

Stratemeyer Edward

**The Rover Boys in Alaska: or,  
Lost in the Fields of Ice**



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## The Rover Boys in Alaska or Lost in the Fields of Ice

### CHAPTER I

#### TOM AND SAM

"Well, here we are again, Tom, down to the grind of college life."

"That's right, Sam. Not so much fun as attending a wedding, is it?" And Tom Rover grinned broadly at his brother.

"We can't expect to go to weddings all the time," returned Sam Rover, a grin showing on his own face. "Wonder how Dick and Dora are making out," he mused.

"Oh, fine, you can be sure of that. Dora is just the girl for Dick."

"How do you like being back here, Tom?" and the youngest Rover looked anxiously at his brother.

Tom heaved a deep sigh before replying.

"To tell the truth, Sam, I wish I had stayed home a bit longer," he said slowly. "My head isn't just as clear as it might be. That whack Pelter gave me with that footstool was an awful one."

"It certainly was, and it's a wonder it didn't split your skull open. Maybe you'd better go back home for a rest."

"Oh, no, it isn't as bad as that. Sometimes I feel a bit dizzy, that's all. But I guess that will wear away, sooner or later. You see, I've been studying hard the last three days, trying to make up for lost time, and that is what's done it. I think I'll take it a bit easier after this, until I feel more like myself."

"Don't you think you had better see a doctor?"

"No, I've had the doctor fussing over me until I am tired of it. What I need is some fun, Sam. Can't you think of something? Whenever I try to concoct some sort of a joke it makes my head ache," and poor Tom, who loved to play pranks as much as ever, heaved another sigh.

"Let us take a long walk this afternoon, Tom. Maybe that will do your head some good. We can take Songbird and some of the others along."

"All right; anything to get out of the greasy grind of studying. My! don't I wish I was in Dick's place and didn't have to go to college any more!"

"Well, Dick's got his hands full with Dad's business. Those brokers left things in a perfect mess."

"I know it. But Dick will straighten things out – he's got a head for just that sort of thing." Tom took up a text book, glanced at it for a moment, and then threw it on the table. "No use, I can't study any more to-day. I'm going out on the campus. You come as soon as you are done and we'll take that walk."

"All right. Will you tell Songbird and whoever else you want to go along?"

"Yes," answered Tom, and without further words he took up his cap, heaved another deep sigh, and left the room. Sam watched his brother pass down the corridor of the college building and noted that he placed his hand to the back of his head and kept it there for some time.

"Poor Tom!" murmured the youngest Rover, as he turned again to the lesson he had been studying. "He tries to keep up a brave front, but that crack he got on the head some weeks ago was a worse one than most folks imagine. I'm thinking he ought to be home and under the doctor's care instead of trying to rack his brains making up lessons he missed while we were away."

Tom passed along the corridor until he had turned a corner and was out of sight of me room he and Sam occupied. Then he looked around to make certain that nobody was observing him. Both of his hands went up to the back of his head and he clenched his teeth hard.

"What is the matter with this old head of mine!" he murmured. "Sometimes I feel as if I had a regular windmill inside of it. And when I try to study it gets to be a regular blank. Something is wrong, that's certain. What is it?"

He stood in the corner of the corridor for several minutes, trying to pull himself together, mentally and physically. His face was still somewhat pale, from the suffering he had undergone, since the time a wooden footstool hurled by an enemy had hit him and knocked him unconscious.

"Rats! this won't do!" he finally exclaimed, and shaking himself, he hurried out of the building and on to the broad, velvety college campus.

Students were walking in various directions, going to, or coming from, classes and lectures. Many hailed him and he called out in return, or waved his hand. The Rover boys had a host of friends at Brill.

Presently Tom saw a tall, slim young man coming up, dressed in a light, checked suit, and wearing pointed patent-leather shoes and a rose-colored cap. In the buttonhole of the student was a large carnation. Under his arm the approaching one carried half a dozen text books.

The face of the fun-loving Rover lighted up and for the time being the pain in his head was forgotten. His hand went down in a pocket, to feel for something, and then came forth again. Then he stepped forward and crooked out his elbow.

The other student was looking to one side as he came forward and he did not notice the elbow in his way. The elbow caught him in the ribs, causing him to give a grunt, and the armful of books were scattered on the walk.

"My gracious me!" gasped the stylishly-dressed youth. "What did you do that for, Tom Rover?"

"Sorry, Tublets," answered Tom, making as sober a face as possible. "I didn't know you wanted the whole walk."

"You did that on purpose, Tom Rover, you know you did!"

"Did what on purpose, Tubby?"

"How many times must I tell you that my name is not Tubby or Tublets. It is William Philander Tubbs, and I want you to call me by my right name after this."

"Very well, Mr. W. P. Washbasin – I mean Tubbs. I'll not forget again," and Tom made a low bow.

"And I don't want you to knock my books out of my arm again," went on William Philander, drawing himself up disdainfully.

"Your books, Willie?"

"Yes, my books," came wrathfully from the dudish student "And don't you dare to call me Willie. My name is –"

"Oh, yes, I remember now, Philugger."

"It's not Philugger, either. It is Wil –"

"Sure, I know, Philliam Tubbander Williams. Sorry I forgot before." And Tom looked truly sorrowful.

"Oh, you are simply horrid, that's what you are!" declared the stylishly-dressed student, in despair. "And my books are all covered with dirt!"

"I beg a million pardons," cried Tom, and started to pick the books up, one after another. As he did this one hand went again into that pocket before mentioned and, on the sly, he inserted a printed sheet of paper into each book. "Now you are all fixed, Tubby," he added. "And you can run along to school like a nice little boy. But wait a moment till I fix your collar," he went on, as he turned the other youth around.

"What's the matter with my collar?" demanded the dudish student, suspiciously.

"Talcum powder, I guess. You mustn't use so much after this." And Tom commenced to brush the collar vigorously.

"I – er – I didn't use much – just a little for my nose, don't you know," answered William Philander Tubbs, who made much of his personal appearance.

Tom continued to brush the coat collar off with one hand, while unfolding a printed bill with the other. An advertising wagon had gone past the college grounds the day before, and from a fellow distributing handbills Tom had gotten a sheet telling of the merits of "Gumley's Red Pills for Red-Blooded People," and also some small bills relating to the same wonderful cure for many ills. The small sheets were in the books; the large sheet he now proceeded to place on William Philander's back, fastening it under the turned-down coat collar. There were a few specks of talcum powder on the coat collar, but not enough to have attracted any attention.

"Now you are all right, Tubbsky," said the fun-loving Rover. "My, but you certainly do know how to dress!" he added, in affected admiration.

"Ah, really?" lisped the dude "Thanks. But please don't knock my books down again," he added, and then proceeded on his way to one of the classrooms.

"Well, that makes me feel a little better," murmured Tom, and then he followed slowly, to watch the fun. He saw a number of students gather and all commenced to snicker at Tubbs, who, totally unconscious of what was taking place, marched on, holding his head erect.

"Wish it was my class, I'd like to see it out," mused Tom. "But never mind, I guess I'll hear about it later," and he turned back to the campus, to wait for Sam. As he did this, a queer pain shot through his head and he murmured a suppressed groan.

"If that keeps on I'll have to do as Sam says, go and see a doctor," he told himself. "Gosh, how queer I feel! Just as if I was getting batty!"

"Hullo, Tom!" came the salute from nearby, and looking in that direction the fun-loving youth saw another student coming up rapidly. "Sam just told me you were going to take a walk and asked me to go along."

"Yes, Songbird, we'll start as soon as Sam gets through with the lesson he's studying. How's the muse these days?"

"Oh, I'm not writing much poetry now," answered John Powell, otherwise known as Songbird, because of his efforts at composing verses. "I've got too much to do studying."

"Why don't you write a poem to the professors? Maybe they'd excuse you from recitations for it," and Tom smiled broadly.

"I – er – I did write one little poem about the lessons," answered the would-be poet. "It went like this:

"The student sat in his room in a chair  
With a look on his face of keen despair;  
Outside his chums were playing ball  
And oft to him they sent a call.  
He wanted to play with all his heart,  
But from his books he could not part."

"Grand! Immense! You've struck the clothespin on the head the first clip!" cried Tom. "Any more of the same brand?"

"Well – er – I started the second verse, but I didn't get it finished. It went like this:

"He had a lesson hard to learn,  
It made his heart with anguish burn;  
He wanted to throw those books away

And rush outside and run and play  
And so – and so – and so – "

And so he kept on grinding there,  
Gnashing his teeth and pulling his hair,"

finished Tom. "I know, for I've been there. Really, Songbird, that's a dandy poem. You ought to have it framed and hung up in the gym."

"Do you really think so?" and the would-be poet looked pleased.

"I do. It would hit every fellow in Brill. And I think – What can that fellow want?" added Tom suddenly, as a messenger boy from the town came running up to him.

"Guess he's got a message for you," returned Songbird.

"For me? I trust it's no bad news," said Tom.

## CHAPTER II

### SOMETHING ABOUT THE PAST

"Is this Mr. Thomas Rover?" asked the messenger boy, as he came to a halt.

"Yes, that's my handle," answered Tom. "What have you got for me, a check for a thousand dollars or a bill?"

"Telegram," was the laconic answer, and the lad held it out. "Sign here," he added, bringing his receipt book into evidence. "It's paid fer."

"All right, son." Tom signed the book, fished up a dime from his pocket and handed it to the lad, who took it with a broad grin.

"T'anks, mister. Any answer?"

"I'll see," said Tom, and tore open the envelope of the telegram. He perused the yellow sheet inside with interest.

"It's from Dick!" he cried, to Songbird. "He's got to come to Casford on business and he says he will make the trip in the auto and bring Dora along. They'll be here to-morrow or the day after, and they'll stop at Hope Seminary too. Say, this is great! I must tell Sam!" went on Tom, his face brightening. "You can go," he told the messenger boy.

"Here comes Sam now," announced Songbird. "He's got Stanley and Spud with him." And he pointed to one of the doors of the college building.

To my old readers the Rover boys will need no introduction. For the benefit of others, allow me to state that the youths were three in number, Dick being the oldest, fun-loving Tom coming next, and sturdy little Sam being the youngest. When at "the old homestead," as they called it, they lived with their father, Anderson Rover, and their Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha on a farm called Valley Brook, in New York State.

As related in the first volume of this series, entitled, "The Rover Boys at School," the three lads had been sent to Putnam Hall Military Academy, a well-known institution of learning presided over by Captain Victor Putnam. There they had made many friends and also a few enemies.<sup>1</sup>

The first term at school was followed by a trip on the ocean, and then another trip into the jungles of Africa. Then came a journey to the West, and jolly times on the Great Lakes and in the mountains. Next the boys returned to the Hall, to go in camp with their fellow cadets. After that they took a long journey over land and sea, being cast away on a lonely island of the Pacific.

"Now I've had enough adventures to last a lifetime," said Dick, on returning home. But strenuous happenings to him and his brothers were not yet over. On a houseboat the Rover boys sailed down the Ohio and the Mississippi rivers, having many adventures by the way, and then found themselves on the Plains, where they solved the mystery of Red Rock ranch. Then they reached Southern Waters, and in the Gulf of Mexico discovered a deserted steam yacht, which they eventually turned over to its anxious owner.

"Now for a good rest," said Sam, and the three lads returned to the home farm, where more adventures befell them. Next they returned to Putnam Hall, where all graduated with considerable honor.

"College next," said Tom, and he made a wry face, for studying was not particularly in his line, although he could knuckle down as hard as anyone when it was necessary. But before they went to college the lads and their father, accompanied by some others, went off on a treasure hunt, locating what was known as the Stanhope fortune.

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<sup>1</sup> For particulars regarding how Putnam Hall Military Academy was organized, and what fine times the cadets there enjoyed even before the Rovers appeared on the scene, read "The Putnam Hall Series," six volumes, starting with "The Putnam Hall Cadets." – PUBLISHERS.

Brill College was a fine institution of learning, located in the middle west, not far from the town of Ashton. With the Rovers went their old-time school chum, Songbird Powell, already introduced. At the same time William Philander Tubbs came there from Putnam Hall. He was a dudish fellow who thought more of his dress and his personal appearance than anything else, and was often made the butt of some practical joke.

At Brill the Rovers soon made other friends, including Stanley Browne, a tall, gentlemanly youth, and Will Jackson, generally called Spud, because of his unusual fondness for potatoes. Spud was a great story teller and some of his yarns were certainly "the limit," to use Sam's way of expressing it.

While at Putnam Hall the Rover boys had made the acquaintance of Dora Stanhope, who lived nearby with her widowed mother, and also Nellie and Grace Laning, Dora's two cousins. It was not long before Dick and Dora showed a great liking for each other, and at same time Tom commenced to "pair off" with Nellie and Sam was often seen in the company of Grace. Then came the time when the Rovers did a great service for Mrs. Stanhope, saving her from the rascality of Josiah Crabtree, a teacher at Putnam Hall who was trying to get possession of the money Mrs. Stanhope held in trust for Dora. Crabtree was exposed and then he lost no time in disappearing.

Not far from Brill College was located another institution of learning, Hope Seminary, for girls. When the Rovers went to Brill, Dora and her two cousins went to Hope, so the young folks met as often as before.

A short term at Brill was followed by an unexpected trip down East, where the lads again fell in with the rascally Crabtree. Then the youths returned home for a brief vacation and while there became the owners of a biplane and took several thrilling trips through the air, and, later on, by means of the same aircraft, managed to save Dora and Nellie from some rascals who had abducted them.

About this time, Mr. Anderson Rover, who was not well, was having much trouble with some brokers, who were trying to do him out of much valuable property. He went to New York and disappeared, and the sons immediately went in search of him, as related in the volume before this, entitled "The Rover Boys in New York."

The brokers were Pelter, Japson & Company, and it was not long before Dick and his brothers discovered that they were in league with Josiah Crabtree. The plotters were holding Mr. Rover a prisoner, in the hope that he would sign away certain rights to them. The boys traced the crowd to a lonely farmhouse, and it was during the happenings which followed that poor Tom was struck on the head by a wooden footstool, thrown by Pelter, and knocked unconscious. Josiah Crabtree tried to escape from a garret window by means of a rope made of a blanket and this broke and he fell, breaking a leg in two places. He was taken to a hospital and the doctors there said he would be a cripple for life.

All of the Rovers were much concerned over Tom, and for some time it looked as if the youth might be seriously injured. But the boy had grit and pulled himself together, and presently announced himself as well as ever. But he often got that sharp pain through the head, and there were times when, for an instant, his mind became a blank.

While Dick was at college he had become formally engaged to Dora, and now it was decided that, as Mr. Rover was in no physical condition to look after his various financial affairs, and as Dick seemed to take more to business than to studying, he should leave college and take the reins out of his parent's hands. Then he pleaded with Dora that they get married and she consented, only stipulating that they must both look after her mother. Then followed the grandest wedding that quiet Cedarville had ever known, and Dick and Dora went off on a short but exceedingly happy honeymoon trip.

"And now it is back to the college grind for us," Sam had said to Tom.

"Right you are," was the reply. "And we'll have to work pretty hard to catch up with our classes."

"But your head, Tom – "

"Oh, that has got to take care of itself," had been Tom's reply; and there the matter had dropped for the time being. But often Sam would watch his brother closely, for he knew that poor Tom had been seriously hurt and was by no means entirely over it.

When the two brothers had returned to Brill they had had to tell their chums of all their doings in and near New York. Songbird had smiled grimly on hearing of the fate of Josiah Crabtree.

"Well, he deserved it," the would-be poet had said. "He was a snake in the grass from the start."

"I hope he doesn't cross our path again," Sam had replied. "I never want to see him, again."

"Nor do I," had come from Tom. "If he's a cripple I reckon he'll keep out of our sight."

It was hard work, after all the excitement of their doings in New York, and the added excitement of the wedding, for Sam and Tom to settle down to the hum-drum routine of life at college, but the lads did their best. Nellie Laning and her sister Grace came back to Hope Seminary and the young folks managed to see each other at least once a week. Nellie was very solicitous about Tom, and when he admitted to her that his head still hurt at times she wanted to know why he didn't return to the farm for a long rest.

"Oh, I don't want to drop behind in my studies, Nellie," had been his answer. "I want to get through, and go into business, like Dick has done," and he gazed at her in a manner that caused her to blush deeply.

"Yes, I know. But, Tom dear, supposing your head – " She did not know how to go on.

"Oh, my head will be all right, Nellie, so don't you fret. Why, I wouldn't have you fret for the world!" And Tom had caught both her hands tightly within his own. They understood each other perfectly.

"But you know what the doctor said – that you must be very careful for a long, long time." She had not added that one of the specialists had remarked that victims of such injuries sometimes went out of their minds.

"Oh, I'll be all right I tell you, Nellie," he had answered. "I'll go through Brill with a rush, see if I don't. And then we'll get married – "

"Oh, Tom!"

"Surest thing you know," he had added, and then, as they chanced to be alone, he had caught her in his arms and given her a quick little hug and a kiss that meant a great deal. To Tom, the whole world did not hold such another girl like Nellie. And to Nellie – well, there was Tom and that was all.

"Well, you take good care of yourself," she had said on parting, and he had told her again not to worry.

"What's the news?" asked Sam, as he came up to his brother and saw the telegram in Tom's hand.

"Read it for yourself," was the answer and the younger Rover did so.

"So Dick is coming to Casford; eh?" mused Sam. "I suppose it's some more of Dad's business. Well, I'll be glad to see him and see Dora, too. We can all go up to Hope together."

"Go to Hope to see the teachers, I suppose," said Stanley Browne, closing one eye suggestively. "Fine fun that, seeing the teachers," and then Sam made a playful pass at him with his fist.

"Sam said we were to take a walk," put in Spud. "Where are we going?"

"We might go out towards the Sanderson farm," suggested Songbird.

"So you can call on Minnie," cried Tom, for he knew of Songbird's deep regard for the farmer's daughter. "All right, that suits me."

"Let us go through Lanker's woods and by the old mill," suggested Sam. "That's a fine walk, Tom, and almost as short as the regular road."

"Just as short," put in Songbird. "I've walked it several times and I know." And then he bit his lip as several of the others commenced to laugh. "I don't care – I've got a right to visit the Sandersons if I want to."

"Sure you have," answered Sam. "And Minnie – Great Scott! What's the row now? Here comes Tubbs on the run and shaking his fist at us!"

"I guess I am in for it," returned Tom. "I fancy Tubblets wants to see me."

## CHAPTER III

### TOM'S JOKE

"What did you do to him?" asked Sam, quickly.

"Put an advertisement of pills on his back and some other ads. in his text books," answered Tom. "Say, he looks some mad; doesn't he?"

"I should say yes," came from Stanley.

William Philander was approaching with long strides. In one hand he held the poster Tom had fastened on his back, and he was shaking his other fist wrathfully.

"Tom Rover, you've – er – insulted me!" he gasped as he came up. "You've humiliated me before the whole class! I'll – I'll – " The dudish student was so full of wrath he could not speak.

"Take a cough drop and clear your throat Billy," suggested Tom, coolly. "Don't get so excited, you might drop dead from heart disease."

"How dare you put that – er – that advertisement of Gumley's Red Pills on my back?" stormed the stylishly-dressed one.

"Gumley's Red Pills for Red-Blooded People," quoted Spud, from the poster. "Say, they are fine, Willie. Didn't you ever take 'em?"

"No, and I don't want to. I want Tom Ro – "

"Say, if you haven't taken any of Gumley's pills you don't know what you've missed," went on Spud, with a wink at the others. "Why, there was a man over in Rottenberg who was flat on his back with half a dozen fatal diseases. The doctors gave him just three days to live, – three days, think of it! His wife nearly cried her eyes out. Then along came this Gumley man with a trunk full of his Red Pills for Red-Blooded People. He didn't exactly know if the dying man was red-blooded or not, but he took a chance and gave the fellow sixteen pills, four after breakfast, four after dinner, four after supper and four on retiring, and the next day, what do you think happened? That man got up and went to work, and he's been at his Job ever since."

"Yes, and not only that," added Tom, earnestly. "That man organized a tug-of-war team, – the plumbers against the Local Conclave of the R. W. Q. Society, – and they've had three tug-of-war matches, and he has pulled the R. W. Q. Society over the line every time. Talk about pills that are worth their weight in gold! Why, Gumley's Red Pills for Red-Blooded People are worth their weight in diamonds, and you ought to get down on your bended knees and thank somebody for having been given the opportunity to advertise them."

"Oh, you make me – er – tired, don't you know," gasped William Philander. "It was a – er – a horrid trick. All the class were laughing at me. And when I opened my Greek book, out fell one of those horrid bills! And then I dropped another bill on the platform, and – oh, it was awful! I'll never forgive you, Tom Rover, never!" And William Philander stalked away, still clutching the poster in his hand.

"Poor William Philander!" murmured Sam. "It was rather a rough joke, Tom."

"Oh, it will do him good," was the answer. "He's too uppish to live."

"Yes, he wants some of the conceit knocked out of him," added Stanley. "But come on, if we are going for a walk, let us get started."

"Wish I had been in the classroom to see the fun," mused Tom, his old-time grin overspreading his face. No matter how old Tom got he'd never give up his boyish pranks.

The crowd of students were soon on the way in the direction of the Sanderson farm. But at the first turn in the road they left that highway, and following a path across a pasture lot, plunged into the depths of what was known as Lanker's woods. Through the woods ran a fair-sized stream of water, and at one spot there was an old dam and the remains of a saw mill, now going to decay.

"Sam, don't you wish you had the old *Dartaway* back," remarked Stanley, presently. "You used to cover this part of the country pretty well with that flying machine?"

"I've never wanted it back since it got smashed up on the railroad track," was the answer. "Flying was good enough, but I don't think I was cut out for a birdman."

"I'd like to go up again some day," put in Tom. "But not regularly. I'd rather travel in an auto, or behind a fast horse."

"Give me a horse every time," said Songbird. And then he warbled softly:

"To rush along at railroad speed,  
In auto, or on wings of air,  
Is well enough for some, I think,  
To make you jump and make you stare.  
But when I journey roundabout,  
I'll take a horse, or maybe two,  
And then I'll – I'll – "

"And then I won't bust any tires  
And walk home feeling pretty blue!"

added Tom. "Say, that's right, Songbird, although you can't burst tires on a flying machine," he added.

"That isn't just the way I was going to finish the verse," said the would-be poet. "But it will do."

On went the boys, deeper and deeper into the woods, chatting gaily and occasionally singing snatches of college songs. Sam kept close to his brother and he was glad to note that Tom was acting quite like his old self.

"What he needs is plenty of fresh air and rest from studying," thought the younger Rover. "Hang it all, it was a mistake for Tom to get down to the grind so soon. He ought to have taken a trip out West, or to Europe, or somewhere."

Presently the students came out on the bank of the stream and there, in the sunshine, they rested on a fallen tree and some rocks. It was pleasant to watch the swiftly-rushing water, as it tumbled over the stones.

"The brook is pretty strong on account of those rains we had," remarked Sam.

"Yes, I never saw it so swift," answered Stanley.

"Humph! this is nothing," announced Spud. "I saw it once when it ran so swiftly that the water couldn't make the turn at the bend below here and ran right up the hill and over on Shelby's barn, drowning sixteen cows! And some of the water hit the barn roof and bounced off into the chimney of Shelby's cottage and put out the fire, and – "

"Wow, Spud! put on the soft pedal!" interrupted Sam.

"Oh, it's absolutely true. Some day I'll show you the tombstone they erected over the sixteen cows. It's of granite and a hundred and ten feet high."

"Never mind the tombstone," interrupted Tom. "What I want to see is the match box Shelby stored that water in after it hit the barn." And at this sally a general laugh went up.

On the boys went again, and half an hour later reached the abandoned saw mill. All that was left was the dam with the broken wheel and one end of what had once been a long, low, one-storied building.

"Let's have a look inside," suggested Stanley, and led the way, and the others followed. Sam was the last to enter, coming directly behind his brother and he saw Tom suddenly put his hand to the back of his head and stop.

"Does it hurt again, Tom?" he whispered, kindly.

"Just a – a – spasm!" gasped poor Tom, and then he drew a long breath. "There, it's gone now," he added, and walked on. Sam sighed and shook his head. What was this queer condition of Tom going to lead to? It made him shiver to think of it.

There was but little to see in the old mill. It was a damp, unwholesome place, and the boys soon came out again. Not far away was a well hole, rather deep and partly filled with water.

Tom was the first to notice this hole, which was partly covered with rotted boards. Of a sudden he commenced to grin, as if he scented a huge joke. He ran up and rearranged the rotted boards, so they completely covered the hole. Then in the center he placed the bright-colored cap he had been wearing, and hurried along, to the path leading beside the dam.

"Hi, Stanley!" he called out, as the others came from the mill. "Get my cap, will you? The wind blew it off. It's back there somewhere."

"I see it!" shouted Stanley.

"I see it, too," came from Spud, who was close by. "I'll race you for it, Stan."

"Done!" was the reply, and side by side the two collegians raced for the cap.

"An apple for the fellow who wins!" shouted Sam, who saw nothing wrong in what was going on.

"Leg it, both of you!" added Songbird.

Side by side Stanley and Spud sped over the uneven ground in the direction of the cap. Then both made a plunge forward in true football style. In a heap they landed on the rotted boards, each catching hold of the coveted headwear. Then came an ominous crash, and both boys disappeared headlong into the well hole!

"Look! Look what has happened!" shrieked Sam, in dismay.

"They are in the old well!" gasped Songbird.

"Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho!" came from Tom, and he shook with laughter. "Isn't that the dandy joke? I thought Stanley would go in, but I didn't expect to catch the pair of 'em."

"Tom!" cried Sam, in new horror. "You didn't really mean – "

"Sure I did. I put my cap there on purpose. Say, they had some tumble, didn't they?" And Tom commenced to laugh again – a strange laugh that didn't sound like him at all.

"They'll be drowned – we must save them!" exclaimed Sam, hoarsely. "Songbird, what can we do?" he added, turning to his chum.

"I don't know – maybe we can throw 'em a rope – if there is one around."

"Let 'em crawl out – it's easy enough," came from Tom. "Don't you spoil the joke." And he commenced to laugh again.

"Tom, don't act as if you were crazy!" said Sam, catching him by the arm and shaking him. "Those fellows can't get out without help – it's too deep! And the sides may cave in on top of them! And there is water down there, too! We must help them, and at once."

Tom stared at his brother in bewilderment. Then of a sudden the look of fun died out of his face and was succeeded by a look of horror and terror combined.

"Did I do that, Sam? Oh, what a foolish thing to do! Yes, we must help them! What shall I do? I'll jump down after them if you say so!" And Tom started forward.

"No, don't do that!" Sam held him back. "We'll get a rope, or a long pole. Don't go too close or you may cave the top of the well in on 'em."

"Yes, we must get a rope, or a pole," gasped poor Tom and ran off on a search. "And I thought I was having a good joke! Oh, I certainly must be going crazy!" he muttered.

In the meantime Songbird had thrown himself on his hands and knees and crawled to the edge of the old well hole. He called out several times, but got no reply. He heard a great floundering and splashing.

"Hi, you!" he continued. "Are you alive?"

"Sa – save us!" came the spluttered-out words, from Spud. "Sa – save us!"

"Are you both alive?" continued Songbird, anxiously.

"Yes," answered Stanley. "But we need help, for the water is over our heads. Get a rope, or something, and be quick about it!"

"Hang on the best you can and we'll help you," was the answer.

"Well, don't be too long about it, or we'll be drowned!" came in a shivering tone from Spud.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE OLD WELL HOLE

The three youths at the top of the old well hole gazed around anxiously. All were looking for a rope, but no such article presented itself to their view. There was a bit of iron chain lying in the dead leaves nearby, but it was too short to be of service.

"I don't see anything to use," remarked Songbird, wildly. "Oh, Sam, this is awful!"

"Come on, I think I see something," answered the younger Rover. "Tom, you can help bring it over."

He took his half-dazed brother by the arm, more to keep him from approaching too close to the well than for any other reason, and the three boys raced to where a number of saplings were growing. Sam had noted that one of the saplings had been bent over by the wind and was partly uprooted.

"Maybe we can get it up – we've got to do it!" he cried. "Come, catch hold and pull for all you are worth!"

The others understood and laid hold of the young tree, which was all of fifteen feet high and several inches in diameter. It had but few branches, which was an advantage. They bent it down and pulled with a will, and out of the ground it came, so suddenly that the boys fell flat on their backs.

"Wait, I'll break off some of the branches!" cried Sam. "Tom, Songbird, try to break off that twisted root. There, that will do. Now, if we can get it down the well they ought to be able to climb up on it."

It was but the work of a few seconds to drag the sapling to the hole. Then it was lifted upright, so that the end might not dig into the sides of the well and cause a cave-in.

"Look out below there!" shouted Sam.

"Don't knock any stones on us!" came back from Stanley. He and Spud had braced themselves on the sides of the old well, with the water up to their waists.

"We'll be as careful as we can," answered Songbird.

"Look out for dirt in your eyes," added Tom. All the fun had died out of him and his face was full of concern.

Slowly and cautiously the three boys lowered the sapling into the old well hole. In doing this they had to stand close to the edge, and once they sent down a shower of loose dirt that caused a wild cry of alarm from below.

"Go slow!" cried Spud, presently. "I've got it," he added, a second later. "Let her come," and then the sapling was lowered until the roots rested on the bottom of the hole. The top was now several feet below the top of the old well.

"The old chain – just the thing!" cried Sam, and took it up.

"You had better come up close together," suggested Songbird, peering down at those below. "Then, if the well caves in, you'll be up that far anyway."

This was thought good advice and Stanley and Spud determined to act on it. Stanley came first with Spud at his heels. The many small branches of the sapling afforded good holds, and as each of the youths was something of an athlete, both of them came up with comparative ease.

"Can't get any higher," remarked Stanley, when within two feet of the top of the sapling. "It's almost ready to break now."

"Catch hold of the chain!" cried Sam. "I'll hold it. Tom and Songbird, you hold me, so I don't fall in."

Sam had the chain twisted around his right hand and he leaned far over into the well hole, his brother and Songbird holding him by his free arm. The loose end of the chain dangled close to

Stanley and he grasped hold. Then came a short, hard pull, and Stanley came sprawling out on the grass. Then Spud crawled up a little higher and he was hauled out the same way.

Both boys were wet to the skin and covered with mud, presenting anything but an enviable appearance. For several seconds they sat on the grass, panting for breath.

"Phew! that was a close shave!" gasped Spud, presently. "I'm mightily glad the old well didn't cave in on us!"

"We went down head first," came from Stanley. "If it hadn't been for the water we would have smashed our skulls!"

"And the water came close to drowning us," added Spud; "And say, it was some cold, believe me," and he shivered.

"You'd better race around in the sun a bit, or you'll take cold," said Sam.

"Take off your coat, Spud, and put on mine," said Songbird, as he commenced to divest himself of his garment.

"Yes, and Stanley can have my coat," came from Tom. He now looked relieved, but his eyes had a strange light in them.

"It's queer how your old cap landed right on the top of the well," remarked Spud. "Why didn't the wind carry it to some safer place?"

At this remark Tom's face grew suddenly red. He tried to speak and gave a gulp.

"There isn't much wind now," added Stanley. "How was it, Tom?"

"I – er – I – the wind didn't blow the cap," was the lame answer. Just then Tom wished he was a thousand miles away. He could not look his chums in the face.

"It didn't blow the cap?" demanded Spud. "What do you mean?"

To this Tom did not answer. Sam wanted to speak, but did not know what to say. Songbird looked curiously at Tom.

"Say, look here!" burst out Stanley, striding forward. "Do you mean to say, Tom Rover, that you put that cap on the old well on purpose?"

"I – I – did," answered Tom feebly. "I – er – I thought it was a – a joke."

"A joke?" cried Spud, sarcastically.

"A joke, to put us in peril of drowning, or smothering to death!" roared Stanley. "If you call that a joke I don't, and I want you to know it!" And in a sudden passion he doubled up his fists and sprang towards Tom.

But Sam rushed between the pair.

"Stanley, don't, please don't!" he cried. "Tom made a mistake, – he knows it now."

"He'll know it after I am done with him!" cried the other, hotly. "He's not going to play a joke on me that puts me in danger of my life! I'll take it out of his hide!" And he tried to get past the younger Rover.

But still Sam held him back.

"Stanley, don't touch him. You know how sick he's been. He isn't himself. Let it pass. He's as sorry as any of us that it happened; aren't you, Tom?"

"Sure I am," answered Tom, readily; but his tone of voice was that of one who didn't care much, one way or the other. Tom was not himself, that was certain.

"Humph, maybe he's sorry and maybe he isn't," muttered Stanley. "I guess he ought to have a thrashing. Anyway, I am done with him," and he flung back the coat Tom had offered him.

All in the crowd looked at Tom, expecting him to say something more. But Tom shut his mouth tightly and walked away, up the river path. He was without his coat. Sam picked up the garment and made after his brother.

"Tom, come back here!"

"I won't, Sam. You can stay with them if you want to. I'll take a walk alone," was the moody answer, and Tom walked faster than ever.

"Of all the mean things to do!" murmured Spud, shaking his head slowly. "I would never have thought it of Tom Rover, never!"

"Tom hasn't acted just right since he came back to Brill," said Songbird, in a low tone, "You know he got an awful crack on the head, and, somehow, he's been different ever since. I wouldn't lay it up against him, if I were you fellows."

"Huh! I guess you'd lay it up against him if you had been soused down into that old well hole and were all wet and covered with mud!" growled Stanley. "Fun is fun, but that was no joke, I can tell you that! He deserves a good thrashing."

"If he isn't right in his head they ought to put him under the doctor's care, or in a sanitarium," remarked Spud. "Why, if he isn't right in his mind there is no telling what he'll do next! He might take it into his head to murder some of us!"

"Oh, I don't think it's as bad as that," answered Songbird, hastily. "I think in a short while he'll be just as he used to be. But the excitement of that capture of those brokers and old Crabtree, and the fight, and then Dick's wedding, were too much for him. What he needs, I think, is a good, long rest."

"Well, he can keep away from me after this," grumbled Stanley, as he looked at his wet and bedrabbled clothes. "Nice sight we'll present going back to the college!"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," suggested Songbird. "I'll go ahead, to the gym., and get you some changes and you can put them on in Dobb's barn. Then nobody will know about it."

"All right," said Stanley, his face brightening a trifle.

"What of Sam and Tom?" asked Spud, who was not as angry as his companion in misfortune.

"I'll tell them we are going back," answered Songbird, and ran after the Rovers.

In the meantime Sam and Tom had kept on walking – or rather Tom had hurried on and his brother had kept up with him, trying to make him turn back. But to all of Sam's entreaties Tom turned a deaf ear.

"I came out for a walk and I'm going to walk," he said, stubbornly. "If they want to go back they can do it – and you and Songbird can go with 'em."

"But, Tom, that isn't fair," insisted Sam. "They are all wet, and –"

"Humph! a little water won't hurt 'em. I've been soaked myself more than once. If they can't take a joke let 'em go," and Tom continued to stalk on until he came to a flat rock, when he suddenly sat down to rest, at the same time putting both hands to his head.

It was here that Songbird found them and informed them of what the others and himself proposed to do.

"All right, Songbird; I guess that is best," said Sam, softly. "Tom doesn't feel just right and he'll rest here awhile."

"Oh, I'm not sick!" cried Tom. "I'm sorry I played the trick, but I don't see any reason for Stanley and Spud to cut up about it." And then he got up as suddenly as he had sat down and stalked on once more.

"Do your best to fix it up, Songbird," pleaded Sam, in a low tone. "You can see Tom isn't himself. Try to explain to those fellows."

"I will. I think Tom ought to have a doctor," was the low reply; and then Songbird rejoined Stanley and Spud and the three started back to Brill.

Tom stalked on for fully half a mile without speaking and Sam came behind him. The younger Rover was busy thinking and did not say a word. Presently the pair reached the end of the river path and came to a bridge and the highway. On the bridge Tom sat down again.

"Want to go any further, Tom?" asked Sam, as pleasantly as he could.

"I don't care where I go!" burst out the other. "I'm sick of it all! Sick of the college, sick of studying, sick of those fellows, sick of everything and everybody! I wish I could go to Africa, or the North Pole, or somewhere else, where I wouldn't see or hear of 'em again!"

"Tom!"

"I mean it. What's the use of keeping in the grind day after day, like a horse on a tread mill? What does a fellow get out of it? Nothing but hard work and a pain in the head! Some times my head hurts to beat the band! I can't stand it, and I won't! They are all against me, every one of 'em!" And Tom commenced to wring his hands, while two tears stood in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

## CHAPTER V

### TOM'S QUEER ACTIONS

Sam did not know what to say or what to do. He realized more fully than ever that his brother was not himself. He was growing wilder and more irrational every moment.

"Tom," he asked suddenly, "have you got those pills with you that the doctor gave you to take?"

"Sure," was the ready answer.

"Have you taken any lately?"

"No. What's the use? They don't seem to help me."

"Let me see them, please."

"There they are." Tom brought the box from his pocket. "They might as well be bread pills, or Gumley's red ones," and he grinned for a moment at the recollection of the trick played on William Philander Tubbs.

Sam took the box and looked at the directions carefully. "It says to take one three times a day when needed," he said. "You had better take one now, Tom. Come on."

"It won't do any good, Sam."

"Well, take one for me, that's a good fellow. Wait, I've got my pocket cup and I'll get some water." And he did so.

"Oh, dear, you're bound to feed me pills," sighed Tom, and made a wry face as he swallowed the one Sam handed him. Sam kept the box, making up his mind that he would play nurse after this.

"I guess we had better walk some more," said Tom, suddenly. "I hate sitting still. If we had the old *Dartaway* I'd take a sail from here to San Francisco, or some other far-off place."

"Wait a little, I'm tired," answered Sam, soothingly. "Just see those little fishes!" he said, pointing to the water under the bridge.

He made Tom get down and watch the fishes and bathed his brother's forehead. At first Tom was rather restless, but soon the pill seemed to take effect and he grew quiet.

"I'm getting awfully tired," he announced, presently. "I guess we had better be getting back, Sam."

"Just as you say, Tom," was the quiet reply.

It was growing dark when they reached the college grounds and most of the students had gone in to supper. Tom said he did not feel much like eating, but his brother told him he had better have a little food, and they went in together. They saw Songbird and the others at another table. The would-be poet and Spud nodded to them, but Stanley paid no attention.

Sam and Tom still occupied their old room, Number 25, while Songbird was still in Number 26. Since Dick was not to return to Brill his place in the latter room had been taken by Max Spangler, a jolly fellow of German-American parentage.

"Vot is der madder mit Dom Rofer?" asked Max of the would-be poet, as both came up to the room after supper.

"Oh, he isn't feeling very well, Max," was the reply. "What makes you ask?"

"Oh, I see him put his hands by his head on so many dimes," said Max. "He got knocked owit, didn't he?"

"Yes, a rascal hit him over the head with a wooden footstool and nearly cracked his skull."

"Den he should be py der hospital, yah, instead of py college," said the German-American student.

"Well, maybe they'll have to take him to the hospital, or somewhere," returned Songbird, thoughtfully. "Hang it all, with Dick gone and Tom acting as he does, times are not half as jolly as they used to be!"

In the next room Sam sat down to study. Tom had wanted to study, too, but his brother had persuaded him to lie down and rest, and now he was asleep and breathing heavily. Sam tiptoed his way across the room to gaze at him.

"Poor, poor Tom!" he murmured softly. "He'll have to take it easy. If he tries to keep up here it may kill him, or –" Sam did not finish. It was a terrorizing thought to imagine that Tom might go out of his mind. "He's got to have a doctor – some specialist. I'm glad Dick is coming, so we can talk it over. But it's too bad to burden Dick with this – and Dora, too – when they aren't over their honeymoon yet. Oh, dear, it's too bad Pelter threw that footstool at Tom!"

Tom continued to sleep and Sam tried his best to study. But it was hard work and the youngest Rover made slow progress. An hour passed and then there came a soft tap on the door. Songbird was there.

"I thought I'd ask how he was," he whispered, nodding towards Tom.

"Sound asleep, Songbird." Sam paused for a moment. "Come in," and his chum did so, and Sam closed the door again. "I wanted to ask you about Stanley and Spud."

"I – I tried to explain to them, without going into it too deeply," said Songbird. "I think Spud understands. But Stanley – well, he's pretty well riled yet. But I guess he'll get over it."

"You can tell 'em that Tom would never play such a trick if he was – well just right here," and Sam touched his forehead. "It's an awful state of affairs, Songbird! I hardly know what to do."

"Why not send Tom home for a rest?"

"How can I if he won't go?"

"Get the doctor to order it."

"That's an idea. I'll talk it over with Dick when he comes. But I wish you could fix it up with Stanley."

"I'll do my best," answered Songbird, and then, as Tom moved restlessly, he hastily left the room as quietly as he had entered it.

Before Sam went to bed Tom roused up and wanted a drink of water. His brother made him take another of the pills and then both retired. For a long time Sam could not sleep, but at last he fell into a profound slumber.

When Sam awoke it was with a start, for the sun was shining brightly and he feared he had overslept himself. He glanced to where Tom had been resting and uttered an exclamation.

"Gone! I wonder where he went to?"

He glanced at the chair on which Tom had placed his clothes and saw that it was empty. The door to the corridor was ajar.

"Can he have been walking in his sleep, or did he wander away out of his mind?" was the agonizing thought that rushed through Sam's, mind. In a jiffy he was out of bed and had begun to dress. He did not spend longer than was necessary on his toilet. Then he hurried out of the room and gazed about him. An assistant janitor was nearby, running a vacuum cleaner over the floor.

"Gilson, you know my brother Tom," he said. "Have you seen him?"

"Saw him outside quite a while ago," was the reply.

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know. He was near the gym."

"Thanks."

It did not take Sam long to reach the campus. Fully a score of Brill students were in evidence, but a quick glance showed that Tom was not among them.

"Hello, Sam!" came from Bob Grimes, one of the crowd. "How goes it this morning?"

"Fine, Bob. Have you seen Tom?"

"Yes, he took a walk down the road."

"Which way?"

"Towards town."

"Long ago?"

"Best part of half an hour, I guess."

Sam said no more but hurried across the broad campus and on to the highway leading to Ashton. The big bell in the tower was sending out its last call for breakfast. Sam put down the road on a run, all sorts of thoughts wandering through his brain. What if Tom was clean out of his mind and had wandered off?

"Whoop! Sam! Where bound in such a hurry, child?" came the unexpected call from a nearby field, and Tom vaulted the rail fence lightly. "Taking the morning air, like myself?"

"Tom!" gasped the younger brother, coming to a halt. He ran up closer and gave the other a quick look. Tom's eyes were as bright as they had ever been. "Are you feeling all right this morning?" he faltered.

"Best I've felt in a long time, Sam. Say, were you coming after me?" demanded Tom, quickly.

"Yes, if you want to know."

"Thought I was going to run away, eh? Well, you're mistaken, Sammy, my son. I'm not going to do anything of the sort. You know how bad I felt yesterday."

"You certainly were bad yesterday. But come on, it's time for breakfast."

"All right, Sam," and the two walked to the college side by side. "Say, I did some queer things yesterday, didn't I?" went on the fun-loving Rover, anxiously.

"You certainly did, Tom."

"Got Spud and Stanley in a regular mess."

"Worse than that. They were in danger of their lives."

"I was a fool, Sam, a regular, downright fool, and I'll tell 'em so when I get a chance. But it was my head, – it wasn't just right."

"You must take another pill, Tom. Here it is, take it as soon as you can get some water."

"All right, Sam, you're the doctor and what you say goes. I certainly don't want to act like I did yesterday again," and poor Tom looked greatly worried.

"It's that crack you got on the head, Tom. You want to go slow with studying and with all excitement. Maybe you had better go back home and take it easy."

"Well, I will if I don't feel stronger in a week or two," was the slow and thoughtful answer. And then Tom put his hand to the back of his head, as he had done so many times lately.

It was not until the noon hour that the fun-loving Rover had a chance to talk to Spud and Stanley. He went up to both of his chums frankly and told them what he had told Sam.

"Oh, it's all right," said Spud, quickly. "I knew you weren't yourself, Tom. Don't say anything more about it."

With Stanley, however, it was different. He had spoiled a good suit of clothing and scratched his chin and hands. Sam had told him to send the suit to the cleaner's at the Rovers' expense, but even this had not altogether satisfied the big student.

"It was a mean joke, and I don't like it," said Stanley. "It was no sort of thing to do at all, Tom Rover. If you are going to act like that in the future I don't want anything to do with you," and he left Tom standing helplessly where the two had met. Then Tom rejoined Sam, feeling as uncomfortable as ever.

"I suppose it is all right, Tom," said his younger brother.

"It's all right as far as Spud is concerned," was the moody reply.

"What about Stanley, didn't you speak to him?"

"I did, but he is as mad as hops. He said if I was going to play that kind of jokes he didn't want anything to do with me," and Tom sank in an easy chair in the room. "Sam, I guess I put my foot in it that time. Stanley is a fine fellow and if he talks like that he's got a reason for it."

"He doesn't understand the situation, Tom. I'll speak to him as soon as I get a chance."

"No, don't do it. I told him how it was, but he won't believe it. And why should he? I'm all right, am I not? I'm not crazy, or anything like that, am I?" and Tom looked at his brother pleadingly. "I ought to know what I am doing."

"Of course you are not crazy, Tom. Nobody said you were. That crack on the head put you – well, a little out of sorts, that's all."

"If I thought I was going crazy, I'd – I'd – well I guess I'd jump overboard," said Tom, and he heaved a deep sigh. Then he very abruptly turned to the table, got out one of his text books, and commenced to study.

## CHAPTER VI

### BOYS AND GIRLS

"Hurrah, Tom! Here's good news!"

"From Dick and Dora?"

"Yes. They will be here at half-past two. Dick stopped to transact that business first, so he and Dora can spend the rest of the time with us and with the girls at Hope. Isn't that just fine?" And Sam's face showed his pleasure.

"All to the merry," was Tom's comment. "Say, I guess we can all go over to Hope together, can't we?" he asked anxiously.

"We'll make a try for it anyway," returned his brother.

It was the day after the events recorded in the last chapter, and Tom had declared in the morning that he felt better than ever. He had even gone out on the campus to joke with Songbird and William Philander Tubbs, and speak a few words with Spud. Stanley had seen him and kept out of his way, and that was the only cloud on the horizon.

"I've got nothing on to-day after two o'clock," went on Tom, with a grin. "How about you?"

"I've got a physics lecture, but I guess I can cut it," answered Sam. "I'll get Spud to tell me all about it afterwards. I wouldn't miss the chance to go to Hope for anything."

They had heard from Dick early in the morning by telegram, and now had come in a message over the long-distance telephone. The oldest Rover brother and his bride were making the tour in the Rover family car, doing this for the express purpose of giving the others a ride when they stopped at Brill and Hope. Dick of course wanted to see all the boys at the college and Dora was equally anxious to visit with the girls at the seminary.

Promptly on time the shrill tone of an auto horn was heard, and Tom and Sam ran across the campus to greet the new arrivals. Dick was at the wheel and Dora sat beside him, smiling and blushing prettily. In the tonneau of the big car rested several bags and wraps.

"Welcome to our city!" sang out Tom gaily. "And how is Mrs. Rover this afternoon?" and he made a profound bow and swept the ground with his cap.

"The same old Tom, I see!" cried Dora gaily. "Are you feeling all right?" she asked, quickly.

"Sure," was the answer. Tom was the last one to put on a doleful face in front of a lady.

"Talk about style," came from Sam, merrily. "Nothing like keeping the Rover name up!" And he leaped on the running board and shook hands. "Did you have a good trip?"

"Fine. Not a puncture," answered Dick.

"Oh, it was just too lovely for anything!" cried Dora. "If Dick had the time I'd like to go on a tour for a month!"

"I thought maybe you fellows would like to get in and run over to Hope," went on Dick, with a smile.

"You couldn't keep us out," answered Tom, promptly.

"We telephoned for them to be ready for us," said Dora. "But you will have to take our baggage out, to make room."

"Here comes Songbird, he'll look after that, I know he will," said Sam.

The would-be poet came up all smiles and shook hands. He said he would do anything they wished and at once took charge of the things. Several others came up, including Spud and Stanley, and there was a general handshaking and a rapid-fire of conversation. Then Sam and Tom got in the automobile and away went the car in the direction of Hope Seminary.

"Want me to drive?" asked Tom.

"Tom, you'd better sit in the back with me," put in Sam, quickly. "This is Dick's outing, let him run the car." He was afraid that if Tom got his hands on the wheel he might do something to put the crowd in danger.

"All right, I'm satisfied," was the ready answer and Tom sank back on the cushions.

The touring car was a powerful one and Dick knew how to handle it to perfection. Along the smooth road they rolled swiftly, only slowing down at the turns and where the highway was not in a good state of repair. Dora turned around to talk to the others, asking about the college, and then spoke about those left at Cedarville and at Valley Brook.

"Mamma is real well again," she said. "Better, in fact, than she has been in a long while. I know she feels relieved to think that Dick can now take charge of all of her affairs, and of my affairs, too."

"Dick is getting to be a business man fast," remarked Sam. "With your affairs and Dad's affairs he must be having his hands full."

"Oh, the more the merrier," answered the oldest brother. "I like it better than going to college." But as he spoke his face became very thoughtful. Clearly Dick had something on his mind. He was not nearly as talkative as usual, Sam soon noticed that and so did Tom.

Presently the touring car came in sight of Hope Seminary, nestling in a pretty grove of trees. Two girls were down by the stone gateway, and both waved their hands.

"Grace and Nellie!"

"Here they come!"

"I told you they'd bring Sam and Tom."

"Doesn't Dora look sweet in that brown suit!"

"And how handsome Dick is getting!"

"Say, Tom looks awfully pale." These words came from Nellie, and as she spoke she turned a bit pale herself.

"To be sure – he's been real sick," answered Grace. "But he'll soon get over it, don't worry," she added, trying to comfort her sister.

By this time the touring car had come to a halt, and Dora and Dick and the two college boys were getting out. Then followed more handshaking and not a few kisses. Dora hugged her cousins and was hugged in return. All felt very happy and their faces showed it.

Of course Dick and Dora had to tell all about the trip, how they had gotten on the wrong road, and how a drove of cows had once blocked their way, and how they had stopped at one hotel where they had heard a concert given for charity.

"And the weather has been almost ideal," said Dick. "Only one little shower that was just enough to lay the dust on the roads that weren't oiled."

To give Tom and Sam a chance to "visit" with Nellie and Grace, Dick continued to run the car, with Dora at his side, and all of the others in the back. With Nellie near him, Tom seemed to brighten up considerably and told a number of jokes that made everybody laugh. But with it all, he was by no means as lively as was natural with him.

"I've got it all arranged to go to Spotswood," said Dick. "I telephoned to the big hotel there to have a table ready for us. And we'll come back in the moonlight."

"Oh glorious moonlight!" returned Sam, and gave Grace a look that caused her to blush deeply.

"Say, let us sing one of the old time songs!" cried Tom, and started one that had been their favorite ever since going to Putnam Hall Military Academy.

"That's like old times!" exclaimed Dick. "But please don't sing so loud or you may scare the car," and this sally caused a general laugh.

"Don't you miss the seminary, Dora?" asked Nellie.

"Of course I do, but – but –"

"She'd rather be with Dick," finished Sam, with a wink.

"To be sure I would, Mr. Smarty," came promptly from the bride.

"Wish I could leave college, as Dick did," put in Tom, with a glance at Nellie. "I hate books anyway."

"Oh, that's because you are not strong yet, Tom," said Dora, sympathetically.

"I've told him he ought to take more of a rest," said Sam.

"Oh, let's talk about something else," cried Tom. "I'm tired of being held up as an object of sympathy. Look at the little calf!" he continued, pointing to a field beside the roadway. "A fellow could pick it up in his arms. Say, wouldn't it be great to introduce that calf in Professor Blackie's bedroom some night."

"No more such tricks, Tom!" answered Dick, almost sternly. "You've got to settle down."

"Oh, must I, Papa?" returned Tom, in a trembling childish treble. "Yes, Papa, I'll be your own little good boy." And then another general laugh went up.

"We hardly have any fun any more at Hope," said Nellie. "It's just lessons and lectures from morning to night, and the instructors are that sharp! Yesterday I missed a question in ancient history and I was nearly scared to death."

"Humph! ancient history is enough to scare anybody to death. What's the use of studying ancient history when there is so much history still to come of which we know absolutely nothing?" and Tom looked around with the air of a profound professor.

"Here is where we once came over in the *Dartaway*," said Dick, a little later. "I guess you'll remember that ride," he added, to his bride.

"Shall I ever forget it!" murmured Dora. "Oh, how glad I was to get away from that horrid Josiah Crabtree and those Sobbers!" went on the girl, with a shudder. She referred to a happening which has been related in detail in "The Rover Boys in the Air."

"Well, the Sobbers are going to get what is coming to them," put in Tom.

"And old Crabtree, too," said Dick. "They told me up at the hospital that the double break in his leg will make him more or less of a cripple for life."

"Well, if ever a man deserved to be punished it was Josiah Crabtree," said Sam. "He was a bad egg from the first time we met him at Putnam Hall. But I say, let us forget all that unpleasant past and enjoy ourselves," and he started up another song, and the others joined in.

By six o'clock they reached Spotswood and Dick ran the touring car around to the big hotel located there. Then they went inside and washed up a little. In the dining room a special table had been set for them in an alcove. There was a big bouquet in the center and a small bouquet at each plate.

"Say, Dick, this is immense!" said Sam, admiringly.

"Just too lovely for anything!" burst out the Laning girls simultaneously.

"How did you come to think of the flowers?" asked Tom, putting his bouquet in his buttonhole and letting Nellie pin it fast.

"That was Dora's idea," answered the big brother.

"I thought it would brighten things up," said Dora. "It's our first dinner together since – since – you know," and she blushed prettily.

"Since the wedding feast," said Sam. "Well, it's just A, Number One! Couldn't be better!"

"That's what!" cried Tom.

Dick and Dora had ordered the dinner with care, so there was a well-selected course, starting with tomato bisque soup and ending with ice-cream and crackers, cheese and coffee. They had some dainty fish and an extra tenderloin steak, and it is perhaps needless to state that the boys did full justice to all that was set before them, and the girls also ate heartily, for all were still in their growing years. Tom created some fun by sticking some stalks of celery in the big center bouquet on the sly and then asking Dora what sort of flowers she had ordered mixed in. And Nellie told Dick he ought to make a speech and he said he'd leave that to Tom, whereupon the irrepressible Tom said he would deliver a lecture on 'How to Cook for Two Alone' if Dick and Dora wanted to listen. Then the fun became general and lasted long after the meal was over.

It was moonlight outside and presently all went to the broad veranda of the hotel. Tom naturally paired off with Nellie and Sam with Grace, and Dick and Dora wisely kept out of the way.

"We had our day, now let them have theirs," said Dick, to his bride.

"By all means, Dick," returned Dora, with a smile that made him pinch her arm. "But listen, dear," she added, in a whisper. "Did you – did you notice Tom?"

"Yes."

"He tries to keep up, but he isn't himself at all."

"I know it, and so does Sam, and, I might as well admit it, Dora, both of us are a good deal worried," replied the young husband, gravely.

## CHAPTER VII

### COLLEGE DAYS

Sam and Grace sat in a corner of the piazza for the best part of half an hour, and during that time the girl told of her various doings at Hope and about the news from home, and Sam related what had occurred at Brill, omitting, however, to tell how Tom had sent Spud and Stanley into the old well hole. There was a good deal of nonsense added to the conversation, and it must be admitted that Sam held Grace's hand as much as she would permit. They also spoke about the wedding of Dick and Dora, and of the good times they had enjoyed on that occasion.

Tom and Nellie took a stroll through a little park opposite the hotel. What they talked about none of the others knew at the time, but Nellie came back looking very sober and thoughtful, so that her sister wondered if Tom had really and truly proposed to her. Tom was whistling softly to himself, as if to keep up his courage.

"Well, I guess it is time to start on the return, if you young ladies have got to be in by ten," said Dick, at last. "Even as it is I haven't allowed any time for punctures or breakdowns."

"Perish the thoughts of such happenings!" cried Grace.

"We've had our blow-out where I like it best – at the hotel," added Sam, and this joke caused a smile.

As before, Dick drove the car, with Dora beside him, and the others in the tonneau. He had all his lights lit, making the roadway almost as bright as day. Once out of town, the oldest Rover put on speed until they were flying along grandly.

"Oh, Dick, be careful!" pleaded Dora. "You might hit something in the dark."

"Not much to hit on this road," he answered. "But I'll look out, don't fear."

"Oh, let her go!" shouted Tom, recklessly. "Why, you can get ten miles more of speed, Dick, if you try. Let her out for all you are worth!"

"Oh, Tom!" pleaded Nellie, and as he arose and waved his hand she pulled him down on the seat. "If you don't look out you'll fall out."

"Look out, fall out!" repeated Tom. "A good joke! Ha! ha! Let her out, Dick!" And he tried to stand up again. "Want me to help?" And he leaned over his brother's shoulder and took hold of the steering wheel.

"Drop it, Tom!" exclaimed Dick, warningly. "Do you want to steer us into a ditch? Drop it, I say!" And he pushed Tom with his elbow.

"Sit down, Tom," called Sam, and caught hold of his brother. "Don't monkey like that in the dark, – it's dangerous."

"Oh, I was only fooling," returned the fun-loving one. "Can't you stand for a little sport?" and then he sank in a corner and had nothing more to say for some time. Nellie heaved a deep sigh and for a moment buried her face in her hands.

All too soon Hope Seminary was reached and Sam and Tom escorted the Laning girls to the doorway of that institution. There was a fond good night, cut somewhat short on Nellie's part, and then the Rover boys returned to the touring car.

"What a grand time," murmured Grace, as she and her sister went upstairs to the room they occupied.

"Was it?" asked Nellie, absently. "I am glad you enjoyed it."

"Why, Nellie, didn't you?"

"No."

"Oh!" And Grace clutched her sister by the arm. "What do you mean?"

"I – I can't tell you!" burst out the other, and then she fairly ran for their room, and, once inside, threw herself on her bed and burst into tears. Grace came after her, locked the door, and sat down and held her hand. She thought she understood and determined to ask no more questions.

"You are going to stay in Ashton over night, are you not?" questioned Sam, of his brother, as the auto neared Brill.

"Yes."

"I want to see you – to talk about Dad's affairs, – and about Tom," went on the youngest Rover, in a whisper.

"All right, Sam. I'll get up early and run over here before breakfast. I'll be at the gate at seven o'clock – if it is clear. I'll see you first and then talk to Tom;" and so it was arranged.

"Here, what's the secret?" demanded Tom, abruptly.

"Nothing much," answered Sam. "Dick will be over to see us in the morning, before he and Dora go back."

"Oh, all right." Tom gave a sudden chuckle. "Wish I had brought that calf along. I could have a barrel of fun with him to-night!"

"You're going right to bed, and so am I," answered Sam. "We've had fun enough for the present." And then he and his brother said good-bye to Dora, for they did not expect to see her again for some time to come.

Sam was afraid that Tom might not want to go to bed so soon, but his fears were groundless. Tom undressed at once and inside of five minutes was in profound slumber. He occasionally moved uneasily in his sleep and sighed heavily, but that was all.

"Maybe he ought to have a doctor, but what a doctor can do for him I don't know," thought Sam, and retired himself, sighing deeply. With Tom not himself the whole world seemed wrong.

Dick was on hand at the appointed time and Sam was glad to get up to meet him and know that Tom was still sleeping.

"Well, first of all, I'll have to tell you about Dad," said Dick, as he ran the auto up the road a bit, out of sight of Brill. "He is not nearly as well as I would like to see and the doctor says he must not dream of doing a stroke of work. So that leaves all that New York business, and that Western business, in my hands."

"Can you manage it, Dick?"

"I've got to manage it, Sam. And in the meantime I've got Mrs. Stanhope's affairs to look after, and also Dora's money matters. It is keeping me hustling, I can tell you. I never dreamed I would become such an out-and-out business fellow."

"It's fine of you to be able to do it, Dick. I am only sorry I can't help you. But some day Tom and I will finish up here and then we'll take hold."

"Sure, I know that. But now let us drop business. Tell me all about Tom. Just how has he been acting? I know you didn't want to let out in front of the girls."

"Well, Tom is a problem, Dick. Sometimes he acts as bright as ever and then he seems to be clean off." And then, in as few words as possible, Sam related the particulars of his brother's doings since he had returned to Brill. As he proceeded Dick's face grew very thoughtful.

"I don't like this at all," he said flatly. "Maybe after all it would be much better to send Tom home and place him under the care of a specialist. If he remains here there is no telling what he will do next. Supposing Spud or Stanley had been drowned in that well hole?" and Dick gave a shiver.

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