

Chapman Allen

**Tom Fairfield's Schooldays: or,
The Chums of Elmwood
Hall**



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CHAPTER I

TOM HEARS STRANGE NEWS

“Hi, Tom, give us a ride in your boat; will you?”

“Take us across to the other side of the river.”

The request and the suggestion came from two lads who were walking toward a small boathouse, on the edge of a rather wide river. The youth to whom they spoke looked up from a small motorboat, the engine of which he was cleaning.

“What do you want to go over to the other side of the river for, Dick Jones?” asked Tom Fairfield, of the lad who had made that suggestion.

“Got to go on an errand for dad, and it’s too far to walk away around by the bridge. Take me over, will you?”

“I will if I can get this engine to run.”

“What’s the matter with it?” asked Will Bennett, the companion of Dick Jones. The two were chums, and friends of Tom Fairfield, all of them living in the village of Briartown. Tom, whose parents were quite well off, had recently bought a motorboat, not very large, but of sufficient size to enable him to take out several of his chums. “What’s the matter with the engine?” asked Will again, as he and his chum walked out on the small dock, at the end of which the motorboat was made fast.

“Matter with it? What isn’t the matter with it?” asked Tom in some disgust. “The cylinder is flooded with oil, that’s what’s the matter, and I don’t know how many more things I’ll find wrong before I get through. It’s all that Dent Wilcox’s fault.”

“How’s that?” asked Dick, as he and his chum watched Tom trying to drain some of the lubricating oil out through a small valve.

“Oh, I took Dent out for a ride last night, and as I was in a hurry to get up to the house when I got back, I asked him to shut off the oil cups. But it’s like everything else he does – he’s too lazy, almost, to breathe. He didn’t turn off the oil, and all that was in the cups ran into the cylinder during the night. I’ve tried for the last half hour to get the engine started, but she won’t run.”

“That’s too bad,” spoke Will sympathetically.

“I’ll never trust Dent to do anything for me again,” went on Tom. “I ought to have seen to the oil cups myself, and I will next time. Wait until I catch him!”

“There he goes now!” exclaimed Dick, pointing to a lad crossing a field some distance away. “Shall I run and tell him you want to see him?”

“No, it isn’t worth while,” replied Tom. “Besides, he’s so lazy he wouldn’t walk down here. But I’ll talk to him like a Dutch Uncle when I do see him. Now let’s see if the engine will work. If it does, I’ll give you fellows a ride.”

Once more Tom turned the flywheel over several times, but, though the engine coughed, wheezed and spluttered, as though in apology at having such poor health, it did not start.

“Say, you haven’t got your forward switch on!” suddenly exclaimed Will. “There’s no spark.”

“No wonder!” cried Tom. “I remember now, I had it on, and then, as I didn’t want to get a shock when I was cleaning the spark plug, I shut it off. Then I forgot to put it on again. Hop in, and close the switch, Will, and then maybe we can start. I guess most of the oil is out, now.”

The two chums got in the boat, and Will, making his way forward, closed the connection. Then Tom, who had remained near the motor, again turned over the flywheel. This time there was an explosion, and the engine worked rapidly. The propeller churned the water, and the painter strained as the boat moved forward.

“Hurray!” cheered Dick.

“That’s the stuff!” exclaimed Will, at the prospect of a ride.

“Yes, I guess it’s all right now,” assented Tom. He shut off the engine by pulling out a switch near it, and added: “Wait until I get some more oil from the boathouse, and I’ll be with you.”

As Tom started up the dock toward the little building, which he had built, with the help of his chums, to house his boat, he saw, coming along the road that ran near the river, a young man in a small auto runabout. The youth was well dressed, but on his face was a look of sadness and worry, in contrast, Tom thought, to the cheerful expression he should have worn.

“If I had a natty little car like that, I wouldn’t look so glum,” reasoned Tom, as he opened the boathouse door. The runabout came nearer, and the lone occupant of it, bringing it to a stop opposite Tom, called out:

“Is there any place around here where I can hire a boat for a row of an hour or so?”

“Not near here,” replied Tom.

The young man’s eyes rested on Tom’s own trim rowing craft.

“Is that one to hire?” he asked, nodding toward it.

“No,” replied our hero. “But if you’d like to take it I’ve no objections. I’ve got a motorboat, and, if you like, I’ll take you for a ride in that. Did you want to go anywhere in particular?”

“No, I just want to get off by myself, and worry over my troubles,” and the newcomer laughed, but the laugh had no merriment in it.

“Troubles?” questioned Tom, now that the other had given him an opening. “You don’t look as if you had troubles.”

“Well, I have – lots of ’em. I’ve acted like a blamed chump, and now I’ve got to pay the piper. A man is trying to make trouble for me, and I guess he’ll succeed, all right. I’m too easy, that’s the trouble. But I’m not going to bother you with my woes.”

“Do you want to come for a ride with me?” asked Tom. “I’m going to take a couple of friends across the river.”

“No, thank you. I don’t want to seem stiff, but really I’d be better off by myself for a time. So, if you really mean it, and will lend me your boat, I’ll go for a row alone. I was out on a little country run – I live in Camden – and when I saw this river, looking so calm and peaceful, I just felt as though I’d like to row on it, and forget my troubles.”

“You may take the boat, and welcome,” went on Tom, looking at the other, and forming a liking for him at once.

“Thanks. My name is Bennington – Bruce Bennington. I haven’t a card, or I’d give you one.”

“My name’s Tom Fairfield,” spoke our hero, and the two shook hands.

“Know how to row?” asked Tom, as the newcomer started toward where the small boat was moored.

“Yes, I’m on the crew at Elmwood Hall. I’m a senior there,” Bruce explained.

“Oh!” exclaimed Tom, for he had often heard of that place of learning. “That’s quite a school,” he added. “I’ve often wished I could go there.”

“Yes, it’s quite a place,” admitted Bruce Bennington. “And we have a pretty fair crew. You won’t want your boat right away?”

“No. And the reason I asked if you could row was because there are some stiff currents in the river. You’re welcome to come in the motorboat if you like, though it isn’t much of a craft.”

“No, thank you, I’d rather row off by myself, and do some good hard thinking. I’ve got to go back to school as soon as the fall term opens, which will be in about two weeks, and I’d like to find a way out of my troubles before then, if I can.”

“It’s too bad,” spoke Tom sympathetically, for he had, somehow, come to form a strange and sudden liking for this lad. Tom looked into the other’s frank and pleasant face, and really wished he could help him.

“Well, I guess I’ll have to squirm out of it the best I can,” went on Bruce. “A good row, and a rest in the cool shadows, will calm me down, maybe, and I’ll try to make some plans before I have to get back to the grind. I’ll take good care of your boat.”

By the manner in which he entered it, and took up the oars, Tom saw that Bruce knew how to handle the craft. The auto runabout had been left near the dock, and a little later the senior was sculling down the stream.

“Who was that?” asked Tom’s chums, as he rejoined them.

He explained briefly, as he filled the empty oil cups, and soon he and the two lads were puffing across the river in the motorboat. The rowing craft had disappeared around a bend in the stream.

“Troubles, eh?” mused Will. “I don’t believe I’d let much trouble me if I went to a cracker-jack school like Elmwood Hall, and had a runabout like that.”

“Me either,” added Dick.

“Well, you never can tell,” spoke Tom, as he thought of the sad look on the senior’s face – a look that had returned several times during the talk, in spite of the frequent smiles. “He seems like a nice sort of chap.”

“Did he say what his trouble was?” asked Will.

“No, and I didn’t ask him. Said some man had it in for him. Look out where you’re steering, Dick.”

“Why, what’s the matter?” asked Dick, who had requested Tom to let him take the wheel for a time.

“There’s a big rock somewhere out here,” went on the owner of the motorboat. “I must mark it with a buoy, or I’ll hit it myself some night. Keep more to the left.”

Dick spun the wheel over, and the boys rode on, talking of many things.

“Where do you think you’ll go to school this fall?” asked Will of Tom.

“Oh, back to the Academy, I suppose.”

“Why, you graduated from there in June!”

“I know I did, but there’s going to be a post-graduate class formed, I hear. Going to take up first year college work, and dad talks of sending me. I wish I could go to Elmwood Hall, though, or some place like that.”

“So do I!” cried Will.

“Boarding school’s the place!” affirmed Dick, with energy. “I’d like to go to one.”

They had reached the other side of the river now and Dick Jones, who had been sent by his father to take a message to a lumberman, started off on his errand, Will and Tom promising to wait for him in the motorboat. When Dick returned on the run, Tom yielded to the request of the two lads, and took them for a run up the stream.

“That is, unless you have something to do, Tom,” spoke Will.

“No, I’m going to have all the fun I can before school opens, that’s all. And it will do the engine good to run a bit and get rid of the oil that chump Dent let run in.”

The boys were out in the motorboat for about two hours, and, on nearing the dock on the return trip, Dick remarked:

“That fellow’s auto is gone.”

“Is my boat there?” asked Tom, who was tinkering with the motor of his craft.

“Yes,” replied Will, who was steering.

“All right; I guess that fellow got tired of rowing, or maybe he thought of a way out of his troubles, and came in.”

When Tom had made fast his motorboat, he went to the rowing craft to see if it was in good condition. He saw a piece of paper on one of the seats, held down by a little stone. Picking it up he read:

“Many thanks for the use of your boat. I had a fine row, and I feel better, though I’m as much up a tree as ever. I hope to see you again, sometime. If ever you are near Elmwood Hall, look me up.

“Bruce Bennington.”

“That was nice of him,” remarked Will, as Tom showed him the note.

“And he didn’t damage your boat any,” spoke Dick.

“No, he knows how to handle ’em – he rows on the Elmwood Hall crew,” said Tom. “Well, so long, fellows. I’m going for a long run to-morrow, if you’d like to come.”

“Sure!” they chorused.

But Tom was not destined to take that long run on the morrow, for, when he reached his home, not far from the river, he heard strange tidings, that made quite a difference in his plans.

As Tom entered the house he saw his father holding a letter, that he had evidently been reading to his wife, and discussing with her. There was a look of concern on the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Brokaw Fairfield.

“What’s the matter?” asked Tom, quickly. “Any bad news?”

“No, not exactly bad news, Tom,” replied his father. “But it is news, and it’s going to make quite a difference to us – to you also.”

“What is it?”

“You remember that property in Australia, Tom, which was left to me by an uncle; don’t you?” asked Mr. Fairfield.

“Yes,” replied our hero, for he had often heard the inheritance mentioned. “What about it?”

“Well, I’ve been trying to dispose of it, and have the money from the sale sent to me here, but it seems that some trouble has arisen, and I’ve got to go there to straighten it out. I tried to do it by correspondence, but I have just received a letter from a lawyer in Sydney, saying that my personal presence is needed, or I may lose it all. So – ”

“Your father and I have decided to go to Australia!” suddenly broke in Mrs. Fairfield, anxious to get the worst over. “Oh, Tom, I don’t want to go at all, and leave you behind, but I’ve got to!”

“What!” cried Tom. “Can’t I go? You two going to Australia, and leaving me alone here? Oh, say, now – ”

“Wait, Tom,” cautioned his father with a smile, “we’re not going to leave you alone, exactly. Besides, there is your education to think of, and we may be gone for many months.”

“Oh, but I say – ” began Tom again.

“Now, dear son,” began his mother in a gentle voice, “we have it all planned out for you. You are to go to boarding school while we are away.”

“Boarding school!” Tom’s eyes began to sparkle. After all, this might be as good as going to Australia.

“Yes,” said his father, “and we have picked out – ”

“Elmwood Hall!” broke in Mrs. Fairfield, unable to let her husband tell all the news.

“Elmwood Hall!” cried Tom, thinking of the note in his pocket from Bruce Bennington.

“Yes,” spoke Mr. Fairfield, “though if you’d rather go to some other place it may be arranged. But your mother and I picked out Elmwood Hall, and – ”

“Elmwood Hall!” cried Tom again. “Say, that’s all right. I’m satisfied! That beats Australia. When are you going? When can I start for Elmwood? Have you got a catalog from there? Say, I’ve

got something to tell you!” and Tom, overcoming a desire to stand on his head, pulled out the note Bruce had left in his boat.

“Elmwood Hall!” exclaimed Tom again. “This is the best ever!”

CHAPTER II

THE DRIFTING BOAT

“What makes you so enthusiastic about Elmwood Hall, Tom?” asked Mr. Fairfield, when his son had somewhat calmed down. “I didn’t know you knew much about it.”

“I don’t except what I’ve heard and read, but it just happens that I met a fellow from there today.” And Tom told of his talk with Bruce Bennington, showing his parents the letter.

“Hum, that is rather odd,” spoke Mr. Fairfield. “I wonder what his trouble could have been? Bennington – Bennington. I’ve heard that name before. Oh, I know; Mr. Bennington is a millionaire manufacturer. That must be his son, though if he’s in trouble I should think Mr. Bennington would help him out.”

“Maybe it isn’t money,” spoke Tom. “But, anyhow, I’m glad I’m going to Elmwood, and maybe I’ll get chummy with Bruce Bennington, though there’s not much chance, for he’s a Senior, and I’ll be a Freshman.”

“I hope, if you can, that you’ll help him,” said Mrs. Fairfield. “And oh, Tom, do you think they’ll haze you?”

“If they do, I guess I can stand it,” replied her son. “Everyone has to be hazed. I won’t mind. But now tell me something about going to Australia.”

“It’s going to be quite a trip,” said Mr. Fairfield, “and one I wish I could get out of, but I can’t. We’ll start as soon as we can, Tom. We’re to go to San Francisco by train, and take a steamer there. I’ll write at once, and make arrangements for you to go to Elmwood Hall. Your mother will see to getting what clothes you need. Here is a catalog of the school.”

Tom eagerly looked the pamphlet over, while his father went to his library to write some letters and Mrs. Fairfield, not without some misgivings as to what might happen to Tom at boarding school, or to herself and her husband on their long trip, went to look over her son’s wardrobe.

As I have explained, Mr. Fairfield was quite well off, and had the prospect of more wealth. He did not care to lose his Australian inheritance, and, though the journey meant some trouble for him, in that it would complicate his business affairs at home, he decided to make it. He had long promised his wife a trip abroad and now was the chance for it, as they intended to come home by way of Europe.

Tom Fairfield was a tall, well built youth, fond of all out-doors sports, and about as lively a lad as you would care to meet.

He had lived in Briartown all his life, though he had traveled extensively with his father and mother, and knew considerable of the world. He was an only son, a sister having died when a little girl.

Tom had many friends in the village, where his father’s silk factory was located, and our hero took part in the scenes and activities of the place. He had attended the Academy there, and was one of the best football and baseball players. He always had a liking for the water, and since getting his motorboat, had been on Pine river more often than ever. He had tried to get up a crew at the Academy, but could not seem to interest enough boys, or get them to subscribe the necessary funds.

Tom had one or two enemies, too, chiefly because he would not let them bully him, but they did not worry him, for any lad of spirit is as likely to have enemies as friends, and Tom had plenty of the latter.

“Jove! To think that I’m really going to Elmwood Hall!” Tom whispered to himself, as he leafed over the catalog, and looked at the pictures of the various buildings. “That’ll be great! I wish I knew some of the fellows who were going there, but I guess I can soon get acquainted. I wonder if I can pass the entrance examinations?”

He looked at the requirements for the Freshman class, and noted that there was no study but what he had had at the Academy.

“I guess I can do it,” he said.

There were soon busy days in the Fairfield household.

Besides making arrangements for the voyage, and getting their business affairs in shape to leave, Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield had to arrange for Tom's stay at Elmwood. This was done by correspondence and, about a week after Tom had heard the news, he went to the school to take the entrance examinations. He met a few lads in like case, all rather miserable, and Tom felt a feeling of pride as he walked about the campus, and thought that soon he would be a student there.

“That is, if I pass,” he mused. “That Latin exam. was a bit stiff, and so were the maths. Maybe the others will be easier. I hope so, anyhow.”

Tom's hopes were realized, for on the second day – the test extending over that time – he had no difficulty in answering the entrance questions. Then he went back home, to receive, a few days later, word that he had passed, and would be admitted to the Freshman class.

“Wow!” he cried, as he read the formal announcement. “That's great! I'm going to tell the boys!”

He rushed off to find Dick and Will, his most particular chums. But, on visiting their houses, he was informed that they had gone fishing on the river.

“I'll find 'em,” he said. “I know the fishing hole. I'll go down in my motorboat.”

He hurried back to the dock, and, as he reached a point where he could look down to it, he uttered an exclamation of dismay.

“My motorboat!” he cried. “It's gone! Some one has it! If it's stolen – ”

He broke into a run, and as he had a good view of the river he saw his boat out in the middle of the stream.

“Well, of all the nerve!” he cried. “Dent Wilcox has taken my boat without asking me. I'll fix him!”

Then he noticed that the boat was not running under her own power, but was drifting down stream.

“Hi there, Dent! What's the matter with you?” Tom cried. “What did you take my boat for? Why don't you start up and run her back here?”

The lazy lad addressed looked up from what was evidently a contemplation of the stalled engine.

“Start her going!” cried Tom. “Start the engine, or you'll be on the rocks!”

“I can't,” yelled back Dent. “She's stopped.”

“Crank her,” ordered Tom. “Turn the flywheel over!”

Dent did so, but in such a lazy and slow fashion that even from shore Tom could see that the lad was not exerting himself enough. The wheel needed a vigorous turn.

“Oh, put some muscle into it!” cried Tom. “You'll never get her going that way!”

“I've tried three or four times, and she won't go,” retorted Dent, leaning back against the gunwale, and looking at the engine, as though a mere glance would set it going.

“Keep on trying!” cried Tom. “Don't you see where you're going? You'll be on the rocks in five minutes more! Can't you even steer? Next time you take my boat I'll wallop you good!”

“I didn't think you'd care,” came the answer over the stretch of water.

“Well, I do. Now you crank up!”

Dent Wilcox tried again, but his inherent laziness was against him, and nothing resulted. The boat was in the grip of the current, and was rapidly drifting toward the dangerous rocks.

“By Jove! He'll wreck my boat!” thought Tom. “Say!” he cried desperately, “can't you get that engine going somehow, and avoid the rocks?”

“I guess there's no gasolene,” retorted Dent.

“Yes, there is, the tank's full.”

“Then the batteries have given out.”

“Can't be. They're new. Oh, you big chump, to take out my boat when you don't know how to run her!” and Tom looked at his drifting craft in despair.

“Can’t you come out and get me?” suggested Dent, as he looked helplessly at the engine.

“Well, of all the nerve!” cried Tom. “But I’ll have to, I guess, if I want to save my boat!”

He hurriedly cast off his rowing craft, jumped in, and was soon pulling out toward the drifting motorboat.

CHAPTER III

OFF FOR ELMWOOD HALL

"Talk about lazy fellows!" murmured Tom, as he bent to his oars, "that Dent Wilcox certainly is the limit. He's too lazy to row, so he borrows my motorboat. Then he's too lazy to learn how to crank the engine, and too lazy to turn the flywheel over hard enough. It's a wonder he ever got started, and when he does get going he doesn't take enough pains to look out where he's steering. If he wrecks my boat I'll make him pay for her."

Tom cast a glance over his shoulder toward his craft, and the sight of the boat nearer the rocks made him row faster than ever.

"Why don't you try to steer, or crank her?" he yelled to Dent.

"What's the use?" asked the lazy lad indifferently.

"Use? Lots of use? Do you want to go on the rocks?"

"No, not exactly," spoke Dent, and his voice was quicker than his usual slow tones, as he saw his danger. "But you'll be here in a minute, and you can run things."

"Yes, that's just like you," retorted Tom. "You want someone else to do the work, while you sit around. But I'll make you row back, and pull the boat too, if I can't get her going."

"Oh, Tom, I never could pull this boat back."

"You'll have to," declared our hero grimly, "that is if the engine won't run. Stand by now, to catch my painter."

Dent stood up in the stern of the drifting motorboat, and prepared to catch the line Tom was about to throw to him. Tom was near enough to his motorcraft now so that the headway and the current of the river would carry him to her.

"I hope I can get that engine going," he remarked to himself, as he saw how dangerously near he was to the rocks.

"Catch!" he cried to Dent, throwing the end of his line aboard, and Dent, forgetting his usual lazy habits, made a quick grab for the painter. He reached it, took a turn around a cleat, and in another moment Tom was aboard.

"Pull my rowboat closer up," he ordered Dent. "I'm going to have a try at the motor, and if she doesn't go, we'll have to row out of danger."

He gave a quick look at the engine, and then cried:

"Well, you're a dandy!"

"What's the matter?"

"You didn't have the gasolene turned on."

"I did so. Else how could I have run out from the dock?"

"With what was in the carbureter, of course. But when that was used up, you didn't get any more from the tank. You're a peach to run a motorboat! Don't you ever take mine out again!"

"I won't," murmured Dent, thoroughly ashamed of himself.

With a quick motion Tom turned on the gasolene, saw that the switches were connected, and, with a turn of the flywheel, he had the motor chugging away a second later.

"There you are!" he exclaimed, as he sprang to the steering wheel.

"Glad I don't have to pull in," said Dent, thinking of the work he had escaped.

"Well, it was a narrow squeak," said Tom, as he steered out of the way of the rocks, and then sent his boat around in a graceful curve.

"How'd you come to take my boat?" asked our hero, when he had a chance to collect his thoughts.

“Oh, I just strolled down to the dock, and saw it there. I heard you were out of town – taking the Elmwood Hall examination – and I thought you wouldn’t mind.”

“I did take the exams., and I passed,” spoke Tom, his pride in this rather making him forgive Dent now. “I’ll soon be going there to school, and I’ll have swell times. I came down to tell Dick and Will that I just got word that I’m to enter the Freshman class, when I saw you had my boat. You want to be more careful after this.”

“I will,” promised the lazy lad, as he settled himself comfortably on the cushioned seats, and watched Tom steer. The latter, after running ashore, and tying up his rowboat, started for the fishing hole, intending to look for his chums.

“Can’t I come along?” asked Dent, who had not offered to get out, nor help Tom tie his boat. “Take me along,” he pleaded. “If you go to school I won’t get any more rides.”

“Well, you have got nerve!” laughed Tom, and yet he felt so elated at the prospect before him that he did not seriously protest. “First you take my boat without permission, then you nearly wreck her, and next you want to have an additional ride. You have your nerve with you, all right.”

“Might as well,” spoke Dent, lazily, as he lolled back on the cushions. “If you don’t ask for things in this world you won’t get much.”

“I guess that’s right,” agreed Tom. “You’ve got more sense than I gave you credit for. But crank that motor now. Let’s see if you can get it going. You’ll have to work your passage, if you come with me on this voyage.”

Dent turned the flywheel over, and after a few attempts he did succeed in getting the engine to go. Then Tom steered down to the fishing hole. Dick and Will saw him coming, and called and waved their welcome.

“Any luck?” asked Tom, as he ran his boat close to shore.

“Pretty fair. Did you hear from Elmwood?” asked Dick.

“Yes, just got word, and I passed. I’ll soon be a Freshman. I wish you fellows were coming along. Come on, get in, and I’ll tell you all about it. You’ve got fish enough.”

His chums were glad enough to ride back, and soon, with their fish, they were in the motorboat. While Tom was showing them his letter from the school, Dent managed, by a great effort, to steer properly.

“How soon are you going there?” asked Will.

“In about a week. I hope I make some friends there. I’m going to look up that Senior, Bennington. He told me to.”

Talking with his chums of the prospects before him, Tom was soon at his dock again, and this time he locked his boat fast so that Dent could not take it without permission.

“I’m going to let you two fellows run it while I’m at Elmwood,” he said to Dick and Will, much to their delight.

The days that followed were busy ones. Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield had much to do, and as for Tom, he had, or imagined he had, so much to take with him, that he thought he would need three trunks at least. But his mother sorted out his clothes, and reduced the number of his other possessions, so that one trunk and a valise sufficed.

In the meanwhile arrangements were made for Tom’s father and mother to sail for Australia. Their railroad tickets had been bought, and passage engaged on the steamer *Elberon*, which was to sail from San Francisco.

“I’m giving you enough money to last you for the term, Tom, I think,” said his father. “I want you to have everything you need, but don’t be wasteful. I will also leave a further sum in the bank here to your credit, and you will have a check book. But I want you to give me an account of your expenditures.”

Tom promised, and felt rather proud to have a bank account, as well as go to a preparatory boarding school. His chums in Briartown envied him more than ever.

At last the day for Tom to start came. His parents were to leave two days later, closing up their house for the fall, for it was early in September.

Good-byes were said, Tom's chums came in numbers to see him off, and with rather a tearful farewell of his father and mother our hero started for school, or rather, college, since Elmwood ranked with upper institutions of learning in conferring degrees.

"Be sure and write," begged Tom's mother.

"I will," he said. "And you write, too."

"Of course," his mother assured him.

The train pulled in, Tom got aboard, and at last he felt that he was really off. He waved his last good-byes, and could not help feeling a little lonesome even though so many pleasures lay before him.

As he took his seat, while his chums cheered and shouted "Rah, Rah, Elmwood!" after him, Tom was aware that a lad across the aisle was regarding him curiously.

This lad was of athletic build. He had red hair, and a pleasant, smiling face.

"Are you going to Elmwood Hall?" he asked Tom.

"Yes," was the answer. "Do you go there?" and then Tom saw that he need not have asked, since he saw the pin of the college on the other's coat.

"I do, Burke's my name – Reddy Burke they all call me. I'm beginning my third year there. Come over and sit with me, and we'll have a talk. Elmwood boys ought to be friendly."

CHAPTER IV

TOM MAKES AN ENEMY

Tom crossed the aisle of the lurching car, and was soon sitting beside the red-haired youth who had made such friendly advances.

“How did you know I was going to Elmwood?” asked our hero, as a sort of opening.

“Easy enough. You’ve got the air of a fellow going to college for the first time sticking out all over you. Oh, no offense!” exclaimed Reddy Burke as he saw Tom’s start. “It’s an honor to start at Elmwood Hall. Lots of fellows would like to, but can’t. I spotted you for a Freshman right off the bat.”

“I suppose I do look a bit green,” admitted Tom, with a smile.

“Oh, no more so than usual. Then, too, I heard your friends giving an imitation of the Elmwood yell, and that told me all I wanted to know. I’m glad to meet you. I hope I see more of you when we strike the school. Term opens to-morrow and next day you know, and there’ll be no end of fellows there. Opening day generally lasts a week. I thought I’d go down a day early, and get settled in my room.”

“That was my idea,” confessed Tom.

“Where are you going to put up?”

“I’ve got a room in Opus Manor. That seemed a nice place, and I picked it out when I came down for the entrance exams,” replied Tom.

“It is nice,” admitted Reddy Burke. “It’s where all the Freshmen like to get, but usually it’s so crowded that you have to go on the waiting list. You’re in luck, Fairfield.”

“Glad you think so. Where do you room?”

“Oh, I put up with the rest of our crowd at the Ball and Bat. That’s our fraternity house you know.”

“Yes, I noticed it when I was down before. It’s a beaut place, all right.”

“Pretty fair. We have some good times there. You must come to some of the blowouts. I’ll send you a card when we get settled, and you know the ropes.”

“Thanks,” replied Tom gratefully. “And now tell me all about Elmwood Hall.”

“Oh land! It would take a week!” exclaimed the red-haired athlete. “There’s lots to tell about it, but I guess you know the history of it as well as I do, if you’ve seen a catalog.”

“Yes, but I mean tell me something about the fellows, and the professors.”

“Well, the professors are no better nor worse than at other colleges, I suppose,” spoke Reddy, with something like a sigh. “They all seem to have exaggerated notions about the value of Greek, Latin and mathematics, though I’ll be hanged if I like ’em. Baseball and football for mine, though I suppose if I’m ever to become a lawyer, which dad seems to think I’m cut out for, I’ll have to buckle down sooner or later, and assimilate some of that dry stuff. It’s time I begin, I reckon.”

“I should think so – if you’re in your Junior year,” spoke Tom with a laugh.

“That’s right. Oh, I have done some boning, and I haven’t cut lectures any more than the rest of the team did. You simply *have* to cut some if you play all the games, and I didn’t miss any contests, you can make up your mind to that. Most all of us at the Ball and Bat play either on the diamond, or gridiron, or row on the crew. I say though, maybe you’re that way yourself?” and Reddy looked questioningly at our hero.

“Well,” admitted Tom, modestly, “I can row a bit, and I like baseball. I’ve never played football much. I wasn’t quite heavy enough for the team at our Academy.”

“You look husky enough,” spoke Reddy, casting a critical pair of blue eyes over his seatmate. “You ought to try for the eleven down at Elmwood.”

“Maybe I will. Think I’d have a chance?”

“It’s too early to say, but have a try, anyhow.”

“Are any of the professors very savage?” asked Tom.

“Only so-so. Doctor Pliny Meredith is head master, I suppose you know.”

“Yes. How is he?”

“As full of learning as a crab is of meat in the middle of August, but he’s not very jolly. Rather stand-offish, and distant, though sometimes he warms up. We call him ‘Merry’ because he’s usually so glum. But he’s fair, and he thinks Elmwood Hall the greatest institution ever. To him a fellow’s word is as good as his bond. It all goes on the honor system there. No profs. at the exams., you know, and all that. You have to be a gentleman at Elmwood.”

“Do the fellows live up to it?” asked Tom.

“Pretty much. There are one or two a little off color, of course. But any fellow who would lie to Merry wouldn’t stay long at Elmwood if the fellows got on to it.

“Then, the rest of the profs. are about like the average, except that I don’t mind admitting that Burton Skeel is a regular grinder, and as mean as they make ’em. He’s the Latin taskmaster and maybe that’s why I hate it so.”

“Aren’t there any jolly professors?” asked Tom, beginning to think that perhaps, after all, he wasn’t going to like it at Elmwood as much as he had hoped.

“Oh, bless you, yes!” exclaimed Reddy. “I was almost forgetting Live Wire. That would never do.”

“Live Wire? Who’s he?”

“Professor Livingston Hammond. He’s fat and jolly and he almost makes you like trigonometry, which is saying a lot, and, as for solid geometry, and conic sections, well, if anybody can make them look like the comic sheet of a Sunday newspaper it’s the Live Wire. You’ll like him; all the fellows do. But he won’t stand for any nonsense. You’ve got to come ‘prepared,’ or he’ll turn you back to make it up after class.”

“I like maths.,” admitted Tom.

“Then you and the Live Wire will be friends and brothers, I guess,” predicted Reddy.

“Tell me something about the fellows,” suggested Tom. “I know one Senior, slightly.”

“You do? How’d you make his acquaintance?”

“He’s Bruce Bennington,” replied our hero, as he told of the manner of their first meeting.

“That’s odd,” commented Reddy. “Bruce is one of the nicest chaps in college. ‘Easy Money Bennington’ we call him, ‘Easy’ for short, though. He’s a good spender, and his own worst enemy.”

“How’s that?” asked Tom. “I could see that something was troubling him the day I met him, but he wouldn’t say what it was.”

“No, that’s his way,” spoke the red-haired athlete. “I mean that he’s impulsive. He’d do anything for a friend, or an enemy too, for that matter, and that often gets him into trouble. He doesn’t stop to think, but he’s got a host of friends, and everybody likes him, even old Skeel I guess, for I’ve seen ’em together lots of times.”

“I wonder what his special trouble is now?” speculated Tom.

“Give it up. Bruce will never tell until it’s settled. He’s proud – won’t take help from any one if he can help it. So you know him?”

“Well, I hardly can say I know him. He may not want to keep up the acquaintance down here,” spoke Tom.

“Oh, yes he will. Bruce isn’t that kind. Once he meets you he’s always friendly, and, if he takes a notion to you, why you couldn’t have a better friend.”

Tom was glad to hear this, and he felt a warm spot in his heart for the somewhat unhappy Senior. He resolved to find out his trouble, if he could, and help him if it were possible.

“Of course there are some mean and undesirable chaps at Elmwood,” admitted Reddy. “Just as there are anywhere, I guess, only I wouldn’t want to name any of ’em. You’ll find out who they are,

soon enough. But you just play straight and they'll soon let you alone. They may try to pick a quarrel, and there are a few who are always trying to get up a mill. Do you fight?"

"I box a little," admitted Tom.

"Good, then you can take care of yourself if it comes to a scrap, I suppose. But don't get into a fight if you can help it. Not that I mean to run away, but it's against the rules to fight, and you don't want to be suspended, though there are more or less mills pulled off every term."

"I'll fight if I have to; not otherwise," spoke Tom, quietly.

"Good. Say, you'll think I'm trying to put it all over you, and do the big brother act with such advice; won't you?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Tom, stoutly. "I'm glad to have you give me points."

"All right then. I guess you'll do. We've got one funny character at the school – Demosthenes Miller."

"A student?"

"Land no. He's our educated janitor. He's always around with a copy of the classics, or some book on maths., and if he sees you getting at all friendly he'll ask you to help him translate a passage, or work out a problem. He says he might as well be getting an education on the side as long as he's at college. He's good fun, but rather tiresome at times. Demy, we call him."

"He must be odd," agreed Tom.

"There! I guess I've told you all I know," spoke Reddy, with a laugh. "The rest you'll find out after you've been at the school a few days. Now tell me something about yourself."

Which Tom did, mentioning about his father and mother going to Australia.

"That's a trip I'd like to take," said Reddy. "Cracky, what sport! I love travel."

The lads talked on various topics as the train sped along. They were nearing Elmwood Hall, which was located in the town of the same name, on the Ware river. Several other lads, whom Reddy pointed out to Tom as old or new students, had meanwhile boarded the train. A number greeted Tom's seatmate as an old friend and our hero was introduced to them. They greeted him nicely enough, but talked to Reddy.

Soon the latter was deep in conversation about the chances for a good football season, and Tom did not like to break in, but listened with all his might.

"Here we are, Fairfield," said Reddy Burke, at length. "Get your grip, and I'll show you the way to the Hall. Oh, I forgot, you've been here before, though."

"Yes, I can find my way up well enough," spoke Tom. "Don't let me hold you back."

"All right then. I'll see you later. There's Hen Mattock up ahead. He was football captain last year. I want to talk to him, so I'll just run on. See you again!" and with that Reddy rushed off, to clap on the shoulder a tall, well-built lad, who looked every inch an athlete. Tom gathered up his belongings, gave his trunk check to an expressman, and headed for Opus Manor.

This residence, or dormitory, was one of the school buildings, located not far away from the main hall and was "within bounds," so that the Freshmen, did they wish to spend an evening in town, had to get permission, or else "run the guard," a proceeding fraught with some danger, carrying with detection a penalty more or less severe. It was the aim of the school proctor, Mr. Frederick Porter, to thus keep watch and ward over the first year students.

The others were allowed more liberty, or at least they took it, for many of them lived in fraternity houses, and some Seniors boarded in private families in town. Most of the Seniors, however, dwelt in a house near the Hall. It was called Elmwood Castle, and Tom looked longingly at it as he passed on his way to his own more humble, and less distinctive, dormitory.

As Tom was ascending the steps, intending to report to the monitor in charge, and also seek out the matron, he became aware of a student standing on the topmost platform, looking down at him. Beside him was another lad, and, as our hero came up, one shoved the other against Tom, jostling him severely.

Instantly Tom flared up. He could see that it was done intentionally. His face flushed.

“What do you mean?” he asked quickly.

“Whatever you like to think,” was the reply of the student whom Tom had first noticed.

“Well, I think I don’t like it,” retorted Tom quickly.

“You’ll have to get used to it then; won’t he, Nick?” and the lad who had done the shoving appealed to his companion, with a sneering laugh.

“That’s what he will, Sam.”

“I won’t then!” exclaimed Tom, “and the sooner you realize that the better.”

“Oh ho! So that’s the kind of talk, eh?” sneered the one called Sam. “What’s your name, Fresh?”

“Fairfield – Tom Fairfield – Fresh!” retorted Tom, for he could see by the other’s cap that he, too, was a first year lad.

“Well mine’s Heller – Sam Heller, Capital ‘S’ and capital ‘H,’ and don’t forget it. This must be the fellow who’s got my room, Nick,” he added.

“Probably,” replied Sam Heller’s crony, who was Nick Johnson. “Yes, that was the name the monitor mentioned, come to think of it.”

“How have I your room?” asked Tom.

“Because you have. I had the room last year, and I told ’em to save it for me this term. But you came along and snatched it up, so – ”

“I took it because it was assigned to me,” spoke Tom, and from the other’s talk he understood that the lad was a Freshman who had not passed, and who, in consequence, was obliged to spend another year in the same grade. Perhaps this made him bitter.

“Well, you’ve got my room,” grumbled Sam, “and I’m going to get square with somebody.”

“You can get square with me, if you like,” said Tom quietly, “though I told you I had nothing to do with it. One thing, though, if you do any more shoving I’ll shove back, and it won’t be a gentle shove, either.”

“Is that a threat?” growled Sam.

“You can take it so if you like.”

“I will, and if you don’t look out – ”

What Sam was going to say he did not finish, for, at that moment, the monitor in charge of Opus Manor came to the door, and the two who had sought to pick a quarrel with Tom slouched off across the campus.

“New student here?” asked the monitor, who did not seem to remember Tom.

“Yes. I’m Fairfield.”

“Oh yes, I recall you now. Come, and I’ll introduce you to my wife. She’s matron here. Blackford is my name.”

“I remember it,” spoke Tom, who had met the monitor when down for his examinations.

As the two were about to enter the building Tom saw his new friend, Reddy Burke, hurrying along, beckoning to him to wait.

He halted a moment, and the Junior ran up the steps.

“I just saw you talking here to a couple of students,” began the athlete, “and as I passed them just now I heard Sam Heller say he was going to get even with you. What happened?”

Tom told him and Reddy whistled.

“Why, what’s up?” asked our hero.

“Nothing, if you don’t mind it, only you’ve made an enemy right off the bat. That Heller is one of the few undesirables here. His crony, Nick Johnson, is another. Heller is down on you all right, though it isn’t your fault.”

“I don’t mind in the least,” spoke Tom.

“He’s one of the scrappers,” went on Reddy. “Look out!”

“I can take care of myself,” replied Tom. “Thanks, just the same,” and, as he followed Monitor Blackford into the dormitory, he realized that he had made an enemy and a friend in the same day.

CHAPTER V

TOM FINDS A CHUM

“This is the room assigned to you,” said the monitor, pausing in a long corridor, after he had introduced Tom to Mrs. Blackford. “It is one of the best in the Manor, though I don’t quite understand why you picked out a double apartment.”

“Is it a double one?” asked Tom in some surprise. “I did not know it. As I was requested in the circular I received, I indicated the section of the building where I would like to be, and this room was assigned to me. I supposed it was a single one.”

“No, it is intended for two students, and I suppose it was assigned to you by mistake. I’m sorry, as it is too late to change now, since all the reservations are taken, and – ”

“Oh, I don’t want to change!” exclaimed Tom quickly, as he entered the apartment shown him by the monitor. He saw that there were two beds in it, and that it was large and airy. “I’ll keep this,” our hero added. “It’s fine.”

“Have you a chum who might like to share it with you?” asked Blackford. “The expense may – ”

“Oh, I don’t mind that part of it,” said Tom. “My father knew how much it was to cost, and he did not object. I haven’t a friend yet – that is, a Freshman friend – but I may find one.”

“There is one, a Sam Heller, who had this room last term,” went on the monitor. “He would doubtless be very glad to come in with you.”

“I’m afraid not,” replied Tom with a smile. “He and I had a little difference of opinion just now, and – ”

“Very well,” interrupted Mr. Blackford. “You needn’t explain. Suit yourself about the room. It is yours for the term.” He knew better than to enter into a talk about the disagreements of the students. There were other troubles to occupy him.

Left to himself, Tom sat down and looked about the room that was to be his for the Freshman year. It had a good view of the campus and buildings, and he liked it very much.

“Though I should be glad if I had a good chum to come in with me,” reflected the new student. “I may get in with somebody, though. It’s rather lonesome to have two beds in one room, but I can sleep half the night in one, and half the night in the other I suppose,” he ended, with a smile.

Tom was unpacking his belongings from his valise when the expressman arrived with his trunk, and a little later the matron knocked at the door to ask if our hero found himself at home.

“Yes, thank you,” replied Tom, accepting the clean towels she brought. He had begun to hang up his clothes.

“I do hope you get a nice young man in with you,” suggested Mrs. Blackford. “One who won’t be cutting up, and doing all sorts of mischievous pranks.”

Tom proceeded with getting his room to rights as she left him, and a little later, finding that it wanted an hour yet to twelve o’clock, our hero strolled out on the campus.

He looked about for a sight of Sam Heller, or his crony, Johnson, who, it appeared later, had passed his examinations, and was a Sophomore, while Sam had to remain a Freshman, much to his disgust. But the two, whom Tom had come to feel were his enemies, were not in sight. Nor was Reddy Burke, and, though Tom strolled over past Elmwood Castle, he did not get a sight of Bruce Bennington.

Tom strolled about until lunch, and the mid-day meal was not a very jolly affair. About twenty Freshmen, who had come a day before the term formally opened, were at the tables and they were all rather miserable, like fishes out of water, as Tom reflected. Still our hero talked with them, experiences were exchanged, and the ice was broken.

“But I don’t exactly cotton to any of them enough to have one for a roommate,” reflected Tom.

That afternoon, having formally registered, and being told about the hours for chapel, and his lecture and recitation periods, Tom wrote a long letter to his father and mother.

He was coming back, from having posted it, when he noticed, standing on the steps of Opus Manor, a solitary figure.

"I hope that isn't Sam Heller, waiting to renew the quarrel with me," reflected Tom, as he drew nearer. "Still, if it is, I'll meet him half way, though I don't want to get into a fight my first day here."

But he was soon made aware that it was not the bully who stood on the steps. It was a lad about his own age, a tall, straight youth, with a pleasant smiling face, and merry brown eyes. No, I am just a trifle wrong about that face. It was naturally a jolly one, but just now it bore a puzzled and unhappy look.

"Hello," said Tom pleasantly, as he mounted the steps, and was about to pass in.

"Hello!" greeted the other. "Do you room here?"

"Yes. This is my first day."

"Say, you're in luck. It's my first day too. I'm a stranger in a strange land, and I'm stuck."

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

"Well, very foolishly, I delayed settling about my room until I got here. I thought there'd be plenty of places, and, when I did arrive I found that Opus Manor was the only desirable place for us Freshmen. Up I steps, as bold as brass, and asks for a room and bath. 'Nothing doing,' answers the worthy monitor, or words to that effect. Consequently, behold yours truly without a place to sleep, unless he goes into town to a common boarding house. And I *did* want to get in with the Freshmen! It's tough luck!"

Tom was doing some rapid thinking.

"I don't suppose you know of a good place in town; do you?" went on the other. "My name is Fitch – Jack Fitch. I'm from New York city."

"Mine's Tom Fairfield, from Briartown," said our hero.

"Well, Tom Fairfield, have you been here long enough to recommend a place to room, where I can also get the eats; especially the eats, for I'm a good feeder. Know of a likely place?"

Tom's mind was made up.

"Yes, there's a place here," he said.

"Here? Are you stringing me? They told me every room was taken."

"So it is, but I have a large double one, and I was looking for a chum. So – "

"You don't mean you'll take me in?" cried Jack. "Oh, end the suspense! Fireman save my child! Don't torture me!" and he gave a good imitation of a woe-begone actor.

"I'll be glad to have you," said Tom, who had taken a sudden liking to Jack. "That is, if you'd really like to come. You might look at the room."

"Say no more! Come? Of course I'll come! Will a duck swim? But I say, you know, you don't know much about me."

"I'll take a chance – if you will," said Tom, laughing.

"All right. Then we'll call it square. Lead on and I'll follow. To think that, after all, I'm going to get in Opus Manor! It's great, Fairfield!"

"Call me Tom, if you like."

"I like. I'm Jack to you, from now on. Shake!" and he caught Tom's hand in a firm clasp. The two looked into each other's eyes, and what they read satisfied them. They were chums from then on.

"I'll take you to my room — *our* room," Tom corrected himself. "It's a fine one!"

"I'm sure it must be. But do you reckon the Lord and Lady of this castle will allow me to share it with you?"

"Yes. In fact Mrs. Blackford spoke of me getting some one in with me. So that will be all right."

"Great! Do you mind if I do a little dance? Just a few steps to show my joy?" asked Jack, and Tom perceived at once that his new friend was a jolly lad.

“Not at all,” Tom answered, and Jack gravely did a hop skip and jump on the top platform of the steps.

As he finished there came a laugh from a couple of lads passing.

“Look at the ballet lady!” mocked a voice, and Tom saw Sam Heller and Nick Johnson approaching.

“Did you like it?” asked Jack, coolly. He was not to be easily disconcerted.

“Oh, it was great!” declared Sam with a sneer. “We’ll have you in the Patchwork Club if you keep on.”

There was no mistaking the sneering tone of his voice, and Jack flushed.

“Friends of yours?” he asked Tom.

“Just the reverse. But don’t bother with them now. We can attend to them later – if we have to.”

“And I think I shall have to,” said Jack quietly, as he looked Sam full in the face. “I don’t mind fun, but I like it to come from my friends. Lead on, Tom, and, as you say, we’ll attend to those two later.”

He followed Tom, and, as they disappeared into Opus Manor there floated to them the mocking laughs of the two cronies.

CHAPTER VI

AN ANGRY PROFESSOR

“Tom, did you ever balance a water pitcher on your nose? I mean full of water. The pitcher full, that is to say, not the nose.”

“Never, and I’m not going to begin now.”

“Well, I am. Watch me. I used to be pretty good at juggling.”

“Say, you want to be careful.”

“Oh, I will be. I’ve never done it, but there must always be a first time. And, though balancing water pitchers may not be an accomplishment taught in all schools, still there may come a time when the knowledge of how to juggle one will come in handy. Here goes.”

Tom and Jack were in their room – the room our hero had decided to share with his new chum. The matron and monitor had been interviewed, and Mrs. Blackford was very glad, she said, to know that Tom was to have a companion.

“And such a nice, quiet-appearing lad as he is, too,” she confided to her husband. Alas, she did not know Jack Fitch!

“The other one seems very quiet, also,” said Mr. Blackford. “I wish all the students were like those two.”

But if he and his wife could have looked into the chums’ room at that moment, perhaps they would not have held to that opinion.

For Jack had taken the large water pitcher, and was preparing to balance it on his nose, while Tom, rather fearing how the experiment would terminate, had gotten safely out of the way in case of an accident.

“I wouldn’t do it, if I were you,” spoke Tom, though he could not help laughing at his chum’s odd notion.

“Why not?” demanded Jack.

“Well – Oh, because it might fall.”

“No reason at all, Tom. If would-be jugglers hesitated on that account there’d be no experts. Give me a hand until I get it up on my nose; will you?”

“I’d rather not.”

“Why?”

“I’m afraid it will fall.”

“Oh, pshaw! Why fear? Never mind. I’ll balance it on my chin instead of my nose. On second thought it’s a little too heavy for the nose act, and my nose is like a bear’s – it’s tender. Watch me!”

Jack carefully lifted the pitcher of water, and managed to get it on his chin. He steadied it with his two hands, bending his head back, and then, when he thought he had it where he wanted it, he lowered his palms, and the pitcher – for an instant – was balanced on his chin.

“Look!” he called to Tom, not taking his eyes from the vessel of water. “Talk about jugglers! Some class to me; eh, Tom?”

“Yes, I guess so.”

“Now bring me a chair,” requested Jack. “I’m going to do it standing on a chair.”

“You’ll never do it!” predicted Tom.

“Yes, I will. I’ll get the chair myself, then.”

This was his undoing. As long as he remained in one spot, with his head carefully held still, the pitcher did not tilt enough to upset. But, as soon as Jack moved, there was an accident.

“Look out!” yelled Tom, but his warning came too late.

Jack made a wild grab for the slipping vessel, but his hands did not grasp it in time. A moment later there was a heavy crash, pieces of china flew about the room, and a shower of water drenched the chums.

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