watch how I do it."

"William Philander has gone to see that new, girl of his," answered Sam.

"Not just yet— but he'll be on the way soon. I'll have to hurry, if I want to do something."

Tom led the way up a back stairs and to the room occupied that term by Tubbs and some other students. They met the dudish student, half dressed, going to the lavatory to wash up.

"Quick!" cried Tom. "I hope I can find the box."

"What box?" asked Dick, as he and Sam followed Tom into Tubbs' room.

"The box of candy he bought for Miss Ruggles. It was a dandy— but maybe we can improve it just a little," and Tom grinned broadly.

All looked around and presently found the box of candy on a dresser. It was tied up with a blue ribbon, but this Tom slipped off with ease. Inside of the box were chocolates and bonbons and some candied fruit.

"Hold the box, Sam," said Tom, whipping out his knife. "We've got to move mighty quick!"

On the instant he was at work with his pocket−knife, cutting the floor wax into various shapes to resemble candy. He took out some of the candied fruit and substituted the wax. Then he felt in his pocket.

"This will help," he said, bringing forth a soapstone slate pencil, which he cracked into tiny lengths. "The candy that lasts!" he cried softly, as he dropped the bits into the box.

"Rather rough on the girl," declared Dick.

"Not at all, Dick," said Sam. "I was introduced to her last week and the very next day she passed me on the road with a stare as if she had never seen me."

"And Stanley says she is stuck up to the last degree," added Tom. "Maybe this will take her down a peg—

anyway I hope so."

Sam was searching his pockets. He brought out several dried beans and a heavy rubber elastic.

"The remains of a slingshot and ammunition I confiscated from a Freshy who was taking shots at me," he explained.

"Drop the beans in— they'll look like jelly beans!" cried Tom. "And cut up that rubber band into pieces for jujube−paste!"

Dick was at the door on guard, and presently he gave a low whistle, to notify the others that Tubbs was coming back. Instantly Tom shut the candy box, put back the paper covering and ribbon; and then he and Sam slipped out of the dormitory by a side door, so that the dudish student might not see them.

Such a joke as had been played Tom could not keep to himself, and when the Rovers went downstairs he told Stanley, Songbird and Spud Jackson.

"Fine!" cried Stanley. "That Miss Ruggles deserves it, too. She thinks, just because her father has rocks, that she is too good to even recognize any of us. The only fellow she tolerates is Tubby— I guess because he's such a dude."

Tom wanted to follow William Philander Tubbs when he went to see the young lady, who was stopping with an aunt who lived not far from Brill. The others were willing, and all hung around the campus until the stylish student made his appearance.

"She's crazy for candy— Tubby told me so himself," said Spud. "Eats about a barrelful a week, so I understand. That's why he got her the box, I guess."

"If she eats that boxful she'll be a good one," was Tom's dry comment.

It was not long before Tubbs appeared. The stylish student was faultlessly attired, in light trousers, dark Prince Albert coat, white vest, spats, and a silk hat. In one hand he carried a cane and in the other the box of candy.

"My, but we are some swell!" murmured Sam.

"He ought to pose for a fashion magazine," returned Tom. "Keep back, fellows, or he'll spot us!" And he pulled those nearest to him behind some shrubbery.

William Philander passed them and they followed at a safe distance in the darkness. The dudish student headed directly for the house at which Miss Clarabel Ruggles was stopping, and the others saw him ascend the front piazza and ring the bell. A servant ushered him in, and the boys saw the light turned up in a parlor.

"Come on and see the fun," said Tom, and led the way across a lawn. The curtains to the parlor windows were half up, so they could look into the room with ease. One window was partly open for ventilation.

They saw William Philander sitting in a chair, the box of candy on his lap. Presently Clarabel Ruggles came in, attired in an elaborate evening gown. Tubbs at once arose to his feet and, bowing very low, accepted her hand, which was held on high. Then the dudish student said something and offered the box of candy.

"Oh, is this really for me!" those outside heard the young lady cry, the words coming through the partly open window.

"No, he bought it for the cat!" murmured Tom, and at this the others had to snicker.

"A— er— a slight token of my regard, don't you know," said William Philander, with a flourish.

"So kind of you, Mr. Tubbs!" The girl gazed hungrily at the box. "Shall I open it now?"

"If you wish to," answered the dudish student, gallantly.

"I will— and you shall have a share of the candy," said the young lady, and quickly drew off the ribbon and paper. "Oh, my, how perfectly delicious!" she murmured. "Oh, Mr. Tubbs, how could you guess just the kind I like!"

"Help yourself, my dear Miss Ruggles," said Tubbs, as the box was held out. "Ladies first, don't you know," and he smiled sweetly.

She took a candy and he did likewise, and as they ate they talked of various things. Then the box was passed back and forth.

"Yes, I came to see if you would go to the— er— to the— er——" stammered William Philander, and then he came to a dead halt. "Oh, my tooth!" he gasped, suddenly.

"What is it, Mr. Tubbs?"

"I— er— I really think I've broken one of my— er— teeth, don't you know!" gasped the stylish student. "Oh, dear, that candy is awfully hard!"

"I didn't find it so, Mr. Tubbs. Here, try another piece," answered the young lady, and helped both him and herself. "As you were going to say," she added, with a smile. "Was it that concert that——" She, too, stopped short. "Oh, my!" she gasped.

"Wha— what is it?" stammered William Philander.

"This piece of candy I have! It tastes awfully queer!"

"So does this piece I have!" groaned the dudish student.

"Oh, Mr. Tubbs, what kind of candy is it anyway? My teeth are— are stuck fast in it!"

At this moment the aunt of the young lady came in. She looked in wonder at the others, for both were making wry faces.

"It's the candy, Aunt Mabel!" cried the young lady. "It— it tastes so queer!"

"Ha! Let me see that box?" exclaimed the aunt, who was a portly person. "I read in the newspaper only yesterday of some folks being poisoned by eating cheap candy." And she looked severely at poor Tubbs.

"This is— er— not cheap candy, my dear Mrs. Garlett," spluttered William Philander. "It is some of the best to be had in Ashton, I assure you."

By this time the lady had taken something from the box and was sampling it. As it chanced to be a piece of the rubber band she made slow progress in chewing it.

"I never saw such candy!" she declared, with vigor. She took another piece. "That was all right," she added, a moment later. "But this piece! Why, I declare, it tastes like wax! And it is wax, too," she continued, inspecting the lump more closely.

"Wax!" gasped poor William Philander, hollowly.

"Yes, wax, Mr. Tubbs."

"Oh, you must be mistaken, my dear Mrs. Garlett!"

"Humph! I think I know wax when I see it. And this is rubber— nothing but rubber!"

"Oh, Aunt Clarabel!" murmured the young lady.

"Let me look at that box!" cried the lady of the house. She commenced to make an inspection, holding the box close to a lamp. "Humph! Rubber bands, beans, slate pencils, and polishing wax!" she declared. "Mr. Tubbs, do you call this a box of candy?"

"Upon my word, Mrs. Garlett, I——" gasped the dudish student. He did not know how to finish.

"It's just some old horrid joke!" declared Miss Ruggles, haughtily. "One of your college jokes, I presume!" And she gazed scornfully at poor Tubbs.

"No, no, I— er— I didn't— I really——" gasped William Philander.

"You can have your box of candy back, Mr. Tubbs," went on the girl, sarcastically. "I do not wish it. And allow me to bid you good evening!" And with a stately bow she passed out of the room.

"I'll keep this box of so−called candy and have it investigated," said Mrs. Garlett. "I don't want to be poisoned. Good night, Mr. Tubbs."

"But, my dear Mrs. Garlett——"

"I said good night," interrupted the lady of the house. "Mary will show you to the door," she added, and then, in complete bewilderment, poor William Philander rushed out of the residence, and along the garden walk in the direction of the road leading to Brill.

CHAPTER IX. A BREAKDOWN ON THE ROAD

"I rather think that was rough on William Philander," remarked Dick, with a serious shake of his head.

"Oh, he has got to be taken down somehow," replied Tom, "That's right," added Stanley. "Why, the way he acts towards some of the fellows is outrageous. Just because they don't dress as well as he does he thinks them beneath his notice."

"And I wouldn't waste any sympathy on that girl," put in Spud. "She is as bad as Tubby, when it comes to cutting the fellows she doesn't care to know."

"Well, I guess it will all pass over," remarked Sam. And it must have, for a few days later William Philander and Clarabel Ruggles were seen out driving together and apparently as friendly as over. The dudish student had sent the young lady a letter stating he thought some of his fellow collegians had doctored the box of candy, and this explanation was accepted by the girl and her aunt. Then William Philander sent the girl some candy he was sure was all right, and also a big bouquet of roses; and that was the end of the unpleasantness.

It must not be thought that in those days the girls at Hope Seminary were forgotten. Whenever the Rover boys got a chance they visited the place, and many a nice time they and the girls had together. On those occasions Dick and Dora would roam off together, the others making no attempt to follow them, and the pair would plan the many things they hoped to do in the future.

"You have not heard from Josiah Crabtree, have you?" questioned Dick, on one of these visits.

"Not a word— and I don't want to hear from him," replied Dora.

"He's in hiding, but he'll let us hear from him sooner or later— mark my words."

"Oh, I wish he hadn't escaped, Dick!" And Dora clung tightly to his arm.

"Well, that can't be helped."

"Is there anything new about your father's business?"

"Nothing of any importance."

"How does he feel?"

"In his last letter he said he felt somewhat better and was going to take a trip to New York. How is your mother?"

"Quite well. But the fact that old Crabtree is at large disturbs her very much. As soon as she heard of it, she went over to the Lanings' home to stay."

The boys had driven over to Hope in a carriage. When they started to return to Brill it was quite dark.

"We've got to hurry up," remarked Tom, as they rode away, Sam driving the team.

"Why so?" asked Dick. "We have no boning to do to−night."

"Have you forgotten the spread Bob Grimes is going to give? He said it was to be the finest yet given at Brill, and I don't want to miss it."

"That's so!" cried Dick. "Sure, we want to be on hand, since we are invited. Bob is a first−class fellow."

"Queer we forgot about that feast," murmured Sam. "But I suppose we were thinking too much of the girls," and he grinned sheepishly.

"What time is the spread to come off, Tom?" asked his big brother.

"Ten o'clock sharp, so Bob said."

"In his room?"

"His room and the one next to it. They connect, you know."

"We'll get there in plenty of time— unless we have a breakdown— which I don't expect."

"Don't be too sure of that. This carriage is none too good. I said so when Abner Filbury brought it around for me."

"The wheels do appear to be somewhat shaky," remarked Sam.

"We miss the biplane, for making quick trips," returned Tom, with a sigh. "We ought to get a runabout— an auto runabout, I mean."

"That's the talk!" cried his younger brother. "If we had one of those we could run over to Hope whenever we pleased."

The main road was being repaired, so, at a certain place, the boys had to turn off on a side road for a distance of nearly a mile. Here the going was anything but good, and they went down in more than one rut or hollow.

"Be careful, Sam!" warned Dick. "Don't drive so fast."

"Oh, go ahead," put in Tom, impatiently. "We are losing a lot of time on this side road."

Just then came a narrow turn, with a down grade, very uneven and full of rocks. Over the latter bumped the carriage. Then came a sudden jounce, followed by a crash.

"Whoa!" yelled Sam to the team, and brought them to a standstill at the foot of the hill.

"What broke?" asked Dick, anxiously.

"The back axle, I think," answered Tom, as he leaped to the ground.

The boys had a lantern with them and with this they looked for the damage done. Tom's guess proved correct— the back axle had given way close to the left wheel.

"What's to be done now?" asked Sam, in some dismay. "Say, I don't think that was my fault," he added, quickly.

"I told you to be careful," returned Dick. "Now we are in a pickle and no mistake."

"If we had a wire we might bind up that axle," said Tom, looking at the fracture, which was in the form of a long split.

"But we haven't any," said Dick. He looked into the carriage. "Nothing here but the hitching strap and I don't think that will do."

"There is a farmhouse," said Sam, pointing to a light in a nearby field. "Maybe I can get help there."

"We'll see," said Dick. "Just draw up alongside the fence— so that nobody will run into the carriage. Now that the main road is shut off, everybody has to use this one."

Soon the carriage was safe by the roadside, and then the three Rovers hurried to where the light gleamed from the kitchen windows of a small farmhouse. Dick knocked on the door of the place.

There was a stir from within, and then the door was opened, revealing an old man, who held a lighted lamp in his trembling hand.

"Who be yeou?" he drawled.

"We have had a breakdown on the road," answered Dick. "We thought we might get some help here."

"A breakdown, eh? What sort?" And the old man gazed curiously at the boys.

In a few brief words the Rovers explained matters.

"If you can let us have some wire, or straps, we'll pay you for them," went on Dick.

"I hain't got much," replied the old man. "I'm poor, I am— with havin' sech rheumatism I can't work the farm. But yeou kin look in the barn an' see wot there is."

The boys waited to hear no more, but hurried to the structure indicated— a building all but ready to fall down. In a harness closet they found a few old straps and a coil of fence wire.

"I guess these will answer," said Dick.

"Anyway, let us try them. Sam, you go back and pay the old man whatever he wants, while Tom and I do the mending."

"All right," answered the youngest Rover, and hurried off in the direction of the farm−house.

Sam found the old man sitting by a small table, eating a frugal meal of beans and bread and coffee.

"We found three old straps and some fence wire," said the youth. "What do you suppose they are worth?"

"Well, I'm a poor man, I be," whined the old man. "I don't think yeou be goin' to rob a poor, old man."

"Not at all," answered Sam, kindly. "How much do you want?"

"Them tudder fellers wot had a breakdown give me a dollar fer wot they got," said the old man, shrewdly.

"If I give you a dollar, will that be all right?"

"I guess so," answered the old man. He knew what three straps and what wire were meant, and knew they were not worth half the amount offered.

"Who had the other breakdown?" asked Sam, as he handed over a dollar bill.

"Some fellers in an autymobile— a couple o' weeks ago, or so."

"Some men in an automobile!" cried Sam, with sudden interest. "Who were they?"

"I dunno. They left the autymobile in the barn one night an' come fer it the next day. They give me a dollar."

"How many men?"

"Two I think there was, although one on 'em kept putty well out o' sight, as if he didn't want to be seen."

"How did the man look that you saw?"

"Oh, he was a tall feller, with a face that stuck out here," and the old man pointed to his chin.

"And did he have real heavy eyebrows?"

"He sure did— eyebrows 'most as heavy as a moustache."

"How did the other man look?"

"I dunno— didn't git no good sight o' him. But, say, wot you askin' about them fer? Do you know 'em?"

"I think I know one of the men, but I am not sure," returned Sam, and went outside to join his brothers.

Dick and Tom were deeply interested in what the old farmer had told their brother, and as soon as the strapping and wiring of the split axle was completed all of the boys went into the house to ask the farmer more about the two men and the automobile.

"I can't tell yeou nuthin' more," said the farmer. "They left the autymobile in the barn all night an' paid me a dollar fer it. I don't know who they was, or where they went."

"Can you remember the date this happened?" asked Dick.

"I certainly kin do that, fer it was on my birthday, the tenth."

"The day Crabtree escaped!" murmured Dick, and Sam and Tom nodded.

"Where did they go?" asked Tom.

"I dunno. They went off at night."

This was all the old farmer could tell, and a few minutes later the boys left him. All were rather thoughtful as they got into the carriage once more and drove off.

"Just to think of it!" cried Tom. "Crabtree was around here a night and a day, and nobody knew it!"

"It's too bad we didn't get news of it before," returned Dick. "We might have followed up that 'autymobile,' as the old man called it. But it's too late now. They must be miles and miles away. Crabtree may be in Canada, or on his way to Africa, or China."

"I don't believe he'd go to Africa or China," said Tom. "I think he'll hang around, trying to do us or the Stanhopes or Lanings an injury."

"Just what I think," put in Sam. "I'd like to know who the fellow with the pointed chin and heavy eyebrows is."

"He must be some old friend, or he wouldn't help Crabtree to get away."

"Either an old friend, or else Crabtree paid him pretty well for his services."

"Well, Crabtree is gone, and that is all there is to it."

All the way to Brill the boys discussed the situation. At first they thought they would notify the authorities about what they had learned, but finally concluded that this would do no good. Too much time had elapsed since the automobile had stopped at the old farmhouse.

Arriving at the college, they turned the carriage over to Abner Filbury, explaining about the axle and offering to pay for the damage done. Then they hurried to their room, to get ready for the feast Bob Grimes was to give.

As they entered the dormitory they saw a letter lying on the table. It bore a special delivery stamp and was addressed to Dick.

"Hello, what's this?" cried the oldest Rover boy; "A letter from home, and sent by special delivery. What can it mean?"

"No bad news, I hope," said Sam, his face sobering.

"Read it, Dick," put in Tom. "It must be something important."

CHAPTER X. STARTLING NEWS

Sam and Tom watched with interest while Dick tore open the envelope and took out the letter it contained. The oldest Rover boy scanned the communication hastily.

"What is it?" questioned both of his brothers, impatiently.

"It's from Uncle Randolph," replied Dick. "He says father went to New York several days ago."

"Is that all?"

"No, he adds that he sent father a telegram and so far no answer has come back," went on Dick, seriously. "He thinks something has happened to dad."

"Oh, Dick" cried Sam. "What could happen to him?"

"A great many things, Sam— in a big city like New York. He might get run down by a street car, or an automobile, or be hurt in the subway, or on the elevated railroad. He wasn't very well, remember."

"Yes, I know that. Is that all?"

"Uncle Randolph wants to know at once whether we have heard from dad during the past three days."

"We haven't had a word," broke in Tom "I thought it kind of strange, too."

The other boys read the letter, and then the three talked the matter over. They were interrupted by a knock on the door, and Stanley appeared.

"Going to the spread, aren't you?" he questioned. "Hurry up— it's getting late."

"I don't think I can go," answered Dick. "I've got something I must attend to— this letter from my uncle," and he held the communication up. "Sam and Tom can go."

"I don't feel much like it— now," murmured Sam.

"Neither do I," added Tom.

"Oh, you might as well go," urged Dick. "I'll attend to the message to Uncle Randolph. Everything may be all right— and there is no use of the three of us disappointing Bob. You go, and explain why I didn't come."

"Maybe you can come later," suggested Stanley.

"I'll see. But I must get word to my uncle first," answered Dick.

While Sam and Tom got ready to attend the spread Bob Grimes was to give, Dick hurried downstairs again. In the hallway he ran into Paul Orben, one of the older students whom he knew real well.

"Why in such a hurry, Dick?" questioned Paul, good−naturedly grabbing him by the shoulder.

"I want to get to town— to send a telegram home," answered Dick. Then, struck by a sudden idea, he added: "Paul, is your motorcycle ready for use?"

"It is, and if you want to use it to run down to Ashton with, take it," answered the other, readily. He had once been up in the Dartaway and was glad of a chance to pay the debt he thought he owed the Rovers.

"Thanks very much, I'll use it," returned Dick.

"Come on, then, and I'll make sure that it is all right."

The two young collegians hurried to a room attached to the gymnasium, where bicycles, motorcycles, and other things were kept. Soon the motorcycle was brought out and Paul gave it a brief inspection.

"All right," he announced. "I thought it would be."

"Then I'm off," answered Dick, and pushing the machine along the path towards the road, he hopped into the seat and turned on the power.

Dick had never had much experience in running a motorcycle, but he had tried one enough to know how it should be handled, and soon he was well on his way and riding at a fair rate of speed. The road was good, and he had a fine headlight, and almost before he knew it he had reached Ashton and was approaching the depot.

He had been afraid the ticket and telegraph office would be closed, but he found the man inside, making up a report.

"I want to rush a message home," he said. "And I want to arrange to have it telephoned to our house. I will pay the bill, whatever it is."

"It will depend on whether we can get the operator at Oak Run," said the man. "He may have locked up for the night."

The message was written out, and Dick waited in the depot for an answer. Quarter of an hour passed slowly and then the telegraph operator came to him.

"Sorry, Mr. Rover, but Oak Run doesn't answer. I guess the office is closed for the night."

"Try for Spotstown," said Dick, naming another railroad station several miles further from his home.

Again came a wait.

"Same story— can't get Spotstown, either," said the operator.

"Well, I've got to get somebody, somehow," murmured the oldest Rover boy. "I guess you can get New York City, can't you?" he asked, with a faint smile.

"Of course."

"Then I'll write another message."

Dick knew that when his father was in the habit of going to the metropolis he usually stopped at a large place on Broadway, which I shall call the Outlook Hotel. He accordingly addressed a message to the manager of that hotel, as follows:

"Is Anderson Rover at your hotel? If so, have him telegraph me; otherwise send me word at once."

"Now I guess I'll hear something," thought Dick, as he turned in this telegram and paid for having it transmitted. "Send it Rush, please," he told the operator.

Again there was a wait— this time of nearly half an hour. At last the instrument commenced to click in the telegraph office, and Dick waited anxiously while the man took the message down.

"Is it for me?" he asked. And the man nodded, as he continued to write.

When the sheet was passed over the operator looked curiously at Dick— a look that made the youth's heart sink. With a hand that trembled in spite of his efforts to steady it, the oldest Rover boy held up the paper and read this:

"Anderson Rover was at this hotel until yesterday morning. His baggage is here. Bill unpaid. Left no word.

Manager."

"Gone!" murmured Dick, brokenly. "'Left no word,' 'Bill unpaid!' What can it mean?"

"Something unusual, eh?" said the operator, as he took the bankbill the youth handed out to him for the message and gave back the change.

"Very unusual," was the reply. "I don't know what to make of this." Dick thought for a moment. "I suppose I can't get a train home before morning."

"No, the first train for you is the eight−forty−five to−morrow."

"Too bad! I wish there was a train right away."

There was no help for it, and a few minutes later the youth left the depot, and jumping on the motorcycle, started back for Brill College.

As he rode along Dick's thoughts were busy. What had taken his parent to New York and why had he disappeared so mysteriously?

"He certainly must have gone there on business— the business that has been bothering him so long," he mused. "But would that cause him to disappear? Maybe he had an accident, or was waylaid for his money."

A thousand thoughts surged through poor Dick's brain, but he could reach no definite conclusion regarding his father's disappearance. Yet he was certain of one thing.

"He didn't leave the hotel that way of his own accord," he reasoned. "He would pay his bill and look after his baggage. It's for some outside reason that he didn't return to his hotel and answer Uncle Randolph's telegram."

When Dick arrived at the college he put the motorcycle away and went directly to his room. Sam and Tom were still away, but he heard them returning just as he was on the point of going after them. As they came in, he motioned for them to close and lock the door. Fortunately, they had their rooms to themselves, Songbird, their only roommate, having gone away for the night.

"What did you learn, Dick?" asked both brothers, quickly.

"Not much— and still a great deal," he answered, and told them how he had tried to send word home and had then called up the hotel in the metropolis.

"What do you make of this?" asked Tom, after he and Sam had read the brief message from the hotel manager.

"Do you think he met with an accident?" questioned Sam.

"I don't know what to think."

"It looks mighty suspicious to me— the bill unpaid and baggage left behind," murmured Tom. Then of a sudden he drew a sharp breath. "Oh, Dick, do you think——" And then Tom stopped short.

"What, Tom?"

"I— I hate to say it, but do you think it's possible that dad got— got a little bit out of his head— with that business worrying him?"

"It's possible, Tom. Men have been known to get that way from business troubles, and dad was far from well, we all know that."

"He should have taken somebody to New York with him," put in Sam. "But it's no use talking about that now. The question is, What are we going to do? I can't stay here and study when he is missing."

"Not much— I couldn't study a thing!" cried Tom.

"I know what I am going to do," replied Dick. "I am going to take that early train home, and see Uncle Rudolph. I'll send another message to that hotel manager, too, and then, unless we get word that everything is O. K., I'm going to New York as fast as I can get there."

"And I'll go along!" cried each of the two brothers.

"Yes, that might be best— for if he is still missing we may have a great task to learn what became of him. We'll have to hunt the hospitals, and the police headquarters, and the— the——" Dick was going to add "morgue," but he could not bring himself to utter the word. It was too awful to think that their father might be dead.

"We'll have to explain to Doctor Wallington, or Professor Blackie," said Tom.

"And send word to the girls," added Sam.

"I don't want to worry anybody more than I have to," said Dick. "This may turn out all right after all," he added. But he had his doubts. That something unusual had happened to his father he was certain.

The boys spent some little time in packing their suitcases with such things as they deemed necessary for the trip, and then turned out the lights and went to bed. But none of them slept well. All tumbled and tossed on their couches, trying in vain to solve the mystery that surrounded the disappearance of their parent.

They were up an hour earlier than usual, and it was Dick who took the liberty to knock on the door of the head of the institution.

"Who is it?" asked the worthy doctor, and the young collegian told him. A moment later the head of the college appeared, wrapped in a dressing gown.

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir," said Dick. "But something has happened that has upset me and my brothers a great deal." And he briefly related the condition of affairs, and asked leave of absence for himself and Tom and Sam.

"This is certainly alarming," said Doctor Wallington, sympathetically. "I trust your, father is speedily found and that nothing serious has happened to him. Yes, you may go, and remain as long as is necessary. When he is found, let me know."

"Thank you, sir," said Dick, and after a few words more he hurried off. Then he and his brothers got an early breakfast, and had Abner Filbury drive them to the Ashton depot. Only a handful of students saw them depart.

"Wish you success, boys!" cried Stanley after them.

"Yes, indeed," added Spud. "Keep up a stout heart. Maybe it's all right, after all. There may be some mistake somewhere."

CHAPTER XI. AT THE FARM

"Oak Run! All out for Oak Run!"

It was the familiar cry of the brakeman of the train, as the cars rolled into the little station at which the Rover boys were to alight. The ride from Ashton had been without incident. They had had to make two changes, and had fretted not a little over a delay of half an hour at one junction point.

"There's old Ricks!" cried Sam, motioning to the station master, who was looking after some baggage. "Remember the fun we had with him on our last trip here, Tom?"

"Indeed, yes," was the reply, and the fun−loving Rover grinned a little.

"No time for fun now," put in Dick, quickly. "We want to get home just as soon as possible."

From one of the telegraph offices along the line the boys had sent word ahead, and at the station they found Jack Ness, the hired man, who had brought the family touring car.

"Glad to see you back," said the hired man, touching his cap.

"Any news, Jack?" asked the three, in one voice.

"You mean from your father?"

"Yes."

"No," and Jack Ness shook his head slowly "Not a line for several days. Your aunt an' uncle are worried 'most to death."

The boys leaped into the touring car, Dick taking the wheel and Sam getting in beside him. Tom and the hired man occupied the tonneau, with the baggage. Away they went, in a cloud of dust, over the frail bridge that spanned the river and through the village of Dexter's Corners. Then they struck the country road leading to Valley Brook farm, their home. Dick increased the speed to thirty miles an hour— all the car would stand on such a highway.

"Say, we'll have an accident!" cried Jack Ness, in alarm. "It ain't safe to run so fast, nohow!"

"Sit still, Jack; Dick knows what he is doing," commanded Tom. "We want to get home just as soon as we can."

"Well, I don't blame ye fer wantin' to git home,— but I don't want to git kilt!" murmured the man of all work.

Farm after farm was passed and also a patch of timber land. Then they swept around a turn and came in sight of Valley Brook, with its broad fields and its gurgling brook flowing down to Swift River.

"There's Aleck!" shouted Sam, pointing to a colored man who was standing at the entrance to a lane. He waved his hand and Alexander Pop, one of the servants, and a man who had made many trips with the Rovers, took off his hat and waved in return.

As he swung up to the broad piazza of the house, Dick honked the automobile horn. At once the door flew open and Mrs. Rover ran out, followed by her husband.

"Oh, boys! I am so glad to see you!" cried Mrs. Rover.

"How are you, Aunt Martha!" returned Sam, leaping out and kissing her, an example speedily followed by his brothers.

"Very glad you came," said Randolph Rover, a tall, thin, and studious−looking man, wearing big spectacles. He shook hands all around. "Come right into the house."

"You haven't any word from dad?" questioned Sam.

"Nothing, boys— and I do not know what to make of it."

"It is a fearful state of affairs," burst out Mrs. Rover, and tears stood in her motherly eyes. "We cannot imagine what has happened to your father."

"I sent another telegram to that hotel," said Dick. "I asked the manager to send his reply here."

It was a rather sad home−coming, and even Tom felt much depressed in spirits. All filed into the house and to the sitting−room, leaving Jack Ness and Aleck Pop to look after the automobile and the baggage.

"We ought to get a message from New York soon," remarked Dick, after his uncle had related the little he had to tell about how Anderson Rover had gone away on the trip to the metropolis. Evidently Randolph Rover knew little about the business that had taken his brother to the city. He was no business man himself— being wrapped

up in what he called scientific farming— and probably the boys' father had not thought it worth while to take him into his confidence.

Dinner was on the table, and the boys went to the dining−room to eat. But nobody had any appetite, and the fine repast prepared by the cook under Mrs. Rover's directions, was much of a failure. Once the telephone rang and the boys rushed to it. But the call was only a local one, of little consequence.

"I think the best thing I can do will be to go over dad's private papers," said Dick, presently. "They may give me a clew of where to look for him in New York."

"That's the talk!" cried Tom. "Come on, let's get busy." He hated to sit still at any time, and just at present inactivity was doubly irksome.

During the past year a room had been added to the house and this was used as a library and sort of office combined, being provided with a substantial safe and two roller−top desks. One of the desks was used exclusively by Anderson Rover for his private letters and papers. When sick the man had given Dick the extra key to the desk, telling him to keep it. The father trusted his three sons implicitly, only keeping to himself such business affairs as he thought would not interest them.

The boys sat down and, led by Dick, began a careful inspection of the many letters and documents which the roller−top desk contained. A large number of the papers and letters they knew had no bearing on the affair now in hand. But presently Dick took up some letters of recent date and scanned them with interest.

"I guess this is what we are after!" he cried.

"I was afraid it might be that."

"What is it?" asked his brothers.

"That old irrigation scheme— the one run by Pelter, Japson Company, of Wall Street, New York."

"Why, I thought dad had dropped that," said Sam, in surprise.

"He tried to. But they held him to some agreement— I don't know exactly what. They wanted to get more money out of him— if they could."

"And you think he went to New York on that account, Dick?" asked Tom.

"It looks so to me."

"But that doesn't account for his disappearance."

"Perhaps it does."

"What do you mean?"

"Those fellows may be holding him a prisoner, or they may even have put him out of the way altogether— although I doubt if they are as bad as all that."

"Some men would do anything for money," grumbled Sam. "But what good would it do to hold him a prisoner?"

"They may want to force him to sign some papers, or give up some papers he is holding, Sam. One thing is certain, they were very anxious to see him— these letters show that."

"Hadn't we better telegraph to them and see what they have to say?" suggested Tom.

"Perhaps, Tom— but, somehow, I don't think that would be a wise move to make. Father did not trust them. He said they were sharpers. If we sent them any word it might put them more on guard than they would otherwise be. I think the best thing to do is to go to New York and interview them personally— if we don't get word from dad before we leave."

"I think——" commenced Tom, and just then the telephone bell rang and all rushed to it. Dick took up the receiver.

"Is this the Rovers' house?" asked a voice over the wire.

"Yes."

"I have a telegraph message for Richard Rover."

"All right, Mr. Barnes," answered Dick. "What is it?" He had recognized the voice of the telegraph operator at Oak Run.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Rover?" returned the operator. "This is from New York City, and is signed, 'Thomas A. Garley.'"

"Yes, yes! Read the message!" cried Dick, and all three boys listened closely while Dick held the receiver.

"He says: 'No news of Anderson Rover. Better come on and investigate.'"

"Is that all?"

"Yes." And the operator repeated the message. "I'll mail the sheet to you," he added.

"All right, much obliged." Dick turned to his brothers. "Shall I send word back that we are coming?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"Take this message down, Mr. Barnes," went on Dick, and dictated what he wished to say. "I'll settle next time I see you," he added, and hung up the receiver.

The uncle and the aunt of the boys wished to know the news, if such it can be called, and the lads told them. At once Mrs. Rover burst into tears.

"I am sure something has befallen Anderson!" she sobbed. "Oh, what shall we do, Randolph?"

"I— I think I had better go to New York and— er— make some— er— inquiries," answered her husband, somewhat helplessly, for a visit to the teeming metropolis always appalled him.

"No, you stay here, and wait for some word, Uncle Randolph," said Dick. "Sam and Tom and I are going to New York."

"Oh, boys!" cried Mrs. Rover. "Going alone?"

"Why not, Aunt Martha?" asked Sam. "We are not afraid."

"I know that. But this is— er— no ordinary trip. You may get into trouble, and——"

"If we do, we'll get out of it again," put in Tom, grimly.

"Oh, if only we knew what had become of your dear father!" and the lady's eyes filled again with tears, while Uncle Randolph looked deeply sympathetic.

"I think we had better start at once," went on Dick. "We can get the five−thirty train down."

"What, to−night!" exclaimed the aunt. "Why, that will get you to New York at midnight!"

"Just about," said Tom.

"You had better start in the morning. What will you do at midnight in a big city like New York!"

"We'll go direct to the Outlook Hotel," answered Dick. "And then, if we can't find out anything about father, we can go down to the offices of Pelter, Japson Company in the morning."

"And if you don't find out anything there?" asked Randolph Rover, timidly.

"Then we'll go to the police, and maybe get a detective or two on the case," returned Dick. "And we'll have to look up the hospitals— in case he met with an accident. But I don't think he has met with any accident," he continued hastily, for he saw how alarmed his aunt was becoming. "For if he had an accident, the authorities would find out, from the things in his pockets, who he was, and notify us, or the hotel."

Mrs. Rover heaved a deep sigh, and her husband shook his head slowly. Dick closed the desk again and locked it, and then the three boys hurried to their rooms, to prepare for the trip to the metropolis.

"Say, I dun heah dat you am gwine to New York," came a voice from the entrance to Dick's bedroom, and looking up from the suitcase he was packing, the oldest Rover boy saw Aleck Pop standing there, an anxious look on his ebony face.

"Yes, Aleck, we are going to take the five−thirty train. You can tell Jack to get the car ready."

"Want me to go along?" asked the colored man, wistfully.

"No, Aleck, not this trip. You stay here and do what you can for my aunt and uncle."

"Yo' father am missing, ain't he?"

"Yes."

"It's too bad. Hope you find him, Dick, I do, indeed! I'll tell Jack about dat auto." And Aleck Pop went off, shaking his head in sorrow. He loved all of the Rovers, and their troubles were his own.

CHAPTER XII. OFF FOR NEW YORK

"Boys, you must take care and not get into trouble."

"And as soon as you have word of your father let us know."

Thus spoke Aunt Martha and Uncle Randolph, as the three Rover boys stood ready to say good−bye. The automobile was already at the door and their suitcases were in the tonneau.

"We'll take care of ourselves," said Dick. "And as soon as we get any word we'll let you know. And remember, Uncle Randolph, if any word comes to the farm you are to forward it at once to the Outlook Hotel."

"Yes, I'll remember that," answered the uncle.

The boys kissed their aunt, who shed silent tears at their departure. To Aunt Martha the great metropolis was a wonderful as well as dangerous place.

"Good−bye!" cried Tom, and was the first to climb into the automobile, getting into the driver's seat. Jack Ness was to go with them as far as Oak Run, to bring the touring car back.

The other lads climbed in, and all those left at the farm waved them an adieu. Then Tom threw in the dutch, and off they sped, down the lane to the main road. Soon a cloud of dust hid them from view.

"It's awful, Randolph!" murmured Mrs. Rover to her husband. "New York is such a busy place— and there are so many wicked people in it!"

"The boys know how to take care of themselves," answered Randolph Rover. "Why, they even took care of themselves when they were cast away on that island in the Pacific Ocean," he added, referring to happenings which I have related in detail in the volume entitled "The Rover Boys on Land and Sea."

"True— but— but I am nervous about this trip. And then, what can have happened to Anderson?"

"That I don't know. Maybe a street car or an automobile ran over him. They have such accidents in New York every day, so I've been told."

"I know it! Oh, it is terrible, this suspense!" And Mrs. Rover walked away, the tears still coursing down her cheeks.

In the meanwhile the touring car was making good time along the road to Oak Run. At Dexter's Corners they stopped at the post−office for letters. There were three— one for each boy, but not one was postmarked New York. They were from the girls at Brill.

"Glad to hear from the girls," said Sam. "But, just the same, this time I'd rather get word from New York."

"So would I," added Dick.

"Ditto here," echoed Tom, with a long−drawn sigh.

Without waiting to read the communications, the lads kept on to the Oak Run depot. They could hear the train coming through the hills and presently it glided into sight and up to the station.

"Good luck to ye!" shouted Jack Ness, as they boarded one of the cars. And then he turned back towards the farm with the touring car.

The train was not more than half filled, so the three youths had but little difficulty in getting seats. They turned one of the seats over, so that they might face each other, and put their suitcases in the racks overhead.

"Guess we might as well read our letters," said Dick, as soon as they were settled. He was anxious to learn what Dora had written. He had asked her to write to her mother concerning their proposed marriage.

"Just what I say," added Tom, and soon he and Sam had settled back, following their big brother's example.

The communication from Dora was quite long and Dick enjoyed it so thoroughly that he read it twice before stowing it away in his breast pocket. The girl stated that her mother had left everything to her own judgment and that she, in turn, was willing to leave everything to Dick.

"Dear, dear Dora!" he mused. "The sweetest girl in all the world! I only hope I prove worthy of her!" And then he sat back and pictured to himself the happy home they would establish as soon as everything could be arranged. Had it not been for the cloud concerning his father, Dick would have been the happiest youth in the world.

"Well, they are not doing much at Hope," remarked Sam. "Society meetings, fudge patties, and grinding away at themes."

"Just what Nellie writes," answered Tom. "Well, you can't expect much fun when you are trying to get an

education!" And he sighed, as he thought of what was before him at Brill. In a way, he envied Dick his opportunity to break away and get out into the business world.

It had been too early to get supper before leaving home— although their aunt had offered it— so about seven o'clock the lads went into the dining car attached to the train. They found a table for four vacant and took possession, and presently ordered what they wanted.

"Hello! look there!" exclaimed Tom, in a low voice, after looking around the dining car, and he pointed to a man at one of the tables for two.

"It's that lawyer who settled for the smashed biplane," returned Sam. "Must be going to New York, too."

"Most likely his profession takes him to the city quite often," remarked Dick.

"Wonder if he'll speak to us if he sees us," ventured Sam.

"I don't know and I don't care," came from his big brother. "I didn't like him at all— he was too crafty−like."

Their food served, the boys fell to eating with that gusto that characterizes youths who are still growing. They had about half finished when Dick felt himself touched on the arm. At his side stood Belright Fogg.

"Taking a little trip, eh?" remarked the railroad lawyer, with a bland smile.

"Yes," answered Dick, shortly.

"To New York, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, you got settled about that flying machine, didn't you?" went on the lawyer, and dropped into the vacant seat opposite Dick, on the side where Tom sat.

"We did— but we had some trouble," replied Tom.

"That was a mistake— to remove the machine," said Belright Fogg. He gazed at the boys a moment. "I understand you sold the wreck for quite a price," he continued.

"We didn't get as much as we wanted," said Sam. "We are still quite something out of pocket."

"But not as much as the railroad company!" The lawyer gave a brief chuckle, which surprised the lads. "Oh, it's all right, so far as I am concerned," he continued. "Maybe you'd be interested to know that I no longer represent that road."

"You don't?" and now Dick was interested.

"No, I handed in my resignation three days ago," answered Belright Fogg. He did not add that he had been asked to resign by the head of the railroad company, because of irregularities in his accounts and because of several professional shortcomings.

"Going to give up law?" asked Tom, for the want of something better to say.

"Not at all, my boy. I am going down to the city to practice my profession. There is a much larger field for my abilities down there than up here," Belright Fogg answered, loftily.

"Yes, New York is pretty large," responded Tom, dryly.

"I expect to open my offices in a few days," went on the lawyer. "If you ever have any business down there, come in and see me. I will mail you one of my cards," and with another bland smile, and a bow, he passed out of the dining car.

"Oh, my, but we are some pumpkins!" murmured Tom. "First thing you know he'll be putting all the other lawyers in New York out of business."

"I shouldn't want him for a lawyer," remarked Sam. "He doesn't impress me very favorably."

"Handed in his resignation, eh?" mused Dick. "More than likely he had to do it. No, I shouldn't want anything to do with him."

The boys finished their meal, and after paying the bill, returned to their former seats. They looked around for Belright Fogg, but he was evidently in some other car of the train.

It was dark, so they could see little of the country through which they were passing. At one station at which they stopped, a newsboy came through the train, crying his wares, and Dick purchased several metropolitan evening papers and handed them around.

"Nothing but politics, a murder, a big auto race, and a new war in Central America," remarked Tom, thumbing over his paper. "How tired the reporters must get of writing about the same kind of things every day."

"They must have exciting times getting the news, sometimes," returned Sam.

"Here's an advertisement that will interest you," remarked Dick, and he pointed to the bottom of a page.

"Pelter, Japson Company advertise themselves as brokers and dealers in high−class Western securities, and they offer stock in that Sunset Irrigation Company. That's the company dad was interested in."

All of the boys read the advertisement carefully, but it added nothing to their stock of knowledge. Then they looked the newspapers over some more, and finally threw them away.

"Wish we were in New York," sighed Sam. He was growing tired, having been on the go since early morning.

"We'll be there inside of half an hour," returned Dick, after consulting his watch.

Presently the long train rolled into the city and came to a stop at One Hundred and Twenty−fifth Street. Then they rolled on and on, through the city, past block after block of apartment houses, stores and offices, and private dwellings.

"Talk about a bee hive!" murmured Tom. "You can't beat New York City, no matter where you go!"

"Well, Chicago is a close second," answered Dick.

"And St. Louis and Philadelphia, and some other cities," put in Sam. "Ours is a big country and no mistake."

The passengers were already getting their belongings together, and in the parlor cars the porters were brushing off the people and, incidentally, pocketing various tips. Then the train rolled into the Grand Central Depot, now called the Grand Central Terminal.

"Last stop!" was the cry, and the boys piled out, each with his suitcase. The sleepy crowd moved along the long platform, in the glare of the electric lights, and through the depot into the busy street.

"Cab!" "Taxi!" "Carry your baggage!" Such were some of the cries which greeted the boys' ears as they emerged on Forty−second Street. The clang of the street car gongs added to the din, and newsboys were everywhere, crying the latest editions of the afternoon papers.

"I'll get a taxi to take us down to the hotel," said Dick, and soon the brothers were in a taxicab, with the suitcases in front, next to the driver. "Outlook Hotel," he ordered, and away they moved, out of the maze of vehicles, for certain thoroughfares of the metropolis are crowded nearly every hour out of the twenty−four.

"Somebody told me that New York never sleeps, and I guess that is true," remarked Sam. "It is half−past twelve and look at the people!"

The taxicab turned over into Fifth Avenue and sped down that noted thoroughfare for about ten blocks. Then it made another turn westward and reached Broadway, and almost before they knew it, the boys were at the main entrance to the Outlook Hotel.

Leaving the driver to turn the baggage over to the hotel porters, Dick paid the fellow and hurried into the building, with Tom and Sam at his heels. They found the night clerk and his assistant at the desk.

"I am Richard Rover," said Dick, to the head clerk.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Rover," was the answer. "I am glad you have come."

"Have you any word about my father?" went an Dick, quickly.

"Nothing, Mr. Rover. We have made all sorts of inquiries, but we haven't learned a single thing, excepting that he walked out of this hotel alone and didn't come back."

CHAPTER XIII. AT THE OUTLOOK HOTEL

The news had not been totally unexpected, yet the three lads felt very much depressed. They had hoped that some sort of word might have been received concerning their father while they were speeding towards New York on the train.

"I wish you would give me all the particulars," went on Dick.

"Here comes the manager,— he can tell you more than I can," replied the clerk, and he nodded in the direction of a tall, heavy−set individual who was approaching.

"So you are Mr. Rover's sons, eh?" said Mr. Garley, as he shook hands. "I am sorry for you, indeed I am. This is certainly a puzzle. Come in here and I will tell you all I know," and he led the way to a small reception parlor that was, just then, unoccupied. He drew two chairs up to a small sofa, so that all might sit close together.

"I don't suppose any word came from the farm for us?" suggested Sam, as he was about to sit down.

"If anything came in the name of Rover I'd know about it," returned the hotel manager. "I am very much interested in this case."

"Have you spoken to the police about it?" asked Tom.

"Not yet. I thought that perhaps you would not like it. Sometimes, you know, men go away and leave no word, and, later on, they come back, and they don't want anything said about it. So we have to be careful."

"What have you got to tell us?" asked Dick.

"It isn't very much. In the first place, though, I don't think your father was in the best of health. I noticed that, and so did one of my clerks and one of the elevator men."

"Did he have an attack while he was here?" cried Sam.

"I don't know about that. But we all noticed that he was feeble at times— and that he seemed to be very much worried over something. He was continually getting his notebook out and doing some writing or figuring, and then he would shake his head, as if it didn't please him at all."

"Yes, he was worried over some business matters," answered Dick. "But that wasn't bad enough to make him go off like this and leave no word. When was he last seen?"

"In the morning, about ten o'clock. He came down in one of the elevators with a small package in his hand— a package, so the elevator man said, that looked like some legal documents. He seemed to be very much disturbed, and the man said he talked to himself. He hurried out of the side door of the hotel, but one of the doormen saw him go to the corner and turn down Broadway— and that was the last seen of him, so far as we knew."

"And what of the things in his room?" questioned Dick.

"Outside of the usual cleaning up, I have had everything left as it was," answered the hotel manager. "You may go up there, if you wish."

"We will,— and we'll most likely want rooms, too."

"The room next to his is vacant, you can have that if you wish."

"All right, we'll take it," returned Tom. "Do they connect?"

"Yes. I'll have the hallman unlock the connecting door for you."

They were soon in an elevator, a boy bringing up their baggage. They passed to the fourth floor of the hotel and to the rear.

"Your father wanted a quiet room, so we put him on the court," explained the manager of the Outlook Hotel, as he unlocked the door and turned on the electric lights.

It was a typical hotel room of the better class, with a brass bed, a bureau, a desk, and several chairs. At one side was a small bathroom.

On a chair rested Mr. Rover's suitcase, locked but unstrapped. On the bureau were his comb and brush, a whisk broom, and some other toilet articles. On some hooks hung a coat and a cap. They glanced into the bathroom, and in a cup on the marble washstand saw his toothbrush.

"He certainly meant to come back," murmured Tom.

"Yes, and that very soon— or else he wouldn't have left these things lying around," added his younger brother.

Dick passed over to the coat that hung on a hook and felt in the pockets. They contained nothing but some

railroad timetables.

"Can't you call up some of your father's business friends or acquaintances?" suggested the hotel manager.

"He had very few acquaintances in the city," answered Dick. "He used to have some close friends, but they are either dead or have moved away. As for the business men he had dealings with— I guess I had better see them in the morning."

"Then, if there isn't anything more I can do, I'll leave you," returned the hotel manager.

"Nothing more at present," answered Dick.

With the hotel manager gone, the boys closed the door leading to the hallway and sat down to discuss the situation. The door between the two bedrooms had already been opened by a hallman, so that they would have ample sleeping accommodations when they wished to retire. But just now they were too excited and worried to think of sleeping.

"Maybe we had better put the police at work," suggested Sam.

"We surely ought to do something," added Tom.

"What can the police do— with no clews to work on?" asked their big brother.

"They might look around in the hospitals for him."

"I don't think we'll find him in any hospital."

"Why not, if he met with an accident?"

"I don't believe there was any accident," continued Dick, earnestly.

"Do you think he met with foul play at the hands of those men he came to see?" demanded Sam.

"It looks that way to me, Sam."

"Then we ought to have them locked up at once!"

"How can we— when we have no evidence against them?"

"Let us look into dad's suitcase," suggested Tom.

"I'll see if I can unlock it."

Dick had a bunch of keys in his pocket, as did Tom and Sam, and the boys tried the keys one after another. At last they found one which fitted, and the suitcase came open.

The bag contained the usual assortment of wearing apparel which Mr. Rover was in the habit of carrying when on a trip that was to last but a few days or a week. In addition, there were several letters and documents, placed in a thick manila envelope and marked with the owner's name.

The boys read the letters and documents with interest. From them they learned that Mr. Rover had been requested to come to the city immediately, to see about some business connected with the Sunset Irrigation Company. The documents were some transfers of stock which they did not quite understand.

"He came down here to see Pelter, Japson Company, that's certain," remarked Dick. "It eras evidently the only reason why he came to New York. Now the question is, Did he go and see those men, and did they waylay him, or did they hire somebody to do it?"

"I wish we knew more about those men," said Tom. "You can soon size a fellow up when you talk to him."

"Not always," answered Sam. "Sometimes the smoothest talkers are the greatest rascals. Don't you remember how nicely Josiah Crabtree used to talk to Mrs. Stanhope, and see what a rascal he turned out to be!"

"I wonder if they have captured him yet," mused Tom.

"Never mind Crabtree now," put in Dick. "What we want to do is to find father. I don't know exactly how we are going at it, but I think I'll have some sort of plan by morning."

"We can go down to Pelter, Japson Company and make them tell what they know," said Sam.

"They'll tell what they feel like telling, Sam,— and that might not do us any good. Mind you, I don't say they did father any harm. But I know they didn't like the way he was getting after them, for they knew that, sooner or later, he might sue them and possibly put one or more of them in jail for fraud."

For fully an hour the boys talked the situation over, and by that time Sam was so sleepy he could scarcely keep his eyes open. Then they retired, Dick remaining in the apartment his father had occupied, and Sam and Tom taking the next room.

For over half an hour Dick turned and tossed on the bed— his mind filled with thoughts of his father. What had become of his parent? Had he been hurt, or killed, or was he being held a prisoner by his enemies? What if his father should never be heard of again? The last thought was so horrible it made the youth shiver.

"We've got to find him!" he murmured, as he drew the bedclothes around him. "We've got to do it!"

At last Dick fell into a troubled sleep, following the example of his brothers, who had also found difficulty in settling themselves.

Presently the oldest Rover boy awoke with a start. He sat up in bed, wondering what had thus awakened him.

From the next room came the regular breathing of Sam and Tom, showing that they were still in the land of slumber. Dick listened, but no unusual sound broke the stillness.

"It must have been my nervousness," he thought. "Father's disappearance has been too much for me. Well, it's enough to get on anybody's nerves."

He prepared to lie down again, when a faint scraping sound caught his ear. He listened intently.

Somebody was at the hallway door, trying to insert a key in the lock. But the key would not go in, because of the key already there.

"Maybe it's father coming back!" thought the youth, and leaped from the bed to the floor. Three steps took him to the door and he quickly turned the key and caught hold of the handle.

As Dick started to fling the door open he heard a muttered exclamation of dismay in the hall outside. Then came the sound of retreating footsteps, and a slight tinkle, as of metal striking metal.

"Hi, stop! Who are you?" called the youth, and the cry aroused Tom and Sam. He flung open the door and leaped into the semi−dark hallway. The figure of a man was just disappearing around a corner. Dick saw that he wore a heavy beard and that was all.

The oldest Rover boy was thoroughly aroused now, and calling to Sam and Tom to follow, he darted after the flying individual. But by the time he reached the corner of the corridor the man was out of sight. He heard a distant door shut and then all became quiet.

"Who was it?" asked Tom, as he joined Dick.

"Was the fellow in your room?" asked Sam.

"No, but he was trying to get in," answered Dick. "When I woke up he was trying to put a key in the lock. When I started to open the door, thinking it might be dad, the fellow ran away."

"Was it a hallman?"

"I don't think so."

"Where did he go to?"

"Somewhere in this part of the hotel. I just heard a door shut."

"Then he must be on this floor," said Tom. "Say, we ought to investigate this. Did you get a look at him, Dick?"

"Not much of a look. I saw he had a heavy beard."

By this time one of the hallmen was coming up, and to him the boys explained what had happened. He was much interested, for he knew about the disappearance of Mr. Rover, and said he would report to the office.

"I think I heard something drop," said Dick, as the boys returned to the rooms, to put on some clothing. "Hello, here they are! A bunch of keys!" And he held them up.

"One of 'em is new," said Sam, examining the bunch.

"Maybe it was made for the lock of the door to the room father occupied," suggested Tom.

"It's like the old key," returned Dick, comparing the two. "That rascal, whoever he is, must have had the key made for the sole purpose of getting into this room!"

"But for what reason?" questioned Sam.

"To get at dad's private papers," answered his big brother. "Boys, if we catch that man maybe we'll be able to find out what has become of father!"

CHAPTER XIV. DICK MAKES A DISCOVERY

While the boys were discussing the situation one of the night clerks of the hotel arrived, having been summoned by the hallman. He listened with interest to what the lads had to tell.

"I'll set the house detective on this," he said. "We can't allow anybody to prowl around, trying to use false keys."

"We want to catch that man ourselves," said Dick. "We are going to set a watch for him. No more sleep for us to−night."

"I don't blame you," returned the clerk. "If you spot him, call up the office and we'll give you all the help you want."

The boys hurried into their clothing, and then, led by Dick, walked noiselessly through the various hallways of the big hotel in the direction where the oldest Rover boy had heard the door shut. But though they passed many doors, Dick could not determine which was the right one.

"Let us set a regular watch," suggested Tom "We can take turns. One can watch while the others sleep."

"All right, I'll watch first," answered Dick.

"Call me in an hour, Dick," returned Tom.

"And call me an hour after that— if you want me," added Sam.

The hallway was long and but dimly lighted. At the end was a sofa, and after walking up and down several times, Dick sat down on this. The long journey from Valley Brook farm had made him sleepy, but he resolved to keep wide awake, in case the mysterious individual should again show himself.

"He's got to come out of his door some time, unless he tries to get away by a fire escape," thought the youth. "And I guess all the fire escapes on this side of the building are at the end of the hall. I hope I've got him trapped, whoever he is."

Half an hour went by and nothing unusual happened. Then Dick heard a distant elevator stop, and two men got off and came down the hallway. They stared rather curiously at the youth.

"What's the matter?" asked one, presently.

"Waiting for a friend," was the answer.

"Humph! rather late," remarked the man.

"Better say early, Jack," laughed the other. "It's ten after two."

"Is that so! Great Scott! Time we got to bed!" And the two men passed into a nearby room, locking the door after them.

After that came another period of silence, broken only by the sounds of the two men undressing. To keep himself awake Dick commenced to walk up and down the long hallway again.

"I guess I'll call Tom," he thought, at last, after more than an hour had passed. "I've got to get some sleep, or I won't be worth anything in the morning. And if I am to call on Messrs. Pelter, Japson Company I want to have my wits about me."

He stepped around the corner of the hallway, in the direction where his own room was located. He did not know that a man with eager eyes was watching him,— a man who stood on a chair in one of the rooms, peering through the transom light of the door.

"Gone at last— I was afraid he would stay here all night!" muttered the man. "Now is my chance to get away. I didn't think they'd get here to−night. I should have gotten that key made sooner." And opening the door noiselessly, he came out into the hallway. He wore a thin overcoat and a slouch hat, and a heavy beard covered his face.

Dick hurried his steps and called Tom, and then went back to the other hallway, unwilling to leave it unguarded even for a few minutes. He was just in time to see somebody disappearing down a broad flight of stairs to the floor below.

"Hello! who's that?" he asked himself, and ran towards the stairs. When he arrived there he looked down, to see the man going down further, to the ground floor of the hotel.

"The same fellow, I'll bet all I'm worth!" cried Dick. "There is that heavy beard! He must have been watching

for a chance to get away! What a chump I was to let him get out! I've got to stop him!" And he bounded down the stairs three steps at a time.

By the time Dick reached the next floor the man was in the lower corridor of the big hotel. Here, in spite of the hour, quite a few people were stirring— coming in from late suppers after an evening at the play or opera. The man moved into the crowd and towards the main entrance on Broadway.

"Hi! Stop him! Stop that man!" cried the oldest Rover boy, as he, too, gained the lower corridor. But the man had already gotten out on Broadway. As Dick came out he saw the fellow run across the street to a distant corner and leap into a taxicab that was empty. The driver was on the seat and the turnout started rapidly away.

"You're not going to get away if I can help it," muttered Dick, desperately, and looked around for another taxicab. One stood halfway down the block, the driver taking a nap inside.

"Wake up!" exclaimed Dick, shaking the man. "See that taxi? I want to follow it! Don't let it get out of your sight, if you want your fare and a couple of dollars besides."

"I'm on!" answered the driver, and leaped into his seat, while Dick got into the cab. Away they started, in the full glare of the electric lights of Broadway.

The course was downtown, and the first taxicab made rapid progress. The man inside looked back and when he saw Dick following him, he spoke hurriedly to his driver. Then the cab turned swiftly into a side street, and, reaching Fifth Avenue, shot northward on that well−known thoroughfare.

"Can you catch that other taxi?" asked Dick, anxiously.

"I can try," was the grim answer. "He's going some, though!"

"Maybe they'll be held up at some cross street."

"Not this time in the morning," answered the driver, "They've got a straight road to the Park."

On and on went one taxicab after the other. Fifty−fifth Street was passed and still the first turnout kept well in the lead. But then a big furniture van appeared out of a side street and the cab ahead had to slow down.

"Now is your chance!" cried Dick. "Run up alongside of 'em!"

His driver did as requested. But then came a mix−up, as two more cabs appeared, and Dick's was caught between them. He looked ahead and saw the man with the heavy beard leap to the ground.

"Guess your man is going to run for the Park!" cried the taxicab driver. "Hold on— I want my money first, young fellow!"

Dick had leaped to the ground, bent on catching the fleeing individual. He pulled some bills from his pocket.

"Here is five dollars— wait for me!" he cried. "Or maybe you had better come along. That fellow is a criminal."

"I'll wait here," answered the taxicab driver. He did not wish to become mixed up in an affair which he did not understand.

The corner of Central Park at Fifty−seventh Street was already in sight. The bearded man ran swiftly across the broad plaza and the sidewalk. Then he darted along the side of the Park and on to the path leading to the menagerie. In a moment more the darkness of the place swallowed him up.

"Hey there, what are you running for?" It was a challenge from a Park policeman, as he stepped in front of Dick.

"I wanted to catch that man who just ran in here," explained the youth.

"I didn't see any man."

"Well, he went in here just now. He ran away from the Outlook Hotel in a taxi and got out just below here."

"Who is he?" asked the policeman, becoming interested.

"I don't know. But he tried to get in my room at the hotel. The hotel men want to catch him."

"Humph! Well he's gone now."

Dick continued to look around for the escaped man, but it was all to no purpose. Then he returned to where he had left the taxicab. He found his driver in earnest conversation with the other driver.

"That fellow didn't pay me a cent!" complained the other driver, bitterly. "An' after me doing my best for him, too!"

"Why did you try to run away?" asked Dick, coldly.

"I thought it was all right. He said he had a 'phone message that his father was dying and he must git up town at once, and he promised me big pay. I didn't know he was trying to git away from anybody."

"Well, it's too bad he got away from all of us. By the way, can you describe him to me?" went on Dick, curiously.

"Don't you know him?"

"Only by reputation— and that's bad," and Dick smiled grimly.

"He was tall and thin and didn't have much hair on his head. I think them whiskers was false."

"Anything else that you remember?"

"He had two of his front teeth filled with gold. I noticed it when he yawned under the electric lights."

"Two front teeth filled with gold!" cried Dick, in amazement. "And tall and thin! Can it be possible!"

"Do you know him after all?" asked the man who had given the information.

"Perhaps I do. Tell me some more about him. How was he dressed and how did he talk?"

As well as he was able the taxicab man described the individual who had gotten away. As he proceeded Dick became more and more convinced that he was on the right trail.

"Here is a dollar for what you have told me," said he, to the driver. "If you spot that rascal, have him arrested, and call up the Outlook Hotel," he added.

"All right, I'll remember that," was the ready answer.

"I'll go back to the hotel," said the youth, to his own driver. He knew that Sam and Tom would be wondering what had become of him.

It took but a short while to reach the Outlook Hotel, and there Dick found not only Sam and Tom, but also a clerk and several others awaiting his return. He settled with the driver, and dismissed him.

"Do you know anything about the man who got away?" asked Dick, of the clerk.

"Not much. He came here several days ago and registered under the name of Peter Smith, of Pittsburgh. All he had was a small valise, and that is still in his room."

"Anything in it?"

"I don't know. We can go up and take a look."

"It's a pity you didn't catch the rascal, whoever he is," was Tom's comment.

"Wait," whispered Dick, to his brothers. "I've got something to tell you."

All passed upstairs in an elevator, and the clerk led the way to the room which the patron calling himself Peter Smith had occupied. All the apartment contained was a rusty−looking valise.

"Must have picked that up at some second−hand store," was Sam's comment.

The valise was unlocked and the clerk opened it. It contained nothing but a comb and brush and some magazines.

"Humph! A dead beat!" muttered the clerk. "He put the magazines inside to make the valise feel as if it was filled with clothing. It's an old game. Be intended to leave without paying his bill. I wish you had collared him!"

"I wish I had," answered Dick; and then he and his brothers returned to their own rooms.

"What have you got to tell?" demanded Tom, when they were alone.

"I've found out who that man was," answered Dick.

"Who?" questioned Sam.

"Josiah Crabtree."

CHAPTER XV. AT THE BROKERS' OFFICE

Sam and Tom gazed at their brother in amazement.

"Josiah Crabtree!" exclaimed the youngest Rover.

"How did you find that out?" questioned Tom.

"I suspected Crabtree as soon as I saw the man jump into the taxicab," answered Dick. "There was something about his form, and in the way he ran, that looked familiar. Then the taxi driver told me he had two front teeth filled with gold. That put me on the trail, and from what the man told me I am sure the fellow was old Crabtree."

"But if it was Crabtree, what has he to do with dad's visit to New York?" asked Sam.

"That remains to be found out. But one thing is sure. Crabtree knows that father is missing,— and he had that extra key made to get into the room during father's absence."

"But where is dad? Do you imagine Crabtree had anything to do with his disappearance?" came from Tom.

"I certainly do. Maybe Crabtree is holding him a prisoner."

"Then Pelter, Japson Company haven't anything to do with it?"

"I wouldn't say that, Tom. The whole crowd may be working together."

"You think Crabtree knows those other men?"

"It may be so— I am not sure. But I am sure of one thing," went on Dick, decidedly. "Dad didn't meet with any accident. His disappearance is due to Crabtree, and, likely, to some of his other enemies."

"Well, that clears up one corner of the mystery," said Sam. "But it doesn't get us any nearer to finding dad."

"I think it does, Sam. If we can locate Crabtree, I think we can locate father."

"But how are we going to locate Crabtree?"

"I don't know. But if we keep our eyes and ears open we may learn something. In the morning some of us can call on those brokers and see what they have to say," continued the big brother.

"Some of us? I thought we were all going?" remarked Tom.

"I've got a new plan, Tom; I'll tell you about it in the morning. Now, as there is no use of watching that room any longer, let us try to get a little sleep."

"It will be very little," murmured Sam, consulting his watch. "It is nearly five o'clock already!"

"We'll sleep until eight o'clock. Those brokers don't get to business until nearly ten."

Once more the boys retired, and, after much turning, all dropped into slumber. Dick had made up his mind to awaken at eight o'clock and promptly at that hour he opened his eyes. His brothers were still asleep and he allowed them half an hour longer, for he knew they needed it.

"Now then, Dick, what's your programme?" asked Tom, while he was dressing.

"My programme is this," answered the big brother. "Instead of the three of us calling on Pelter, Japson Company I think one is enough— and that ought to be me, for I have already met Mr. Pelter, once, when I came to New York with dad."

"But what do you want to leave us out for?" grumbled Sam.

"I don't want to leave you out— I want you to be doing something else, for we have no time to lose in this matter. I want you, Sam, to come with me, and when I go into the offices, I want you to hang around outside and watch for old Crabtree. If he is in league with the brokers he may be looking for a chance to interview them, but he will be on his guard, knowing that we are here."

"What am I to do?" asked Tom.

"I think you had better go up to Central Park, Tom, and see if you can find out anything there about Crabtree. Maybe some of the night prowlers around there saw him last night. Anyway, I don't want you to be seen at the offices with me— for I've got another plan in my head— if this one fails," went on Dick.

"All right, Dick, we'll do what you say," was Tom's reply.

The boys went below and obtained breakfast in the hotel restaurant. Then they went to the desk, to ask for letters, and then to the telegraph office, to send a brief message to the farm.

"Have you discovered anything?" questioned the hotel manager, as he came up to them.

"Not a great deal," answered Dick. "But we hope to get on the track of something to−day."

"Hope you do. What about those two rooms?"

"We'll keep them for the present, Mr. Garley."

"All right."

"And I want you to watch out, so that no outsider gets into them," went on Dick.

"Leave that to me, Mr. Rover. My men have their instructions. We can't afford to leave our guests go unprotected."

"Good! If anybody tries to get into our rooms I want you to have him arrested and held."

"He'll be held, don't worry about that," answered the hotel manager, grimly.

A little later the three Rover boys separated, Tom walking over to Fifth Avenue, to take an auto bus going uptown, as that would land him close to the Park entrance.

"We might as well take a Broadway car down to Wall street," said Dick, to Sam. "We have plenty of time, and I don't like the air in the subway."

"I like the street cars better anyway," responded the younger brother. "A fellow can see more."

As was to be expected, the car was crowded, and the boys had to take "strap seats," as Sam called them— standing up in the aisle, holding on to a strap to keep from falling or sitting down suddenly into somebody's lap when the car made a turn. They swept down past Union Square and block after block of tall business buildings.

"My, what a big place New York is!" remarked Sam. "It's a regular bee hive and no mistake."

"We are coming down to the Post Office," said Dick, a little later.

"Gracious! See the building opposite!" gasped Sam. "It's higher than a church steeple! Wonder how many stories it is?"

"Fifty stories," answered a young man standing beside him.

Soon the car was in lower Broadway, and the boys watched out for Wall street, that narrow but famous thoroughfare opposite Trinity church. It was soon reached, and, in company with several men and boys, they left the car.

Dick had the address of the brokers in his pocket and the place was easily found. The offices were located in an old building— one of the oldest on the street, and also one of the shabbiest. But it was five stories in height and boasted of two elevators, and was, from appearances, filled with prosperous tenants. In Wall street rents are so high that many a person doing business there is willing to take whatever quarters he can get.

"Now you hang around in the street here until I come back," said Dick to Sam. "Keep out of sight all you can, so that if Crabtree comes along he won't see you. I'll go up and see what Pelter, Japson Company have to say."

"How long will you be gone, Dick?"

"Not more than half an hour at the most— and maybe not half that," responded the big brother.

Sam dropped behind and Dick entered the dingy office building. From the directory on the wall the oldest Rover boy learned that the brokers were located on the fourth floor, rooms 408 to 412,— the numerals really meaning offices 8 to 12 on floor 4. He got into one of the narrow elevators and soon reached the fourth floor.

The offices of Pelter, Japson Company were located in the rear, overlooking the roof of a restaurant on the street beyond. Dick entered a tiny waiting room and an office boy came to ask what he wanted.

"I wish to see Mr. Pelter," said Dick.

"Not in yet."

"When do you expect him?."

"Ought to be here now."

"Then I'll wait," and Dick dropped on a chair. He had hardly done so when the door opened and a burly individual hurried in. He gave Dick an inquiring look.

"Wants to see you, Mr. Pelter," said the office boy. "Just came in."

"Want to see me? What is it?" and the head of the brokerage firm stepped up to Dick.

"You are Mr. Pelter?"

"Yes."

"I am Richard Rover— Anderson Rover's son."

"Ah! indeed!" cried Jesse Pelter, and gave a slight start. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Rover," and he held out his hand. "Will you— er— step into my office?"

He led the way through two offices to one in the extreme rear. This was well furnished, with a desk, a table,

several chairs and a bookcase filled with legal−looking volumes. In one corner was a telephone booth, and a telephone connection also rested on the desk.

"I came to see about my father," said Dick, as he sat down in a chair to which the broker motioned.

"You mean, about your father's business, I suppose."

"No, about my father. Do you know where he is, Mr. Pelter ?"

"Know where he is? What do you mean? Isn't he in New York?" The broker pretended to arrange some papers on his desk as he spoke and did not look at Dick.

"He has disappeared and I thought you might know something about it."

Dick looked the man full in the face. He saw the broker start and then try to control himself.

"Well that— er— accounts for it," said Jesse Pelter, slowly, as if trying to make up his mind what to say.

"Accounts for what?"

"Why, he didn't come back here as he said he would."

"He has been here then?"

"Yes, a number of days ago. We had quite some important business to transact. He said he would come back the next day and sign some papers, and fix up some other matters. But he didn't come."

"Did he say he would be here sure?"

"He did. So he has disappeared? That is strange. Perhaps some accident happened to him."

"I hope not. I knew he came to New York to see you and your partners. I thought you could tell me something about him."

"I don't know any more than that he called here one day and said he would come in again the next, Mr. Rover. If he is— er— missing you had better notify the police,— unless you have some idea where he went to," continued the broker.

"I have no idea further than that he came to New York to see you— and that he came here from his hotel."

"See here! Do you mean to insinuate that we— er— may know where he is— why he is missing?" demanded Jesse Pelter, sharply.

"I insinuate nothing, Mr. Pelter. But if you expected him the next day after he was here, and he didn't come, why didn't you telephone to him?"

"I— er— I didn't know where he was stopping. If I had known, I might have telephoned to him. Although he had a right to stay away from here if he wanted to."

"He is transacting quite some business with you, isn't he?"

"We have done quite some business together in the past, yes," answered the broker, coldly.

"And matters were not going very well, were they?" questioned Dick, sharply.

"They were going as well as could be expected."

"You owed my father a great deal of money, didn't you? "

"We did owe him something. But we don't owe him anything now. We settled up with him in full," was the reply, which filled Dick with new astonishment.

CHAPTER XVI. MORE DISCOVERIES

"You settled up with him in full?" gasped Rick.

"Yes— some time ago."

"Not for that stock in the Sunset Irrigation Company."

"I was not talking about the Irrigation Company. That is another affair. Your father was to see us about that on the morning when he— er— when he failed to come here. I— er— I thought he had gone back home to get certain documents which he stated he did not have with him."

"And you haven't seen or heard of him since?"

"Not a word, Mr. Rover— I give you my word."

"Did he leave any of his papers with you when he was here last?"

"No." Jesse Pelter took up the telephone on his desk. "Give me 2345 River!" he said to Central. He turned to Dick. "You will have to excuse me, Mr. Rover, I have some important business to transact."

"It isn't as important as finding my father,". answered Dick, bluntly.

"I do not know how I can aid you."

"Perhaps you don't care to try," returned Dick, pointedly, as he arose.

"What do you mean?" demanded the broker, and hanging up the telephone receiver, he, too, arose.

"Never mind what I mean, Mr. Pelter. If you will give me no aid, I'll find my father alone," and having thus spoken, Dick marched from the offices, leaving the broker staring after him curiously.

"Hum! Looks like a smart young man!" murmured Jesse Pelter, to himself. "And I thought Anderson Rover's boys were all school kids! This lad has grown up fast. I wonder what he'll do next? I guess I had better keep my eye on him."

When Dick reached the street he saw nothing of Sam. He looked up and down, and then walked slowly in the direction of Broadway. On the corner he came to a halt.

"He must be somewhere around," he mused. "Perhaps I'd better go back and wait for him."

"Dick!" The cry came from Sam, as he arrived on a run. "Did you learn anything?"

"Not much. But you look excited, Sam. What's up?"

"I think I saw Crabtree!"

"You did! Where? Why didn't you collar him?"

"I didn't get the chance," returned the youngest Rover, answering the last question first. "It was on the corner below here. I was standing in a doorway, watching up and down, when I saw a tall man come along slowly. He halted at the corner and presently another man came out of the side street and touched him on the arm. The second man wore a heavy beard and a slouch hat and colored eyeglasses, but I am almost sure it was Josiah Crabtree."

"Why didn't you go up and make sure? You could have pulled the beard from his face— if it was false."

"Just what I thought. But I decided that first I would listen to what the two men had to say. When I got closer to the pair I made another discovery.

"What was that."

"The first man had a pointed chin and the heaviest pair of eyebrows I ever saw."

"What!" ejaculated Dick, and his mind ran back to the jail at Plankville, and to what had been said about the man who had visited Josiah Crabtree. And then he thought of the mysterious automobile and its driver.

"Yes, I know what you think, Dick— and I think the same— that that man was the one who aided Crabtree to escape from jail," said Sam.

"What did the men say, Sam?"

"I didn't get a chance to listen. As I was coming up I saw the first man give the second man some money. Then the second man looked up and saw me, and shoving the money into his pocket, he dove across the street and into the crowd. That made me feel sure it was Crabtree, and I ran after him pell−mell. I followed him for about half a block. But the crowd was too much for me, and he got away. I was going to tell a policeman, but then I thought he couldn't do any more than I could, and I made up my mind I'd wait for you."

"What became of the other fellow— the man with the pointed chin?"

"I don't know. He went off somewhere while I was after Crabtree— if it was Crabtree," answered Sam.

"Show me which way Crabtree went," said Dick, and the brothers walked in the direction the fugitive had taken. But, though they spent over an hour in looking for the man, not a trace of him could be found.

"Well, this proves one thing anyway," said Dick, as he and Sam started on the return to the hotel. "Crabtree is in league with Pelter, Japson Company. If he wasn't, he wouldn't show himself so close to their offices."

"Just what I think," returned his brother. "And another thing, Dick; I think that man with the pointed chin is in with the brokers, too."

"More than likely. For all we know he may be one of the firm!" went on Dick suddenly. "Wait, I've got an idea. I think I'll go back to those offices."

"And see if the man with the pointed chin is there?"

"Yes."

"All right. Want me to go back, too?"

"You might hang around as you did before. I don't know of anything else to do."

The boys walked back, and while Sam stationed himself in the street Dick walked into the office building which he had before visited. He was just in time to see a boy come from the elevator, some letters in his hand.

"Their office boy," he thought. "Maybe I can get something out of him."

He walked up to the youth and nodded pleasantly.

"You're the boy from Pelter, Japson Company, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yep," was the laconic reply.

"I want to find a man connected with your concern— I don't know his name," continued Dick. "He has a pointed chin and very heavy eyebrows."

"Oh, you mean Mr. Japson," said the boy, quickly.

"Is that Mr. Japson?" repeated Dick, scarcely able to suppress his astonishment.

"Sure it is. He's got a very long chin, and his eyebrows is so heavy they come right down over his eyes. I don't see why he don't cut 'em off some— I would quick enough," went on the office boy.

"Is Mr. Japson in the offices now?"

"No."

"Are you sure of that? He was coming down."

"I know it. But he just telephoned to Mr. Pelter that he couldn't come— something important,"

"How long ago was this?"

"Oh, just a couple of minutes ago."

"Is Mr. Pelter there yet?"

"No, he went out as soon as he got the message. Nobody there but a clerk."

"When will Mr. Pelter be back?"

"I dunno— maybe not till late— or maybe not till to−morrow," answered the office boy, and hurried away.

In a thoughtful mood Dick rejoined Sam, and the pair this time hurried to the subway, to get a train uptown.

"I've found out who the second man was," said the oldest Rover boy. "It was Japson, of Pelter, Japson Company. Sam, I begin to think this is some deep game. This fellow Japson aided Crabtree to escape from the Plankville jail and in return Crabtree is aiding these brokers in their efforts to get the best of father!"

"If we can prove that, we ought to have the brokers arrested."

"But we can't prove it, absolutely. But I am convinced that I am right. The office boy told me that Japson telephoned to Pelter that he could not come in. More than likely Japson was afraid you would be on guard and spot him. As soon as Japson telephoned in Pelter went out— most likely to meet his partner."

"And maybe to hunt up Crabtree, Dick."

"Perhaps."

"But what of father?" went on the youngest Rover, anxiously.

"I can't answer that question, Sam. But it is going to be answered sooner or later— if I have to have all those men arrested. I am certain in my own mind that they are responsible for dad's disappearance. They got him out of the way so that they could get the best of him in that Sunset Irrigation Company scheme."

"I think we ought to watch the men and see where they go."

"So do I. But, now they know we are on guard, they will be very careful."

"Do you think they had father abducted?"

"That is just what I do think. If you'll remember, that is one of Crabtree's favorite tricks. He would not dare to put father out of the way— take his life, I mean— and that would be the only other thing he could do."

"Where could they take him to, in such a city as this?"

"Oh, there are a dozen places— empty stores and basements, vacant flats and apartments. And then they may have taken him away from New York, in an automobile, or on some vessel in one of the rivers."

"I'd give a good deal to know where he is now!" cried Sam, bitterly.

"So would I, Sam. Well, we'll do what we can," added Dick, with determination.

It did not take the boys long to return to the Outlook Hotel. They looked around for Tom, but he was not in sight. However, he arrived a few minutes later. His face showed that his quest had been an unsuccessful one.

"I talked to everybody around that end of Central Park," he said. "One man saw Crabtree, but he couldn't tell where the rascal went to. Did you learn anything?"

"We did," answered Dick. "Come on to dinner and we'll tell you."

While the three ate a hasty midday meal, Dick and Sam told of their discoveries. Tom listened with interest.

"I think you are right!" he cried. "Crabtree is in with the brokers, and the whole bunch is a bad one. I think they are holding dad a prisoner somewhere. The question is, Where? And how can we get to him and rescue him?"

"We might watch those offices," suggested Sam. "But those fellows will be on guard, and we may not learn anything for days and days."

"We could have them arrested," suggested Tom. "But it won't do any good without positive evidence."

"There is something about this whole affair that I can't understand," said Dick. "That man Pelter claims that he settled up with father for everything excepting this Irrigation Company project. Father never told me that he settled up— and I think he would have said something if it was so."

The three boys talked the affair over from every possible standpoint, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion. All were sorry that they had not captured Josiah Crabtree.

"Let me get my hands on him and I'll make him tell what has become of dad," said Dick.

The meal concluded, they went up to their rooms, to talk the matter over further.

"I suppose Aunt Martha and Uncle Randolph are as anxious, almost, as we are," said Sam. "Hang the luck! I wish old Crabtree was back in jail, and Pelter, Japson Company were with him!"

There was a knock on the door and a boy appeared with a telegram. It was addressed to Dick.

"Maybe it's from dad!" cried Sam and Tom, in a breath.

Dick tore open the envelope and read the message rapidly. His brow darkened and he shook his head slowly.

"What does it say?" asked Sam.

"Who it is from?" added Tom.

"It is from Uncle Randolph," answered Dick. Listen!" And he read as follows:

"Important news. Your father's signature demanded on important documents inside of three days, or great financial loss and dishonor to all of us.

"Randolph Rover."

CHAPTER XVII. AN IMPORTANT TELEPHONE MESSAGE

"There's the answer!" cried Tom.

"It's as plain as day!" added Sam.

"You are right," came from Dick. "I see it all now." He signed for the telegram and dismissed the boy, closing the door after him. "They are keeping father a prisoner somewhere, so that he cannot sign those documents."

"And it means a big financial loss and dishonor to all of us," went on Tom. "That must mean Uncle Randolph as well as dad."

"I wish Uncle Randolph had sent some particulars," sighed Sam.

"They may come in by mail— most likely they will," answered Dick. "It would be just like him to send a letter and then telegraph afterwards."

"Well, one thing is clear," remarked Tom. "We have got to find dad, and do it pretty quickly, too. We know— or, at least, we are pretty sure of it— that he is in the power of Crabtree and Pelter, Japson Company. Now the question is, What are we going to do about it?"

"I said this morning I had an idea, Tom," answered his big brother. "I don't know whether it will work out or not, or if you'll care to try it. You know I told you to go to Central Park while Sam and I went down to those offices. I did that so that those brokers wouldn't see you. They don't know you, and you can go down and interview them as a stranger. Do you catch the idea?"

"I do!" cried Tom, eagerly. "And I'll do it! But what shall I say?" he asked, suddenly sobering.

"You might state that you had heard of the Sunset Irrigation Company and thought of investing, or something like that. Maybe they might give you some information that would be valuable for us. And, while there, you may hear something about Crabtree, or something about where father may be."

"I'll go this afternoon," cried Tom. The idea of playing the spy pleased him greatly.

"But you want to be careful," warned his older brother. "If cornered, those brokers may prove to be desperate men."

"I'll be on my guard, Dick."

"Sam and I can go down part of the way with you, and when you go in, we can hang around outside, one at the upper and one at the lower street corner. Perhaps by doing that, we'll catch another sight of Crabtree, although I think, for the present, he'll keep away from Wall street and meet those brokers somewhere else, or telephone to them."

It was not long after this when the three Rover boys set out for the lower part of the great metropolis. They took the subway, that being the quickest way to get there. Dick gave Tom directions how to find the brokers' offices, and then the brothers separated as agreed.

Tom had fixed himself up for the occasion, wearing a slouch hat and a flowing tie, in the manner of a young man from the West or South. He carried a pocket full of timetables and another pocket full of legal−looking documents. He also carried half a dozen visiting cards, with the name and address:

Roy A. Putnam Denver, Colo.

With eyes on the alert for the possible appearance of somebody who might know him, Tom walked into the office building where Pelter, Japson Company did business and entered the elevator. He was the only passenger, and arriving at the fourth floor, he found himself alone in the corridor leading to the brokers' offices.

"Guess I'll listen a bit and see if I can hear anything," he told himself, and tiptoed his way to one of the doors.

He listened intently, but the only sound that broke the stillness was the click of a typewriter and the occasional shifting of some papers. Then he tiptoed his way to the next door, that marked Private.

Straining his ears, Tom caught the scratching of a pen and then a deep sigh, as if somebody had just completed an important bit of work. Then he heard the footsteps of a man, walking from the inner to the outer office.

"If he comes out, I'll have to show myself," thought the youth. But the man did not appear, instead Tom presently heard him return to the inner office. Then the telephone rang and the man answered it.

"Yes," Tom heard him say. "All right. Wait a second," And then the man kicked shut a door between the

offices, to assure himself of privacy.

There followed a long wait, during which time the man in the office was probably receiving some message.

"To−morrow morning?" Tom heard him ask "What time? Ten o'clock. That is rather early, but I can go there directly from my home." There came another pause. "Leave that to me," cried the man. "I'll make him do it!" He paused again. "I am not afraid of those boys," he added. "I'll be there, sure." Another pause. "Yes, the boat is the best place. Nobody can disturb us there. Good−bye." And then the man hung up the telephone receiver.

Tom had taken in every word that the man said. If it was Pelter he must be talking to Japson, or Crabtree, or somebody else in the affair. And Tom did not doubt but what by "those boys" the man had meant himself and his brothers.

"And when he said, 'I'll make him do it,' he must have been speaking of father," he reasoned. "And he mentioned a boat. Maybe they have dad on a boat."

Tom waited for some time longer in the corridor, but nothing of importance occurred. Then he stepped loudly to the main door of the offices and entered.

The same boy Dick had met was there and asked him what he wanted.

"I want to see about some shares in the Sunset Irrigation Company," answered Tom. "Anybody in I can talk to?" And he handed out one of the cards he had fixed up.

"I'll see," answered the office boy, and disappeared into the inner office with the card.

A moment later Jesse Pelter appeared, holding the card in his hand. He smiled pleasantly.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Putnam," he said, bowing. "I am Mr. Pelter. I'll be glad to let you know all about our Irrigation Company and its prospects."

He ushered Tom into his private office and offered him a chair.

"Want to make an investment for yourself?" he said, suggestively.

"If it's a good one," returned Tom, with an assumed grin. "A fellow who comes into a fat legacy has got to do something, hasn't he?"

"Surest thing you know," responded Jesse Pelter. "And this Irrigation Company of ours is the best thing in the world for rapid money making," he continued. "Just come on from Denver, Mr. Putnam?"

"I've been in New York a couple of days," answered Tom. "I want to look around a bit before I invest anything. I heard something of this company before I reached here."

"No doubt! No doubt! It is a big thing, and our rivals are all watching and envying us. Did you get our printed prospectus?"

"No, but I saw one somewhere, some time ago."

"Here you have it, with a map of the property. The shares are now selling at sixty−five, but next week I think we'll have to advance them to seventy or seventy−five, owing to the demand."

"Could a fellow buy five thousand dollars' worth at sixty−five?" asked Tom, trying to show an interest.

"You could, if you were quick about it."

"Well, I want to know something more about this property first," continued Tom. "I don't want to throw any money away."

"Quite right. I see you are a level−headed young man and that is the kind I like to deal with. We'll go over this matter carefully." And then Jesse Pelter plunged into the details of the irrigation scheme, showing up its many good points, and how, in the near future, it was bound to make a lot of money for all who invested in it.

"And you have the shares to sell?" asked Tom.

"Oh, yes."

"Do you own the property, Mr. Pelter?"

"Our company owns it— that is, we have a controlling interest in it."

"There are no other big stockholders?"

"None at all. We have invested heavily,— buying out the old company and reorganizing it. All of the other stockholders are small ones. You see, we have such faith in this scheme that we don't want to let too much stock get away from us."

Tom did not see, but he did not say so. Not a word had been said about Mr. Rover and his interest— Mr. Pelter ignored Tom's father entirely. And yet the youth knew that his parent had fifty thousand dollars or more tied up in that very company!

"I'd like to know some of the people who have invested in this stock," said Tom, after the matter had been talked over for nearly an hour.

"I will give you some names," was the broker's reply, and he wrote them down. "They are the principal stockholders outside of ourselves."

Tom took the list and glanced at it. His father's name did not appear, nor did the names of two other men he knew were interested in the concern.

"Thank you," said the youth, rising. "I will look into this. It might be a good investment for me."

"Finest in the world," returned Jesse Pelter. "Better let me put you down for five thousand dollars' worth of shares to−day."

"No, I want to think it over first."

"Supposing I hold the shares for you until to−morrow?" went on the broker, persuasively.

"You can do that, if you wish," answered Tom.

"Do you want to leave a deposit on them?"

"I didn't bring any money with me— that is, not enough."

"You might write out a check, Mr. Putnam."

"No, I'll think it over first."

"Then I'll hold the shares and look for you to−morrow," returned Jesse Pelter, somewhat disappointedly. He loved to get his hands on another's money at the first interview. "Please come in after lunch," he added. "I have an important engagement for the morning."

With the map and prospectus and list of names in his pocket, Tom left the offices. He saw that the man with the pointed chin and heavy eyebrows was not present. The force consisted of Mr. Pelter, the office boy, a girl at a typewriter, and a very old man who was at the books.

"Japson must be keeping out of the way," mused Tom, as he descended to the street. "I wonder if it was he or old Crabtree who talked to Pelter over the 'phone?"

Tom soon rejoined his brothers and all three walked away from the vicinity of Wall street. The youth told of his interview with the broker, and of the talk he had overheard while Jesse Pelter was at the telephone.

"They must have been talking about father!" cried Dick, eagerly.

"Maybe they have him a prisoner on a boat!" added Sam.

"It looks that way to me," said Tom. "And I know what I think we ought to do," he continued.

"So do I," answered Dick, quickly. "Watch this Pelter to−morrow, when he leaves his home, and see where he goes to."

"Right you are."

"Where does he live?" questioned Sam.

"I don't know, but we can easily find out."

The boys presently passed an office building in which there was a large telephone station, and there they hunted up Jesse Pelter's home address.

"He lives up in the Bronx," said Dick, taking down the street and number. "We can find out up at the hotel how to reach the place. Let us go back to the Outlook and see if there is any letter from home. Maybe we'll get more news about that financial loss mentioned in that telegram."

CHAPTER XVIII. ON THE HUDSON RIVER

When the boys returned to the Outlook Hotel they found several letters awaiting them. There was one each from the girls and also a communication from Songbird, written partly in verse, and telling of matters at Brill.

But the letter that interested them most just then was one from their Uncle Randolph, in which he explained something of the financial matters mentioned in the telegram. Their uncle was not a good business man, and often got his statements mixed, but from the communication the boys learned the truth.

There were two matters of importance— the irrigation scheme and the purchase of a large tract of land which would be benefited by the flow of water, when the irrigation plant was put into operation. In both of the schemes the Rovers held large interests— that is, they held what were called options, for which Anderson Rover had put up large sums of money, and he had likewise induced some friends to let him put up money for them. In order to clinch their hold on the two business propositions Anderson Rover must sign certain papers and have them delivered to the right parties inside of the next three days. Should he fail to do this, then his options on the property would terminate, and Pelter, Japson Company would be able to step in and gain control. The brokers had at first tried to gain control by getting Anderson Rover to assign his interest in the options, but this the boys' father had refused to do.

"And now that father wouldn't turn the control over to them, they have had him kidnapped, so that he can't sign those papers and serve them," said Dick. "The case is as plain as day."

"And they got old Crabtree to manage the kidnapping," put in Tom.

"But how did they know about Crabtree?" asked Sam.

"Most likely he has been mixed up in some of their shady transactions of the past," replied Dick. "When he got in jail, he sent for Japson and made him fix it up so he could escape. That fire helped the rascals. Then both came down to New York, and all hands hatched the plot to put dad out of the way."

"Poor dad! If only we knew he was safe!" murmured Tom.

"That's just it— he may be suffering terribly!" added Sam.

"I think we'll find out something definite to−morrow— when we follow Pelter," said Dick. He, too, was greatly worried.

The evening proved a long one to the boys, even though they spent some time in penning letters to the girls and to the folks at home. Dick had received a most sympathetic letter from Dora, in which the girl stated that she wished she was with him to help him.

"Dear Dora!" he murmured, as he placed the letter in his pocket. "I wish all this trouble was over, and we could be married and go off on our honeymoon!"

The boys had found out from the hotel clerk how to reach the address in the Bronx, as the upper portion of New York city is locally called. They could take a subway train to within two blocks of Pelter's home.

They were up bright and early, and after a hasty breakfast went out to a nearby store, where all purchased variously−colored caps of the automobile variety, and also some automobile goggles.

"We'll pass for chauffeurs in a crowd," said Dick. "The goggles will change our appearance, even if we only wear 'em on our foreheads."

They were soon on a subway train and being whirled northward. The train was an express, making but few stops, and almost before they knew it, the guard called out their station.

Dick had consulted a street map at the hotel, so he knew exactly how to turn. They easily located the apartment house in which Jesse Pelter resided, and then stopped at a nearby corner to await his appearance.

"We have got to be very careful how we follow him," said Dick. "If he spots us, it will be all up with us. I think Sam had better go first. I will follow, and Tom, you can bring up the rear. And let us all act as if we were perfect strangers to each other."

Then came a wait of nearly half an hour. At last they saw the front door of the apartment open and several men came out. Two of the men turned in one direction and the other man hurried off alone.

"There he is— there's Pelter!" cried Dick, in a low voice. "Now, Sam, see to it that he doesn't get out of your sight."

"I'll do my best," answered the youngest Rover, and walked off after the broker.

As Jesse Pelter hurried along he consulted his watch. Then he hastened his steps, making his way to the nearest railroad station. He boarded a train, and the boys followed, Sam getting in the same car with the broker and Dick and Tom entering the next car, but keeping in sight of their brother.

A number of stations were passed and then the broker left the train and the boys did likewise. On the street Jesse Pelter called a cab that was handy and entered it.

"Say, this looks as if we might lose him!" cried Dick, in alarm. Then he chanced to see another cab, and hurried to it, waving for Tom and Sam to do the same. He ordered the driver to keep the first turnout in sight, but not to get too close.

"I can do that with ease," said the driver, with a broad grin. "It's Jerry Dillon's cab, and Jerry's horse is no good at all."

The two cabs rolled on for several blocks, and then the first turned in the direction of the Hudson River. It halted near the railroad, and Jesse Pelter sprang to the ground. He paid the driver of the cab and dismissed him. Then he hurried along the railroad on foot.

"I guess he is going up to the dock yonder," Said Tom, while the boys got out.

"Looks like it," answered Dick.

All left the cab and hurried after Jesse Pelter, who was now all but out of sight. He passed between two buildings and the boys followed him slowly.

"Wait!" cried Dick presently. "Look!"

"Why, it's Crabtree!" exclaimed Sam, as another figure came into view— that of a heavily−bearded man with a slouch hat.

"Exactly," returned Dick. "Now keep back, or we may spoil everything," he continued, cautiously.

The three boys saw Pelter and Josiah Crabtree converse earnestly for several minutes. The man who had escaped from jail pointed to a big bundle he carried and Pelter nodded. Then both walked slowly across the railroad tracks to a dock jutting out into the Hudson.

At the dock lay a rowboat, with a man who looked like a sailor at the oars. Pelter and Crabtree climbed down into the boat, which was quickly shoved away. Then the sailor took up the oars and commenced to row out into the broad river.

"Now we are stumped!" murmured Tom, as he and his brothers watched the departure of the rowboat from behind a shed at the inner end of the dock.

"Let us watch that rowboat as far as we can," returned Dick. "I don't believe they intend to row very far."

"Maybe they are going to one of the vessels anchored out yonder," remarked Sam.

"More than likely."

The sailor was pulling up the stream, close to the shore, and the brothers could watch him with ease. The tide was running out and the oarsman had all he could do to make any headway.

"If he is going to keep to the shore, we might follow him on foot," suggested Tom, after several minutes had passed, and while the rowboat was still clearly in view.

"He is turning out now!" cried Dick. "See, I think he is making for yonder two−masted schooner."

The rowboat had turned out and in a few minutes more the boys felt certain it was headed for the schooner.

"Oh, if we only had a rowboat!" groaned Tom.

Dick did not reply. He was watching a steam tug that had come up the river. A line had been thrown from the tug to the schooner and made fast.

"The steam tug is going to tow her down the river!" exclaimed Sam. "Oh, Dick, what shall we do?"

"Dad may be on that schooner!" supplemented Tom.

Dick gazed up and down the stream. A rowboat was coming along, manned by two boys. Dick gave the lads a hail.

"Hi! want to earn a dollar quick?" he asked.

"How?" questioned both lads, in a breath.

"See that schooner? We want to get on board of her as quickly as possible."

"All right— but let us see the dollar first," answered one of the lads, shrewdly.

The rowboat came to the dock and the three Rovers leaped on board. Dick produced a dollar bill, and the boys commenced to row with all the power at their command.

In the meantime the first rowboat had reached the schooner's side and the men and the sailor had gone on hoard. The boat was tied fast to the stern and orders were given to the captain of the tug to go ahead.

"Stop! stop! You rascals!" cried Tom, as the schooner commenced to move down the Hudson. And in his anger he shook his fist at those on the vessel.

At first the actions of the boys attracted no attention. Then there was a stir on the rear deck of the craft.

"Somebody in a rowboat, calling to you," remarked the captain of the schooner, to Josiah Crabtree.

"To me?" exclaimed the former teacher, in surprise. "I will see about this."

He hurried to the stern of the schooner. The rowboat with the Rovers had now come quite close. Josiah Crabtree gave a start.

"Can it be possible?" he gasped.

"What is it?" asked Jesse Pelter, who had stepped up.

"Those young men in yonder boat! Unless I am mistaken they are Anderson Rover's sons!"

"Is it possible!" ejaculated the broker. "Oh, there must be some mistake."

"No, no! I know them well! And see, they are motioning to us! They want us to stop!"

"They must have seen and followed us!" said the broker, and his manner showed his sudden fear.

"Want to take those fellows on board?" questioned the captain of the schooner.

"No! no!" cried Josiah Crabtree. "Tell the captain of the tug to hurry up! That we er— that we must make better time!"

"I will, sir," said the captain of the schooner, and hurried forward to give the necessary order.

A big steamboat was passing up the river and the wash from this sent the rowboat containing the Rover boys dancing up and down. The lads at the oars headed the craft to meet the rollers, and the schooner passed further and further away.

"They are leaving us!" groaned Sam. "Oh, what luck!"

"Mr. Rover!" yelled Dick, at the top of his lungs. "Are you on board? Rover! Anderson Rover! It's Dick! Dick!"

For fully a minute no answer came back. Then there was a commotion on the deck of the schooner and a man appeared, clad in a torn suit of clothing and hatless.

"Dick! Where are you?" was the exclamation, and the man rushed to the stern of the craft. "Dick! And Tom and Sam! Help me!"

"It's father!" yelled Dick. "Stop that schooner! Stop her, I say!"

"Get back there!" exclaimed Josiah Crabtree, catching Mr. Rover by the arm. "Get back, I say! Help me, somebody! This man is crazy!"

He and Jesse Pelter hustled Anderson Rover back, and then the boys saw their father disappear from view. Swiftly the tug and the schooner gathered headway. The boys shouted in vain. They looked around for some other boat to come to their aid, but none was in sight. Then the schooner passed down the Hudson River and the Rover boys were left in the rowboat, gazing at each other in dismay.

CHAPTER XIX. THE SEARCH FOR THE SCHOONER

"Anyway, we have got the name of the schooner," remarked Sam, after a moment of silence. "She's the Ellen Rodney."

"And we ought to be able to follow her somehow," added Tom.

"We must!" cried Dick. "Let us get to shore and see what we can do."

"Don't we get that dollar?" queried one of the boys who rowed the boat.

"Yes," answered Dick, and handed the money over. "Now get us to shore as quickly as possible."

"If you want to catch that schooner, why don't you go downtown after her?" asked the second boy of the rowboat.

"Just what I was thinking of doing," answered Dick. "I think we can get down there ahead of them. The only question is, Can we get anybody down there to go out after the schooner?"

"You can get a boat at the Battery, if you're willing to pay for it. Plenty of tug captains down there looking for jobs."

"Then we'll get to the Battery as fast as possible," said Tom.

The boys who had been rowing the boat were tired, so Tom and Dick took the oars, and thus the little craft was speedily brought back to the dock from which it had started.

"You can get an elevated train over there," said one of the boys, pointing with his hand. "It will take you right to the Battery."

The Rover boys lost no time in leaving the dock and crossing the railroad tracks. Then they fairly ran to the nearest station of the elevated railroad. Dick purchased the tickets and dropped them in the box. Then came a wait of several minutes on the platform.

"Train for South Ferry!" called out the guard, as a rumble was heard.

"Does that go to the Battery?" questioned Dick.

"Sure."

The boys piled on board and away swept the line of cars, on the way downtown. But it was a local train, making all the stops, so their progress was not as fast as they wished.

Here and there, through the cross streets, they caught sight of the glistening river, with its numerous craft. Once Tom thought he saw the Ellen Rodney, but at that distance he could not he sure.

At last the train swept around a curve into the Battery, as the little park at the extreme lower point of the great metropolis is called. Here were located several ferries and also some shipping offices, as well as the Aquarium. Dick almost ran to the nearest shipping office.

"I want to stop a schooner that is coming down the Hudson River," he said, to the clerk in charge. "Can I hire a boat around here to take me out?"

"Anything wrong?" asked the clerk, curiously.

"Yes, very much wrong."

"In that case, why don't you put the harbor police on the job?"

"Can I get them handy?"

"Yes, the office is up there," and the man pointed it out.

"Thanks," returned Dick, and headed for the place in question, with Tom and Sam at his heels.

An officer was in charge of the office of the harbor police and he listened with interest to what the boys had to tell.

"This is certainly a serious matter," he said, when they had finished. "Those men are actually kidnapping your father— in fact, they have already kidnapped him. We'll have to get after them."

"You have a boat handy?"

"Yes, several of 'em."

The officer touched a bell and another man in uniform appeared. He was given some instructions, and then the second man told the Rover boys to follow him. He led the way to a dock where a steam tug lay, the smoke pouring from the funnel.

"Quick work here, Andy!" he cried, to an officer on board. "We've got to catch a schooner coming down the river— the Ellen Rodney. Do you know her?"

"I've seen her," was the answer, from the tug officer.

"The fellows on board the schooner are kidnapping the father of these boys. I reckon it's a serious case— a money affair," he added, in a lower tone.

"Who is the man?"

"Anderson Rover is his name. If you find him, and the boys make a charge, place all hands under arrest."

"I will."

The steam tug was fully manned, carrying a crew and several police officers. The Rover boys were told to get aboard, and the tug was headed out into the Hudson, or, as here called, the North, River.

"You don't suppose they have passed here. do you?" questioned the captain of the tug.

"I don't think so— unless that towing tug was an extra fast one," answered Dick.

"They wouldn't dare to run too fast, with so many ferryboats crossing the river. It would be too dangerous."

The police tug swept out into the bay and then started slowly up the river, moving from one shore to the other. The police officer in charge had a pair of glasses and he used these on the various craft that came into view, and also allowed the boys to use them.

"Ought to be along soon," said Tom, after a quarter of an hour had passed. "It took us quite some time to get down here, you know."

"Maybe they didn't come down the river," suggested the officer.

"Didn't come down?" cried Sam. "What do you mean?"

"Maybe they thought you would come down here and wait for them and so changed their plans and went up the river instead."

"That's so!" exclaimed Tom. "They might do that."

"Well, if they went up the river, we ought to be able to catch them sooner or later," put in Dick.

"Let us hope so," returned the officer.

Soon they had passed up the river to a point opposite the Twenty−third Street ferries. Here a number of boats were moving up and down the stream, and from the Hoboken shore a big trans−Atlantic steamer was coming out, to start on its trip across the ocean.

"That looks like her!" cried Sam, pointing to a craft behind the trans−Atlantic steamer.

"So it does!" returned Tom.

They made a semi−circle, other boats giving way to the police tug. But when they got closer to the schooner in question, all the Rover boys uttered a cry of dismay. It was a craft similar to the Ellen Rodney, but that was all.

"Either we missed her or else the schooner went up the river," said Dick, at last.

"Looks that way," returned Tom, with a sigh.

They continued to move up the stream, scanning each shore closely. They passed numerous boats, but not one that looked like the craft they were after.

"Well, here we are, at the spot where Crabtree and Pelter got aboard," said Dick, a while later. "So, either we have missed them, or else the Ellen Rodney went up the river instead of down."

The boys were much disheartened, for they had thought that the police tug would surely locate the craft and that they would thus be able to come to their father's rescue. They scarcely knew what to do next.

"I'll go up the river a bit further, if you say so," said the police officer in charge of the tug.

"Perhaps we had better run down first and make another search on our second trip," suggested Dick. "I shouldn't like them to get out into the Bay and give us the slip."

The tug was turned back, and a little later they reached the vicinity of the Battery once more. Then began another search up the river, from shore to shore, as before. But not a trace of the schooner could be found.

"Must have gone up the river," said the police official. "We'll try it for a way and see."

This they did, the police tug moving from side to side as before.

"This is the end of it, so far as we are concerned," said the officer in charge of the tug, at last. "We don't go up the river any further than this."

"All right then," answered Dick, much disheartened. "I guess the only thing for you to do is to put us ashore."

"Sorry we couldn't find that schooner. Of course, if you'll make a regular charge against these men we'll send

word up the river to be on the lookout for them."

"We'll make the charge," answered Dick.

The steam tug turned in on the New York City side and the Rover boys went ashore.

"I'll make the regular charge a little later," said Dick. "It may be that I'll have some men in the city arrested first." And then he and his brothers moved off, after receiving instructions from the police official as to what might be best to do.

"Are you going to have Japson arrested?" asked Sam.

"If I can find him. But I guess he'll keep out of sight for the present, Sam. You must remember one thing— these rascals only want to keep dad a prisoner for three days. After that they will let him go— and then it will be too late to save that property."

"Would that be so if we could prove that dad had been kept a prisoner?" asked Tom, with much anxiety.

"I don't know. Another thing, they may make dad sign certain papers. Don't you remember Pelter said over the telephone that he would 'make him do it'? They'll force father into something— if they can."

"Well, what's our next move?" asked Sam, impatiently.

"As it is after noon, we had better visit a quick lunch room and get a bit to eat. Then I think we had better hire some private tug to take us up the river. I am almost certain now that the Ellen Rodney went that way."

"If she went up the river she might go all the way to Albany," said Tom.

"Possibly, but I think those rascals would be too afraid to do that. They'll leave the schooner at the first chance they get, and take father with them."

The boys did not have to walk far before they came to a small shedlike building displaying the sign, "Quick Lunch." They entered and ordered some sandwiches, pie, and coffee. While they were eating they questioned the proprietor about some craft to take them up the river.

"We are hunting for a schooner," explained Dick. "We don't know just where she is. We'll pay somebody well for finding her for us."

"I know a young fellow who owns a motor−boat," said the quick lunch man. "He could take you anywhere you'd want to go."

"Just the thing!" cried Dick, quickly. "Where is that fellow?"

"He ought to be here now— he generally comes in about noon for sandwiches and coffee."

"I wish he would come now," murmured Sam.

After that they did not hurry their lunch, hoping the owner of the motor−boat would appear. He came in ten minutes later— a bright, cheery individual, not much older than Dick.

"Sure I can take you anywhere along the river, if you are willing to pay for it," said he, in answer to a question from the oldest Rover boy. "Just give me time to get a mouthful and I will be with you."

"Let us take some lunch along," suggested Tom. "There is no telling how long this search will last."

"We might take a little," answered Dick. "But I don't think we'll be on the river long."

Ten minutes later the crowd was on the way to the river, to a dock where lay the motor−boat. It was not a very elegant craft, but it had a good engine and could travel well— and that, just then, meant everything to the Rover boys. A bargain was struck for the run, and the boys and the owner got aboard. And then the search for the schooner was begun anew.

CHAPTER XX. A MINUTE TOO LATE

"Well, this looks like a wild goose chase, Dick."

It was Sam who spoke, from the bow of the motor−boat. For over two hours they had been moving up the Hudson River, slowly, scanning one shore and the other with care. They had noted many boats, but nothing that looked like the schooner for which they were so eagerly searching.

"They had a pretty good start of you," said John Slater, the owner of the motor−boat. "Maybe they are up to Nyack or Haverstraw by this time."

"Well, all we can do is to keep on and watch out," said Tom, with a sigh. His disposition, for fun seemed to have entirely left him.

Another half hour went by, and they came in sight of a number of lumber barges, all heavily loaded. The barges were being towed by a big tug.

"I know the captain of that tug," said John Slater. "We might ask him about the schooner."

"A good idea," answered Dick.

They were soon close to the steam tug and the motor−boat owner waved his hand to the captain of the larger craft, who waved in return.

"I want to find a schooner named the Ellen Rodney!" shouted John Slater. "Did you pass her, Captain Voss?"

"I did," was the answer. "She was opposite Nyack, heading in to shore."

"Opposite Nyack!" exclaimed Dick, "How far is that from here?"

"Not more than two miles," answered John Slater, as he turned his motor−boat up the river again.

"We ought to be able to catch them now!" cried Sam, his face brightening a bit.

"Wish we had the police along," remarked Tom. "Bringing those rascals to terms may not be as easy as you imagine."

"I've got a gun on board," said John Slater. "A double−barreled shotgun I keep on hand to guard against river thieves. I use it to go gunning with, too."

"Good! Better bring it out and let us look at it," returned Dick.

The weapon was produced and found to be in good condition and loaded. It was placed on one of the seats, an oilskin raincoat being thrown over it to hide it from view.

"We won't use force unless it is necessary," said Dick, grimly.

They soon came in sight of Nyack, but nothing that looked like the schooner came into view.

"Maybe they went further," suggested Sam. "Their turning in might have been a bluff— to throw us off the trail."

"Or they may have sent a message ashore— maybe a message to Japson!" cried Dick.

"Of course they would want to put him on guard— and put those at the offices on guard, too," murmured Tom.

They continued on up the river, with their eyes ever on the alert. It was now growing late in the afternoon and the sky was clouded, as if a storm was coming.

"Look!" cried Dick, suddenly, and he pointed ahead and to the right.

"The schooner, sure enough!" said Tom. "And see, a rowboat is alongside!"

"Maybe we are just in time," added Sam. "I hope so."

Without delay, the motor−boat was headed in the direction of the Ellen Rodney. As they drew closer they saw but one man on the deck of the schooner,— a burly fellow who looked like a sailor.

"Schooner ahoy!" shouted Dick, as they ran alongside.

"Ahoy, the motor−boat!" cried the burly man, coming towards them.

"Are you the captain?"

"No, the captain is ashore," was the short answer.

"I'll come aboard," said Dick, and without waiting for another word from the man he made his way to the deck, followed by Tom. He had already directed Sam to remain in the motor−boat with John Slater, to summon assistance if necessary.

"What do you want here?" demanded the burly man, surlily.

"I guess you know well enough," answered Dick, shortly. "Where is that man who is a prisoner?"

"You mean the crazy man?"

"He isn't crazy, and you know it."

"Those men who had him in charge said he was crazy," grumbled the burly individual.

"Where is he?"

"What is that to you?"

"Everything. That man is my father, and they have kidnapped him. Maybe you know that kidnapping is a State's prison offense," added the oldest Rover boy, sharply.

"Humph! I ain't had nothing to do with any kidnapping, young fellow," growled the man. "I'm the mate o' this schooner, that's all. If anything is wrong, you'll have to see the captain about it."

"You say he went ashore?"

"Yes."

"Did those men and my father go with him?"

"All of 'em went, yes."

"Who was left here besides you?"

"Those two dago sailors, that's all," and the mate pointed to two men who lay on the forward deck, asleep.

"Are you willing to have me take a look around?" went on Dick, after a pause.

"You'll have to wait till the captain gets back," answered the man, doggedly. "If there is anything wrong I don't want to be mixed up in it."

"If you want to keep out of trouble you'll help us all you can," put in Tom. "This is a serious business."

"I don't know a thing about it," and the man shrugged his shoulders.

Without another word Dick walked across the deck and descended into the cabin. The burly man's face clouded and he made a move as if to follow him.

"You stay here," said Tom, and put his hand in his hip pocket, as if about to draw some weapon.

The man changed color and shifted uneasily.

"All right, have your own way," he said. He was a coward at heart, and as he had not been in the plot against Anderson Rover he did not wish to get any deeper into the trouble.

It did not take Dick long to convince himself that his father was not on board the schooner. He called his parent's name, and then passed swiftly through the cabin and several staterooms and also a cook's galley. He saw where somebody had been locked in one of the staterooms, for the compartment was in disorder and the door was marred and cracked.

"Dad must have struggled to get away," he murmured. "I hope they didn't hurt him."

When Dick came on deck he found Tom guarding the burly man. The two sailors were still asleep— or pretended to be.

"Nothing doing below," he announced. "I guess they took him ashore."

"We might as well go ashore, too, then," said his brother. "We are wasting valuable time here." He turned to the mate. "Will you tell us where they went? It will be to your interest to open your mouth."

"They mentioned the old Blue Horseshoe Tavern," growled the burly mate. "But I don't know if they went there."

Dick said no more, but hurried over the side, followed by Tom. As he left the schooner the fun−loving Rover could not help but bring from his hip pocket an extra handkerchief and flourish it at the mate.

"There's my gun, how do you like it?" he cried, with a grin.

"Go to grass!" grunted the burly fellow, and scowled deeply.

In a few words the pair told Sam what they had learned. The motor−boat was headed for a nearby dock, and a few minutes later the Rovers leaped ashore.

"I don't know if I will need you again or not," said Dick to John Slater.

"If it wasn't for watching my boat I'd go along," said the motor−boat youth. "I am interested in this case."

"Here is your money. But I wish you would hang around a while," went on Dick, paying him.

"I sure will hang around, and I'll watch that schooner."

"Good! Our address in New York is the Outlook Hotel," said Dick.

The boys saw nobody around the dock, which was in the rear of a small lumber yard. They walked through the yard to an office in front. A road ran out of the side of the yard and the boys wondered if the men they were after had taken that.

Nobody but a boy of fifteen was in the office, clicking out a letter on an old typewriter.

"The boss ain't around— he had to go to New York on business," he announced, as soon as the boys appeared. "Want to leave an order for anything?"

"We are looking for some men who came ashore a while ago," said Dick. "Did you see 'em?"

The boy shook his head.

"Ain't nobody been here all afternoon," he said.

"Do you know anything of a place called the Blue Horseshoe Tavern?"

"Sure I do. It's up on the post road— the place where all the auto parties stop," was the knowing reply.

"How far from here?"

"Not over a quarter of a mile."

"Which way?"

"I'll show you," and the boy reached for his cap. Going outside, he led them from the yard to a road running up a hill.

"Keep right on that till you get to the Blue Horseshoe," he said. "You can't miss it, because it's the only place around here."

They thanked the lad and hurried on. By this time it was quite dark and a few drops of rain had begun to fall.

"The Blue Horseshoe Tavern must be one of the old−time roadhouses that has had a revival of business since auto parties became popular," said Dick, as he and his brothers trudged along. "I wonder what those rascals will tell the proprietor?"

"Most likely the same old story— that dad is crazy," answered Tom. "That's Crabtree's favorite game."

They had just turned a curve in the road and come in sight of a low, rambling tavern, when they saw a big touring car of the enclosed pattern coming towards them. To avoid the machine, which was being driven rapidly, they leaped to the side of the road.

As the touring car came closer, they saw that two men sat on the front seat,— the driver and a man who had his hat pulled far down over his face and his coat collar turned up.

"Look!" yelled Tom, pointing to the man beside the driver.

"Look into the car!" yelled Sam.

The automobile rolled on, lost to sight in less than a minute, around the bend of the road. It was headed in the direction of New York City.

"The man on the front seat with the driver was Pelter!" exclaimed Tom.

"And dad was inside the car!" gasped Sam.

"You are right," returned Dick. "And Crabtree and another man was with him. Dad looked as if he had his hands bound behind him."

"What shall we do now?"

"How can we follow that car?"

"How did they get that auto so quick?"

"I think I know how they got the auto," said the oldest Rover boy, after a pause. "There must be a garage at the tavern. Come on and see. Maybe we can get another auto and follow that car!"

CHAPTER XXI. CAPTAIN RODNEY'S TESTIMONY

It was raining steadily when the three Rover boys reached the Blue Horseshoe Tavern, an ancient hostelry standing at the junction of two main roads. In the rear was a barn, and a big carriage shed which had been converted into a garage. The youths headed for the latter place and entered quickly, to get out of the downpour.

A colored man came forward to see what they wanted.

"Can we hire a car here, and at once?" questioned Dick.

"Sorry, boss, but we ain't got no car in jest now," answered the colored man. "I expect one back in about an hour."

"The car that just went out?" demanded Tom.

"Yes, sah."

"Can't you get us any sort of a car?" pleaded Sam.

"Ain't got nuffin' in 'ceptin' a roadster, an' that won't run— sumthin' the matter with the carburetor."

"Are you sure that other car will be back in an hour?" demanded Dick.

"I think so. The gents as took it said they didn't want to go more than ten miles."

"All right, we'll wait till the car gets back," answered Dick, struck with a sudden idea.

"But, Dick, we'll lose valuable time," whispered Sam.

"Perhaps not, Sam. If we got a car now we wouldn't know where to go. If that driver comes back and takes us——"

"Oh, I see."

"Fine!" murmured Tom.

"You call us as soon as that car shows itself," said Dick, to the colored man. "We'll be in the tavern."

"Yes, sah," was the reply, and the man readily pocketed the quarter that the oldest Rover tossed to him.

The boys ran to the tavern by a side entrance which was not far from the shed. They walked along a porch until they came to some windows opening from a dining room.

"Look in there!" cried Tom, coming to a halt.

The others did as directed and saw, at one of the tables, the man they had seen on the deck of the Ellen Rodney. "It's Captain Rodney," went on Tom, who had learned the name from the schooner's mate.

"And he is alone, which proves that the others were in that auto with dad," returned Sam.

"I'm going to interview him!" cried Dick. "And maybe I'll have him arrested."

All three boys walked into the dining room of the tavern and took seats at the same table with the master of the schooner. He started, and was about to spring to his feet, when Dick stopped him.

"Sit where you are," said the oldest Rover boy, sternly. "If you attempt to leave I'll call the police."

"What do you— er— mean?" stammered the man, and he looked decidedly uncomfortable.

"I reckon you know who we are, Captain Rodney," said Tom.

"I don't."

"We are Anderson Rover's sons," said Sam.

"Never heard of that man," faltered the captain.

"You had him a prisoner only a short while ago."

"Oh, you mean that crazy man who was aboard my schooner? I thought his name was Brown."

"See here, Captain Rodney, you can't fool us, so you had better not try," said Dick, sternly. "You know the game those men are trying to play. They are going to prison for it,— and you'll go, too, if you are not careful."

"What! you threaten me!" roared the man, growing red in the face.

"I do."

"I can have the law on you for it."

"Go ahead, the sooner the better," responded Dick, coolly. "Those men are rascals and you know it. Now, I am going to give you one chance— just one," went on Dick, looking the master of the Ellen Rodney squarely in the eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"As I said before, those men are rascals. They abducted my father, and you aided them. I can prove it. As soon as we rescue my father we are going to prosecute those rascals. If you want to save your own skin you had better help us all you can."

At these plain words the face of Captain Rodney became a study.

"They told me he was a crazy man— a brother to one of the others— and they wanted to get him to some sanitarium."

"If that was so, why did they run away?"

"I didn't know they ran away— until just now."

"You started to go down the river," said Tom.

"Why did you change your mind and come here?"

"They chartered the schooner for a week— I was under their orders."

"Where were they going at first?"

"Down the Jersey coast and back. They said they thought a little ocean air would do the crazy man good before they put him in the sanitarium. I own up that I was suspicious, but they claimed everything was straight."

"They were going to take my father down the coast for several days so that he could not sign important papers," returned Dick. "It is a well−laid plot to do our family out of a great deal of money and dishonor my father."

"Well, I ain't in it, I give you my word. I chartered my vessel to 'em, that's all."

"We will take you at your word, then. But you must tell all you know about them and their plans," said Dick, after a pause.

"And if I do that, will you— er— drop the charge against me?" questioned the master of the Ellen Rodney, eagerly.

"If you don't, we are going to have you

placed under arrest as soon as we can get an officer."

"Don't do that! I never had any trouble before and I don't want it now. I'll help you all I can— if what you say its true, and that man is your father."

After that the captain was quite willing to talk, and he told how Crabtree and Japson had come to him and questioned him about the schooner, and finally chartered the craft for a week. They had at first wanted to pay him at the end of the time, but he had insisted upon receiving his money in advance and it was then paid over. He had been told that the strange man was Crabtree's brother, who had gone crazy because of the loss of his money in a Western irrigation scheme.

"They said they would take him down the coast for three or four days, to brace him up a bit. Then we were to run in at Absecon, near Atlantic City, and land all hands. They said they would go from Atlantic City to Lakewood, where the sanitarium was located."

"Probably they intended to let him go at Absecon and then deny that they had ever touched him," said Dick.

"Maybe— I don't know anything about that," replied the captain.

"But how did you come to change your plans?" asked Tom.

"When you came out in that rowboat and the crazy man— excuse me, I mean your father— cut up so, they hustled him back to one of the state−rooms," went on Captain Rodney. "Then they had a long talk. I think they were afraid you would go down the river by train and try to head them off "Which we did," murmured Sam.

"After a while Pelter and Japson came to me and said they must come up the river— that a sister of the crazy man lived up here, and they must visit her before they went down the coast. I was suspicious, but what could I do? I had chartered my vessel and I had my money, so I obeyed orders. Then we came up here as fast as we could. The steam tug was dismissed, and we came ashore to this place. Then they hired an auto and went off— and that's all I know about it."

"You don't know where they went?" cried Dick.

"No more than what they said— that they were going to the crazy man's sister."

"Which was false," muttered Tom.

"What were you to do?" asked Dick.

"They told me I might sail up the river to Newburgh and wait there for a telegram."

After that the captain talked freely. But what he had to say shed but little more light on the subject. The boys

came to the conclusion that he had been dragged into the plot without knowing what it was, but that he had been willing to lend his help, provided he was well paid for it.

"When the proper time comes I shall want your testimony," said Dick, at the conclusion of the interview. "In the meantime I advise you to have no more to do with those fellows."

"They shan't come near the schooner, even if they did charter her," growled Captain Rodney.

CHAPTER XXII. HOT ON THE TRAIL

The boys had no appetite, but as they were in the dining room they ordered a light lunch and paid for it. Then they saw an automobile come splashing through the mud of the road.

"There is that car!" cried Sam, as be recognized the driver.

The boys ran out and made their way through the rain to the garage. The enclosed touring car had just entered and the driver had shut off the power. The wind shield had been up, but the man had gotten quite wet and stood shaking the water from his coat.

"Here's the car!" cried the colored man, coming forward.

"So I see," returned Dick. He turned to the driver. "Pretty bad traveling, I imagine."

"You bet! The road is a mass of slippery mud. I came near skidding half a dozen times."

"Where did you go?" and Dick stepped closer to the chauffeur.

The man started and looked at the oldest Rover boy sharply.

"What's that to you?" he asked, shortly.

"Everything. We want to go to the same place."

"And as quickly as you can get us there," added Tom.

The chauffeur surveyed the three Rovers in amazement. Then he took off his coat and shook it briskly.

"Sorry, but I can't take you," he said, slowly. "I've got another job in— er— in half an hour."

"You are going to take us," said Dick, firmly. "And right away. What did those men pay you?"

"What is that——"

"How much— out with it? I haven't any time to spare."

"Ten dollars."

"All right. You'd like another ten, wouldn't you?"

"Sure. But——"

"Ten dollars to get us to the same place inside of twenty minutes," went on Dick, and showed a roll of bankbills.

"Can't do it— in this slippery weather," answered the man, his eyes glistening at the sight of the money. "Make it in half an hour."

"All tight then."

"I'll put on the chains," cried the chauffeur, and brought out the anti−skidding chains for the rear wheels. The boys got the colored man to assist him, and the chains were soon adjusted. Then the car was backed out of the garage and the three Rovers leaped inside.

"Now, don't lose a minute," said Dick.

"I won't. But we are taking chances on this road, sir, I can tell you that."

It was still raining steadily, and the highway was a mass of oily mud,— a splendid compound upon which to skid. On and on rushed the touring car at a rate of speed varying from twenty to thirty−five miles an hour.

"I could eat this road up if it was dry," shouted the chauffeur. "The machine is good for fifty miles an hour."

"Well, don't climb a tree, or a stone wall," cautioned Dick, grimly.

Ordinarily the Rover boys might have been anxious because of such wild riding, but now every thought was centered on their father. How he was faring, and would they be able to rescue him?

Twice the touring car made dangerous lurches to one side, once fairly brushing some trees which lined the roadway. But the driver stuck to his post, and gained the middle of the roadway again, and rushed on as rapidly as ever.

"I'll wager he doesn't own the machine," muttered Sam. "If he did, he'd be more careful of it."

"Well, he owns his own neck," returned Tom, grimly. "So maybe he'll be careful of that."

They passed through several small villages, the inhabitants gazing out curiously at the rushing and swaying car. Then they took to a side road, where the traveling was worse than ever.

Suddenly the car made a turn. They had struck a rut in the road and even the chains did not save them. Around swung the automobile. There was a grinding of the brakes and the power was shut off. Then came a jar that sent

the Rover boys in a heap.

"Something has happened sure!" cried Tom, who was the first to get up.

They looked out of the door of the enclosed car. They had come up to a mass of bushes beside the road, and the left front wheel had struck a rock and was twisted around. The mud guard on that side had crumpled up.

"I guess the journey is over— so far as this car is concerned," muttered Dick, as he leaped out, followed by his brothers.

The chauffeur was trying his steering wheel. The right wheel responded, but that which had hit the rock did not.

"Out of commission!" he said, with a frown. "I was afraid something would happen."

"If it's only the steering gear it won't cost much," said Dick. "How much further to that place?"

"Not over half a mile."

"Then we'll walk it!" cried Tom.

"Of course," added Sam.

"Ain't you going to pay me!" exclaimed the chauffeur, in dismay. "I did my best."

"Yes, I'll pay you," responded Dick. "And give you an extra five for the repairs. Now tell us just where that place is, and what sort."

"It's a country home,— a white place, set in a lot of trees,— with a wind mill back of the barn. Got a green hedge in front— the right side of the road— you can't miss it."

"Did you hear the name of the owner?"

"Belongs to one of the crowd— man named Japson. It's an old country home that was in his family for years. He don't live there, but it's furnished, I understand."

The boys said no more, but as soon as the chauffeur was paid, they set off through the rain. It was a disagreeable journey, and but little was said. All wondered what would be best to do when they reached the place for which they were bound.

"I wish we had the sheriff and his posse with us, as we had when we rounded up those rascals at Plankville," said Tom.

"Or if we only had John Slater's shotgun," added Sam.

"Never mind. As I understand it, we are three to three," said Dick. "And we can arm ourselves with heavy sticks," which they presently proceeded to do, tearing up some bushes for that purpose.

It was not long before they came in sight of a long, high hedge. Back of it was a white house, surrounded by numerous old trees. Over the trees showed the top of an old wind mill, used for pumping water from a driven well.

"Think we had better go right up to the door and knock?" asked Sam, as they halted at the edge of the hedge.

"No, I think we had better spy around a little at first," answered his big brother.

All crawled through a gap in the hedge and, skulking from tree to tree, gradually neared the house. Near one of the windows grew some bushes, and they crept along to these. Then Dick looked through the window.

He saw Pelter and Japson seated at a table, going over some legal papers. Nobody else was visible.

"Perhaps Crabtree took father to some other place, after the chauffeur left!" thought the youth, in dismay.

The window was closed, so the boys could not hear what was being said. They consulted among themselves, and walked around the house, being careful to keep well under the windows, which were rather high.

"Here is a cellar door, let us try that," said Tom, and he raised it up, and almost before they knew it, they were in the cellar under the building.

Above them they could hear footsteps and a murmur of voices. Evidently Josiah Crabtree had joined the brokers.

"You stay here and I'll investigate further," said Dick, after a pause, during which he had espied a stairs leading upward to the rear of the house.

He mounted the stairs and came out into a wide kitchen. No one was present, nor did any fire burn in the big stove. From the kitchen a door led to a dining room, which, in turn, led to a sitting room. In the last−named room were the three men.

"Do you think he'll raise a row?" Pelter was asking.

"He can't raise much of a row, with that towel bound over his mouth," replied Josiah Crabtree.

"It's lucky we had this place to come to," put in Japson. "I only hope they don't get on our trail and follow us."

"I don't think they will follow us here," said Pelter. Then followed a murmur, as he and the other broker went over the legal papers on the table.

Dick wondered what he had best do next. He gazed around the kitchen and saw a small side door, opening on an enclosed stairs leading to the second floor. He went up the stairs noiselessly.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE RESCUE

The oldest Rover boy had reached a rapid conclusion. This was that his father was not on the first floor of the house, nor in the cellar. Consequently, if he was in the building at all— and Dick believed he was— he must be somewhere upstairs. While the three rascals were in the sitting room he intended to make a quick investigation.

With his stick still in his hand, in case of attack, Dick reached the second floor and entered a small bed chamber. Opening from this was a second room, containing a cot. Beyond the rooms was a closet, and that was all.

"Too bad! This stairs leads only to a kitchen addition!" murmured the boy. "How can I get into the main house? Why didn't they cut a door through?"

He looked out of a window and saw the roof of a porch. At the end of the roof was another window, one of a room in the main building. Without hesitation Dick raised the sash of the window at which he stood and stepped out on the porch top. Soon he was at the other window.

It was locked, but the catch was not a strong one, and with the blade of his pocketknife he easily pushed it back. Then the sash came up and he stepped into the bedroom beyond.

The room was empty and the bed showed that it had not been used for some time. Dick crossed the apartment and opened a door leading to a wide hallway. From downstairs came a murmur of voices. The rascals were still in consultation.

Swiftly the oldest Rover boy passed from one room to another of the big house. Each was empty, and in the last he came to a halt, somewhat dismayed. Then he thought of an enclosed staircase he had noticed, leading to the next floor, and he hurried to this.

The third floor of the building was but an open garret, piled high with old furniture and discarded things generally. The two windows were covered with dirt and cobwebs, and as it was dark outside, because of the rain, Dick could see but little.

"Father!" he called softly. "Father, are you here?"

He listened and heard a tapping, coming from one end of the garret. He moved over in the direction and struck a match. Then he gave a cry, half of gladness and half of dismay.

His parent was there, bound to an upright of the garret floor. He had his hands behind him, and a towel was tied over his mouth. With deft fingers Dick unloosed the towel, and then he cut his father's bonds with his pocketknife.

"Oh, Dick! How glad I am that you have come!" gasped Anderson Rover, when he could speak. "That towel nearly smothered me!"

"Did they hurt you any, Dad?" asked the boy anxiously.

"Not so very much, Dick. We had several rough and tumble fights,— when I tried to get away from them. But they were too many for me. Have they gone?"

"No, they are in the sitting room below, talking matters over."

"And you came here all alone?" asked Mr. Rover, stretching his cramped limbs.

"No, Tom and Sam are down in the cellar. I told them I would come upstairs and investigate."

"Good! Then we are four to three. I am glad to know that. It will make it easier to get away from them."

"Have you done anything for them— I mean, signed any papers, or anything like that?" asked the son, anxiously.

"No. They wanted to keep me from signing certain papers that must be signed inside of two days, Dick."

"I know it."

"They also wanted me to sign other documents, and Crabtree said if I didn't do it he would leave me here to starve!"

"The rascal!" muttered Dick. "We have got to get him back to jail, that's sure! Are you sure you are well enough to go with me, Dad? "

"I— I think so, Dick. But this has been an awful strain on me," sighed Anderson Rover.

He was very pale, and the hand he placed on Dick's shoulder trembled greatly.

"After this you must let me attend to business for you," said the son. "I am old enough to do it. You need a complete rest."

"Yes, Dick, but your college career——"

"We'll talk about those things later, Dad. First, I want to get you away from here, and in a safe place. Then we'll attend to Crabtree, Pelter and Japson," added Dick, grimly.

"The business matters have been too much for me— I realize it now," sighed Anderson Rover. "I must take a rest— a good, long rest. They would not have gotten the best of me if I had been stronger."

"Come," said Dick. "Don't make any noise if you can help it," he added, in a whisper.

He guided his parent, and both tiptoed their way to the second floor of the dwelling. Then they entered the bed chamber opening on the top of the porch, and so made their way down to the kitchen and then into the cellar.

"Father!" cried Sam and Tom, simultaneously, and rushed to embrace their parent.

"My boys!" murmured Anderson Rover, and the tears stood in his eyes. Never before had he realized how much they were to him.

"Come on— no time to talk now," said Dick, in a low voice. "We'll get away from here first."

"But those rascals—" began Sam.

"We'll take care of them, Sam, never fear."

The boys led their father from the cellar and across the back yard to the barn. From the barn a lane ran to the main road. The lane had a hedge that practically hid it from the house.

"Wait here, in the barn," said Dick. "But keep out of sight."

"Where are you going?" asked Tom.

"To watch on the road for a wagon or an auto, to take us to the nearest town or railroad station."

"Going to leave those men here, Dick?"

"Not much! I thought Sam might take dad back to New York, while you and I had it out with Crabtree and the others."

"Good! I'm with you!" cried Tom.

Dick posted himself on the highway, and presently saw a covered wagon approaching, drawn by a spirited team. The driver was a young man, evidently from some nearby town.

"Going to town?" asked Dick, as he stopped the fellow.

"Yes, want a ride?" and the young man smiled.

"I don't, but another fellow, my brother, and my father, do," said Dick. "If you'll take them, we'll pay you."

"All right," was the answer. "Come right along."

"How far is it to the railroad station?" went on Dick.

"About two miles."

"Will you take 'em over?"

"Sure— I'm going there myself."

Dick hurried back to the barn, and soon Sam and Mr. Rover were in the wagon. Before Sam left his big brother gave him some instructions in private. Then the wagon went on through the rain.

"Thank heaven! dad is safe!" murmured Tom, when the wagon had disappeared. "I hope Sam doesn't let him out of his sight until those business affairs are settled up."

"He is going to take him to the Outlook Hotel first," answered Dick. "But he is going to do more than that, Tom— if it is possible."

"What?"

"I told him to stop in that town and send some help here— a police official, or a constable, or some men. Crabtree has got to go back to jail, and I think we ought to have Pelter and Japson locked up, too— although that may depend upon what father may have to say."

"Then we can't do anything until somebody gets here from town," said Tom, somewhat disappointedly.

"We can watch those rascals and listen to what they are talking about," returned Dick.

Both boys returned to the barn, to get out of the rain. Then they sneaked to the cellar of the house and up to the kitchen, and then to a little storeroom next to the dining room. From the storeroom they could catch much of the conversation coming from the three men in the dining room.

There were some matters Dick and Tom did not understand. But from what was said they learned that Japson

was a distant relative of Josiah Crabtree and the two had been in several shady transactions together. Crabtree had agreed, if aided in his escape from the Plankville jail, to assist the brokers in making Anderson Rover a prisoner and keeping him such until he signed certain documents and until the time had passed when he could no longer take up the options which were so valuable to the Rovers and their friends.

"Well, I think these documents are all right," the boys heard Jesse Pelter say, presently. "Now we can turn them over to Belright Fogg and tell him to go ahead."

The boys looked at each other in amazement. Belright Fogg! The lawyer who had tried to outwit them in their claim against the railroad company because of the smashed Dartaway! Was that fellow mixed up in this game also? It looked like it.

CHAPTER XXIV. FROM A GARRET WINDOW

"This is getting interesting!" whispered Tom.

"I should say so," murmured Dick.

"That must have been what was bringing Belright Fogg down to New York City."

"It looks like it."

"Well, if he is mixed up in this he can get pinched with the rest of the rascals."

"Right you are."

After that the boys listened to more of the talk between the brokers and Josiah Crabtree. From what was said it was easy to guess that the plotters expected to make quite a large sum of money out of their evil doings.

"But you have got to get Rover's signatures to those papers," said Jesse Pelter.

"We'll do it!" cried Josiah Crabtree. "Even if we have to starve him into it."

"I hope those boys didn't come after the schooner," muttered Japson.

"I reckon Captain Rodney will know how to throw 'em off the scent," returned Crabtree.

"We were lucky to find that automobile at the tavern," went on Pelter.

Some more talk followed and then Japson exclaimed:

"Why can't we make Rover sign those papers now? Maybe we can scare him into it."

"We might try," answered his partner, slowly.

The men arose and Japson lit a lantern, for he knew it was dark in the garret. Then, one behind the other, they filed out into the hallway and went upstairs.

"They are going to find out something pretty soon!" chuckled Tom.

"Come on, let us follow 'em, Tom," answered his brother. "I've got a new idea."

"What is it?"

"Perhaps we can lock 'em in that garret until help arrives."

"Just the cheese, Dick! I remember there was a lock on the door,— and maybe we can fasten it in some other way, too— so they can't break out."

"They can't get out by the windows— they are too high from the ground."

By this time the three men were mounting the garret stairs. They had to pass around a pile of furniture to get to where Anderson Rover had been kept a prisoner.

"Quick now!" cried Dick, as the men disappeared from view. He closed the garret door and turned the key in the lock. "Get a chair or two, Tom, so we can wedge the door fast."

Tom understood, and ran into a nearby room, to bring out a square table. The stairway to the garret ran from a right angle of the wall, so that the table could be stood up against the door, with the bottom of the four legs against the wall opposite. Some books chanced to be handy, and the lads were able to place these against the wall under the feet of the table legs, thus wedging the door fast.

"Now I reckon they'll have their own job getting out!" cried Tom, grimly.

"Go to a front window and watch the road," ordered his big brother. "If you see any help coming, call them."

Tom at once departed, to station himself at the window of one of the front bed chambers. By this time a clattering of feet could be heard on the garret stairs.

"He has locked the door on us!" came a cry in Jesse Pelter's voice.

"How did he get free?" asked Japson. "I thought we tied him good."

"He cut the ropes!" cried Josiah Crabtree. "But how he got hold of his knife to do it, I can't guess."

Dick had to smile to himself. Evidently the rascals thought his father had liberated himself and turned the tables on them.

"Hi, Rover! Are you out there?" called Jesse Pelter. "If you are you had better unlock that door."

To this call Dick did not answer.

"He must have run away!" exclaimed Japson. "Break the door down! We must catch him!"

"That's the talk!" added Josiah Crabtree, in great excitement.

"Touch the door at your peril!" cried Dick, sharply. "I am armed and I will stand no nonsense!"

"Who is that?" asked Japson.

"That wasn't Rover's voice," added his partner.

"I think I know who that is," answered Josiah Crabtree, and his voice commenced to tremble. "Dick Rover, is that you?" he called, faintly.

"Yes. Don't you dare to touch that door, Crabtree," replied Dick.

"Is it Dick Rover?" questioned Pelter.

"Yes."

"Anderson Rover's oldest son? The one who was in the rowboat with the others?"

"Yes."

"Then we have been followed after all!" shouted Japson, hoarsely. "We have been trapped!"

"You've hit the nail on the head," called out Dick. "Now, don't touch that door, or it will be the worse for you."

"Is he alone?" whispered Pelter.

"No, I am not alone!" answered Dick. "Hi, Tom, am I alone?" he called.

"Not much!" answered Tom. "We are all on deck here, and all armed. You just sit still and suck your thumbs until the officers come," he added, dryly.

"The officers!" shrieked Josiah Crabtree, and was so overcome that he sank down on one of the steps of the stairs.

"See here, Dick Rover," said Jesse Pelter, after a pause. "Let us see if we can't— er— patch this up somehow."

"You can do your patching−up after you are in jail, Mr. Pelter."

"If you have me arrested, boy, you will be sorry for it!" growled the broker.

"We can ruin your family, and disgrace your father," added Japson. "Better let us go and fix this up without the police."

"No, I am going to have you locked up," replied Dick, determinedly. "As to what charge will be brought against you, I'll have to consult my father about that first."

"You lock us up and you'll get nothing out of us!" growled Japson. "We can ruin your family, and we'll do it!"

"Can't we get out another way?" asked Josiah Crabtree, in a whisper.

"I don't think so," said the owner of the house. "We can go up and look around."

All returned to the garret floor and walked to one window and the other. The distance to the ground was all of twenty−five feet, too far for any of them to risk a drop.

"We might make a rope of these old blankets," suggested Jesse Pelter. "Talk to Rover at the door while I try it."

His partner went back to the door, while the others commenced to make a rope by tearing a blanket into strips and tying the ends together. The back window was raised and the rope lowered.

"Nobody in sight!" cried Crabtree, looking down. "Oh, I trust we can get away from them!" He saw a term in prison staring him in the face.

"Don't lose any time!" cried Japson. "Here, tie the end fast to that old bed. Now let me get out!"

"I'll go first!" cried Josiah Crabtree, and shoved the broker aside. With trembling hands he grasped the improvised rope and slipped out of the window.

In the meantime Dick commenced to suspect that all was not right and called to Tom.

"Go below and outside and look at those windows," he said. "If they try to drop, shy some stones at 'em!"

"I will!" answered Tom, and ran down the stairs three steps at a time. He looked up at the front of the house but saw nothing unusual. Then he dashed to the rear.

"Hi! stop!" he called out, as he saw Josiah Crabtree dangling just under the garret window. "Get back there, or I'll fire at you!" And looking around, Tom saw a sharp stone and picked it up.

As he did this there was a sudden tearing sound, and the blanket−rope parted at the point where it passed over the window sill. Josiah Crabtree uttered a wild yell of terror and clutched vainly at the sill and the clapboards under it. Then he came tumbling to the ground, doubling up in a heap as he did so. Tom expected him to arise and run, but he lay still where he had fallen.

"He's hurt, seriously hurt!" muttered the youth. "Maybe he's killed!"

CHAPTER XXV. WHAT HAPPENED TO TOM

Tom glanced up, to see the white face of Jesse Pelter peering down upon him.

"You had better let us out of this!" cried the broker, hoarsely.

"You stay where you are— if you know, what is best for you!" returned Tom.

"Is he dead?" went on the broker, referring to Crabtree.

"I don't know."

The youth ran up to the former school teacher and turned him over. As he did this Josiah Crabtree gave a gasp and a groan and opened his eyes.

"Oh! Oh! what a— a fa— fall!"

"If you hadn't tried to get away it wouldn't have happened," returned Tom, briefly. He could have but little sympathy for such a hardened rascal.

Josiah Crabtree sat up and then tried to get to his feet. There was a cut on his forehead from which the blood was flowing.

"Oh! oh!" cried the man and put his hand to his left leg. It was twisted under him in a peculiar fashion. To get up on it was impossible, and Crabtree fell back with a cry of pain and fright.

"My leg! It is broken! Oh, what shall I do? Rover, please help me!" And the former teacher turned a look of genuine misery on Tom.

"Let me examine it," said the boy, in a more kindly tone. He approached the man and felt of the injured limb. By the way it was doubled up Tom felt certain it must be broken, perhaps in two places.

"I don't know what I can do," said Tom. "I guess you need a doctor. I'll carry you to the barn, if you say so— or into the house."

"Can't you— you——" began Josiah Crabtree, and then another look of pain crossed his face and he fainted.

Alarmed, Tom picked up the tall, thin form and carried the man into the house, for it was still raining, although not as hard as before. He placed Crabtree on an old couch in the sitting room and, getting some water, laid a wet cloth over his bruised and swelling forehead. Knowing but little about broken limbs, he did not attempt to do anything for the broken leg but placed that member out in a somewhat straight position. He called up to Dick and told his brother of what had happened.

"Keep the other fellows up there, Tom!" yelled back the big brother. "Don't let 'em get away!"

At this Tom ran out of the house once more. With the fall of Crabtree had come the greater portion of the blanket−rope. Pelter had disappeared from the window, and evidently he and Japson were in consultation.

"See here, Rover, we want to talk to you!" called out the broker, reappearing at the window a minute later. "Call your brothers."

"What do you want?"

"We want to fix matters up with you."

"You can do that after you are in jail."

"You'll gain nothing by having us arrested."

"That remains to be seen."

"We have got the upper hand in those deals with your father and if you have us locked up we won't let go— no matter what happens," put in Japson.

"We'll make you let go," returned Tom, with determination. "You fellows have reached the end of your string, and the sooner you realize it the better it will be for you."

"Bah! Do you think we'll give up the things we have fought so hard to get? Not much!"

While Japson was speaking Pelter had stepped back into the garret. Now he came again to the window, at the same time whispering to his companion.

"Hello, Dixon!" he called, as if to somebody behind Tom.

As was but natural, the youth below turned quickly, thinking some friend of the broker's had appeared. The moment Tom turned, Pelter hurled something down at him. It was an old wooden footstool, and it struck the youth squarely on the head. Down went poor Tom in the grass, senseless.

"Now is our time!" exclaimed Pelter. "Quick, with that other rope!"

A second rope, also made from sections of a blanket— but stronger than the first— was produced. As the lower end struck the ground, Pelter commenced to slide down, closely followed by his partner. Evidently they were both willing to risk their lives in an effort to escape. The thought of going to jail filled them with grim terror.

Reaching the ground, neither of the men hesitated an instant over what to do next. The man who owned the place knew it thoroughly, and he turned in the direction of the barn, and his partner went after him. They crossed a back lot, and then, coming to a side road, took to that, running as fast as their wind and strength permitted.

In the meantime Dick, hearing Crabtree groaning, came down in the sitting room to look at the sufferer. The man was still flat on his back.

"Oh, my leg!" he groaned. "Oh my leg! Can't you get a doctor?"

"Perhaps,— later on," answered Dick.

"Oh, Rover, I never thought I would come to this!" whined the criminal. "Oh, the pain!"

"We'll do what we can for you, Crabtree. You had better lie still for the present."

Dick listened in the hallway. As nobody seemed to be at the garret stairway, he ran outside, to learn how Tom was faring.

"Tom! Tom! What happened to you?" he cried, in horror, when he beheld his brother on the ground. Then he saw the footstool and a cut on Tom's head and understood what had occurred. The dangling rope told the rest of the story.

"They have gotten away!" he groaned. "And after all our efforts to hold them prisoners until help came! Too bad!"

He wanted to go after the brokers, but just now his concern was entirely for his brother.

He turned Tom over and then ran for some water. When he returned Tom was just opening his eyes.

"Dick! Some— something hi— hit me!" gasped the hurt one.

"They threw that wooden footstool at you, Tom. I'm afraid you're badly hurt."

"Am I? I— I feel mighty queer," returned Tom, and then he closed his eyes again.

Dick was now more alarmed than ever. He carried his brother to the dining room, and laid him on some chairs, with a doubled−up blanket from a bed for a pillow. He washed Tom's head and bound it up as best he could. Once or twice the injured youth opened his eyes for an instant, but he did not make a sound.

"It was a fearful blow,— it must have been!" thought Dick. "I hope they didn't crack his skull!"

Josiah Crabtree was still groaning in the next room, but Dick paid little attention to the man. Nor did he think of the rascals who had escaped. All his thoughts were centered on Tom.

"If I only knew where to get a doctor," he mused. Then he ran out of the house by the front door and looked up and down the road.

A carriage was approaching, containing three men. As it drew closer Dick saw that one of the men wore a shining badge on his coat and carried a policeman's club.

"Want me here?" he cried, on catching sight of the youth.

"Are you a policeman?"

"I am."

"Then come right in."

The policeman and the other two men followed Dick into the house. The youth took them first to where Josiah Crabtree lay.

"There is a man who escaped from the jail at Plankville. He tried to get out of a garret window and had a fall. I guess his leg is broken."

"If that's the case, he won't need much watching from me," replied the policeman, grimly.

"The other two rascals who were with him got away, after hitting my brother with a footstool and hurting him quite badly. Here he is. Can I get a doctor anywhere around here?"

"Doctor Martin lives up the road about half a mile," said the man who had driven the carriage.

"Will you get him for me, just as soon as you can?"

"I will," said the man, and went off at once after the physician.

While he was gone Dick told his story to the policeman and the other man, who was a local constable. Both listened with interest, and said they would make a hunt for Pelter and Japson.

"They may go back to New York," said Dick. "If they do, telephone down there to have them arrested." And he gave the address of the brokers' offices.

It was about half an hour later when Doctor Martin, and elderly physician, arrived. Dick escorted him at once to where Tom lay, still in a semi−conscious state.

"A bad case, I am afraid," said the doctor, after a brief examination. "His skull may be fractured. We had better get him to the hospital at once!"

CHAPTER XXVI. DICK TAKES THE REINS

It was long after dark before an ambulance could be brought to the old house. Tom was still unconscious, in fact he had not even opened his eyes for the past half hour. Dick's heart was filled with fear. Was it possible that his brother, so full of fun and high spirits, was so badly hurt that he was going to die?

"No! no! Not that!" groaned poor Dick, and sent up an earnest prayer to heaven that Tom might be spared.

The doctor had said that Josiah Crabtree's leg was broken in two places, above and below the knee. The physician had done what he could for the sufferer, and Crabtree was to be removed to the hospital after Tom was taken there.

Neither the policeman nor the constable had come back to the house, so Dick did not know whether or not the brokers had been captured. To tell the truth, he hardly thought of the men, so anxious was he concerning Tom's condition.

"Can I go to the hospital with you?" he asked, when they were about to take Tom away.

"If you wish, Mr. Rover," said the ambulance doctor. "Hop up on the seat with the driver." And Dick did so.

It was a drive of several miles and during that time Dick said but little. Once Tom roused up, to murmur something about his head, but that was all.

As soon as the hospital was reached, Tom was placed in a private room, Dick asking for such accommodations.

"Do your best for my brother," said he, to those in attendance. "Don't let money stand in the way. I'll see that all bills are paid."

"We'll have the best doctor we can get for your brother," answered the physician in attendance, and then he sent for a specialist.

After that there was nothing to do but to wait. Dick went down to the office and called up the Outlook Hotel in New York by telephone. He found that Sam had just arrived there with his father, and told his younger brother of what had occurred.

"Don't worry father too much about it," said he. "Maybe it will all come out right in the end— anyway I hope so." And then he told Sam to get the police to watch the offices of Pelter, Japson Company, and also look out for Belright Fogg.

Before the specialist arrived to care for Tom, the ambulance came back with Josiah Crabtree. The former teacher of Putnam Hall showed his cowardly nature by groaning dismally every time he was moved. He was placed in a public ward, and those in attendance were told that he was an escaped prisoner and must not be allowed to get away again, under any circumstances.

"He won't try it himself for a good many weeks," said one of the doctors, grimly. "Those breaks are had ones. He'll be lucky if he gets over them."

At last the specialist came and took charge of Tom. For over an hour Dick waited for a report on his brother's condition. When the specialist came to the youth he looked unusually grave.

"Your brother's case is a peculiar one, Mr. Rover;" said he. "I do not find any crack in the skull. But he has received a great shock, and what the outcome of that will be I cannot say."

"You don't think he will— will die?" faltered Dick, hardly able to frame the words.

"Hardly as bad as that, Mr. Rover. But the shock has been a heavy one, and he will need close attention for some time. I will come in again to−morrow morning and see him."

"Well, do your best," said Dick, brokenly,

"I always do that," answered Doctor Garrison, gravely.

There were no accommodations for Dick at the hospital, so he found a room at a hotel several blocks away. From the hotel he sent another telephone message to Sam, telling him what the specialist had said. Then he asked Sam if he would come up.

"If you'll do that I can go down and help father," he added.

"All right— I'll come up to−night or first thing in the morning," said Sam.

It was eight o'clock in the morning when the youngest Rover boy appeared. He was as anxious as Dick

concerning Tom, and both waited for the specialist to appear and report. Tom had regained consciousness for a few minutes, but that was all.

"He is no worse," reported Doctor Garrison. "I hope to see him improved by this afternoon. I will call again about three o'clock." And then he left directions with the nurse as to what should be done.

"This is terrible, Dick!" murmured Sam, when the brothers were alone, in the room at the hotel. "Poor Tom! I can't bear to see him lay as he does!"

"I feel the same way, Sam," answered Dick. "But I think I ought to go down to New York and help father with his business affairs. He isn't well enough to do anything alone."

"That's true, Dick; and this news about Tom has upset him worse than ever."

A little later they separated, Sam promising to send word both to New York city and to Valley View farm as soon as there was any change in Tom's condition. Dick hurried to the railroad station and a little later got a train that took him to the Grand Central Depot.

The youth found his father at the rooms in the Outlook Hotel, he having promised to remain there until Sam returned, or Dick arrived. Mr. Rover looked much careworn, and Dick realized more than ever that his parent was in no physical or mental condition to transact business.

"You ought to return to the farm and rest, Father," said he, kindly.

"I must fix up these papers first, Dick," was the answer. "But tell me about poor Tom! Oh, to think that those villains should strike him down that way!"

"They are desperate and will stop at nothing now," answered the son.

Then he told as much as he could about his stricken brother. Anderson Rover shook his head sadly.

"I am afraid he will never get over it, Dick!" he groaned.

"Let us hope for the best, Father," answered the son, as bravely as he could.

Then he questioned his father about the investments in the Sunset Irrigation Company and in the lands out west, and soon the pair were going over the matters carefully.

"I think we need the services of a first−class lawyer— one we can trust absolutely," said Dick.

"But where can you find such a lawyer?" asked the father.

"Oh, there must be plenty of them." Dick thought for a moment. "One of my best chums at Putnam Hall and at Brill was John Powell— Songbird. You know him. He has an uncle here, Frank Powell, who is a lawyer. The family are well−connected. Perhaps this Frank Powell may be the very man we need. I can call him up on the telephone and find out."

"Do as you think best, Dick," sighed Mr. Rover. "From now on I shall leave these business matters in your hands. I realize that I am too feeble to attend to them properly."

Dick lost no time in communication with Mr. Frank A. A. Powell, as his name appeared in the telephone book. When the youth explained who he was the lawyer said he would be glad to meet the Rovers. His office was not far from the Outlook Hotel, and he said he would call at once, Dick explaining that his father was not feeling very well.

Mr. Powell's coming inspired Dick with immediate confidence. He was a clean−cut man, with a shrewd manner but a look of absolute honesty.

"My nephew has often spoken of you," he said, shaking hands with Dick. "I shall be pleased to do what I can for you."

"It's a complicated case," answered Dick. "My father can tell you about it first, and then I'll tell you what I know, and show you all our papers."

A talk lasting over an hour followed. The lawyer asked many questions, and studied the various documents with interest.

"From what I can make out, Mr. Rover, that concern— Pelter, Japson Company— are a set of swindlers," said he, at last. "If I were you I'd close down on them at once, and with the heaviest possible hand. To give them any leeway at all might be fatal to your interests."

"Do as you think best,— with Dick's advice," returned Mr. Rover. "I am going to leave my business affairs in his hands after this," he added.

"Then we'll go ahead at once!" cried the lawyer. "I will draw up the necessary papers and you can sign them. We'll get after that whole bunch hot−footed!"

"And don't spare them," added Dick, thinking of poor Tom. "They deserve all that is coming to them."
"And they'll get it," said the lawyer, briefly.

CHAPTER XXVII. DAN BAXTER GIVES AID

The next morning was a busy one for Dick. He visited the lawyer's office at an early hour and then went to the police station.

"We are watching those offices in Wall Street," said the officer at the desk in the station. "But so far neither Pelter nor Japson has shown himself. The clerks say they are out of town one in Boston and the other in Philadelphia, but can't give any addresses."

"Well, don't let up on the watch," replied Dick. "We want to get them if it can possibly be done. I may have another charge to make against them," and he told of how Tom had been struck with the footstool and was now in the hospital.

"They sure must be rascals," returned the man at the desk. "Well, we'd do all we can. But maybe they've cleared out for good."

Towards noon came a telephone message from Sam to the hotel. Dick had just come in and he answered it.

"Tom is a little better," said the youngest Rover. "He is conscious and has asked about dad and you. He has taken a little nourishment, too."

"What does the doctor say about the case?" questioned Dick, anxiously.

"He said it is a strange case and that he will watch it closely. I heard him say to the nurse to watch Tom very closely."

"Why, that he was so low?"

"No, that he might go out of his mind. Oh, Dick, wouldn't that be awful!" and Sam's voice showed his distress.

"You mean that he might go— go insane, or something like that?"

"Yes,— not for always, you understand, but temporarily."

"Well, all they can do is to watch him, Sam. And you keep close by, in case anything more happens," added Dick, and then told his brother of what had been done in the metropolis towards straightening out the business tangle.

Mr. Powell was to see some people in Brooklyn regarding the land deal in which Anderson Rover held an interest, and he had asked Dick to meet him in that borough at four o'clock. At three o'clock Dick left the Outlook Hotel to keep the engagement.

"You had better stay here until I get back, in case any word comes in about Tom," said he to his father.

"Very well, Dick; I shall be glad of the rest," replied Anderson Rover.

He had already given the particulars of how he had been kidnapped while on his way to meet Japson. The broker had come up accompanied by the disguised Crabtree, and he had been forced into a taxicab and a sponge saturated with chloroform had been held to his nose. He had become unconscious, and while in that condition had been taken to some house up in Harlem. From there he had been transferred to the Ellen Rodney on the evening before the boys had discovered his whereabouts.

"They treated me very harshly," Mr. Rover had said. "Mr. Crabtree was particularly mean."

"Well, he is suffering for it," Dick had answered. "Sam telephoned that his leg was in very bad shape and the doctors thought he would be a cripple for life."

To get to Brooklyn Dick took the subway, crossing under the East River. He did not know much about the place, but had received instructions how to reach the offices where he was to meet Mr. Powell and the others.

There was a great rush on the streets, owing to a small fire in the vicinity. Dick stopped for a minute to watch a fire engine at work on a corner, and as he did so, somebody tapped him on the shoulder.

"Dick Rover! of all people!" came the exclamation. "What are you doing in Brooklyn?"

Dick turned quickly, to find himself confronted by a tall, heavy−set youth, dressed in a business suit.

"Dan Baxter!" he cried. "How are you?" and he shook hands.

As my old readers well know, Dan Baxter was an old acquaintance of the Rover boys. When at Putnam Hall he had been a great bully, and had tried more than once to get the best of our heroes. But he had been foiled, and then he had drifted to the West and South, and there the Rovers had found him, away from home and practically penniless. They had set him on his feet, and he had gotten a position as a traveling salesman, and now he counted

the Rovers his best friends, and was willing to do anything for them.

"Oh, I'm pretty well," answered Dan Baxter, with a grin. "My job agrees with me."

"What are you doing, Dan?"

"Oh, I'm still selling jewelry— doing first−rate, too," added the former bully, a bit proudly.

"I am mighty glad to hear it."

"How are you and the others getting along, Dick?" went on Baxter curiously. "Thought you were at Brill College."

"I'm here on business," and Dick gave the other a brief account of what had happened.

"Sorry Tom got hurt and hope he will come out all right," said Dan Baxter, sympathetically. "But who are those men you mentioned?"

"A firm of brokers; named Pelter, Japson Company."

"What!" ejaculated Dan Baxter. "Did you say Japson?"

"Yes, Dan. Do you know him?"

"Sure I do. He used to be in a jewelry firm in Albany. They tried to stick our firm— but we shut down on 'em. But that isn't all, Dick. I saw Japson to−day— not two hours ago."

"You did? Where?" And now Dick was all attention.

"I visited a— er— a lady friend of mine. She lives in an apartment house near Prospect Park. I might as well tell you that some day we are going to be married. Well, when I was coming out of the place I saw Japson go in— he and two other men."

"Dan, show me that place— and do it as quickly as possible!" cried Dick. "Come on— don't tell me you can't. I'll pay you for your time!" And Dick caught the other youth by the arm.

"I'll do it willingly, Dick, and there won't be any time to pay for, even if it takes a week!" cried Dan Baxter. "I am glad to be able to do you a favor, indeed I am!" And he gazed admiringly at the oldest Rover boy. "Just you come with me."

Dan Baxter led the way to the nearest elevated station and they ran upstairs to the platform and soon boarded a car bound for the vicinity of Prospect Park.

"The young lady lives in the Nirwick Apartments," explained Baxter. "It is a big place, with elevator service. I don't know to which apartment Japson went, but maybe the elevator man can tell us."

"Describe the other two men to me, if you can, Dan."

The young traveling salesman did so, and Dick came to the conclusion that one of the men must have been Pelter. The identity of the third was a mystery.

"Maybe it was that Belright Fogg," thought the youth. "Well, I'll soon find out— if they are still at the apartment house— and I hope they are."

At last the elevated train reached the proper station and Dick and Baxter alighted. The latter led the way for a distance of two blocks.

"There is the apartment," said Baxter, pointing the building out. "If you want those men arrested, hadn't you better call a policeman or two?"

"I can do that later,— after I have spotted them," answered Dick.

A colored man ran the elevator. He had often seen Dan and knew him.

"The gentlemen you mean went up to the fourth floor— to the apartment that was rented last week."

"May I ask who rented it?" asked Dick.

"A lawyer, sah— a Mr. Fogg. He's got a queer first name."

"Belright?"

"That's it, sah; Belright Fogg."

"Just as I thought," murmured Dick "They didn't go out, did they?"

"I don't think they did. I didn't see 'em, and I don't think they would go downstairs without using the elevator, although they could use the stairs."

"Which apartment is it?"

"On the fourth floor— the apartment in front, on the right," answered the elevator man.

"I'll go up," said Dick. He motioned Baxter to one side. "Dan, will you go out and get a policeman or two, just as quickly as you can?" he whispered.

"I will," returned the young traveling salesman, and hurried out on the street again.

Dick stepped into the elevator and in a few seconds was deposited on the fourth floor of the apartment house. He walked to the front and to the right, and stopped in front of one of the doors. From the room beyond came a murmur of voices. He listened intently. The voices were those of Pelter, Japson and Fogg.

CHAPTER XXVIII. THE CAPTURE

With bated breath Dick knelt at the door and applied his ear to the keyhole. At first he could hear only indistinctly, but gradually he caught the drift of the conversation between the rascally brokers and the former railroad lawyer.

"Then you want me to date those papers a week back?" he heard Belright Fogg ask.

"That's it," answered Pelter.

"And remember, we signed them just before we went to the West," added Japson.

"And remember also that you saw us take a train at the Grand Central Depot," went on Pelter.

"Oh, I'll remember that," returned the lawyer, with a sly chuckle. "And I'll remember also that I got two telegrams from you— one from Chicago and one from Detroit." And he laughed again.

"That alibi ought to fix us up," remarked Japson. "Anyway, it will set the authorities to guessing."

"It will help, provided that fellow, Crabtree, doesn't squeel," said Pelter. "He gave his word, when we were in the garret, that he would keep mum, no matter what happened. But if he was badly hurt he may have told everything."

"Fogg, you must try to see him in the hospital," said Japson. "Tell him it will do no good for him to tell anything, and that, if he keeps mum, we will remain his friends and do all we possibly can for him."

"You are piling a lot of work on my shoulders," grumbled the lawyer. "And shady work, too. What do I get out of this?"

"You know what I promised you," answered Jesse Pelter.

"A thousand isn't enough. Just look at the risk I am running."

"Well, if you help us to clear ourselves, we'll make it two thousand dollars," cried Japson. He paused a moment. "Quite a swell apartment, Fogg."

"It's good enough."

"Why can't we stay here for a day or two?" questioned Japson.

"I— er— suppose you could," answered the lawyer, with some hesitation. "But don't you think you would be better off out of the State, or in Canada?"

"That's what I say!" cried Pelter. "Canada for mine. I've been wanting to visit Montreal and Quebec. Now is our chance."

"All right, whatever you say," answered Japson. "Maybe we would be safer out of the country until this matter blew over. Hang the luck! It was too bad to have Rover get away from us as he did. If we could have held him back a couple of days longer that land and maybe those stocks would have been ours."

"He's got some smart sons, that man," observed Fog. "I know, for I once ran up against them," and he told about the biplane incident.

"They are altogether too smart," growled Pelter. "I'd like to wring their necks for 'em!"

"Well, we'll turn the trick on 'em yet," said Japson. "Remember, the game isn't ended until the last card is played."

"That's right," thought Dick. "And it won't be long before I play the last card!"

"After this affair is a thing of the past, I am going after those business interests of the Rovers," went on Jesse Pelter. "They are pretty well tangled up— they got so while Rover was sick. I think we can make something out of them yet."

"Not if I know it," murmured Dick, to himself. "You are a first−class fellow to put in jail— you and the others, too!"

The talk in the apartment went on, covering the things Belright Fogg was to do while Pelter and Japson were in hiding in Canada. The unscrupulous lawyer was to produce a power of attorney dated some days before, so that he might act in place of the brokers. He was also to do his best to help the brokers prove an alibi when accused of the abduction of Anderson Rover.

"I'm getting dry," remarked Japson, presently. "Fogg, haven't you got something to drink, and some cigars?"

"Sure I have," answered the lawyer, and Dick heard him leave the apartment and go into a dining−room.

While Dick was listening at the door he also kept his ears open for the return of Dan Baxter. Presently he heard the elevator come upstairs, and then there sounded a low whistle— a whistle Dick had heard many times while he was a cadet at Putnam Hall.

Eagerly the oldest Rover boy tiptoed his way down the corridor. Baxter came forward to meet him, accompanied by two policemen, and the elevator man, who wanted to know what the trouble was.

"The two brokers are in that room," whispered Dick, pointing to the door of the apartment. "They are planning to skip out to Canada and leave their affairs in the hands of the lawyer who has rented this apartment. He is almost as much of a rascal as any of them, for he is to take their power of attorney dated some days back, and is going to try to prove an alibi for them. I heard 'em arrange the whole thing."

"The rascals!" murmured Baxter. "Glad you cornered 'em, Dick."

"You helped, Dan— I shan't forget that," returned Dick, warmly.

"What do you want us to do?" asked one of the policemen.

"I want all three men arrested," answered Dick. "I'll make a charge against them. Don't let 'em get away. They'll do it if it's possible."

"All right, but you must come along to make the charge," answered the bluecoat.

"All right."

"Please don't make no more row in the house than you can help," put in the elevator man. "This is a swell apartment and we don't like rows. I didn't know that lawyer who took this apartment was a crook."

"We'll do the job as quietly as possible," answered the second policeman, who chanced to know the elevator man.

"Dan, I think you can help me out," suggested Dick. "You might go to the door and call out that there is a telegram for Belright Fogg. Then, when he opens the door, push into the room and we'll follow."

"Want me to help?" asked the elevator man, who was becoming interested.

"If you will," said Dick. "You can guard the stairs— so they can't run down that way."

"I'll do it."

Without further delay Dan Baxter walked to the door at which Dick had been listening. He chanced to have an old telegram envelope in his pocket and this he produced. He knocked loudly on the portal.

"Who is there?" cried the lawyer, in a somewhat startled voice, and Baxter heard several chairs shifted back as the occupants of the apartment leaped to their feet.

"Telegram for Mr. Fogg— Belright Fogg!" drawled Dan, in imitation of an A. D. T. youth.

"A telegram, eh?" muttered the lawyer. "Wonder what is up now?"

He came to the door and unlocked it cautiously. He was going to open it only a few inches, to peer out, but Baxter threw his weight against the portal, sending the lawyer backwards and bumping into Jesse Pelter.

"Hi, what's this?" stammered Belright Fogg. "What do you mean by——"

He got no further, for at that instant Dick came into the apartment, closely followed by the two policemen.

At once there was a wild commotion. Pelter and Japson let out yells of alarm, and both tried to back away, into the next room. But Dick was too quick for them and barred their progress.

"Let me go!" yelled Pelter, and tried to hurl Dick to one side. Then Japson struck out with his fist, but the oldest Rover boy dodged.

"So that's your game, is it?" cried Dan Baxter, as he saw the attack. "Two can play at that!" And drawing back, the young traveling salesman hit Japson a blow on the chin that bowled the broker over like a tenpin.

In the meantime Dick had grappled with Pelter and was holding the rascally broker against the wall. One of the policemen already held Fogg, who was trembling from head to foot in sudden panic.

"Surrender, in the name of the law!" said the bluecoat. And he made a move as if to draw a pistol.

"I— I sur— render!" gasped Belright Fogg, and up went his hands, tremblingly.

The other policeman produced a pair of handcuffs and in a twinkling they were slipped upon Japson's wrist. Then the bluecoats turned towards Pelter.

"You shan't arrest me!" yelled that broker, savagely, and with a wrench, he tore himself from Dick's grasp and started through the rooms to the rear of the apartment.

CHAPTER XXIX. BROUGHT TO TERMS

"Stop him!"

"He must not get away'"

Such were some of the cries that echoed through the apartment as Jesse Pelter ran for the rear room.

He knew there was a fire escape there and thought he might reach the ground from that.

But Dick was at his heels, determined that the broker should not escape if he could possibly prevent it.

The window to the fire escape was open, for a maid in the kitchen had just set out some cooked dish to cool.

Pelter made a leap for the window, nearly scaring the maid into a fit. She screamed loudly, and as she did so Dick made a wild leap and caught Pelter by the foot.

"Let go, Rover!" yelled the broker, hoarsely.

"I won't! You are not going to get away, Pelter."

There was a struggle, and the broker aimed a blow at Dick's head. Then the oldest Rover boy suddenly caught the rascal by the neck and banged his head vigorously against the window casing.

"Ouch! Don't!" groaned the broker. "Oh, my skull is broken!"

"Then keep still," answered Dick, grimly, and he continued to hold the man. Soon one of the policemen came up, and then, much against his will, the head of the firm of Pelter, Japson Company was handcuffed like his partner in crime.

"You'll suffer for this, Rover; see if you don't!" growled Jesse Pelter, after the excitement was over. "I have done nothing wrong, and I can prove it. This is all a plot on the part of you and your family to get our firm into trouble."

"You can do your talking when you are in jail," answered Dick, briefly. "I know what I am doing."

"Maybe you got Crabtree to hatch up a story against us," came from Japson.

"Never mind what Crabtree confessed," said Dick. "You'll get what is coming to you, never fear."

"I guess I had better send in a call for the patrol wagon," said one of the policemen. "Can you watch 'em, Jake?"

"Sure," answered the second bluecoat. "I guess the young fellows will help."

"I will," said Dick.

"So will I," put in Dan. He turned to Dick. "I'm mighty glad to be of service to you. It kind of helps to— to— pay off old scores, eh?" he faltered.

"Yes, Dan; you are doing us a great service, and I shan't forget it," returned Dick, with warmth.

A number of tenants in the apartment house had been alarmed by what was going on, and among them were the girl Baxter was engaged to marry, and her mother. Dan quickly explained matters to them, and introduced Dick, and the latter told of the service Baxter had done. Then the police patrol wagon came along, and the prisoners and the others went below.

"Maybe I had better go to headquarters with you," suggested Dan to Dick.

"Yes, you'll have to go," put in one of the policemen.

The ride was not a long one, and as soon as the prisoners were brought in, Dick explained the situation and asked that the authorities in Brooklyn communicate with those in New York. This was done, and then Pelter, Japson, and Fogg were held for a further hearing.

"Can't we get bail?" demanded the lawyer.

"Certainly, if you wish," was the reply. And then the amount was fixed, and the prisoners sent out a messenger, to see if they could not get somebody to go on their bail bonds.

Dick's parting with Baxter was very cordial. The oldest Rover boy realized that the former bully of Putnam Hall was greatly changed and that he had done him a great service.

"I wish you all kinds of luck, Dan," he said. "You've got a nice position and a fine girl, and you ought to do well."

"Do you like her, Dick?" and Dan blushed a little. "We expect to be married soon."

"Well, I am going to be married myself before long."

"Is that so? Good enough! I guess I know the girl," and Dan grinned.

"You do, Dan."

"Give her my best regards, and tell her I think she is getting the best fellow in the world!" said Baxter, and shook Dick's hand. And thus the two former enemies parted.

Dick had already called up Mr. Powell on the telephone, telling the lawyer of what had occurred. Now he engaged a taxicab to take him to the place which he had started out to visit when coming to Brooklyn. It was rather late, but the lawyer had persuaded the people he had come to see to wait.

An interview lasting over an hour followed. The lawyer had already explained many things, and now Dick told of others.

"You have opened our eyes, Mr. Rover," said one of the men present, when Dick had finished. "We rather suspected Pelter, Japson Company and we were bewildered by what your father proposed to do. Now all is perfectly clear, and, if you wish us to do so, we'll stand by your father to the end."

"Thank you very much!" cried the youth, in delight.

"Your father is not very well, you say," said another of the men. "In that case——"

"I am going to transact his business for him, after this," answered Dick. "He is going to place it in my hands."

"You are rather young, Mr. Rover. But the way you handled those brokers shows you can do things. I wish you success."

"I shall rely upon Mr. Powell for assistance," said Dick.

"And I'll do what I can," put in the lawyer.

When Dick got back to the Outlook Hotel it was quite late. But he had telephoned to his father, so Mr. Rover was not alarmed. The youth found his parent smiling pleasantly.

"Good news all around!" cried Anderson Rover.

"Then you've heard from Sam?" asked Dick, quickly.

"Yes, he sent in word about an hour ago. Tom is doing very well, and the specialist says he will soon be himself again."

"That's the best news yet!" cried Dick, and his face showed his relief.

"Yes, it is even better than this news you sent me— that Pelter and Japson have been captured."

"Well, I am mighty glad we rounded up those rascals," said the son.

"So am I."

"Did Sam say anything about Crabtree?"

"He said Crabtree was about the same. The doctors are doing what they can for him. But he will most likely be a cripple for life."

"That's bad. But he has nobody to blame but himself."

After that Dick had to sit down and tell his father the details of all that had occurred. Then he got a late supper, and some time after that he and his parent retired. The youth was thoroughly tired out, but happy.

The next few days were as busy as those just past had been. Dick and his father ran up to where Tom lay in the hospital. They found the sufferer had come to his senses. Sam and a nurse were with him.

"Oh, I'll be all right again, in a few days!" cried Tom, with a brave attempt at a smile. "I guess I fared better than old Crabtree. They tell me he'll limp for life."

"Limp for life!" cried Dick.

"That is what they say."

"What a terrible affliction!" murmured the oldest Rover boy. "But he has nobody to blame but himself."

"Tom, are you quite comfortable here?" asked Mr. Rover, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, they do all they can for me, Dad," was the answer.

"We must send you home as soon as we can."

"Well, I'll be willing to go," returned Tom. He thought of the quiet farm, and of his Aunt Martha's motherly care, and gave a deep sigh.

"He can be moved in four or five days— the doctor said so," put in Sam. "I've figured it all out. We can take him to the train in an auto, and I'll see that he gets to Oak Run all right. There Jack can meet us with our own machine, and the rest will be easy."

"I can go along," said Dick.

"It won't be necessary, Dick," said Tom "You stay in New York and get Dad's affairs straightened out."

The matter was talked over, and it was at length decided that Sam should remain with Tom and take him home, while Mr. Rover and Dick returned to the city.

Four days later the youngest Rover got permission from the specialist who had attended Tom to take him home. An easy−riding automobile was procured, and in this the two brothers drove to the nearest railroad station. A compartment in a parlor car had already been engaged, and Tom was placed in this and made as comfortable as circumstances permitted. The ride was a long and tedious one for the youth, and by the time he had made the necessary changes to get to Oak Run he was pretty well exhausted, and had a severe headache.

"Poor boy!" murmured the hired man, who had brought the family touring car to the station.

"Dis am de wust yet, de werry wust!" came from Aleck Pop, who had come along. Both men aided Sam in getting Tom into the car, and then Jack started for Valley Brook farm, running the machine with the greatest possible care.

Aunt Martha stood on the piazza ready to receive the boys, and when she beheld Tom's pale face the tears streamed down her cheeks.

"My boy! My poor boy!" she cried. "Oh, what a terrible happening!" And she bent over and kissed him.

"Oh, don't worry, Aunt Martha; I'll soon be myself again," answered Tom, as cheerfully as his spirits permitted.

"I've got the front room all ready for you," went on the aunt. And she led the way into the house and to the apartment in question. Here the sufferer was put to bed, and his aunt did all in her power to make him comfortable. The local doctor had already been notified, and soon he appeared, to read a note written by the city specialist and listen to what Sam had to tell him. Then he took charge and said Tom must be kept very quiet.

"It shall be as you say, Doctor," said Mrs. Rover. And after that, for a number of days, nobody but the members of the family was allowed to go in and talk to the youth.

In the meantime, Dick and his father had several interviews with their lawyer, and also with a lawyer who represented Pelter, Japson, and Belright Fogg. The brokers and Fogg were anxious to hush matters up, and promised to do whatever was wanted by the Rovers if they would drop the case against them.

"I think we had better arrange matters, Dick," said Mr. Rover, with a sigh. "I am tired of fighting. If they will do the fair thing all around, let them go."

"Just as you say, Father," replied Dick. "But they must give up everything that belongs to us."

"Well, you can see to it that they do— you and Mr. Powell," answered Anderson Rover. "I am going back to the farm to rest, and after that I think I'll travel a little for my health."

"All right, Dad. But— but——" Dick stammered and grew red. "You— er— you won't go away until after my wedding, will you?"

"No, Dick, I'll stay home until after you and Dora are married," answered Mr. Rover, with a quiet smile.

CHAPTER XXX. MRS. DICK ROVER— CONCLUSION

"The day of days, Dick!"

"Right you are, Sam! And what a perfect day it is!"

"Oh, I had this weather made to order," came from Tom Rover, with a grin.

"How do you feel, Tom?" questioned his big brother kindly, as he turned away from the window to look at the lad who had been hurt.

"Oh, I'm as chipper as a catbird with two tails!" sang out the fun−loving Rover. But his pale face was not in keeping with his words. Tom was not yet himself. But be wasn't going to show it— especially on Dick's wedding day.

All of the Rovers had come up to Cedarville and they were now stopping at the home of Mr. Laning, the father of Grace and Nellie. As my old readers know, the Stanhopes lived but a short distance away, and nearby was Putnam Hall, where the boys had spent so many happy days.

Dora had left Hope as soon as it was settled that she and Dick should be married, and she and her mother, and the others, had been busy for some time getting ready for the wedding. Nellie and Grace were also home, and were as much excited as Dora herself, for they were both to be bridesmaids. The girls had spent several days in New York, shopping, and a dressmaker from the city had been called in to dress the young ladies as befitted the occasion.

Tom was to be Dick's best man, while Sam was to head the ushers at the church— the other ushers being Songbird, Stanley, Fred Garrison, Larry Colby, and Bart Conners. A delegation of students from Brill— including William Philander Tubbs— had also come up, and were quartered at the Cedarville Hotel.

The wedding was to take place at the Cedarville Union Church, a quaint little stone edifice, covered with ivy, which the Stanhopes and the Lanings both attended and which the Rover boys had often visited while they were cadets at Putnam Hall. The interior of the church was a mass of palms, sent up on the boat from Ithaca.

Following the sending out of the invitations to the wedding, presents had come in thick and fast to the Stanhope home. From Dick's father came an elegant silver service, and from his brothers a beautifully−decorated dinner set; while Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha contributed a fine set of the latest encyclopaedias, and a specially−bound volume of the uncle's book on scientific farming! Mr. Anderson Rover also contributed a bank book with an amount written therein that nearly took away Dora's breath.

"Oh, Dick, just look at the sum!" she cried.

"It sure is a tidy nest egg," smiled the husband−to−be. "I knew dad would come down handsomely. He's the best dad ever was!"

"Yes, Dick, and I know I am going to love him just as if I was his own daughter," answered Dora.

Mrs. Stanhope gave her daughter much of the family silver and jewelry, and also a full supply of table and other linen. From Captain Putnam came a handsome morris chair, and Songbird sent in a beautifully−bound volume of household poetry, with a poem of his own on the flyleaf. The students of Brill sent in a fine oil painting in a gold frame, and the girls at Hope contributed an inlaid workbox with a complete sewing outfit. From Dan Baxter, who had been invited, along with the young lady to whom he was engaged, came two gold napkin rings, each suitably engraved. Dan had written to Dick, saying he would come to the wedding if he had to take a week off to get there, he being then in Washington on a business trip.

The wedding was to take place at high noon, and long before that time the many guests began to assemble at the church. Among the first to arrive was Captain Putnam, in military uniform, and attended by about a dozen of the Hall cadets. George Strong, the head teacher, was also present, for he and Dick had always been good friends. Then came the students from Brill, all in full dress, and led by William Philander Tubbs, bedecked as only that dudish student would think of bedecking himself.

The Lanings and Mrs. Stanhope came together and the Rovers followed closely. Soon the little church was packed and many stood outside, unable to get in. The organ was playing softly.

Suddenly the bell in the tower struck twelve. As the last stroke died away the organ peeled forth in the grand notes of the wedding march. Then came the wedding party up the middle aisle, a little flower girl preceding them.

Dora was on her uncle's arm, and wore white satin, daintily embroidered, and carried a bouquet of bridal roses. Around her neck was a string of pearls Dick had given her. The bridesmaids were in pink and also carried bouquets.

Dick was already at the altar to meet his bride, and then began the solemn ceremony that made the pair one for life. It was simple and short, and at the conclusion Dick kissed Dora tenderly.

The organ pealed out once more, and the happy couple marched from the church, everybody gazing after them in admiration.

"A fine couple," was Captain Putnam's comment. "A fine couple, truly!"

"Yes, indeed!" echoed George Strong. "I wish them every happiness."

"A perfectly splendid wedding, don't you know!" lisped William Philander Tubbs. "Why, I really couldn't run it off better myself!"

"It was all to the merry!" was Stanley's comment. "She's a dandy girl, too— wish I had one half as good."

"Dick Rover deserves the best girl in the world," was Songbird's conclusion. "He is the finest fellow I know, barring none."

"I suppose you'll get up a poem about this, Songbird," suggested one of the other students.

"Perhaps," was the answer, and the would−be poet smiled in a dreamy fashion.

"It seems only yesterday that the Rover boys came to the Hall," remarked Captain Putnam, to one of his friends. "My, how the years have flown!"

"But they are still boys— at least Tom and Sam are," was the ready reply. "And Tom is just as full of sport as he ever was— I don't believe he'll ever settle down."

"Time will tell. But with all his fun he is a good lad at heart— and that is what counts."

"Right you are, Captain Putnam. I wouldn't give a rap for a lad who didn't have some fun in his make−up."

"All of them had plenty of fun while they were at my school. They cut up a good deal sometimes. But I liked them all the better for it, somehow," concluded the captain, with a twinkle in his eyes.

Carriages and automobiles were in waiting, and Dick and his bride, along with their relatives and many friends, were quickly whirled away to the Stanhope home. Here followed numerous congratulations, interspersed with not a few kisses. Mrs. Stanhope's eyes were still full of tears, but she smiled at her newly−made son−in−law.

"It's all right, Dick!" she whispered. "I'm not a bit sorry. But— but a woman can't help crying when she sees her only girl getting married."

"You are not going to lose Dora," he answered, tenderly. "You are going to get a son, that's all."

A long table had been spread, from the dining−room to the sitting−room, with another table in the library, and soon a grand wedding dinner was in progress. Dora sat at her husband's side, and never did a pair feel or look more happy. Close at hand was Tom, paying his attentions to Nellie, and at the smaller table Sam was doing his best to entertain Grace. Mr. Anderson Rover sat beside Mrs. Stanhope, and not far away were the others of the families.

"Well, they are married at last," said Mr. Rover to Mrs. Stanhope. "I, for one, am well satisfied. I think they will get along well together."

"Yes, Mr. Rover, I think they will get along finely," answered Mrs. Stanhope. "I liked Dick from the first time I met him— and Dora— well, there was nobody else after he came into view," and she smiled faintly. Then her eyes traveled over to where Tom and Nellie were talking earnestly, and his followed. "I think that is another pair," she whispered.

"I shouldn't wonder," was the reply. "But they can wait a while. Tom is rather young yet."

"He looks rather pale."

"Yes, that blow he received on the head was a severe one. I am worried about it," went on Mr. Rover, soberly.

It had been arranged that Dick and Dora should depart on a honeymoon trip to Washington late that afternoon. The dinner over, the rooms were cleared, and the young folks enjoyed themselves in dancing, an orchestra having been engaged for that purpose.

"How perfectly happy they all seem to be!" remarked Aunt Martha to Anderson Rover, as they sat watching the dancing.

"Yes," he answered. "I trust that nothing happens to make it otherwise after this."

"Oh, something is bound to happen to those boys!" murmured the aunt. "You simply can't hold them in!" And

something did happen, and what is was will be related in the next volume of this series, to be entitled: "The Rover Boys in Alaska; Or, Lost in the Fields of Ice." In that book we shall learn how Tom suddenly lost his mind and wandered away from home, and what strenuous things happened to Dick and Sam when they went after their brother.

But for the time being all went well. The young folks danced to their hearts' content, and Tom kept them roaring over the many jokes he had saved up for the occasion. His head ached a good deal, but he refused to let anybody know about it.

Then came the time for Dick and Dora to depart. An auto was at the door, gaily decorated with white ribbons, and bearing on the back a sign painted by Tom which read, "We're Just Married." Another auto was in the backyard, to take some of the guests to the steamboat dock.

"Good−bye!" was the cry, as the pair came down the stairs, ready for the trip. "Good−bye and good luck!" And then came a generous shower of rice and several old shoes. Dora kissed her mother for the last time and she and Dick hurried to the auto. Away they went, and the other auto after them, Tom and Sam and some others tooting horns and the girls shrieking gaily.

"To the steamboat dock, I suppose," said the driver of the auto, to Dick.

"Not much!" cried the newly−married youth. "Here is where we fool them. Straight for Ithaca, and as fast as the law allows!"

"I get you," replied the chauffeur, grinning.

"We want to catch the seven−forty−five train for New York," went on Dick.

"We'll do it, sir," was the answer, and then the auto driver turned on the speed, made a whirl around a corner of the road, and in a minute more was on the way to Ithaca, with the second car far behind.

"Hello! he's given us the slip!" cried Sam, in dismay.

"Never mind, let them go!" whispered Grace.

"Yes, we've had fun enough," added Nellie. "Oh, what a grand wedding it has been!" she added, with a sigh. And then, when Tom squeezed her hand, she blushed.

In the other automobile, Dora and Dick sat close together on the back seat. Under the robe her hand, the one with the wedding ring upon it, was clasped tightly within his own.

"Glad?" he whispered.

"Perfectly," she answered.

THE END