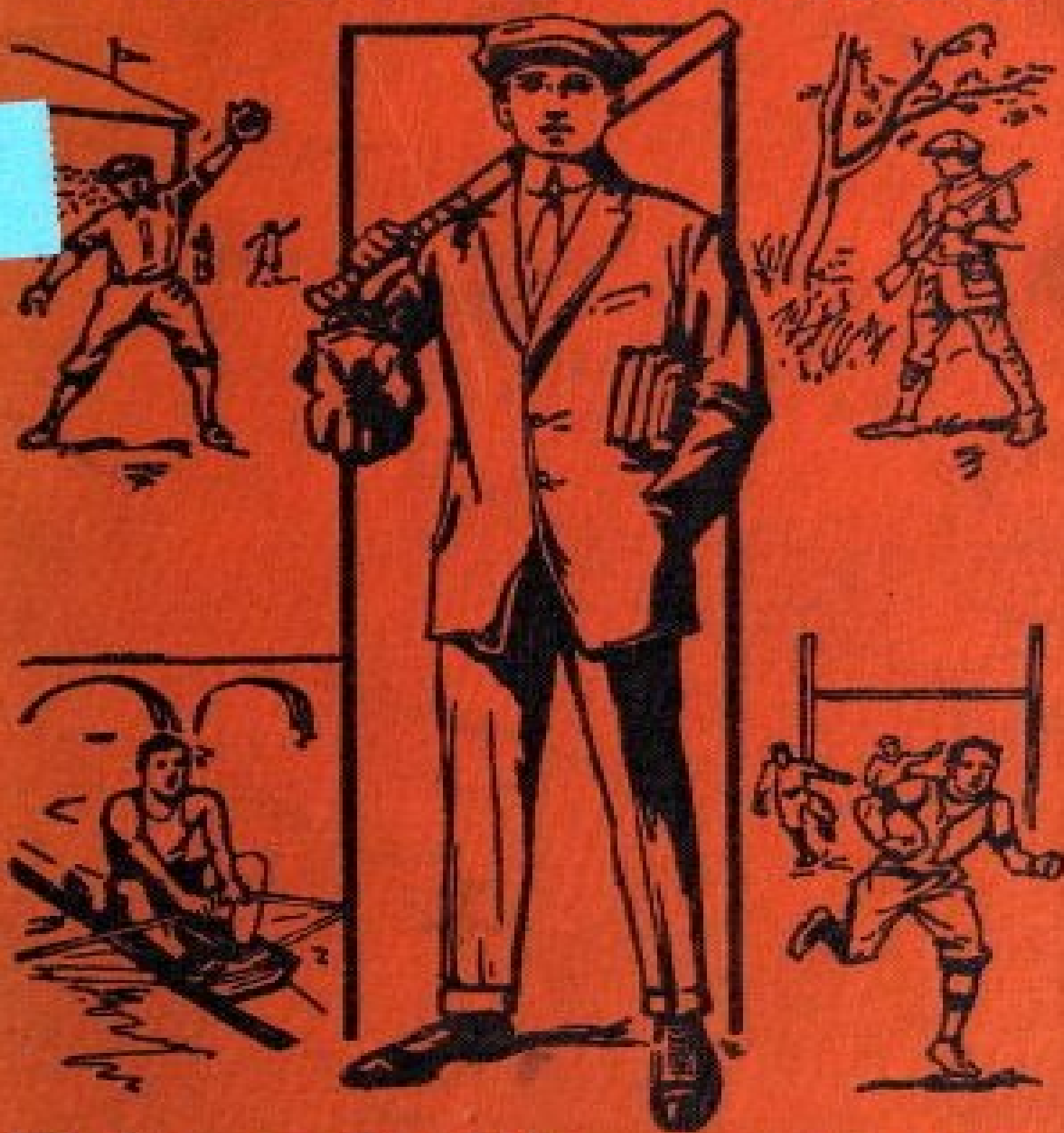


Dave Porter and His Double



nia
1

Edward Stratemeyer

Project Gutenberg's Dave Porter and His Double, by Edward Stratemeyer

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

Title: Dave Porter and His Double
The Disapperarance of the Basswood Fortune

Author: Edward Stratemeyer

Illustrator: Walter S. Rogers

Release Date: November 2, 2009 [EBook #30394]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DAVE PORTER AND HIS DOUBLE ***

Produced by David Edwards, Dan Horwood and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net> (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive)

THE TEAM LEFT THE ROADWAY, AND THE NEXT INSTANT HAD CRASHED THROUGH A FRAIL RAIL-FENCE.—*Page 24.*

Dave Porter Series

DAVE PORTER AND HIS DOUBLE

OR

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE BASSWOOD
FORTUNE

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," "The Old Glory Series," "Colonial Series," "Pan-American Series,"
"Soldiers of Fortune Series," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER S. ROGERS

BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

Published, August, 1916

COPYRIGHT, 1916,
BY LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

All rights reserved

DAVE PORTER AND HIS DOUBLE

Norwood Press
BERWICK & SMITH CO.
NORWOOD, MASS.
U. S. A.

PREFACE

“DAVE PORTER AND HIS DOUBLE” is a complete story in itself, but forms the twelfth volume in a line issued under the general title of “Dave Porter Series.”

This series was begun some years ago by the publication of “Dave Porter at Oak Hall,” in which my young readers were introduced to a wide-awake American lad at a typical American boarding-school.

The publication of this volume was followed by “Dave Porter in the South Seas,” to which portion of our globe the lad journeyed to clear up a question concerning his parentage. Next came “Dave Porter’s Return to School,” telling of additional happenings at Oak Hall; “Dave Porter in the Far North,” where he went on a second journey looking for his father; “Dave Porter and His Classmates,” in which our young hero showed what he could do under most trying circumstances; “Dave Porter at Star Ranch,” in which he took part in many strenuous adventures in the Wild West; “Dave Porter and His Rivals,” in which the youth outwitted some of his old-time enemies; “Dave Porter on Cave Island,” giving the details of a remarkable sea voyage and strange doings ashore; “Dave Porter and the Runaways,” in which the boy taught some of his school chums a much-needed lesson; “Dave Porter in the Gold Fields,” whither he went in search of a lost mine; and finally “Dave Porter at Bear Camp,” which was located in the Adirondack Mountains, and where we last left him.

In the present volume we find our hero in a new field of activity. Having graduated from school, he has taken up the study of civil engineering, and while engaged in that calling in Texas he becomes mixed up in most unusual happenings, the particulars of which are given in the pages that follow.

Once more I wish to thank my young readers, and many of their parents, for all the kind things they have said regarding my stories. I trust that the reading of the present book will not only please but also profit the young folks.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

March 1, 1916.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	OFF FOR A SLEIGH-RIDE	1
II	SOMETHING OF THE PAST	13
III	THE TEAM THAT RAN AWAY	22
IV	WARD PORTON AGAIN	32
V	WHAT ASA DICKLEY HAD TO SAY	42
VI	MORE TROUBLE	53
VII	FACE TO FACE	63
VIII	THE BASSWOOD FORTUNE	72
IX	SOMETHING ABOUT MINIATURES	82
X	THE BIG SLEIGHING-PARTY	93
XI	HELD BY THE BLIZZARD	104
XII	TIM CRAPSEY'S PLOT	114
XIII	WHAT WASHINGTON BONES HAD TO TELL	124
XIV	MOVEMENTS OF THE ENEMY	133
XV	THE RETURN TO CRUMVILLE	143
XVI	HOW THE MINIATURES DISAPPEARED	153
XVII	A VAIN SEARCH	163
XVIII	THE CIVIL ENGINEERING EXAMINATION	173
XIX	OFF FOR TEXAS	181
XX	IN NEW YORK CITY	191
XXI	DAVE IN WASHINGTON	201
XXII	IN TEXAS AT LAST	211
XXIII	AT THE ENGINEERING CAMP	221
XXIV	A MIDNIGHT ALARM	230

XXV	THE MEXICAN RAIDERS	239
XXVI	THE CHASE ON THE BRIDGE	249
XXVII	ACROSS THE RIO GRANDE	259
XXVIII	A STRANGE DISCOVERY	269
XXIX	THE CAPTURE	278
XXX	THE FORTUNE RECOVERED—CONCLUSION	288

ILLUSTRATIONS

THE TEAM LEFT THE ROADWAY, AND THE NEXT INSTANT HAD
CRASHED THROUGH
A FRAIL RAILWAY FENCE (*Page 24*)

Frontispiece

FACING PAGE

HE SEIZED PORTON'S UPRAISED ARM AND BACKED THE FELLOW AGAINST A TREE	70
FROM UNDER THE SNOW AND THE ROBES CRAWLED THE BOYS AND THE GIRLS	102
SLOWLY THE TRAIN PUFFED IN, AND PROVED TO BE A FREIGHT	136
THE YOUNG PEOPLE PLAYED GAMES, SANG, AND DANCED TO THEIR HEARTS' CONTENT	170
THE NEXT INSTANT HE WAS DASHING INTO THE STREET	202
"HERE WE ARE AT THE CAMP!" ANNOUNCED THE GUIDE	226
"HOLD TIGHT, ROGER! I'LL HELP YOU," RETURNED DAVE, QUICKLY	256

DAVE PORTER AND HIS DOUBLE

CHAPTER I

OFF FOR A SLEIGH-RIDE

“What is the matter, Dave? You look rather mystified.”

“I am mystified, Laura,” replied Dave Porter. “I have a letter here that I can’t understand at all.”

“Whom is it from?” questioned Laura Porter, as she came closer to her brother, who was ensconced in the largest easy-chair the Wadsworth library contained.

“It’s from a shopkeeper in Coburntown, Mr. Wecks, the shoe-dealer. He wants to know which pair of shoes I have decided to keep, and asks me kindly to return the pair I don’t want.”

“Well, what of that, Dave?” continued his sister, as the youth paused with a wrinkle on his forehead. “Can’t you make up your mind which pair of shoes you want to keep?”

“I certainly can not, seeing that I haven’t had any shoes from Wecks’s store,” returned Dave, with a faint smile. “I haven’t been in his place for nearly a year, and the last time I was there I bought a pair of rubbers and paid for them.”

“Oh, then the letter must be meant for somebody else, Dave. Mr. Wecks has got his customers mixed.”

“Perhaps so. But in the letter he speaks of the two pairs of shoes I took away with me. That looks as if somebody had gotten two pairs of shoes in my name.”

“Well, as we are going out sleighing this afternoon, why don’t you drive to Coburntown and drop into his shop and explain matters?” suggested the sister.

“I guess that would be best, Laura.” Dave folded up the letter and placed it in his pocket. “How soon will you be ready?”

“Inside of quarter of an hour.”

“And how about Jessie?”

“She was almost ready when I came downstairs.”

“Good! Then we can get an early start and have a good long ride besides stopping at Coburntown, where I suppose you and Jessie can do a little shopping while I am at Wecks’s store.”

“That will be fine, Dave! I would like to match some ribbon, and the only place I can do it is in the French Shop in Coburntown;” and thus speaking Laura Porter hurried out of the room to get ready for the sleigh-ride.

Dave had proposed the ride just before lunch, and the young people living at the Wadsworth mansion had telephoned over to the Basswood home, asking if Ben Basswood would accompany them.

“Sure I’ll go—be glad to!” Dave’s former school chum had answered over the wire. “I haven’t a thing to do this afternoon, and a first sleigh-ride of the season will tickle me to death.”

“Oh, I don’t want it to kill you, Ben,” Dave had answered gaily. “Just the same, you be ready for us when we come over;” and to this Ben had agreed.

Although it was still early in the winter, there had been a heavy fall of snow two days before and now the roads in and around Crumville were in excellent condition for sleighing. The musical sound of sleigh-bells could be heard in all directions, and this had made Dave anxious to get out on the road, even though he had to spend most of his time indoors studying, as we shall learn later.

Dave had already given orders to the hostler connected with the Wadsworth estate, and now this man brought to the front of the mansion a fine, big sleigh drawn by a pair of sleek-looking, high-stepping steeds. The sleigh was well provided with heavy robes to protect its occupants from the cold.

“Oh, Dave, I’m so glad to go sleighing!” burst out Jessie Wadsworth, as she came bounding down the broad stairway of the mansion to meet him. “Isn’t it just glorious weather?”

“It sure is,” he answered, as he gave her a warm glance. To Dave, Jessie was the most beautiful girl in the world, and just now, clad as she was in her dainty sealskin coat and her jaunty sealskin hat, she looked more bewitching to him than ever.

“Going for a ride, eh?” came from Dave’s uncle, Dunston Porter, who had just finished a belated lunch. “Well, have a good time, and don’t let that pair of grays run away with you. John was telling me they are feeling quite mettlesome lately.

I guess they don't get exercise enough."

"Oh, don't worry, Uncle Dunston. I'm sure I can manage them," answered Dave.

"Sure you can!" returned his uncle, heartily. "Too bad you couldn't have asked an old fellow like me to go along," he continued, making a wry face.

"Why, you can come along if you want to. Can't he, Dave?" burst out Jessie. "We'd be very glad to have you."

"He's only fooling, Jessie," answered Dave. "You couldn't hire Uncle Dunston to go sleighing to-day. I saw him cleaning up his shotgun right after breakfast. And I'll wager he has just come in from hunting and expects to go out again this afternoon. How about it, Uncle—am I right?"

"You've got me, Davy," answered the man, with a grin. "You see, I can't get over my old habit of going hunting when I get the chance. And now that this snow is on the ground, it's just fine for tracking rabbits."

"Did you get any this morning?"

"A few. I didn't go very far. This afternoon I am going deeper into the woods, and I guarantee to bring back enough to make the biggest rabbit pot-pie tomorrow you ever saw;" and, thus speaking, the uncle hastened away.

He had spent many years of his life roaming the world in quest of game both big and little, and now, though of late years he had done his best to settle down, it was still impossible for him to give up his hunting habit entirely.

Laura soon appeared ready for the ride. Dave had already donned his heavy overcoat, fur cap, and his driving-gloves. He assisted the girls into the sleigh and saw to it that they were well tucked in with robes.

"Have a good time and don't stay out too late," were the farewell words of Mrs. Wadsworth, who had come to the door to see them off.

"Well, you know we don't expect to be back to dinner this evening," answered Dave. "We can get something to eat at Coburntown, or some other place, and then drive back in the moonlight."

"Very well, but don't make it too late," answered the lady of the mansion. And then Dave took up the reins, chirped to the team, and away the sleigh started out of the Wadsworth grounds and down the highway leading to the Basswood home.

Ben was on the lookout for them, and by the time Dave had drawn up beside the

horse-block he was outside to meet them.

“Good afternoon, everybody,” he said gaily, lifting his cap. “This is just fine of you to take me along.”

“Let Ben come in back here with me,” said Laura, “and that will give Jessie a chance to sit in front. I know she always likes to be up ahead,” and Laura smiled knowingly.

“Suits me,” answered Ben, quickly; and then assisted Jessie to make the change, which, however, the miss did not undertake without blushing, for it may as well be admitted here Jessie thought as much of Dave as he did of her.

“Oh, Dave, do you think the grays will behave themselves to-day?” asked the girl, partly to conceal her embarrassment.

“I’m going to make them behave,” he answered, sturdily.

“I don’t believe they have been out of the stable for several days. You know we don’t use the horses nearly as much as we used to, before we got the automobile.”

“I’ll watch them.” Dave looked behind him. “All right back there?”

“Yes,” answered his sister. “But please don’t drive too fast.”

“I don’t believe sleighing will seem too fast after the riding we have been doing in the auto,” answered the brother. He took up the reins again, and once more the turnout sped along the highway.

They made a turn, passed along the main street of Crumville, and also passed the large Wadsworth jewelry works, and then took to a road leading to Coburntown, some miles distant. The air was cold but clear, with the bright sunshine sparkling on the snow, and all of the young people were in the best of humor.

“Say, Dave, how would you like to be back at Oak Hall?” cried Ben, while the sleigh sped along. “Wouldn’t we have the dandy time snowballing each other, and snowballing old Horsehair?”

“So we would, Ben,” answered Dave, his eyes gleaming. “We sure did have some good times at that school.”

“How are you and Roger getting along with your civil engineering course?”

“All right, I think. Mr. Ramsdell says he is greatly pleased with our work.”

“That’s fine. I almost wish I had taken up civil engineering myself. But dad

wants me to go into real estate with him. He thinks there is a big chance in that line these days, when Crumville is just beginning to wake up.”

“Hasn’t your dad got a big rival in Aaron Poole?”

“Oh, no! Poole isn’t in it any more when it comes to big deals. You see, he was so close and miserly in all his business affairs that a great many people became afraid of him.”

“What has become of Nat Poole?” questioned Laura. “Did he go back to Oak Hall?”

“For a short while only. When his folks found out that he had failed to graduate they were awfully angry. Mr. Poole claimed that it was the fault of the school and so he took Nat away and told him he would have to go to work. I think Nat is working in some store, although where, I don’t know.”

“I don’t think it’s in Crumville or we should have seen him,” said Dave.

“I never want to meet that boy again,” pouted Jessie. “I’ll never get over how meanly he acted toward us.”

“It’s not so much Nat’s fault as it is his bringing up,” remarked Ben. “His father never treated him half decently. But I hope Nat makes a man of himself in spite of the way he used to treat us,” went on the youth generously.

“By the way, Ben, didn’t you say your father had gone away?” queried Dave, a few minutes later.

“Yes, he has gone to Chicago on very important business. It seems an old friend of his—a Mr. Enos, who was once his partner in an art store—died, and now the lawyers want to see my father about settling up the Enos estate.”

“An art store?” queried Dave. “I never knew that your father had been in any such business.”

“It was years ago—before my folks came to Crumville. You see, my father and this Mr. Enos had been chums from early boyhood. My father says that Mr. Enos was a very peculiar sort of man, who was all wrapped up in pictures and painting. He got my father to advance a thousand dollars he had saved up, and on that money the two opened an art store. But they couldn’t make a go of it, and so they gave it up, and while Mr. Enos went West my father came here.”

“Maybe the dead man left your father some money,” suggested Laura.

“That is what my mother said to dad. But he thinks not. He thinks it is more than

likely Mr. Enos died in debt and left his affairs all tangled up, and that the lawyers want my father to help straighten them out.”

“I’d like to be able to paint,” said Jessie, with a sigh. “I think some of those little water-colors are just too lovely for anything.”

“Why don’t you take it up? There must be some teacher in Crumville,” returned Dave.

“Let’s both do it!” cried Laura. “I used to paint a little before father and I did so much traveling. I would like to take it up again. It would be very interesting.”

While the young folks were talking, the pair of mettlesome grays had been speeding over the snow of the road at a good rate of speed. Dave, however, had them well in hand, so that there was little danger of their running away.

“We’ll be to Benson Crossroads soon, Dave,” remarked Ben a while later, after they had passed over a long hill lined on either side with tidy farms. “Which road are you going to take—through Hacklebury or around Conover’s Hill?”

“I haven’t made up my mind,” answered Dave. He looked at Jessie. “Have you any preference?”

“Oh, let us go up around Conover’s Hill!” cried Jessie. “That is always such a splendid ride. There is so much of an outlook.”

“Yes, let us go by way of the hill by all means,” added Laura. “It isn’t very nice through Hacklebury, past all those woolen mills.”

“All right, the Conover road it is,” answered Dave; and forward they went once more as fast as ever.

They soon passed the Crossroads, and then took the long, winding road that led around one side of the hill just mentioned. Here travel since the snow had fallen had evidently been heavy, for the roadway was packed down until it was almost as smooth as glass. Over this surface the spirited grays dashed at an increased rate of speed.

“Some team, believe me!” was Ben’s comment. “Mr. Wadsworth ought to put them on a race-course.”

“Papa does not believe in racing,” answered Jessie. “But he always did like to have a horse that had some go in him.”

“Hark!” cried Laura, a moment later. “What is that sound?”

“It’s an auto coming,” announced Ben, looking behind them. “A big touring-car,

and whoever is in it seems to be in a tremendous hurry.”

“I wish they wouldn’t cut out their muffler,” was Dave’s comment, as he saw the grays pick up their ears. “They have no right to run with the muffler open.”

As the touring-car came closer those in the sleigh who were able to look back saw that it was running at a great rate of speed and swaying from side to side of the roadway. It contained four young men, out, evidently, for a gloriously good time. Dave did not dare look back to see what was coming. The grays had their ears laid well back and their whole manner showed that they were growing more nervous every instant.

“Hi! Stop that noise!” yelled Ben, jumping up and shaking his hand at the oncoming automobile. But those in the car paid no attention to him. The fellow at the wheel put on a fresh burst of speed, and with a wild rush and a roar the touring-car shot past the sleigh and the frightened horses, and in a few seconds more disappeared around a turn of the road.

As might have been expected, the coming and going of the big machine, with its unearthly roar, was too much for the mettlesome grays. Both reared up wildly on their hind legs, backing the sleigh off to one side of the roadway.

“Whoa there! Whoa!” cried Dave, and did his best to keep the team in hand. But they proved too much for him, and in an instant more they came down on all fours and started to run away.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING OF THE PAST

“The horses are running away!”

“Oh, we’ll be killed!”

Such were the cries from the two girls as the mettlesome grays tore along the country highway at a speed that seemed marvelous.

“Dave, can I help you?” asked Ben, anxiously.

“I don’t think so,” answered the young driver between his set teeth. “I guess I can bring them down. Anyway, I can try.”

“What shall we do?” wailed Jessie.

“Don’t do anything—sit still,” ordered Dave. He was afraid that Jessie in her excitement might fling herself from the flying sleigh.

On and on bounded the frightened team. Each of the grays now had his bit in his teeth, and it looked as if it would be impossible for Dave to obtain control of the pair. And, worst of all, they were now approaching a turn, with the hill on one side of the roadway and a gully on the other.

“Better keep them as far as possible away from the gully,” suggested Ben.

“That is what I’m trying to do,” returned Dave, setting his teeth grimly.

14

Dave Porter was a resolute youth, always doing his best to accomplish whatever he set out to do. Had it been otherwise, it is not likely that he would have occupied the position in which we found him at the opening of our story.

When a very small youth Dave had been found wandering along the railroad tracks near Crumville. He could tell little about himself or how he had come in that position; and kind people had taken him in and later on had placed him in the local poorhouse. From that institution he had been taken by an old college professor, named Caspar Potts, who at that time had been farming for his health.

In Crumville, the main industry was the Wadsworth jewelry works, owned by Mr. Oliver Wadsworth, who resided, with his wife and his daughter Jessie, in the finest mansion of that district. One day the Wadsworth automobile caught fire, and Jessie was in danger of being burned to death, when Dave came to her rescue. This led Mr. Wadsworth to ask about the boy and about Mr. Potts. And when it was learned that the latter was one of the jewelry manufacturer's former college professors, Mr. Wadsworth insisted upon it that Caspar Potts come and live with him, and bring Dave along.

"That boy deserves a good education," had been Oliver Wadsworth's comment, after several interviews with Dave, and as a consequence the youth had been sent off to a first-class boarding-school, as related in the first volume of this series, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall."

At the school Dave had made a host of friends, including Roger Morr, the son of a United States senator, and Phil Lawrence, the son of a rich shipowner.

Ben Basswood, the son of a Crumville real estate dealer and a lad who had been friendly with Dave for several years, also went to Oak Hall, and thus he and Dave became closer chums than ever.

The great thing that troubled Dave in those days was the question of his parentage. Some of the mean boys in the school occasionally referred to him as "that poorhouse nobody," and this brought on several severe quarrels and even a fist fight or two.

"I'm not going to be a nobody," said the youth to himself; and when he received certain information from an old sailor he eagerly went on a quest after his father, as told of in "Dave Porter in the South Seas." There he managed to locate his uncle, Dunston Porter, and learned much concerning his father, David Breslow Porter, and also his sister Laura.

Coming back from the South Seas, Dave returned to school, and then took a trip to the Far North, whither his father had gone before him. There he had many adventures, as already related in another volume.

Glad to know that he had found, not only so many kind friends, but also several rich relatives, Dave went back again to Oak Hall. His classmates were more than glad to see him, but others were jealous of his success in life, and several of his enemies, including a certain Link Merwell, did all they could to annoy him. The annoyances went from bad to worse, and in the end one boy named Jasniff ran away from school, and the other, Merwell, was expelled.

Dave's sister Laura had a friend, Belle Endicott, who lived in the Far West, and through this young lady Dave and his chums and also Laura and Jessie received an invitation to spend some time at the Endicott place, known as Star Ranch. While in the West Dave once more fell in with Link Merwell, and this young man, as before, tried to make trouble, but was exposed.

"I hope I have seen the last of Merwell," said Dave to himself, on returning once again to Oak Hall. But this was not to be, for Merwell became a student at a rival academy, and once more he and some others did all they could to make life miserable for our hero.

When the Christmas holidays came around Dave went back to Crumville, where he and his folks resided with the Wadsworths, who had taken such a liking to the youth that they did not wish to have him live elsewhere. Directly after Christmas came a thrilling robbery of the jewelry works, and Dave and his chums discovered that the crime had been committed by Merwell and his crony, Jasniff. After a long sea voyage to Cave Island, one of the evil-doers was captured, but the other, Link Merwell, managed to make his escape.

During Dave's next term at school there was much trouble with one of the teachers, who was harsh and unsympathetic, and as a result some of the boys ran away. It was Dave who went after them and who, in spite of a fearful flood, managed to bring them back and make them face the music. Then came the graduation exercises at Oak Hall, Dave receiving high honors.

Our hero had promised Roger Morr that he would pay the senator's son a visit. During this time Dave heard of a gold mine belonging to Mrs. Morr which had been lost because of a landslide. All the boys went out West in an endeavor to relocate this claim. Their adventures were both numerous and hazardous, and once more Dave fell in with Link Merwell. But all went well with our young friends, and they had a glorious time visiting Yellowstone Park and other points of interest.

"Now you fellows have got to come on a little trip with me," Phil Lawrence had said after he, Dave and Roger, with the others, had returned again to the East. There was a small steamer belonging to Mr. Lawrence that was tied up at Philadelphia getting ready for a trip to Portland, Maine. The voyage up the Atlantic coast had been productive of several unlooked-for results. On the way those on the boat had discovered another vessel in flames. This was a craft being used by a company of moving-picture actors, and some of the latter in their panic had leaped overboard. Our young friends, as well as some of the sailors on

their ship, had gone to the rescue; and among others had picked up a young man, Ward Porton by name. Much to the surprise of Roger Morr and Phil Lawrence, Ward Porton had looked a good deal like Dave. Not only that, but many of his manners, outwardly, were similar to those of our hero.

Following the trip up the coast, it had been decided by the Wadsworths and the Basswoods to spend part of the summer in the Adirondacks, at a spot known as Mirror Lake. Thither all of the young people and some of the older ones went to enjoy themselves greatly and to meet with a number of strange happenings, all of which have been related in detail in the volume preceding this, entitled "Dave Porter at Bear Camp."

The boys fell in with a wild sort of creature whom they at first supposed to be a crazy uncle of Nat Poole, the son of a miserly money lender of Crumville. Later, however, the man was found to be a missing uncle of Phil Lawrence, for whom the Lawrence family had been seeking for a long time.

Although Dave Porter did not know it at the time, the moving-picture company to which Ward Porton belonged had also numbered among its members Dave's former school enemy, Link Merwell. From Link, Ward Porton, who was the good-for-nothing nephew of a Burlington lumber dealer, had learned the particulars concerning Dave's childhood and how he had been placed in the Crumville poorhouse and listed as of unknown parentage.

This had caused Porton to concoct a clever scheme, and to Mr. Porter he announced himself as the real Dave Porter, stating that our hero was really and truly the nobody that years before everybody had thought him.

This announcement had come like a thunderbolt to poor Dave, and for the time being he knew not what to do or say. The others, too, especially his sister Laura and his dear friend, Jessie, were almost equally affected. But they clung to him, refusing to believe the story that Ward Porton was circulating.

"You take it from me—this is some scheme gotten up by Link Merwell and this other fellow," declared one of Dave's chums. And on the strength of this declaration the youth took it upon himself to do some clever investigating. From one of the moving-picture actresses Dave learned much concerning Ward Porton's past, and then, in company with some of his chums, he journeyed to Burlington, where he met Mr. Obadiah Jones, the uncle of Porton, and asked the lumber dealer if Ward were his real nephew or not.

"Yes, he is my real nephew—the son of my youngest sister, who married a good-for-nothing army man," replied Obadiah Jones; and then gave many particulars.

He stated that his sister's name had been Clarice Jones Porton, and that years before she had married a certain Lieutenant Porton of the United States Army, an officer who had been discharged because of irregularities in his accounts. He further stated that the mother of the young man was dead, and what had become of the worthless father he did not know further than that it had been stated he had joined some revolutionists in Mexico.

Dave had gotten Mr. Jones to sign a paper stating the exact truth concerning Ward Porton, and with this duly witnessed had returned to Bear Camp. All present were glad to know that the cloud hanging over his name had been cleared away. His sister Laura and her friend Jessie hugged him over and over again in their delight.

Then came news that Link Merwell had been captured, and later on this misguided young man was sent to prison for his share in the crime at the jewelry works. A hunt was instituted for Ward Porton, but he had taken time by the forelock and disappeared.

"I don't believe Ward Porton will ever bother you again, Dave," said Roger one day. But the surmise of the senator's son proved incorrect, as we shall see. Ward Porton was to show himself and make more trouble than he had ever made before.

CHAPTER III

THE TEAM THAT RAN AWAY

“Oh, Dave, the gully!” cried his sister Laura. “If we go into that we’ll all be killed!”

“Please keep quiet, Laura,” flung back her brother in a low, tense voice. “These horses are scared enough as it is.”

Dave was doing his best to bring the spirited grays out of their mad gallop. But they had not been out of the stable for the best part of a week, and this, combined with the scare from the roar of the automobile, had so gotten on their nerves that to calm them seemed next to impossible. On and on they flew over the packed snow of the hard road, the sleigh bouncing from side to side as it passed over the bumps in the highway.

Jessie was deadly pale and had all she could do to keep from shrieking with fright. But when she heard Dave address his sister in the above words, she shut her teeth hard, resolved to remain silent, no matter what the cost. Ben was worried as well as scared—the more so because he realized there was practically nothing he could do to aid Dave in subduing the runaways. The youth on the front seat had braced both feet on the dashboard of the sleigh, and was pulling back on the reins with all the strength of his vigorous muscles.

Thus fully a quarter of a mile was covered—a stretch of the hill road which fortunately was comparatively straight. But then there loomed up ahead a sharp turn, leading down to the straight road through the valley below.

“Dave—the turn!” gasped Ben, unable to keep himself from speaking.

“I see it. I’ll do what I can,” cried the young driver; and then pulled on the reins more strongly, if possible, than before.

Closer and closer to the dreaded turn in the road the sleigh approached, and as it drew nearer the girls huddled in their seats almost too terror-stricken to move. Ben sprang up, totally unconscious of doing so.

“Can you make it, Dave, do you think?” gasped the real estate man’s son, when the turn was less than a hundred feet away.

“I don’t think I’ll try,” was the unexpected answer. “Hold fast, everybody! We’re going through the fence!”

The turn in the road led to the left, and as they approached it Dave relaxed his hold on the left rein and pulled with might and main on the right. This brought the team around just a trifle, but it was enough to keep them from attempting to follow the road—something which would undoubtedly have caused the slewing around of the sleigh and probably its overturning. As it was, the team left the roadway, and the next instant had crashed through a frail rail-fence and was floundering along in the deep snow of a ploughed-up and sloping field beyond.

“Whoa there!” cried Dave, soothingly. “Whoa, Jerry! Whoa, Bill!” And thus he continued to talk to the team while the sleigh bumped along through the deep snow and over the uneven ground.

Running away on the smooth surface of the highway had been one thing; keeping up such a gait over a ploughed field and in snow almost a foot deep was quite another. Soon the fiery grays broke from their mad gallop into a trot, and a minute later Dave had no trouble in bringing them to a halt. There they stood in the snow and the furrows of the field, snorting, and emitting clouds of steam from their nostrils.

“Hold ’em, Dave, while I get out and go to their heads!” cried Ben, and an instant later was out in the snow and had hold of the steeds. Each of the horses was trembling a little, but the run seemed to have done neither of them any harm.

“Oh, Dave! Dave!” gasped Jessie. She tried to go on, but could not.

“Oh, how thankful I am that you did not attempt to go around that corner!” came from Laura. “If you had tried that we would have been upset and maybe all killed!” and she shuddered.

“It was just the right thing to do, Dave,” was Ben’s comment. “But I don’t know that I would have thought of it. You are a quick thinker, and I guess we have you to thank for saving our lives.”

“Well, we’ve broken down somebody’s fence,” returned Dave, not knowing what else to say. “We’ll have to fix that, I suppose.”

“Huh! What’s a broken fence to saving one’s neck!” snorted Ben. “Besides, we

only busted a couple of rails, and they are not worth a great deal.”

“Dave, do you think it will be safe to ride behind that team any more?” questioned Laura.

“I’m going to do it,” he answered promptly. “No team of horses is going to get the better of me!”

“I think, now that they have had this run, they’ll tame down a little,” said Ben. “Besides that, the rest of the road to Coburntown is almost straight and flat.”

“Yes, and as soon as we get on a straight road I’ll give them all the running they want,” answered Dave. “I’ll guarantee that by the time we reach town they’ll be just as meek as any one would want them.”

With Ben still at their heads the team was turned around and led to the roadway once more. There the horses were tied to a tree near by, and then Dave and Ben spent a little time in repairing the damage done to the fence.

“I wish we could find out who those fellows in the auto were,” said Ben, when they were once again on the way. “They ought to be fined for speeding.”

“I doubt if we’ll be able to locate them,” answered Dave. And he was right—they never saw or heard of the reckless automobilists again.

As has been mentioned, beyond the hill the road to Coburntown was almost straight and level. And here for over two miles Dave allowed the grays to go along at a good gait, although keeping his eyes on them continually, so that they might not get beyond control. As a consequence of this additional burst of speed, when they came in sight of the town for which they were bound, the grays were quite docile and willing to behave themselves properly.

“Now if you say so, I’ll take you girls around to the French Shop,” suggested Dave, “and then Ben and I can drive around to Mr. Wecks’s shoe-store.”

This was agreeable to Laura and Jessie, and in a few minutes the girls were left at the door of the establishment where Laura had said she wished to match some ribbon. Then the two boys started for the shoe-dealer’s shop. Dave had already acquainted Ben with the particulars of his errand to the place.

“What are you going to do if Wecks says you really had the shoes?” questioned the son of the real estate dealer, when they were on the way to the shoe store.

“But how can he say that when I haven’t been near the place, Ben?” returned Dave.

“I don’t know. But I do know that people have sometimes had things charged to them at the stores which other people got.”

“Humph! Well, I sha’n’t pay for any shoes that I did not get,” answered our hero, simply.

Mr. Wecks’s establishment was at the far end of the main street of Coburntown; so the lads had half a dozen blocks to cover before they reached the place.

“Hello, it’s closed!” exclaimed Ben, as they came in sight of the store; and he nodded in the direction of the show window, the curtain of which was drawn down. The curtain on the door was also down, and on the glass was pasted a sheet of note paper.

“Some sort of notice. I’ll see what it is,” answered Dave, and, throwing the reins to Ben, he left the sleigh. Soon he was reading what was written on the sheet of paper:

Closed on account of death in the family.

WILLIAM WECKS.

“Somebody dead. That’s too bad!” mused Dave. “I wonder who it can be?” and then he passed into a barber shop next door to find out.

“It’s Mr. Wecks’s father—a very old man who lived back in the country from here,” explained the barber. “Mr. Wecks went up there last night, and he doesn’t expect to come back until after the funeral, which will probably be day after tomorrow.”

“I don’t suppose his clerk is around?” questioned Dave.

“No. The funeral gave him a holiday, and he was glad of it. He’s out of town, too;” and having thus expressed himself, the barber turned to wait upon a customer who had just come in, and Dave returned to the sleigh.

“If that’s the case, you’ll have to let the matter rest until the next time you come to Coburntown, or else you’ll have to write to Mr. Wecks,” said Ben.

“I’ll be coming over again before very long,” answered Dave. “But, just the same, I’d like to have this matter settled.”

While Dave was speaking to his chum a man passed him on the sidewalk, looking at him rather fixedly. This man was Mr. Asa Dickley, the proprietor of the largest gentlemen’s furnishing establishment of which Coburntown boasted. Our hero knew the man fairly well, having purchased a number of things at his place from time to time, and so he nodded pleasantly. Mr. Asa Dickley nodded in

return, but with a rather sour expression on his face. Then he glanced at Ben, and at the handsome sleigh and still more stylish team of horses, and passed on muttering something to himself.

“Mr. Dickley didn’t look very happy,” was Dave’s comment, as he and Ben entered the sleigh.

“I don’t think he likes my father very much,” answered the son of the real estate dealer. “He wanted to get a piece of property here very cheap, and my father found another customer for the place at five hundred dollars more.”

“I see, Ben. Just the same, why should he give me such a hard look? Of course, I haven’t been in his place of business for a good while. But he can’t expect me to buy all my furnishing goods from him.”

“Well, you know how it is, Dave—when you buy some things from some storekeepers they think they are entitled to your whole trade. However, I shouldn’t let the matter worry me.”

“Not much! I’ve got other things to think about. Don’t forget that I expect next month to take that examination in civil engineering. That’s what is on my mind just now.”

“Oh, you’ll pass, don’t worry, Dave. Just think of what a brilliant showing you made at Oak Hall.”

“True. But my studies in civil engineering have been a good deal harder than anything I tackled at school. If it wasn’t for Mr. Ramsdell, the old civil engineer who is coaching Roger and me, I don’t know how I would possibly have gotten along.”

“If you pass the examination, what will you do next?”

“Roger and I will go out on some constructive work and thus get a taste of real engineering. Mr. Ramsdell thinks he can get us positions with the Mentor Construction Company of Philadelphia, who are now doing a good deal of work in Texas—laying out railroads and building bridges.”

“In Texas? Say! that’s quite a distance from here.”

“So it is, Ben. But it is not as far as I expect to get some day. If I ever make anything of civil engineering I hope some day to be able to do some great work in other parts of the world—maybe in Mexico or South America.”

“Say, that will be great!” cried Ben, enthusiastically. “You’ll have a fine chance

to see the world. You must take after your uncle, Dave. He was always a great fellow to travel. Think of how you located him years ago away down on that island in the South Seas!”

“It sure was a great trip! And some day I’d like to take it over again. But just now I’ve got to put in all my time on this civil engineering proposition. I think I’ll be lucky if I pass and get that chance to go to Texas.”

CHAPTER IV

WARD PORTON AGAIN

A quarter of an hour later the girls had finished their shopping and rejoined the boys. Then it was decided that the party should go on to Clayton, six miles farther. They were told that the road was in excellent condition, and this proved to be a fact, so that the sleighing was thoroughly enjoyed.

It was growing dark when they drove down the main street of Clayton, and, although a bit early, all agreed to Dave's suggestion that they get dinner at the leading restaurant—a place at which they had stopped a number of times and which they knew to be first-class.

“What a pity Roger couldn't come along,” said Jessie to Dave just before sitting down to the sumptuous meal which the boys had ordered. “I know he would have enjoyed this very much.”

“No doubt of it, Jessie,” answered Dave, who well knew what a fondness for his sister the senator's son possessed. “But, as you know, Roger had to go home on a business matter for his father. Senator Morr is very busy in Washington these days, so Roger has to take care of quite a few matters at home.”

“Isn't it queer that he doesn't want to follow in the footsteps of his father and take up politics?” went on the girl.

“Senator Morr didn't want him to do it. And, besides, Roger has no taste that way. He loves civil engineering just as much as I do.”

“It's a wonder you and he didn't persuade Phil Lawrence to take it up, too, Dave.”

“Oh, Phil couldn't do that. You know his father's shipping interests are very large, and Mr. Lawrence wants Phil to take hold with him—and Phil likes that sort of thing. He is planning right now to take several trips on his father's ships this summer.”

“When does that examination of yours come off, Dave?”

“About the middle of next month.”

“And if you really pass, are you going to work away down in Texas?” continued the girl, anxiously.

“If I can get the position,—and if Roger is willing to go along.”

“I don’t like to have you go so far away;” and Jessie pouted a little.

“Well, it can’t be helped. If I want to be a civil engineer I’ve got to take an opening where I can get it. Besides, Mr. Ramsdell thinks it will be the best kind of training for Roger and me. He knows the men at the head of the Mentor Company, and will get them to give us every opportunity to advance ourselves. That, you know, will mean a great deal.”

“Oh, but Texas, Dave! Why, that is thousands of miles away!”

“Not so very many thousands, Jessie,” he answered with a little smile. “The mails run regularly, and I trust you will not forget how to write letters. Besides that, I don’t expect to stay in Texas forever.”

“Yes, but when you come back from Texas, you’ll be going off to some other far-away place—South America, or Africa, or the North Pole, or somewhere,” and Jessie pouted again.

“Oh, say, let up! I’m not going to South Africa, or to the North Pole either. Of course, I may go to Mexico or South America, or to the Far West. But that won’t be so very soon. It will be after I have had considerable experience in civil engineering, and when I am older than I am now. And you know what sometimes happens to a fellow when he gets older?”

“What?”

“He gets married.”

“Oh, indeed!” Jessie blushed a little. “And then I suppose he goes off and leaves his wife behind and forgets all about her.”

“Does he? Not so as you can notice it! He takes his wife with him—that is, provided she will go.”

“Oh, the idea!” and now, as Dave looked her steadily in the eyes, Jessie blushed more than ever.

Where this conversation would have ended it is impossible to say, but at that

moment Laura interrupted the pair, followed by Ben; and then the talk became general as the four sat down to dinner.

The horses had been put up in a stable connected with the restaurant, and after the meal it was Dave who went out to get them and bring them around to the front of the place. He was just driving to the street when his glance fell upon a person standing in the glare of an electric light. The person had his face turned full toward our hero, so that Dave got a good look at him.

“Ward Porton!” cried the youth in astonishment. “How in the world did that fellow get here, and what is he doing?”

Like a flash the memory of the past came over Dave—how Ward Porton had tried to pass himself off as the real Dave Porter and thus relegate Dave himself back to the ranks of the “nobodies.”

Dave was crossing the sidewalk at the time, but as soon as he had the team and the sleigh in the street he jumped out and made his way towards the other youth.

“I think I’ll interview him and see what he has to say for himself,” murmured Dave to himself. “Maybe I’ll have him arrested.”

Ward Porton had been staring at our hero all the while he was turning into the street and getting out of the sleigh. But now, as he saw Dave approaching, he started to walk away.

“Stop, Porton! I want to talk to you,” called out our hero. “Stop!”

“I don’t want to see you,” returned the other youth, hastily. “You let me alone;” and then, as Dave came closer, he suddenly broke into a run down the street. Dave was taken by surprise, but only for a moment. Then he, too, commenced to run, doing his best to catch the fellow ahead.

But Ward Porton was evidently scared. He looked back, and, seeing Dave running, increased his speed, and then shot around a corner and into an alleyway. When Dave reached the corner he was nowhere in sight.

“He certainly was scared,” was Dave’s mental comment, as he looked up and down the side street and even glanced into the alleyway. “I wonder where he went and if it would do any good to look any further for him?”

Dave spent fully five minutes in that vicinity, but without being able to discover Ward Porton’s hiding-place. Then, knowing that the others would be wondering what had become of him, and being also afraid that the grays might run away again, he returned to where he had left the sleigh standing.

“Hello! Where did you go?” called out Ben, who had just emerged from the restaurant.

“What do you think? I just saw that rascal, Ward Porton!” burst out Dave.

“Porton! You don’t mean it? Where is he?”

“He was standing under that light when I drove out from the stable. I ran to speak to him, and then he took to his legs and scooted around yonder corner. I went after him, but by the time I got on the side street he was out of sight.”

“Is that so! It’s too bad you couldn’t catch him, Dave. I suppose you would have liked to talk to him.”

“That’s right, Ben. And maybe I might have had him arrested, although now that he has been exposed, and now that Link Merwell is in jail, I don’t suppose it would have done much good.”

“It’s queer he should show himself so close to Crumville. One would think that he would want to put all the distance possible between himself and your folks.”

“That’s true, Ben. Maybe he is up to some more of his tricks.”

The girls were on the lookout for the boys, and now, having bundled up well, they came from the restaurant, and all got into the sleigh once more. Then they turned back in the direction of Crumville, this time, however, taking a route which did not go near Conover’s Hill.

“Oh, Dave! were you sure it was that Ward Porton?” questioned his sister, when he had told her and Jessie about the appearance of the former moving-picture actor.

“I was positive. Besides, if it wasn’t Porton, why would he run away?”

“I sincerely hope he doesn’t try to do you any harm, Dave,” said Jessie, and gave a little shiver. “I was hoping we had seen the last of that horrid young man.”

“Why, Jessie! You wouldn’t call him horrid, would you, when he looks so very much like Dave?” asked Ben, mischievously.

“He doesn’t look very much like Dave,” returned the girl, quickly. “And he doesn’t act in the least like him,” she added loyally.

“It’s mighty queer to have a double that way,” was the comment of the real estate man’s son. “I don’t know that I should like to have somebody else looking like me.”

“If you couldn’t help it, you’d have to put up with it,” returned Dave, briefly. And then he changed the subject, which, as the others could plainly see, was distasteful to him.

As they left Clayton the moon came up over a patch of woods, flooding the snowy roadway with subdued light. In spite of what had happened, all of the young folks were in good spirits, and they were soon laughing and chatting gaily. Ben started to sing one of the old Oak Hall favorites, and Dave and the girls joined in. The grays were now behaving themselves, and trotted along as steadily as could be desired.

When the sleighing-party reached Crumville they left Ben Basswood at his door, and then went on to the Wadsworth mansion.

“Did you have a fine ride?” inquired Mrs. Wadsworth, when the young folks bustled into the house.

“Oh, it was splendid, Mamma!” cried her daughter. “Coming back in the moonlight was just the nicest ever!”

“Did those grays behave themselves?” questioned Mr. Wadsworth, who was present. “John said they acted rather frisky when he brought them out.”

“Oh, they were pretty frisky at first,” returned Dave. “But I finally managed to get them to calm down,” he added. The matter had been discussed by the young folks, and it had been decided not to say anything about the runaway unless it was necessary.

On the following morning Dave had to apply himself diligently to his studies. Since leaving Oak Hall he had been attending a civil engineering class in the city with Roger, and had, in addition, been taking private tutoring from a Mr. Ramsdell, a retired civil engineer of considerable reputation, who, in years gone by, had been a college friend of Dave’s father. Dave was exceedingly anxious to make as good a showing as possible at the coming examinations.

“Here are several letters for you, David,” said old Mr. Potts to him late that afternoon, as he entered the boy’s study with the mail. “You seem to be the lucky one,” the retired professor continued, with a smile. “All I’ve got is a bill.”

“Maybe there is a bill here for me, Professor,” returned Dave gaily, as he took the missives handed out.

Dave glanced at the envelopes. By the handwritings he knew that one letter was from Phil Lawrence and another from Shadow Hamilton, one of his old Oak Hall

chums, and a fellow who loved to tell stories. The third communication was postmarked Coburntown, and in a corner of the envelope had the imprint of Asa Dickley.

“Hello! I wonder what Mr. Dickley wants of me,” Dave mused, as he turned the letter over. Then he remembered how sour the store-keeper had appeared when they had met the day before. “Maybe he wants to know why I haven’t bought anything from him lately.”

Dave tore open the communication which was written on one of Asa Dickley’s letterheads. The letter ran as follows:

“MR. DAVID PORTER.

“DEAR SIR:

“I thought when I saw you in Coburntown to-day that you would come in and see me; but you did not. Will you kindly let me know why you do not settle up as promised? When I let you have the goods, you said you would settle up by the end of the week without fail. Unless you come in and settle up inside of the next week I shall have to call the attention of your father to what you owe me.

“Yours truly,

“ASA DICKLEY.”

CHAPTER V

WHAT ASA DICKLEY HAD TO SAY

Dave read the letter received from Mr. Asa Dickley with much interest. He went over it twice, and as he did so the second time his mind reverted to the communication received the morning before from Mr. Wecks.

“What in the world does Mr. Dickley mean by writing to me in this fashion?” he mused. “I haven’t had anything from him in a long while, and I don’t owe him a cent. It certainly is a mighty strange proceeding, to say the least.”

Then like a flash another thought came into his mind—was Ward Porton connected in any way with this affair?

“Somebody must have gotten some things in my name from Mr. Dickley, and he must have gotten those shoes from Mr. Wecks, too. If the party went there in person and said he was Dave Porter, I don’t think it could have been any one but Ward Porton, because, so far as I know, he’s the only fellow that resembles me.”

Our hero was so much worried that he gave scant attention to the letters received from Phil Lawrence and Shadow Hamilton, even though those communications contained many matters of interest. He was looking at the Dickley communication for a third time when his sister entered.

“Well, Dave, no more bad news I hope?” said Laura, with a smile.

“It is bad news,” he returned. “Just read that;” and he turned the letter over to her.

“If you owe Mr. Dickley any money you ought to pay him,” said the sister, after perusing the epistle. “I don’t think father would like it if he knew you were running into debt,” and she gazed anxiously at Dave.

“Laura! You ought to know me better than that,” he answered somewhat shortly. “I never run any bills unless I am able to pay them. But this is something different. It is in the same line with the one I got from Mr. Wecks. I didn’t get his

shoes, and I haven't gotten anything from Mr. Dickley for a long time, and nothing at all that I haven't paid for."

"Oh, Dave! do you mean it?" and now Laura's face took on a look of worry. "Why, somebody must be playing a trick on you!"

"If he is, it's a mighty mean trick, Laura. But I think it is more than a trick. I think it is a swindle."

"Swindle?"

"Exactly. And what is more, do you know who I think is guilty?"

"Why, who could be guilty?" The sister paused for a moment to look at her brother. "Oh, Dave! could it be that awful Ward Porton?"

"That's the fellow I fasten on. Didn't we meet him in Clayton? And that's only six miles from Coburntown. More than likely that rascal has been hanging around here, and maybe getting a whole lot of things in my name." Dave began to pace the floor. "It's a shame! If I could get hold of him I think I would have him locked up."

"What are you going to do about this letter?"

"I'm going to go to Coburntown the first chance I get and tell Mr. Dickley, and also Mr. Weeks, the truth. I want to find out whether the party who got those things procured them in person or on some written order. If he got them on a written order, somebody must have forged my name."

"Hadn't you better tell father or Uncle Dunston about this?"

"Not just yet, Laura. It will be time enough to worry them after I have seen Mr. Weeks and Mr. Dickley. Perhaps I can settle the matter myself."

Dave was so upset that it was hard for him to buckle down to his studies; and he was glad that evening when an interruption came in the shape of the arrival of his old school chum and fellow engineering student, Roger Morr.

"Back again! And right side up with care!" announced the senator's son, as he came in and shook hands. "My! but I've had a busy time since I've been away!" he replied in answer to a question of Dave's. "I had to settle up one or two things for father, and then I had to go on half a dozen different errands for mother, and then see to it that I got those new text books that Mr. Ramsdell spoke about. I got two copies of each, Dave, and here are those that are coming to you," and he passed over three small volumes. "And that isn't all. I just met Ben Basswood at

the depot where he was sending a telegram to his father, who is in Chicago. Ben had some wonderful news to tell.”

“What was that?” asked Laura and Jessie simultaneously.

“He didn’t give me any of the particulars, but it seems an old friend of theirs died out in Chicago recently, and Mr. Basswood was sent for by some lawyers to help settle the estate.”

“Yes, we know that much,” broke in Dave. “But what’s the new news?”

“Why, it seems this man, Enos, died quite wealthy, and he left almost his entire estate to Mr. Basswood.”

“Is that so!” cried Dave. “That sure is fine! I don’t know of anybody who deserves money more than do the Basswoods,” and his face lit up with genuine pleasure.

“It will be nice for Ben,” said Jessie, “and even nicer for Mrs. Basswood. Mamma says there was a time when they were quite poor, and Mrs. Basswood had to do all her own work. Now they’ll be able to take it easy.”

“Oh, they are far from poor,” returned Dave. “They’ve been living on ‘Easy Street,’ as the saying goes, for a number of years. Just the same, it will be a fine thing for them to get this fortune.”

“There was one thing about the news that Ben didn’t understand,” continued Roger. “His father telegraphed that the estate was a decidedly curious one, and that was why the lawyers wanted him to come to Chicago immediately. He added that Mr. Enos had proved to be a very eccentric individual.”

“Maybe he was as eccentric as that man in Rhode Island I once read about,” said Dave, with a grin. “When he died he left an estate consisting of about twelve thousand ducks. This estate went to two worthless nephews, who knew nothing at all about their uncle’s business. And, as somebody said, the two nephews very soon made ‘ducks and drakes’ of the whole fortune.”

“Oh, what a story!” cried Jessie, laughing. “Twelve thousand ducks! What ever would a person do with them?”

“Why, some duck farms are very profitable,” returned Roger.

“You don’t suppose this Mr. Enos left such a fortune as that to Mr. Basswood?” queried Laura.

“I’m sure I don’t know what the fortune consists of. And neither did Ben. He

was tremendously curious to know. And he said his mother could hardly wait until Mr. Basswood sent additional information,” replied Roger.

“Ben told me that this Mr. Enos was once a partner of his father in business, the two running an art store together. Enos was very much interested in art; so it’s possible the fortune he left may have something to do with that,” added Dave.

As my old readers know, Roger Morr had always thought a great deal of Laura; and of late his liking for her had greatly increased. On her part, Dave’s sister had always considered the senator’s son a very promising young man. Consequently, it can well be imagined that the four young people spent a most enjoyable time that evening in the mansion. The girls played on the piano and all sang, and then some rugs were pushed aside, a phonograph was brought into action, and they danced a number of the latest steps, with the older folks looking on.

Roger was to remain over for several days at Crumville, and early the next morning Dave asked his chum if he would accompany him on a hasty trip to Coburntown. He had already acquainted Roger with the trouble he was having with the shoe-dealer and the man who sold men’s furnishings.

“We can take a horse and cutter and be back before lunch,” said Dave.

“I’ll be glad to go,” answered the senator’s son. “I haven’t had a ride in a cutter this winter.”

They were soon on the way, Dave this time driving a black horse that could not only cover the ground well, but was thoroughly reliable. By ten o’clock they found themselves in Coburntown, and made their way to the establishment run by Asa Dickley. The proprietor of the store was busy with a customer at the time, and a clerk came forward to wait on the new arrivals.

“I wish to speak to Mr. Dickley,” said Dave; and he and Roger waited until the man was at leisure. Mr. Dickley looked anything but pleasant as he walked up to our hero.

“I got a very strange letter from you, Mr. Dickley. I can’t understand it at all,” began Dave.

“And I can’t understand why you treat me the way you do,” blurted out the shopkeeper. “You promised to come in here and settle up over a week ago.”

“Mr. Dickley, I think there is a big mistake somewhere,” said Dave, as calmly as he could. “I don’t owe you any money, and I can’t understand why you should write me such a letter as this,” and he brought forth the communication he had

received.

“You don’t owe me any money!” ejaculated Asa Dickley. “I just guess you do! You owe me twenty-six dollars.”

“Twenty-six dollars!” repeated Dave. “What is that for?”

“For? You know as well as I do! Didn’t you come in here and get a fedora hat, some shirts and collars and neckties, and a pair of fur-lined gloves, and a lot of underwear? The whole bill came to just twenty-six dollars.”

“And when was this stuff purchased?” went on Dave.

“When was it purchased? See here, Porter, what sort of tom-foolery is this?” cried Asa Dickley. “You know as well as I do when you got the things. I wouldn’t be so harsh with you, only you promised me faithfully that you would come in and settle up long before this.”

“Mr. Dickley, I haven’t had any goods from you for a long, long time—and what I have had I have paid for,” answered Dave, doing his best to keep his temper, because he knew the storekeeper must be laboring under a mistake. “As a matter of fact, I haven’t been in your store for several months.”

“What!” ejaculated the storekeeper. “Do you mean to deny that you bought those goods from me, young man?”

“I certainly do deny it. As I said before, I haven’t been in this store for several months.”

At this plain declaration made by Dave, Mr. Asa Dickley grew fairly purple. He leaned over his counter and shook his clenched fist in Dave’s face.

“So that is the way you are going to try to swindle me out of my money, is it, Dave Porter?” he cried. “Well, let me tell you, it won’t work. You came here and got those goods from me, and either you’ll pay for them or I’ll sue your father for the amount. Why, it’s preposterous!” The storekeeper turned to his clerk, who was gazing on the scene in open-mouthed wonder. “Here a customer comes in and buys a lot of goods and I am good-hearted enough to trust him to the amount, twenty-six dollars, and then he comes here and declares to my face that he never had the things and he won’t pay for them. Now what do you think of that, Hibbins?”

“I think it’s pretty raw,” responded the clerk.

“Weren’t you in the shop when I let Porter have some of those goods?”

“I certainly was,” answered Hibbins. “Of course, I was in the rear, sorting out those new goods that had come in, so I didn’t see just what you let him have; but I certainly know he got some things.”

“Mr. Dickley, now listen to me for a minute,” said Dave in a tone of voice that arrested the man’s attention in spite of his irascibility. “Look at me closely. Didn’t the fellow who got those things from you look somewhat different from me?”

Dave faced the storekeeper with unflinching eyes, and Asa Dickley was compelled to look the youth over carefully. As he did this the positive expression on his face gradually changed to one of doubt.

“Why, I—er—Of course, he looked like you,” he stammered. “Of course you can change your looks a little; but that don’t count with me. Besides, didn’t you give me your name as Dave Porter, and ask me if I didn’t remember you?”

“The fellow who got those goods may have done all that, Mr. Dickley. But that fellow was not I. I may be mistaken, but I think it was a young man who resembles me, and who some time ago made a great deal of trouble for me.”

“Humph! That’s a fishy kind of story, Porter. If there is such a person he must look very much like you.”

“He does. In fact, some people declare they can hardly tell us apart.”

“What’s the name of that fellow?”

“Ward Porton.”

“Does he live around here?”

“I don’t know where he is living just at present. But I saw him day before yesterday in Clayton. I tried to stop him, but he ran away from me.”

The storekeeper gazed at Dave for a moment in silence, and then pursed up his lips and shook his head decidedly.

“That is too much of a fish story for me to swallow,” he said harshly. “You’ll either have to bring that young man here and prove that he got the goods, or else you’ll have to pay for them yourself.”

CHAPTER VI

MORE TROUBLE

Dave and Roger spent the best part of half an hour in Asa Dickley's store, and during that time our hero and his chum gave the particulars of how they had become acquainted with Ward Porton, and how the young moving-picture actor had tried to pass himself off as the real Dave Porter, and how he had been exposed and had disappeared.

"Well, if what you say is true I've been swindled," declared the storekeeper finally. "I'd like to get my hands on that young man."

"You wouldn't like it any better than I would," returned Dave, grimly. "You see, I don't know how far this thing extends. Mr. Wecks has been after me to pay for some shoes that I never got."

"Say, that moving-picture actor must be a lulu!" declared the storekeeper's clerk, slangily. "If you don't watch out, Porter, he'll get you into all kinds of hot water."

"I think the best you can do, Dave, is to notify the storekeepers you do business with to be on the lookout for Porton," suggested Roger. "Then, if he shows up again, they can have him held until you arrive."

"I'll certainly have to do something," answered Dave.

"Then I suppose you don't want to settle that bill?" came from Asa Dickley, wistfully.

"No, sir. And I don't think you ought to expect it."

"Well, I don't know. The fellow who got those goods said he was Dave Porter," vouchsafed the storekeeper doggedly.

From Asa Dickley's establishment Dave, accompanied by his chum, drove around to the store kept by Mr. Wecks. He found the curtains still down, but the shoe-dealer had just come in, and was at his desk writing letters.

“And you mean to say you didn’t get those shoes?” questioned Mr. Wecks with interest, after Dave had explained the situation. “That’s mighty curious. I never had a thing like that happen before.” He knew our hero well, and trusted Dave implicitly. “I shouldn’t have sent that letter only I had a chance to sell a pair of shoes that size, and I thought if you had made your selection I could sell the pair you didn’t want to the other fellow.”

Once again the two boys had to tell all about Ward Porton and what that young rascal was supposed to be doing. As they proceeded Mr. Wecks’s face took on a look of added intelligence.

“Exactly! Exactly! That fits in with what I thought when that fellow went off with the shoes,” he declared finally. “I said to myself, ‘Somehow Dave Porter looks different to-day. He must have had a spell of sickness or something.’ That other chap was a bit thinner and paler than you are.”

“He’s a regular cigarette fiend, and that is, I think, what makes him look pale,” put in Roger. And then he added quickly: “Do you remember—was he smoking?”

“Yes, he was. He threw a cigarette stub away while he was trying on the shoes, and then lit another cigarette when he was going out. I thought at the time that he was probably smoking more than was good for him.”

“I don’t smoke at all, and never have done so,” said Dave. He turned to his chum. “I think the fact that the fellow who got the shoes was smoking is additional proof that it was Porton.”

“I haven’t the slightest idea that it was anybody else,” answered the senator’s son.

Mr. Wecks promised to keep on the lookout for Ward Porton, in case that individual showed himself again, and then Dave and Roger left.

“I’m going into all the stores where I do business and tell the folks to be on the watch for Ward Porton,” said our hero.

“A good idea, Dave. But see here! How are they going to tell him from you?” and the senator’s son chuckled. “You may come along some day and they may hold you, thinking you are Porton.”

“I thought of that, Roger, and I’ll leave each of them my signature on a card. I know that Ward Porton doesn’t write as I do.”

This idea was followed out, the boys spending the best part of an hour in going

around Coburntown. Then they drove back to Crumville, and there Dave visited some other establishments with which he was in the habit of doing business.

All the storekeepers were much interested in what he had to tell, and all readily agreed to have Ward Porton detained if he should show himself. At each place Dave left his signature, so that there might be no further mistake regarding his identity.

After that several days passed quietly. Both Dave and Roger were applying themselves to their studies, and as a consequence saw little of Ben except in the evenings, when all the young folks would get together for more or less of a good time.

“Any more news about that fortune in Chicago?” asked Dave, one evening of the Basswood lad.

“Not very much,” answered Ben. “Father telegraphed that he was hunting for some things that belonged to Mr. Enos. He said that as soon as he found them he would tell us all about it.”

“That certainly is a strange state of affairs.”

“Strange? I should say it was!” cried the other. “Mother and I are just dying to know what it all means. One thing is certain—Mr. Enos did not leave his fortune in stocks or bonds or real estate, or anything like that.”

On the following day came additional trouble for Dave in the shape of a communication from a hotel-keeper in Coburntown. He stated that he had heard through Asa Dickley that Dave was having trouble with a party who was impersonating him, and added that a person calling himself Dave Porter was owing him a bill of fifteen dollars for five days’ board.

“Isn’t this the limit?” cried Dave, as he showed the letter to his father and his Uncle Dunston.

“No use in talking, Dave, we’ll have to get after that rascal,” announced the father. “If we don’t, there is no telling how far he’ll carry this thing. I think I’ll put the authorities on his track.”

Two days after that, and while Dave was continuing his studies as diligently as ever, came word over the telephone from Clayton.

“Is this you, Dave Porter?” came over the wire.

“Yes,” answered our hero. “Who are you?”

“This is Nat Poole talking. I am up here in Clayton—in the First National Bank. You know my father got me a job here last week.”

“No, I didn’t know it, Nat. But I’m glad to hear you have something to do, and I hope you’ll make a success of it,” returned Dave promptly.

“I called you up to find out if you were in Clayton,” continued the son of the money lender. “I wanted to make sure of it.”

“Well, I’m not. I’m right here at home, Nat.”

“Then, in that case, I want to tell you that the fellow who looks like you is here.”

“Where do you mean—in the bank?”

“Well, he came in here to get a five-dollar bill changed. I happened to see him as he was going out and I called to him, thinking it was you. When I called he seemed to get scared, and he got out in a hurry. Then I happened to think about that fellow who looked like you, and I made up my mind I’d call you up.”

“How long ago since he was in the bank?” questioned Dave, eagerly.

“Not more than ten minutes ago. I tried to get you sooner but the wire was busy.”

“You haven’t any idea where he went?”

“No, except that he started down the side street next to the bank, which, as maybe you know, runs towards the river.”

“All right, Nat. Thank you very much for what you’ve told me. I want to locate that fellow if I possibly can. He is a swindler, and if you clap eyes on him again have him arrested,” added Dave; and this Nat Poole promised to do.

The news over the wire excited Dave not a little. Of the men of the household, only old Professor Potts was in, and he, of course, could not assist in the matter. Dave at once sought out Mrs. Wadsworth and told her of what he had heard.

“I think I’ll drive to Clayton and see if I can locate Porton,” he added. “Roger says he will go with me.”

“Do as you think best, Dave,” answered the lady of the house. “But do keep out

of trouble! This Ward Porton may prove to be a dangerous character if you attempt to corner him.”

“I think Roger and I can manage him, if only we can find him,” returned the youth.

Once more the black horse and the cutter were brought into service, and the two youths made the best possible time on the snowy highway that led through Coburntown to Clayton. Arriving there, they called at the bank and interviewed Nat Poole.

“If what you say about Porton is true he certainly must be a bad one—almost as bad as Merwell and Jasniff,” was the comment of the money lender’s son. “I certainly hope you spot him and bring him to book. That’s the way he went the last I saw of him,” he added, pointing down the side street.

Dave and Roger drove down the street looking to the right and the left for a possible sight of Ward Porton. But their search was doomed to disappointment for the moving-picture actor was nowhere to be seen.

“It’s a good deal like looking for a needle in a haystack,” was the comment of the senator’s son, after a full hour had been spent in the hunt.

They had left the sleigh and had walked around a number of mills and tenement houses which were situated in that locality.

“I’ve got an idea,” said Dave, as several children approached them. “I’m going to ask the youngsters if they’ve seen a young man who looks like me.”

The first boys and girls to whom the subject was broached shook their heads and declared they had seen nobody that resembled Dave. Then our hero and his chum passed on to other children, and finally to some men working around a newly-constructed tenement.

“Why sure! I saw a young feller wot looked like you,” said a youth who was piling up some lumber. “He ast me fer a match. Say! he looked like he could have been your twin,” he added in wonder; and then continued suddenly: “Maybe youse is playin’ a trick on me, and it was youse got the match?”

“No, I never met you before,” answered Dave, quickly. “When did you meet the other fellow, and where? I am very anxious to locate him.”

“It was down on de bridge, about an hour ago. I was comin’ dis way, and he was goin’ de udder way.”

“Was he smoking a cigarette?” asked Roger.

“He had one o’ de coffin-nails in his hand and he lit up after I given him de match.”

“Did he say anything?” questioned our hero.

The carpenter’s helper scratched his head for a moment. “Sure he did! He ast me if it was putty good walkin’ to Bixter. I told him ‘putty fair,’ and den he went on and I came here.”

“Then he must have gone on to Bixter!” cried Roger. “How far is that from here?”

“About two miles and a half,” answered Dave. He turned to the carpenter’s helper. “Much obliged to you.”

“Dat’s all right. Say! but dat guy certainly looks like you,” the carpenter’s helper added, with a grin.

“Come, we’ll follow him,” said Dave to his chum, and led the way on the run to where the horse was tied.

Soon they were in the cutter once more. Dave urged the black along at his best speed, and over the bridge they flew, and then along the road leading to the village of Bixter.

CHAPTER VII

FACE TO FACE

“If you catch Porton, Dave, what will you do—turn him over to the authorities?”

“Yes, Roger.”

“Is Bixter much of a place?”

“Oh, no. There are but two stores and two churches and not over thirty or forty houses.”

“Then you may have some trouble in finding an officer. Probably the village doesn’t boast of anything more than a constable and a Justice of the Peace.”

“I am not worrying about that yet, Roger,” returned our hero, grimly. “We have got to catch Porton first.”

“Oh, I know that. But if he started for Bixter on foot we ought to be able to locate him. A stranger can’t go through such a small place without somebody’s noticing it.”

On and on trotted the horse, past many well-kept farms, and then through a small patch of timber land. Beyond the woods they crossed a frozen creek, and then made a turn to the northward. A short distance beyond they came in sight of the first houses that went to make up the village of Bixter.

“Well, we’ve not seen anything of him yet,” remarked the senator’s son, as they slowed up and looked ahead and to both sides of the village street.

“No, and I don’t understand it,” returned Dave. “From what that carpenter’s helper said, I thought we should overtake him before we got to Bixter. Either he must have left this road, or else he must be some walker.”

“I don’t see where he could have gone if he left the road, Dave. All we passed were lanes leading to the farms, and a path through that wood. It isn’t likely he would take to the woods in this cold weather—not unless he was going hunting,

and that chap back in Clayton didn't say anything about his carrying a gun."

With the horse in a walk, they passed down the village street and back again. As they did this they kept their eyes wide open, peering into the various yards and lanes that presented themselves.

"I'm afraid it's no use unless he is in one of these houses or in one of the stores," was Roger's comment.

"I'll ask at the stores," returned Dave.

The inquiries he and his chum made were productive of no results so far as locating Ward Porton was concerned. No one had seen or heard of the former moving picture actor.

"All the strangers we've seen to-day was a cigar drummer," said one of the shopkeepers. "And he was a fat man and about forty years old." The other storekeeper had had no strangers in his place.

Hardly knowing what to do next, Dave and Roger returned to the cutter.

"Maybe he went farther than this," suggested Roger. "We might go on a mile or two and take a look."

Now that they had come so far, Dave thought this a good idea, and so they passed on for a distance of nearly two miles beyond Bixter. Here the sleighing became poor, there being but few farmhouses in that vicinity.

"It's no use," said Dave, finally. "We'll go back to Bixter, take another look around, and then return to Clayton and home."

When they arrived once more at the village Dave suggested that he and his chum separate.

"There are a number of these lanes that lead to some back roads," said Dave. "Perhaps if we tramp around on foot and ask some of the country folks living around here we may get on the track of the fellow we are after."

The senator's son was willing, and he was soon walking down a lane leading to the right while Dave went off to the left. Presently Dave came to a barn where a farmer was mending some broken harness.

"Hello! Back again, are you?" cried the farmer, as he looked at Dave curiously. "What brought you? Why didn't you stop when I called to you before?"

"I guess you're just the man I want to see," cried Dave, quickly. And then, as the farmer looked at him in increasing wonder, he added: "Did a young man who

looks very much like me go past here to-day?"

"Look like you?" queried the farmer. "Why, it was you, wasn't it?"

"No. It must have been a fellow who resembles me very closely. I am trying to catch him."

"Well, I swan!" murmured the farmer, looking at Dave critically. "That other feller looked as much like you as could be. Wot is he—your twin brother?"

"I am thankful to say he is no relative of mine. He is a swindler, and that is why I would like to catch him. He has been getting goods in my name. If he went past here perhaps you can tell me where he has gone?"

"He walked past here less than fifteen minutes ago. He went down that lane, which is a short cut to the road to Barnett."

"Barnett!" cried our hero. "That's the railroad station up this way, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then he must be heading for a railroad train!" exclaimed Dave, quickly. "How far is it from here?"

"Barnett is three miles by the road, but it's less than a mile and a quarter by that short cut through Gerry's Woods."

"Then I'll go after him by that short cut," answered Dave. He thought for a moment. To hunt up Roger and get him to go along might take too long. He looked at the farmer. "Would you like to go with me? I'll make it worth your while," he continued.

"Sorry, but I can't do it," was the reply. "I've got to meet the man who buys my milk down town in about fifteen minutes. He's a very particular customer, and if I should fail him he might get mad. So I can't go."

"All right, I'll go after him alone," answered our hero; and then continued: "If you are going down town, and you chance to see a friend of mine with my black horse and cutter, will you kindly tell him where I have gone?"

"Sure, I will;" and with this promise from the farmer Dave started on a swift walk along the short cut to Barnett which the other had pointed out.

Fortunately for the youth, to keep his feet warm while riding he had donned a heavy pair of rubbers, so that walking through the rather deep snow of the path leading through the back farms and through Gerry's Woods was not as uncomfortable as it might otherwise have been. To be sure, he occasionally

found himself floundering in snow that was over his shoetops, but when this happened he simply smiled grimly and made the best of it. When at Oak Hall he had often taken part in track athletics, cross-country running, and occasionally in a game of hare and hounds, and consequently his wind was good and he made rapid progress without becoming too much exhausted.

He was in the depth of the woods when, at a turn in the path, he saw a figure ahead of him. The individual wore a heavy overcoat and had a cap pulled well down over his ears and the back of his head.

“I may be mistaken, but that looks as if it might be Porton,” said Dave to himself. “However, I’ll soon know;” and he increased his speed so that he might catch up to the other walker.

As the ground was covered with snow our hero made but slight noise while he advanced, and as a consequence he drew quite close to the other individual before the latter was aware of his presence.

“Hi there!” called out Dave, when he was but a few feet behind. The fellow had stopped and turned around, and a single glance showed our hero that it was the youth he was seeking.

“Dave Porter!” muttered Ward Porton, as he recognized our hero. His manner showed that he was much astonished, as well as chagrined, at this unexpected meeting.

“You didn’t expect to meet me out here, did you?” remarked Dave, sharply, as he came up alongside the former moving-picture actor.

“Why—I—er—I—can’t—can’t say that I did,” returned Porton, lamely.

“You’ve been acting in a fine way, haven’t you, Porton?” went on Dave, angrily.

“Huh! What have I done?” Porton’s gaze was shifty. He did not dare to look our hero in the eyes.

“You know well enough what you’ve done, Porton—buying a whole lot of goods in my name.”

“What are you talking about? I didn’t do any such thing!” was the blustering reply. The former moving-picture actor was recovering from his surprise.

“I can prove that you did; and I’m going to hold you responsible for it,” answered Dave, calmly.

“Look here, Porter, I don’t want any such talk from you!” and now Ward Porton

doubled up his fists and stuck out his chin. "I've stood all I am going to stand from you. I want you to leave me alone."

"Porton, you can bluster all you please, but it won't do you any good," answered Dave, and his voice had a more positive ring to it than before. "You thought you could play this trick on me and get away with it, but I am going to show you it can't be done. I am going to hand you over to the authorities and see that you go to jail."

"If you think you can do that, Porter, you've got another guess coming. You clear out and let me alone or I'll make it hot for you;" and Ward Porton shook his fist in Dave's face.

The manner of the young man who had been obtaining goods in Dave's name was so aggressive that many a youth would have been intimidated and inclined to withdraw. But that was not our hero's way. He was righteously indignant, not only because of what the rascal before him had done, but also because of his present threat. Without more ado he seized hold of Porton's upraised arm and backed the fellow against a tree.

HE SEIZED PORTON'S UPRAISED ARM AND BACKED THE FELLOW AGAINST A TREE.—*Page 70.*

"Now, you just listen to me," he said sternly. "Your bluff and bluster won't do you any good. I am going to hand you over to the authorities, and that is all there is to it. You've got to behave yourself and stop threatening me, or I'll give you something that you won't want."

"You imp, you! Let go of me!" roared Porton, and, bringing around his disengaged hand, he struck Dave a glancing blow on the chin.

If anything more was needed to arouse our hero's just ire, this blow proved more than sufficient. As much anger as he had ever felt in his life surged up in Dave's heart. He drew back, letting go his hold—and the next instant his fist shot out and landed straight on Ward Porton's nose.

"Ouch!" spluttered the former moving-picture actor, and not without reason, for the stinging blow our hero had delivered not only hurt exceedingly, but also caused the blood to flow.

"Now will you behave yourself and come with me, or do you want some more?"

demanded Dave.

“I’ll fix you for that! Just wait!” bellowed Porton; and then he made a savage rush at our hero.

The next instant they were locked in each other’s arms and swaying from side to side, each doing his utmost to gain the mastery.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BASSWOOD FORTUNE

Over and over in the snow of the woods rolled Dave and Porton, first one being on top and then the other. Each was encumbered by his heavy overcoat and his gloves, so that to send in a decisive blow was practically impossible.

The former moving-picture actor fought desperately, for he had no desire to go to jail, and he realized that Dave meant to send him to such a place if he could possibly accomplish it.

Dave, on his part, was angered through and through, not only because of what Porton had done at the stores, but also because of the way the former moving-picture actor had threatened him.

The encounter had occurred at a spot where the trees were somewhat scattered and where rocks were numerous. As the two continued their struggle they sent the loose snow flying in all directions and often struck on some of the rocks.

At last Dave managed to get his opponent by the throat, and he forced Porton's head backward against a large stone. In the meantime, however, the rascal managed to double up one of his legs, and he gave Dave a shove in the stomach which sent him rolling over on his side.

"Now I'll fix you!" panted Porton, and, releasing his right hand, he picked up a loose stone which their scuffle had exposed to view. The next instant he brought the stone up, hitting our hero on the side of the head. It was a furious blow, and for the moment Dave was stunned. He let go of the other's throat, and as he did this Ward Porton arose to his feet.

"Now I guess you'll let me alone!" he snarled; and aimed a vicious kick at Dave's head. But the youth, even though somewhat bewildered, had sense enough left to dodge, and the blow landed on his shoulder.

Then Porton turned and dashed wildly along the woods path leading in the direction of Barnett.

It took our hero several seconds to collect himself sufficiently to arise. His ear was ringing from the contact with the stone, which fortunately had been a smooth one, and his shoulder also ached, even though the kick had been delivered through the padding of his overcoat.

He gazed along the path, and was just in time to see Porton disappearing around a bend.

If Dave had been thoroughly angry before, he was now even more so; and, shaking his head to clear his brain, he started on a run after the fugitive. He reached the turn in the path to see Porton emerging from the woods and taking to the highway leading to the railroad depot.

“He must be running to catch a train,” thought our hero. “And if that is so I’ll have to hustle or he’ll get away.”

By the time Dave gained the highway leading to Barnett, Ward Porton had reached the vicinity of the first of the houses in the village. Here he paused to glance back, and, seeing his pursuer, shook his fist at Dave. Then he went on about fifty yards farther, suddenly turning into a lane between two of the houses.

“He’s afraid to go to the depot for fear I’ll get after him before a train comes in,” thought Dave. “Well, I’ll catch him anyway, unless he takes to the woods.”

What Dave had surmised was correct. Ward Porton had thought to get on a train that would stop at Barnett inside of the next ten minutes. Now, however, he realized that to go to the depot and hang around until the cars took their departure would probably mean capture.

“Confound the luck! How did he manage to get on my trail so quickly?” muttered the former moving-picture actor to himself. “Now I’ll have to lay low and do my best to sneak off to some other place. I wish it wasn’t so cold. When I stop running I’ll be half frozen. But, anyway, I had the satisfaction of giving him one in the ear with that rock and another in the shoulder with my foot,” and he smiled grimly, as he placed his handkerchief to his bleeding nose.

By the time Dave reached the lane between the houses, Porton was nowhere in sight. There were a number of footprints in the snow, and following these Dave passed a barn and some cow-sheds. From this point a single pair of footprints led over a short field into the very woods where the encounter had taken place.

“He’s going to hide in the woods, sure enough,” reasoned our hero. “Or else maybe he’ll try to get back to Clayton, or Bixter.”

“Hi! What’s going on here?” cried a voice from the cow-shed, and a man showed himself, followed by two well-grown boys.

“I’m after a fellow who just ran across that field into the woods,” explained Dave, quickly. “He’s a thief. I want to catch him and have him locked up.”

“Oh, say! I thought I saw somebody,” exclaimed one of the boys. “I thought it might be Tom Jones goin’ huntin’.”

In as few words as possible Dave explained the situation to the farmer and his two sons, and they readily agreed to accompany him into the woods.

“But you’ll have a big job trying to locate that chap in those woods,” was the farmer’s comment. “The growth back here is very thick, and my boys have been lost in it more than once.”

“Huh! we always found our way out again,” grumbled the older of the sons, who did not like this statement on his parent’s part.

“Yes, Billy, but the woods are mighty thick,” returned his brother. “If that feller don’t look out he may get lost and get froze to death to-night, unless he knows enough to make a fire.”

It was easy enough to follow the footprints to the edge of the woods. But once there, the brushwood and rocks were so thick that to follow the marks one would have had to have the eyes of an expert trailer. Dave and the farmer, with the two boys, searched around for the best part of a quarter of an hour, but without success.

“He’s slipped you, I guess,” remarked the farmer, shaking his head. “I thought he would.”

“Are there any trails running through the woods in this vicinity?”

“The only trail I know of is the one running to Bixter. There is a woods road used by the lumbermen, but that is on the other side of the railroad tracks.”

The struggle with Ward Porton, followed by the run, had put Dave into quite a perspiration, and in the depth of the woods he found it exceedingly cold.

“I’ll have to keep on the move or I may get a chill,” he told the others, after another look around. “I guess we had better give it up.”

“Goin’ to offer any reward for capturin’ that feller?” questioned the older of the two boys, when the four were on their way back to the cow-shed.

“Yes, I’ll give a reward,” answered our hero, promptly. “If any of you can catch

him and have him held by the authorities I'll give you ten dollars."

"Wow! Me for the ten dollars!" cried the youth. "But say! how'll I know that feller if I do find him?" he questioned suddenly.

"That's right, Billy, you won't want to hold the wrong man," put in the father, with a grin. "If you did that, you might get into hot water," and he chuckled.

"It will be easy to recognize him," answered Dave. "Just take a good look at me. Well, unfortunately, that other fellow resembles me very closely. In fact, that's the reason I want to catch him. That's how he got those goods I said he had stolen. It's virtually stealing to get goods in such an underhand manner."

"All right, I'll know the feller if he looks like you," said Billy. He turned to his younger brother. "Say, Paul, what do you say if we go into the woods later on and lay low for that feller? Maybe he'll come out this way after he thinks the way is clear."

"Sure, I'll go with you," declared Paul. "If we look around very carefully we may be able to pick up his tracks somewhere."

It must be admitted that Dave felt much crestfallen when he bade good-bye to the farmer and his sons, after having left them his name and address.

The farmer had offered to drive him back to Bixter, but our hero had stated that he would rather walk and take the short cut through the woods. When he arrived at the village he found Roger wondering what had become of him.

"Well, did you catch Porton?" queried the senator's son.

"I did and I didn't," answered Dave, with a grim sort of smile. And he related the particulars of what had occurred.

"Great hambones, Dave! you certainly have had an experience!" was Roger's comment. "Let me look at that ear. I declare! it's quite swollen. I hope it didn't hurt anything inside," he added anxiously.

"It rings and aches a little, Roger; but I don't think it is seriously hurt."

"How about your shoulder?"

"That feels a little sore, but that's all. I'll soon get over it."

"And to think you got so close to capturing him and then he got away!" was the sad comment of the senator's son. "It does beat all how slippery some of those rascals are."

“I’m living in hope that those farmer boys will locate Porton,” said Dave. “I promised them a reward of ten dollars if they did so. That’s a lot of money for lads living around here.”

Now that he had rejoined Roger, and had gotten partly over the effects of his encounter with Porton, Dave was rather loath to give up the hunt. They managed to find a store where the proprietor occasionally furnished lunches, and there procured some sandwiches and hot chocolate. Then they drove to Barnett by the regular highway, and there took another look around for the missing evil-doer.

“The boys have gone down to the woods to look for him,” announced the farmer when Dave called on him once more. “If they learn anything I’ll let you know.”

That evening found Dave and Roger back in Crumville, where, of course, they had to relate the details of what had happened.

“Oh, Dave, you must be more careful!” cried Jessie, after he had told of the encounter in the woods. “That wicked fellow might kill you!” and she shuddered.

“Yes indeed, you ought to be careful,” said Laura. “Why, he seems to be almost as bad as Merwell and Jasniff were!”

“So he is, Laura. And if I ever get the chance I’ll put him where they are—in prison,” answered the brother grimly.

As was to be expected, Dave was quite worked up over what had occurred, and that night he did not sleep very well. Both his father and his sister insisted that he go to a physician and have his ear examined.

“No damage done, so far as I can see,” said the doctor. “But you had better bathe it with witch-hazel and keep it warm for a day or two.”

The next day Dave settled down to his studies as well as he was able. He hoped that word might come in that Ward Porton had been captured, but in this he was disappointed.

“I think he’ll steer clear of this neighborhood, for a while at least,” was Mr. Porter’s comment.

“That’s just my idea,” added Dave’s Uncle Dunston. “He must know that a great many swindled storekeepers and other people are on the watch for him.”

Dave had not seen Ben Basswood for several days. On the following evening the son of the real estate dealer came hurrying over to the Wadsworth mansion.

“We’ve got news about that Mr. Enos’s estate!” cried Ben, as soon as he met Dave and Roger. “It’s the queerest thing you ever heard of. Mother doesn’t know what to make of it, and I don’t know what to make of it, either.”

“Well, I hope it’s a valuable estate if it is coming to your father,” said the senator’s son.

“I don’t know whether it is valuable or not, and neither does father. He says in his telegram it is certainly worth several thousand dollars, and he doesn’t know but that it may be worth a hundred thousand dollars or more.”

“A hundred thousand dollars!” cried Laura, who had come in to hear what Ben had to tell. “Oh, Ben, that certainly is a fortune!”

“Well, what does it consist of?” queried Dave. “If it may be worth all the way from two or three thousand dollars to a hundred thousand or more, it must be mining stocks or something like that.”

“No, it isn’t in stocks or bonds or anything like that.”

“Then what in the world does the estate consist of?” questioned our hero.

“Miniatures,” answered Ben Basswood, simply.

CHAPTER IX

SOMETHING ABOUT MINIATURES

“Miniatures?” came from all of Ben Basswood’s listeners in a chorus.

“Do you mean those little paintings that are sometimes so valuable?” continued Laura.

“That’s it,” answered Ben. “I don’t know much about miniatures myself, but as soon as mother and I heard about this queer fortune of ours she asked the minister. You know he is quite interested in art, and he told her that most of these little miniatures, which are about the size of a silver dollar or a small saucer, are usually painted on ivory. Of course, some of them are not so valuable, but others, especially those painted by celebrated artists, are worth thousands of dollars.”

“And how many of these miniatures are there, Ben?” asked Roger, with increased curiosity.

“Father didn’t know exactly, but said they would number at least fifty, and maybe seventy-five.”

“I suppose they are paintings of celebrated individuals—kings, queens, and like that?” was Dave’s comment.

“No, these miniatures, so father stated, are made up almost entirely of the great fighters of the world—army and navy men, lieutenant-generals, admirals, and officers like that.”

“Well, where in the world did this Mr. Enos get money enough to buy such things?” asked Jessie, who had followed Laura into the room.

“That’s the queer part of it,” answered the real-estate dealer’s son. “It seems, after Mr. Enos and my father gave up business and separated, Enos went South—first to Texas and then into Mexico. There he joined some men who were opening up a gold mine. These men struck it rich, and almost before he knew it Mr. Enos was worth quite a lot of money. He had never been very much

of a business man—being wrapped up almost entirely in art—and so he did not know how to handle his money. He had always had a liking for miniatures, so my father stated, and he went in to gather this collection. He didn't want any kings or queens or noted society women, or anything like that, but he did want every miniature ever painted of an army or a navy fighter. Of course, my father doesn't know all the particulars yet, but he has learned that Mr. Enos put himself out a great deal to get hold of certain miniatures, hunting for them all over Europe and also in this country. He even went down to South America to get miniatures of some of their heroes, and also picked up several in Mexico, and one or two in Texas."

"His hobby must certainly have had a strong hold on him," was Dave's comment. "But still, that sort of thing isn't unusual. I heard once of a postage-stamp collector who went all over the world collecting stamps, and finally gave up his last dollar for a rare stamp when he actually hadn't enough to eat. Of course, he was a monomaniac on the subject of stamp collecting."

"Well, my father has an idea that Mr. Enos must have been a little queer over his miniature collecting," returned Ben. "But even so, the fact remains that he left his collection of miniatures behind him, and that they are now the property of my father."

"And what is your father going to do with them?" questioned Roger.

"He doesn't know yet. You see, the settling of the estate is in a very mixed-up condition. He is going to stay in Chicago for a week or so, and then he'll probably bring the miniatures East with him and have some art expert place a valuation on them. After that I suppose he'll offer the miniatures for sale to art galleries and rich collectors."

This was about all Ben could tell concerning the fortune left to his parent. The young folks talked the matter over for quite a while, and were presently joined by the older people, including Caspar Potts.

"Miniatures, eh?" said the genial old professor, beaming mildly on Ben. "Very curious! Very curious indeed! But some of them are wonderful works of art, and bring very good prices. I remember, when a young man, attending a sale of art works, and a miniature of one of the English nobility was knocked down for a very large sum, several thousand dollars if I remember rightly."

"Well, it's very fine to get hold of a fortune, no matter in what shape it is," observed Mr. Wadsworth. "Just the same, Ben, I think your father would prefer to have it in good stocks and bonds," and he smiled faintly.

“No doubt of that, sir,” was the prompt answer. “But, as you say, miniatures are much better than nothing. In fact, I’d rather take a fortune in soft soap than not get it at all,” and at this remark there was a general laugh.

“Oh, my gracious, Ben! what would you do with a hundred thousand dollars’ worth of soft soap?” queried Laura, slyly.

“Oh, I’d go around and smooth down all my friends and enemies with it,” the boy returned, and this caused another laugh.

Several more days passed, and during that time Dave and Roger continued to devote themselves to their studies. Mr. Ramsdell, the old civil engineer, was on hand to tutor the two youths, and he declared that they were making satisfactory progress, and that he thought they would pass the coming examinations without much trouble.

“I wish I felt as confident about it as Mr. Ramsdell does,” observed our hero to his chum one day.

“The same here, Dave,” returned Roger. “Every time I think of that examination I fairly shake in my shoes. Passing at Oak Hall wasn’t a patch to passing as a civil engineer.”

There had been another fall of snow, and now sleighing was even better than before. Jessie and Laura went out in company with their uncle, and on their return both showed some excitement.

“Oh, Dave—Roger—what do you think!” cried Laura. “I’ve got a letter from Belle Endicott, and she is coming on from Star Ranch to spend several weeks with me, and she is going to bring along one of her old school chums, Cora Dartmore. What do you think of that? Won’t it be fine?”

“It certainly will be, Laura,” answered her brother. “When do you expect them to arrive?”

“They are coming on immediately; so I suppose they’ll be here in a day or two if they are following this letter.” Laura looked inquiringly at Dave. “What a pity Phil Lawrence isn’t here,” she half whispered.

Both of them knew that during the visit of the young folks to the Endicott ranch the shipowner’s son and Belle Endicott had become exceedingly friendly.

“Well, I’ve invited Phil to come here,” answered Dave. “I guess all I’ve got to do is to mention Belle to him and he’ll be on the way without delay.”

“Then, by all means, send him word,” returned the sister. “Then we can make up a fine little party, for we can pair Cora Dartmore off with Ben.”

A letter from Dave to Phil Lawrence was dispatched that evening, and the next day came a telegram from the shipowner’s son stating that he would come on that night.

“I knew the mention of Belle would fetch Phil,” remarked Dave to Roger, when they were alone. “Phil certainly has got an eye on that girl.”

“Well, you can’t blame him, Dave. Belle Endicott is a splendid girl and comes from a splendid family. I’ll never forget how royally they treated us when we were at Star Ranch.”

“Yes, we certainly did have one grand time, in spite of what Link Merwell did to annoy us.”

“Oh, drop Link Merwell!” Roger paused for a moment and then went on: “Isn’t it queer, Dave, how just as soon as you get rid of one bad egg like Merwell another bobs up like this Ward Porton?”

“It is queer, Roger.” Dave heaved a deep sigh. “I wish I could get on the track of that rascal.”

“Haven’t heard a thing, have you?”

“No.”

“Well, you can be thankful that he hasn’t been around buying more goods in your name.”

“Oh, I think I scared him pretty well when I met him in the woods. He’ll probably lay low for a while—at least until he thinks the field is clear again. But I’d give a good deal if I never saw or heard of him again,” and Dave heaved another sigh.

The next day the local paper came out with a big article on the front page speaking about the Basswood fortune. Mr. Basswood had returned to town, and had been interviewed by a reporter, and the sheet gave many of the particulars regarding the wonderful miniatures left by Mr. Enos. According to the paper they numbered sixty-eight all told, and were worth from a hundred dollars to five thousand dollars apiece. It was said that they had been placed in a safe deposit vault, being packed in several plush-lined cases.

The paper went on to state that Mr. Basswood thought something of bringing

them to Crumville, where they might be judged by a committee of experts in order to ascertain their real value. The real-estate dealer was spoken of as a man well-known in the community, and the article concluded by stating that all the good people of Crumville and vicinity would undoubtedly congratulate him on his good fortune.

“They certainly piled it on a little thick,” was Dave’s comment, after he and Roger had read the article. “Just the same, I agree with the paper—the Basswoods richly deserve the fortune that has come to them.” Dave had not forgotten those days, now long gone by, when he had been a boy just out of the poorhouse living with Caspar Potts, and how Ben Basswood had been his one young friend during those trying times.

As luck would have it, all the young visitors bound for the Wadsworth mansion reached Crumville on the same train. Of course, the others went down to the depot to meet them, and there was a grand jollification lasting several minutes.

“My, Belle, how you have grown!” declared Laura, after the numerous kisses and handshakes had come to an end. “Isn’t she growing tall, Dave?”

“She certainly is,” returned the brother. And what they said was true—Belle Endicott was now tall and willowy, and exceedingly pretty to look at,—so much so in fact, that Phil Lawrence could hardly take his eyes from her.

“It was mighty good of your folks to invite me down,” said the shipowner’s son, when the whole crowd was making its way over to where the Wadsworth automobile and sleigh were standing. “I appreciate it, I assure you.”

“Oh, my! you don’t suppose we could leave you out, Phil, with Belle here,” returned Dave, as he gave his chum a nudge in the ribs.

“Good for you, Dave!” Phil blushed a little, and then winked one eye. “How are matters going between you and Jessie?”

“Very well.”

“Glad to hear it. And I suppose Roger has that same old eagle eye of his on your sister Laura?”

“Well, you don’t find him talking very much to anybody else when Laura is around,” was Dave’s dry comment.

“Oh, we had a perfectly splendid journey!” cried Belle Endicott. “And wasn’t it the strangest thing that we should run into Phil at the junction where we had to change cars to get here?”

“Must be some sort of mutual attraction,” cried Laura, mischievously. And then to hide any possible confusion she added quickly to Cora Dartmore: “I hope you enjoyed the trip also.”

“Yes, I had a splendid time,” answered the newcomer, a girl not quite so tall as Belle but almost equally good-looking. “You see, this is my first trip to the East. Oh, I know I am going to have a perfectly lovely time!” she added enthusiastically.

The young folks piled into the sleigh and automobile, and in a very short time arrived at the Wadsworth mansion. Here Mrs. Wadsworth was ready to receive the visitors, and her gracious manner made them feel at home immediately.

Phil, as was his custom, insisted on rooming with Roger and Dave, while Belle Endicott and her chum were made comfortable in a room next to those occupied by Jessie and Laura.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do with you boys,” said Mrs. Wadsworth, laughingly. “You always bunk in as thick as fleas.”

“We got used to that at Oak Hall,” returned Dave. “Besides that, the room is a large one with two single beds in it, and we can easily put in a cot;” and so it was settled.

“My, but I’m mighty glad to be with you two fellows again!” declared the shipowner’s son, when the youths were left to themselves. “It seems like a touch of old times.”

“So it does,” returned Roger, smiling broadly.

“From now on I suppose we won’t be able to get together as much as we used to,” said Dave; “so while we are together let us make the most of it.”

“So say we all of us!” cried Phil and Roger, gaily.

CHAPTER X

THE BIG SLEIGHING-PARTY

Of course, even with so many visitors to entertain, Dave and Roger could not neglect their studies; so it was arranged that every day the pair should apply themselves diligently to their books and to what their tutor had to say from eight o'clock until twelve. Then lunch would be had and the young folks could start out to enjoy themselves in one way or another.

On one occasion the three boys went hunting with Dunston Porter in the woods back of Crumville. They had a most delightful time, and brought back quite a bagful of rabbits, as well as several squirrels, and also a plump partridge, the bird being brought down by Dave.

“And it was a fine shot, Davy,” remarked his Uncle Dunston in speaking about the partridge. “As fine a shot on the wing as I ever saw.”

Crumville boasted of a good-sized pond; and from this the snow had been cleared, giving the young folks an opportunity for skating, which every one of them enjoyed to the utmost. They also attended a concert given in the church one evening, and even went to a moving-picture show which had recently been opened in the town.

The moving pictures interested the two girls from the Far West more than anything else, for, so far, they had had little opportunity to take in such a form of entertainment.

During those days Dave was continually on the watch for some information concerning Ward Porton, but no word of any kind came in, and he finally concluded that the rascal had left that vicinity.

“Most likely he thought things were growing too hot for him,” was Phil's comment, when the boys talked the matter over. “He probably realized that if he continued to go to the stores and get goods the way he did he would be caught sooner or later.”

Ben Basswood often went out with the others, pairing off, as had been expected by Laura, with Cora Dartmore. This left Belle Endicott more or less in Phil's care, for which the shipowner's son was grateful.

"Yes, my father has brought the Enos miniatures here," answered Ben, one day, in reply to a question from Dave. "He had them in a safe deposit vault first, but he concluded that they would probably be just as safe at our place. You know, he has a big safe of his own in which he keeps all his real estate documents." Mr. Basswood's office was in a wing of his house, and all the boys had visited it and knew that it contained a massive steel affair about five feet square and probably four feet deep.

"They ought to be safe there, Ben," returned Dave. "I don't see what a thief could do with miniatures, and I don't believe your father's office is liable to catch fire."

"And that safe must be fire-proof," put in Roger.

"I think it is fire-proof," returned the real estate dealer's son. "And I guess you are right about thieves—they would rather steal money or jewelry or silverware, or something like that, every time."

Used to a life in the open air, and to riding and driving, the sleighing in and around Crumville proved to be a constant delight to Belle and Cora. As a consequence, it was arranged by the boys that the whole crowd should go out in a large sleigh, to be procured from the local livery stable and to be drawn by four reliable horses.

"We'll put a lot of straw in the bottom of the sleigh and make it a sort of straw-ride," declared Dave.

"And just to think! it will be moonlight!" cried his sister. "Won't that be the finest ever!"

"It certainly will be!" came from Jessie, her eyes beaming. But then she turned suddenly to Dave, her face clouding a little. "Who is going to drive—you?"

"No, we're going to have a regular man from the livery stable," he answered. And then as his sister turned away, he added in a low tone: "I didn't want to spend my time on the horses—I wanted to spend it on you."

"Oh, Dave!" murmured the girl, and blushed. Then she gave him a look that meant a great deal.

The sleighing-party was to start off about two o'clock the next afternoon, and

did not expect to return to Crumville until well towards midnight. They were to go to the town of Lamont, about seventeen miles away. A new restaurant had been opened in this town, in connection with the hotel, and Mr. and Mrs. Wadsworth had stopped there for a meal and had pronounced it excellent, the food being of first-class quality and an orchestra being present to liven matters up. Ben had thought at first that he could not accompany the others, his father having been taken sick; but as Mr. Basswood's illness was not of a serious nature, Mrs. Basswood, knowing how disappointed the youth would be, urged that he go along anyhow.

"Your father is resting quite comfortably," she told Ben; "and the doctor says he will be around again inside of a week, so you may as well take in this sleighride while you have the chance."

"But there are those miniatures, mother," returned Ben. "Wasn't father going to let Mr. Wadsworth see them?"

"Mr. Wadsworth is going to have several art critics at his home in a day or two, and then your father is to let all of them examine the miniatures carefully to see if he can get an idea of what they are worth. But you need not bother your head about that. If Mr. Wadsworth sends word that the critics have arrived at his house I'll take care of the matter." And so this was arranged, and Ben went off to prepare for the sleigh-ride.

At the appointed hour, the big sleigh came dashing up to the door of the Wadsworth mansion. All of the young folks, including Ben, were on hand and ready for the trip, each bundled up well for protection against the cold. The sun had been shining in the morning, but towards noon it had gone under a heavy bank of clouds.

"Looks a little to me like more snow," observed Dunston Porter, who was present to see them depart. "I shouldn't be surprised to see you coming back in the midst of another fall."

"Oh, Uncle Dunston, don't say that!" cried Laura. "We want the moon to shine this evening."

"Well, it will shine, Laura," returned the uncle, with a wink of the eye. "It always does shine, even when we don't see it," and then he dodged when she laughingly picked up a chunk of snow and threw it at him.

Into the big sleigh piled the girls, and the boys quickly followed. All the back seats had been removed, and they nestled down in the thick straw and covered

themselves with numerous robes.

“Look out that you don’t jounce off when you go over a bump,” cried Dunston Porter to Phil and Belle, who sat at the back of the turnout.

“Oh, we’ll hold on, don’t worry!” cried Phil.

“I’m used to hanging on,” came from the western girl, quickly. “Riding in this sleigh won’t be half as bad as hanging on to the back of a half-broken broncho.”

“I guess that’s right, too,” answered Dave’s uncle. “Just the same, you take care. I don’t want you young folks to have any accidents on this trip.”

“I trust you all have a good time,” came benevolently from old Caspar Potts, as he gazed at them and rubbed his hands. “My, my! how I used to enjoy sleighing when I was a young man! And how many years ago that seems!” he added with a little sigh.

“Don’t stay any later than midnight,” warned Mrs. Wadsworth.

“We’ll be back by that time unless something unusual turns up,” returned Dave. He turned to the others in the sleigh. “Everybody fixed and ready?”

“All ready!” came back the answering cry.

“Then we’re off.” Dave turned to the driver, a middle-aged colored man. “Let her go, Wash.”

“Yassir,” responded Washington Bones, with a grin. “Giddap!” he called to his horses. And with a crack of the whip and a grand flourish the turnout left the front of the Wadsworth mansion and whirled out on to the broad highway leading to Lamont.

The four horses were used to working together, and they trotted along in fine style, causing many a passer-by to stop and gaze at the team and the gay load of young people in admiration. The horses were well equipped with bells, and each of the youths had provided himself with a good-sized horn, so that noise was not lacking as they dashed along past the stores and houses of Crumville. Then they came out on the Lamont road, where the sleighing was almost perfect.

“I hope we don’t have any such adventure as we had at Conover’s Hill,” remarked Jessie to Dave while they were spinning on their way.

“I don’t think these livery stable horses will run away,” he returned. “They are used every day, and that makes them less frisky than our horses, which sometimes are in the stable for a week. Besides that, Wash Bones is one of the

most careful drivers around here. If he does anything, he'll let the team hold back on him rather than urge them to do their best."

On and on flew the sleigh, the young folks chatting gaily and occasionally bursting out into a verse of song.

"Let's give 'em our old Oak Hall song!" cried Dave, presently.

"That's it!" came eagerly from his two chums, and a moment later they started up the old school song, which was sung to the tune of Auld Lang Syne, the girls joining in:

"Oak Hall we never shall forget,

No matter where we roam;
It is the very best of schools,

To us it's just like home!
Then give three cheers, and let them ring

Throughout this world so wide,
To let the people know that we

Elect to here abide!"

"Say, that takes me back to the old days at Oak Hall," remarked Roger, when the singing had come to an end. "My, but those were the great days!"

"I don't believe we'll ever see any better, Roger," answered Dave.

The sleighing party had still three miles to go when suddenly Laura uttered a cry.

"It's snowing!"

"So it is!" burst out Belle. "What a shame!"

"Maybe it won't amount to much," said Ben. "It often snows just a little, you know."

The first flakes to fall were large, and dropped down lazily from the sky. But soon it grew darker, and in a short time the snow was coming down so thickly that it almost blotted out the landscape on all sides.

"Some fall this!" exclaimed Phil. "Looks now as if it were going to be a regular storm."

“O dear! and I wanted it to be moonlight to-night!” wailed Laura.

Dave was peering around and looking anxiously at the heavy, leaden sky.

“If this is going to be a heavy storm, maybe it might be as well for us to turn back,” he announced.

“Turn back?” came from several of the others.

“Yes.”

“What for, Dave?” questioned Phil. “I don’t think a little snow is going to hurt us. Maybe it will help to keep us warm,” he added with a grin.

“We don’t want to get snowed in, Phil.”

“Oh, let’s go on!” interposed Roger. “Even if it does keep on snowing it won’t get very heavy in the next couple of hours. We can hurry up with our dinner at Lamont and be home again before it gets very deep.”

“All right, I’m willing if the rest are,” returned Dave, who did not wish to throw “cold water” on their sport. “Lamont it is! Go ahead, Wash, we want to get there just as soon as possible.”

On they plunged, the snow coming down thicker and thicker every minute. Then, just as the outskirts of the town were gained, they heard a curious humming sound.

“Oh, Dave! What is that?” queried Jessie.

“It’s the wind coming up,” he answered. “Listen!”

All did so and noted that the humming sound was increasing. Then the wind came tearing through the woods and down the highway with great force, sending the snow in driving sheets into their faces.

“My gracious, this looks as if it were going to be a blizzard!” gasped Phil, who had started up to see what the sound meant. “We had better get under some kind of cover just as soon as possible.”

“We’ll be up to dat hotel in anudder minute,” bawled Washington Bones, to make himself heard above the sudden fury of the elements. “Say! dis suah is some snowsto’ m!” he added.

Again he cracked his whip, and once more the four horses ploughed along as well as they were able. They had to face both the wind and the snow, and these combined made progress slow. By the time the party came into sight of the hotel

with the restaurant attached, the wind was blowing almost a gale, and the snow seemed to be coming down in driving chunks.

“Drive us around to the side porch,” ordered Dave. “It will be a little more sheltered there.”

“Yassir,” came from the colored driver; and soon they had come to a halt at the spot mentioned. From under the snow and robes crawled the boys and the girls and lost no time in running into the hotel. Then the colored man drove the turnout down to the stables.

FROM UNDER THE SNOW AND THE ROBES CRAWLED THE BOYS AND THE GIRLS—*Page 103.*

“My! did you ever see such a storm!” was Roger’s comment. “And how quickly it came up!”

“If it isn’t a blizzard, it is next door to it,” returned Dave. And then he added quickly: “It looks to me as if we were going to be snowbound!”

CHAPTER XI

HELD BY THE BLIZZARD

“Snowbound!” The cry came from several of the party.

“Yes, snowbound, if this heavy fall continues,” answered Dave. “Just see how the chunks of snow are coming down, and how the wind is driving them along.”

It was certainly an interesting sight, and all the young people watched it for some time before they took off their wraps and prepared to sit down to the meal, which had been ordered over the telephone before leaving Crumville.

“My, just listen to the wind!” was Phil’s comment. “You’d think it was a regular nor’-wester.”

“If it keeps on it certainly will be a blizzard,” put in Roger. “In one way we can be glad we are under shelter, even though we are a good many miles from home.”

“Yes. And snow or no snow, I move that we sit down to dinner,” continued Phil. “We can’t go back while it is snowing and blowing like this, so we might as well make the best of our stay here.”

After having ordered a meal for the colored man, which was served in another part of the hotel, Dave joined his friends in the restaurant. A special table had been placed in a cozy corner, and that was decorated with a large bouquet of hothouse flowers, with a smaller bouquet at each plate.

“Oh, how lovely!” burst out Jessie, when she saw the flowers.

“You folks in the East certainly know how to spread yourselves,” was Cora Dartmore’s comment. “Just look at those beautiful flowers and then at the fierce snowstorm outside.”

“Oh, let us forget the storm!” cried Laura. “It will be time enough to think about that when we have to start for home.”

“That’s the truth!” answered her brother, gaily. “Everybody fall to and do as much damage to the bill-of-fare as possible;” and this remark caused a general smile.

Then the first course was served and soon all of the party were eating and chatting with the greatest of satisfaction.

In the meanwhile, the blizzard—for such it really was—continued to increase in violence. The wind tore along through the woods and down the streets of the town, bringing with it first the heavy chunks of snow and then some hard particles not unlike salt in appearance. The fine snow seemed to creep in everywhere, and, driven by the wind, formed drifts which kept increasing in size steadily.

After the first course of raw oysters, came some cream of celery soup with relishes, and then some roast turkey with cranberry sauce and vegetables. After that the young folks had various kinds of dessert with hot chocolate, and then nuts with raisins.

“What a grand dinner!” remarked Belle, when they were finishing. “Dave, you certainly know how to order the good things.”

“Oh, I had Roger and Phil to help me on that,” returned our hero. “Trust them to order up the good things to eat.”

“And trust Dave to help us get away with them,” sang out the senator’s son, gaily.

“There is only one time when those fellows can’t eat,” retorted Dave. “That is when they are asleep.”

At a small table not far away from where the young people were seated, sat an elderly man and a lady.

“There is Doctor Renwick and his wife,” said Laura, when the meal was finished. “They must have been sleighing, too. I am going to speak to them.” For Dr. Renwick came from Crumville, and had often attended the Porter family, as well as the Wadsworths.

“We are staying here for a few days,” said Mrs. Renwick to Dave’s sister, after they had shaken hands. “You see, the proprietor of this hotel and restaurant is my cousin.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that,” said Laura. “They certainly have a very nice place here, and the dinner we had was just too lovely for anything.”

“Are you folks calculating to drive back to Crumville now?” questioned Dr. Renwick.

“That was our expectation,” replied Dave, who had followed his sister; “but it looks pretty fierce outside, doesn’t it?”

“I should say so, Porter. Just listen to that wind, and see how it is driving the snow! I shouldn’t like to face it for any great distance.”

The others came up, and all the strangers were introduced to the doctor and his wife, and then the entire party left the restaurant and entered the parlor of the hotel, from the windows of which they could watch the storm.

“It certainly is fierce!” remarked Phil, as they gazed at the furious onslaught of the elements.

The wind was blowing as hard as ever, rattling the windows and sending the snow against the panes as if it were so much hail. It was impossible to see across the street, and, although Lamont boasted of a limited electric light service, all the lights upon the street corners were out.

“This storm is going to break down a lot of the wires,” announced Roger.

“What do you think about our trying to get back to Crumville?” questioned Dave.

“To tell the truth, Dave, I don’t see how we are going to make it. You don’t want to face that wind, do you? And going back we’d have to head into it nearly all the way.”

“I think I’ll go outside and have a talk with the driver,” answered our hero, and went out accompanied by Roger and Ben.

“I’d like to get home on account of my father’s being sick,” announced the real estate dealer’s son. “Otherwise I would just as lief stay here until to-morrow.”

“That’s all right enough for us boys,” put in Roger, “but how about the girls?”

“We can leave them in Mrs. Renwick’s care if we have to,” announced Dave. “Laura and Jessie know her very well, and I am sure she’ll be only too glad to play the chaperon. She’s a very nice lady, and the doctor is a very fine man.”

They found that Washington Bones had had his supper and had returned to the stable to feed his horses. When they questioned the colored man about getting back to Crumville he shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

“Might try it if you say so,” he said; “but it ain’t gwine to be no easy job, boss,

and we may git stuck somewheres so as you cain't git to not even a house. Then we might all be froze to death."

"What do you think it is, Wash, a blizzard?" questioned Roger.

"Dat's jest what dis is, boss. And my opinion is it's gwine to be a heap sight wo'se before it gits bettah," added the driver.

"I guess you're right there," answered Dave. "And that's one reason I think we ought to try to get back to Crumville. But just the same, I'd hate to get stuck somewhere along the road, as he says. We boys might be able to get out of it along with Wash, but we couldn't expect the girls to do any tramping in such deep snow and in such a wind."

There was an old-fashioned covered walk from the hotel to the stables, so that the boys in going from one place to the other had not had to expose themselves to the elements. Now, to get an idea of how bad the storm was, Dave walked out as far as the street, followed by his chums.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" puffed the senator's son, as they stood where they could get the full benefit of the storm. "This is frightful, Dave! Why, it would be nothing short of suicide to try to go anywhere!"

"I—I—guess we h-had better g-go in and telephone that we c-c-can't come!" panted Ben; and then lost no time in returning to the stable, followed by the others.

They had been outside less than five minutes, yet the fury of the blizzard had nearly taken their breath away.

"We won't attempt it, Wash; so you can make arrangements to stay here to-night," announced Dave. He turned to his chums. "Come on back to the hotel, and we will do what telephoning is necessary."

They returned to the parlor, and there the situation was explained to the girls and to Dr. Renwick and his wife.

"Oh, you mustn't think of trying to get back to-night!" cried the doctor's wife, quickly. "There are plenty of vacant rooms here, and I'll see to it that my cousin gives you good accommodations."

"And will you look after the young ladies, Mrs. Renwick?" questioned Dave.

"I certainly will, Dave," she answered graciously. "Don't let that worry you in the least. I'll be glad to take charge of such a nice family," and she smiled

sweetly at all the girls.

“We are going to telephone to Crumville and let the folks know how matters stand,” announced Ben; and then he and Dave hurried to where there was a telephone booth.

Here, however, they met with no success so far as getting into communication with their folks at Crumville was concerned. It took a long time to get Central, and then it was announced that the storm had taken down all the wires running to Crumville and beyond. One wire that was down was still connected, but, try their best, neither of the boys was able to understand anything of what was said over it. Then this line snapped; and that ended all efforts to send any messages.

“I wish they knew we were safe,” said Dave. “Now that they don’t know it they may worry, thinking we are snowed in somewhere along the road.”

“Well, we’ve got to make the best of it,” answered Ben. “I did hope to speak to mother, to ask her how father was, and to let her know that we were all right.”

“It looks to me, Ben, as if this blizzard might last for several days or a week.”

“So it does. But sometimes these storms clear away almost as rapidly as they come.”

The two youths returned to the others and announced the failure of their effort to get into communication with Crumville. This was disheartening to Laura and Jessie, but as it could not be helped the girls said they would make the best of it. Then Laura and Dave went off with the doctor and his wife, to obtain accommodations for the whole party.

It was learned that Dr. Renwick had a fine apartment on the second floor, and that there were two rooms adjoining which were vacant. These were turned over to the four girls. The boys were accommodated with two rooms on the floor above.

“Not quite as good as they might be,” observed Dave, when he and his chums inspected their rooms, which were directly under the roof of the country hotel. “But they are much better than nothing, and, as the sailors say, ‘any port in a storm.’”

“Oh, this is plenty good enough,” returned Phil. “But I am glad the girls are on the floor below. Those rooms are much better than these.”

As the boys had no baggage, there was nothing for them to arrange in the rooms which had been assigned to them, so after a hasty look around they started to go

downstairs again, to rejoin the girls in the parlor. As the boys passed the room next to the one which Dave and Ben had elected to occupy, the door of the apartment was opened on a crack. Then, as the youths left the corridor to descend the stairs, the door was opened a little wider, and a young man peered out cautiously.

“Well, what do you know about that!” muttered the young man to himself, after the four chums had disappeared. “Right here at this hotel, and going to occupy the room next to the one I’ve got! Could you beat it?”

The young man was Ward Porton.

CHAPTER XII

TIM CRAPSEY'S PLOT

"Who are you talking to, Port?" questioned a man who was resting on the bed in the room which Ward Porton occupied.

"Didn't I tell you not to call me by that name, Crapsey?" returned the former moving-picture actor, as he closed the door softly and locked it.

"What's the difference when we're alone?" grumbled the man called Crapsey, as he shifted himself and rubbed his eyes.

"It may make a whole lot of difference," answered Porton. "I've just made a big discovery."

"A discovery?" The man sat up on the edge of the bed. "Discovered how to git hold of some money, I hope. We need it."

"You remember my telling you about that fellow who looks like me—the fellow named Dave Porter?" went on the former moving-picture actor. "Well, he's here in this hotel. And he and three of his chums have the rooms next to this one."

"You don't mean it?" and now Tim Crapsey showed his interest. "Did they see you?"

"Not much! And I don't intend that they shall," was the decided reply.

"Did you know the other fellows?"

"Yes, they are the regular bunch Porter travels with. I've got to keep out of sight of all of them. From what they said they are evidently snowbound here on account of this blizzard, so there is no telling how long they will stay," added the former moving-picture actor in disgust. "Confound the luck! I suppose I'll have to stay in this room a prisoner and let you get my meals for me."

"This fellow's being here may not be such a bad thing for you," remarked Tim Crapsey. "Maybe you can impersonate him and touch the hotel clerk for a loan

of ten or twenty dollars.”

“I am not going to run too many risks—not with so many of those fellows on hand. If I had only Porter to deal with it might be different,” returned Ward Porton. “Just the same, I’m going to keep my eyes open, and if I can get the best of him in any way you can bet your boots I’ll do it.”

In the meanwhile Dave and his chums had rejoined the girls and Dr. Renwick and his wife in the parlor of the hotel, and there all made themselves as much at home as possible. There was quite a gathering of snowbound people, and a good deal of the talk was on the question of how long the blizzard might last.

“Some of the people here are going to try to get over to Pepsico,” said one man. “That is only a mile and a quarter from here, and they are hoping to get the train that goes through that place about one o’clock in the morning.”

“The train may be snowbound, too,” returned another; “and if it is those folks will have their hard tramp to Pepsico for nothing.”

Outside it was still snowing and blowing as furiously as ever. All the street lights were out, and so were the electric lights in the hotel, so that the hostelry had to depend on its old-time lamps for its illumination. But the lamps had been discarded only the year before so it was an easy matter to bring them into use again.

Not to keep the good doctor and his wife up too long, Laura told Mrs. Renwick that they would retire whenever she felt like it. About half past ten good-nights were said and the girls went upstairs with the lady, followed presently by the doctor. The boys remained below to take another peep out at the storm.

“It’s a regular old-fashioned blizzard,” announced Dave.

“And no telling how long we’ll be stalled here,” added Roger. “Quite an adventure, isn’t it?” and he smiled faintly.

“Well, we can be thankful that we weren’t caught somewhere along the road,” broke in Phil.

“That’s it!” came from Ben. “Why, if we had been caught in some out-of-the-way place, we might be frozen to death trying to find some shelter.”

The two rooms which the chums occupied on the third floor of the hotel were connected, and before they went to bed the youths all drifted into the one which was to be occupied by Dave and Ben, for here it was slightly warmer than in the other room, and the lamp gave a better light. It seemed good to be together like

this, especially on a night when the elements were raging so furiously outside. The former school chums talked of many things—of days at Oak Hall, of bitter rivalries on the diamond, the gridiron, and on the boating course, and of the various friends and enemies they had made.

“The only one of our enemies who seems to have made a man of himself is Gus Plum,” remarked Dave. “He has settled down to business and I understand he is doing very well.”

“Well, Nat Poole is doing fairly well,” returned Ben. “I understand his father owns stock in that bank, so they’ll probably boost Nat along as rapidly as his capabilities will permit.”

“Nat was never the enemy that Plum and Jasniff and Merwell were!” cried Phil. “He was one of the weak-minded kind who thought it was smart to follow the others in their doings.”

“This storm is going to interfere with our studies, Dave,” announced Roger. “Not but what I’m willing enough to take a few days’ rest,” he added with a grin.

“We’ll have to make up for it somehow, Roger,” returned our hero. “We’ve got to pass that examination with flying colors.”

“I’m afraid this storm will interfere with the art critics who were to look at those miniatures,” put in Ben. “Oh, dear! I wish we knew just what those little paintings were worth.”

“I hope they prove to be worth at least a hundred thousand dollars,” said Phil. “That will be a nice sum of money for you folks, Ben.”

“Right you are!” answered the son of the real estate dealer.

The youths were tremendously interested in the miniatures, and a discussion of them ensued which lasted the best part of half an hour. Ben described some of the pictures as well as he was able, and told of how they were packed, and of how they had been placed in the Basswood safe, waiting for the critics that Mr. Wadsworth had promised to bring from the city to his home to inspect them.

“Well, I suppose we might as well turn in,” said Roger, presently, as he gave a yawn. “I must confess I’m tired.”

“Come ahead, I’m willing,” announced Phil; and then he and the senator’s son retired to the next room.

“O pshaw! what do you suppose I did?” exclaimed Dave to Ben, while the pair

were undressing. "I left my overcoat and my cap on the rack in the lower hallway. I should have brought them up here."

"I did the same thing," answered his chum. "I guess they'll be safe enough. All the folks in this hotel seem to be pretty nice people."

"I don't suppose there are any blizzard pictures among those miniatures, Ben?" observed Dave, with a laugh just before turning in.

"There is a picture of one army officer in a big, shaggy uniform which looks as if it might be worn because of cold weather," answered Ben; and then, as the miniatures were very close to his heart, the youth began to talk about them again.

This discussion lasted for another quarter of an hour, after which the chums retired and were soon deep in the land of slumber.

Although none of our friends knew it, every word of their conversation had been listened to eagerly by Ward Porton and the man with him. They had noted carefully all that had been said about the Basswood fortune, and about the miniatures having been placed in the real estate dealer's safe awaiting inspection by the critics who were to visit Mr. Wadsworth at his mansion. Both had noted also what Dave had said about leaving his overcoat and his cap on the rack on the lower floor of the hotel.

"A hundred thousand dollars' worth of miniatures!" murmured Tim Crapsey, after the sounds in the adjoining room had ceased. "Say, that's some fortune, sure enough!"

"But pictures! Humph, what good are they?" returned Ward Porton, in disgust. "I'd rather have my fortune in something a little more usable."

"Oh, pictures are not so bad, and miniatures can be handled very easily," answered Tim Crapsey. His small eyes began to twinkle. "Jest you let me git my hands on 'em, and I'll show you wot I kin do. I know a fence in New York who'll take pictures jest as quick as anything else."

"And what would he do with them after he got them?" questioned Ward Porton curiously.

"Oh, he'd ship 'em 'round to different places after he got 'em doctored up, and git rid of 'em somehow to art dealers and collectors. Of course, he might not be able to git full value for 'em; but if they're worth a hundred thousand dollars he might git ten or twenty thousand, and that ain't bad, is it?" and Tim Crapsey looked at Ward Porton suggestively.

“Easy enough to talk, but how are you going to get your hands on those miniatures?” demanded the former moving-picture actor, speaking, however, in a low tone, so that none of those in the next room might hear him.

“I jest got an idee,” croaked Tim Crapsey. He was a man who consumed a large amount of liquor, and his voice showed it. “Didn’t you hear wot that chap said about leaving his coat and hat downstairs? If you could fool them shopkeepers the way you did, then, if you had that feller’s hat and coat, and maybe fixed up a bit to look like that photograph you had of him, you might be able to go to the Basswood house and fool the folks there.”

“I don’t quite understand?”

“I mean this way: We could go to Crumville and you could watch your chance, and when the coast was clear you could git a rig and drive over to the Basswood house and go in quite excited like and tell ’em that this Mr. Wadsworth was a-want-in’ to see them miniatures right away,—that a very celebrated art critic had called on him, but couldn’t stay long. Wanted to ketch a train and all that. You could tell ’em that Mr. Wadsworth had sent you to git the miniatures, and that he had said that he would return ’em jest as soon as the critic had looked ’em over. Do you ketch the idee?” and Tim Crapsey looked narrowly at his companion.

“It might work, although I’d be running a big risk,” said Ward Porton, slowly. Yet his eyes gleamed in satisfaction over the thought. “But you forgot one thing, Tim: We are snowbound here, and we can’t get away any quicker than they can.”

“That’s where you’re mistaken, Port—I mean Mr. Jones,” Crapsey checked himself hastily. “I heard some folks downstairs talkin’ about going over to Pepsico to ketch the one o’clock train. That goes through Crumville, and if we could ketch it we’d be in that town long before mornin’. We could fix up some story about the others bein’ left behind here, and Dave Porter comin’ home alone. They can’t send any telephone message, for the wires are down, and I don’t know of any telegraph office here where they could send a message that way.”

“If we were going to try it we’d have to hustle,” announced Ward Porton. “And it’s a fierce risk, let me tell you that,—first, trying to get to the railroad station, and then trying to bluff Mr. and Mrs. Basswood into thinking I am Dave Porter. You must remember that since I got those things in Porter’s name at those stores, the whole crowd are on their guard.”

“Well, you can’t gain anything in this world without takin’ chances,” retorted Tim Crapsey. “If I looked like that feller I’d take the chance in a minute. Why,

jest see what we could make out of it! If you can git your hands on those miniatures, I'll take care of the rest of it and we can split fifty-fifty on what we git out of the deal."

Ward Porton mused for a moment while Tim Crapsey eyed him closely. Then the former moving-picture actor leaped softly to his feet.

"I'll do it, Tim!" he cried in a low voice. "Come ahead—let us get out of this hotel just as soon as possible. And on the way downstairs I'll see if I can't lift that cap and overcoat."

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT WASHINGTON BONES HAD TO TELL

Dave was the first of the four chums to awaken in the morning. He glanced toward the window, to find it covered with frost and snow, thus leaving the room almost dark. The wind was still blowing furiously, and the room was quite cold. Without disturbing Ben our hero looked at his watch and found that it was almost eight o'clock. He leaped up and commenced to dress.

"Hello! getting up already?" came sleepily from his roommate, as Ben stretched himself and rubbed his eyes. "It must be pretty early."

"That's where you're mistaken, Ben," was Dave's answer. "In a few minutes more it will be eight o'clock."

"You don't say so! How dark it is! But I suppose it's the frost on the window makes that," went on the real estate dealer's son, as he, too, got up. "Phew! but it's some cold, isn't it?" and he started to dress without delay.

The noise the two boys made in moving around the room aroused the others, and soon they too were getting up.

"Wow! Talk about Greenland's Icy Mountains!" commented Phil, with a shiver. "How'd you like to go outside, Roger, just as you are, and have a snowball fight?"

"Nothing doing!" retorted the senator's son, who was getting into his clothing just as rapidly as possible. "Say, fellows, but this surely is some snowstorm!" he continued, as he walked to the window and scraped some frost from a pane of glass so that he could catch a glimpse of what was outside. "It's still snowing to beat the band!" he announced.

"And listen to the wind!" broke in Ben. "Why, sometimes it fairly rocks the building!"

"Doesn't look much as if we were going to get back to-day," said Dave. "I

suppose the roads are practically impassable.”

“They must be if it snowed all night,” answered Ben. “Let us go down and take a look around.”

“I wonder if the girls are up yet?” questioned Roger.

“It won’t make much difference whether they are or not,” returned Dave. “If we can’t get away from here they may as well sleep as long as they please. There certainly isn’t much to do in this small hotel.”

The youths were soon washed and dressed, and then all trooped below. They passed the rooms occupied by the girls and by Dr. Renwick and his wife, but heard no sounds coming from within.

“They are taking advantage of the storm to have a good rest,” commented Phil. He gave a yawn. “I almost wish I had remained in bed myself. We won’t have a thing to do here.”

“I noticed a bowling alley next door, Phil,” announced Roger. “If we can’t do anything else to-day we can bowl a few games. That will be fine exercise.”

“Do the girls know about bowling?” questioned Ben.

“Not very much,” answered Dave. “Laura has bowled a few games, I believe. But it will be fun to teach them, if we don’t find anything better to do.”

The boys walked through the small lobby of the hotel and into the smoking room. Here several men were congregated, all talking about the storm and the prospects of getting away.

“The snow is nearly two feet deep on the level,” said one man; “but the wind has carried it in all directions so that while the road is almost bare in some spots there are drifts six and eight feet high in others.”

“Looks as if we were snowed in good and proper,” returned another man. “I wanted to get to one of those stores across the way, and I had about all I could do to make it. In one place I got into snow up to my waist, and it was all I could do to get out of it.”

“Doesn’t look like much of a chance to get away from here,” observed Roger.

“We are booked to stay right where we are,” declared Phil; “so we might as well make the best of it.”

“Let us go out to the barn and see what Wash Bones has to say,” suggested Dave. “He has probably been watching the storm and knows just how things are on the

road.”

“All right,” returned Ben. “But I am going to put on my cap and overcoat before I go. It must be pretty cold out there even though they do keep the doors shut.”

“Yes, I’ll get my cap and overcoat, too,” said Dave. Phil and Roger had taken their things up to the third floor the night before, and now had their overcoats over their arms.

The large rack in the hallway of the hotel was well filled with garments of various kinds, so that Ben had to make quite a search before he found his own things. In the meantime, Dave was also hunting, but without success.

“That’s mighty queer,” remarked the latter. “I don’t seem to see my cap or my overcoat anywhere.”

128
“Oh, it must be there, Dave,” cried his chum. “Just take another look. Maybe the overcoat has gotten folded under another.”

Both youths made a thorough search, which lasted so long that Phil and Roger came into the hallway to ascertain what was keeping them.

“Dave can’t find his overcoat or his cap,” explained Ben. “We’ve hunted everywhere for them.”

“Didn’t you take them up-stairs last night?” questioned Phil.

“No, I left them on this rack. And Ben left his things here, too,” replied Dave. “I can’t understand it at all;” and he looked worried.

“Maybe Laura saw them and took them upstairs, thinking they wouldn’t be safe here,” suggested Roger.

“I hardly think that, Roger. However, as the coat and cap are not here, maybe I’d better ask her.”

Another search for the missing things followed, Dave looking through the parlor and the other rooms on the ground floor of the hotel, and even peeping into the restaurant, where a number of folks were at breakfast. Then he went upstairs and knocked softly on the door of the room which Laura and Jessie were occupying.

“Who is it?” asked his sister, in a somewhat sleepy tone of voice.

“It’s I, Laura,” answered her brother. “I want to know if you brought my cap and overcoat upstairs last night.”

“Why, no, Dave, I didn’t touch them. What is the matter—can’t you find them?”

“No, and I’ve hunted high and low,” he returned. “I don’t suppose any of the other girls or the doctor touched them?”

“I am quite sure they did not.” Laura came to the door and peeped out at him. “Are you boys all up already?”

“Yes, we went down-stairs a little while ago. We were going out to the barn, and that’s why I wanted my overcoat and cap. They seem to be gone, and I don’t know what to make of it;” and now Dave’s face showed increased anxiety.

“What’s the trouble?” came from Jessie, and then Laura closed the door again. Dave heard some conversation between all of the girls, and then between Laura and Mrs. Renwick. Then his sister came to the door once more.

“None of us touched your cap or overcoat, Dave,” she said. “Isn’t it queer? Do

you suppose they have been stolen?”

“I hope not, Laura. I’m going down and see the hotel proprietor about it.”

The proprietor of the hostelry was not on hand, but his son, a young fellow of about Dave’s age, was behind the desk, and he listened with interest to what our hero had to say. Then he, too, instituted a search for the missing things.

“I can’t understand this any more than you can,” he announced, after this additional search had proved a failure. “I didn’t know we had any thieves around here. Are you sure you left the coat and cap on this rack?”

“Yes, I am positive,” announced Dave.

“I saw him do it, when I placed my own things on the same rack,” declared Ben.

“But you found your coat and cap all right?”

“Yes.”

“It’s mighty queer,” declared the young clerk, shaking his head. “I guess I’d better tell my father about this.”

The hotel proprietor was called, and he at once instituted a number of inquiries concerning the missing things. But all these proved of no avail. No one had taken Dave’s wearing apparel, and none of the hired help had seen any one else take the things or wear them.

“You should have taken your things up to your room last night,” declared the hotel proprietor, during the course of the search. “It’s a bad idea to leave things on a rack like this, with so many strangers coming and going all the time.”

He agreed to lend Dave a coat and a hat, and, donning these, the youth walked through the little shelter leading to the stables, accompanied by his chums.

“If those things are not recovered I think you can hold the hotel man responsible,” remarked Roger.

“Just what I think,” put in Ben. “That overcoat was a pretty nice one, Dave; and the cap was a peach.”

“I’ll see what can be done, in case the things don’t turn up,” returned our hero.

They found Washington Bones down among the stablemen, taking care of his horses.

“Well, Wash, what are the prospects for getting away this morning?” questioned Roger.

“Ain’t no prospects, so far as I kin see,” declared the colored driver. “This suah am one terrible sto’ m. I neber seen the like befo’ aroun’ heah.”

“Then you don’t think we’re going to get back to Crumville to-day?” questioned Ben.

“No-sir. Why, if we was to try it we’d suah git stuck befo’ we got out ob dis town. Some ob de drifts is right to de top of de fust story ob de houses.” Washington Bones looked questioningly at Dave. “How did you like your trip outside las’ night?” he queried. “Must ha’ been some walkin’, t’rough sech deep snow.”

“My trip outside?” questioned Dave, with a puzzled look. “What do you mean, Wash? I didn’t go out last night.”

“You didn’t!” exclaimed the colored driver in wonder. “Didn’t I see you leavin’ de hotel las’ night ’bout half pas’ ’levin or a little later?”

“You certainly did not. I was in bed and sound asleep by half past eleven,” answered Dave.

“Well now, don’t dat beat all!” cried the colored man, his eyes rolling in wonder. “I went outside jest to take a las’ look aroun’ befo’ turning in, and I seen a young fellow and a man leavin’ de hotel. Dey come right pas’ where a lantern was hung up on the porch, and when dat light struck on de young fellow’s face I thought suah as you’re bo’n it was you. Why, he looked like you, and he had on de same kind of cap and overcoat dat you was a-wearin’ yeste’day. I see you’ve got on something different to-day.”

“A fellow who looked like me and who had on my cap and my overcoat!” ejaculated Dave. He turned to his chums. “What do you make of that?”

“Maybe it was Ward Porton!” cried Roger.

“If it was, he must have run away and taken Dave’s cap and overcoat with him,” added Ben.

CHAPTER XIV

MOVEMENTS OF THE ENEMY

As my readers doubtless surmise, it was Ward Porton who had made off with Dave's overcoat and cap.

Leaving the room which they occupied on the third floor locked, the young moving-picture actor and his disreputable companion had stolen down the two flights of stairs leading to the lower hallway. Fortunately for them, no one had been present, and it had been comparatively easy for Porton to find Dave's things and put them on. Tim Crapsey already wore his own overcoat and hat.

"We might as well provide ourselves with rubbers while we are at it," remarked Crapsey, as his gaze fell upon a number of such footwear resting near the rack, and thereupon each donned a pair of rubbers that fitted him.

Thus equipped they had stolen out of the hotel through a side hallway without any one in the building being aware of their departure.

"We're going to have a fight of it to get to the railroad station," muttered Ward Porton, as the fury of the storm struck both of them.

"It's lucky I know the way," croaked Tim Crapsey. And then, as they passed over the porch in the light of the lantern by which Washington Bones had seen Porton, the man went on: "Say, what's the matter with us stoppin' at some drinkin' place and gittin' a little liquor?"

"Not now," interposed his companion, hastily. "We want to make our get-away without being seen if we possibly can."

"Oh, nobody will know us," grumbled Crapsey, who had a great fondness for liquor, "and the stuff may prove a life-saver if we git stuck some place in the snow."

The realization that they might become snowbound on the way to Pepsico made Porton pause, and in the end he agreed to visit a drinking place several blocks

away, which, by the light shining dimly through the window, they could see was still open.

“But now look here, Tim, you’re not going to overdo it,” said the former moving-picture actor, warningly. “If we are going to pull this stunt off you are going to keep perfectly sober. It’s one drink and no more!”

“But I’m goin’ to git a flask to take along,” pleaded the man.

“You can do that. But I give you fair warning that you’ve got to go slow in using the stuff. Otherwise we are going to part company. In such a game as we are trying to put over, a man has got to have his wits about him.”

Having procured a drink, and also a package of cigarettes and a flask of liquor, the two set off through the storm for the railroad station, a mile and a quarter away. It was a hard and tiresome journey, and more than once they had to stop to rest and figure out where they were. Twice Tim Crapsey insisted upon it that he must have a “bracer” from the flask.

“I’m froze through and through,” he declared.

“Well, I’m half frozen myself,” retorted Ward Porton, and when he saw the man drinking he could not resist the temptation to take some of the liquor himself.

“We’ll be in a fine pickle if we get to Pepsico and then find that the train isn’t coming through,” remarked the former moving-picture actor, when about three-quarters of the journey had been covered and they were resting in the shelter of a roadside barn.

“That’s a chance we’ve got to take,” returned his companion. “But I don’t think the train will be stormbound. Most of the tracks through here are on an embankment, and the wind would keep them pretty clear.”

It was after one o’clock when the pair finally gained the little railroad station at Pepsico. They found over a dozen men and several women present, all resting in the tiny waiting-room, trusting that the train would soon put in an appearance.

“The wires are down so they can’t tell exactly where the train is,” said one of the men, in reply to a question from Porton. “They are hoping, though, that it isn’t many miles away.”

From time to time one of the would-be passengers would go out on the tracks to look and listen, and at last one of these announced that a train was on the way.

“But I can’t tell whether it’s a passenger train or a freight,” he said.

“Let’s git on it even if it’s a freight,” said Tim Crapsey to Ward Porton. “She’ll take us to Crumville jest as well.”

“All right, provided we can get aboard.”

Slowly the train puffed in and proved to be a freight. On the rear, however, was a passenger car, hooked on at the last station.

SLOWLY THE TRAIN PUFFED IN, AND PROVED TO BE A FREIGHT. *Page 136.*

“The regular passenger train is stalled in the cut beyond Breckford,” announced the conductor of the freight, “and there’s no telling when she’ll get out. If you folks want to risk getting through, get aboard;” and at this invitation all those waiting at the station lost no time in boarding the mixed train. Then, with a great deal of puffing and blowing, the locomotive moved slowly away from Pepsico, dragging the long line of cars, some full and some empty, behind it.

Long before Crumville was reached it became a question as to whether the train would get through or not. The snow was coming down as thickly as ever, and the wind whistled with increased violence.

“I don’t believe we’ll get much farther than Crumville,” announced the conductor, when he came through to collect tickets. “We should have passed at least two trains coming the other way. But nothing has come along, and that would seem to show that the line is blocked ahead of us.”

As a matter of fact, the mixed train did not get even as far as Dave’s home town. Running was all right so long as the tracks were up on the embankment, but as soon as they reached the level of the surrounding country the snow became so deep that several times the train had to be backed up so that a fresh start might be made. Then, when they came to a cut not over three feet deep, just on the outskirts of the town, the engineer found it utterly impossible to get any farther.

“We’ll have to have a snow-plough to get us out,” he declared, “or otherwise we’ll have to remain here until the storm clears away.”

By listening to the conversation of some of the people in the car, Porton and Crapsey learned that it was only a short distance to the town, and they followed several men and a woman when they left the train to finish the journey on foot.

“I know where we are now,” said Porton, presently, as he and his companion

struck a well-defined road leading past the Wadsworth jewelry works. "We'll be right in Crumville in a little while more."

Ward Porton knew very well that he must not show himself in Crumville any more than was necessary. Consequently, as soon as they came within sight of the town proper, he suggested that they look around for some place where they might remain until daybreak.

"Right you are," answered Tim Crapsey. And a little later, coming to a large barn, they tried the door, and, finding it unlocked, entered and proceeded to make themselves comfortable in some hay, using several horse blankets for coverings.

Here both of them, being thoroughly exhausted, fell sound asleep and did not awaken until it was daylight.

"Now we've got to lay our plans with great care," announced Ward Porton. "We can't go at this in any haphazard way. Even though it may prove comparatively easy to get our hands on those miniatures, it will be another story to get away with them in such a storm as this, with the railroad and every other means of communication tied up."

"This storm is jest the thing that's goin' to help us," answered Crapsey. "With all the telegraph and telephone wires down the authorities won't be able to send out any alarm. And with the snow so deep, if we git any kind of a start at all it will be next to impossible for 'em to follow us up."

A discussion of ways and means followed that lasted the best part of an hour. Then, with money provided by Porton, and with many an admonition that he must not for the present drink another drop, Tim Crapsey was allowed to depart for Crumville.

"And you be very careful of how you go at things," warned Porton.

Tim Crapsey had a delicate mission to perform. First of all he was to size up matters around the homes of the Wadsworths and the Basswoods, and then he was to do what he could to hire a cutter and a fast horse at the local livery stable. This done, he was to procure something to eat both for himself and for his companion.

As time went by Ward Porton, on the alert for the possible appearance of the owner of the barn, became more and more anxious, and twice he went out in the roadway to see if his companion was anywhere in sight.

“It would be just like him to go off and get full of liquor,” muttered the young man, with a scowl. “I really ought to part company with him. But when he is perfectly sober he certainly is a slick one,” he continued meditatively.

To pass the time the young man made a thorough search of the overcoat which he had stolen from Dave. He had already discovered a fine pair of gloves and had worn them. Now, in an inner pocket, he located a card-case containing half a dozen addresses, some postage stamps, and some of Dave’s visiting cards. There were also two cards which had been blank, and on each of these, written in Dave’s bold hand, was the following:

*Signature of
David Porter,
Crumville.*

“Hello! what’s this?” mused the former moving-picture actor, as he gazed at the written cards. Then suddenly his face brightened. “Oh, I see! It’s one of those cards that I heard about—the kind he has been distributing among the storekeepers in an effort to catch me. Say, one of these may come in handy when I go for those miniatures!” he continued.

At last he heard a noise outside, and looking in that direction saw Tim Crapsey approaching in a somewhat dilapidated cutter, drawn, however, by a powerful-looking bay horse.

“Had a fierce time gittin’ this horse,” announced the man, as he came to a halt beside the barn. “The livery stable man didn’t want to let him go out, and I had to tell him a long yarn about somebody bein’ sick and my havin’ to git a doctor. And I had to offer him double price, too!” and at his own ruse the man chuckled hoarsely.

He had brought with him some sandwiches and doughnuts, and also a bottle of hot coffee, and on these both made a somewhat limited breakfast, the man washing the meal down with another drink from his flask.

“I kept my word—I didn’t drink a drop when I was in town,” he croaked. “But say, this is mighty dry work!”

“You keep a clear head on your shoulders, Tim,” warned Porton. “Some day, drink is going to land you in jail or in the grave.”

“Not much!” snorted the man. “I know when to stop.” But Porton knew that this was not true.

Another conference was held, and Crapsey told of having taken a look around, both at the Wadsworth place and the Basswood home.

“There is no one at the Basswood place but Mr. and Mrs. Basswood; and I understand the man is sick in bed,” he said. “All the telephone wires are out of commission, but to make sure that the Basswoods couldn’t telephone I cut the wire that runs into his real estate office—and I also cut the wire up at the Wadsworth house.”

“Good for you, Tim!” returned Ward Porton, and then he told of having found the two cards, each containing Dave’s signature.

“That’s fine!” cried the man. “That ought to help you a great deal when you ask for the miniatures.”

“I hope it does,” answered Ward Porton, thoughtfully. “Now let us go; the sooner we get at this affair the better.” And then both left the barn, entered the cutter, and drove rather slowly in the direction of the Basswood home.

CHAPTER XV

THE RETURN TO CRUMVILLE

“If Ward Porton got my cap and overcoat he must have been staying at this hotel,” said Dave, after the announcement made by Ben. “Let us interview the proprietor without delay.”

He and his chums hurried back into the hotel and there met not only the proprietor but also his son.

“See here, have you anybody staying here who looks like me?” demanded our hero of both of them.

“Sure, we’ve got a fellow who looks like you,” declared the hotel-keeper’s son before his father could speak. “It’s a Mr. Jones. He has a room up on the third floor. He’s here with an older man named Brown.”

“I wish you would take me up to their room!” cried Dave, quickly.

“Why! what’s the matter now?”

“I want to find out whether that fellow is still here. If he is I want him placed under arrest.” And then Dave related a few of the particulars concerning Ward Porton and his doings.

“That certainly is a queer story,” remarked the hotel proprietor. “I’ll go upstairs with you.”

He led the way, followed by Dave and his chums. The youths were much astonished to see him halt at the door next to their own.

“They don’t seem to be there, or otherwise they are sleeping pretty soundly,” remarked the hotel proprietor, after he had knocked on the door several times.

“I guess you had better unlock the door,” suggested Dave. “I rather think you will find the room empty.”

A key was secured from one of the maids and the door was opened. The

proprietor gave one look into the apartment.

“Gone!” he exclaimed. “Say! do you think they have run away?”

“That’s just exactly what I do think,” answered Dave. “And that fellow who looks like me most likely took my cap and overcoat.”

“And you say his name is Porton? He signed our register as William Jones.”

“Here’s his hat and coat,” announced Phil, opening the door to a closet. “Pretty poor clothing he left you in return for yours, Dave,” continued the shipowner’s son, after an inspection.

The hotel proprietor was very wrathful, declaring that Porton and his companion owed him for three days’ board.

“They’re swindlers, that’s what they are!” he cried. “Just wait till I land on them! I’ll put them in jail sure!”

“I’d willingly give you that board money just to get my hands on Ward Porton,” announced Dave. He turned to his chums. “This sure is the limit! First he goes to the stores and gets a lot of things in my name and then he steals my hat and overcoat right from under my nose!”

“Yes, and that isn’t the worst of it,” declared Roger. “There is no telling where he has gone; and even if you knew, in this awful storm it would be next to impossible to follow him.”

All went below, and there they continued to discuss the situation. In the midst of the talk the girls came down, accompanied by Dr. Renwick and his wife.

“Oh, Dave! you don’t mean to tell me that that horrid Ward Porton has been at more of his tricks!” cried Laura.

“Isn’t it perfectly dreadful!” put in Jessie. “And to think he was right in this hotel with us and we never knew it!”

“That’s what makes me so angry,” announced Dave. “If only I had clapped my eyes on him!” he added regretfully.

“Well, there’s no use of crying over spilt milk,” declared Roger. “He is gone, and so are Dave’s overcoat and his cap, and that is all there is to it.”

“Speaking of milk puts me in mind of breakfast,” put in Phil. “Now that the others are downstairs don’t you think we had better have something to eat?”

All were agreeable, and soon they were seated at a large table in the dining

room, in company with the doctor and Mrs. Renwick. Here, while eating their breakfast, they discussed the situation from every possible standpoint, but without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion.

“Porton must have seen us when we came up to the rooms,” said Dave to his chums. “He probably heard me speak about leaving my cap and overcoat downstairs, and he just took a fiendish delight in walking off with them and leaving his old duds behind. Oh, he certainly is a peach!”

Had there been the slightest let-up in the blizzard, Dave and his chums would have gone out on a hunt around the town for Porton and his unknown companion. But with the wind blowing almost a hurricane, and the snow coming down as thickly as ever, Dr. Renwick told them that they had better remain indoors.

“It isn’t likely that they stayed anywhere around here, fearing detection,” said the physician. “They probably put a good distance between themselves and this hotel. And to go out in such a storm as this might make some of you sick.”

“Oh, well, what of that? We have a doctor handy,” answered Dave, whimsically. “Just the same, I guess we had better remain where we are,” he added, with a deep sigh.

It was not until the following morning that the wind died down and the snow ceased to fall. In the meantime, the young folks did what they could to entertain themselves, the girls playing on the piano in the hotel parlor, and the boys later on taking them to the bowling alleys next door and initiating them into the mysteries of the game. Dave was a good bowler and so was Roger, each being able occasionally to make a score of two hundred. But Ben and Phil could not do much better than one hundred, while none of the girls got over eighty.

“Now that the snow has stopped falling, I suppose we had better try to get back to Crumville,” said Laura to her brother.

“Yes, we ought to get back,” put in Jessie. “I suppose our folks are dreadfully worried about us.”

“It was too bad that you couldn’t send some sort of word,” came from Belle. “If you could only do that we could stay here until the roads were well broken.”

“In the West we don’t pretend to go out in such a storm,” remarked Cora Dartmore. “But, of course, our distances are greater, and we have so few landmarks that it is an easy thing to get lost.”

“I don’t think we are going to get away from here in any great hurry,” replied Dave. “It is true the snow has stopped coming down and the sun is breaking through the clouds; but I am quite sure the drifts on the road between here and Crumville are much higher than we can manage, even with the powerful horses we have. We’ll have to wait until the roads are more or less broken.”

Our hero was right about not getting away. They went down to the stables and interviewed Washington Bones and several of the other drivers present, and all agreed that it would not be possible to get very far beyond the town limits. This news made the young folks chafe considerably, but there was nothing to be done; so for another day they had to content themselves as best they could. During that time the boys did their best to send some message to Crumville, but without success, for all of the telephone and telegraph wires were still down and nothing had been done to mend them.

The next morning, however, things looked a little brighter. The weather continued to improve, and several horse teams, as well as an ox team, came through on the road from the direction of Crumville.

“The road ain’t none too good so far as I could see,” announced one of the drivers to Dave. “But if you take your time and watch where you’re going, maybe you can get through.”

“Oh, let us try it anyway!” cried Laura, who was present. “If we find we can’t make it we can come back here, or else stop at some other place along the way.”

It was finally agreed that they should make the effort, and they started about ten o’clock. The sun was shining with dazzling brilliancy on the snow, and with no wind blowing it was considerably warmer than it had been on the journey to Lamont. All of the young folks were in good humor, Dave for the time being dismissing from his mind the trouble occasioned by the loss of his cap and overcoat.

As they drove away from the town they could see the effects of the great wind. In some spots the road was almost bare of snow, while in others there were drifts ten and twelve feet in height. To drive through such drifts was, of course, impossible; so they had to make long detours through the surrounding fields. At such places the horses, of course, had to be driven with extra care, for no one wanted the sleigh to land in some hole or be overturned. Occasionally, when the turnout was on a dangerous slant, the girls would shriek and the boys would hold their breath; but each time Washington Bones was equal to the occasion and brought them through safely.

By noon they had covered five miles, and then they stopped to rest at a village where all procured a good hot dinner. Then they went forward once again, this time through a long patch of timber.

“If we gits through dat, we’ll be all right,” declared the colored driver.

The snow lay deep in the woods, but the horses proved equal to the occasion, and at last the timber was left behind and they came out on a ridge road where the snow was only a few inches in depth. Here they were able to make fairly good time, so that three o’clock found them almost within sight of the outskirts of Crumville.

“We’re going to make it easily,” declared Ben. But he proved to be mistaken, for a little distance farther on they ran again into the deep snow and had to pass around one drift after another, finally going clear across several fields to another highway. As a result it was well after dark before they gained the road leading past the Wadsworth jewelry works.

“Well, this looks like home, anyway,” declared Dave to Jessie, as he nodded in the direction of her father’s establishment.

“Yes, and I’m glad of it,” returned the girl. “Gracious! it seems to me that we have been on the road for a week!”

“We can be thankful that we got through so easily, Jessie. Wash is certainly some driver.”

On account of another big drift they had to pass to still another road, and this brought them finally to the street leading past the Basswood home.

“If it’s all the same to you folks, I’ll get off at my place,” announced Ben. “I suppose my father and mother are worrying about me.”

“Go ahead, Ben,” returned Dave. And then he added quickly: “I trust you find your father is better.”

With a flourish Washington Bones drew up the panting horses in front of the Basswood place. Just as Ben leaped from the sleigh the front door of the house opened and Mrs. Basswood appeared.

“Ben! Ben! is that you?” cried the youth’s parent, quickly.

“Yes, Mother,” he answered cheerily. “Don’t worry. I am all right.”

Forgetful that she had on only thin shoes, and no covering over her head or shoulders, Mrs. Basswood ran directly down to the big sleigh. She glanced over

the occupants and her eyes fastened instantly on Dave.

“Dave, have you been with Ben since you went away?” she queried. “You haven’t been to our house?”

“Why certainly I haven’t been here, Mrs. Basswood,” he returned promptly.

“Then it’s true! It’s true!” she wailed, wringing her hands.

“What’s true, Mother?” demanded the son.

“The miniatures! They’re gone! They have been stolen! That young man who looks like Dave was here and took them away!”

CHAPTER XVI

HOW THE MINIATURES DISAPPEARED

“The miniatures are gone?” came from Ben Basswood in astonishment.

“Yes, Ben, gone!” and the mother wrung her hands in despair.

“Do you mean to say Ward Porton dared to come here and impersonate me and get them?” cried Dave.

“It must have been that fellow, Dave. He looked exactly like you. That is why I just asked you if you had been to our house.”

“I have been with Ben and the others since we went on our sleigh-ride,” said our hero. “This is terrible! How did it happen?”

“Come into the house and I’ll tell you all about it,” answered Mrs. Basswood. Her face was drawn with anxiety, and all could see that she was suffering keenly.

“And how is father?” questioned Ben, as the party trooped up the piazza steps and into the house.

“He isn’t so well, Ben, as he was before you went away. Oh, dear! and to think how easily I was duped!”

Dave had told Washington Bones to wait for them, and, entering the parlor of the Basswood home, the others listened to what the lady of the house had to tell.

“Your father had just had another bad turn, and the nurse and I were doing what we could for him when the door-bell rang,” she began. “I went downstairs, and there stood somebody that I thought was Dave. I asked him into the house and he at once wanted to know how Mr. Basswood was getting along.”

“When was this?” questioned Ben.

“This was two days ago, and just about noon time.”

“Two days ago!” repeated Roger. “Then Porton must have come here right after leaving the hotel in Lamont. How ever did he get here?”

“Maybe he took that train that got through from Pepsico,” answered Phil. “You remember we heard that quite a few people made that train.”

“Let us hear about the miniatures,” broke in Ben, impatiently.

“Well, he came in, as I said, and asked about Mr. Basswood’s health. Then he told me that he was in a great hurry—that a certain famous art critic had called on Mr. Wadsworth, and, having heard about the Enos miniatures, was very anxious to see them. He told me that the art critic had thought of coming over with him, but Mr. Wadsworth had said that it might disturb Mr. Basswood too much to have the miniatures examined in our house. The art critic did not want to become snowbound in Crumville, so he was only going to stay until the four o’clock afternoon train. The young man said Mr. Wadsworth wanted to know if we would allow him to take the miniatures over to the Wadsworth house, and that he would bring them back safely, either that evening or the next morning.”

“Oh, Mother! didn’t you suspect it might be a trick?” questioned Ben, anxiously. “You knew how this Ward Porton has been impersonating Dave.”

“Yes, yes, Ben, I know,” answered Mrs. Basswood, again wringing her hands. “And I should have been more careful. But you know I was very much upset on account of the bad turn your father had had. Then, too, the young man threw me off my guard by asking me if I had one of those cards which Dave had distributed among the storekeepers—the one with his autograph on it.

“I said ‘no,’ but told him I was very well acquainted with his handwriting. Then he said he would write out a card for me, adding, with a laugh, that he wanted me to be sure he was really Dave. He drew a blank card out of his pocket and turned to a table to write on it and then handed it to me. Here is the card now;” and, going to the mantelpiece, the lady of the house produced it.

“One of the cards that I left in the overcoat that was stolen!” exclaimed Dave. “He didn’t write this at all, Mrs. Basswood. That rascal stole my overcoat and some of these cards were in it. He simply pretended to write on it.”

“Well, I was sure it was your handwriting, and that made me feel easy about the fellow being you.”

“But you knew I was with Ben and the others on the sleigh-ride,” broke in Dave.

“Oh, I forgot to state that when he came in he explained that you were all stormbound at the hotel in Lamont and that, as the telephone and telegraph wires were all down, he had managed to get to Pepsico and reach Crumville on a freight train, doing this so that we and the Wadsworths would not worry,

thinking the sleighing-party had been lost somewhere on the road in this awful blizzard.”

“And then you gave him the miniatures?” questioned Ben.

“I did. Oh, Ben, I know now how very foolish it was! But I was so upset! At first I thought to ask your father about it; but I was afraid that to disturb him would make him feel worse, and I knew he was bad enough already. Then, too, I knew that Mr. Wadsworth was expecting some art critics to look at the miniatures, so I concluded it must be all right. I have always known the combination of your father’s safe, so it was an easy matter for me to open it and get the miniatures out. I told the young man to be careful of them, and he told me not to worry—that the miniatures would be perfectly safe, and that Mr. Wadsworth had promised to get the critic to set a fair value on each of them.”

“Was this Ward Porton alone?” asked Laura. The girls, of course, had listened with as much interest as the boys to what the lady of the house had to relate.

“No, he came in a cutter driven by a man who was so bundled up because of the cold that I could not make out who he was. As soon as I gave him the cases containing the miniatures the young man hurried off in the cutter, stating that the sooner the critic had a chance to see the paintings the better.”

“And what happened next?” questioned Dave, as Mrs. Basswood paused in her recital.

“I went back to assist a nurse who had come in, and all that night we had our hands full with my husband. We had to call in the doctor, and he was really not out of danger until noon of the next day. I had wanted to tell him about sending the miniatures over to the Wadsworth house, but he was in no condition to be told anything, so I kept silent.”

“But didn’t you get worried when noon came and the supposed Dave didn’t return with them?” questioned the son.

“Yes, as soon as the doctor said that your father was out of danger I began to worry over the miniatures. I waited until the middle of the afternoon, and then, although it was snowing and blowing something awful, I hailed a passing man—old Joe Patterson—and asked him if he would go on an errand to the Wadsworth house. He said he would try to make it for a dollar, and so I wrote a short note to Mrs. Wadsworth, knowing that she must be at home even though her husband and Dave might be away.

“Old Patterson delivered this message, and Mrs. Wadsworth sent back word that

she had not seen anything of Dave since he had gone away on the sleigh-ride, nor had she seen anything of the miniatures. She added that her husband had gone to the jewelry works, but that she would send one of the hired men after him at once and acquaint him with the situation.”

“What did you do then?” went on Ben.

“I really didn’t know what to do. Your father was so ill that the nurse and I had to give him every attention. I was waiting for the doctor to come again, but he could not get here on account of the snow-drifts. Mr. Wadsworth put in an appearance about two hours later, and then I told him just what I have told you. He declared at once that it must be a trick, stating that Dave had not been near the house since going away with all of you young folks. Mr. Wadsworth was quite put out, and wanted to know how it was that I had not been able to detect the deception.”

“Well, I must say—” commenced Ben, and then stopped short, for he could see how his mother was suffering.

“Oh, yes, Ben, I know what you were going to say,” she broke in quickly. “Having known Dave so many years I should have discovered the deception. But, as I said before, I was terribly worked up over your father’s condition. Then, too, the young man came in bundled up in an overcoat and a cap that looked exactly like those Dave wears.”

“They were mine. That fellow stole them from me,” interrupted our hero, bitterly.

“Not only that, but he had a tippet placed over his head and around his neck, and he spoke in a very hoarse voice, stating that he had caught a terrible cold while on the sleigh-ride and while coming back to Crumville on the freight train. He spoke about Mr. Basswood’s real estate business, and about Mr. and Mrs. Wadsworth and Jessie, and so many other things that we are familiar with, that I was completely deceived. Then, too, his turning over that written card to me also threw me off my guard. But I know I was very foolish, very foolish indeed!” and Mrs. Basswood’s lips trembled and she wrung her hands once again.

“What did Mr. Wadsworth do?” questioned Dave, in the midst of rather an awkward pause. He agreed with Ben that Mrs. Basswood should have recognized Ward Porton as an imposter, but he did not want to say anything that might add to the lady’s misery.

“He said he would set the authorities at work and see if he could not find Porton

and his confederate. I was so bewildered that I—well, I might as well admit it—I told him that I couldn't understand how I had been deceived, and that maybe Dave had gotten the miniatures after all.”

“Oh, Mrs. Basswood, you didn't really mean that!” cried our hero.

“I was so bewildered I didn't know what I meant, Dave. That young man did look so very much like you. That's the reason, when you folks drove up to the house, I ran out to ask if you had really been here or not.”

“Have you heard anything of this Ward Porton since?” asked Roger.

“I haven’t heard anything. Whether Mr. Wadsworth has learned anything or not I do not know, for he has not been here and the storm has been so awful, with all the telephone wires down, that I could not send for news.”

“Does father know about this now?” questioned Ben.

“No, Ben, I have not had the courage to tell him,” answered the mother. “I told the doctor, and he advised that I say nothing for the present.”

“I don’t think I’d tell him,” said Dave. “I think the best thing we can do is to try to follow Porton and this fellow with him and get back the miniatures. Then it will be time enough to tell Mr. Basswood about the affair.”

As soon as they had entered the parlor the lady of the house had shut the door, so that none of the conversation might reach the sick chamber overhead. In reply to numerous questions Mrs. Basswood gave all the details as to how the rascally Porton had been able to gain possession of the miniatures.

“I think I’ll hurry up and get home,” declared Dave, presently. “I want to hear what Mr. Wadsworth has to say; and also find out what he and my folks have done towards getting on the track of Porton and his confederate.”

“That’s the talk!” exclaimed Roger. “Say! but this is the worst yet, isn’t it?”³⁶ He turned to the lady of the house. “I am awfully sorry for you, Mrs. Basswood.”

“I guess we are all sorry,” broke in our hero, quickly.

“Oh, I hope they catch that Porton and put him in prison!” cried Jessie.

“That is where he belongs,” answered Dave, soberly.

CHAPTER XVII

A VAIN SEARCH

To find out what Mr. Wadsworth, as well as Dave's father and his uncle, had done, Ben accompanied the other young folks to the jewelry manufacturer's mansion. They found that Mr. Wadsworth had gone to business, but the other men were present and were much interested in what Dave and his chums had to relate.

"We've done all we could to get the authorities on the trail of Ward Porton," announced Dave's father; "but we have been much hindered on account of this awful blizzard. The telegraph and telephone wires are down in all directions, so it has been practically impossible to send word any great distance."

"With such a storm it may be possible that Porton and his confederate are still in Crumville," suggested Roger.

"I hardly think that," said Dunston Porter. "More than likely they did everything they could to put distance between themselves and this town after they got their hands on the miniatures."

"I suppose you know we found out that Porton's confederate managed to ^{get} a horse and cutter from Bryson's livery stable," said Dave's father.

"No, we didn't know that!" cried Ben.

"Well, it's true. The confederate, who gave his name as Frank Carson, said he wanted the turnout to go for a doctor. He said he had been sent by Mr. Jamison, the minister. Of course, it was all a trick and Mr. Jamison knew absolutely nothing about it."

"Did they return the horse and cutter?"

"They did not. And Bryson is mourning the loss of a good horse. The cutter he says did not amount to so much. He would not have let the animal go out, only the fellow begged so hard, stating that it was practically a case of life or death—

and he offered to pay double money for the horse's use."

"Were they seen at all?" questioned Ben.

"Oh, yes! A number of people who were stormbound saw them pass down the street and stop at your house. Then others saw the cutter turn in the direction of Hacklebury."

"Of course you tried to follow?" queried Dave.

"I did that," answered Dunston Porter. "It was tough work getting through as far as the mill town. But I managed it, and made all sorts of inquiries. Two people had seen the cutter pass the mills, but no one could give me any definite information as to which way it headed after that. You see, it was growing dark by that time, and the snow was coming down so thickly that it was next to impossible to see any great distance in any direction."

"Well, we know they went as far as Hacklebury, and that's something," returned Phil hopefully.

"Yes, but it isn't much," came in a rather hopeless tone from Ben. "I'm afraid they've got away and we'll never see them again, or the miniatures either."

"Oh, don't say that, Ben!" cried Laura, sympathetically. "Pictures, you know, are not like money. Porton and that rascal with him will have no easy time disposing of the miniatures."

"I'll tell you what they may do!" burst out Jessie, suddenly. "They may go to some big city and then send you word that they will return the miniatures provided you will pay them a certain amount of money for so doing."

"Say! I believe that's just what they will do!" cried Dave. "Jessie, I think you've struck the nail right on the head!" and he looked at the girl admiringly.

"I hope they do that—if we don't catch them," returned Ben. "If those miniatures are worth anything like a hundred thousand dollars, I guess my dad would be glad enough to give five or ten thousand dollars to get them back."

"I wouldn't give up the hunt yet, Ben," urged Roger. "Just as soon as this awful storm is over I'd let the authorities in all the big cities, as well as the little ones, know about the theft, and then they can be on the watch for Porton and his confederate. By the way, I wonder who the confederate can be."

"I'm sure I haven't the least idea," answered the real estate dealer's son.

With the disappearance of the Basswood fortune in their minds, neither the

young folks nor the grown folks could talk about much else. Laura and Jessie told the latter's mother how they had fallen in with Dr. Renwick and his wife, and how the pair had looked after the girls during their stay at the Lamont Hotel.

"It was nice of Mrs. Renwick to do that," said the lady of the mansion; "but it is no more than I would expect from her. She is a very estimable woman."

It was rather hard for Dave and Roger to settle down to their studies on the following morning, but there was nothing they could do to help along the search for those who had taken the miniatures, and, as both youths were anxious to make up for lost time, they applied themselves as diligently as possible.

Mr. Ramsdell had been away, but the tutor came back that afternoon, and the two students put in a full day over their books, leaving Laura, Jessie and Phil to look after the visitors from the West.

The blizzard had now ceased entirely, and by the end of the week all the roads in the vicinity of Crumville were fairly well broken and some of the telegraph and telephone lines had been repaired. The newspapers came in from the larger cities, and it was found that the blizzard had covered a wide area of the country, extending practically from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic seaboard.

"It's given Ward Porton and his confederate a dandy chance to get away," was Roger's comment.

"You're right, Roger," answered Dave. "And so far it would seem that they have left no trace behind them."

From Ben it was learned that Mr. Basswood was slowly improving in health. He had asked about the miniatures, and the art critics who were to have visited Crumville on the invitation of Mr. Wadsworth.

"We couldn't keep the news from him any longer," said Ben. "When he asked about the pictures my mother broke down and had to confess that she had let Porton take them, thinking he was Dave. Of course, father was very much disturbed, and the doctor had to pay an extra visit and give him something to keep him quiet. I told him that all of us were doing everything we possibly could to get on the track of the thieves, and now he is resting in the hope that sooner or later the miniatures will be recovered."

The loss of the miniatures had taken a good deal of the fun out of Ben, and when the young folks stopping at the Wadsworth mansion went out sleighing again, and for some fun skating, he begged to be excused.

“I wouldn’t take the loss too hard, Ben,” said Dave, quietly. “Remember, if the worse comes to the worst, you are just as well off as you were before you heard of this Enos fortune.”

“That is true, Dave. But it makes me mad to think that we had such a fortune as that right in our hands and then let it get away from us.”

“I suppose your mother feels dreadfully about it?”

“She certainly does, Dave. Why, she isn’t herself at all. Sometimes I think that her worrying will bring on a regular fit of sickness. She, of course, thinks that it is entirely her fault that the miniatures are gone.”

“You’ll have to do all you can to cheer her up.”

“Oh, I’m doing that! And I do what I can to cheer up my father too. Just the same, I’m mighty blue myself at times;” and the real estate dealer’s son heaved a deep sigh.

At last came the day when Belle and Cora must return to their homes in the West. On the evening before, Jessie and Laura gave a little party in their honor, which was attended by over a score of the boys and girls of Crumville. The young people played games, sang, and danced to their hearts’ content, and Mrs. Wadsworth saw to it that ample refreshments were served to all.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE PLAYED GAMES, SANG, AND DANCED TO THEIR HEARTS’ CONTENT.—Page 169.

“Oh, I’ve had a perfectly lovely time!” declared Belle, when she and the others were on their way to the depot.

“And so have I had a lovely time,” added Cora Dartmore. “But I’m so sorry your friend lost that fortune,” she added. Ben had said good-bye over the telephone, the wire of which was once more in working order.

“If you ever do hear of those miniatures you must let us know,” went on Belle.

“We’ll be sure to do that,” answered Laura. And then the train came in, and, with a final handshake all around, and with several kisses exchanged between the girls, Belle and Cora climbed on board, Dave and Phil assisting them with their suitcases.

“I’m sorry I’m not going with you,” cried the shipowner’s son, “But I’ve

promised Dave and Roger to stay a few days longer.”

“Be sure to send us a letter as soon as you get back home,” cried Jessie.

And then the train rolled out of the station and the visitors from the West were gone.

On the night before Phil took his departure the three chums had what they called a “talk-fest” in Dave’s room. They spoke about many things—of how they had first gone to Oak Hall, and of various adventures that had occurred since that time.

“The Oak Hall boys are becoming scattered,” said Phil. “I don’t suppose they’ll ever all get together again.”

“Oh, we’ll have to meet at some future graduation exercises at the Hall!” cried Dave. “I can’t think of letting such fellows as Shadow Hamilton, Buster Beggs, and Sam Day drop.”

“Right you are!” came from Roger. “If I can get there at all you can count on my going back to Oak Hall whenever there are any commencement exercises.”

“I half wish I was going into this civil engineering business with you two fellows,” continued Phil. “But I’m afraid I’m not cut out for that sort of thing. I love the sea and everything connected with ships.”

“That shows you’re a chip of the old block,” announced Dave, clapping his chum on the shoulder. “You take after your father, Phil, and I don’t think you could do better than to follow him in his shipping business.”

“If I do follow him in that business, I tell you what you’ve got to do,” announced the shipowner’s son. “Some time you’ve both got to take a nice big cruise with me.”

“That would suit me down to the shoe-tips,” returned Roger.

“It would be fine, Phil,” answered Dave. “But just at present, Roger and I have got to bone to beat the band if we want to pass that examination. You must remember that being away from home on account of that blizzard put us behind quite a good deal.”

“Well, you won’t have me to worry you after to-night,” grinned the chum. “Starting to-morrow morning you and Roger can put in twenty-four hours a day over your studies, as far as I am concerned.”

“Wow! Listen to that! He’s as considerate as old Job Haskers used to be,”

exclaimed the senator's son. And then, picking up a pillow, he shied it at Phil's head.

Another pillow was sent at Roger in return; and in a moment a so-called "Oak Hall pillow fight" was in full progress in the room, pillows, blankets, books, and various other objects flying in all directions. Then Phil got Roger down on one of the beds and was promptly hauled off by Dave, and in a moment more the three youths were rolling over and over on the floor.

Suddenly there sounded a knock on the door.

"Hello! Who is that?" cried Dave; and at once the three youths scrambled to their feet, readjusting their clothing as they did so.

"Oh, Dave, such a noise!" came from his sister. "What in the world are you doing in there?"

"We are only bidding Phil good-bye," answered the brother, sweetly.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CIVIL ENGINEERING EXAMINATION

As the days went by, and Dave and Roger continued to prepare themselves for the examination which was rapidly approaching, the authorities did all they could to locate Ward Porton and his confederate. Diligent inquiries were made concerning the identity of the man who had occupied the room at Lamont with the former moving-picture actor, and it was finally discovered that he was Tim Crapsey, a fellow already wanted by the police for several crimes.

“It’s queer that a fellow like Porton should throw in his fortunes with a man like Crapsey,” was Roger’s comment. “From all accounts Crapsey is a thoroughly good-for-nothing fellow with a great liking for strong drink.”

“That shows Porton’s real disposition, Roger,” answered Dave. “If he were any kind of a clean-minded or decent fellow he wouldn’t want to put up with such a vile fellow as this Tim Crapsey is represented by the police to be.”

“If Crapsey is already known to the police they ought to be able to locate him sooner or later.”

“Those slick criminals have a way all their own for keeping out of sight of the police.” Dave paused for a moment. “Do you know I’ve been thinking of something. Maybe this fellow, Crapsey, simply used Porton as a tool.”

“I don’t quite understand, Dave.”

“Why, in this way: when they heard about the miniatures, and Crapsey heard how much Porton looked like me, and how intimate I and the Wadsworths were with the Basswoods, it may have been Crapsey who concocted the scheme for getting possession of the miniatures. And if he did that, it is more than likely that he will be the one to dispose of the pictures or send in an offer to return them for a certain amount.”

“You mean and cut Ward Porton out of the deal?” questioned the senator’s son, quickly.

“He may not cut Porton out entirely. But the chances are that he’ll let Porton have as little of the returns as possible. A professional criminal like this Crapsey isn’t going to let an amateur like Porton in on the ground floor if he can help it.”

“Maybe he’ll do Porton out of it entirely. Wouldn’t that make the moving-picture actor mad!” and Roger grinned over the thought.

“It is no more than Porton would deserve,” answered our hero. “Just the same, I hope the authorities capture them both and return the miniatures to Mr. Basswood.”

Two days before the time when Dave and Roger were to undergo the much talked-of examination in civil engineering, there came news from a country town fifteen miles beyond Hacklebury. A livery stableman there sent in word that he was boarding a horse which he thought might be the one stolen from Mr. Bryson. The Crumville liveryman at once notified Ben and the local police, and the boy and an officer accompanied him to Centertown. Mr. Bryson at once recognized the horse as his own, and wanted to know how the Centertown liveryman had become possessed of the animal.

“He was left here by a man I think was this Tim Crapsey the paper spoke about,” announced the livery stable keeper. “He said he was on the road to the next town, but that the storm was too much for him, and that he wanted to leave the animal with me for a few days or a week. He said he was rather short of cash and asked me to lend him ten dollars, which, of course, I did, as I thought the horse was ample security,” went on the livery stableman, bitterly.

“Was the fellow alone?” was the question which Ben put.

“He came in alone, but I think after he left the stable he was joined by another fellow down on the corner.”

The Centertown livery-stable keeper had not noticed where Crapsey and his companion had gone, but thought they had made their way to the railroad station. It was learned that a train bound for New York City had left Centertown about an hour later. All came to the conclusion that Ward Porton and Tim Crapsey had taken this. The train had been stalled some hours along the road, but had finally reached the Grand Central Terminal of the metropolis.

“Well, this proves one thing—that Porton and Crapsey got as far as New York City with the miniatures,” said Dave, when he heard the news.

“Yes, and New York is such a large place, with so many people in it, that it will be almost impossible for the authorities to trace them there.”

“That’s it, Roger—especially when you remember that this happened some time ago, so that by now the thieves may be in Chicago, San Francisco, or in London, Paris, or some other far-away place.”

At last came the time when Dave and Roger were to go in for the examination which meant so much to them. They had worked hard, and Mr. Ramsdell had assisted them in every way possible; yet both were rather doubtful over the outcome of the affair.

“It isn’t going to be like the examinations at Oak Hall,” said our hero. “Mr. Ramsdell admitted that it would be stiff from the word go.”

“I know that,” answered the senator’s son. “It seems that several years ago they were a little lax, and, as a consequence, some fellows slipped through that had no right to pass. Now they have jacked the examiners up, so that the test is likely to be fierce.”

“Oh, Dave! what are you going to do if you don’t pass?” cried Jessie, when he was ready to leave home.

“If I don’t pass now, Jessie, I’ll simply go at my studies again and keep at them until I do pass,” he answered.

The examination which was held in the city was divided into two parts, one taking place from ten to twelve in the morning, and the other from two to five in the afternoon. There were about thirty students present, and as far as possible each was separated from any friends he might have on hand, so that Dave sat on one side of the hall in which the examination occurred and the senator’s son sat on the other.

“Well, how did you make out?” questioned Roger of Dave, when the two went out for their midday lunch.

“I don’t know exactly, Roger,” was the reply. “I think, however, that I answered at least seventy per cent, of the questions correctly. How about yourself?”

“Well, I’m hoping that I got seventy per cent. of them right,” returned the senator’s son. “But maybe I didn’t get above fifty or sixty per cent.”

The afternoon questions seemed to be much harder than those of the morning. The students were given until five o’clock to pass in their afternoon papers, and never did Dave and Roger work harder than they did during the final hour. One question in particular bothered our hero a great deal. But at almost the last minute the answer to it came like an inspiration, and he dashed it down. This

question proved a poser for the senator's son, and he passed in his paper without attempting to put down a solution.

Following that examination, Dave returned to Crumville. Roger journeyed to Washington, where his folks were staying at a leading hotel, Congress being in session and Senator Morr occupying his place in the Senate.

There was a week of anxious waiting, and then one day Dave received an official-looking envelope which made his heart beat rapidly.

"What is it, Dave?" cried his sister, when she saw him with the letter in his hand. "Is it your civil engineering report?"

"I think it is, Laura," he answered.

"Oh, Dave, how I hope you've passed!"

"So do I," put in Jessie.

Dave could not give an answer to this, because, for the moment, his heart seemed to be in his throat. Passing to the desk in the library, he slit open the envelope and took out the sheet which it contained. A single glance at it, and he gave a shout of triumph.

"I've passed!" he cried. "Hurrah!"

"Oh, good!" came simultaneously from his sister and Jessie. And then they crowded closer to look at the sheet of paper.

"Does it say what percentage you got?" continued his sister.

"Why, as near as I can make out, I've got a standing of ninety-two per cent.," he announced, with pardonable pride. "Isn't that fine?"

"It's the finest ever, Dave!" said his sister, fondly, as she threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Dave, it's just glorious!" exclaimed Jessie, her eyes beaming. And when he caught her and held her tight for a moment she offered no resistance. "Oh, won't your father and your uncle be proud when they hear of this!"

"I'm going to tell them right now!" he cried, and ran off to spread the good news.

"My boy, I'm proud of you," said his father. "Proud of you!" and he clapped Dave affectionately on the shoulder.

"I didn't expect anything different from our Davy," put in Uncle Dunston. "I

knew he'd pass. Well, now you've passed, I wish you every success in the profession you have chosen."

"Oh, I'm not a full-fledged civil engineer yet, Uncle Dunston," broke in Dave, quickly. "I've got a whole lot to learn yet. Remember this is only my first examination. I've got to study a whole lot more and have a whole lot of practice, too, before I can graduate as a real civil engineer."

Dave lost no time in sending a telegram to Roger. In return, a few hours later came word from the senator's son that he, too, had passed.

"Hurrah!" cried Dave, once more, and then could not resist the temptation to grab Jessie about the waist and start on a mad dance through the library, the hallway, the dining-room, and the living room of the mansion. Mrs. Wadsworth looked on and smiled indulgently.

"I suppose your heart is as light as a feather now, Dave," she said, when the impromptu whirl came to an end.

"Indeed it is, Mrs. Wadsworth," he answered. "Passing that examination has lifted a tremendous weight from my shoulders."

Of course Mr. Ramsdell was greatly pleased to think that both of his pupils had passed.

"Now I can write to my friends of the Mentor Construction Company and see if they can give Dave and Roger an opening," he said. "They promised it to me some time ago in case the boys passed." And he set about sending off a letter without delay.

CHAPTER XIX

OFF FOR TEXAS

“Glorious news!”

“Oh, Dave! have you heard from Mr. Ramsdell?” cried his sister Laura.

“Yes, here is a letter. And it enclosed another from the Mentor Construction Company. They are going to give me an opening with that portion of the concern that is now operating in Texas, building railroad bridges.”

“Oh, Dave! then you will really have to go away down there?” burst out Jessie, her face falling a trifle. “It’s a dreadfully long way off!”

“Well, it’s what I expected,” he answered. “A fellow can’t expect to become a civil engineer and work in his own backyard,” and he grinned a trifle. “This letter from Mr. Ramsdell states that Roger will be given an opening also.”

“With you, of course?” queried Laura.

“He doesn’t state that. But he knew we wanted to stick together, so I suppose it’s all right.”

“When do you have to start?” questioned Jessie.

182

“Just as soon as we can get ready—according to Mr. Ramsdell’s letter. He says he is also sending word to Roger.”

As was to be expected, the tidings quite excited our hero. Now that he had passed the preliminary examination and was to go out for actual field practice, he felt that he was really and truly on his way to becoming a civil engineer. It was the first step towards the realization of a dream that had been his for some time.

Dave’s father and his uncle, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Wadsworth, were greatly interested in the news.

“There is one thing about it, Dave,” said his parent; “I have made a number of

inquiries, and have learned that the Mentor Construction Company is one of the largest and finest in this country. They employ a number of first-class engineers; so it is likely that you will receive the very best of instruction, and I sincerely hope that you will make the best of your opportunities.”

“I am going to do my level best, Dad,” he returned earnestly. “I think I’m a mighty lucky boy,” he added, with a smile.

“I think you owe Mr. Ramsdell a good deal,” said his Uncle Dunston. “Of course, we have paid him for his services, but that isn’t everything.”

“I know it,” Dave returned; “and I’m either going to thank him in person or else send him the nicest letter that I can write.”

Now that he was really going to leave home, Mrs. Wadsworth, as well as Laura and Jessie, took it upon their shoulders to see that Dave should be properly taken care of so far as wearing apparel went.

“But oh, Dave! it’s awful to think of your going so far away!” said Jessie, one day, when the two were alone in the library. “The house will be dreadfully lonely after you are gone.”

“It won’t be much different from when I was at Oak Hall, Jessie,” he answered.

“Oh, yes, it will be, Dave. Texas is a long way off. And my father says the construction work that the Mentor Company is doing is close to the Mexican border. What if you should have trouble with some of those awful Mexican bandits?” and the girl shuddered.

“I don’t expect any trouble of that kind. Practically all the fighting that has been going on has been on Mexican soil on the other side of the Rio Grande. As I understand it, the nearest point that the Mentor Construction Company reaches to Mexico is some miles from the border.”

“Well, that’s close enough with so much fighting going on,” Jessie pouted. “I don’t want any of those awful Mexican revolutionists to fire at you.”

“Don’t worry, Jessie,” Dave answered; and then caught her by both hands and drew her closer. “You’re going to write to me regularly, aren’t you?” he continued, earnestly.

“Of course, Dave! And don’t you forget to answer every letter,” she replied quickly.

“Oh, I’ll do that, never fear!”

“And do you really think you are going to enjoy becoming a civil engineer?”

“I’m positive of it, Jessie. The more I see of the profession, the more I am in love with it. It’s a wonderful thing. Just think of being able to plan out a great big bridge across a broad river, or some wonderful dam, or a tall sky-scraper, or an elevated railroad, or a tunnel under a gigantic mountain, or a tube under some river, or—”

“Oh, my gracious me, Dave! are you going to do all those wonderful things?” gasped the girl, her eyes opening widely.

“I don’t expect I’ll ever have the chance to do all those things, Jessie; but I’m going to try my best to do some of them. Of course, you must remember that at the present time civil engineering is divided into a great many branches. Now, for instance, I didn’t mention anything about mining engineering, and that’s a wonderful profession in itself.”

“Oh, Dave! it’s wonderful—simply wonderful!” cried the girl. “And you are going to be a wonderful man—I know it!” and she looked earnestly into his eyes.

“If I ever do get to be a wonderful man, it’s going to be on your account, Jessie,” he returned in a low voice. “You have been my inspiration. Don’t forget that;” and he drew her closer than before.

“Oh, Dave!”

“It’s true, Jessie. And I only hope that I’ll make good—and that too before I am very much older. Then I think you already know what I am going to do?”

“What?” she whispered, and dropped her eyes.

“I am going to ask your folks for your hand in marriage,” he continued firmly, reading his answer in her face.

Word had come in from Roger that he too was getting ready to go to Texas, and that both of the youths were to work together, as had been anticipated. As the senator’s son was in Washington, it was arranged that Dave was to join him in the Capitol City, and then the two were to journey to Texas.

Ben had heard about Dave’s proposed departure for the South, and he came over several times to see his former Oak Hall chum before the latter left home.

“Any news regarding the miniatures?” questioned Dave, during the last of these visits.

“Not much,” answered the real estate dealer’s son. “The police thought they had one or two clues, but they have all turned out to be false. They arrested one fellow in Pittsburgh, thinking he was Tim Crapsey, but he turned out to be somebody else.”

“Then they haven’t any word at all about Ward Porton?”

“No, that rascal seems to have disappeared from the face of the earth.”

“How is your father getting along, Ben?”

“He isn’t doing so well, Dave. This loss of the miniatures was a terrible blow to him. You see, the real estate business lately has not been quite as good as it might be. My father went into several pretty heavy investments, and he needed a little more money to help him through. So when he got word about this fortune in pictures, he at once thought that he could sell some of the miniatures and use the proceeds in his real estate deals. Now that end of the business is at a standstill.”

“Is your father actually suffering for the want of some cash?” asked our hero, quickly. “If he is, I think my father or my Uncle Dunston can help him out.”

“Your father has already promised to assist him, and so has Mr. Wadsworth, Dave. But that isn’t the thing. You know my father is an independent sort of man, and it worries him to think that he can’t stand entirely on his own feet in his real estate transactions. Of course, if he were well enough to be around I suppose he could adjust matters without any special assistance. But it’s hard lines when things go wrong and you are flat on your back in bed.”

“Yes, I can understand that. And it must worry your mother, too.”

“Oh, it does! Ma isn’t the same woman. She is awfully pale and quite thin. The doctor told her not to worry so, or she’d be down on her back, too.”

“Well, you’ll have to do what you can to cheer up both of them.” Dave drew a long breath. “I do wish somebody would catch those two rascals, not only on your account but on my account also. I’d like to settle matters with Porton, for having impersonated me at those stores, and for taking my cap and overcoat.”

“We’ve offered a reward of five thousand dollars for the return of the miniatures, and another thousand each for the capture of the thieves,” announced Ben. “That ought to be a strong inducement for the detectives to do all they possibly can.”

“We thought you might possibly get an offer from Porton or Crapsey, or both of them, to return the miniatures for a certain amount,” went on Dave. “But you say

no such offer has come in?"

"No."

"Would your father consider it if it did come in?"

"I don't know what he would do, Dave. Of course, he'd hate to give up money to a thief; but, just the same, he'd hate it worse if he never got the miniatures back."

At last came the time for Dave to leave home. His trunk had been packed and shipped on ahead. There was still considerable snow on the ground; so he was taken to the depot in the big Wadsworth sleigh, the girls and his father accompanying him.

"Good-bye, Davy, my boy!" cried his Uncle Dunston, when he was ready to leave the house. "Now I expect you to give a good account of yourself while with that construction company."

"I'll do what I can," he answered.

"And do keep away from the Mexicans," added Mrs. Wadsworth with a sigh.

"You trust David to do the right thing," came from old Caspar Potts, his mellow eyes beaming brightly. "David is all right. He's my boy, and I'm proud of him," and he nodded his head over and over again.

For the girls, the drive to the depot was all too short. Laura had so many things to say to her brother that she hardly knew what to speak of first. As for poor Jessie, she felt so bad she could scarcely speak, and when she looked at Dave there were unbidden tears in her eyes.

"Now don't look at it that way," David whispered, when he caught sight of the tears. "I'll be back again before a great while."

"Oh, Dave, I—I—ca—can't help it," she murmured. "I—I—think so—so—much of—of—you!" and then, for the moment, she hid her face on his shoulder.

Mr. Porter had a few words of advice to give, and he had hardly finished when the train rolled into the station. Then Dave shook hands with his father, and kissed each of the girls, and climbed on board.

"Good-bye, my son!" called Mr. Porter.

"Good-bye, Dad! Take care of yourself while I'm gone," he shouted back. "Good-bye, Laura! Good-bye, Jessie!"

“Good-bye, Dave!” returned the sister, waving her hand.

Jessie tried to speak but could not, and so she too waved a farewell.

Then the train rolled from the Crumville station, slowly gathering speed, and finally disappearing in the distance.

At last our hero was off to become a full-fledged civil engineer.

CHAPTER XX

IN NEW YORK CITY

“Dave Porter!”

“Buster Beggs!” cried our hero, his face lighting up. “Where in the world did you come from?”

“Just got off the accommodation coming the other way,” announced Joseph Beggs, otherwise known as Buster, a fat youth who had long been one of Dave’s Oak Hall classmates.

“Are you alone?” questioned our hero. He had just stepped from the local train to change to the express for New York City; and he had fairly run into Buster, who was standing on the platform flanked by several suitcases.

“No, I’m not alone,” answered the fat youth. “Shadow Hamilton and Luke Watson are with me.”

“You don’t say so!” and our hero’s face showed his pleasure. “Are you bound for New York?” he questioned quickly.

“Yes, we are going to take the express.”

“Fine! I am going there myself.”

“Got a seat in the parlor car?”

192

“Yes. Number twelve, car two.”

“Isn’t that wonderful! We have eleven, thirteen and fourteen!” answered Buster Beggs.

“Hello there, Dave Porter!” shouted another youth, as he stepped out of the waiting-room of the depot. “How are you anyway?” and he came up, swinging a banjo-case from his right hand to his left so that he might shake hands. Luke Watson had always been one of the favorite musicians at Oak Hall, playing the banjo and the guitar very nicely, and singing well.

“Mighty glad to see you, Luke!” cried Dave, and wrung the extended hand with such vigor that the former musician of Oak Hall winced. Then Dave looked over the other’s shoulder and saw a third lad approaching—a youth who was as thin as he was tall. “How is our little boy, Shadow, to-day?” he continued, as Maurice Hamilton came closer.

“Great Scott! Am I blind or is it really Dave Porter?” burst out Shadow Hamilton.

“No, you’re not blind, Shadow, and it’s really yours truly,” laughed Dave. And then as another handshake followed he continued: “What are you going down to New York City for? To pick up some new stories?”

“Pick up stories?” queried the former story teller of Oak Hall, in perplexity. “I don’t have to pick them up. I have—”

“About fourteen million stories in pickle,” broke in Buster Beggs.

“Fourteen million!” snorted Luke Watson. “You had better say about fourteen! Shadow tells the same stories over and over again.”

“Say, that puts me in mind of a story!” cried the youth mentioned, his face lighting up. “Once on a time there was a—”

“Oh, my, Shadow! are you going to start right away?” demanded Dave, with a broad grin on his face. “Can’t you give a fellow a chance to catch his breath? This is a great surprise—meeting you three on my way to the city. And to think we are going to be together in one of the parlor cars, too!”

“Oh, you can’t lose the Oak Hall boys!” cried Buster. “Say, let me tell you something,” he went on. “Luke has written a song about Oak Hall that is about the finest thing I ever heard.”

“It ought to be if it mentions us,” answered Dave, with a boldness that took away much of the conceit.

“Say, you haven’t let me tell that story!” interrupted Shadow, with a disconcerted look on his thin face. “Now, as I was saying, there was once a—”

“Not now, Shadow!”

“You can tell it on the way to New York!”

“Provided the conductor will give you written permission.”

“Not much!” returned the would-be story-teller. “If I can’t tell that story now, I’m going to be mum forever.” He suddenly looked at Dave. “What is taking you

to New York?" he inquired.

"I'm on my way to Texas," answered Dave, and then told his former classmates of how he and Roger had passed the preliminary examination as civil engineers and of how they were now going to take up field work in the Lone Star State.

"Say, that's great!" exclaimed Buster, in admiration. "I wish I was going to do something like that."

"So do I," added Luke, while Shadow nodded in assent.

The other lads had many questions to ask, and in return told Dave much about themselves. In the midst of the conversation the express train for the metropolis rolled in and the four youths lost no time in clambering aboard. They found their seats with ease, and quickly settled themselves.

"That's a fierce loss that the Basswoods sustained," remarked Luke. "I read all about it in the newspapers. That fellow, Ward Porton, must be a peach."

195
“I should say he was a lemon so far as Dave was concerned,” said Buster, with a slow wink of his eye.

“Speaking of peaches puts me in mind of another story,” cried Shadow. “A man had a tree in his garden and—”

“Oh, Shadow, why this infliction!”

“Have we really got to listen?”

“How much will you pay us if we keep still until you have finished?”

“Yes, you’ve got to listen, and I won’t pay you a cent for it, either,” retorted the would-be story-teller. “This is a short one. A man had a fruit-tree in his garden, and he told a friend of his that he got three kinds of fruit from it. His friend didn’t believe it, so he told his friend: ‘Why, it was dead easy. I went out in the garden to pick an apple. I picked one, and then I picked a pair. One was no good, but another was a peach.’”

“Wow! listen to that!”

“Shadow must have had a peach of a time getting up that story,” commented Luke, evidently feeling himself justified.

“Good thing there are not a pair of them,” came from Dave.

“Such stories are the fruits of idleness,” was added by Buster, solemnly.

196
“Oh, don’t you poke fun at that joke,” retorted Shadow. “It’s a good deal better than any you could get up.”

Dave learned that Luke Watson’s folks were now living in New York City, and that Luke had invited Buster and Shadow to spend a week with him.

“It’s too bad you can’t stop off, at least for a day or two,” said Luke to Dave. “It would suit me down to the ground to have you join us.”

“And I’d like first-rate to do it, Luke,” answered our hero. “But I promised to be in Washington by to-morrow, and that means that I’ve got to take the midnight train from New York City.”

“Well, we’ll get down to New York by three o’clock this afternoon. That will give us nine hours in which to have a good time. You’ve got to come up to our house for dinner,” continued Luke; and so it was arranged.

“I was wondering what I would do with myself this evening,” said our hero. “I don’t mind going around the city in the daylight, but after it is dark it is rather

hard for a stranger to put in his time, unless he wants to go to some kind of show.”

“We might all go to a moving-picture show after dinner,” suggested Buster. “I’ll blow you to front seats,” he added generously.

“You’ll have to make it a seat farther back than that for me,” put in Shadow. “A front seat at a moving-picture show is no good,” and at this there was a general snicker.

“We’ll see about the show after we have had dinner,” said Luke.

The time on the train was spent in talk about Oak Hall and their numerous classmates, many of them now well scattered throughout the States.

“Polly Vane has gone into business, so I hear,” announced Luke. “He’s in real estate, and in spite of the fact that he’s a regular dude they tell me he is doing very well.”

“Well, Polly ought to do well,” answered Dave, who had not forgotten that the student who acted so very girlishly had at graduation stood as high in his percentage as our hero himself had done.

“And they say Chip Macklin is doing pretty well, too,” put in Buster, referring to a small lad who had once been a toady to Gus Plum, the Hall bully.

“Well, Plum is doing well,” returned Dave. “I’m glad he reformed. Evidently there was much better stuff in him than there was in Jasniff and Merwell.”

“Oh, Jasniff and Merwell were thoroughly bad eggs,” announced Luke. “I’ll never forget, Dave, how Jasniff once tried to brain you with an Indian club.”

“Say, speaking about bad eggs, puts me in mind of another story,” cried Shadow. “A lady went into a store and asked the store-keeper’s clerk how much the eggs were. The clerk—Now don’t interrupt me, because this isn’t a very long story,” pleaded the would-be story teller. “The clerk was only a small boy, and he hadn’t been in the business very long, so he told the lady, ‘The really fresh eggs are fifty cents, and the almost fresh eggs are forty cents, and those that ain’t so fresh are thirty-five cents, and the rotten eggs are thirty cents.’”

“Oh, Shadow! what a story!”

“Haven’t you got any fresher than that?”

“You can’t make anybody believe any such yarn as that.”

“That story is absolutely true,” returned the story teller, soberly. “If you don’t

believe it, you come down to the town of Necopopec, Maine, and on the principal street of the town I'll show you the town pump where that boy used to get a drink three times a day," and at this sally there was a general laugh.

At last the train rolled into the Grand Central Terminal at Forty-Second Street, New York City, and, alighting, the lads made their way through the spacious depot to the crowded thoroughfare beyond. Here taxicabs were numerous, and the youths piled into one, leaving the driver to look after their suit-cases. Dave's trunk had been checked through to Washington.

Luke's family lived in the vicinity of Central Park, and it did not take the chums long to reach the home. Here they were greeted by Mrs. Watson, Luke's father being away on business. Then Luke took the lads up to his own room, where all proceeded to make themselves at home.

At a little after five Mr. Watson came in to greet them, and about an hour later all sat down to a sumptuous dinner, to which it is needless to say each of the boys applied himself diligently.

"I see by the papers that they are showing a very fine war spectacle at one of the photo-play houses," announced Luke. "How would you fellows like to go and see it?"

This was agreeable to all, and a little later the chums left the Watson house to go to the theater, which was about ten blocks farther downtown.

"If we get there by half-past seven, we can take in the first show of the evening," announced Luke. "That will give us a chance to do some other things before it is time for Dave to catch his train."

The war spectacle proved very entertaining to all the youths, and they were rather sorry when it came to an end. Then Buster proposed that they walk down the Great White Way, as a certain portion of Broadway has been designated.

The boys had been walking for the best part of half an hour, taking in various sights, including the wonderfully illuminated signs, when suddenly, as they passed through a rather dense crowd, Shadow plucked Dave by the arm.

"What is it?" questioned our hero, quickly, for he saw that the former story-teller of Oak Hall was much excited.

"That fellow we just passed, Dave!" cried Shadow.

"What of him?"

“Why, he looked just like you!”

“You don’t mean it!” gasped Dave, and came to a sudden halt. “If he looked like me it must have been Ward Porton!”

CHAPTER XXI

DAVE IN WASHINGTON

“Ward Porton!” exclaimed the other youths in a chorus.

“Let us go after him,” went on Dave. “Shadow, which way did he go?”

“Come on, I’ll show you,” answered the story-teller, and led the way through the crowd as well as he could.

As already mentioned, the crowd at this particular spot on the Great White Way was dense, and the chums had all they could do to force their way along, often elbowing people in a way that was far from polite. Presently they gained a street corner where the pedestrians were being held up by the traffic flowing the other way.

“There he is!” exclaimed Shadow, suddenly, pointing with his hand.

Looking in the direction indicated, Dave saw a well-known form. It was indeed Ward Porton, still wearing the cap and overcoat he had stolen from our hero.

“Hi there, Porton! Stop!” cried Dave, and made a dash for the rascal.

As his hand fell on Porton’s arm the other swung around in a startled way. Then, as he caught sight of Dave and his friends, he gave a sudden duck and crowded in between several ladies standing in front of him. The next instant he was dashing out into the street in the midst of a perfect maze of automobiles and wagons.

THE NEXT INSTANT HE WAS DASHING OUT INTO THE STREET.—Page 202.

“I’m going after him!” cried Dave to his chums, and did his best to follow. But an automobile got in his way, and then a large express wagon, and before our

hero could get around these, Porton had gained the opposite sidewalk and was darting through the crowd with great rapidity, paying scant attention to those he met and hurling one little girl off her feet and into the gutter.

“Stop! What’s the matter here?” cried a voice to Dave; and the next moment a policeman came up beside him.

“That fellow ahead! I want to catch him!” burst out our hero. “He’s a thief!”

“Where?”

“There he goes, straight into the crowd!” answered Dave, and then hurried on once more, with his chums trailing behind him.

The chase so suddenly taken up did not, however, prove long. By the time Dave and his friends reached the next corner of the crowded thoroughfare Ward Porton had disappeared once more and none of the youths could tell what direction he had taken.

“I don’t know what you’re going to do, Dave,” said Luke, sympathetically. “He may have gone ahead and then again he may have turned to the right or to the left.”

“I don’t believe you’ll be able to locate him in such a crowd as this,” put in Buster. “What a shame that you weren’t able to get your hands on him!”

“I did have one hand on him, but he slipped away like a greased pig,” announced Dave, dolefully.

“Say, speaking about greased pigs puts me in mind of a story,” put in Shadow. “Once there were two boys—” and then, as his chums gave him a sudden cold look, he continued: “Oh, pshaw! what’s the use of trying to tell a story just now. I know Dave would rather find this fellow Porton.”

“You’re right there, Shadow!” answered our hero, quickly. “I’d rather get my hands on him than listen to a thousand stories.”

Dave was unwilling to let the chase end there; so he and his friends spent the remainder of the evening walking up and down Broadway, and traversing several blocks of the side streets in the vicinity where Ward Porton had disappeared. But it was all of no avail. The rascal had made good his escape. Then all walked around to the nearest police station, and told the authorities of the affair, so that the detectives of the city might be on the watch for the criminal.

His chums insisted upon seeing Dave off on his journey to Washington, and

before going to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station on Seventh Avenue the youths treated themselves to a lunch. During the meal Shadow was allowed to tell several of his best stories, and Luke was called on to hum over the song he had composed in honor of their days at Oak Hall.

“That’s a fine song, Luke, and you ought to have it published,” declared Dave, heartily. “I believe every lad who ever went to Oak Hall would want a copy of it.”

It may be mentioned here that later on Luke Watson did have the composition brought out by a metropolitan music publisher. He dedicated it to the senior class of which he had been a member, and the song sold very well.

Dave had already secured his berth on the train, so that when his friends left him he lost no time in retiring. But the novelty of the journey, and his thoughts concerning Ward Porton, kept him awake for some time. Finally, however, he went sound asleep and did not awaken until some time after the Capitol City was reached.

Senator Morr and his family were staying at the New Willard Hotel in Washington, and Dave soon found a street car that passed the door of that place. When he entered the hotel, he found Roger in the lobby waiting for him.

“I thought you’d come right up,” cried the senator’s son. “I told the folks I’d meet you. Of course, you haven’t had any breakfast? The folks will be down in a little while and then we’ll all go to breakfast together.”

Roger was much interested to learn that Dave had met three of their old chums, and wanted to know all that had been said and done. The fact that our hero had also seen Ward Porton was a surprise.

“What a shame you didn’t capture him, Dave! Maybe you might have got on the track of that Basswood fortune.”

“Just what I was thinking, Roger. I did my best, but you know what a New York crowd is. Porton slipped through it and disappeared almost like magic.”

Senator Morr and his wife greeted Dave warmly. The four had breakfast in a private dining-room, and during the course of the meal the senator had much to say regarding the departure of his son and Dave for Texas.

“I know one or two of the men connected with the Mentor Construction Company,” said the senator. “They are very fine fellows, and I think they will see to it that you are treated rightly.”

“Dad, of course, has some influence with them,” broke in Roger, “being a senator, you know.”

“I don’t use my influence that way, Roger,” answered the father, shortly. “You must not expect special favors because I happen to be a United States senator. I expect you to make your way on your own merit.”

“And that’s what I’m going to do,” answered the son, promptly.

“I do hope both of you boys keep out of trouble,” said Mrs. Morr. “You are going close to the border of Mexico, and there has been fighting going on along that border for many months.”

“We are not going down there to get into any fights,” answered Dave. “We are going down there to attend strictly to business. If the Mexicans will only leave us alone, we’ll leave them alone.”

Dave and Roger had at first thought to go to Texas by the way of New Orleans and Houston, but after some thought they decided to take the journey by the way of St. Louis, Kansas City and San Antonio. Their train was to leave on the following morning, so that the two youths had a whole day practically to themselves.

“Now I am in Washington I’d like to take a look around,” said Dave.

“I knew you’d like to do that, so I got everything ready beforehand,” announced his chum. “We’ll spend to-day in sightseeing.”

They visited the Capitol and the White House, and numerous other buildings, and almost before they were aware it was evening. Then Mrs. Morr insisted upon it that her son retire early, knowing what a hard journey was before him.

The senator’s son had received word that the Mentor Construction Company had opened a temporary office at San Antonio, and the two youths were to report there before proceeding farther. The engineering corps to which they had been assigned was on the point of moving from one place to another, and they were to get definite instructions at San Antonio regarding their further movements.

“Well, good-bye and good luck to you!” said the senator, who came down to the depot with them to see them off.

“Good-bye, Dad,” answered Roger, shaking hands warmly. Dave, too, shook hands with his chum’s father.

Then, in a moment more, the two youths were off on their long journey to Texas.

“This kind of traveling is rather different from what the pioneers put up with,” remarked Roger, as the two settled themselves in their comfortable seats, they having a whole section of the sleeper to themselves. “Think of what it must have been to travel thousands of miles in a boomer wagon behind a team of mules or oxen!”

“Yes, Roger, and think of being on the lookout constantly for unfriendly Indians and wild beasts,” added Dave. “I’ll tell you, when you come to consider the luxuries we enjoy these days we have much to be thankful for.”

The day’s run was a pleasant one, and the youths enjoyed it greatly. They spent the time in chatting about the prospects and in gazing at the swiftly-moving panorama to be seen from the car window.

“It’s a pity we have to sleep when there is so much to see,” was Dave’s comment, as, after having passed through Cincinnati, it grew time to retire. “I’d like very much to see what this section of the country looks like.”

The following morning found them crossing the Mississippi River. They passed through St. Louis, and then the train headed for Kansas City, where they were to change for Fort Worth and San Antonio.

The train for San Antonio proved to be much less crowded than the other had been. As before, the youths had a section to themselves, and none of the sections near them was occupied. But when, on the following day, the train stopped at a way station several passengers got aboard, including a man who took the section opposite to that occupied by our friends.

This man was a tall, heavy-set and red-faced individual, having reddish hair and a heavy reddish mustache. He looked the youths over rather coldly, and then, throwing himself down in his seat, proceeded to read a newspaper.

“Doesn’t look like a very friendly fellow,” whispered Roger to Dave. “I was hoping we might meet somebody who would warm up a little and tell us something about this part of the country.”

“You’ve got to go slow in making friends out in a strange place like this,” answered Dave.

“Oh, I don’t know about that, Dave,” was the quick reply. “My father tells me that folks in the West and Southwest are usually very friendly. We found them so on our way to Star Ranch.”

The boys continued to talk of the prospects ahead, and during the conversation

the Mentor Construction Company was mentioned several times. Then Dave noticed that the burly man opposite had dropped his newspaper and was looking at them curiously. Finally the man arose and stepped across the aisle.

“Did I hear you young fellows speaking about the Mentor Construction Company?” he asked, not unpleasantly.

“You did,” answered Dave.

“Are you connected with that concern?” went on the man.

“We are going to work for them,” answered Roger. “We have just been appointed to the engineering department.”

“You don’t say!” cried the man in surprise. “I’m with that company myself. My name is William Jarvey. What is yours?”

The boys told him, and all shook hands. Then, as Roger crossed over to sit down beside Dave, the man sank down in the seat opposite.

CHAPTER XXII

IN TEXAS AT LAST

“So you are going to join our engineering department, eh?” queried William Jarvey. “Do you know anybody in that department?”

“We don’t know any one down here,” answered Dave. “We are utter strangers. We obtained our positions through a Mr. Ramsdell, who was our tutor.”

“Oh, I see.” The man had been looking rather sharply at Dave. “May I ask where you come from?”

“We come from New England. I live in a town called Crumville. My friend here is the son of United States Senator Morr.”

“Oh, indeed!” William Jarvey showed increased interest. “The son of a United States senator, eh? Well, that ought to help you a great deal. The Mentor Construction Company often has to ask the government for favors, you know,” and he laughed lightly.

“I’m not going to trade on the fact that my father is a United States senator,” remarked Roger, somewhat shortly. “I am going to make my own way.” 212

“And I guess you will. You look like a pretty bright young man,” returned William Jarvey, hastily.

“Are you a civil engineer?” questioned Dave.

“Oh, no! No such luck for me. I am connected with the bookkeeping and the blue-print department. I wish I were a first-class civil engineer. I might be earning a much larger salary;” and the man drew down his mouth as he spoke. Evidently he was a fellow who was not at all satisfied with his position in life.

“We are to report to a Mr. Perry Watson at San Antonio,” explained Roger. “He is to tell us where to go and what to do.”

“Perry Watson, eh?” and the man scowled and showed his teeth in an unpleasant

manner.

“What’s the matter—don’t you like Mr. Watson?” asked Dave.

“Not much. Very few of the men do. He’s terribly sharp on watching everything a man does.”

“I sincerely hope we don’t have any trouble with him,” was Roger’s comment. “We’d like to start right, you know.”

“Well, you’ll have to watch yourselves pretty closely,” announced William Jarvey.

The talk then became general, and the burly man told the youths much about the work being done by the Mentor Construction Company. It seemed that there were four gangs in the field, two operating south of San Antonio, and the others to the westward.

“It’s more than likely you’ll be sent to the west,” he said. “I think the gangs in the south have all the helpers they need. I am going west myself; so if you are sent that way perhaps we’ll see more of each other.”

“Perhaps,” answered Dave. He was not particularly elated over the thought, for there was something about William Jarvey which did not appeal to him. The man was evidently very overbearing and had an exceedingly good opinion of himself.

“I’m going back to have a smoke,” said the man, presently. “Will you come and join me?”

“Thank you, but neither of us smokes,” answered Roger.

“What! not even cigarettes?”

“No,” returned Dave.

“Humph! I don’t see how you can resist. I would feel utterly lost without a cigar. Well, I’ll see you later.” And thus speaking William Jarvey took himself off.

“I sincerely trust the rest of the men we meet will be of a better sort than that fellow,” remarked Roger. “I don’t like his make-up at all.”

“I agree with you, Roger,” answered Dave. “He looks like a chap who would be very dictatorial if he had the chance—one of the kind who loves to ride over those under him.”

“I can’t get over the way he kept looking at you, Dave. He acted as if he had met you before and was trying to place you.”

“I noticed he did look at me pretty closely a number of times,” answered our hero. “But I took it that he was only trying to size me up. You know some strangers have that habit.”

“Well, he didn’t look at me that way,” continued the senator’s son. “I believe he was doing his best to try to place you.”

“I wish I had asked him where he was from. Maybe that might have given us some sort of clue to his identity.”

“Let’s ask him if we get the chance.”

On the journey to San Antonio they had an opportunity to speak to William Jarvey a number of times, and once they sat at the same table with him in the dining-car. When asked where he came from, he replied rather evasively that he had lived for a great number of years in the Northwest, but that he had left that section of the country to try his fortunes in Mexico.

“I was interested in the mines down there, and then I got mixed up in one of their revolutions and got shot in the leg,” he added. “That was enough for me; so I crossed the Rio Grande into Texas, and by luck got the position I am now holding with the Mentor Company.”

“Are the Mexican revolutionists interfering at all with the work of the construction company near the border?” questioned Dave.

“Not very much. One gang, that was working on one of the railroad bridges not many miles from the Rio Grande, had a little run-in with some raiders who came across the river to steal cattle. They helped the ranchmen drive the raiders away, and in the fight one fellow was shot through the shoulder.”

“Well, that was trouble enough!” cried Roger. “It’s more than I’d like to see.”

“That’s right,” returned Dave. “We didn’t come down to fight the Mexicans. We came down to become civil engineers.”

“Oh, I don’t think you’ll run into any fighting,” answered William Jarvey. “But, of course, a good many of those greasers are very treacherous and there is no telling what they will do. They shoot down and rob anybody they meet in their own country, and then, when there is nothing in sight on that side of the river, they watch their chance and come over on this side. Of course, United States soldiers are on the lookout for them; so they don’t dare to make their raids very public.”

It developed that William Jarvey had been sent up to Denison on business for the

construction company. He carried with him a heavy valise, and also a large roll of blue-prints.

“I should have been back to San Antonio yesterday,” he exclaimed. “But I was delayed in Denison. I suppose Perry Watson will be as mad as a hornet when I get back because I didn’t make it as quick as he expected. He expects an awful lot from those working under him.”

To this neither of the youths replied. They had noticed that William Jarvey smoked a great deal and that his breath smelled strongly of liquor, and they concluded that he was not a man who would be likely to kill himself with overwork.

“From what Jarvey has told us of Mr. Watson I am inclined to think the superintendent is a hustling sort of fellow,” remarked Dave, when he and Roger were left alone. “And, being that kind of man, he probably can’t stand for a fellow who wants to loaf around and drink and smoke.”

“I guess you’ve sized it up about right, Dave,” answered the senator’s son. “In these days the watchword seems to be ‘keep moving’; and a fellow has got to ‘get there’ if he wants to hold down his job.”

At last the train rolled into the city of San Antonio. Before this place was reached William Jarvey had met a number of other men who had boarded the train at a station some miles away; and he was so interested in what the newcomers had to tell him that he seemed to forget completely the presence of Dave and Roger.

“And I’d just as lief he would forget us,” said our hero to his chum. “I’d rather go to Mr. Watson alone than have that man introduce us.”

“Exactly the way I feel about it,” returned the senator’s son. “Come on, let’s see if we can’t slip away from him through the crowd.” This they did easily, and soon found themselves walking along one of the quaint streets of San Antonio bound for the building in which the Mentor Construction Company had its temporary offices.

Contrary to what William Jarvey had told them, they found Mr. Perry Watson a very pleasant man with whom to deal. There was little of nonsense about him, and he lost no time in finding out who the youths were and for what they had come. But his manner was courteous, and he made both Dave and Roger feel thoroughly at home.

“I know Mr. Ramsdell very well. He’s a fine fellow,” said the superintendent of

the construction company. "I had a personal letter from him in regard to you, and I'm going to put you out under one of the best men we have down here in Texas, Mr. Ralph Obray, who is now working on the construction of the new Catalco bridge to the west of this place. He is expecting some new helpers, and he asked me to send him the two best fellows I could find, so I am going to send you," and Mr. Watson smiled slightly.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Watson," answered Dave.

"Oh, you don't have to thank me, Porter," returned the superintendent, quickly. "You just go out and make good. That is all this company asks of any one it employs."

"When do you want us to start, Mr. Watson?" questioned Roger.

"You can suit yourselves about that, although the sooner you report to Mr. Obray the better I think he'll be pleased."

The superintendent walked to a back door of his office and called to some one without.

"I'll turn you over to one of our clerks and he will give you all the details regarding your positions," he explained.

The clerk proved to be a young man only a few years older than Dave and Roger, and the youths took to him at once. He explained in detail where they were to go and what the construction camp located near the new Catalco bridge consisted of, and also told them what their work would probably be for the first few months.

"Of course, you've got to start at the bottom of the ladder," he explained. "But you'll find Mr. Obray a splendid man to be under, and you'll probably learn more under him than you would under any of our other head engineers."

"In that case I'm mighty glad Mr. Watson assigned us to Mr. Obray's gang," answered Dave.

It was arranged that Dave and his chum should start westward early the following morning. This would give them a part of an afternoon and an evening in San Antonio in which to look around and take in the sights of that quaint town.

During the conversation with Mr. Watson and the clerk, Dave had been rather surprised because William Jarvey had not shown himself, because on the train he had said he was behindhand; and they had naturally supposed he would come to

the offices without delay. Just as they were preparing to leave they heard an angry discussion going on in Mr. Watson's private office, and they heard the voices of the superintendent and the man they had met on the train.

"I gave you strict orders to come right back, Jarvey," they heard Mr. Watson say. "You knew we were waiting for those blue-prints."

"I was delayed," growled William Jarvey in return. "You see, there were some things about the prints—"

"I don't want any excuses," broke in Mr. Watson. "The blue-prints were all right and were waiting for you. You took a day off simply to go and have a good time. Now I want to warn you for the last time. If such a thing happens again I'll discharge you."

CHAPTER XXIII

AT THE ENGINEERING CAMP

“I can understand now why that man Jarvey spoke against Mr. Watson,” remarked Dave, as he and his chum walked along the main street of San Antonio. “Mr. Watson evidently has no use for a fellow who doesn’t attend to business.”

“I think he’s all right, Dave,” returned Roger. “Of course, he’s business clean through. But that is what you’ve got to expect from a man who holds such a position.”

“Exactly, Roger. The fellow who takes his own time and does things about as he pleases has no place in the modern business world.”

The two youths had received full instructions regarding what they were to do. They were to take a train westward early in the morning for a small place known as Molona, situated but a short distance from the Rio Grande. There they were to report to Mr. Ralph O Bray. Mr. Watson had asked them regarding what they had brought along in the way of baggage, and on being questioned had advised them to purchase several other things before starting for the engineering camp.

“This is certainly an odd sort of place—quite different from a New England town,” was Dave’s comment, as he and his chum went from one shop to another in San Antonio in quest of the things they wished to buy.

“Seems to me that it has quite a Mexican flavor to it,” remarked Roger. “Just see all the big hats and the fringed trousers.”

Now that they had come so far the chums were eager to get to the camp, and they could scarcely wait until the following morning. They found a comfortable hotel, had an early breakfast, and by seven o’clock were on their way westward.

“Now we are almost on the border,” remarked Roger, as they stopped at a place called Del Rio. He was studying a railroad map. “At the next place, called Viaduct, we will be on the Rio Grande, with Mexico just across from us.”

“It isn’t such a very grand river after all,” remarked Dave, when they came in sight of the stream. “It looks more like a great big overgrown creek to me.”

“You can’t compare these rivers with the Hudson or the St. Lawrence, Dave. But I suppose at certain seasons of the year this river gets to be pretty big.”

Soon their train rolled into Molona and the youths alighted. The station was a primitive affair, consisting of a small platform and a building not over ten feet square.

Word had been sent ahead that they were coming, and among the several Texans and Mexicans who had gathered to watch the train come in, they found a middle-aged man on a burro with two other burros standing behind.

“Are you the young fellows for the Mentor camp?” he questioned, as Dave and Roger approached him.

“We are,” returned our hero, quickly. “Did you come for us?”

“I did. Mr. Watson sent a wire that you were coming, so the boss sent me here to get you, thinking you wouldn’t know the way. Porter and Morr, I believe—but which is which?”

“I am Dave Porter,” answered Dave, “and this is my chum, Roger Morr.”

“Glad to know you. My name is Frank Andrews. I am from Scranton, Pennsylvania. I suppose you can ride?”

“Oh, yes,” answered Roger. “We did more or less riding when we were out on Star Ranch.”

“Good enough! Some of the young fellows who come out here can’t ride at all, and they have some trouble getting around, believe me! This, you know, is the country of magnificent distances,” and Frank Andrews laughed.

“How many have you in the camp here?” questioned Dave, after he and Roger had mounted the two waiting burros and were riding off beside the man from the engineering camp.

“There are twenty of us in the engineering gang, and I think they have about seventy to eighty men in the construction camp, with forty or fifty more on the way. You see, they have been bothered a great deal for hired help lately on account of the trouble with the Mexican bandits and revolutionists. Lots of men are afraid to come down here to work for fear some bandits will make a raid across the border and shoot them down.”

“Have you had any trouble lately?” questioned Roger, quickly.

“We had trouble about two weeks ago. A couple of dirty Mexicans came into camp and were caught trying to steal away that night with some of our belongings. One of the fellows got a crack on the head with a club, and the other we think was shot in the side. But both of them got away in the darkness.”

“That’s interesting, to say the least,” remarked Dave, drily. “I guess we’ve got to sleep with our eyes open, as the saying is.”

“You’ve certainly got to watch yourself while you’re down here,” answered Frank Andrews. “There is more *talk* about trouble than anything else, but the talk gets on some of the men’s nerves, and we have had one civil engineer and two helpers leave us just on that account. They said they would prefer to work somewhere in the United States where they wouldn’t be worried thinking the greasers might attack them.”

As the party rode along they had to cross a bridge which was comparatively new, and their guide explained that this structure was one erected by the Mentor Company. Then they went over a slight rise, and finally came into view of a long row of one-story buildings with several rows of adobe houses behind them.

“Here we are at the camp!” announced the guide. “The engineering gang lives and does business in these houses here, and those huts at the back are used by the construction gangs.”

“HERE WE ARE AT THE CAMP!” ANNOUNCED THE GUIDE.—Page 225.

It was all so new and novel to Dave and Roger that they were intensely interested. With their guide they rode up to the main building and dismounted. In a moment more they found themselves inside and confronted by Mr. Ralph Obray, the head of the camp.

“Glad to see you,” he said, shaking hands after they had introduced themselves. “We are rather short of helpers just now; so you’ll find plenty to do. I understand Mr. Ramsdell has given you a first-class recommendation. I hope that you’ll be able to live up to it,” and he smiled faintly.

“I’m going to do what I can, Mr. Obray,” answered Dave.

“And so am I,” added Roger.

Frank Andrews had already told them that a man with a wagon would be sent down to the station for their trunks and suitcases, all of which had been left in charge of the station-master. The youths were taken to one of the buildings not far from the office, and there assigned to a room containing two cots.

“Of course, this isn’t the Biltmore Hotel or the Waldorf Astoria,” remarked Frank Andrews, with a grin. “If you stay out here you’ll have to learn to rough it.”

“We know something about roughing it already,” answered Dave. “If the other fellows can stand it I guess we can.”

“You won’t find it so bad when you get used to it,” answered the man. “Of course, it’s pretty hot during the day, but the nights are quite comfortable. We’ve got a first-class colored cook, so you won’t find yourselves cut short on meals.”

“That’s good news,” answered the senator’s son. “I always thought that a good meal covered a multitude of sins,” and at this misquotation Frank Andrews laughed heartily.

The man had already been despatched to get the baggage, and after it arrived Dave and Roger proceeded to make themselves at home, each donning such clothing as they saw the others of the engineering corps wearing.

“It’s good-bye to boiled shirts and stiff collars,” said Roger, “and I’m not sorry for it.”

“Nor am I,” returned Dave. “I’ll feel much more like working in this comfortable outfit.”

Almost before they knew it, it was noon, and presently they saw a number of men, some of them quite young, coming in to dinner. Through Frank Andrews they were introduced to all the others, and then placed at one of the tables in the mess hall where a helper of Jeff, the cook, served them with a meal which, if not exactly elegant, was certainly well-cooked and substantial.

“I want you two young men to stay around the offices for the rest of this week,” announced Mr. Obray to them after the meal. “That will give you a chance to familiarize yourselves with what we are doing in the way of constructions in this vicinity. Then next week you can go out with the gang and begin your regular field practice.”

The youths soon found that practical work in the office was quite different from the theoretical work done under Mr. Ramsdell. Still their tutor had instructed

them faithfully, so that they soon “caught on,” as Roger remarked.

When they did not understand a thing they did not hesitate to ask questions, and they found the other persons present very willing to explain and to help them. There was a spirit of comradeship throughout the whole camp that was as comforting as it was beneficial.

“It isn’t everybody for himself here,” explained Frank Andrews. “It is one for all. You are expected to do all you can for the other fellow, and in return it’s understood that he will do all he can for you.”

“It’s a fine method,” answered Dave; “and I don’t wonder that the Mentor Construction Company is making such a success of its undertakings.”

One day our hero asked Frank Andrews if he knew William Jarvey. At the question the man drew down the corners of his mouth and shook his head in disgust.

“Yes, I know Bill,” he answered. “He’s over in the offices at San Antonio mostly, but he occasionally comes out here on business for Mr. Watson. I must say I don’t like him very much, and I don’t think the other men do either. He’s a fellow who likes to drink now and then, and I understand he often gambles. That is, when he has the money. He’s usually strapped long before pay-day comes around.”

“I thought he might be that sort of fellow,” answered Dave.

“He got into a row with Mr. Watson while we were at San Antonio,” put in Roger, and related a few of the particulars.

“If Bill doesn’t look out he’ll lose his job, and it will be too bad,” answered Frank Andrews, “because he won’t be likely to get another such easy berth in a hurry. He gets good money for what little he does. He hired with the company as a first-class bookkeeper, but I understand he is only ordinary when it comes to handling big masses of figures.”

“Well, I didn’t like him when I met him, and I’d be just as well satisfied if we didn’t meet again,” said Dave.

But Dave’s wish was not to be gratified. He was to meet William Jarvey in the future, and that meeting was to bring with it a great surprise.

CHAPTER XXIV

A MIDNIGHT ALARM

“Well, Dave, we have been in this camp just a month to-day. How do you think you like it?”

“I like it first-rate, Roger—in fact, better than I first thought I would. All the engineers and assistants are so kind and helpful.”

“That’s what they are,” returned the senator’s son. “And I think we are getting along famously. Do you know, I am actually in love with the construction of this new Catalco bridge. I think it’s going to be a dandy when it’s completed.”

“Not only a dandy, Roger, but, unless I miss my guess, it will be a monument to the skill and ingenuity of the Mentor Construction Company. I’ve been reading up on all kinds of bridges, and I think the construction of this particular bridge goes ahead of most of them.”

“One thing is sure—Mr. Obray is very proud of the way things are going. I heard from Andrews that some of the other construction companies thought we would never be able to build this bridge the way it is going up.”

The talk between the two chums was held in the evening after work for the day had come to an end. Dave and Roger stood on an elevation of ground surveying the unfinished bridge—or rather chain of bridges—which spanned a river and the marshland beyond. It had been a great engineering feat to obtain the proper foundations for the bridge where it spanned the marshland, and make them impervious to the floods which came with great force during certain seasons of the year.

The first week at the camp had been spent in the offices, but all the other time had been put in with the engineering gang that was superintending the construction of the far end of the bridge, and also the laying out of the railroad route through the hills and cuts beyond. The work had proved fascinating to the chums, and they were surprised to see how quickly the time passed.

Dave and Roger had made a number of friends, but none more agreeable than Frank Andrews. Andrews occupied a room close to their own, and often spent an evening with them.

About the end of the second week they had received word concerning William Jarvey. The bookkeeper in the offices at San Antonio had had a violent quarrel with Mr. Watson and had been discharged. He had gone off declaring that his being treated thus was unjustifiable, and that he was going to bring the Mentor Construction Company to account for it.

“I guess he’s nothing but a bag of wind,” was Roger’s comment, on hearing this. “The company is probably much better off to have such a chap among the missing.”

“I don’t see what he can do to hurt the company,” had been Dave’s answer. “He was probably discharged for good cause.”

Although so far away from home, it must not be supposed that Dave and Roger had forgotten the folks left behind. They had sent numerous letters telling of their various experiences and of what they hoped to do in the future. In return Roger had received one letter from his father and another from his mother, and Dave had gotten communications from his sister Laura and from Jessie, and also a long letter from Ben.

Of these the letter received from Jessie was to our hero the most important, and it must be confessed that he read it a number of times. The girl was greatly interested in all that he had told her about his work, and she said she hoped he would become a great civil engineer, and that she certainly trusted he would not have any trouble with the Mexicans.

The letter from Ben Basswood had been rather a disheartening communication. Ben wrote that his father did not seem to regain his health as rapidly as the doctor had anticipated, and that nothing new concerning Ward Porton or Tim Crapsey had been uncovered. Ben added that he had written to the authorities in New York City concerning Porton and had received word back that they had been unable to locate the former moving-picture actor.

“I believe the loss of those miniatures has had its full effect on Mr. Basswood,” remarked Dave, when speaking of the matter to his chum. “I suppose it makes him feel blue, and that retards his recovery.”

“More than likely,” answered Roger. “A person can’t very well throw off a heavy spell of sickness when he is so depressed in spirits. It’s too bad! And I suppose

Mrs. Basswood feels dreadful to think she was the one to let the fortune slip out of their hands.”

“No doubt of it, Roger. Of course, it’s easy enough to blame her, and I suppose a great many of their neighbors do. But, just the same, place yourself in her position—worried half to death over the sickness of her husband—and you might have done the same thing.”

It was a warm evening and the chums took their time in returning to the camp, knowing supper would not be served until a little later. During the day several shots had been heard at a great distance to the southward, and some of the civil engineers had wondered if some sort of a scrimmage was taking place on the other side of the Rio Grande.

“If a fight is in progress I hope it doesn’t extend to this neighborhood,” remarked one of the engineers, in speaking of the matter. “We’ve got troubles enough of our own—getting this bridge right—without having the greasers interfering with our work;” and he gave a grim laugh.

When the chums arrived in camp they found that the day’s mail had come in. There was a Washington newspaper for Roger containing an address delivered in the Senate by Senator Morr, and also a long letter for our hero from Ben.

“Well, here is news at last!” cried Dave, as he scanned the communication. “Come on out here, away from the crowd, Roger, and I’ll read it to you;” and then he led the way to a corner and acquainted his chum with the contents of the letter, which was as follows:

“I know you will be interested to learn that we have at last heard from that rascal, Tim Crapsey, who, with Ward Porton, got the miniatures from my mother. Crapsey sent a very badly written letter to my father, stating that he and Porton had parted company, but that he had the most of the miniatures,—in fact, all but six of them.

“Crapsey wrote that he was in the city of New York, and had the miniatures in a safe place, and that he would return them to us for fifteen thousand dollars. We were to insert a personal advertisement in one of the New York newspapers if we were willing to accept his offer, and then he would send us word how the exchange of money for the miniatures could be made.

“Of course, as you know, my father is still sick. He didn’t have anything like fifteen thousand dollars in cash to offer Crapsey, and besides that Mr. Wadsworth and your Uncle Dunston thought it was altogether too much money to offer a thief like that. In fact, your uncle was of the opinion that they should only try to lead Crapsey on, so that they could capture him. But my father, backed up by Mr. Wadsworth, at length agreed to put up five thousand dollars in order to get the miniatures back, and an advertisement was inserted in the newspapers to that effect.

“We waited two days for a reply, and then came a scrawl on a bit of paper signed by Crapsey, stating that he was having trouble of another kind and could not for the present

keep on with his negotiations. After that my father inserted another advertisement asking for more information, but up to the present time no additional word has come in.

“My father does not know what to make of it. Your folks and Mr. Wadsworth are of the opinion that either Crapsey was trying to fool them and got scared or else that the rascal has been caught by the police for some other crime and is trying to conceal his identity. They are divided on the question as to whether to believe Crapsey when he wrote that he and Porton had parted company—they are half inclined to believe that Porton is still with him, and that the whole scheme was framed up by Porton.”

“That is certainly interesting news,” remarked Roger, after both had perused the letter a second time. “And it settles one thing—and that is that Tim Crapsey must have been in New York with Ward Porton at the time we saw the latter.”

“Exactly, Roger. And it also proves beyond a doubt that that pair were really the thieves. Previous to this we only supposed such to be the fact—we really couldn’t prove it.”

“Oh, I was sure of it all along, Dave.”

“So was I, Roger. But you know in a court of law it is one thing to know a thing and another to be able to prove it.”

The two young civil engineers discussed the letter all through the evening meal and even for some time later. Then, however, Roger turned to his newspaper, to read with care the address that his father had delivered. Dave was also interested in this.

“I’d like to be in the Senate some time when your father was speaking,” he remarked to his chum. “It must be a great sight to see such a body as that when it is in session.”

“It is, Dave,” answered his chum. “And people come thousands of miles to see it.”

Before retiring for the night Dave penned a letter to Ben, and also sent a letter to Jessie, and another to his Uncle Dunston which was meant for the entire household. Roger spent the time in a communication to his mother, and also in a long letter to Luke Watson.

The night proved to be unusually warm, for the breeze which was usually stirring had died down completely. Dave fell into a fitful doze, from which he awoke about midnight to find his mouth and throat quite parched.

“I guess I’d better get up and get a drink,” he told himself, “and then I may be able to sleep better. Phew! but the thermometer has certainly been going up the last few days.”

He arose to his feet and walked out of the room into the hallway of the building, where in one corner there was a water-cooler. He had just finished drinking a glass of water when a sound from outside reached his ears. There was a shout from a distance, followed almost instantly by a rifle shot.

“Hello! what can that mean?” he cried.

A moment later came more shouts, this time a little closer to the camp. Then two more rifle shots rang out sharply through the midnight air.

“Something is wrong, that’s sure!” exclaimed the youth. Rushing back into the bedroom he shook Roger vigorously. At the same time he heard others getting up and calling to each other, wanting to know what the shouts and shots meant.

“What do you want, Dave?” asked the senator’s son, sleepily.

“Get up, Roger!” answered our hero, quickly. “Hurry up! there is something going on outside! I just heard a number of yells and several rifle shots.”

“You don’t mean it, Dave!” and now Roger was on his feet with a bound. “Maybe it’s the greasers.”

“I don’t know what it is, Roger. But I guess we had better slip into our clothing. Maybe somebody is— Listen!”

Dave broke off short, and both strained their ears to hear what was taking place outside. They heard a confused shouting, followed by several yells. And then came a volley of shots—five or six in number.

“It’s an attack! That’s what it is!” cried the senator’s son. “I’ll bet some of those Mexican bandits are coming over here! Oh, Dave! what do you suppose we had better do?”

“I don’t know, except that we had better slip on our clothing and get our pistols,” answered Dave. “This looks as if it might be serious.”

“Up, boys! Up!” came the cry from somebody outside. “Get your guns and your pistols! The Mexican raiders are coming this way!”

CHAPTER XXV

THE MEXICAN RAIDERS

By the time the two chums had hastily donned their clothing and possessed themselves of the pistols they had purchased in San Antonio on the advice of Mr. Watson, the camp was in confusion from end to end, with the various bosses shouting orders and the men themselves wanting to know what the trouble was and what they had better do.

“It’s some of those confounded greasers!” cried Frank Andrews, as he, too, arose and armed himself. He had a repeating rifle, and it was known to Dave and Roger that he was an exceptionally good shot.

Andrews led the way from the building, followed by our hero and Roger and several others. In the meantime, the distant shouting and shooting seemed to have moved farther westward, in the direction where the new Catalco bridge was being constructed.

“It can’t be their intention to blow up the bridge?” queried Roger. There had been talk of this several times.

“No telling what those rascals are up to,” answered Frank Andrews. “This may be only a rumpus kicked up to cover a cattle raid or something like that.”

In the midst of the excitement the telephone in the main office began to ring and was answered by one of the clerks. A few minutes later he came rushing out to where Mr. Obray stood talking to his assistant and the boss of the construction camp.

“Just got a telephone from the Tolman ranch,” announced the clerk. “Old man Tolman said they had been raided and that half of the raiders were coming this way. I tried to get some details from him, but in the midst of the talk I was shut off. I suppose somebody cut the wire.”

“I thought that might be it,” answered the head of the engineering corps.

“We ought to help Tolman all we can,” announced the boss of the construction camp. “He promised to assist us in case we had any trouble, and turn about is fair play.”

“Right you are, Peterson, and any man who wants to go out can do it.” And word was passed around to this effect.

Dave and Roger listened to this talk and what followed with much interest. In less than five minutes over thirty men from the construction camp had signified their willingness to go after the raiders, and these men were joined by Frank Andrews and three other civil engineers, all well armed and mounted.

“I’d like to join that crowd and go after those Mexicans!” exclaimed Dave, his eyes sparkling.

“So would I!” returned the senator’s son, quickly. “Those fellows can’t be anything but plain bandits and cattle thieves.”

“Sure! No regular revolutionists would come over the border and act in this fashion.”

“What do you say, Dave—shall we go?”

“I’m willing.”

“No, no! You young fellows had better stay in the camp,” announced Ralph Obray, who overheard the talk. “Just remember that in a certain sense I am responsible for your safety while you are under me.”

“But those others are going,” returned Dave, somewhat reproachfully.

“So they are, Porter. But they are all older than you, and most of them have had experience in this sort of thing. I would rather that you stayed here. Maybe if those raiders come this way we’ll have our hands full defending the camp.”

Dave and Roger realized that for the head of the camp to express his desire in this instance was equal practically to a command; so they at once gave up the idea of following Frank Andrews and the others. The men rode off quickly, and were soon lost to sight in the darkness of the night.

An hour of intense anxiety passed. During that time those left in the camp heard an occasional shot in the distance. Then several shots seemed much closer. There followed some yelling, and, then about five minutes later, came a dull explosion.

“That’s at the bridge!” exclaimed Dave. “They must be trying to blow it up!”

The dull explosion was followed by a sudden rattle of rifle and pistol shots and

more yelling. Once or twice some men seemed to come quite near to the construction camp, the hoof strokes of the horses being distinctly heard.

All who remained in the camp were on the lookout, and each man stood ready with his weapon to do what he could to defend the place should the occasion arise. But with the explosion and the rattle of rifle and pistol shots that followed, the conflict seemed to die down, and presently all became utter silence; and thus two more hours passed.

“Whoever they were, they seem to have left this vicinity entirely,” said Roger.

“I wish it was morning,” put in another of the young men present. The watching was beginning to get on his nerves.

At last, just as the first streaks of dawn were beginning to show in the eastern sky, a number of horsemen were descried approaching from the southward. All in the camp were instantly on their guard, but it was soon seen that it was their friends who were coming back. They came in somewhat of a horseshoe formation, driving in their midst four prisoners, one of them with his arm done up in a sling and another with his head bandaged.

“They’ve got somebody!” exclaimed Roger, as the crowd came closer, “Four greasers!”

“Three of them look like Mexicans, but the other fellow looks like an American,” returned Dave, as the party came to a halt in front of the camp buildings.

Those who had come in were at once surrounded by the others, who wanted to know the particulars of what had taken place.

“It was a band of about thirty greasers, and with them were two or three Americans,” announced Frank Andrews. “They went down to old man Tolman’s corral and tried to drive off about two hundred head of cattle. They got away from the ranch, and then part of the gang came over this way in the vicinity of the new bridge. We had two running fights with them, and then they let the cattle go and started for the Rio Grande. But before they went one of the rascals set off a bomb near the end of the bridge and blew up a corner of the foundation.”

“Why in the world did they want to blow up the bridge?” demanded Mr. Obray.

“They weren’t all Mexicans, Mr. Obray. Several of them were Americans. We’ve got one of the Americans right here. And do you know who it is? Jack Pankhurst!”

“What’s that!” exclaimed the head of the camp, and then he turned to the prisoners. One man had his sombrero pulled well down over his forehead, as if somewhat ashamed of himself.

“There he is,” went on Frank Andrews, pointing to this individual. “That’s Jack Pankhurst, who was discharged for drinking and gambling about two months ago.”

Mr. Obray strode up to the prisoner and gave him a tap under the chin, thus elevating his face.

“You’re a fine specimen of humanity, Pankhurst!” he cried sternly. “A fine business for you to be in—joining Mexican outlaws and becoming a cattle rustler. What have you to say for yourself?”

“I haven’t anything to say,” grumbled the prisoner. “What’s the use? I was caught with the goods, wasn’t I?” he sneered.

“I’m ashamed to think an American would go in with a bunch of Mexican bandits,” said Mr. Obray; and then gave directions that the prisoners should be well bound so that there would be no possibility of their escaping.

All listened with interest to the details of the cattle raid so far as the men who had gone out from the construction camp could relate. They said that some of the fighting had been exceedingly hot, and they were satisfied that a number of the Mexicans, and also one of the Americans with them, had been wounded.

They themselves had not escaped unscathed, one man being hit in the shoulder and another in the leg. Fortunately, however, neither of these wounds proved serious. The camp doctor was called in to attend them, after which he attended the wounded prisoners. In the meantime, a message was sent to the railroad station and to San Antonio, to acquaint the authorities with what had occurred.

“I was questioning Pankhurst on the way here,” said Frank Andrews to the head of the camp. “He wouldn’t admit it outright, but I am strongly of the opinion that one of the other Americans who was with him was Bill Jarvey.”

“Jarvey!” muttered Mr. Obray. “Well, it would be just like him to join a fellow like Pankhurst. They were quite chummy when they both worked for the company.”

“I’ve got another idea about this affair,” went on Andrews. “Do you remember how they said Jarvey vowed he would get square with the company for discharging him? I’ve got an idea that it was his scheme to attempt to blow up

the bridge, and that he was the one who set off that bomb. Their idea was to get the cattle to some safe place first, and then ruin the bridge. More than likely Jarvey and Pankhurst made a deal with the greasers to that effect—the Americans to help with the cattle and the Mexicans to help destroy our work.”

“You may be right, Andrews,” answered Ralph Obray. “And if you are, it’s a pity that you didn’t catch Jarvey.”

Dave and Roger listened to this talk with interest, and also joined in the general discussion of those in the camp regarding the raid, and what would be done with the prisoners.

“I suppose they will turn the prisoners over to the United States authorities,” was Dave’s opinion; and in this he was right. Some government officers appeared by noon of the next day, and after a lengthy talk with the head of the camp and a number of others, the prisoners, including Jack Pankhurst, were taken away.

“I wonder if old man Tolman got his cattle back,” remarked Roger.

“All but three of the animals,” answered one of the men present. “Those were trampled to death during the raid. But three are nothing alongside of two hundred.”

The raid had caused so much excitement in the camp that there was but little work done that day. The boys went down with the others to inspect the bridge, and look curiously at the hole which had been torn in the corner of one of the foundations by the bomb.

“That was certainly a mean piece of business,” was our hero’s comment. “It didn’t do anybody a bit of good, and it’s going to make a good deal of work to repair the damage.”

Several days passed, and the camp at last settled back into its usual routine. Dave and Roger worked as hard as ever, and both were much pleased when Mr. Obray told them that they were doing very well.

“I am going to write a letter to Mr. Ramsdell,” said the head of the camp, “and tell him that I am well satisfied with his pupils,” and he smiled faintly.

A day or two later word came to the camp which interested the chums as much as it did anybody. It seemed that Jack Pankhurst had been subjected to a “third degree” of questioning. He had broken down completely and confessed that the two other Americans in the raid with him had been former employees of the Mentor Construction Company—one a fellow named Packard Brown, and the

other William Jarvey. Pankhurst had also let fall the information that Jarvey had once been an officer in the United States Army, and that he was traveling under an assumed name.

“A former officer of our army and acting in that way!” exclaimed Dave, when he heard this report. “I certainly do hope they’ll catch him and punish him as he deserves!”

“My sentiments exactly!” added Roger.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CHASE ON THE BRIDGE

“My, Dave! but it’s hot!”

“I agree with you, Roger. This is the hottest day we’ve struck yet. And such a hard day as it’s been too!” and our hero paused to wipe the perspiration from his brow.

“What do you say if we take a swim this evening?” went on the senator’s son. “A plunge into the river would feel good to me.”

“I’m with you, Roger. Let us eat a light supper and get down to the river before it grows too dark.”

Four weeks had passed since the events narrated in the last chapter, and matters in and around the construction camp had once more quieted down. Work was being pushed forward rapidly, and Dave and Roger were making excellent progress in their chosen profession. They had made a warm personal friend of Frank Andrews, as well as a friend of Mr. Obray, and both of these individuals gave them many instructions during off hours which proved highly beneficial.

No more had been heard from the Mexican raiders, and it was hoped that those bandits had departed for some other locality along the Rio Grande. The prisoners taken during the raid were still in jail, awaiting trial.

Down along the stream over which the new Catalco bridge was being constructed there was a favorite swimming place used by the civil engineers and their assistants, the men and boys of the construction gang using another spot farther down the stream.

“I’ll beat you getting in, Dave!” cried Roger, as the pair neared the bathing place that evening, and he started to take off some of his clothes.

“Don’t jump in too quickly, Roger,” warned our hero. “Remember you have just been eating and you are rather warm. Better take it easy on the bank for a little

while.”

“I guess you’re right,” was the reply. “I don’t want to get a cramp or a chill, or anything like that.”

To reach the swimming spot, the chums had to pass one end of the new bridge. As they drew closer they saw somebody high up on the skeleton structure gazing at them curiously.

“Hello! who’s that up there?” remarked Dave.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” answered Roger. “I thought all our men were back in camp.”

As they came still closer the individual on the bridge turned to walk toward them. Suddenly, however, he stopped short and tried his best to hide himself behind some of the steel work.

“Say! that looks rather queer to me,” remarked Dave. “He acts just as if he didn’t want us to see him.”

“Just what I thought, Dave.” The senator’s son gave a sudden start. “You don’t suppose it’s one of those Mexican raiders, do you?”

“I can’t say anything about that. I’m going up there to find out who he is. It seems to me he is acting very suspiciously. Maybe he’s trying to plant some more bombs.”

Dave turned back to a point where he could get up on the bridge, and his chum followed. From this point they could not see the person above them nor could he see them. When they reached the flooring of the big bridge they were less than two hundred feet from where the unknown person stood. He was leaning over the side of the structure, evidently trying to find out what had become of them.

“Why, Dave, he—he—looks like you!” burst out the senator’s son, as both hurried in the direction of the unknown person.

“I do believe it’s Ward Porton!” ejaculated our hero. He began to quicken his pace. “Yes, I’m almost sure it’s Porton,” he added, a few seconds later.

“If it’s Porton what in the world tempted him to follow you to this place?” queried Roger.

“I don’t know. But I do know that I’m going to capture him if it is possible to do so,” answered Dave, with determination.

The two chums were still almost a hundred feet from the other person when the

latter glanced up suddenly and discovered them. He looked them full in the face for just an instant, and then turned and began to run away towards the opposite end of the long bridge.

“It’s Porton, sure enough!” burst out Roger.

“Hi there, Porton! Stop!” cried Dave. “Stop, I tell you!”

“You go on back!” yelled Ward Porton, in an ugly voice. “Go on back, I tell you! If you don’t it will be the worse for you!” and he shook his fist at the chums.

“You might as well stop,” continued Dave, undaunted by the threat. “You can’t get away from us. If you try to jump off the unfinished end of the bridge you’ll break your neck.”

“If you fellows don’t go back I’ll shoot,” returned the fellow who resembled Dave. “Stop right where you are! Don’t dare to come a step closer!”

“Oh, Dave! do you suppose he is armed?” questioned Roger, hastily and in a low tone.

“Maybe he is. But I am going to keep on after him until he shows his pistol,” was the rapid reply. “You need not come if you don’t want to. I’m going to capture him and make him give up the Basswood fortune.”

“If you are going after him, so am I,” returned the senator’s son, sturdily. “Maybe it was only a bluff about shooting after all.”

While running along the bridge Dave’s eyes fell on a short steel bar left there by one of the workmen. He stopped just long enough to pick the bar up, and then went after Porton with all the speed at his command.

It was a perilous chase, for in many places the flooring of the big bridge was still missing and they had to leap from girder to girder of the steel structure.

“Stop, I tell you!” yelled Ward Porton once more, when Dave was within ten yards of him. And then he turned squarely around and our hero and Roger saw the glint of a pistol as the rascal pointed it toward them.

“He is armed!” cried Roger, and now there was a note of fear in his voice, and not without reason.

“Get behind the steel work,” ordered Dave, and lost no time in dodging partly out of sight. As he moved, however, he launched forth the steel bar he had picked up.

More by good luck than anything else the bar sped true to its mark. It struck

Ward Porton in the forearm, the hand of which was holding the pistol. In another instant the weapon was clattering down through the steel work of the bridge to the river far below.

“Hurrah, Dave! you’ve disarmed him!” cried Roger.

For the instant Ward Porton seemed dazed by the sudden turn of affairs. Evidently, however, the blow from the steel bar had not hurt him much, for, turning quickly, he continued his flight along the bridge. Dave and Roger lost no time in following him.

It was not long before the fugitive and those behind him reached a section of the long bridge which was far from completed. Here there was practically no flooring, and Ward Porton had to jump from one piece of steel work to another, while Dave and Roger, of course, had to do the same. Once those in the rear saw the rascal ahead make a misstep and plunge downward. But he saved himself, and, scrambling to his feet, dashed forward as madly as before.

“Take care, Dave, it’s dangerous here,” gasped Roger; and scarcely had he spoken when he himself made a misstep and shot down below the level of the bridge flooring.

Dave was several feet in advance, but turned instantly when his chum let out a cry of alarm. He saw Roger four or five feet below him, clinging frantically to one of the stays of the bridge.

“Hel—help m—me!” panted the unfortunate youth.

“Hold tight, Roger. I’ll help you,” returned Dave, quickly.

“HOLD TIGHT, ROGER! I’LL HELP YOU,” RETURNED DAVE, QUICKLY.—Page 255.

The stay below was so small in diameter that all Roger could do was to cling to it with both hands and one leg. In this position he hung until Dave let himself down several feet and managed to give him a hand. Then with extreme caution both worked their way back to the unfinished flooring of the bridge.

“Oh my! I thought sure I was a goner!” panted the senator’s son, when he found himself safe once more. He had turned white and he was trembling from head to foot.

“I guess you had better not go any farther, Roger,” remarked Dave. “This certainly is dangerous work.”

“It’s a wonder Porton doesn’t fall,” was the other’s comment, as they both watched the fleeing rascal, who was leaping from girder to girder with a recklessness that was truly amazing.

“He’s scared stiff at the idea of being captured,” was Dave’s comment. “If it wasn’t for that, I don’t believe he would take any such chance;” and in this surmise our hero was probably correct.

Dave hated to give up the chase, so he continued his way along the bridge, making sure, however, of every step and jump he took. Roger remained where he was, too shaken up to proceed farther when he knew that each step would prove more hazardous than the last.

At last Ward Porton gained a point where one of the foundations of the bridge rested on comparatively solid ground, with the river behind and a wide stretch of marshland ahead. Here there was a long ladder used by the workmen, and down this the rascal went as fast as his feet could carry him. By the time Dave reached the top of the ladder, Porton was well on his way over the solid ground. Soon the gathering darkness hid him from view.

Knowing that it would be next to useless to attempt to follow the rascal now that he had left the vicinity of the bridge, Dave returned to where he had left Roger. Then the pair started slowly back to the end of the bridge from which they had come.

“I can’t understand what brought Ward Porton here,” remarked Roger, when the chums had once more gained the swimming-place. “Do you suppose he knew you were in this vicinity, Dave?”

“Possibly, Roger. But at the same time, I don’t think that would explain his presence here. He wouldn’t dare to impersonate me around this camp. He’d be sure to be caught at it sooner or later.”

“Well, I don’t understand it at all.”

“Neither do I. I am sorry that we didn’t catch the rascal,” returned Dave, soberly.

When they went back into camp they informed Frank Andrews, and also Mr. Obray, of what had occurred. These men had already heard some of the particulars regarding Dave’s double and the disappearance of the Basswood fortune.

“Too bad you didn’t get him,” said Frank Andrews. “But you be careful how you run over that unfinished bridge, unless you want to have a nasty fall and either get killed or else crippled for life.”

Several days went by, including Sunday, and nothing more was seen or heard of Ward Porton although the lads made a thorough search for him. Dave sent letters home and to Ben Basswood, telling the folks in Crumville of what had happened.

“A little greaser to see you, Dave,” remarked one of the civil engineers as Dave was coming from an unusually difficult afternoon’s work.

He walked to where his fellow worker had pointed, and there saw a dirty, unkempt Mexican lad standing with a letter in his hand. The communication was addressed to Dave, and, opening it, he read the following:

“I have broken with Tim Crapsey and have the Basswood miniatures here with me safely in Mexico. If the Basswoods will pay me ten thousand dollars in cash they can have the pictures back. Otherwise I am going to destroy them. I will give them two weeks in which to make good.

“As you are so close at hand, maybe you can transact the business for Mr. Basswood. When you are ready to open negotiations, send a letter to the Bilassa camp, across the border, and I will get it.

“WARD PORTON.”

CHAPTER XXVII

ACROSS THE RIO GRANDE

Dave read the note from Ward Porton with intense interest, and then passed it over to Roger.

“What do you know about that!” exclaimed the senator’s son, after he had perused the communication. “Do you think Porton tells the truth?”

“I don’t know what to think, Roger. If he does tell the truth, then it is quite likely that Tim Crapsey was trying to play a double game so far as the Basswoods were concerned.”

“It’s pretty clever on Porton’s part,” said Roger, speculatively. “He knows it would be very difficult for us to get hold of him while he is in Mexico, with this revolution going on. And at the same time he is close enough to keep in touch with you, knowing that you can easily transact this business for the Basswoods—providing, of course, that Mr. Basswood is willing.”

Dave did not answer to this, for he was looking around for the Mexican youth who had delivered the note. But the boy had slipped away, and a search of the camp failed to reveal what had become of him.

“I guess he was instructed to sneak away without being seen,” was our hero’s comment. “Porton knew that I wouldn’t be in a position to answer him at once, and he didn’t want me to follow that boy.”

Dave read the note again, and then went off to consult with Frank Andrews and Mr. Obray.

“It’s too bad you didn’t capture that little greaser,” observed the head of the civil engineers. “We might have been able to get some information from him. However, if he’s gone that’s the end of it. I think the best thing you can do, Porter, is to send a night message to this Mr. Basswood, telling him how the note was received and repeating it word for word. Then the responsibility for what may follow will not rest on your shoulders.”

Our hero thought this good advice, and, aided by his chum, he concocted what is familiarly known as a Night Letter, to be sent by telegraph to Crumville.

On the following day came a surprise for our hero in the shape of a short message from Ben Basswood which ran as follows:

“Yours regarding Porton received. Crapsey makes another offer. Pair probably enemies now. Will write or wire instructions later.”

“This is certainly getting interesting,” remarked Dave, after having read the message. He turned it over to Roger. “I guess Ben is right—Crapsey and Porton have fallen out and each is claiming to have the miniatures.”

“Well, one or the other must have them, Dave.”

“Perhaps they divided them, Roger. Thieves often do that sort of thing, you know.”

“Do you suppose Ward Porton is really around that Bilassa camp in Mexico?” went on the senator’s son.

“Probably he is hanging out somewhere in that vicinity. I don’t think he has joined General Bilassa. He thinks too much of his own neck to become a soldier in any revolution.”

Having sent his message to the Basswoods and received Ben’s reply, there seemed nothing further for our hero to do but to wait. He and Roger were very busy helping to survey the route beyond the new Catalco bridge, and in the fascination of this occupation Ward Porton was, for the next few days, almost forgotten.

“If the Basswoods expect you to do anything regarding that note you got from Porton they had better get busy before long,” remarked Roger one evening. “Otherwise Porton may do as he threatened—destroy the pictures.”

“Oh, I don’t believe he’d do anything of that sort, Roger,” answered Dave. “What would be the use? I think he would prefer to hide them somewhere, thinking that some day he would be able to make money out of them.”

Four days after this came a bulky letter from Ben Basswood which Dave and his chum read eagerly. It was as follows:

“I write to let you know that Tim Crapsey has been caught at last. He was traced to New York and then to Newark, N. J., where the police found him in a second-rate hotel. He had been drinking, and confessed that he had had a row with Ward Porton and that one night, when he was under the influence of liquor, Porton had decamped, taking all but two of the miniatures with him. The two miniatures had been sold to a fence in New York City for one

hundred dollars, and the police think they can easily get them back. With the hundred dollars Crapsey had evidently gone on a spree, and it was during this that Porton sneaked away with the other miniatures. Crapsey had an idea that Porton was bound for Boston, where he would take a steamer for Europe. But we know he was mistaken.

“The case being as it is, my father, as well as your folks and Mr. Wadsworth, thinks that Porton must have the pictures with him in Mexico. That being the case, your Uncle Dunston says he will come down to Texas at once to see you, and I am to come with him. What will be done in the matter I don’t know, although my father would much rather give up ten thousand dollars than have the miniatures destroyed. If you receive any further word from Ward Porton tell him that I am coming down to negotiate with him. You had better not mention your uncle’s name.”

“Looks as if Porton told the truth after all,” announced Roger. “Probably he watched his opportunity and the first chance he got he decamped and left Crapsey to take care of himself.”

“Most likely, Roger. I don’t believe there is any honor among thieves.”

Ben had not said how soon he and Dunston Porter would arrive. But as they would probably follow the letter the two chums looked for the pair on almost every train. But two days passed, and neither put in an appearance.

“They must have been delayed by something,” was Dave’s comment.

“Maybe they are trying to get that ten thousand dollars together,” suggested Roger.

“I don’t believe my Uncle Dunston will offer Porton any such money right away,” returned our hero. “He’ll see first if he can’t work it so as to capture the rascal.”

On the following morning Roger was sent southward on an errand for Mr. Obray. When he returned he was very much excited.

“Dave, I think I saw Ward Porton again!” he exclaimed, as he rushed up to our hero.

“Where was that?” questioned Dave, quickly.

“Down on that road which leads to the Rio Grande. There was a fellow talking to a ranchman I’ve met several times, a Texan named Lawson. As soon as he saw me he took to his heels. I questioned Lawson about him and he said the fellow had come across the river at a point about a quarter of a mile below here.”

Dave listened to this explanation with interest, and immediately sought out Mr. Obray. The upshot of the talk was that our hero was given permission to leave the camp for the day, taking Roger with him.

The two chums went off armed with their pistols, not knowing what might happen. They first walked to where Roger had met the ranchman, and there the senator’s son pointed out the direction that the young man who had run away had taken. They followed this trail, and presently reached the roadway which ran in sight of the river. There were comparatively few craft on the stream, and none of these looked as if it might be occupied by the young man they were after. But presently they reached a small creek flowing into the Rio Grande, and on this saw two flat-bottomed rowboats.

“There he is now!” exclaimed Dave, suddenly, and pointed to the first of the rowboats, which was being sent down the creek in the direction of the river. 265

The sole occupant of the craft was the fellow at the oars, and the two chums readily made out that it was the former moving-picture actor. As soon as he made certain of Porton’s identity, Dave pulled Roger down in the tall grass which bordered the creek.

“There is no use in letting him see us,” explained our hero.

“Do you suppose he is bound for the Mexican shore?” questioned the senator’s son.

“More than likely, Roger.” Dave looked questioningly at his chum. “Are you game to follow him?” he added.

“What do you mean?”

“We might take that other rowboat and go after him. I see it contains a pair of oars. Either of us ought to be able to row as well as Porton, and if we can catch him before he lands maybe we’ll be able to drive him back to the United States side of the river.”

“All right, I’ll go with you,” responded Roger, quickly. “Come ahead!” and he

started on a run for the rowboat.

The craft was tied fast to two stakes, but it was an easy matter for them to loosen the ropes. This done, Dave took up the oars, shoved off, and started to row with all the strength at his command.

Evidently Ward Porton had not expected to be followed, for he was rowing leisurely, allowing his flat-bottomed boat to drift with the current. He was much surprised when he saw the other boat come on at a good rate of speed.

“Get back there!” he yelled, when he recognized the occupants of the second craft. “Get back, I tell you, or I’ll shoot!”

“If you do we’ll do some shooting on our own account, Porton!” called back Roger, and showed his pistol.

The sight of the weapon evidently frightened Porton greatly. Yet he did not cease rowing, and now he headed directly for the Mexican shore.

The river at this point was broad and shallow and contained numerous sand-bars. Almost before they knew it the craft containing our friends ran up on one of the bars and stuck there. In the meantime Ward Porton continued his efforts to gain the shore.

“What’s the matter, Dave?” cried Roger, when he saw our hero stop rowing.

“We are aground,” was the answer. “Here, Roger, get to the stern of the boat with me, and we’ll see if we can’t shove her off again.”

With the two chums in the stern of the craft, the bow came up out of the sand-bar, and in a few seconds more Dave, aided by the current of the stream, managed to get the rowboat clear. But all this had taken time, and now the two chums saw that Ward Porton had beached his boat and was running across the marshland beyond.

“I’m afraid he is going to get away,” remarked Roger, dolefully.

“Not much!” answered Dave. “Anyway, I’m not going to give up yet,” and he resumed his rowing.

“Here, let me take a turn at that. You must be getting a little tired,” said Roger, and he insisted that Dave allow him to do the rowing.

Soon they reached the Mexican shore, at a point where there was a wide stretch of marshland with not a building in sight. They had gotten several glimpses of Ward Porton making his way through the tall grass. The trail was an easy one to

follow.

“Come on! We’ll get him yet!” muttered Dave, and started off on the run with Roger behind him.

They had just reached an ill-kept highway when they heard shouting in the distance. They saw Ward Porton running wildly in the direction of a set of low buildings, evidently belonging to some sort of ranch. As the former moving-picture actor disappeared, a band of Mexican cavalry swept into view.

“Quick, Roger! Down in the grass!” cried Dave. “We don’t want those soldiers to see us! They may be government troops, but they look more like guerrillas—like the rascals who raided the Tolman ranch!”

“Right you are,” answered the senator’s son. And then both lay low in the tall grass while the Mexican guerrillas, for they were nothing else, swept past them.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

As nearly as Dave and Roger could calculate, there were about two hundred of the Mexican guerrillas—dirty and fierce-looking individuals, led by an officer wearing an enormous hat and a long, drooping mustache.

The entire crowd looked disreputable in the extreme, and the youths could not help but shudder as they gazed at the cavalcade.

“My gracious, Dave! do you call those revolutionists?” remarked Roger, after the last of the horsemen had disappeared down the roadway.

“They may be revolutionists, Roger. But to my mind they look more like bandits than anything else. Under the pretense of aiding Mexico they probably steal whenever they get the chance.”

“I’d hate awfully to fall into their clutches. I think they’d rob a fellow of every dollar he had.”

“Well, never mind those Mexicans, Roger,” pursued Dave. “Come on, let us see if we can’t locate Ward Porton.”

“He went over into one of yonder buildings.”

270

“I know it, and I’ve got an idea,” answered our hero. “Let us see if we can’t sneak across the roadway without being seen and then come up to those buildings through the thick grass and behind that chaparral. If we expose ourselves Porton will, of course, keep out of our sight or run away.”

With extreme caution the two chums worked their way through the tall grass to the edge of the roadway. Then, watching their chance when nobody seemed to be looking, they dashed to the other side and into the grass again. Then they began to work their way cautiously in the direction of the group of buildings into which the former moving-picture actor had disappeared.

The buildings belonged to a Mexican ranch; but the place had evidently been the

scene of a fight at some time in the past, for one of the buildings was completely wrecked and several of the others much battered. There were no horses, cattle, pigs, or chickens anywhere in sight; and the youths came to the conclusion that the ranch had been abandoned by its owner.

“Probably some of those guerrillas came along and cleaned him out,” observed Dave, “and after that he didn’t think it would be worth while to stay so long as the country was in a state of war.”

In a few minutes more Dave and his chum gained the first of the buildings. Here they paused to listen and to look around.

“You want to be on your guard, Roger,” whispered our hero. “Porton may be watching us and he may have some of his friends here. For all we know this may be his hang-out.”

“I’ll be on guard, don’t fear,” answered the senator’s son, and brought forth his pistol.

“Don’t use that gun unless you have to,” warned Dave, who did not favor any shooting, even in an extreme case like this.

“I’ll not give a rascal like Porton the chance to shoot me first,” retorted Roger. “That fellow ought to be in jail, and you know it.”

To this our hero did not answer. He felt in his pocket to make sure that his own weapon was ready for use.

Not a sound from the other buildings had reached them, nor did any one appear to be in sight.

“Looks to me as if we were in sole possession, now that those guerrillas have gone,” announced Roger. “Wow! I hope they don’t come back,—at least not until we are safe on our side of the Rio Grande,” he added grimly.

“Come on, we’ll take a look through the buildings,” answered Dave. “Don’t make any noise if you can possibly help it.”

Leaving the building which they had first entered—an abandoned stable—they moved through a broken-down cow-shed to a long, low structure which had evidently been used by the helpers on the ranch. This building was also deserted, and all that remained in it was some filthy bedding alive with vermin.

“Come on, let us get out of here,” remarked Roger, as he looked with disfavor at the squalor presented. “How can human beings live like this, Dave?”

“I don’t know, Roger. This place ought to be burned down—it’s the only way to get it clean,” Dave added, shaking his head in disgust over the sight.

Less than fifty feet away was the corner of the main building of the ranch. Peering out cautiously, to make sure that no one was watching them, the two chums hurried across the open space and crouched down beneath a wide-open window. Then Dave, pistol in hand, looked in through the opening.

The room beyond was deserted, and a glance around showed him that it contained little besides some heavy pieces of furniture which the looters had evidently been unable to remove. On a table rested several empty liquor bottles, and also a number of cigar and cigarette stubs. On the floor were scattered newspapers and some playing cards.

“The fellows who were here evidently got out in a hurry,” remarked Dave.

“Are you going to go in?” questioned Roger.

“I guess so. What do you think about it?”

“I’m with you, Dave. Now we have gone so far, we might as well finish the job.”

It was an easy matter for the two chums to climb through the low window. Once in the room, they advanced toward a doorway leading to an apartment that opened on the *patio* of the ranch home—an open courtyard which had once boasted of a well-kept flower garden, but which was now neglected and overrun with weeds.

As Dave gazed out across the *patio* he saw a movement in a room on the opposite side of the ranch home. The face of a man had appeared for a few seconds. Behind him was some one else—who, however, Dave could not make out.

“My gracious, Roger!” gasped our hero in a low voice. “Did you see that fellow?”

“I saw some one.”

“It was William Jarvey!”

“Jarvey! Are you sure?”

“I am certain of it. Now what do you think of that!”

“I’m sure I don’t know what to think, Dave. Maybe he is making his headquarters here, the same as Ward Porton.”

“I am going to try to find out. Come on.”

Our hero made a quick mental calculation as to the ground plan of the ranch homeland then he and Roger began to work their way from one room to another, and then through a long, narrow hallway, until they reached the other side of the building. Here they paused at the end of the hallway to listen.

From a room close at hand came a murmur of voices. By straining his ears Dave made out the tones of William Jarvey. The former bookkeeper for the Mentor Construction Company was evidently talking to another man, but what was being said was not distinguishable.

“It’s Jarvey all right enough,” whispered Dave.

“Yes. But that isn’t Ward Porton with him,” returned Roger.

“I know it. It’s some man.”

Both continued to listen, and presently heard William Jarvey give a sarcastic laugh.

“You’ve got another guess coming, Packard Brown, if you think you are going to get that much out of the deal!” he cried. “Remember, you haven’t done a thing to help us.”

“That’s all right, Bill Jarvey,” retorted the man called Packard Brown. “When we left the U. S. A. and came over here it was understood that we were to share and share alike in everything.”

“Yes, but I didn’t think this new thing was coming up,” growled Jarvey. “We were to share equal on what we happened to get out of the greasers. This is another thing entirely.”

“I admit that. Just the same, I think I’m entitled to my share.”

“Well, you help us all you can and you’ll get a nice little wad out of it, Brown.”

What more was said on this subject did not reach the ears of Dave and Roger, for just then the latter pulled our hero by the sleeve.

“Somebody’s coming!” he whispered. “Maybe it’s Porton.”

Dave did not answer. At the end of the semi-dark hallway there was a closet which in years gone by had been used for the storage of guns and clothing. Into this closet the two youths went, closing the door carefully after them.

“It’s Porton all right enough,” whispered Dave, who a moment later was

crouching low and looking through a large keyhole devoid of a key. “There he goes into the room where the two men are.”

“Then those two men must be in with him,” returned the senator’s son. “Say, Dave, this is certainly getting interesting!”

“It’s going to make our job a pretty hard one,” answered our hero. “If Ward Porton was alone we might be able to capture him. But I don’t see how we are going to do it with Jarvey and that man named Brown present.”

“Maybe if we offer Jarvey and Brown a large reward they will help us make Porton a prisoner,” suggested Roger. “More than likely Jarvey is on his uppers and will do anything to get a little cash.”

The two youths came out into the semi-dark hallway once more, and on tiptoes crept toward the door of the room occupied by Ward Porton and the two men.

“I went all around the buildings, and looked up and down the roadway, but I couldn’t see anything of them,” the former moving-picture actor was saying. “I guess they got cold feet when they saw those soldiers. Say, those greasers certainly were a fierce-looking bunch!”

“I don’t believe they were any of General Bilassa’s army,” returned William Jarvey. “They were probably some detachment out for whatever they could lay their hands on,” and he chuckled coarsely. Evidently he considered that such guerrilla warfare under certain circumstances was perfectly justifiable.

Following this there was some talk which neither of those outside the door could catch. Then came a rather loud exclamation from Ward Porton which startled our friends more than anything else that could have been said.

“Well, now, look here, Dad!” cried the former moving-picture actor. “You let me run this affair. I started it, and I know I can put it through successfully.”

“That’s right, Jarvey!” broke in Packard Brown. “Let your son go ahead and work this deal out to suit himself. He seems to have made a success of it so far—getting the best of that fellow Crapsey,” and the speaker chuckled.

Dave and Roger looked at each other knowingly. Here indeed was a revelation. Evidently Ward Porton was the son of the man they knew as William Jarvey.

“My gracious! I remember now!” burst out our hero in a low tone. “When we went to Burlington to see that old man, Obadiah Jones, about Ward don’t you remember that he told us that Ward was the son of a good-for-nothing lieutenant in the army named Jarvey Porton? That man Pankhurst who was captured

declared that Jarvey was living under an assumed name and had been an officer in the army. It must be true, Roger. This fellow is really Jarvey Porton, and he is Ward Porton's father!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CAPTURE

What Dave said concerning the man he had known as William Jarvey was true. He was in reality Ward Porton's father, his full name being William Jarvey Porton. Years before, however, on entering the United States Army, he had dropped the name William and been known only as Jarvey Porton. Later, on being dismissed from the army for irregularities in his accounts, he had assumed the name of William Jarvey.

A lively discussion lasting several minutes, and which our hero and Roger failed to catch, followed the discovery of Jarvey Porton's identity. Then the listeners heard the former lieutenant say:

"Brown, I think you had better go outside and watch to make sure that no one is coming to this place."

"All right, just as you say," was the other man's answer. Evidently he understood that this was a hint that Jarvey Porton wished to speak to his son in private.

As Packard Brown placed his hand on the door leading to the semi-dark hallway Dave and Roger lost no time in tiptoeing their way back to the closet in which they had before hidden. From this place they saw Brown leave the room and walk outside. Then they returned to their position at the door.

"Are you sure the cases are in a safe place, Ward?" they heard Jarvey Porton ask anxiously.

"Sure of it, Dad. I hid them with great care."

"Are you sure nobody saw you do it?"

"Not a soul."

"Where was the place?"

"On a high knoll not far from where we have been tying up the boats," answered

Ward Porton. "There are a number of big rocks there, and I found a fine *cache* between them."

"It's rather dangerous to leave them around that way," grumbled the man. "Maybe you would have done better if you had brought them over here."

"I thought there would be no use in carting them back and forth," returned the son. "I wanted to have them handy, in case the Basswoods met my demands."

"Well, we'll see what comes of it, Ward. I hope we do get that money. I certainly need some," and Jarvey Porton heaved something of a sigh. Evidently father and son were equally unscrupulous and took no pains to disguise that fact from each other.

More talk followed, Ward telling something of the way in which the miniatures had been obtained and his father relating the particulars of his troubles with the Mentor Construction Company. In the midst of the latter recital Dave and Roger heard Packard Brown returning on the run.

"Hi there!" called out the man in evident alarm. And then as the two chums hid in the closet once more, he burst into the room occupied by the Portons. "Those greasers are coming back and they are heading for this place!" he explained.

"In that case we had better get out," answered Jarvey Porton, quickly.

"But you and Brown helped them in that raid, Dad," interposed the son. "Why should you get out?"

"We had a big quarrel after that raid, Ward," explained the parent. "And now those greasers have no use for us. We'll have to get out, and in a hurry, too."

Shouting could now be heard at a distance, and this was followed by a volley of shots which surprised all the listeners.

"I'll tell you what it must be," said Jarvey Porton, as he led the way from the deserted ranch. "A detachment from the regular army must be after General Bilassa's crowd. Maybe they'll have a fight right here along the border!"

"I don't want to get mixed up in any fight!" exclaimed Ward Porton. "Maybe we had better get back to the United States side of the river."

"That's the talk!" put in Packard Brown. "Come on!"

All left the ranch and headed directly for the river, at the point where Ward had left his flat-bottomed rowboat. Dave and Roger followed them, but did their best to keep out of sight in the tall grass.

“Oh, Dave, I hope they do go over to the other shore!” exclaimed the senator’s son. “It will be so much easier to capture them.”

“Exactly, Roger. And don’t you remember what Ward told his father—that he had left the miniature cases hidden on the other side? He said they were on a high knoll not far from where the boats had been tied up. We ought to be able to find that *cache*.”

By the time the two chums gained the shore of the Rio Grande those ahead of them had already entered Ward Porton’s boat. Ward and Brown each had an oar and rowed as rapidly as possible to the other side of the stream. Jarvey Porton sat in the stern of the craft, and looked back from time to time, trying to catch sight of the guerrillas and the other Mexicans, who were still shouting and firing at a distance.

“Hadn’t you better hold back a bit, Dave, so they don’t see you?” questioned Roger, as he and our hero managed to gain the rowboat they had used, which, fortunately, had been placed some distance away from the other craft.

“Good advice, Roger, if it wasn’t for one thing. I don’t want to give them a chance to get out of our sight. Let us tie our handkerchiefs over the lower parts of our faces. Then they won’t be able to recognize us—at least unless we get pretty close.”

With Dave’s suggestion carried out, the chums leaped into the rowboat, and, this done, each took an oar. They pulled hard, and as a consequence reached the mouth of the little creek on the United States side in time to see those ahead just disembarking.

“Where do you suppose they are going?” queried the senator’s son.

“That remains to be found out,” answered Dave. “Duck now, so they won’t see us.” And with a quick motion of the oar he possessed he sent the flat-bottomed boat in among some tall grass which bordered the creek at this point.

Ward Porton and those with him had tied up their boat and were walking to the higher ground away from the creek. Jarvey Porton paused to look back along the creek and the bosom of the river beyond.

“I don’t see anything on the river just now,” he announced.

“Look! Some one is coming from the other way!” exclaimed his son, suddenly.

“Is that Lawson, the ranchman?” questioned Packard Brown, anxiously.

“No, I don’t think it is,” answered Ward Porton. “They seem to be strangers,” he added, a minute later.

Two men and a well-grown boy were approaching. They came on slowly, as if looking for some one.

“I’d like to know what those fellows want around here,” came from Jarvey Porton, as he gave up looking along the river to inspect the newcomers.

From their position in the tall grass bordering the creek, Dave and Roger looked from the Porton party to those who were approaching. Then, of a sudden, our hero uttered a low exclamation of surprise.

“Look who’s here, Roger! Ben Basswood and my Uncle Dunston! And Mr. Andrews is with them!”

“Oh, Dave! are you sure?”

“Of course I am! I would know my Uncle Dunston as far as I could see him. And you ought to know Ben.”

“My gracious, Dave, you’re right! This sure is luck!”

“I know what I’m going to do,” decided our hero, quickly. “I’m going to send both of the boats adrift. Then, no matter what happens, those rascals won’t have any easy time of it getting back to Mexico.”

In feverish haste Dave sent the flat-bottomed boat out into the creek once more. Roger assisted him, and a few strokes of the oars brought the craft alongside of that which had been used by the Porton party. Then the chums leaped ashore, threw all the oars into the water, and set both of the rowboats adrift.

“Hi there! What are you fellows up to?” came suddenly from Packard Brown, who had happened to look behind him. “See, Jarvey, those two fellows have cast our boat adrift!”

“Who are they?” demanded Jarvey Porton, and looked in some bewilderment at the two figures approaching, each with a handkerchief tied over the lower portion of the face.

“Uncle Dunston! Ben!” cried Dave at the top of his lungs, and at the same time whipped the handkerchief from his face. “Here are Ward Porton and his father! We must capture them!”

“Hurry up! Don’t let them get away!” put in Roger, as he, too, uncovered his face.

As he uttered the words Roger drew his pistol, an action which was quickly followed by our hero, for both understood that the criminals before them might prove desperate.

Of course Dunston Porton and Ben Basswood, as well as Frank Andrews, were greatly astonished by the calls from Dave and Roger. But our hero's uncle, while out hunting in various parts of the world, had been in many a tight corner, and thus learned the value of acting quickly. He had with him his pistol, and almost instantly he drew this weapon and came forward on the run, with Ben and Frank Andrews at his heels.

"Stop! Stop! Don't shoot!" yelled Ward Porton in alarm, as he found himself and his companions surrounded by five others, three with drawn pistols.

"We won't shoot, Porton, if you'll surrender," answered Dave.

"Oh, Dave! has he got those miniatures?" burst out Ben.

"He sure has, Ben!"

"Good!"

"I haven't got any miniatures," growled the former moving-picture actor.

His father and Brown looked decidedly uncomfortable. Once the former army officer made a motion as if to draw his own weapon, but Dunston Porter detected the movement and instantly ordered all of the party to throw up their hands.

"Oh, Dave! are you sure he has those pictures?" queried Ben, and his face showed his anxiety.

"I think so, Ben. However, we'll find out as soon as we have made them prisoners."

"That's the talk!" put in Roger. He turned to Dave's uncle. "Can't you bind them or something, so that they can't get away?"

"We'll disarm them," announced Frank Andrews. "Jarvey and Brown are wanted for that raid on old man Tolman's ranch and for using that bomb on the bridge. We can prove through Pankhurst that they were with the party."

"That man is Ward Porton's father," explained Dave to his uncle and Ben, while the evil-doers were being searched and disarmed one after another.

"Ward Porton's father, eh? Well, they seem to be two of a kind," answered Ben.

With their weapons taken from them, the prisoners could do nothing but submit.

They were questioned, but all refused to tell anything about what they had done or intended to do.

“You’ll never get anything out of me, and you’ll never get those miniatures back,” growled Ward Porton, as he gazed sourly at Ben and at Dave.

“We’ll see about that, Porton,” answered our hero. And then he requested his uncle and Frank Andrews to keep an eye on the prisoners while he, Roger and Ben set out for the knoll some distance away from the creek.

“Ward Porton said he had hidden some cases in a *cache* between some rocks on that knoll,” explained our hero. “By cases I think he meant those containing the miniatures.”

“Oh, I hope he did!” returned Ben, wistfully. “To get those miniatures back means so much to my folks!”

CHAPTER XXX

THE FORTUNE RECOVERED—CONCLUSION

As Dave, Roger, and Ben tramped through the tall grass to where was located a knoll of considerable size, the son of the Crumville real estate dealer related how he and Dunston Porter had arrived in the construction camp and how they had gotten Frank Andrews to show them in what direction our hero and the senator's son had gone.

"We knew you were after Porton, and we hoped to catch sight of that rascal," went on Ben, "but we didn't dream that we were going to capture Ward and also those two men who are wanted for that raid on the Tolman ranch. And to think that one of the men is Ward's father! He certainly must be a bad egg!"

"He is, Ben," answered Dave. "And Ward is a chip of the old block."

The chums were soon ascending the knoll, containing many rocks between which were dense clumps of chaparral. Here they had to advance with care so as not to turn an ankle or get their clothing torn.

Dave had hoped that the search for the missing cases would be an easy one, but in that he was disappointed. The three chums walked all around the knoll several times without getting anything in the way of a clue as to where Porton's *cache* was located.

"It's a shame!" burst out Roger at length. "If we could only—" He looked quickly at Dave. "What do you see?"

Our hero did not reply. Instead he hurried forward several feet, and then gave a low cry.

"Porton has been here!" he exclaimed, and held up a half-burned cigarette.

It was not much of a clue, but it was something; and working on this all three of the youths searched the vicinity diligently. They soon came upon a somewhat flat rock, and all seized hold of this to cast it to one side.

“Hurrah!” came simultaneously from Dave and Roger, as they saw a large opening under where the stone had been placed.

Ben said nothing, but plunged his hand into the opening, to draw from it an instant later one of the cases that had contained the Enos miniatures. The other cases quickly followed.

“Are the miniatures in them?” questioned the senator’s son.

“That’s what I’m going to find out,” answered Ben.

The cases were fastened by several catches, but these were quickly unfastened and the lids thrown open.

“Good! Good!” exclaimed Ben, and his face showed his intense satisfaction.

There before the eyes of the youths were nearly all of the wonderful collection of miniatures which Mr. Basswood had inherited. Only two were missing—those which the thieves had sold in New York.

“Oh, this is simply grand!” cried Roger, enthusiastically.

“That’s what it is,” added Dave, and then went on quickly: “We’ll have to get these to some safe place and then make sure that they’ll never be stolen again.”

“Don’t you worry about that, Dave. I won’t let them out of my sight until they are safe and sound,” declared the real estate dealer’s son.

Locking up the cases once more, the three youths carried them off the knoll and through the chaparral to where they had left Dunston Porter and the others. Of course, Dave’s uncle was much gratified to learn that the miniatures had been recovered, and Frank Andrews was also pleased. Jarvey Porton looked downcast, and his son showed his deep disgust.

“I was a fool not to take them over into Mexico,” remarked the former moving-picture actor.

“Well, I told you that was what you should have done,” retorted his father. And then he added in a low tone: “We might have purchased our freedom with those miniatures.”

While Dunston Porter and Frank Andrews looked after the prisoners to see that they did not get away, Dave and his chums took care of the cases containing the precious miniatures, and thus the whole party made its way to the engineering and construction camp. There the Portons and Packard Brown were handcuffed, and word was sent to the authorities to take charge of them.

“And now I’ve got to send word home about this good news!” cried Ben, and lost no time in getting off a long telegram to his folks, and asking them to inform Dave’s father and the Wadsworths by telephone of the success of the trip to Texas.

“That message ought to do your father more good than a dose of medicine,” remarked Dave.

“It will, Dave,” answered Ben, his face beaming. “I know father will recover now that he has nothing more to worry about.” Ben was right. The recovery of the fortune in miniatures did much toward restoring the real estate dealer to his former good health.

In the camp it was remarked by a number of men how much Ward Porton resembled Dave. But no one at that time dreamed that this resemblance was shortly to come to an end. Yet such was a fact. When being transferred from Texas to the State in which his crimes had been committed, Ward Porton attempted to make his escape by leaping from a rapidly moving railroad train. As a consequence he broke not only both of his legs, but also his nose, and cut his right cheek most frightfully. As a result, when he was retaken he had to remain in the hospital for a long time, and when he came out his face was much disfigured and he walked with a decided limp.

“It’s too bad, but he brought it on himself,” was Dave’s comment, when he heard of this.

“It’s a good thing in one respect,” was Roger’s reply. “With his nose broken and his cheek disfigured and with such a limp, no one will ever take Ward Porton for you again.”

It may be mentioned here that when the proper time came Ward Porton and Tim Crapsey were brought to trial and each was given a long term of imprisonment. Ward’s father and the other men who had participated in the attack on the Tolman ranch and on the bridge and had been captured were also severely punished.

The store-keepers and the hotel-keeper who suffered through Ward Porton’s misrepresentations could get nothing from the young culprit, but they had the satisfaction of knowing that he had now been put where it would be impossible for him to dupe others.

Ben Basswood remained at the camp but a few days, and then he and Dunston Porter started northward. The miniatures had been boxed up and shipped by

express, insured for their full value. It may be stated here that they arrived safely at their destination. Those which had been disposed of in New York City were recovered, and in the end Mr. Basswood disposed of the entire collection to the museums in four of our large cities for the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars. With part of this money he went into several heavy real estate deals, taking Ben in with him, and father and son did very well.

“I think the getting back of those miniatures was entirely your work, Dave,” declared Roger, one day.

“I don’t know about that,” answered our hero, modestly. “I think you had a hand in it.”

“I had a hand in catching Ward Porton, but you were the one to spot that *cache* and locate the Basswood fortune.”

And now let me add a few words more and then bring to an end this story of “Dave Porter and His Double.”

A number of years have passed since Dave graduated from Oak Hall and took up the profession of a civil engineer. Both he and Roger learned rapidly, and at the end of the required time both passed their final examinations with flying colors. They remained with the Mentor Construction Company, journeying all over the United States, and also going down into Mexico and into Central and South Americas. They, of course, met with numerous adventures, some of which I may relate to you at a future time. They returned to Crumville a number of times, and during those visits Dave was more attentive to Jessie than ever, while Roger spent nearly all his time at Laura’s side.

“They’ll make a fine pair of married couples,” declared Dave’s Uncle Dunston.

“Well, I hope they’ll be happy,” answered Dave’s father. “They certainly deserve to be.”

“You are right. But I guess they had better wait awhile yet.”

“Of course. They are young, and Dave and Roger want to get a good foothold in their profession.”

“Those boys have had some strenuous doings,” continued the uncle. “I wonder what will happen next?”

“Something, that’s certain,” answered Dave’s father; and he was right, as will be

related in my next volume, to be entitled, “Dave Porter’s Great Search; or, The Perils of a Young Civil Engineer.” In that book we will meet all our young friends again, and learn the particulars of Jessie Wadsworth’s strange disappearance.

“Great days, those—on the Rio Grande, Dave!” remarked Roger, one day, when the two had been discussing what had taken place in the past.

“Yes, Roger, they certainly were great days,” answered our hero. “No matter what exciting times may come in the future, I’ll never forget how I helped to capture my double.”

“And how we managed to become full-fledged civil engineers, Dave.”

“Yes, that was just as good as getting back the Basswood miniatures, if not better,” answered Dave.

Here, at the height of his success in his chosen profession, we will wish Dave Porter well, and say good-bye.

THE END

Transcriber's Note

Illustrations have been moved closer to their relevant paragraphs.

The page numbers in the List of Illustrations do not reflect the new placement of the illustrations, but are as in the original.

Author's archaic and variable spelling and hyphenation is preserved.

Author's punctuation style is preserved.

Typographical problems have been changed and these are highlighted.

Transcriber's Changes

Page 152: Was single quote (“**Why** certainly I haven't been here, Mrs. Basswood,” he returned promptly.)

Page 155: Removed extra double quote (“I said ‘**no**,’ but told him I was very well acquainted with his handwriting. Then he said he)

Page 213: Was ‘Wiliam’ (would feel utterly lost without a cigar. Well, I'll see you later.” And thus speaking **William** Jarvey took himself off.)

Page 265: Was ‘go you’ (“All right, I'll **go with you**,” responded Roger, quickly. “Come ahead!” and he started on a)

End of Project Gutenberg's Dave Porter and His Double, by Edward Stratemeyer

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DAVE PORTER AND HIS DOUBLE ***

***** This file should be named 30394-h.htm or 30394-h.zip *****
This and all associated files of various formats will be found in:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/3/0/3/9/30394/>

Produced by David Edwards, Dan Horwood and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net> (This
file was produced from images generously made available
by The Internet Archive)

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions
will be renamed.

Creating the works from public domain print editions means that no
one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation
(and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without
permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules,
set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to
copying and distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works to
protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm concept and trademark. Project

Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for the eBooks, unless you receive specific permission. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the rules is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. They may be modified and printed and given away--you may do practically ANYTHING with public domain eBooks. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

*** START: FULL LICENSE ***

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg-tm License (available with this file or online at <http://gutenberg.org/license>).

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is in the public domain in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal

fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH F3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at <http://www.pgla.org>.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at <http://pglaf.org/fundraising>. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at <http://pglaf.org>

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit <http://pglaf.org>

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: <http://pglaf.org/donate>

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

<http://www.gutenberg.org>

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.