

# THE ARGOSY

VOL. XII, No. 5.

SATURDAY, JUNE 27, 1891.

WHOLE No. 447.

## TRAIN AND STATION ;

OR,

### THE RAMBLES OF A YOUNG RAILROADER.\*

BY EDGAR R. HOADLEY, JR.

#### CHAPTER XXXIX.

##### THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

"I BEG your pardon, Miss Orloff, do you wish to see me?" said Dash, promptly dropping one hand to his side, and raising the other to his cap, as he turned to the young lady and advanced towards the door.

"Most happy to see you, Miss Orloff," joined in Forsdyke, in his politest and most winning tones, dropping all hostilities even more quickly than Dash had. "Won't you come in and brighten my poor quarters with your presence?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Forsdyke," replied the young lady, with an amused smile, glancing from one to the other of the would be belligerents, on whose faces the flush of anger had not entirely departed. "I'm in a hurry, and only wish to send a telegram."

"There's the operator, Miss Orloff," said Forsdyke, with a sneering emphasis on the word operator, as he indicated Dash with a lofty wave of the hand.

"Yes, Miss Orloff, I'm the operator," added Dash impertubably, turning away. "Come to the office, please."

"Are you really the operator, too, Dash? I thought you were only agent," said the fair girl as she followed him.

"Yes," replied Dash, briefly and soberly, for he was still foolishly troubled by what Forsdyke had said.

"Oh, how lovely," went on the young girl impetuously and all over smiles. "You can teach me and I could tell what those aggravating old things are always ticking about. Couldn't you?"

"Yes, certainly, if you would care to undertake it, but it isn't as easy as it looks, and you wouldn't hear any secrets if you did understand it."

"You're not very encouraging, sir," she returned with a little pout; and then added with a roguish smile: "I believe you are afraid I would get your position."

"Oh, yes, very much," laughed Dash;

"but you *could* be my assistant. How would you like to be night operator?"

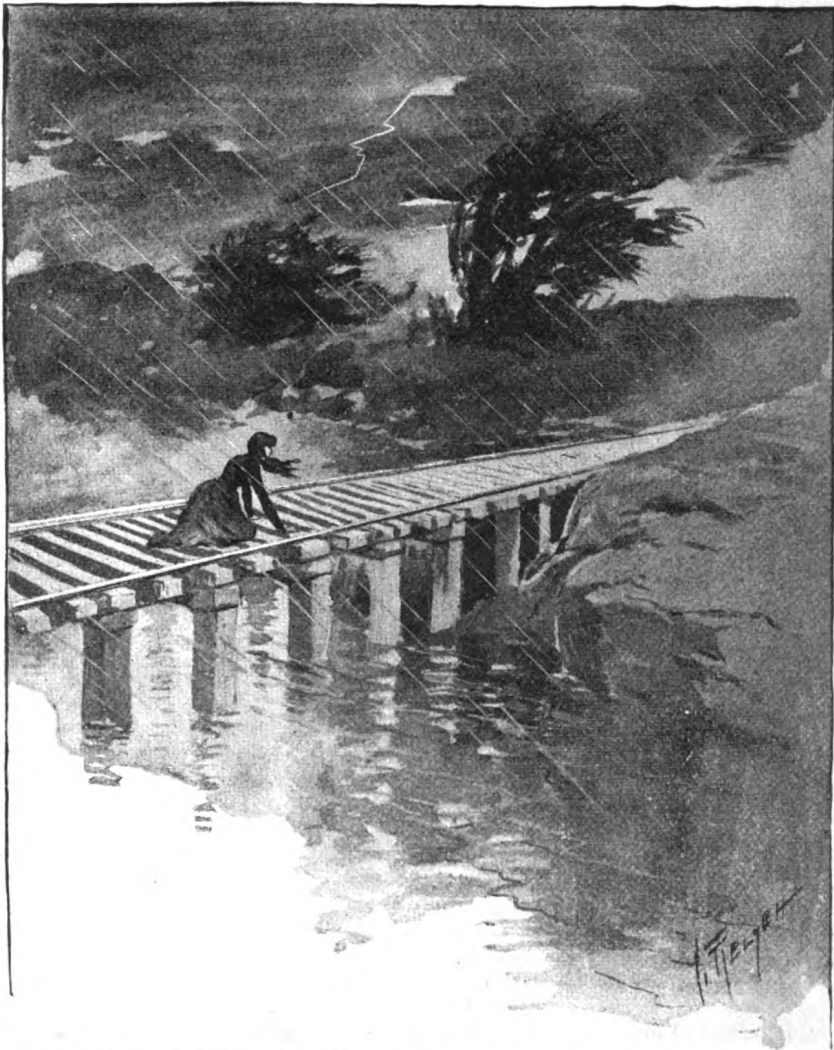
"Oh, dear, I'm such a sleepy head, I never could keep awake," with a comical frown. "Would I have to begin with that?"

"That's generally the first work a new operator gets."

"Then I'll not go into the business; but I might learn it so I could telegraph just a little; couldn't I?"

"Yes, you could; but here we are. Have you your message ready?" said Dash as they entered the waiting room and stopped at the ticket window.

"Yes, but it's horridly written, and that's all the paper I



\*Begun in No. 434 of THE ARGOSY.

could find in the house," said Dorothy, with the usual feminine excuses.

"I guess he can read it," laughed Dash jokingly, as he passed the paper through the window to the night operator, who had relieved him early so he might pay his expected visit at Mrs. Handiford's.

"He! Who, Dash?"

"The night operator."

"Does he commence work as early as this all the time?"

"No, but I wanted to get off, and he came down early to accommodate me."

"How good of him, and you're coming down to our house this evening. I think you have been a very bad boy not to come before."

"I suppose I have, but I really couldn't possibly come before, as there was so much to do here," protested Dash.

"You're excused, sir," with the condescension of a princess. "I know you would have come if you could, Dash."

"I will come right now, if you permit me to escort you home," suggested Dash.

"Will you? How nice!" in glad surprise, and if Dash still had any doubts of the truth of Forsdyke's assertion, he should have had none now. "Can you really get away now without any inconvenience?"

"Yes; its all arranged with my night man."

Dash and the beautiful girl walked down the platform, Brakewood Forsdyke saw them out of the end window of his office, and there was bitter envy and defeated malice in his heart.

"Miss Orloff," began Dash, as they started down the track, which was the nearest way to reach Mrs. Handiford's residence, "do you know, if you hadn't come to the office this afternoon—"

"Miss Orloff! Now, Dash, what *do* you mean?" interrupted Dorothy severely. "Every time we meet you begin that way. What's the matter now? Are you on your dignity because you are agent?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss—Miss—Dorothy," stammered Dash; "I thought perhaps you didn't want to continue the acquaintance, or to have me call at the house."

"And you mean to say that if I hadn't gone to the depot you wouldn't have called this evening?" exclaimed Dorothy.

"Yes."

"Why?" in astonished tones.

"Because Brakewood Forsdyke appeared to know I was going to your house, and said that I was not wanted there."

"Did he say that?" exclaimed the young girl indignantly.

"The horrid thing! It's not true, and you ought to know it. I guess the only one who doesn't want you there is himself, and it's the last time he will come if I can help it. If he comes, I'll not see him."

"I told him he was a li—base prevaricator," added Dash, checking the harsher term, with a smile, as all his doubts took wing.

"And that's why you two were in pugilistic attitudes, glaring at each other as if you wanted to eat somebody?" observed Dorothy, laughing.

"Yes; and I'm sorry I didn't give him a good pounding, now that I'm sure of his dirty, underhand work, the upstart," exclaimed Dash, not very savagely.

"And you believed what he said, Dash," said the young girl reproachfully.

"I'm afraid I did, a little," responded Dash sheepishly; "but forgive me, Dorothy."

"You don't deserve it; but I'm glad you didn't fight—for Mr. Forsdyke's sake," laughed Dorothy, as she gazed at

Dash's muscular figure. She did not seem to have any doubt about which way the victory would have gone, and Dash blushed at her tribute to, and confidence in, his prowess.

"But how did Forsdyke know I was going to your house tonight?" continued Dash.

"You foolish boy! I don't know, but I suppose Aunt Helen let it drop, for she's a great talker. I'm sure I never told him."

Like most young men who become victims of the "tender passion" for the first time, the young agent had made mountains out of trifles, and could not return to a calm, ecstatic state of bliss without a full explanation, but now he was satisfied.

Their further conversation during the walk down the track was of such a nature that it could not possibly be of interest to any one but themselves. But it restored Dash to that beatific state when one feels that his feet hardly touch the ground and that his head is in the seventh heaven of bliss.

The distance to Mrs. Handiford's was almost a mile, but Dash wouldn't have believed the statement if he had been told so that afternoon; it was, to him, the shortest mile he had ever walked.

Mrs. Handiford's cottage was situated on a hill, only a few hundred feet from the railroad, around which flowed a shallow and brawling stream which nearly made an island of the elevation. As the opposite shore was an almost perpendicular cliff of flinty granite, the railroad had avoided it by crossing the river on a high bridge, skirting the foot of the hill on which stood Mrs. Handiford's residence, and then returning to the other side, below the rocky formation, over another high trestle. The first named structure was named High Bridge, and the latter South Bridge.

To reach Mrs. Handiford's the shortest way, coming from the depot or the village, one would have to cross High Bridge. The old country road to the town led straight back from the house three quarters of a mile, to get around a bend in the river, and then it was a mile to Madrid.

Dorothy had no timidity about crossing the high trestle, especially with Dash beside her, for that had been her favorite route to and from the depot and town since her arrival at her aunt's.

It is hardly necessary to say that Dash passed a most enjoyable evening, though he did find that Mrs. Handiford was "a great talker," as Dorothy had said, and became a little tiresome after a while. If it had been the niece doing the talking, Dash would have been glad to sit up all night to listen to her.

Mrs. Handiford took the opportunity to hand him the amount he had expended in behalf of Dorothy's mother, which he did not accept without many protests. Then Dash suggested to Dorothy that he should return the deed she had sent him, as he had not been able to make any inquiry concerning it; but she requested him to keep it in his safe for security, though she was doubtful if it had any value. Dash agreed to do so, but mentally determined he would at once get some one to advise him how to proceed to find out if the deed had been made void by the recording of a later one on the same property.

It was a reasonable hour when he left the aunt and niece, but fortunately it was a moonlight night, so he could return over High Bridge, instead of having to make the long detour by the country road. Dash realized then, with only himself for company, that even the shorter distance was fully a mile.

This was only the beginning of many other visits that followed, and he was not always so fortunate as to return over

High Bridge. Some nights were pitchy dark or stormy, and if he had not gone down on horseback, or in a buggy, he was compelled to return afoot by the long country road. He would have taken the High Bridge even then, with a lantern to show the way, but Dorothy entreated him not to.

It did not take it long to become generally understood throughout the village that Dash was Dorothy's "steady company." Dash tried to be moderate in his calls, and not be like the young man who called on his fair one seven nights in the week, and wished there were eight; but it must be admitted the young agent went regularly and often. Dorothy, too, was seen quite frequently at the station, but, as she always gave a plausible excuse for being there, it is not for us to say she had any other motive for going.

Bouquets of flowers were sent daily to the young agent's office, and the night operator reveled in a veritable bower of sweet smelling posies, which he told the train men *his* girl had sent him. As he expressed it, in speaking of Dash and Dorothy, "the boss was as happy as a fly in a honey pot."

As time passed, Brakewood Forsdyke seemed to have given up any aspirations he had had toward Miss Orloff, and actually made overtures toward Dash for a closer and more familiar acquaintance. Possibly he realized that the young agent held the winning hand of "hearts," and had sense enough to know when he was beaten.

As Forsdyke approached him in a proper spirit, Dash was only too glad to meet him half way, for he was the last one to cherish resentment against any one very long. Possibly it was because his heart was stirred with a "sentiment," and probably he felt so secure in the affections of the fair girl that he thought he could afford to be magnanimous. It is said that "all the world loves a lover," so why should not a lover love the whole world, when his heart is running over with the sentiment?"

Dash and the superintendent's clerk finally got upon very good terms with each other, though not intimate, and everything moved along smoothly for several months at the Madrid station.

Then an incident occurred that led up to most startling and disagreeable results.

Dash one day received the following message from the auditor of the company:

"Why are you not making your remittances more promptly? The last received was June 8th."

As it was then June 16th, and Dash had made four remittances since the date given in the telegram, it can easily be understood how surprising to him such an inquiry was.

He instantly referred to his express receipt book, and checked off the four remittances for which Brakewood Forsdyke had receipted. Dash was not responsible for the money after it had been turned over to the express agent and receipted for by him, and he was convinced he was not guilty of the slightest irregularity. He immediately answered the auditor that he had made his remittances promptly, giving the dates of those since the 8th, and adding that he held the express agent's receipt for the same.

It instantly occurred to Dash that there was something wrong in the express agent's office to account for the non-receipt of the packages, and he decided to speak to Forsdyke about it. But before he had an opportunity to do so, he received another message from the auditor, reading:

"Remittances all right. Do not say anything about them to express agent."

Dash felt relieved, and concluded that some one in the auditor's office had made a mistake, and the auditor did not want the express agent to know there had been even a suspicion as to the forwarding of the remittances.

The matter passed from Dash's mind, only to be recalled at the end of a series of exciting and trying events, when he realized how far he had been from the truth in his theory.

## CHAPTER XL.

### THE EXPRESS COMPANY'S SAFE.

"SO you think I look worried, Dykeman," observed Forsdyke, a few days later, as he, Kinney, his assistant, and Dash were sitting around talking in the express agent's office, as had been their habit for some time past.

The young agent had been given a day operator the week before to assist him, and he now had occasional periods of relaxation from his duties.

"Well, I'll tell you what's a fact, Dykeman," Forsdyke went on, after a pause, "so would you, if you had the responsibility resting on your shoulders that I have. Between us, I don't mind telling you that there's ten thousand dollars in that little safe of mine in the corner, and I don't feel that it is the securest place in the world."

"Whew! You don't say!" whistled Dash, certainly astonished at the magnitude of the amount. "Whose is it, and why do you keep it there?"

"It belongs to the railroad company, and was sent down here to be used by the superintendent in purchasing a piece of property they want to possess, and on which they expect to have some lively bidding to meet. The sale was to have taken place three days ago, but it was postponed for a week."

"Why in the world couldn't they have bid just as well, and paid the amount with a check?" asked Dash, wondering that the company should have risked sending down so much cash.

"Because the owner of the property is a crank, I suppose, and wants the purchase money in cash," explained Forsdyke.

"Anything for the south express, Mr. Forsdyke?" interrupted Kinney, as a train pulled up at the station.

"Yes, here's a couple of money packages," replied Forsdyke, handing over a closed receipt book, with a couple of sealed money envelopes between the leaves, and a way bill wrapped about them.

The assistant grasped the book and rushed from the office.

"Now, as I was saying," resumed the express agent, glancing toward the safe, at which Dash had been looking, "that thing isn't a safe deposit vault by any means, and I can't help feeling uneasy about it. The only difference between it and yours is that it has a combination besides the key. I don't suppose you could open it, even if I should give you the combination and you should try, could you?"

"I don't know," responded Dash doubtfully.

"Just try it, for fun," suggested Forsdyke, handing him the key, and giving directions as to the combination, which, by the way, were not the correct ones.

Dash hesitated for a moment, as a faint idea shot across his brain that it was not exactly the proper thing for him to do, especially where there was such a large amount behind the safe door. Had he considered the matter longer, he might have concluded it was a very unwise proceeding on his part, and declined. He should have known that men in positions of trust, such as Forsdyke's, are not in the habit of intrusting the combinations of their safes to others; and that prudent men of business are very careful about keeping away from an open safe, or watching the operation of opening a closed one, when they are in an office other than their own.

"I don't believe you can open it," said Forsdyke, in a bantering tone, to stimulate the other to make the trial.

It had the desired effect, for, without further hesitation

Dash grasped the long, slender key, and, kneeling before the safe, inserted it in the proper place; then he began to turn the combination dial.

"Excuse me a moment, Dykeman," cried the express agent suddenly, "I forgot something to go on that train. Just go ahead; I'll turn the spring latch on the door so no one will interrupt you."

Forsdyke went out, and the door was closed and locked behind him. Dash had no thought of the natural construction that could be placed upon his position—endeavoring to open the express company's safe with door closed and locked—by any one who did not understand the matter, and he had no suspicion that the situation had been deliberately planned by Brakewood Forsdyke. He was too much occupied in endeavoring to work the combination to think of these things.

Forsdyke hastened down the platform, and met Kinney, who had just concluded his business at the express car.

"Look here, Kinney," he said, in low tones. "I don't like the way Dykeman has been sticking around my office lately, and asking questions about the express business. I don't say these things because I think there's anything wrong with him, but you know we've got a big pile in the box, and it's well to be careful about everybody. I'm going up town for a few minutes on business. I left Dykeman in the office, and you had better go there at once, and remain until I come back."

"All right, sir. I noticed he's been round a great deal lately, but he's all right, sir," responded Kinney, as he continued on his way.

As the assistant was furnished with a duplicate key to the spring lock on the door of the office, he could enter without having it opened for him.

When the spring lock turned in the door, Dash looked up, expecting to see Forsdyke returning. Kinney entered, closing the door after him, and stood for a moment gazing at the young agent in speechless amazement.

Dash, on seeing who it was, rose to his feet, a flush on his face, occasioned by his bending posture, and threw the key on the top of the safe.

"I give it up; it's too hard for me," he said, as he stepped towards the door.

"Hold on, Mr. Dykeman. What were you trying to do?" interposed Kinney, finding his speech, and placing himself in front of the door, as if to bar the young agent's egress.

"Trying to open that safe; couldn't you see?" replied Dash; and then, like a flash, the whole significance of the situation shot over him. "Mr. Forsdyke said I couldn't open it, and he gave me the key and the combination to try it."

"It doesn't look likely he would do that, Mr. Dykeman, when there's ten thousand dollars in it," observed the assistant skeptically.

"Do you doubt my word?" demanded Dash hotly.

"No, not exactly, but you know—"

"Open that door, and get out of my way!" ordered Dash, burning with indignation.

Kinney hesitated for a moment, and though he was a tall, powerful man, he concluded it was not safe to oppose the athletic and enraged young fellow before him. He opened the door, allowing Dash to pass out, and then stepped over and put the safe key in his pocket.

Dash was boiling with resentment that the assistant should even have had a suspicion that he was doing anything wrong. He did not for a moment dream that he had been intentionally placed in the compromising position, and that Brakewood Forsdyke was playing a deep game. But

he did not relish being placed in a false situation before even Kinney, though he could not blame the latter under the circumstances, and he determined to see Forsdyke at once, that he might be placed right in the matter. He had no doubt the latter would, in a few words, explain satisfactorily the false but natural impression Kinney had received.

But he could not find Forsdyke anywhere about, and it was late in the afternoon when he saw him. Then he met the superintendent's clerk on the platform, as he was apparently just coming from the village.

The latter hastened to meet Dash, and glanced hurriedly and keenly about him before he spoke.

"That's a nice fix you got me in, Forsdyke," began Dash quickly, and still in some excitement. "I was a fool to touch your safe."

"Why, what's the matter, Dykeman?" responded the other, in feigned surprise. "You are as pale as a sheet, as if you had seen a ghost."

"It's worse than that," continued Dash seriously. "While I was working on the combination of your safe, Kinney came in. When I told him you had given me the key and combination, and asked me to open the safe, he doubted my word, and insinuated I was doing something crooked. He even dared to try to prevent my going out; but I tell you, if he hadn't got out of my way, I'd have knocked him into the middle of next week. You *did* tell me to try the safe, didn't you?" and there was determination in Dash's voice, as he looked keenly at the express agent.

"Is that all?" laughed Forsdyke; "of course I did. Don't you worry. I'll make it all right with Mr. Kinney."

"I want you to do it right now, and before me," demanded Dash quickly.

"Be calm, my dear boy; there's nothing to get excited about. Kinney has gone home, and we'll see him first thing in the morning."

"Well, but be sure you do it," responded Dash with a menace in his tones, and not exactly satisfied. "I have half a mind to tell the superintendent all about it," he concluded, and he would have done so, could he have known how different the result was going to be from not having carried out his intention.

"Don't do it, Dykeman," protested Forsdyke hastily and in some alarm; "don't you see how seriously it would reflect on me if the old man learned I had done such a careless thing as to give the combination of the safe to any one while it had that money in it. There's no telling what he might do. I might get my walking papers."

This should have aroused Dash's suspicions that he had not been induced to try to open the safe without a purpose, but it did not.

"All right; I'll say nothing," he replied slowly; "but be sure you make it all right with Kinney before me in the morning," he repeated in determined tones.

"Why, of course, my dear boy; but you seem awfully suspicious," replied Forsdyke tentatively.

"Not at all; but I don't enjoy this thing even to sleep on one night," responded Dash, to the other's evident relief.

Dash started off down the track to go to Mrs. Handiford's, and Forsdyke accompanied him a short distance, then hastened back to his office.

When he entered he found Kinney there. He had deliberately lied to Dash when he told him that the assistant had gone home.

Forsdyke went direct to his desk and shoved his hand into one of the numerous pigeonholes. He felt around in the aperture for a moment, and then a startled look came over his face. He hurriedly examined his pockets, but apparently

with no result, for, turning to Kinney in evident excitement and alarm, he demanded :

"Where is it, Kinney?"

"Where is what, sir?"

"The key to the safe."

"Here it is, sir," and the assistant deliberately pulled the key out of his pocket and put it on the desk.

"You were trying to scare me, Kinney," laughed Forsdyke, with a sickly but assumed smile of relief. "Where did you get it?"

"Do you generally keep it in that pigeon hole?" asked Kinney, before answering the question.

"Yes; there's a false back to it no one knew of but myself till now."

"Are you sure Mr. Dykeman didn't know about it?" continued the assistant.

"Yes—or no; he may have seen me take it from there. Why do you ask?"

"When I came in from the express, after you had gone up town, I found him on his knees before the safe, trying to open it with this key," replied Kinney, and he went on to tell in detail his encounter with Dash.

"That fellow's got the greatest nerve I ever saw!" exclaimed Forsdyke indignantly, when the assistant had finished. "I never gave him the key or the combination and asked him to open it. I'm no such fool."

"Then you really think he would have robbed the safe if I hadn't interrupted him?" observed Kinney, who evidently wished to believe otherwise.

"Of course he would have done so. How can I think otherwise?" replied Forsdyke positively. "As I have said, I haven't liked the way he has stuck around this office. I thought he was up to something, and now I'm sure of it."

"Well, now, it's too bad. I never would have thought it," said Kinney regretfully. "You could have knocked me over with a straw when I saw him before that safe. But hadn't we better tell the superintendent?"

"I don't know but what we had," began Forsdyke reflectively, though he had not the remotest intention of doing so; "but no; if we did, he might believe Dykeman's story, and I'd get blamed for my pains; and, even if he didn't, he would make it uncomfortable for me when he learned that I carelessly left the key in this pigeon hole. I have a plan that will settle Dykeman, and probably put a couple of hundred dollars apiece in our pockets."

"What is it?" asked Kinney, who was of an avaricious nature, though honest.

"Dykeman has brought all this on himself, and ought to suffer. He will no doubt make another attempt on the safe before that money is taken away. Why not let him do it? We will watch for him, and surprise him at it, and we will then be praised. I have no doubt the company will reward us with a couple of hundred or so."

"How could we arrange it?" asked Kinney, though even he felt that it was despicable business to permit a crime to be committed for their own selfish gain, when it could be prevented, and the perpetrator saved.

"I don't suppose he will try it again in the daytime," explained Forsdyke; "and it's more than likely he will come at night—this very night, perhaps. I've got a cot in my room which you can bring down to sleep on in the back room, and if he should come you will be sure to hear him."

"All right," agreed Kinney, though he did not feel exactly right about the matter.

"You had better go get it now," suggested Forsdyke.

Kinney left the office to obtain the cot, and he had hardly closed the door after him when Forsdyke hurriedly opened

the safe and transferred several packages of money to the inside pocket of his coat. He carefully closed the safe door, but it was a significant fact that he did not lock it again. He then put all but two of the packages he had abstracted from the safe into the pigeon hole with the false back.

When the assistant had returned, and deposited the cot in the back room, Forsdyke said :

"Kinney, I have left the key to the safe in the pigeon hole, where Dykeman will be sure to look for it;" but the assertion was a falsehood, for the key was then in his own pocket.

Forsdyke went immediately to his own room, while Kinney remained in the office, and three hours later the latter lay down on the cot in the back room, determined to keep one eye open for the expected burglarious visitor.

The watcher was not, of course, disturbed during the night, but nevertheless, the next morning there was four thousand dollars missing from the safe.

Brakewood Forsdyke evidently had not intended to "make it all right" for Dash with Kinney in the morning.

#### CHAPTER XLI.

IN WHICH DASH FINDS HE IS THE VICTIM OF A VILE PLOT, AND HAS ANOTHER ENCOUNTER WITH THE TRAIN ROBBERS.

**B**RAKEWOOD FORSDYKE was up unusually early the next morning, and he went immediately to his office. Dash rose some minutes later, and walked over to his breakfast, at which he spent half an hour, but it was long enough for some startling developments to take place at the station.

Forsdyke found Kinney awake, and sitting up in a chair.

"He didn't come, and our plan didn't work, did it?" greeted the express agent.

"No, sir; there didn't a soul come near the office," replied the assistant.

"Never mind; he will turn up, sure, sooner or later," said Forsdyke confidently; "and we'll repeat the programme tonight."

He stepped over and put his hand into the pigeon hole, where the safe key had been kept, as if to get it, though he already had it in his hand.

Then he inserted it in the safe, and started to make the combination with the dial. The first turn he gave to the knob threw the bolts, and the door swung open.

With well feigned astonishment and excitement, Forsdyke staggered backward and to his feet.

"Good gracious, Kinney, the safe is open," he cried; and the assistant, who had been watching him, looked on in amazement.

"He must have blundered upon the combination, after all, and had already opened the safe when I interrupted him last evening," suggested Kinney.

"And maybe he has already helped himself," added Forsdyke, returning to the safe, and hurriedly pulling out a bundle of bank bills and greenbacks done up in packages of even amounts.

He quickly ran his fingers over them, and then repeated the operation, as if to be sure.

"Great Scott, Kinney, there's four thousand dollars missing!" he cried, in an agitated voice, when he had completed the second count.

"Then he had already been in the safe when I surprised him, and was closing the door to return the key to the place where he found it," said Kinney, with a pale face.

"No doubt about it," cried the superintendent's clerk. "Oh, why didn't I examine the safe last evening, after you

told me about Dykeman being at it. We'll have to tell the old man now, sure, and that pretty quick, for Dykeman may have skipped. Have you seen Mr. Layard? He was to have come in on No. 5 at six o'clock this morning."

Before Kinney could answer, the door was opened, and a gentleman with gray hair, but a young looking face, entered. It was division superintendent Layard, and the expression on the faces of his clerk and his assistant told him something unusual had happened.

"What is the matter, Forsdyke?" he asked, glancing from one to the other.

"We have just found the safe open, and four thousand dollars of that money gone, sir," replied Forsdyke, in a trembling voice which was not assumed.

"How did that happen? Have you any idea who did it?"

"Yes, sir; we have no doubt in the world but that it was Dash Dykeman."

"You speak positively. Surely there must be some mistake. I would sooner believe anybody else on the road was a thief than he," said the division superintendent, who was familiar with Dash's record on the road, and had taken quite a fancy to the young railroader.

"I know it's a disagreeable thing to believe, Mr. Layard," answered Forsdyke, with assumed regret, "but when you hear what Kinney has to say, you will understand why I am so positive."

He thereupon told how he had left Dash in his office, making no mention, of course, of how he had got the young agent to work on the safe, and then Kinney added in detail what he had observed immediately after. Forsdyke concluded by telling how they had arranged to catch Dash (?) in the act, and about the discovery of the safe being open a few minutes before.

"You should have told me of this without doing anything of the kind," cried the superintendent, in stern, reproving tones; "but it has got to be looked into, and at once. Send for Dykeman."

Meanwhile, as soon as Dash had finished his breakfast, he hastened to the depot, intent only on getting Forsdyke and Kinney together, and making the former tell that he had given him, Dash, the key and combination to the safe, and asked him to try to open it. He was very much worried about the affair, and had hardly slept all night. He entered the superintendent's office just as Kinney was starting out to find him.

Dash was about to greet the superintendent pleasantly, when he noticed the official's grave looks, and the significant glances of the others, and he knew there was something wrong. He then looked from one to the other in silence.

"Dykeman," began the superintendent, closing and locking the door, no doubt to avoid interruption from without, "I am very much pained to announce that the express company's safe has been robbed of four thousand dollars, and the evidence is that you know something about it."

Though Dash had been fearful of the result of his foolish act of tampering with the safe, this announcement came as a bombshell. He stood for a moment as if paralyzed, various emotions, astonishment, bewilderment, grief, and finally indignation, following each other quickly over his features, but there were no signs of guilt.

"You will have to submit to yourself and your room and office being searched," concluded the superintendent.

These last words stung Dash to the intense reality of his horrible and humiliating position, and he recovered his speech with difficulty.

"Who dares to give such evidence?" he demanded hoarsely. "Is it you, Kinney?" turning fiercely upon,

"And Mr. Forsdyke," replied Kinney, in a troubled voice, and nodding affirmatively.

"Is it because you saw me trying to open the safe last evening?" continued Dash, trying to calm himself.

"You must admit it was a very suspicious position I found you in, sir," replied the assistant, reluctantly.

"Well, didn't I tell you Forsdyke had given me the key and combination, and asked me to see if I couldn't open it?" blazed forth Dash. "I repeat it now, in the presence of Forsdyke, and he won't dare to deny it."

Forsdyke was as pale as a corpse, but he screwed up his courage, and steadied his trembling voice enough to say: "I never did anything of the kind. It doesn't look reasonable——"

Dash was dumfounded, and he never let the express agent complete the sentence he had started on. He sprang forward, balanced on his toes, and launched a terrible blow with his right fist straight at Forsdyke's head. The latter received the blow square on his forehead, and went crashing in a heap to the floor.

Dash now realized that he was the victim of a skillfully laid plot to ruin him, and that Forsdyke was at the bottom of it. He would have followed up his onslaught, had not the superintendent detained him. Forsdyke was not seriously injured, or even rendered insensible, and he rose painfully to his feet, with his handkerchief pressed to his forehead.

"There's a better way to settle this matter than with your fists, Dykeman, which do not explain things at all," said the official, not unkindly; and then he thought to himself:

"There's something decidedly wrong here; there's a daky in this woodpile we haven't found yet. No guilty person ever acted as Dykeman does."

"All right, Mr. Layard," responded Dash, desisting from further hostilities. "I will do just as you say."

"Then give me all of your keys, both to the office and anything that is locked in your room."

Dash did so, and after Mr. Layard had examined everything in the agent's office, the trio followed him to the young railroader's room over the station.

There was nothing there that was locked but Dash's trunk, which was quickly opened and examined by Mr. Layard. Kinney rummaged about the apartment, while Forsdyke investigated a small closet at one end. Finally, when the latter reached up and swept his hand along a shelf in the closet that had apparently nothing on it, a soft package was dislodged, and fell to the floor. Apparently without noticing it, Forsdyke raised himself, by grasping the edge of the shelf, and glanced all over the support, as if he expected to find something more, and an odd expression of perplexity and amazement came over his face when it failed to appear. He then dropped to his feet, and picking up the package, handed it to Mr. Layard.

Dash was thunderstruck, and giving Forsdyke one look, he sank on his bed, white and fairly gasping.

Mr. Layard examined the package, and found it was money, and plainly marked \$300. on the band encircling the bills.

"How do you account for this, Dykeman?" he demanded.

"I don't know anything about it, sir; I never put it there."

The young man spoke with an earnestness that carried conviction with it, and gazed into the superintendent's face with clear and steady eyes. The latter could not believe he was a thief any more than that he himself was one.

"Do you know where the balance of the money is, Dykeman?" asked Mr. Layard, merely as a matter of form.

"No more than you do, sir," was the reply.

A searching investigation was made, but the balance of the money could not be found anywhere. Superintendent Layard questioned Dash over and over again, but of course could learn nothing more than the latter had already told.

"This is a case that will have to be turned over to the law," concluded the superintendent, with regret; "but if you will give me your word, Dykeman, that you will not leave here, I will see that you are not taken into custody, and will give my bond for your appearance when you are needed."

"Thank you," murmured Dash, gratefully and considerably relieved; "I will stay right here, and be ready to answer at any time."

"Do not say anything about this matter to anybody," admonished Mr. Layard, turning to Forsdyke and Kinney. "I will see the proper officers and take their advice."

After the others had gone, Dash straightened up his room and repacked his trunk. He then began his duties of the day, though he did everything in a mechanical sort of way, and was so stunned by the revelations of the morning that he seemed to move about as if in a dream. The whole thing was like a horrible nightmare, from which he could not convince himself he would not awake. He was astounded at Forsdyke's villainy, and wondered why the latter should do such a thing. The express agent was undoubtedly wholly responsible for the vile plot, and Kinney was only his innocent tool.

As Dash thought of the former, his heart throbbed, and his blood boiled with indignation and anger. It was well that Forsdyke kept out of the young agent's way that day, or he might have received an addition to the contusion on his forehead, in spite of Dash's promise to the superintendent to refrain from pugilistic methods to secure satisfaction.

While this dark cloud was hovering over Dash's prospects, another was gathering in nature about him.

The day had been unusually hot and sultry. Not a breath of air had stirred all day along, and there was a leaden haze covering the whole sky. There was an oppressive quietness in the very air that seemed to make dumb animals droop, and to cause the leaves to hang motionless and wilted looking upon the trees. The least sound seemed to be heard with singular distinctness remarkable distances, and the telegraph wires gave forth a dull moaning and vibrating noise. Weather-wise travelers, who took the train that day shook their heads and predicted a storm of unusual violence. The unprecedented calm and sultriness certainly seemed to presage a warring of the elements.

Dash had just finished making his reports, which closed his day's work, and was about starting to supper, when word was brought that the night operator was sick and could not go on duty that night.

As the young agent could not spare his day operator, he agreed with the latter that they should divide the night between them—the day man to work till midnight and Dash the balance of the trick till morning, so both could be on duty the next day. If the night operator was no better in the morning, they could arrange to have a man sent down in time to take his place the next night.

Dash had no inclination to go down to Mrs. Handiford's to see Dorothy that evening, though he felt more like making a confidant of her in his trouble than any one else; but as it was necessary that he should get as much rest and sleep as possible before relieving the day operator at twelve o'clock, he decided it was best not to make a call, and sought his bed at an early hour.

There was decided evidence of an approaching storm when he retired. He slept little, for the night was very close and warm, and he was oppressed with anxious thoughts as to the outcome of the serious suspicions that had been directed against him in the safe robbery.

When the operator called him, Dash was easily awakened, and was quickly down in the office. The former went immediately home and to bed.

The approaching storm had not yet burst, though the lightning was flashing frequently, and the rolling thunder was getting louder. The electric fluid played in sizzling sparks about the switchboard above the operator's table at each flash of lightning, the wind moaned without, and the wires running into the office over the window gave forth a metallic humming like a distant chorus of steam whistles.

Dash took no notice of these things, as he again went over everything concerning the safe robbery, and incidentally listened to what was being said on the ticking instrument before him.

An hour passed, and the only change in the situation was the nearer approach of the warring elements.

Then there came a blinding flash of lightning and a deafening peal of thunder, and Dash heard the latch to the office door at his back raised as if some one was entering. The thought occurred to him that it was somebody who had come to the depot early for the two o'clock night express.

Dash turned his head leisurely to see who it was. Then he gave a start of amazement at what he saw and tried to spring to his feet.

A tall man dressed in black, with a slouch hat and a half mask, stood just inside the door with a Colt's revolver pointed straight at the young agent's head.

"Down, young fellow, or I'll blow the top of your head off! Hands up!" came the command in hoarse, stern tones.

Dash sank back in his chair and raised his hands into the air, though they trembled and swayed as badly as the trees outside in the storm. He instantly decided that the fellow was after the remaining six thousand dollars in Forsdyke's safe.

Two more men, also masked, then came in, and in a moment Dash was bound hand and foot and a gag forced into his mouth. The young agent's heart beat fast with excitement as his eyes took in every movement of the robbers. After he had been secured, one of them removed the telegraph keys from the instruments, no doubt to prevent Dash's calling for assistance, but the latter wondered how they expected him to do it when his hands and feet were confined.

Suddenly the man who had first come in uttered an imprecation, and, stepping over, gazed intently into Dash's face.

"It's him, as sure as shooting, boys," he cried, with cruel satisfaction; "the same young fellow that spoiled our game at the Cut. But he'll never have another chance to block us, for I'm going to settle him right now."

Dash's heart came up into his throat, and a chill shot over him, as he recognized the speaker as the one who had been addressed as Orloff in the attempted train robbery at Big Rock Cut. He felt the urgent necessity of speaking, but the cruel gag effectually kept him silent; and it is doubtful if he could have uttered a word without it, he was so paralyzed with horror.

The outlaw deliberately raised his pistol on a line with the young agent's head, and Dash watched him with fascinated gaze, feeling that his time had undoubtedly come. The robber pressed the trigger, but there was no report—only the click of the hammer. It had missed fire.

The reaction was so sudden that Dash swooned. With another imprecation, the marauder cocked his revolver, and again pointed it at the helpless and insensible agent's head. It would certainly be a miracle if the weapon missed fire a second time.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### DOROTHY PROVES HERSELF A HEROINE.

AS Dorothy Orloff was a participator in some of the exciting and perilous events that occurred on the night of the memorable storm that passed over Madrid, and, as what she did has an important bearing on our story, we must take the reader back to Mrs. Handiford's cottage on the evening of the day that Dash passed in such a maze.

After supper, Mrs. Handiford had her man of all work, Needham, who was called Need for short, hitch up the horse to the top buggy, and immediately started to the village by the country road, with the hired man to drive for her. She would never have ventured to make the journey at that hour in the evening, and in the face of a gathering storm, had it not seemed a case of necessity. A neighbor had stopped late in the afternoon, on her way home, and brought the intelligence from the village that a near and dear friend of Mrs. Handiford's was not expected to live, and had expressed a wish to see her.

As the days were long, and she would have at least an hour between six o'clock and dusk to make her visit, Mrs. Handiford felt reasonably sure of returning before night-fall.

As Need was the only member of the stronger sex about the place, and in fact the only person there beside the aunt and niece, Dorothy was left alone. It was not the first time the young girl had been left so, and she had no fears. Besides, she felt assured that her aunt would return, or that Dash would call, as had been his habit, before night came on.

But the gathering clouds and flashes of lightning made her anxious that neither should get caught in the storm.

Darkness came sooner than usual, occasioned by the black storm clouds, and no one arrived at the cottage. Dorothy felt disappointed first at the non appearance of the young agent, and then, as time passed, till it was nearly nine o'clock, she became apprehensive that something might have happened to her aunt. Dash, she knew, might have been kept away by some unexpected business, but she could not understand the delay in the return of her aunt.

Dorothy did not consider herself in her anxiety about the absent member of the family—it never occurred to her that there was anything to be afraid of. She was not a timid girl, the darkness had no terrors for her, and the gathering storm was to her only a magnificent spectacle.

She sat on the front piazza, watching the vivid flashes, still low down near the horizon, and the rolling clouds marshaling themselves into battle array. She watched them closely, but her only feeling, besides that of awe, was one of apprehension that the contest would begin while her aunt was on the way home.

As the minutes passed, and the storm approached nearer, Dorothy became decidedly worried and anxious about her relative. She went to the sitting room, where there was a light, and tried to read a book, but she could not fix her mind on anything. Then, in spite of her anxiety, the young girl became very sleepy.

She lay down on the lounge, promising herself she would not go to sleep—in fact, telling herself she *couldn't* go to sleep, and, if her aunt did not come very soon, she would start out afoot, on the road to the village, to find her.

These determinations were made with energy, and in full faith, but in a few minutes they faded away from her mind, her eyes closed, and she had gone to sleep.

The next thing Dorothy knew, there was a crashing, rolling report that almost deafened her, and she found herself standing upright in the sitting room, with shaking limbs and startled eyes. It was the same terrific clap of thunder that had ushered in the masked robber at the station, and was the letting loose of the full fury of the long gathering storm.

When she realized what had startled her, Dorothy regained most of her self possession, and felt considerably mortified that she had allowed herself to go to sleep, even for a few minutes. She glanced toward the clock on the mantel shelf. *Its hands pointed to one o'clock, and she had slept four hours!*

With a startled exclamation she sprang closer to the time-piece, as if doubting the evidence of her own eyes.

One o'clock and her aunt not there! Where could she be? "Aunty! Aunty! Aunt Ellen!" she cried, as she started for the front door, but there was no response, and only the rolling thunder and shrieking air broke the silence.

Dorothy pushed open the door, and closed it after her, to keep the rushing air from blowing out the lamp. Then she struggled to one of the posts that supported the veranda, and clinging to it, gazed out upon the wreck and devastation the storm was carrying with it.

The shallow stream that flowed around the foot of the hill had become a raging torrent. Huge limbs of trees were borne by the wind through the flying sheets of rain, and tremendous crashes now and then were heard, as some giant of the forest was uprooted and felled to the ground.

Mrs. Handiford's cottage was partially protected from the wind by the hill on the side of which it stood, and there were no trees near enough to do it damage by being blown down. Beyond the savage gusts which occasionally shook it, it did not appear to be in any danger.

Dorothy was about to return to the shelter of the cottage, when, amid the yelling of the wind, the swish of the falling flood, and the cannonade of thunder, she heard distinctly the shrill clang of an engine bell.

It was a light engine, or pilot, which had been sent out from the end of the division, to feel the way over the numerous bridges and trestles, to insure the safety of the express train that followed.

A moment later, and by the blazing flashes of light, she saw the engine creep out upon the South Bridge. Then there was a crash of rending timbers, the "kerchung" of a heavy engine's plunge into the angry flood, and the wild hissing of the water upon the hot boiler.

No human cry arose above these noises, and that of the shrieking tempest, but it did not need these to tell Dorothy that there were brave men on that engine, and that if they escaped instant death in that terrible plunge they might need assistance.

Without waiting to think how her frail strength could be of any avail amid the warring elements, she flew out into the storm, down the hill, and to the spot nearest to where the engine had gone into the water.

She saw two men dead, and another apparently uninjured, but so stranded among the driftwood and debris of the fallen bridge as to be out of her reach. But she caught up the long slender limb of a tree, which had few branches, and extended it, when there came a favoring flash of light, out towards the struggling man. He grasped it, and with her assistance, was pulled ashore.

But the poor fellow sank to the ground, either overcome



with his exertions, or suffering from some serious injury. As soon as Dorothy could gather courage, she approached him, and discovered when she knelt at his side, that he was a negro.

He looked up at her, rolling his eyes till the whites showed in a startling manner.

"Don' be fraid, missis; de Lord done sent you, I knows he did," gasped the fellow, as if in pain. "I'se hurt bad in yere, an' I ain't goin' for to live," he continued, as he placed his hand high up on his abdomen, and then let it travel to an opening in his shirt, from which he drew something; "but the lord done sent you missis, so this nigger can fess an' go to glory. I'se Sam, I is—Black Sam; all de railroad boys knows Black Sam. My ole mammy, Liza, works roun' to the station at Madrid, an' keeps de gen'lemen's rooms. When I war in Madrid ebenin' afore last, she asked me for to go over an' see ef I could fin' her specs in Mr. Dyke-man's room, which war left open. I found 'em, an' war just goin' outwhen I hearn some one a comin' up de steps. I got behin' the open door, for I feared whoever it mought be, mightn't believe what Black Sam war there for. I see Mr. Forsdyke, the superintendent's clerk, come in, an' arter lookin' 'bout curious, put somethin' on the top shelf of the closet. When he done gone, I looked on the shelf an' foun' two passels o' bills like this 'ere one. I only took one, leavin' 'tother one there, an' here 'tis."

The speaker stopped, completely exhausted by this long speech, and extended the package in his hand to Dorothy.

The latter was so filled with pity and horror at the situation that she hardly realized the significance of the information she had just received, and mechanically took the dark bundle which she thrust into the bosom of her dress.

Then, like a flash she thought of the express that was due at Madrid at two o'clock, and the urgent necessity of warning it of the fallen bridge occurred to her.

Could she reach the Madrid station, and in time for the operator to get word to the express at the first station the other side of the South Bridge? But stay. Could she leave the poor, dying negro lying at her feet?

It would be better to leave him to his fate, she thought, than that many others should perish on the express, but fortunately the alternative was not left to her to decide.

"Good by, missis, I'se goin'," gasped the colored victim and Dorothy knew, from the horrid rattle in his throat, as he completed his words, that he had drawn his last breath.

Sick and faint she turned away, but still determined to make an effort to warn the express of the danger in its path.

All about her were the roaring waters, tearing up great trees by the roots and hurling them into the foaming cataract. The hideous wind yelled about the brave young girl and seemed to dare her to proceed.

She crept along in the darkness, buffeting the whirling cyclone and driving rain, her only guide the livid flashes that flared about her every moment, and at last reached the High Bridge trestle.

To cross this single tracked elevated bridge required the steadiest of nerves, even in the daytime, when all was peace and sunshine around. How could she cross it now, in that fearful darkness, by the vivid flashes of lightning that came only to blind her? What was there for her but death should she lose her footing, or be hurled from the structure by the howling wind?

Then the thought of the express again and its load of human lives. Death would be the penalty of her cowardice if she should not make the effort. This thought infused new courage in her, for she could not be a coward with so much at stake.

Down on her knees the brave young girl fell, determined to do her duty or die. Down on her hands and knees she went, and began the passage of the horrid chasm, straining her ears to hear, amidst the noise of the tempest, the whistle and roar of the flying express train.

(To be continued.)

## ON STEEDS OF STEEL.\*

BY MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

I ALLOWED Steve and Mac to go on ahead, following our fair guide, while I lingered on the porch to find out what was the matter with Dinsmore.

"What's struck you, Hugh?" I demanded, catching him by the arm as he sprang up on the piazza and made a dart for the door.

"Why, I've just found——" he began, then cut himself short, shut his lips for an instant, to open them again and say in quite a different tone: "You're awfully hungry, aren't you, Will?"

"Yes, of course I am," I answered. "But what's that got to do with your freakish action? Have you discovered that all the food here is poisoned, or what?"

"No, no," he laughed. "Just let it remain—'what?' till after we've had our lunch, or whatever it is that fickle minded lady of the ironing board is going to give us. Take my word for it, the thing will keep, but I'm afraid if I spring it on you now you won't give us time to get the inner man recuperated."

And this was all I could get out of him. We heard the other fellows talking, and found our way to the dining room by the sound of their voices, and the next half hour was spent in rapturous enjoyment of a repast, plain in itself, but which the sauce of our hunger flavored most deliciously. Miss Milly and her mother insisted on waiting upon us, although we declared that we could help ourselves just as well, and from the talk we found out that the name of the family was Tucker, and that the husband and father was away at the county seat on some law business.

"Oh, Mrs. Tucker," burst forth Mac, as he pushed his plate for a second slice of gingerbread, "you told us something about a tin peddler who was here the other day. What sort of a looking fellow was he? Young, slim, and with a—swell way of talking?"

"Well, he was young, 'bout twenty, I should say," she answered, "an' purty thin, but I'd know as I understand what you mean by swell talk. He was smooth spoken enough, though, n' I declare for it I can't see what sent a bright young man like him out on the road with a pack of tinware tied to his back."

"The very same fellow we met!" exclaimed Mac, as well as he could articulate for the big piece of cake he held in his mouth. "Depend on it, boys, there's some mystery about him."

Miss Milly opened her eyes, and was, I am sure, about to inquire for particulars, when Hugh sprang up, watch in hand.

"It's half past two," he said, "and, though I know it isn't polite, Mrs. Tucker, to eat and run, still I have an announcement to make which will be an all sufficient excuse for our taking a speedy departure. Fellows, when I leaned

\*Begun in No. 443 of THE ARGOSY.

my bike against the sides of the house, I smelt fresh paint. Mrs. Tucker, am I not right?"

"Yes, we just got rid o' the painters a week ago," replied the lady addressed, looking mystified, as indeed we all did, although I thought I began to see at what Dinsmore was driving.

"And was it done over in the same color?" went on Hugh.

"Laws, no. Milly would have it brown, though her father and I both stuck out for the white and green shutters that it'd been these fifty years."

"There, fellows," concluded Hugh, turning to us, "just as I thought. Mr. Peabody Smart has suffered unjustly in our minds, and Steve's bicycle is undoubtedly awaiting him further up the road."

"And you knew this half an hour ago?" exclaimed Mac, springing to his feet. "Why didn't you tell us?"

"Well, I don't *know* it now," smiled Hugh. "It's simply a theory; and then we were all hungry, and I knew we couldn't do justice to Mrs. Tucker's hospitality if I spoke of it before."

We all thought Hugh's theory a pretty good one, although perhaps the thought had the wish for its father, and we were of course eager to be off. It seemed quite natural that a bridegroom who was in danger of being late for the ceremony should forget the fact that a house by the wayside had been painted a different color, if indeed he had ever noticed it.

"Why, I could have told you where that brown house is if you had asked me about it!" exclaimed Miss Milly. "It's the Withburnes'. I'm going to drive past it this afternoon on my way to take my music lesson."

"Why, yes, Milly, to be sure," blurted out Mrs. Tucker, "you might as well take one of the young gentlemen in the buggy along with you"—here four hearts began to beat very rapidly—"the one that hasn't got anything to ride" (here three of those hearts felt their high beats fall with sickening thuds.)

So Steve was the lucky one, and after we had thanked Mrs. Tucker our prettiest for the handsome manner in which she had come around (although, of course, we didn't so express it) we all adjourned to the stable, to help Miss Milly harness up, for the man was away with Mr. Tucker.

"How far is it to the Withburnes'?" I asked, as we were about ready to start.

"About two miles, I should say," replied the young lady, and then Steve, with a bearing face, took his seat beside her in the trim buggy, and we went off for our machines.

"You don't raise any dust, so you'd better go ahead," suggested Miss Milly.

In this order then we set out on another stage of our tour, feeling in finer spirits than at any time during the trip, for every now and then one of us would drop back to chat with our fair guide in the buggy, who was as bright as she was pretty.

"You'll have to stay ahead for a little way now," she laughed presently, while I was making one of these visits. "The road gets sandy except for the wagon track. Then look out for the brown house on the left."

So I bent to the pedals and joined the others.

"This is the sort of an adventure to have," remarked Mac.

"I dare say Steve thinks so," returned Hugh. "But come, fellows, what do you say to a dash?"

We all said "yes," and were soon flying on ahead. Of course by this means we covered the ground very rapidly, and so it wasn't long before Mac called out that he saw a brown house.

"Let's wait here, then," I suggested, putting on the brake. "We'd better all go in together, and here's a fine place to sit under the trees in that orchard."

So we made a dismount, and, leaning our machines against the fence, crawled under the bars ourselves and prepared to take things easy on the soft turf until the buggy should appear upon the scene. The orchard evidently belonged to the brown house which was still some little distance off, so that we could not as yet determine whether the wedding festivities were still in full blast or not.

"Seems to me they're taking things mighty easy back there," finally remarked Hugh, pulling out his watch and announcing that it was quarter to four.

"Oh, I suppose Steve's in no hurry to have the ride at an end," I rejoined laughingly. "Still, it does seem queer they don't turn up."

It seemed queerer still when another fifteen minutes went by, and still no sign of the bay mare, the red wheeled buggy, the pretty girl and the missing Challenger.

We left our seats on the grass to mount the fence rails and peer down the road anxiously; but the only vehicles that hove in sight were a hay wagon and a buggy with black wheels, with an old lady for driver.

"Well, this a pretty state of things," muttered Hugh. "Of course there is no use to speak of the dreadful thought that suggests itself."

"Fancy having to wire Miss West that her beloved nephew had eloped with a pretty farmer's daughter," and I laughed till I realized that we had been waiting three quarters of an hour. I sobered down at once, and, slipping from the fence on the road side, added: "Something must have happened. We'd better go back and see."

"All right," rejoined Hugh. "Boots and saddles it is."

We mounted our wheels and ran back over our course, expecting to come up with the missing buggy at every turn. But we kept on and on till finally we reached the Tucker place, and no sign of buggy, Steve, or Miss Milly rewarded our search. It was inexplicable. There were no cross roads, and it seemed just as if the earth had opened and swallowed up the entire turnout.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### I FIND A CLEW.

"WELL, I'll be jam jiggered!" exclaimed Hugh, as we all dismounted in front of the Tucker place.

"What on earth could those two have done with themselves?"

"Perhaps Miss Milly forgot something and they came back here after it," suggested Mac.

"We'll go right in and find out," I returned, and led the way around to the kitchen door.

Mrs. Tucker was ironing just as she had been when we first presented ourselves to her notice. I cleared my throat to attract her attention and she looked up with a start.

"For the land's sake; you back again!" she exclaimed, coming forward to open the screen door. "Couldn't you find the bicycle?"

"We've lost the rider of it now," I answered. "We rode on a head a way, and when we came in sight of the brown house sat down to wait till the buggy came along; but it didn't come, and we haven't seen it anywhere on the road. We thought your daughter might have driven back here after something she'd forgotten."

"No; she ain't here," and Mrs. Tucker peered out anxiously over our heads towards the barn. "But come in an' tell me all about it while I go on with my ironin'. You're sure you didn't pass 'em on the road."

"Perfectly," I replied. "We couldn't very well do that when we turned back just on purpose to meet them. Isn't there any place on the way you can think of where your daughter might have stopped?"

"N-n-o," was the reply, as Mrs. Tucker put down her iron for a minute and placed one finger under her chin in an attitude of deep thought. "The Barnwells are away; they've got the mumps at the Craddicks', and then Milly wouldn't have stopped any way; she hadn't more'n just time to get to her music teacher's."

"But where *are* they, then?" I persisted. "There aren't any short cuts they could have taken, are there?"

Mrs. Tucker shook her head as she resumed her ironing with some lines hardening about her mouth that I didn't like to see.

"If you can suggest any place where we could look, Mrs. Tucker," began Mac, "we—"

"I can't; I'm clean beat out," and dropping her iron on the little stand with a bang, the poor lady sank down on one of the hard chairs with a sort of moan.

"Don't worry," I interposed at this point, trying to think of the most comforting thing to say. "If there'd been an accident there'd be certain to have been some traces of it on the road we'd have seen."

"Accident!" Mrs. Tucker's accent was almost scornful, and she lifted her head to glance at me with a most peculiar look.

Then nobody said a word for as much as a minute, it seemed to me, and the ticking of the clock on the shelf over my head reminded me of stories I had read, where it says "the silence was broken only by the sound of the clock telling off the fatal minutes," or something like that.

I felt terribly uncomfortable, for it was now as clear to me as if she had said it in so many words that Mrs. Tucker believed Steve had eloped with Miss Milly. Of course the idea of such a thing was perfectly ridiculous; but I remembered that there had been items in the papers lately about girls marrying hotel waiters and running off with their fathers' coachmen.

"Perhaps *we* took the wrong road."

Hugh's voice broke the quiet so suddenly that we all started.

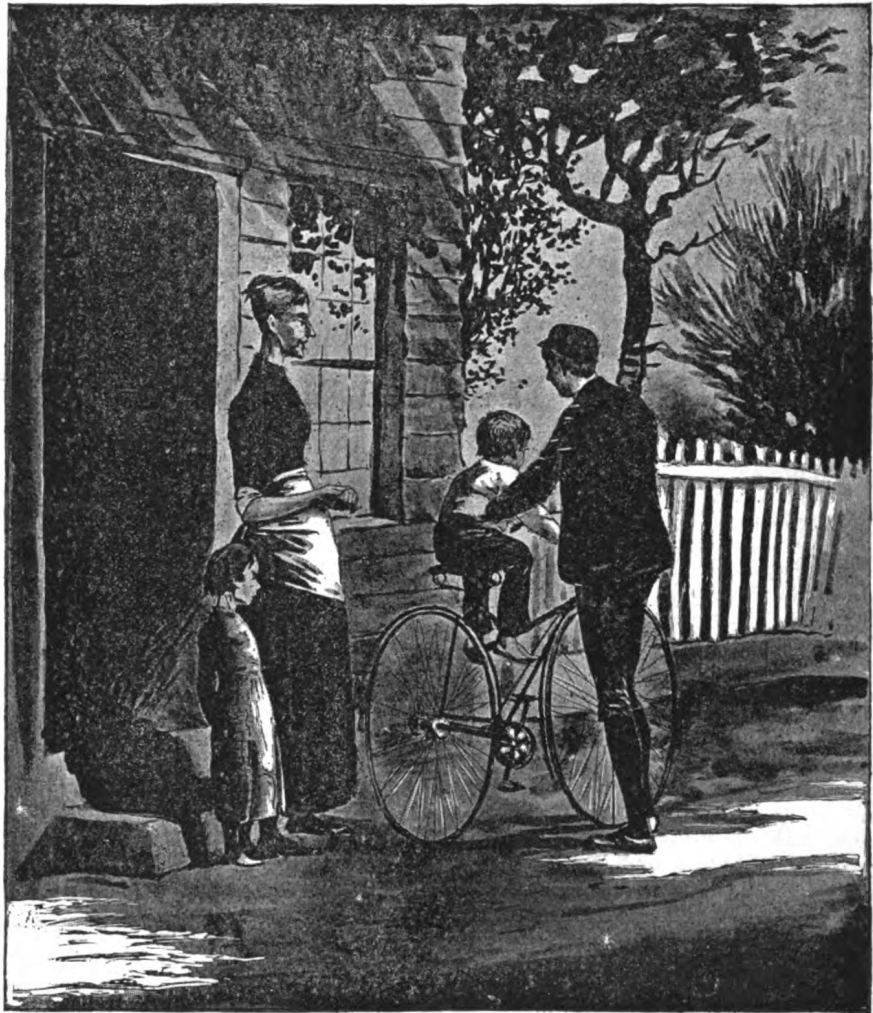
"We couldn't do that," I returned quickly, "when there was only one road to take." Then I bit my tongue for saying that which would only apparently confirm Mrs. Tucker in her suspicions.

"Can't we look somewhere?" Mac again wanted to know. "Those places you mentioned a while ago? It is possible

they stopped there. If you will describe the houses, Mrs. Tucker, I will ride on and inquire."

"Yes," I hastily added, welcoming any idea that would result in action; "we can all go."

"Well, then," said Milly's mother, rousing herself, "the Barnwells' is on this side of the road, just after you come to the first gully."



I PICKED HIM UP AND PLACED HIM ASTRIDE THE SADDLE.

"I'll do that!" I exclaimed, and was out tearing around the house towards my machine before any of the others could stop me.

I heaved a sigh of relief that I knew was only temporary as I skimmed over the road on my steed of steel. It had been terrible—sitting in that kitchen, with Mrs. Tucker thinking all sorts of horrible things about a member of our club.

But now I laughed as I recalled the situation. Steve Osborn was the very last fellow anybody who knew him at all would accuse of eloping. Why, the notion of such a thing was preposterous.

"And now for the house near the gully," I told myself, interrupting these reflections which went round and round,

always arriving at the same starting point like the horses in a merry go round.

Yes; there it was—a long, low structure, seeming quite insignificant beside the group of barns and outbuildings that flanked it on either side. I turned in at the lane and rode swiftly up to the kitchen door, scattering chickens and ducks right and left. They raised a great clatter on making their escape, and when I threw myself from the saddle, a Scotch terrier puppy, who had been snoozing on the doorstep, set up a terrific barking and snapped at my heels in a way that would have caused me to take to them had he been several sizes larger.

There was no need to knock, for by this time a woman, with unkempt hair and crossed eyes, and with two small children peeping fearfully from behind her skirts, had opened the door and was calling off the dog.

I politely doffed my cap and inquired if I was addressing the lady of the house.

"Ya-as. Who be ye?"

Not thinking it necessary to present my card under the circumstances, I ignored the question and proceeded:

"Do you know Miss Milly Tucker?" I asked.

"Ya-as; and a master purty girl she be."

"Has she been here this afternoon?" I went on.

"Y-a-s; she has."

"When—where did she go, and what did she say?"

I poured out all these questions in a torrent, letting my wheel drop to the ground in my excitement.

"Laws a massy! what did ye say?" demanded the woman, putting her hand up to her ear and stepping back so quickly that she almost knocked down the two urchins behind her.

"When was she here?" I repeated, trying to put a curb on my impatience.

"Don't know prezactly. Must a-been about an hour ago. Ye see, I had to leave everythin' 'n run over ter Sarah's. She was tuk sudden with one o' them spells she's had every summer since she went to the Centyannual. But she will go out doors without her sunbunnet, potterin' 'round about the milk an' things, an' I tell her she must expect to be stricken if she won't take more keer on herself."

By this time I was fairly dancing from one foot to the other. What did I care about Sarah's spells? And yet I was afraid to interrupt. It wouldn't do to get the woman grumpy. I eagerly took advantage of the pause for breath.

"Who saw Miss Tucker, then?" I inquired. "And was she alone?"

"Lawsey! what's the matter about Miss Tucker?" the woman now exclaimed. "Who be ye that wants to know all her goin' an' comin's?"

"I'm sent by her mother," I made haste to reply. "She—she wants her home."

"Oh, she does; does she? Well, then, as I was sayin', I was over ter Sarah's when she come, 'n all I know 'bout it is that Ichabod here told me Miss Milly 'd been here."

"And where is Ichabod?" I inquired.

"Here he is;" and reaching one long arm out behind her, the woman took one of the shock headed youngsters by the ear and pulled him round into full view. He looked to be about six, had signs of mud pie all over his person and apparently not two ideas in his head.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

"HERE'S an encouraging prospect," I said to myself, gazing at the small boy who had now buried his shock head in the folds of his mother's dress. "But here goes."

"Ichabod." I called out, "come now, tell me please where Miss Tucker went when she left here."

No answer; the shock head only went deeper into the calico dress. But at this point the owner of the dress took a hand in.

"Come, speak up, Icha," she said, suddenly putting down her hands to twist the small boy around by the shoulders until he stood facing me. He hung his head, to be sure, but then a top view of this was more hopeful than a back one had been.

I repeated my question, and got a shake of the yellow crop for my response.

"What does that mean?" I went on, quickly taking advantage of this relenting mood.

Another shake of the head.

"Was there a fellow dressed like me with her?" I continued, stooping down to touch my knickerbockers.

The shock head nodded two or three times, and I was encouraged to proceed on the yes and no plan.

"Were they in a buggy?"

A shake of the head this time.

"Walking?"

An affirmative nod.

"Whew!" I whistled to myself, "That's queer. Something must have happened."

"Did they say they'd broke down?" I asked.

A shake.

"What did they say?" In my impatience to get at the facts of the case I let my system go, and the consequence was that Ichabod relapsed into one of his bashful spells again, and with his chin sunk on his breast, stood there mute, and kicking morsels of dirt with his toe towards my wheel.

"Can't you get something more out of him?" I said, appealing to Mrs. Barnwell. "I want to know where Miss Tucker went from here."

"Ichabod, tell the gentleman, where the lady went," and in response to the commanding tones the child raised a dirty face, and pointed down the lane to the road. I was just exactly as wise as I had been before.

"What did they stop here for?" I burst out, walking up to the boy, taking his chin in my hands, and lifting his head up till his face looked into mine.

No answer, and conquered, I fell back again on my system, and added: "A drink of water?"

The head was shaken, and then, to my surprise, the lips opened and the boy said: "If I tell yer, will yer give me a ride on that?" pointing to my machine, which still lay in the road where I had dropped it.

"Yes, yes," I replied, scarcely realizing what I was promising. The novelty of hearing the boy speak, together with the expectation that at last I was to learn something definite from him, quite overcame me.

"Well, they wanted pop's horse an' wagon. Now give me a ride," and the urchin made a bounce for my wheel, which he was struggling to pick up when I sprang forward, and seized him by the shoulder.

"Here," I cried, "you haven't earned your ride yet. What did they want your pop's horse and wagon for?"

"To ride in, 'course," was the artful youngster's response. "Now put me on,"

"One minute," I implored, holding my machine with one hand and keeping back from it the impatient Ichabod with the other. "What was the matter with their own carriage."

"Told you they didn't have no carriage," cried the boy, wriggling to get at the saddle of my machine. "Put me on; yer said yer would."

As the urchin gave symptoms of going off into a series of howls if I didn't do as he desired, I picked him up with scant ceremony, placed him astride the saddle, and then, holding him on, started off on a dog trot down the lane. Mrs. Barnwell and the other youngsters bringing up the rear.

"Hi, there, Will, what are you doing?" A shout in a familiar voice from the road, which we had now almost reached, and I looked up to see Hugh dismounting in a hurry.

I don't wonder he thought I needed looking after. I had gone off on most serious business and now for him to find me giving a seven year old youngster a ride on my wheel with an old woman and a little girl, each screaming, tugging on behind me, must have been something of a shock.

At any rate, my idea of the effect the spectacle would make on him was so much in the nature of a shock that I allowed the machine to get away from me, and it went rolling on with Ichabod astride of it, triumphantly independent for a few feet; then it toppled over, making with the kicking boy beneath it an inglorious heap, just at the point where the lane joined the highway.

Mrs. Barnwell and the small girl flew to the rescue of their relative, while I hurried up to meet and explain matters to Hugh.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed again. "What are you doing?"

"Paying the bribes I have offered for information about Steve and Miss Tucker," I answered, adding quickly: "Did you come to tell me they'd turned up?"

"No; I've been over to the Barnwells' to see if the servants knew anything about them," he answered.

"The Barnwells'!" I exclaimed. "Why, this is the Barnwells'."

"It can't be," declared Hugh, "for I've just come from their house—a big place, with nicely laid out grounds around it. You must have misunderstood Mrs. Tucker. She said it was the Craddicks who lived this side of the gully."

"Then this is the place where the children have the mumps!" I exclaimed with a start; "and I've had my arm around that boy's neck all the way down the lane!"

Hugh laughed, and I can't blame him, although I didn't feel very much like joining in his mirth at that moment. I made no attempt to call back the woman and the two children, who had haughtily turned their backs on me and were now walking in solemn procession back to the house.

"Where's Mac?" I asked Hugh, picking up my machine and flicking the dust from the saddle.

"Back at the Tuckers'. He's going to wait to see what reports we bring."

"And what did you go to the Barnwells' for?" I asked, "if you thought I'd gone there?"

"I didn't. We were all mixed, I guess. We supposed you'd gone to the Craddicks', but had no idea you'd make a point of playing nurse to the children when the mumps were around."

I held up my hand entreatingly and asked, "Well, did you learn anything at the Barnwells'?"

"No; what success had you?"

"I only found out enough to make the mystery still more puzzling," and I told of the facts about the efforts to borrow a wagon at the Craddicks'.

"What under the sun did they want a wagon for?" exclaimed Hugh.

We had both leaned our machines against the fence, and had dropped down in the long grass by the roadside.

"I can't imagine," I returned, "unless their buggy had broken down, and in that case we surely would have seen some signs of it, or else they'd have sent the horse home."

"And did the Craddicks lend them a turnout?" Hugh went on.

"No; there was nobody home but the children." I rejoined.

"And then what became of them?"

"That boy told me in the sign language that they came back to the road here," I responded.

"And where are they now, then?" demanded Hugh. "We've been in both directions."

I shrugged my shoulders. I was completely at sea, and didn't know what to think.

"What are we to do next, *captain*?" Hugh placed a slight accent on the term.

"I don't know," I answered gravely. "Really, the situation is getting terribly awkward. What did Mrs. Tucker say before you came away?"

"Nothing. She'd gone back to her ironing again, but I didn't like the way her lips were set, and every once in a while she'd look up at the clock as if counting the minutes before her husband got back."

"You don't think——" I began, and then stopped.

It is one thing to have absurd suppositions harbor themselves in your own mind, but quite another to talk about them to somebody else—even your chum.

"Think what?" asked Hugh, looking at me queerly.

"Oh, nothing much," I answered, adding: "Come, let's go back to the Tuckers'. They may have heard something. And then we can discuss things with Mac."

And two very serious looking Challengers mounted their steel steeds and wheeled slowly back to the Tucker farm.

(To be continued.)

## BRAD MATTOON.\*

OR,  
LIFE AT HOSMER HALL.

BY WILLIAM D. MOFFAT.

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### A WILD CHASE.

NO further word was needed. Nero had earned a wide reputation throughout the neighborhood, and the boys fully appreciated the danger of the situation. Had they supposed that he was wandering freely about the estate instead of at his regular post—securely chained in the stable yard—they would have continued on the road quite contentedly, however roundabout it might have been. So surprised were they that several seconds transpired before they could gather themselves together, and, during this very brief time, the dog had covered nearly one third the distance that lay between him and them. Then they found their legs.

"Make for the trees, fellows!" cried Eugene, and they were off on the instant.

Down the slope they sped, Nero in hot pursuit, and gaining steadily upon them, until, when they reached the level meadow below, he was but a few feet behind them, and his hoarse, low growls sounded ominously near and distinct.

Just here ran a small brook about fifteen feet broad and nearly two feet deep. Over this they went in one, two, three order, Eugene in the lead, and Dan Ellis in the rear. By good chance the mastiff stumbled, slipped into the mud, and went sprawling his way across the swift current, making slow work of it until he reached the further bank. The few seconds gained thereby were precious beyond measure to the boys, who were thus enabled to gain a good thirty yards. Brad and Eugene were now abreast, running nip and tuck, both with heads down, arms flying, and covering ground in a style that would have won them undying fame on the race track.

"Keep it up, old boy, we'll make it yet!" cried Eugene breathlessly over his shoulder, as he turned to encourage Dan Ellis, who was fully

\*Begun in No. 436 of THE ARGOSY.

ten feet behind, panting heavily, and steadily losing ground. The small group of trees, for which they were aiming, was now not more than one hundred yards distant, and only a few seconds' more hard running was needed to secure them a position of safety.

In the meantime Nero was rapidly recovering his lost ground, and once more pressing dangerously close upon them. On and on the boys flew, growing more and more confident as the space between them and their haven of security grew less, and they saw the trees, now only a few yards away, swaying to and fro as if sharing the excitement of the scene, and extending protecting limbs toward them.

A second more passed, and Brad is in the lead. The three are now running almost in a group, for Dan Ellis, at the sound of Nero's fierce growl close behind his coat tails, seemed to take on a new lease of life; and skipped along over the high weeds as if he had wings on his heels.

At length the first tree was reached. This one was by no means easy to climb, for the lowest limbs were fully nine feet from the ground, but Brad had neither the disposition nor the time to be particular, so, with a glad whoop, he leaped into the air and caught the trunk about four feet from the ground. Claspings this about with arms and legs, he "shinned" up out of reach with an ease and rapidity that would have elicited the warmest applause from Bill Scott and old Captain Bunn, his instructors in mast climbing.

The first branches once reached, Brad seized one of them, and drew himself up and astride of it. There he rested, in order to regain his breath and observe how his companions fared.

Eugene lost no time in swinging himself up to a place of safety in the second tree. He was not a moment too soon, for scarcely had his legs left the ground when the dog swept under the tree, making a futile snap at him as he passed, and confining his attentions now to poor Dan Ellis, who was fast becoming exhausted.

Unable to see what had become of Dan on account of the thick foliage, Brad and Eugene sat a moment breathless, listening for any sound that would give them a clew to the situation.

For a few seconds they could hear Dan's footsteps receding in the distance. Then came the sound of a heavy fall, and Dan's voice calling loudly for help.

"Quick, Brad!" cried Eugene in alarm. "We'll have to drop down and fight it out with that beast."

Instantly both boys were on the ground, and hurrying forward to the assistance of their companion.

"Grab the largest stick you can," cried Eugene, suiting the action to the word by picking up a stout limb that lay in his path. Unable to find a suitable stick, Brad seized a large stone, and hastened forward. They were barely in time, for just as they emerged from under the trees upon the open meadow, they saw Dan stagger to his feet, and throw up his arm in weak defense against the fierce onslaught of the dog, who was now almost upon him. Nero leaped straight for Dan's throat, but, meeting his arm instead, seized it in his teeth. The situation was a serious and critical one. The force of the dog's body brought Dan again to his knees, and, in his exhausted and frightened condition, he would have fallen an easy victim to the maddened brute had not Brad and Eugene come so promptly to the rescue.

Quick as a flash Brad let fly with the stone, and struck the animal squarely on the ribs. But, though the blow was a severe one, it did not shake his hold on Dan, and seemed only to enrage him the more. He tore furiously at Dan's arm, and, in spite of the latter's struggles, bore him still nearer the ground. Then he once more made a dash at Dan's throat, but at this moment Brad, reckless of consequences, rushed forward, seized the animal by the hind legs, and hauled him away, allowing Dan an opportunity to gain his feet.

Nero now turned upon Brad, and it would have fared badly with him in his defenseless condition had not Eugene, in his turn, come to the rescue. Just as the mastiff leaped forward, thwack! came Eugene's hickory stick down upon his back. The dog fell heavily on his side, his fierce growls changing into howls of pain.

A moment more, and he was up again, this time making for Eugene, who, with stick upraised, coolly and steadily awaited his approach.

One last leap: the stick whistled through the air, falling with a dull crash directly upon Nero's head; and the next instant he was lying on the ground, moaning feebly, and quivering in every limb. In a few seconds the moaning ceased altogether, the limbs stiffened, the neck stretched forward, and the eyes grew filmy and dim. A strange stillness then ensued, while the three boys stood gazing at the body of the dog, scarcely able to realize what had happened. At length Brad came forward, and, bending over Nero, examined him closely.

"Well, we're safe enough now, boys," he said. "You did him up that time, Eugene, and no mistake."

"Why, is he—"

"Dead as a herring," finished Brad.

"Well, I couldn't help it. I had to defend myself. What had we better do?"

"We'd better get out of this place as fast as we can, before we get in a worse scrape—hullo, fellows, I'm afraid we're too late. Look there," and Brad pointed across the meadows.

Approaching them rapidly on horseback came Mr. Gordon Ivers. He was still some distance away, but it was evident that he had been a witness of the scene, for he was shaking his riding whip fiercely at them, and shouting out a perfect volley of coarse and profane words. Indeed, it seemed most probable that he had purposely set the mastiff upon them, and had followed at a distance to watch results.

For a moment the boys were in despair.

"Jehoshaphat! We've jumped from the frying pan into the fire!" exclaimed Brad.

"Let him come on. I'll give him a dose of this hickory, too," said Eugene, whose blood was up.

"No, we're in trouble enough already. Come, fellows, let's skip. We can reach the woods over there before he can catch us, and he can't follow us in there with his horse."

This seemed the wisest plan, so Eugene dropped his stick, and the three were off again.

Mr. Ivers immediately put spurs to his fine dapple gray horse, and came thundering down along the meadow. The boys, however, were too quick for him, and soon disappeared from view among the trees of the woods that skirted the lake. Recognizing the uselessness of further pursuit, Mr. Ivers wheeled his horse sharply about, and, with a final oath and threat, approached the spot where Nero lay.

It is hardly probable that he realized at first what had befallen his handsome mastiff, for when the whole truth was revealed to him by the examination of the dog's body, his anger knew no bounds, and it would have fared hard with the boys had they decided to await his approach. This occurred to Brad as they hurried along through the woods.

"He'll have it in for us when he finds Nero is dead. I suppose we may look for a lawsuit, or something serious."

"I don't know about that," answered Eugene. "It's quite possible we may get out of the scrape scot free. You see, he was quite a distance off, and, from all I could hear him say, I don't believe he knew who we were."

"Oh, you can't judge by what he said. We wouldn't be able to recognize ourselves by the names he called us," laughed Dan Ellis, whose spirits were rapidly coming back, as he found himself, somewhat tattered and torn, it is true, but, barring a few scratches, quite uninjured by his dangerous encounter with the dog.

"Well, I hope you're right, Eugene," said Brad, "but I'm afraid we'll have no such luck. Even if Ivers didn't recognize us, he is sure to lay it up against the academy boys, and most likely he'll come over to search us out."

"I don't mind that. He'll never get any satisfaction in that way.

But all doubt on this point was cleared up fifteen minutes later when, after a slow and labored walk through the thick underbrush, the boys reached the academy grounds, climbed the fence, and hurried to the main entrance.

There, at the hitching post before the door, stood the dapple gray horse. His master was beyond a doubt inside.

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

##### MR. GORDON IVERS DECLARES WAR.

WITH considerable hesitation the boys entered the hall, and endeavored to slip up stairs without being observed. As they passed Dr. Hope's library, however, all hope of escape was abolished, for the door was suddenly flung violently open, and Gordon Ivers confronted them.

"There!" he exclaimed with an oath, "what more proof do you want than that?"

The boys' torn and mud bespattered clothing and flushed faces told the whole story.

"Young men, will you be kind enough to step this way?" said Dr. Hope.

The three entered in a rather crestfallen fashion.

"Is this true, that you have killed Mr. Ivers's mastiff?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Eugene. "The dog attacked us and we had to defend ourselves. He was making short work of Dan Ellis, when Brad and I came to the rescue. You can see where he had Dan by the arm. I didn't mean to kill the dog—only to drive him off—"

"And what right had you on the place at all, you infernal young scoundrel!" interrupted Mr. Ivers, "The dog belonged on the grounds, and you didn't, and the animal was worth ten such young curs as you—"

"One moment, Mr. Ivers," Dr. Hope's quiet voice interposed. "Allow me to question further. Young men, what were you doing on Mr. Ivers's grounds?"

"We came across the meadows for the sake of the short cut. We always used to do that."

"You remember what I said about that matter?"

"Yes, sir, and I am sorry we did it, but we didn't think there could be any harm in a walk across the fields."

"Well, you'll be wiser when I am done with you," said Mr. Ivers with an evil glance at Eugene. The former's first outburst of anger having subsided, he grew pale and quiet, and his face took on that cold, vindictive expression which his enemies knew so well.

Dr. Hope looked at him quickly.

"What do you mean, Mr. Ivers?" he asked.

"I mean that I claim those three young vagabonds for arrest as trespassers."

The boys started forward with involuntary exclamations. Dr. Hope quieted them by a gesture.

"And I, Mr. Ivers," said he, "refuse to give them up."

"The constables will settle that matter in half an hour from now," answered Mr. Ivers, nodding his head significantly.

"One moment, sir, before you put yourself to the trouble of sending for the constables," continued Dr. Hope. "Allow me to remind you that you have posted no notice of warning to trespassers upon your grounds—"

"That makes no difference," interrupted Mr. Ivers rudely. "I gave you fair warning, by word of mouth, in this very room. That's enough."

Dr. Hope gazed at his visitor half contemptuously.

"Come now, Mr. Ivers," he said calmly. "Surely you know more of law than that. You certainly know that it is absolutely impossible to legally prosecute trespassers under such circumstances as these. The constable would simply scout the idea."

"And how about the loss of that mastiff. Is that out of the question too?" asked Mr. Ivers, with a disagreeable sneer.

"That is something of much more importance. At what do you value the dog, Mr. Ivers?"

"He was a genuine thoroughbred—took second prize at the New York bench show three years ago. I paid \$150 for him when he was only a pup," responded Mr. Ivers in a tone that smacked of the professional dog trainer.

Now, it was pretty well known throughout the neighborhood that, while Mr. Ivers was to a certain degree proud of Nero's pedigree, he had no liking for the ill tempered brute himself, and had for some time past been seeking an opportunity to sell him at a reasonable price. Dr. Hope therefore was quite aware that Mr. Ivers's regret at his loss was only half sincere, and was chiefly intended to enhance the value of the dog. So, when Eugene, only too glad to settle the trouble so easily, eagerly exclaimed:

"I will see that the dog is fully paid for—twice that amount if necessary—"

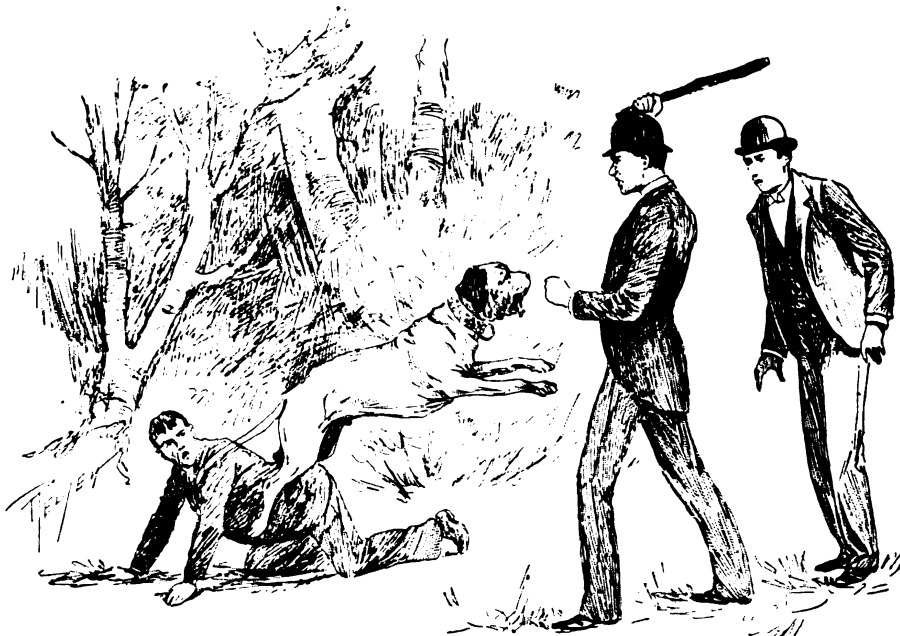
Dr. Hope hastily interposed:

"You shall receive whatever sum the dog is really worth, Mr. Ivers—you may have my assurance of that on behalf of Eugene. We will settle that matter later. I believe now, with that disposed of, your claims against these young men are discharged. You can easily see sir, that they were not trespassers in the sight of the law, and you have no case against them as such."

But Mr. Ivers was not to be disposed of so easily. It was quite

plain throughout the interview that he had been keeping something in reserve. It seemed as if, confident of holding a winning card, he was only lying by, awaiting the most favorable opportunity for displaying it. The moment had evidently now come.

"Well, I may not be so well posted on the subject of law, generally, as you," he said, tapping the leg of his boot viciously with his riding whip, and fixing his cold, malignant eyes on Dr. Hope; "but still I've been studying law a little bit during these past ten days, and I'm of the opinion that there are some special matters on which I am pretty



THE DOG WAS UP AGAIN, THIS TIME MAKING FOR EUGENE.

well posted—perhaps better than you; at least I believe, I could surprise you."

Dr. Hope looked puzzled.

"I am at a loss to understand you, sir," he said.

"Oh, very likely," was the sneering answer. "Very likely, but I'll give you a hint or two to help your understanding. Suppose, now, I were to say that you were holding in your possession something that wasn't yours—yes, that you, who talk so much about law and right, were really retaining as your property something that you had no legal right to; that—"

"Mr. Ivers!" cried Dr. Hope sharply, "what do you mean by these words?"

"That you are living on land that don't belong to you—that's what I mean," answered Mr. Ivers in louder tones. "A part of this academy property is not yours—a good slice of it, and I can prove it. Oh, you needn't wince. You'll have to get used to it. I have the screws on you now, and I intend to squeeze them till the blood comes—"

"Mr. Ivers!" interrupted Dr. Hope in great agitation, "no more of this! I do not understand you. Your words seem wild and absurd. I demand an immediate explanation. Let us have done with these strange accusations and threats. If you have anything to tell me, be plain and explicit—but one moment," and here Dr. Hope turned in his dignified manner to the boys, "young men, you may withdraw."

There was an impressive silence, during which the boys slowly filed out, and Dr. Hope remained standing motionless by his desk. Brad was the last one out, and, as he closed the door after him, he emitted a long whistle of astonishment.

"What under the sun is up now?" he asked in a low tone, upon joining the others on their way up stairs.

"Oh, thunder! don't get scared yet," answered Dan Ellis promptly. "It is probably only another of old Ivers's idle threats. He is an everlasting bluffer."

Eugene and Brad, however, were not so easily satisfied, and their minds were far from easy as they betook themselves to their separate rooms.

Though they had heard only the beginning of the interview that took place between Dr. Hope and Mr. Ivers, it was an easy matter for them, in the light of subsequent events, to guess what had transpired, and to Brad a solution of the matter came far sooner than he expected.

He had dressed, gone down to the dining room, finished his meal, and was on his way, with several of the boys, to the front piazza, whither they had been drawn by the warmth of the evening, when he felt some one touch him on the arm. It proved to be Samuel, who whispered to him :

"Mr. Mattoon, Dr. Hope wants to see you in the library."

"All right, Sam, I'm coming. One moment," he continued, as Samuel turned away. "Has Mr. Ivers gone?"

"Oh, yes. He rode away a quarter of an hour ago."

Brad, without further words, made haste to answer Dr. Hope's summons.

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### BRAD BEARS A MESSAGE.

AS Brad entered the library, he found the room apparently empty. The lamp that rested on the desk was lit, but Dr. Hope was not seated in his accustomed place. A moment's glance about the apartment, however, revealed the figure of the doctor standing by the window. He had evidently failed to hear Brad's entrance, for he took no notice of him, and remained gazing fixedly out into the night.

"You sent for me, I believe, sir," said Brad at length.

Dr. Hope started slightly; then turned and came forward.

Brad could hardly repress an exclamation of alarm as the doctor approached the desk and the lamp light fell upon him. Fully ten years older he seemed to have grown since Brad last saw him but little more than an hour before. He leaned heavily against the chair, his face was pale and worn, dark shadows lay beneath his eyes, and lines of care, as distinct as crayon marks, were traced upon his cheeks.

"Are you well, doctor?" Brad could not help asking.

"Quite so," answered the doctor in a voice that sounded like a far off echo of his customary strong, cheerful tones. "I sent for you, Bradley, to ask you a question. You have just returned from New York today. I suppose you saw Mr. Parker during your vacation?"

"Yes, sir. I saw him only this morning."

"Then he is in the city now," said Dr. Hope with some eagerness.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"I have only his office address, and I was very anxious to learn his home address. I must send an important telegram to him tonight."

"I can give you the address at once," said Brad, promptly taking a notebook from his pocket. "I always visit him at his office, but I have made a point of keeping his home address by me, in case it might be needed."

"Thank you," said Dr. Hope, copying the address upon a telegraph blank which lay on the desk before him. Then he rang the bell which summoned Samuel.

"Take this telegram into Bramford at once," he said, as the boy appeared. "Ride in on Dick—he is already saddled, I believe—and lose no time in delivering the message."

Samuel was off in a twinkling, while Dr. Hope leaned back wearily in his chair. Brad stood a moment awaiting a continuation of the conversation. As the doctor did not speak, he asked :

"Can I be of any other service, doctor?"

Recalled from his thoughts by the question, Dr. Hope looked up quickly.

"Excuse me, Bradley; nothing else, thank you—and yet, one moment. After all, it just occurs to me you can do me a great service. It was my intention to give Samuel a note to deliver to Judge Carter on his way to Bramford, and in some way I overlooked it. Samuel has gone now—I heard the horse's step on the walk a moment ago, and I am anxious to have this note reach Judge Carter at once. Will you be kind enough to take it over for me?"

"Certainly."

"I have not quite finished it. A few lines remain to be written. If you will sit down a moment I will soon have it ready."

Brad sat down at once upon the sofa, and for the next three or four minutes a silence reigned throughout the room, only broken by the occasional scratching of Dr. Hope's pen as it ran rapidly over the paper—a silence during which Brad was busily occupied with his thoughts.

What could all this mean? What could Gordon Ivers have said to produce so serious an effect upon Dr. Hope? What could these urgent messages signify? Something of unusual gravity and importance—bad news beyond a doubt, but of what nature? Both these messages were to go to trustees of the academy; that was peculiarly significant, and coupled with what Brad had heard of the conversation between Mr. Ivers and the doctor, pointed to some trouble in which the interests of the academy were seriously involved. He could stand the doubt no longer; so, when the doctor had finished writing, and he rose to take the note, he said :

"Excuse me, Dr. Hope, but is there going to be trouble of any kind?"

The doctor did not answer at first, and when he did it was in a slow and rather guarded manner.

"Yes, Bradley; I fear so," he said.

"For the academy?"

"It looks like it."

"Of course you know we heard a part of what Mr. Ivers has been saying to you, and I am very much alarmed about it. Does it amount to anything—I mean what he said? Has he any real claim of any kind against the academy?"

"Yes, Bradley, he has, and a very serious claim. Mr. Ivers claims to have discovered—but I will not go into the matter. Suffice it to say that the will of Reginald Hosmer contains a fatal mistake in a measurement of land, by which we are liable to suffer a very heavy loss. I do not see how it can be averted. I must consult Mr. Parker and Judge Carter at once. Do not speak of this now. It may have to be known to all soon enough, but be kind enough to keep silent at present. Now hurry, for I want to get this note in Judge Carter's hands at the earliest moment.

Brad took the note and hastened out for his hat.

The evening air was deliciously soft and warm and illuminated by a golden full moon that now hung half way up towards the zenith.

"What a perfect night!" exclaimed Brad to himself as he set out at a brisk pace. "I could walk for hours, for all the violent exercise I had making tracks in front of that dog this afternoon—Well, what a day this has been, anyhow, starting with that reception last night in New York. Goodness knows it has given me enough to think of for a year. The other things were bad enough, but this last thing that has turned up—the academy trouble—judging, by all appearances, may end with a general smash up all around, and then what will become of Dr. Hope?"

So, continuing to ruminate, he pursued his way along the road towards the Carter estate, which lay fully a twenty minutes' walk distant from the Hall. The subject of the note he carried and the trouble that threatened the academy first engrossed his thoughts, but it was not long before his mind strayed back to his interview with Mr. Parker and the many new and strange impressions it had aroused within him. His father's unfortunate career, his mother's sad life, and the strange, unknown romance that bound the two; his own curious bringing up, and the unusual circumstances that had brought about the revelation of the past—these and kindred thoughts filled his mind to the exclusion of all else. Again and again he went over the whole scene; again and again he recalled every word of that precious narrative of Mr. Parker, repeating over and to himself the name of his mother, Estelle Leclair—the name that had suddenly become so dear to him.

He had now reached a point in the road upon high ground, which commanded a view of a wide expanse of meadows on both sides. To the right lay the fields of Hosmer; to the left lay Judge Carter's fields, and above rolled the moon, bathing the whole scene in an *effulgence* that seemed but a softer day. Deeply absorbed as he was in his thoughts, Brad could not but feel the influence of such a night. He paused a moment, and, removing his hat to cool his forehead, turned and gazed about him. It was then that his eyes suddenly became riveted upon an object at the side of the road—a strange apparition that aroused a curiosity not unmingled with awe.

*(To be continued.)*

#### THE LATEST ABOUT THE PHONOGRAPH.

The newspapers have recently announced the failure of the phonograph company. It seems that Mr. Edison was confident that the instrument had not yet reached its highest stage of perfection and was disinclined to put it on the market. But a tempting offer from a company eager to give the public the benefit of the new marvel was accepted, machines were rented out at forty dollars a year, failed to work satisfactorily, were sent back and hence the failure.

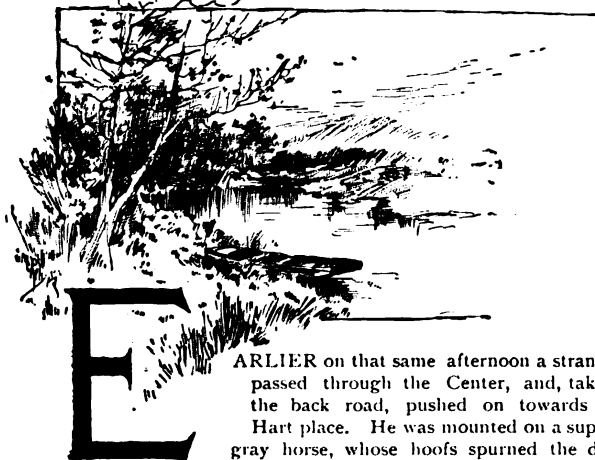


## ARTHUR BLAISDELL'S CHOICE.\*

BY W. BERT FOSTER.

## CHAPTER XXV.

THE STRANGER'S GRAY HORSE IS PRESSED INTO SERVICE.



**E**ARLIER on that same afternoon a stranger passed through the Center, and, taking the back road, pushed on towards the Hart place. He was mounted on a superb gray horse, whose hoofs spurned the dust of the rough country road as though the blood of a long line of equine ancestry coursing through his veins was so much better than that of the few common country horses he met that he felt himself too superior to even plow through the same yellow sand which was thrown out in little feathery clouds behind his heels.

His master, despite the rather brigandish looking hat whose brim drooped over his face, was a man whom we have seen before, and easily recognize as Mr. Chess Gardner. As he reached the high bars which led into the Hart wood lot he fastened his steed, and with his peculiar light, springy step, swung down the path towards the spring.

After drinking a deep draught of the clear water he rose to his feet, and, listening a moment carefully, made his way through the underbrush in the direction from which was heard the dull stroke of an axe. In a few moments he reached a little cleared spot in the woods, on the farther side of which Ben Norton was at work among the thick growth of white birch.

Gardner stood concealed for a moment, watching the young fellow. His features worked convulsively and the veins on the hand which held his silver mounted riding whip swelled to their utmost tension. His lips moved, too, and half articulate whispers burst from them as he bent his fierce glances on the unconscious woodman.

Once as he stood there, glaring with baneful eyes on his victim, his muscular fingers stole towards his hip pocket where the butt of his revolver showed from beneath his handkerchief. But he did not draw the weapon. Every trace of passion left his face as he quitted his concealment, muttering:

"No, that would be too sudden. I've got something worse than that in store for him," and whether it was owing to the present prospect of what was in store for Ben Norton, or not, he met the surprised woodman with a smiling countenance.

"Didn't expect to see me today, did you Ben,?" he inquired.

"No, I didn't," returned Ben ungraciously, stopping in his work and resting his axe against a stump.

"Perhaps you thought I had forgotten you?" suggested Chess, taking a seat on the end of a log.

"I hoped so."

"Oh, come, come," responded Chess good naturedly. "You don't mean that, Ben. Why, just think of the chance you'd miss if you don't go into this plan with me."

"I don't believe 'twill amount to anything," said Ben doggedly.

"You don't," cried Chess, in surprise. "But I tell you we *can't* fail! I thought I made that plain to you the other day. Let me explain further."

Then followed a conversation in a low tone between the two, during

which the emotions revealed in Ben Norton's face were strangely conflicting. Finally Chess produced a folded paper from his breast pocket and passed it to Ben, who examined it carefully.

"There, that's the plan," he said, just a trifle excited. "The arrangement of the rooms are just as they are laid down there. You'll make no mistake."

"But I can't do this all alone," said Ben, handing back the paper.

"I've been thinking about that," returned Chess quickly, "and I think I know just the person you want. To throw off all suspicion I can't be on hand, but I'll get somebody—and let you know."

"Well," returned Ben simply, without lifting his eyes from the ground, and showing little apparent interest in the matter.

For an instant a shadow crossed his companion's face, and he clinched his teeth in rage; but his voice was as calm as ever.

"Well, you know where to meet me, Ben, so don't fail to be on hand. I don't want to be seen 'round here any more, but there'll be no danger around that old ruin. No one ever goes there, I'm told."

"All right," returned Ben, in the same listless tone.

Chess sprang to his feet.

"Well, it's settled, I s'pose. Remember, one quarter of the haul shall be yours. I'll have the whole business worked up when I see you again," and he strode away through the woods towards the road.

As he came in sight of the spot where his horse was fastened, he heard the sound of rapid hoofs along the road from the direction of the distant farmhouse, and the next instant a great black horse, attached to an express wagon, in the body of which crouched the form of a child, dashed along the road like a whirlwind, and was quickly lost to view around a bend in the road.

A moment or two later a boy appeared, following in the track of the runaway horse. His hat was off, and his hair stood straight out behind him as he ran. Just as he reached the bars where the gray horse was tethered, Mr. Gardner stepped back into the woods, out of sight, with a slight exclamation.

In sheer desperation Arthur Blaisdell had followed Black Bob in his mad race down the road. Every moment he expected to see the wagon dashed to pieces, and little Flossie Davidson killed.

Immediately on sighting the gray horse hitched by the roadside, he gained hope. He recognized it at once as the steed ridden by the stranger who had talked with Ben Norton in the woods a few weeks before; but at that instant he did not think of that. All he remembered was that the gray horse could travel, and perhaps might be even a match in speed for Black Bob.

He stopped beside the charger, hesitated just a second, and then, slipping the knot by which the horse was tied, vaulted into the saddle. Jerking his head round, Arthur slapped the horse on the flank, and went flying down the road in the track of the runaway, greatly to the chagrin of Mr. Chess Gardner.

On he flew like the wind, the gray horse seeming to increase his speed at every bound. If Black Bob only kept to the road, and no accident happened, he would overtake him, for he was confident that the runaway horse had never attained the speed at which the gray was going.

The thud of flying hoofs could be plainly heard in advance, then came a turn in the road, and the runaway was revealed. Flossie still lay in the body of the wagon, but Bob's pace seemed unabated. If anything, he had increased his speed, and now that the wagon was in sight, the gray horse seemed unable to gain upon it.

"You *must* go faster!" cried Arthur, in an agony of terror, and, digging his boot heels into the horse's ribs, he urged him forward.

The gray horse seemed unused to such treatment as that. He shied and plucked about for a moment, and then shot along the road at a pace which threw all his former efforts into the shade. In fact, Arthur realized that he was being run away with!

He had lost all control over the stranger's steed, and, although every instant he was drawing nearer Black Bob, he began to doubt if he should be of any assistance in saving the little girl, who was crouching, terrified, in the wagon.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. DAVIDSON IN THE CHARACTER OF A TEMPTER.

**G**ATHERING the reins more firmly in his left hand, Arthur lay back in his saddle, bringing his whole weight to bear on the mouth of the horse he was riding. Instantly its effect was perceived. The bit was a curb, and, tough and wiry though the gray horse was, he could not withstand that terrible pressure on his jaws.

\*Begun in No. 439 of THE ARGOSY.

Although the road was not particularly wide at this point Arthur allowed his steed to turn out beside the rapidly moving wagon, for he at once felt that he had recovered his power over the horse, which had been momentarily lost.

"Save me! save me, Artie!" cried the frightened child, stretching out her arms toward the boy.

He made no reply, but guiding his horse close to Black Bob's side he grasped the runaway steed firmly by the bridle. For a moment his heart almost failed him. If Black Bob should swerve to one side he would be dragged from his saddle and probably crushed under the powerful hoofs of the terrified animals.

"Whoa, Bob!"

The horse pricked up his ears at the familiar voice, but did not abate his pace an atom.

"Whoa, boy—steady," commanded Arthur, holding in the gray horse and bringing his full weight to bear on the obstinate Bob's bit.

Bob paid no attention then. Gradually he slowed down and finally stopped right at the junction of the back road which led to the Center. Arthur slipped out of the saddle and held both horses by their bridles just as a buggy drove up from the direction of the village and halted in front of him.

The single occupant of the carriage, who was a stout, elderly gentleman, hastily sprang out with an excited "Bless my soul!" hurried forward and lifted Flossie from the wagon.

"Oh, papa!" cried the little girl, forgetting her terror in the surprise she felt at seeing her father, for the newcomer was none other than Mr. Davidson.

"What—what—what's this?" gasped the old gentleman, while Arthur was endeavoring to soothe the excited horses.

"Oh, papa, he runned away," cried the child, with her arms around his neck. "And Artie stopped him."

"Who ran away?" demanded Mr. Davidson wrathfully, looking at Arthur as though he considered him the guilty party.

"Why, the horse, papa," cried Miss Flossie, stamping her tiny foot impatiently.

"What horse?" again asked the greatly agitated old gentleman, who had not as yet fully collected his senses.

"Black Bob, here, ran away from the house while Flossie was in the wagon and I chased them on horseback," volunteered Arthur, smiling in spite of the serious danger just averted.

"Well, don't stand there grinning about it," returned Mr. Davidson crustily. "Why don't you turn your wagon 'round?"

"I will," replied Arthur, paying no attention to the old gentleman's ungraciousness, well knowing that it was only born of his excitement; "I will, if you'll hold this horse," extending the bridle of the gray towards him.

Mr. Davidson took it gingerly enough and led the not entirely quieted animal to one side, while Arthur turned Black Bob around.

"Why do you have such vicious beasts about?" inquired Mr. Davidson irritably, and he eyed askance the prancing horse he was holding.

"That doesn't belong to us—I borrowed it for the occasion," replied Arthur, becoming grave as the thought flashed across his mind that the owner of the gray horse could have been about the wood lot for no good purpose.

Tying the borrowed animal to the tail board of the wagon, Arthur mounted to the seat, while Mr. Davidson returned to his buggy, taking Flossie with him. Now, according to the regulation code of story books Mr. Davidson should have fallen on Arthur's neck and called him the "noble preserver of me child," etc. But he did nothing of the kind. As Arthur turned Black Bob out to allow the carriage to pass him, Mr. Davidson said:

"You come over to the house by and by; I want to see you. Don't come before supper, for I'm hungrier than a bear."

Then he drove on, leaving Arthur to follow.

Before he reached the wood lot the boy met Mr. Chess Gardner coming toward him.

"I'm very sorry I ran away with your horse so unceremoniously," he said.

"Don't mention it," returned Chess affably. "I'm glad he was of use. It was a brave thing to do."

"I used him pretty hard," said Arthur apologetically, while Chess unfastened his horse from the wagon.

"Never mind. I must confess, though, that I was surprised on returning from the spring down below there, to see you running off my stock," and he laughed. "Let's see, you are the young fellow, I think,

who directed me to that spring first? You see I patronize it once in a while when out for a ride."

"Yes, I see," replied Arthur, looking at him sharply.

"That fellow knows more than he ought to," muttered Gardner, mounting his horse, while Arthur drove on. "Yet I don't see how, Still, I have a feeling that he does," and he sat in his saddle gazing thoughtfully after the boy until he was out of sight.

At the same moment, Arthur was saying in his own mind:

"What is that scoundrel doing about here, I wonder? No good, I'll be bound. Can it be possible that he is seeking to injure Ben? Or—I wonder if Ben was down there in the woods at the same time he was?"

But on his arrival at the barn, Ben Norton was there waiting for him.

"My gracious, Art, that was a risky piece of business," exclaimed the hired man. "I'd like to take that black scoundrel out in the lot and shoot him. He'll kill somebody yet."

"Why, did you see him run?" asked Arthur.

"No; but Flossie told me about it as they drove by just now. I should think her old man ought to do something handsome for you," said Ben. "I couldn't see the road from where I was at work, so I didn't know anything about the runaway until Mrs. Hart told me. I was down in the swamp meadow," he volunteered unblushingly.

After supper, Arthur went over towards Mr. Peck's, and met Mr. Davidson sauntering along the road before he reached the house. The proprietor of the *Journal* was evidently in a much more genial mood than he had been before supper, and held out his hand cordially when Arthur appeared.

"To say that I thank you, is putting it rather mildly," he began heartily, still holding the boy's hand. "But it's simply a waste of time to talk about *that*. I can't repay you for your bravery, but I can do something which I should have attended to long ago, and which I came out here this very evening to see you about. I want you to report tomorrow at the *Journal* office. You're fit for nothing else but a newspaper man."

Arthur's heart gave a great throb of delight, and then sank as he thought of the duties which bound him to his present position.

"I—I can't do it," he replied hesitatingly.

"Well, if not tomorrow, the next day," said Mr. Davidson jovially. "Just as soon as you can."

"But I can't accept the position," declared Arthur, the tears almost coming to his eyes, so bitter was his disappointment.

"I'd like to know why not," cried Mr. Davidson, stopping in the center of the road and staring at Arthur.

"The man I work for is sick," replied Arthur, "and I promised to stay until he is well again."

"Let him get somebody else," exclaimed Mr. Davidson irascibly.

"Look here," he continued, "two or three nights ago I promised your brother to find you a place on the *Journal*. Finding that you were staying so near where Flossie was boarding, I came out this afternoon to see you. And now you have got to come in town just as soon as possible and go to work," and Mr. Davidson spoke with the confidence of a man who, for the past twenty years of his life, at least, had found very little which his wealth or influence could not bring him.

It was a sore temptation for Arthur Blaisdell. Here was just the chance he had wished for, but had hardly dared hope would be his. A position on the *Journal* staff meant even more to him than it had to Hal. He would not have been content to remain there forever. There would be a chance to work up—telegraph editor, city editor, sub editor, manager; if not on the *Journal*, on some daily equally as large, and then perhaps he might some day be proprietor.

A life just such as he had longed for lay before him, and—he refused it!

"I can't take it, Mr. Davidson," he said, speaking huskily, yet firmly. "I promised Hi I would stay, and I must."

"Well, if you didn't want it, why didn't you say so?" snapped Mr. Davidson.

"If you could hold the position a month for me," commenced Arthur, a vague hope struggling in his heart. "Hi may be well by that time, and I could take it—"

"Don't make any excuses," returned Mr. Davidson gruffly; "I don't want 'em. If you're going to take the place now, say so."

"I can't, sir."

"All right," said the enraged old gentleman; and, turning sharply on his heel, he walked away in the gathering darkness.

"Little upstart!" he muttered angrily, "to refuse what I offered him!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

IN WHICH HI IS CONVALESCENT AND AN ACCOUNT IS GIVEN OF AN EVENING RAMBLE.

THE next day Hiram Hart sat up for a few minutes—the first time he had been out of bed since being taken ill. Dr. Hoskins rubbed his hands together delightedly as he came out of the house to where Arthur happened to be standing beside his horse.

"He's getting along finely," he said. "He's been a pretty sick fellow, let me tell you, and if you hadn't stood by him and attended to his business so as to give him no uneasiness on that score, I shouldn't be willing to answer for the consequences," and with a nod and a smile the doctor drove away.

But this remark failed to put Arthur in a cheerful frame of mind. Just then the world looked pretty dark to him. He had told Hal and Little Mum that morning of Mr. Davidson's offer, and Hal had given him the tallest kind of a blowing up for not accepting it. Little Mum had only put her arms around his neck and kissed him, but somehow even that did not assuage the bitter disappointment in the way in which Little Mum's caresses were wont to do.

"Nothing for me to do but plod on here all the rest of my life," he said gloomily, as after supper that evening he wandered over the farm. "Fortune never knocks at a man's door but once, they say, and I guess I've missed my chance."

He roamed gloomily about the swamp meadow while the sun went down behind the tree tops and the shadows gathered about him.

"Hold on!" he finally exclaimed, bringing himself up shortly, "this won't do. I must stop worrying over this and do something. I believe I'll go over and call on the Remingtons and see if I can drive this fit away," and buttoning his coat around him he set off at a brisk trot across the low land toward his destination.

Miss Annie met him at the door.

"Oh, why didn't you come last night?" was her greeting. "Auntie and Fay have gone away—went this morning. I wanted you to see them once more before they went."

"I'm real sorry," said Arthur, entering the hall while she held the door open for him. "I should like to have seen them again."

"Not in there," suddenly exclaimed Annie, as he turned toward the parlor door.

Arthur stopped and looked at her inquiringly, hearing through the partly open door the sound of voices.

"It's Sadie and Mr. Prentice," whispered Annie with a comical grimace. "They occupy that part of the house now."

Arthur gave her a look of amused surprise.

"I should think they were about fitted for each other," was his comment.

"We'll go into the sitting room, where mamma is," she said; "or would you like to take a stroll? It's a perfect evening."

"I should be delighted," returned Arthur, who in his present state of feelings felt more like keeping in motion than sitting down to make a formal call.

"Wait till I get my hat," said Annie. "We'll take Cæsar for company," and the dog, hearing his name spoken, arose from his place on the porch and trotted sedately at their heels as they left the house.

They took a wide, well beaten path across the fields and through the pine woods and finally struck into the back road which led from the Center.

"You don't seem to be very lively tonight," remarked Miss Annie, who had herself carried on most of the conversation thus far. "What is the matter?"

Arthur hesitated a moment before replying. He wanted most awfully to tell his whole trouble to somebody, and finally he blurted it all out and felt better.

Annie was sympathetic, and that was just what the boy needed. After they had discussed the matter on all sides, Arthur felt as though perhaps it was not quite so bad, after all. When Hi got well, Annie suggested, Mr. Davidson might be persuaded to give him a chance then. Arthur had little faith in this last, but it helped him considerably.

"And your brother is already engaged on the *Journal*?" inquired Miss Annie.

"Oh, yes. He's been there something over two months—ever since I have been out here."

"How does he look? I think I have seen him."

"Oh, Hal is nice looking—he's ever so much better looking than I, although he's got the same colored hair, and looks something like me. He's two years older than I am."

"I believe he came into our office one day," said Annie gravely. "I think it was your brother; but I don't think he was in very good company."

"Why—how do you mean?" asked Arthur, looking in surprise at the grave face of his companion.

"Well, you know I'm not sure that it was he; but he came in with a man named Raymond, who I know is employed on the *Journal*, and who does not bear a very good reputation."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Arthur, at once interested. "How came they to come in there?"

"They came in to see a friend of the president's—Mr. Gardner. Your brother—if it was he—seemed to be on good terms with both Raymond and Gardner, and I don't know which is the worst."

"Why, I thought you said this other fellow was a friend of the president's."

"So he is; but you see Major Van Slyck (that is our president's name) is a very eccentric man, and has some of the oddest whims you ever heard of. This Mr. Gardner is nothing more than an adventurer, I think; but the major has taken a great fancy to him. In fact, I am told that the fellow is to marry one of the major's daughters."

"Perhaps Hal only happened in there with that fellow," said Arthur, who had paid very little attention to the last part of his companion's speech.

"I hope so," rejoined Annie.

"Any way, I'll make it a point to find out," added Arthur energetically.

In his anxiety for his brother he forgot his own troubles. They had now come quite a distance from home; but the night was so beautiful that neither had thought of turning back.

"Let's go on to the old house," suggested Annie. "My folks used to live up here years ago, but it has all gone to decay now. A fire destroyed one end, and the squirrels, rabbits and tramps have enjoyed all its privileges alone for years."

"I think I've seen the old place," said Arthur. "It's a regular ruin, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is now. But it wasn't so bad when I was a little girl. I remember once I got mad with Sadie and threatened to run away. I got as far as the old house and stayed until evening. Then the bats and the darkness drove me home," and she laughed gleefully.

A moment later they came in sight of the ruined dwelling. Its unpainted and blackened timbers were outlined with startling distinctness in the faint moonlight. The half charred beams of the burned end still lay where they had fallen, but the other portion was quite well preserved.

"It does look rather ghostly, doesn't it?" whispered Arthur, lowering his voice without any apparent cause.

At that instant Cæsar gave voice to a low growl and stopped. His human companions stopped likewise, and Annie laid her hand on the dog's collar.

"Be still, Cæsar," she whispered.

As she spoke, the door in the side of the old ruin opened and two dark figures came out, closed the door and stole quietly down the path. They passed within a few feet of Arthur and his companions, but, crouching in the shadows of the ivy grown wall, they remained undiscovered.

"Now remember," said one of the figures in a meaning tone. "Be on the watch for the word."

The other nodded and turned up the road, while his companion stood at the tumble down gate a moment and watched him.

A shaft of moonlight shimmering down through the branches of the trees above him fell upon the man's face, and with almost a cry of surprise, Arthur recognized the stranger's features.

It was the man who had talked with Ben Norton in the woods—the one whose horse he had used in rescuing Flossie Davidson the day before. It was Chess Gardner!

At the instant of his discovery Annie leaned over and whispered in his ear with thrilling distinctness:

"That is the major's friend—Mr. Gardner!"

(To be continued.)



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Any reader leaving home for the summer months can have THE ARGOSY forwarded to him every week by the newsdealer from whom he is now buying the paper, or he can get it direct from the publication office by remitting the proper amount for the time he wishes to subscribe. Three months, fifty cents; six months, one dollar; one year, two dollars.

\* \* \* \*

IN this number, on our first cover page, we present our readers with still another premium offer. We wish our friends to make a note of the fact that we agree to give a camera *and outfit* for one new name, not the camera alone, but also the appliances that render it fit for use. Read the offer carefully; remember that subscriptions can begin with No. 443, the first of the volume, if you like, and that the address, will be changed as often as desired.

\* \* \* \*

ANOTHER pleasant surprise for our readers! We have secured a stirring tale of adventure on a most novel theme, and by a favorite writer for boys. This is in addition to the tempting array of attractions set forth in our announcement for the present volume, all of which will be presented in due course. Full particulars concerning the new serial, which will be begun in No. 450, will be given next week.

\* \* \* \*

A WRITER in *The Christian Union* tells a story about a young man that contains some facts we are sure our boys of THE ARGOSY will find fruitful food for after thought. This young man is a little over twenty one years of age, and receives a salary of \$300 a year, out of which he has saved during four years, the sum of \$1200, on which he is now going to get married.

As he dresses well and pays his own board, this fact was a puzzle to his friends and one of them asked him to explain how he did it. He replied by stating that he portioned out his salary regularly each month when he received it; four dollars for lunches, four for car fares, and five for amusements. Then twenty went for dues in a building association of which he was a member, some for board, and the rest into the bank for clothes and the "reserve fund."

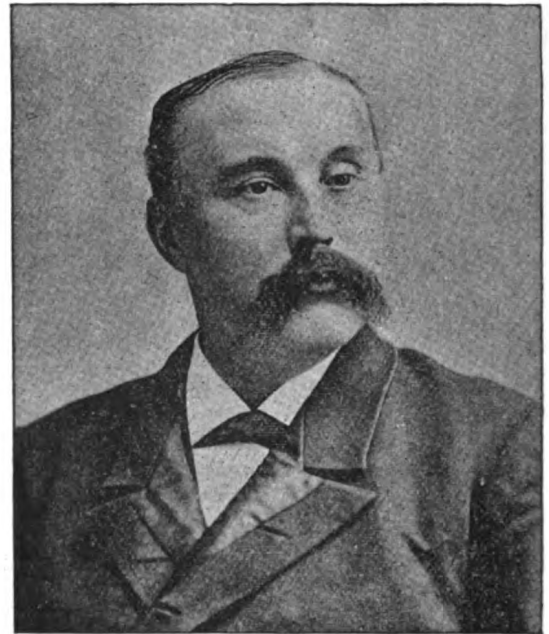
He did nothing impulsively, without counting the cost. He never allowed his eyes or his palate to run away with his judgment. Of course it goes without saying that he had no bad habits. He further stated that when his salary was \$300 a year he carried out the same system, and always put money away in the bank. Now, this young man was not a prig, neither did he go shabby, nor acquire a reputation for meanness. He just exercised as much thought and judgment in spending his money as he was obliged to bring to bear in order to earn it.

THOMAS L. JAMES,

PRESIDENT OF MANY COMPANIES AND EX-POSTMASTER  
GENERAL.

DESPISE not the day of small things. If the subject of our sketch this week had turned up his nose at inking rollers, sweeping out and making fires as a "printer's devil" at a job office on a salary of \$1.50, he would have had no foundation stone laid in the career that was to bring him to the highest positions of trust.

Mr. James's boyhood was passed in Oneida County, New York, and and it was in Utica that he filled the position already referred to. Being in a printer's office, his thoughts naturally turned to "the art pre-



THOMAS L. JAMES.

From a photograph by Bell, Washington.

servative" as a trade for himself. The immediate prospect, to be sure, was not particularly alluring. The first year he received but forty dollars, together with his board, with a prospective increase of ten dollars a year. But he was learning all the time, and in three years was able to enter journalism, splendidly equipped for the profession.

His first venture in this line was the *Madison County Journal*, which he issued for ten years from Hamilton, New York. He disposed of his interest in it in order to accept a position that had been offered him in the Custom House at the metropolis.

Here his abilities told quickly. A clear head, a capacity of arriving at speedy decisions in cases of emergency, a dignity that was never lost—all these qualities insured the new servant of the Government rapid advancement. And thus it was that in 1873 he attained the honor of being appointed Postmaster of New York City. This position he filled for eight years, and under his administrations many and important improvements were made in the postal system of the Empire City.

It was but an easy step from the headship of the post office in the metropolis to the control of the nation's mailbag, and in 1881 Mr. James was appointed Postmaster-General by President Garfield. On his retirement he became president of the Lincoln National Bank and Safe Deposit Company, also of the East Tennessee Land Company.

I cannot close this brief review of Mr. James's history more fittingly than by quoting a remark he made to one who was to "write him up."

"There is only one way of succeeding in anything," he said; "have a clearly defined object or purpose, and keep pegging away towards its accomplishment. Know not only what you *want* to do, but what you are *able* to do, and work for it."

GEORGE K. WHITMORE.