

Standish Burt L.

Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale



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CHAPTER I

GREETINGS ON THE CAMPUS

"Ah, there, Merriwell!"

Frank Merriwell was crossing the campus at good old Yale, and this cry, in a familiar voice, sounded from Durfee Hall.

He turned his eyes toward the favorite dormitory, and seated at an open window on the ground floor he saw his classmate, Jones, he of the famous nickname, "Dismal."

"Hello, Dismal," called Frank, "aren't you going to come out and shake hands with a fellow?"

"I would if it wasn't for the shower," responded Jones, whose usually solemn face was graver than ever.

"Shower?" repeated Frank, looking up in surprise at the perfectly clear sky.

"I see that you've just arrived, so that you probably haven't noticed it," said Dismal, coming out of his window to avoid going around through the hall.

He came slowly across the grass plot that lay between him and Frank and held out his hand, saying:

"How are you, Frank? I'm glad to see you."

Frank, who had just come from the railway station, had a gripsack in each hand. He set them down upon the grass and shook Dismal's hand warmly.

"There it goes!" exclaimed Dismal, with something like animation, "the shower's begun again."

Frank's brows wrinkled in perplexity.

"I don't see any signs of a shower," he said.

"That's because you haven't been here all the morning," returned Jones, solemnly. "I've been sitting there in my window for fully three hours watching it; it's been a perfect rain of gripsacks on the campus. Every fellow that comes along stops to shake hands with everybody he meets, and every time he stops, down goes his gripsacks."

Frank laughed.

"You're the same old cheerful joker, Dismal," he said. "But you're beginning early. If you keep up this sort of thing you'll actually get caught laughing before the end of the junior year."

There was a faint shadow of a smile on Dismal's face as he responded:

"Well, anyhow, Frank, I'm glad to see all the fellows come trooping back. Are you glad to get here yourself?"

"Why, of course I am."

"Had a good time during the vacation?"

"I always have a good time," said Frank. "Don't you?"

"Oh, yes, in my way. To tell the truth, I spent most of the summer dreading the day when I should have to come back to the confounded old books, and lectures and examinations; but I got here yesterday, and now I'm dreading the time I shall have to go away again."

"Then I see that you're sure to enjoy yourself during the junior year," said Frank, stooping to pick up his gripsacks.

"When I've got my room in order I'll come around and go to luncheon with you."

"Do!" replied Dismal. "I'll go back to my window seat and watch the shower. Hello! there comes Browning, and he's loaded down with gripsacks, too. My, but there'll be a perfect torrent!"

Big Bruce Browning came up with friendly words of greeting, and as Dismal had predicted, he set down his gripsacks in order to get his hands free.

"It's getting worse and worse!" remarked Dismal, as if worried about it, "for here comes Rattleton and Diamond from one direction and Harold Page from another."

The last named students were on their way, just as Frank had been, to their respective rooms, and each carried more or less baggage, except Diamond, who, being something of an aristocrat, had sent all his traps to his room on a wagon.

Seeing Frank standing near Durfee, they all turned toward him, and in a moment there was a lively exchange of greetings and small talk.

Four of these students, Merriwell himself, Jack Diamond, Bruce Browning and Harry Rattleton, had not been long separated, to be sure, but after a sporting trip which they had undertaken across the continent, it was like meeting after a long absence to find themselves together again at Yale.

It was the beginning of a new college year, and members of all classes were trooping back to begin their work.

While these juniors were discussing all manner of things that interest students, such as the prospects of the football eleven, the make-up of next year's crew, and the coming elections into secret societies, members of other classes were scattered about the campus chatting in much the same way.

Among those who appeared upon the famous quadrangle were many who belonged to the incoming freshman class. It was easy to recognize them, for, as Rattleton observed:

"You can tell a freshman with the naked eye."

They were either proceeding in a fearful hurry, as if they thought they were in danger of getting in late to an examination, or they were standing in awkward idleness looking at the strange buildings and evidently not knowing which way to turn and dreading to ask anybody a question.

The juniors smiled indulgently as a group of three or four candidates for the freshman class passed them.

The newcomers were discussing an examination from which they had just come, telling each other how they had answered certain questions and wondering if they would get marked high enough to pass.

"I can sympathize with them," remarked Diamond. "I know just the kind of shivers they're suffering from."

"What jolly good subjects those fellows would be for a quiet hazing," remarked Page.

"You mustn't forget," said Frank, "that we're juniors now, and therefore out of it so far as hazing is concerned."

"That's right," added Browning, "the freshies are nothing to us; they're far beneath us."

"Except in one sense," said Frank. "The sophomores, you know, will get even for the hazing we gave them, by taking it out of the freshies, and so it becomes our duty, in a way, to take care of the freshmen and see that they get fair treatment."

Speaking of this it may be well to explain that in all colleges the juniors take this attitude toward the freshmen.

As a rule the freshman receives the attention of a junior with a great deal of gratitude, but also as a rule he does not find that it amounts to very much.

The junior is ever ready to give him a good deal of solid advice, and a great deal more ready to get the freshman to do errands for him, and all manner of odd jobs that the freshman is quite sure to do, until, as the boys say, he tumbles to the fact that after all the junior is really making game of him.

"Speaking of hazing, though," said Page, suddenly, "I've got a new room."

"Have you? Where is it?" asked Rattleton.

"It's up High Street a way, in one of the oldest houses in New Haven."

"Good room?" asked Browning.

"Capital! I've got to do some grinding this year and the room will suit me exactly for that, but there'll be hours when the books can be forgotten, and then you fellows'll find that the room is a corker for cards or any sort of jollification."

"I don't see what that's got to do with hazing," remarked Merriwell. "You said that the hazing reminded you of it."

"Yes, I'll tell you why, or rather I'll show you. There's something about that room that would be perfectly immense if we were sophomores now. Come down and see it, will you?"

"Better wait a week," said Browning, picking up his bags, "I'm busy now."

"How extraordinary!" remarked Dismal Jones. "If the faculty should hear that Browning was busy they'd give him a warning!"

Browning frowned in mock anger and Frank, putting on an expression quite as solemn as Dismal's own, and laying his hand on Dismal's shoulder, said:

"The fact is, boys, Jones has become ambitious. He knows that the election of class-day officers is only a little more than a year away, and he's getting himself into training for one of the positions."

"Oh, go on, it isn't so!" exclaimed Dismal.

"That's just his modesty," continued Frank, "for of course he doesn't want to push himself forward, but he's quietly waiting for his friends to recognize his great ability, and as we're his friends we just want to boom him from now on, and I take this occasion of nominating Dismal Jones, Esquire, as class wit."

Rattleton burst into guffaws of laughter, while the others smiled.

"The idea is humorous enough to elect him!" said Diamond.

"Well, if he's going to be a candidate," added Browning, "we must put the campaign through in proper fashion. We must organize a Dismal Jones Club and have an emblem.

"I move that we all wear crape upon our left arm and mourning bands upon our hats until the election."

"Great Scott!" howled Rattleton, "the time for mourning will be after Jones is elected."

Jones listened to this joking with stolid good humor; never a smile lingered on his face, but his solemn eyes showed no resentment.

"It's all right," he remarked when they gave him a chance to speak, "you fellows think you've got me on a long string, but I'd like to bet that if I should run for a class office, I wouldn't be last in the race!

"Of course," he added, hastily, "I haven't really any insane notion of doing such a thing."

The students laughed again, picked up their gripsacks and prepared to separate.

"Say!" called Page, eagerly, "what about coming down to see my room?"

"Oh, we've got a whole year ahead of us," growled Browning.

"I'll run down in the course of an hour or two," said Frank. "I don't think there's anything to do at my room, and I'll be glad to learn the way to yours. What's the number?"

Page told him, and Frank exclaimed:

"Why! some of the professors live there, don't they?"

"Pretty much the whole house," responded Page, "is let out to students and instructors; I believe Prof. Babbitt has his room there – "

"Babbitt!" interrupted Rattleton; "he's the most unpardonable crank in the whole faculty."

"Well, I shall let him alone, and I've no doubt that he will let me alone," returned Page. "He's a good deal of a hermit, I'm told, and I don't think that his being in the same house will make a particle of difference to me. Anyhow, there's the room and I want you fellows to see it."

"I'll be down in a little while," said Frank, and the others also promised to come in the course of a day or two.

CHAPTER II

IMPRISONED IN A CHIMNEY

Frank found that there was nothing whatever in his room to demand his attention, and so, after he had unpacked his grips and put away their contents, he went down High Street to call on Page.

The house in which Page had taken a room was made of stone. Its walls were very thick, the ceilings low, and everything about it made it seem like a relic of the last century.

This is indeed what it was. In former days it had been the residence of one of the wealthiest men in New Haven, but that was long ago; for years it had been used wholly as a lodging house.

Page's room was on the second floor. It was very large and cheerful. Three windows looked out on the street and in each of them was a broad seat provided with heavy cushions.

On the opposite side of the room there were two old-fashioned benches built against the wall. Between the ends of these benches and right in the middle of that side of the room was one of the ancient chimneys of the house.

It came out three or four feet into the room and gave the place an antique and interesting appearance. Page had hung a lot of ornaments in the way of fencing foils, boxing gloves, baseball bats, and other materials used by students, upon this chimney.

After Frank had taken a general look around the room he said:

"It's a nice old den, Page, and I think the chimney there is the best part of it. What a pity that there isn't a fireplace. There ought to be, and it strikes me that there was at one time."

Saying this, he knelt down before the chimney and examined the stones of which it was made. These had been painted white. Frank thought he could see a line that indicated what had once been an opening. Page watched him in silence.

"There certainly was a fireplace here at one time," said Frank, rising, "and if I were in your place I'd have the stones cut away so that you can use it again. An open wood fire there would look immense in winter."

"That's a good scheme, Frank," responded Page, "and it was that chimney that led me to speak of the room. I didn't know it when I hired the place, but since I've got in I've discovered that – well, I'll show you."

With this he stooped over by the chimney, put his hand upon what appeared to be a little projection from one of the stones, turned it, and opened a door.

Within the door there was revealed an old-fashioned fireplace, deep and high. All it needed was andirons and poker to make it complete.

"Well, that's funny!" exclaimed Frank.

"Isn't it?" returned Page. "I got on to the thing wholly by accident. When I was hanging up some of the things there I stumbled and caught hold of that little projection for support."

"The thing turned in my hand, and the first thing I knew the door was open. It opened a little hard, showing that the thing hadn't been used for a long time."

"Didn't the owner of the house speak of it?"

"I don't think he knows anything about it."

"Have you told him?"

"Not much!"

"Why not?"

"Well, because it just struck me that such a place as this was a kind of a secret worth keeping. You can see for yourself that it was the evident intention of the person who set up this door that it should be a secret. The hinges are perfectly concealed, and it has been fitted in and the edges

painted in such a way that only the closest inspection would give a fellow a suspicion that there was any opening there."

At this moment there was a knock, and Browning came in.

"I thought you were coming next week?" exclaimed Page.

"Well, I found I'd nothing better to do than run down here. What's that you're looking at?"

The boys explained the matter to him, and in his slow way he admitted that if they were sophomores it would be quite possible to utilize this secret door in the course of hazing freshmen.

"As we're not in the hazing business now," he said, "I can't see any use for the place, Page, except for you to hide in when your creditors call."

"Huh!" retorted Page, "it's my habit to keep my bills paid."

"It'll make you unpopular if the fellows know that."

"I was telling Page," said Merriwell, "that if I had the room I'd take down that door entirely, get some andirons and burn a log of wood on a winter evening."

"That's a good scheme," returned Browning, "but if I should do anything of that kind I should never get a stroke of work done here; this room was never meant to study in, but it's an ideal loafing place."

With this he threw himself upon one of the window seats and looked out. The others took places on the other windows and for a few minutes their conversation turned upon college topics.

Then Browning, who was a little restless, as most students are immediately after a vacation, said he would have to be going. Page urged him to wait, but he shook his head.

"By the way," he said, with his hand upon the door, "I've got some news."

"Well?" said both the others together.

"I regret to say it isn't pleasant news, but it may be important to you two; it certainly is to me."

"Spring it!" exclaimed Page.

"Cut the preface!" said Merriwell.

"Babbitt has announced an examination for juniors in mathematics."

"What!"

Merriwell and Page were so surprised that they sat down suddenly. Browning remained standing by the door.

"It's a fact," he said.

"But what can that mean?" asked Merriwell. "We had our regular examination last spring."

"I know we did, but Babbitt's going to have another just the same."

"Where did you learn it?"

"On the bulletin board, of course. The notice was put up not more than an hour ago."

"When is it to be?"

"Three days from now."

Page looked blankly at Merriwell.

"I never was any good at mathematics," he said, "and after a summer without a thought of it I don't believe I could do an ordinary sum in multiplication."

"Well," responded Frank, doubtfully, "it can't be that the examination will have any serious consequences for us fellows if we passed last spring."

"There's no telling how serious Babbitt may make it," said Browning. "The notice on the bulletin board, of course, doesn't give any explanation, but I met Frost, the fellow who graduated a couple of years ago, you know, with high honors in mathematics, and who was made instructor in one of the lower departments of that course."

"I knew Frost quite well when he was a student, so I asked him if he knew anything about this."

"What did he say?"

"He smiled a little queerly and answered that Professor Babbitt had his own ideas."

"In other words, Frost wouldn't tell?"

"Oh, no, that's not it; Frost is a member of the faculty now, you see, and of course he has to speak very respectfully of the older men.

"I got a very distinct idea that Frost regarded Babbitt's examination as all nonsense, but he did explain to me what Babbitt's idea about it is."

"That's what we want to know."

"It's just this way," said Browning, sitting down. "It seems our class is enlarged by the addition of quite a number of men who have graduated from or studied at other colleges.

"They have applied for admission into the junior class, and there's got to be an examination for them, of course; in fact, the examination for such candidates is going on now."

"That's quite a usual thing," remarked Merriwell.

"Yes, certainly, but Babbitt has declared that the examination of last spring was very unsatisfactory. He says men can't go ahead in mathematics unless what they have done before is thoroughly learned, and he proposes to find out just what sort of talent there is in our class before he begins a year's work."

"He'll find out what I can't do!" groaned Page.

"Probably he knows that already," said Merriwell.

"That's the substance of it, anyway," added Browning. "Babbitt's idea is to strike an average as to what the class can do and proceed from that."

"Then I shouldn't think," said Merriwell, "that the examination should have any terrors for us."

"You'd think," exclaimed Page, "that Merriwell looked at an examination as he would a plunge in the surf, just a little dip for the fun of it, and it's all over. It won't be so with me."

"Don't worry," responded Frank, "you've got three days in which to cram."

"And that's just what I'll do, I'm thinking."

Page dropped his chin upon his hands and looked gloomily at the floor.

"I'm sorry to give you unpleasant news," said Browning, rising, "but I told you I thought it was important. So long."

With this he went out.

"Oh, well," said Page, after a moment, "I'm not going to be knocked out by that! I'll just go into the examination and do as well as I can and take chances; that's what the rest of us have got to do."

"That's the best way to look at it," Frank answered, "and I don't think I shall bother my head with cramming for it.

"If I were you, Page, I'd go down to some of those second-hand stores on the street and see if you can't pick up a pair of old-fashioned andirons. You don't want to get new ones, you know, for a place like this, they wouldn't seem appropriate."

"That's so," Page answered, with a queer smile, "I believe I'll adopt your suggestion at once. How would you place them?"

"Why, just as they are placed in every other fireplace," Frank answered, "one on each side; that is, if the old chimney will draw."

"Perhaps it won't," said Page.

"I hadn't thought of that," continued Frank. "It may be that the place was closed up because the chimney was defective. Let's see if we can find out."

So saying, he knelt and entered the fireplace. Once inside it was easy to stand upright, for the chimney was broad, and as he looked up he could see that it ran with a slight incline clear to the roof.

"There's nothing to prevent a fire from being built here," he said, with his eyes turned upward. "Such a chimney as this would draw like a furnace."

Page made no response.

"I declare," Merriwell added, "it makes me wish that winter had come so that I could see a roaring old blaze of logs here. Doesn't that strike you about right?"

As Page made no response, he turned to look at his classmate, and then discovered that the secret door to the fireplace had been closed.

With his eyes turned upward and seeing the little patch of light at the top of the chimney he had not noticed that the light from the room had been shut off.

"Hello, there!" he called, feeling along the wall to find the door. "I'm no freshman."

There was no sound from Page's room. Frank found a match in his pocket and struck it. From inside it was easy enough to distinguish the outlines of the secret door that concealed the fireplace.

It was not possible, however, to discover any way by which it might be opened. The latch was the kind used on doors, but strong, and with no knob on the inside.

Frank pushed against the door with some force. It did not yield in the least degree.

"Seems to me," he thought, "that Page has a queer idea of fun to lock me in like this. I've a good mind to kick the door down."

He thought a moment before deciding to do this, and reflected that it would hardly be a good-natured way of treating the joke.

If Page meant to have some fun with him by making him a prisoner, the joke would be all the more successful if Merriwell should get mad about it and break open the secret door.

"I think," thought Frank, "that I'll get even with Page for this in a way that will surprise him."

His match went out just then and he began to feel in the darkness of the stones that made the chimney. They were untrimmed stones, so that the interior surface was very irregular.

Just above his hand, but within reach, was an iron bar crossing the chimney; it was put there to bind the walls.

Frank drew himself upon this and then, being in the narrow part of the chimney, was able to work his way upward by clinging with hands and feet to the rough edges of the stones.

It was slow progress, but not difficult, and sure. The only question would be whether the opening at the top of the chimney would be large enough to permit of his crawling through.

He had got about halfway up when he halted in his journey. He had heard voices, and he recognized both of them.

He knew that he was on the level of the room above Page's, and he realized that the sounds of talking came to him distinctly because there was a fireplace there that connected with this same chimney.

The voices he heard were those of Prof. Babbitt and Instructor Frost.

"The fact is, Frost," Babbitt was saying, "I'm aiming this examination at certain men in the class, and I've no hesitation in saying so. There's that fellow, Merriwell, for example; I'd like to force him to do more studying."

CHAPTER III

TURNING THE TABLES

"This is growing very interesting," thought Frank, bracing his knees against the stones of the chimney so that he could hold his position easily.

"Why, I thought that Merriwell ranked high, professor?" said Frost.

"He's no fool," growled Babbitt, "and if he would study hard I presume he might lead the class in scholarship, but as it is, he spends most of his time in athletics and skylarking."

"Oh, not quite so bad as that!"

"Yes, it is. He's naturally bright, and by a very little attention to his lessons he's able to get marks that enable him to pass along with fair standing, while most of his time is given to anything but work. It isn't right that anybody should get through Yale so easily; it's bad for the rest of the students."

"I have an idea," said Frost, quietly, "that Merriwell's example isn't regarded as a bad one by other members of the faculty."

"Ah, you're just as bad as the students themselves in your fondness for that scamp!" exclaimed Babbitt. "He seems to fascinate everybody he meets except me."

"Yes, I think you're an exception."

"I believe you are trying to be sarcastic, Frost, but it doesn't make any difference; my mind is set on making an example of Merriwell so that the other fellows in his class who follow his lead will be frightened into studying harder."

"Do you then mean that this examination is aimed directly at Merriwell?"

"Not quite so strong as that. There are others, of course, but he's a natural leader, and I don't at all fancy the easy way he takes things, and then bobs up at examinations with enough knowledge to work out his papers."

"I should think," suggested Frost, "that that was all the professors could require of a student."

"That's because you're young!" snapped Babbitt. "You ought to forget that you've been a student —"

"Excuse me, professor, but I think just the contrary. It seems to me that the more an instructor remembers of his student days the better he will be able to get along with his classes."

"All right, then, you stick to your theory, and I'll stick to mine. Meantime, look at this paper; that's what I asked you to call for."

"Is this the examination paper that you're going to set before Merriwell's class?"

"Yes."

There was then a silence of some minutes during which probably Mr. Frost was studying the examination paper. At last he remarked:

"Well, I've looked it through."

"What do you think of it?" asked Babbitt.

"Do you want my honest opinion?"

"Of course I do! Why else should I get you up here?"

After a slight pause Mr. Frost said: "It seems to me that the examination is very one-sided."

"Eh?"

"Why, it is all aimed at a certain line of work, and doesn't cover anything like all the work done in the course of the year."

"Well, I have my reason for that!"

"I supposed so."

"I know that fellow Merriwell's weakness; I know just where he's likely to be faulty, and if he can pass that paper he'll do better than I think he can."

"Why, Prof. Babbitt," exclaimed Frost in an indignant tone, "it looks as if you were purposely trying to trip Merriwell so as to get him disciplined, or dropped!"

"The faculty can do with him what it likes," remarked Babbitt, crossly, "when I've handed in the marks on this paper."

"I must say it doesn't seem to me to be fair," said Frost.

"I don't care for any opinion of that kind," retorted Babbitt.

"Then I don't see why you asked me for any at all."

"Well, well," and Babbitt seemed to be struggling with his temper, "you and I won't dispute about it. You've got your work and I've got mine. I asked you about this paper because I thought you'd sympathize with me in my design."

"I can't sympathize with you in it, Prof. Babbitt, and I wish if you're going to give an examination that you would give one of the usual kind, including in the questions, problems that cover the entire year's work, and so get an idea – "

"The idea I want to get will come from the answers to these questions, Frost."

"Then I suppose I couldn't persuade you to make up another paper?"

"No, sir; I'm going to take this to the printer at once, and by to-morrow morning the copies will all be here in my room, where I shall keep them until the hour for the examination."

"I'm sorry you told me about it," said Frost.

"Why?"

"Because I think well of Merriwell and the others – "

"I suppose you'd like to warn them of what's coming."

"Prof. Babbitt!"

Frost spoke in a loud tone; he was evidently very angry.

"Oh, well," exclaimed Babbitt, "don't fly in a rage at that suggestion; of course I know that you won't betray any secrets of the faculty. I simply said that I supposed you'd like to warn that rascal, Merriwell."

"You've no right to think even as much as that!" returned Frost, "but you may be very sure that whatever I wish to do I shall not expose the questions on that paper. Good-day, sir."

"Good-day," said Babbitt, and immediately afterward there was a slamming of a door.

Then Frank heard the professor grumbling to himself, but what he said could not be made out. A little later there was the sound of a door opening and closing again. Prof. Babbitt had doubtless started to the printer's with the examination paper.

Frank then resumed his trip up the chimney. He had heard no sound from Page's room, and he was just as determined as before to turn the joke upon his classmate.

As he passed the level of Prof. Babbitt's room he saw that the fireplace of the chimney had been closed in the same way as in Page's room, but in this case the door was not a secret one, and at the moment it stood partly open. This was what enabled him to hear so plainly the conversation between the instructors.

When he came to the chimney top he squeezed through without much difficulty, and dropped out upon the roof.

The next question was as to getting down to the street, but to an athlete like Frank, there was little difficulty in that problem.

New Haven is often called the City of Elms. There were a number of these and other trees growing about, and one of them extended its branches toward the roof of this house in such a way that Frank could grasp it.

He took hold of it with the idea of climbing along to the trunk of the tree, and then shinning down, but the branch bent under his weight until his feet were not more than ten feet from the ground.

Accordingly Frank let go and came down with nothing more than a bit of a jar. He had landed in the yard beside the house, from which he saw that an alley led between buildings to an adjoining street.

His hands and clothes were grimy with soot.

"If I should go through High Street this way," he thought, "and should meet Page, he'd have the laugh on me in earnest. I'll just skip out the other way, get into my room and clean up and then give him a surprise party."

Accordingly Frank hastened through the alley and so to his room. He met nobody on the way with whom he was acquainted, and as soon as he was in his room he washed his hands and face thoroughly and changed his clothes.

"So, then," he thought in the midst of this operation, "Prof. Babbitt wants to make an example of me, does he, and he knows my weak points, eh?"

"Luckily, I know my own weak points, too, so far as mathematics is concerned, and in the next three days it strikes me that I can do a bit of grinding that will enable me to give the professor a surprise party. If my guess is right as to the kind of examples that will be put on that paper, I shouldn't wonder if I could give the other fellows a lift, too."

Meantime, Harold Page, having made his friend a prisoner in the fireplace, had gone from his room for the purpose of finding some other fellow whom he might bring back to share in the fun of Frank's discomfort.

As his room was at some little distance from the campus, he did not expect to find anybody on the street near it, so he started on a run in the direction of the college, for it was not his intention to keep Frank a prisoner more than a few minutes.

He had not gone very far before he met a classmate, whose name was Mortimer Ford. Ford was not a very popular fellow, although it could not be said that anybody had anything special against him.

He was acquainted with Frank and the particular crowd that chummed with him, and sometimes took part in their doings, but on the whole he was rather outside the circle in which Frank had been a leader from the start.

If Page had had his wish, he would have met Rattleton, or Browning, or Diamond, or some of the others more closely associated with Merriwell, for he knew that they would enjoy the trick with better humor than anybody else.

When he saw Ford his first impulse was to go and look up somebody else, but Ford called out to him:

"Hello, Page, how long have you been back?"

"Oh, I came back a week ago," Page answered, "and engaged a room, got it in order, and then went away again. I came back for good this morning."

"Glad to see you," and Ford shook hands. "What are you hurrying for?"

"Oh, nothing much," responded Page, awkwardly.

"I didn't know but you were trying to run away from that examination that old Babbitt has got up," said Ford. "Say! that is a nasty blow, isn't it?"

"It will bother a good many of us, I reckon."

They were standing on the sidewalk, and while they were talking Page was keeping his eyes out for some other friend.

There were no other students in sight, and he began to feel a little ashamed of the small trick he had played on Frank.

"I guess I'll go and let him out," he thought, "Ford will do as well as anybody else to see the fun."

So he said aloud:

"Come down to my room a minute, Ford; I've got something to show you."

"I wish it was a case of beer," remarked Ford, falling in with him and walking along, "or perhaps it's something better than that?"

"It's nothing to drink, but it's something better than that, just the same."

"Tell you what I wish it was."

"What?"

"Babbitt's examination paper."

"Great Scott! why don't you wish you owned the earth?"

"I do."

"You might as well wish that as to think of getting hold of Babbitt's paper. There isn't a secret society in Yale, you know, that is closer than an examination paper. There's hardly a case on record where one has been got in advance."

"Oh, I know it," said Ford, in a mournful tone; "of course it's hopeless to think of getting hold of the paper, and I hadn't any idea of trying to, but that's the only thing that's worrying me just now, and so I spoke of it."

"Merriwell doesn't seem to think the thing's going to be very serious," said Page.

"He wouldn't think anything was serious," answered Ford.

Just as they were entering the house where Page had his room, Prof. Babbitt came out. They had seen Instructor Frost go out and turn in another direction a moment before.

The students touched their hats to the professor, wished him good-morning, and passed in.

Prof. Babbitt grumbled a surly reply, and turned away toward the college.

Page wondered as he went upstairs whether Frank had kicked down the secret door to the chimney.

"It would be just like him," he thought. "Confound him! I wouldn't much blame him if he did!"

The minute he came into the room he glanced at the chimney.

"It's all right," he said to himself, and he felt a little triumphant. "It isn't often a fellow can catch Merriwell, and although it's a small kind of a trick, it will be something to speak of hereafter."

"Well, this is a snug sort of place," remarked Ford, looking around the room. "The ceiling is a little low, but the window seats are broad and you've got soft cushions. I don't see anything the matter with this; where's your bedroom?"

"Over there," responded Page, pointing to a door. "What do you think of this?" and he pointed to the chimney.

"It takes up some room," was Ford's comment; "but you've got plenty of that to spare."

"You know what it is, don't you?" asked Page.

"A chimney, I suppose?"

"Exactly, and it follows that it's hollow."

"I suppose so, unless it's been filled up."

"It hasn't been filled up," said Page. "When they put modern heating into the house they closed up the fireplace that was here, and I had some notion of opening it again, but I've decided not to."

He spoke now in a loud tone of voice, hoping that Merriwell would hear him.

"Why not open the fireplace?" asked Ford.

"Because I've got a pet that I want to keep there."

"A pet?"

"Yes. It's just the place for it – "

"What is it, a big dog?"

"No, though it's big enough."

"Queer place to keep a pet," remarked Ford. "How can you get him in there?"

"Why, he's in there already."

"What! Now?"

"Certainly."

"I don't hear anything."

Page was on the broad grin, and Ford crossed the room out of curiosity. He struck his hand smartly on the chimney, whereat Page exclaimed:

"I wouldn't do that, you might frighten him."

"But what in the mischief have you got there?"

"I'll show you in a minute. Now, then, old boy, want to see the light? Does you want to come out for a little time?"

Page spoke soothingly as if he were addressing a small cat.

"Shall I let him come out?" he went on, mockingly; "shall I let him have a little taste of fresh air and sunlight, poor thing?"

He listened as he spoke for some sign of Merriwell and it bothered him a little that he got no reply.

Ford looked on in wonder.

"Don't be so long about it!" he exclaimed. "Open up the thing if there's any way to do it, and let's see what you've got."

"All right, then; don't be frightened if he should run out suddenly," answered Page.

He put his hand on the knob of the secret door, and threw it open; then he stepped back, smiling broadly.

"There isn't anything there!" exclaimed Ford.

"What!" and Page got down on his knees and thrust his head into the fireplace.

Of course he realized in an instant what had happened. He knew that Merriwell must have climbed out at the top.

"Great Scott!" he thought, "if Frank should know that I brought a fellow up here to see the foolishness, how he would turn the laugh on me."

"Has the thing, whatever it is, vanished?" asked Ford.

"Gone completely!" answered Page in a tone of disappointment. "He must have flown out of the top of the chimney."

Ford got down, too, and looked up.

"Why, yes," he said, "if it was a bird, of course it would get out that way. You ought to have known better than to put a bird in such a place. What was it, a parrot?"

"No, not exactly," said Page. "I guess I won't say what it was until I've made some search for it."

At this moment there was a knock at the door. Page, still on his hands and knees, answered "Come in."

The door opened and in walked Frank Merriwell.

CHAPTER IV

READY FOR THE TEST

Page got up looking very sheepish.

He expected that Frank would begin to turn the laugh on him. Nothing of that kind happened, for the first moment Ford and Frank were speaking together.

They had not met since the close of the last term, and they shook hands in a friendly way, and made polite inquiries about each other's vacations.

"What have you got here?" asked Frank, then, stepping toward the fireplace with a queer look at Page.

The latter had not the nerve to answer.

"I suppose it used to be a fireplace," said Ford. "It looked when I came into the room just as if there was no opening into the chimney at all, but this door fits very closely."

"Were you trying to use the chimney as a telescope when I came in?" asked Frank. "I saw you were both on your knees, looking up."

"No," replied Ford, "Page had something in there, he won't say what it was, some kind of a pet, I believe, and it has flown out."

"No wonder," remarked Frank, dryly; "it would be a pretty poor kind of a pet that wouldn't fly out of a place like that."

"If it was an unusual kind of a bird," suggested Ford, "why don't you give notice of it to the police? It sometimes happens that they recover missing pets."

"Oh, I guess I won't say anything about it," responded Page, blushing furiously.

Frank could not control his laughter, so he threw himself into a window seat, and looked out, having his back to the other two.

"What are you laughing at, anyway?" asked Ford.

"Oh, at my thoughts!" chuckled Frank. "I think Page ought to offer a thousand dollars or so reward for his missing pet."

"You hold your tongue, Merriwell," said Page, "and some time or other I'll make it right with you."

"Are you two fellows putting up some kind of a job on me?" exclaimed Ford, suspiciously.

"Oh, no, on my honor!" exclaimed Frank, quickly. "I was just thinking of a little joke that you don't know anything about."

"Aren't you going to spring the joke?"

"No, I'm going to keep it to myself."

Page looked immensely relieved, while Ford, after a doubtful glance at both of them, turned his attention again to the chimney. He pushed the secret door back into place and then opened it again.

"Mighty funny idea, isn't it?" he said, half to himself. "Certainly, nobody would ever believe that that fireplace could be opened without a pickax."

"I supposed it was solid," responded Page, "and got at the secret entirely by accident."

"Opens easy, doesn't it?"

Ford kept opening and shutting the door.

"If this was in the olden times," he said, "when men had to hide from enemies, what a racket it would be to shut one's self in here and then climb out through the chimney."

Frank turned his back again to conceal his chuckle, while Page answered that he thought it would be a good scheme. Then he added:

"I think I'll take the door down and make a fireplace of it."

"And not get your bird back?"

"No. Hang the bird!"

"Well, of course, that's for you to say. As for myself, I'm going to get over to my room and look up mathematics for a while."

"I shouldn't think you'd need to," said Frank.

"Oh, a man grows rusty after three months away from the books, you know," answered Ford, "and an examination always makes me nervous, anyway. So long."

With this he left the room.

"Say, Merriwell," said Page, the moment the door was closed, "I don't know whether to feel obliged to you, or be as mad as a hornet."

"I don't see any reason for either feeling."

"Well, I am obliged to you for not turning the laugh on me when you had the chance to, and I ought to be mad for your getting out in the way you did."

"What should you have shut me in there for," asked Frank, "if you did not expect me to use my wits?"

"I just did it on impulse," Page answered, "and had no intention, anyway, of keeping you there more than a few minutes."

"It's all right, Page, I didn't mind it a little bit. I went straight out."

"I see you did."

"Now, see here, Page," said Frank, seriously, "I want to ask a favor of you."

"Granted."

"Keep that door closed during the next few days."

"What, the door to the fireplace?"

"H'm! h'm!"

"Why, yes, I'll do that, but why? I shouldn't have it open more than a minute or two at a time to show the fellows."

"Don't do that."

"Not show it to the fellows?"

"Not to anybody."

"I said I'd grant your favor and so I will, but what in the world is on your mind?"

"I'll tell you," said Frank, with a little pause, "after the examination."

"Babbitt's examination?"

"Yes."

"All right I suppose you've got some first-class trick you want to tell, and you haven't got time to get it in shape until the examination is over, is that it?"

"That's asking too much, Page. I'll tell you all about it later; meantime, it is a fact that men like you and me have got to put in some pretty hard licks if we want to pass that examination."

"Oh, thunder and Mars!" groaned Page, "I've made up my mind not to think of it. It's impossible for me to cram up on a whole year's work in three days."

"It might not be necessary to."

"How else can a fellow stand a chance of passing?"

"Well, suppose we should study just one part of the subject, and let the rest of it go?"

"And then there might not be a single question on that subject, Frank."

"Yes, and again they might all be on that subject."

"It isn't likely."

"But it might be so, Page."

"Do you mean to say, Frank, that you'd recommend a fellow to take a kind of gambling chance like that on an examination paper?"

"Well, not as a general thing, but seriously I do think it would be a good scheme this time. You see, Babbitt is springing this examination unexpectedly, and everybody knows that he's got queer ideas. Now I think it would be quite like him to center the whole examination on one topic."

"Why should he do that?"

"Well," answered Frank, slowly, "with the idea, perhaps, of catching the fellows by surprise."

"He don't need to take all that pains for me," said Page, dismally; "he could floor me if his examination was made on the simplest things. If I was like Ford, now –"

"Oh, Ford doesn't need to worry, of course. He led the class in mathematics last year, didn't he?"

"Yes, and the year before, too. The idea of his being worried about the examination is all nonsense."

"I know it is," said Frank, "except that he's got his ambition up to keep at the lead; that's a natural ambition and decent, and I suppose he'll do a lot of grinding to get ready for the exam."

"I'd grind, too, if I thought there'd be any use in it."

"I believe there will, Page, and if you don't mind following my lead, I'll tell you what subject to grind on."

"Do you mean to say that you're going to cram up on just one part of it?"

"Exactly, and what's more, if you'll agree to it, I'll come over here with my books and we'll grind together. We'll get Browning, Rattleton and Diamond, and one or two others in our crowd, and do the job together."

"It's a bully idea!" exclaimed Page, "if it would only work. Gee! but wouldn't it be just great if we should happen to hit on the topic that old Babbitt has chosen and every one of us write a perfect paper?"

"I can't think of anything that would suit me better," Frank answered.

"Then let's try for it. It's just a chance, but I'm with you, Merriwell."

"All right, then, and you'll remember you're to say nothing about that fireplace, and you're not to open it until after the examination!"

"I'll remember, but you won't forget to tell me what it all means?"

"I'll let you into the whole business after Babbitt has examined the papers."

It was not a very difficult matter for Frank to persuade his closest friends to join him in preparing for the examination by studying hard on one particular topic.

They were so in the habit of following his lead that although they all regarded the effort in the same way that Page did, that is, a gamble, they were willing to take the chances if Merriwell was.

Frank was almost perfectly certain that it was not a gambling chance, because he remembered well enough how he had been faulty in that topic at the spring examination, and if Babbitt was going to try to trip him, that was the subject surely that he would select for his purpose.

Three days was none too long for the boys to refresh their memories on the subject and prepare themselves well on this one topic.

They started in in the middle of the afternoon and worked together under Frank's direction until dinner time.

He proved to be as hard a task master as Babbitt himself could have been. The boys were not exactly surprised at that, for it was natural for Frank to do with all his might whatever he undertook, but they joked him a good deal while at dinner about turning professor.

"That's all right," Frank answered, "you can have your joke. If we come out on this as I expect to, you'll be glad enough that you adopted my plan."

"I must say I rather enjoy it," said Diamond, frankly. "Studying by one's self is dull work, but when there are half a dozen or so grinding away, somehow the time passes more quickly."

In the same way they worked until late that night, and began again early the next morning.

Diamond offered the use of his room as a meeting place, and Puss Parker, who had been let into the scheme, suggested that they come to his room, too. Frank said no.

"We began in Page's room," was the way he put it, "and we might as well work it out there."

"His room is so far out of the way!" grumbled Browning.

"A little walk won't hurt you any," responded Frank. "I'd much rather keep at it there, for I'm used to the room."

So it was agreed that the grinding should continue at Page's, and it did until the day of the examination.

They had other duties to perform, of course, during these days, but the regular work of the college had not entirely begun, so that most of their time could be put in to preparing for their examination.

They allowed none of the other students to interrupt them, and for that matter, most members of the junior class were grinding in much the same fashion.

They had only one caller during the entire period. This was Ford, but he did not find them at work. They were just returning to the room from dinner on the evening before the examination, when they met Ford leaving the house.

"Ah, Page, I was just up to see you."

"Sorry I wasn't in," Page responded. "What was it, something special?"

"Oh, no," answered Ford, a little doubtfully, with a glance at the others in the party; "let it go until some other time."

"If it isn't important, then," said Page, "I wish you would, for we fellows are –"

"Sporting your oak, are you?"

"That's it exactly. We're trying to get up on mathematics and so we don't admit any callers."

"All right, then," said Ford, "I'm doing much the same at my own room. Good luck to you."

Frank did not keep the boys at work late that evening. They had pretty well covered all the ground that he had chosen, and he believed that they would be better able for the test the next morning, so at ten o'clock he ordered them to their rooms, and they obeyed as readily as if they were a crew training under their captain for a race.

At nine o'clock the next morning all the junior class assembled in one of the big rooms of Osborn Hall. Prof. Babbitt was there ahead of them with a number of assistants to look out for keeping the students in order and to prevent any possible attempt at cheating.

The students found their places by means of slips of paper on the top of each desk. Merriwell was a little amused to notice that he was placed far from the friends with whom he usually associated.

"I wonder if Babbitt thinks I would cheat?" he thought.

There was a bundle neatly done up in brown paper on the professor's desk at the head of the room. He stood near it until all the students were in their places, each with a pad of blank paper before him, and a number of sharpened pencils.

Then the professor broke the string with which the bundle was tied, and calling up his assistants, handed them several papers each to distribute.

They were the papers from the printer containing the fatal questions.

CHAPTER V

ONE OF THE MISSING PAPERS

Three or four minutes passed while the assistants were distributing some papers. Then one of them approached the professor and said:

"I need two more for my section, sir."

"Well," said the professor, looking around the room, "if you're short two, somebody must have two to spare."

Nobody said anything.

"Which of you," asked the professor of his assistants, "has two more papers than necessary."

No one answered. Prof. Babbitt looked very savage.

"I counted that bundle of papers just as soon as it came from the printers," he said, sharply, "and there was just the number called for. The printers never make a mistake, and I'm sure they haven't this time."

Still there was silence in the room.

"Gentlemen," said the professor, this time addressing the students, "see if any of you have an extra paper accidentally stuck to the one on your desk; there must be two spare papers here somewhere in the room."

Every student took up his paper, felt of it, shook it, but without result; the room was certainly two papers short, and two students sat, therefore, with nothing to do.

The professor frowned.

"I'm certain," he exclaimed, "that I made no miscount. Mr. Jackson," turning to one of the assistants, "count the students here."

Mr. Jackson counted and found that there were one hundred and forty-six.

"That's it," said Prof. Babbitt, "and I had one hundred and forty-six papers. This is very extraordinary."

He glared savagely about the room, his glance resting longest upon the desk where Merriwell sat. Frank was already busily engaged in working out the first problem.

Most of the other students had already gone to work, but some of them were idly watching to see what the professor was going to do, and hoping that he would postpone the whole examination.

This may have been in his mind; but if so, he thought better of it.

"We shall have to go on," he said, presently. "I will write out two papers for those who are short."

He did so, and in the course of a few minutes all the students were at work.

Frank could not help but smile when, after a rapid glance at the problems on the paper, he saw that he had hit exactly the subject chosen by the professor to floor him. The questions were all confined to the one topic which he and his friends had been studying on.

"Now, unless they lose their heads," he thought, "they'll all write a perfect paper."

He had previously warned them not to be in a hurry during the examination.

According to the custom at Yale a written examination of this kind lasts for three hours, that is, three hours is the longest time during which any student is allowed to work at the problems.

If he has not finished in that time, he has to stop. If, however, he should get through the paper in less time, he has the right to withdraw from the room.

"Now boys," Frank had said, "if you find that you can work all the problems take them slowly, so that you make sure that you get them right, and then, if you get through before the time is up, hang around a while."

"It might cause the professor to think queer things if he should see us get up after an hour and a half or so and walk out; he would wonder how we did it, and of course we don't want to let him suspect that we crammed on one topic."

The boys understood the wisdom of this advice, and Frank's only anxiety now was lest Rattleton or Page should get excited at the ease of the paper and write too hurriedly.

The others he knew would be cool.

Believing that the professor would watch him more narrowly than anybody else, he made a good deal of pretense at being puzzled over his problems, and worked each one out separately on a piece of paper before transferring the problem on the paper which was to be passed in as his examination.

There was nothing very unusual in this method, for most of the other students did much the same thing. The only point about it is that it was unnecessary in this case for Frank to do it at all, because the problems were so familiar that he could have worked each one out at the first trial.

Early in the examination Ford, who had a seat in the back part of the room, raised his hand.

Prof. Babbitt saw him and nodded.

The raising of the hand implied that Ford wanted to ask a question. He was a favorite with Prof. Babbitt naturally, and so the professor gave him leave to go up to the desk and make his inquiry.

Ford walked down the aisle with an examination paper in his hand, and as he passed Frank's desk his hand struck a little pile of blank papers that happened to be lying on the very edge, and knocked it to the floor.

He stooped quickly, saying: "Excuse me," in a low voice, and replaced the papers.

Prof. Babbitt, of course, was looking that way at the moment.

"You would do your work just as well, Merriwell," he exclaimed, sharply, "if you didn't spread it all over your desk. Your examples won't work out any easier for taking up the whole room with them."

Frank colored; it was unusual and extremely unpleasant to be rebuked in this way before the entire class. He had not realized that he had left his blank papers so carelessly but even at that, he knew that the rebuke was not deserved.

"The professor has just as good reason," he reflected angrily, "to scold Ford for being careless."

There was nothing to say about it, but it made Frank bitter, and all the more determined to make his paper so correct that the professor could not help giving it a perfect mark.

He pushed his loose papers together in a pile squarely in the middle of the desk and resumed his work.

No one heard what Ford asked the professor; it was some question concerning the paper, and when the professor answered it, it was in a tone of surprise.

"I should hardly think that the question was necessary," he said, "though of course I don't blame you for wanting to be careful about it."

Ford muttered that he wanted to be sure that the problem was correctly printed on the paper, and when the professor told him that it was, he bowed and returned to his desk.

Few of the students paid any attention to this matter, and those who did promptly concluded that Ford was so anxious to lead the class that he got nervous and had therefore asked some question that any child could have understood.

The incident was soon forgotten, and for an hour or two the students worked away at their papers in silence.

The only thing that troubled Frank was that he could have completed the entire paper within an hour if he had tried.

As it was, he had worked out every problem except the last on his loose sheets of paper, and transferred most of them to his regular examination paper by the end of two hours.

He was greatly relieved to notice that none of his best friends had left the room. A few students had gone out, probably because they were utterly unable to answer the questions.

For the sake of killing time, Frank had already written out the last problem on loose paper twice, and he was now at the bottom of his pile with one sheet of blank paper left.

He glanced at the clock; almost an hour to spare. He finished his regular paper up to the last problem, and then, drawing the one remaining blank sheet toward him, began again to work that out.

Again and again he had seen Prof. Babbitt looking sharply at him, and more than once the professor had walked by his desk in the course of his strolling around the room.

Twenty minutes passed, and Frank believed that it could be of no use to waste time longer, so he crumpled up the loose sheet on which he had been working in his left hand, and started to work out the problem on his regular examination paper.

Just then Prof. Babbitt turned up from around the corner of another desk, brought his hand down upon Frank's left hand, and held it there.

"Now, then, Merriwell," he exclaimed in a thundering voice, "I've got you. This will mean your expulsion from Yale, sir, and nothing short of it."

Frank had looked up with a start of surprise at first; now he drew back and looked the professor in the eye, defiantly.

"Don't you say anything to me, sir," exclaimed the professor, sharply.

"I hadn't thought of saying anything," responded Frank, in a dignified way.

"Keep quiet, sir! what have you got in your hand?"

"My pencils."

"You're impudent, sir; I mean, of course, your other hand."

Frank's face turned first pale, and then red, and then pale again; all the students and assistants in the room were looking at him. He knew that the professor suspected him of some low trick, and it cut him deep to think that he should be accused in this public way.

"I've got a piece of blank paper there," he said, slowly, "on which I have been working out the last problem."

"Oh, indeed," returned the professor, sarcastically. "A piece of blank paper, eh? You're quite sure it was a piece of blank paper?"

"It was until I began to figure on it."

"Oh, you're quite sure of that?"

"I am, sir."

"And I can tell you, and I'll make an example of you to the whole class in so doing, that when you thought to conceal that paper by crumpling it up in your hand, I caught sight of the under side of it."

Frank made no response. He had not the slightest idea what the professor was driving at.

"I tell you, I saw what it was in an instant," added the professor.

"Very well, sir," said Frank, rather sharply, "I've nothing to say."

"Oh, you haven't! Very well, then, what's that?"

The professor pointed to the printed examination paper which lay on the desk in plain sight.

"I don't intend to be treated like a schoolboy, sir," exclaimed Frank, starting to rise, and making an effort to draw his hand away from the professor's. "If you have any accusation to make against me, you can lay it before the faculty, but I will not sit here to be browbeaten and insulted in this fashion."

He drew his hand away, but in so doing made no effort to keep his grip on the paper that he had used for figuring.

The professor snatched the paper as it was falling, smoothed it out, and held it up before the entire class.

"You see, young gentlemen," he cried, "Merriwell has been doing his examples on the back of one of the stolen examination papers."

Frank fairly gasped when he saw that this was the fact.

When the professor had announced that the two papers were missing, he had looked with the utmost care all through his desk to see whether one of the missing papers had somehow got laid down

there, and was certain that only one had been given to him; yet here was one of the papers, and he had been unconsciously working out an example on the back of it.

"We shall lay this matter before the faculty at once," said Prof. Babbitt, sternly; "and meantime, Merriwell, you may leave the room."

CHAPTER VI

THE PROFESSOR'S CASE

Frank held his head high as he walked out of the room. There was a flush upon his face, but nothing there or in his manner to indicate his real feelings.

They were in truth very much confused. He was simply bewildered at the discovery of one of the examination papers on his desk.

How it got there he could not imagine. His heart burned with rage at the way in which Prof. Babbitt accused him in the presence of all the class, and he felt, too, how hopeless it would be to clear himself in the face of this damaging evidence.

Expulsion would follow, unless there could be some explanation of the matter.

Frank knew that he could explain nothing, and the thought of the disgrace that awaited him was very hard to bear. With it all, however, there was a consciousness of absolute innocence that gave him strength to leave the room much as if nothing had happened.

"My best friends will know that I am not guilty of any such conduct," he reflected, "and the rest of them may think as they like."

At the outside door of the hall, he paused, in doubt as to what he should do next. Knowing that Babbitt, already disliking him, would insist on his expulsion, Frank was inclined to go straight to his room and pack up his belongings.

The event had made everything about the college extremely distasteful to him, but it was only for a moment, and then he realized how sad he would feel at having to go away from good old Yale forever.

"It won't do," he said to himself, emphatically. "I must make some kind of effort to clear myself; there's no hope of persuading Babbitt that I'm innocent, but there must be members of the faculty who would believe me, and it would not be right to go away without trying to show them that I've been straight in this. If I should leave without making the hardest kind of a defense, everybody would be justified in believing me guilty."

With this thought in mind, Frank debated for a moment whether it would not be well to go straight to the office of the dean and tell him all he could about it.

"That won't do," he concluded, "because Prof. Babbitt will report the matter to the dean at once, and if I should go there first, it would look as if I were trying to get an advantage by assuming frankness. No, the only thing to do is to go over to the room and wait there until I'm summoned; that will come soon enough, but I wish the summons were here now."

Frank's wish was gratified. He had just come to a decision as to what he should do, and was going down the steps of the hall when one of the instructors who had acted as an assistant at the examination came hurrying after him.

"Merriwell, wait a moment," he said.

Frank turned and touched his hat.

The instructor looked worried, and his voice trembled a little as, laying his hand on Frank's shoulder, he said:

"Merriwell, Prof. Babbitt has sent me to tell you to report at the dean's office as soon as the examination is over."

"Very well," Frank responded, "I'll be there."

"I hope," added the instructor, hesitatingly, as he looked earnestly into Frank's eyes "that there's an explanation of this thing, Merriwell."

"So do I," Frank responded, "but what it is, is more than I can tell now."

The instructor sighed and returned to the examining room.

Frank saw several students approaching whom he knew and, not caring to have any conversation with them, he started away at a rapid pace. There was a full half hour to pass before the examination would come to an end.

He put it in by walking about the city at such a distance from the college buildings that he was not likely to meet any acquaintances.

It was a dreary walk, for all the time he suffered the thought of disgrace as well as the maddening perplexity that accompanied the discovery of the examination paper on his desk.

"One might almost think," he reflected, "that Babbitt had put up this job on me for the sake of squeezing me out of college, but I don't think Babbitt is mean enough for that. The paper probably got there by some confounded accident. I certainly cannot account for it on any other theory."

Just as the city clocks were striking noon, Frank entered the campus and proceeded to the dean's office. The dean gave him an inquiring glance as he entered.

"Prof. Babbitt told me to report here at this hour," said Frank, quietly.

"Ah!" returned the dean, "Prof. Babbitt is conducting an examination, I believe, which should be over at this time; doubtless he will be here in a moment. Sit down, Merriwell."

Frank took a chair in a corner of the room, and waited, while the dean kept at work at his usual affairs.

Fully a quarter of an hour passed before Prof. Babbitt came in. When he did so, he had his arms full of examination papers, and he was accompanied by a man whose face was vaguely familiar to Frank, but whom he did not know by name.

It was a resident of New Haven whom he had seen on the street from time to time during his college career.

Babbitt gave Frank a scowling glance and remarked:

"Ah! I see that with your customary nerve you're here. We will settle this matter, therefore, without delay."

The dean laid down his pen and looked up in surprise.

"What is the matter, Prof. Babbitt?" he asked.

"I am compelled, dean," returned the professor, "to accuse Merriwell of cheating in an examination. I hardly need say that I should not make the charge unless I had ample proof to sustain it."

The dean looked over his glasses at Frank in a way that showed that he was not only shocked, but vastly surprised; then he gave an inquiring glance at the man who had come in with Prof. Babbitt.

"Excuse me, dean," said the professor, "this is Mr. James Harding. I thought that you were acquainted with him."

"I have not met Mr. Harding before," responded the dean, "although his face is familiar."

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance, sir," said Harding.

The dean rose and both shook hands. Then the dean hesitated a moment and said:

"Won't it be as well, Prof. Babbitt, to postpone the inquiry as to Merriwell until –"

"No, excuse me," interrupted the professor, "I've brought Mr. Harding here for a purpose. He can tell you something that has a bearing upon Merriwell's case."

"Oh, very well. Step this way, Merriwell."

The dean sat down, and Frank advanced to a place in front of his desk. Babbitt's mouth was open to talk, but the dean ignoring him, turned to Frank.

"This is a very grave charge to be laid against a student, Merriwell," he said, "and I can't tell you how it grieves me that you should be suspected."

"We have all had a high opinion of your honor. I will add frankly that I hope you can clear yourself."

"Thank you," responded Frank, huskily. "I'll try to, for I'm absolutely innocent, but I'm afraid there's nothing else that I can say in my defense."

"That can hardly be possible," responded the dean. "What are the circumstances, professor?"

"Why, the case is as plain as day!" exclaimed Babbitt, quickly. "This examination was set as a test for the class, a special test, I may say, and on the strength of it I expected to require certain students, like Merriwell and his particular friends, to go over a portion of last year's work.

"I knew from the examination of last spring just where they were weak, and I drew up this paper in such a way that the students themselves would be readily convinced of their weakness and so be the more willing to study."

The dean nodded to show that he understood.

"Now, then," continued the professor, "I had the papers printed by the college printer in the usual way, with just enough copies to go around.

"I counted the papers when they were delivered at my room by the printer, and found them to be one hundred and forty-six in all. I tied the papers up in a parcel and left them in my room until this morning, when I took the parcel to Osborn Hall. There I opened the bundle and when the papers were distributed, it proved that two were missing."

Prof. Babbitt paused, as if expecting the dean to make some comment. He did not do so, but looked straight ahead, and so the professor went on.

"I must say that I instantly had my suspicions of Merriwell, for during the past three days he has been frequently at the house where I have my room.

"I kept my eyes on him during the entire examination, and I could easily see that he was not conducting himself as usual. He used up a great deal of paper and was evidently nervous.

"At length I took a position back of his desk, where I could watch what he was doing without being observed. Presently I saw him work out the last problem on the examination paper, and work it out correctly, too.

"Then, as he crumpled up the paper on which he had been figuring, I caught a glimpse of the other side of it. I pounced upon his hand and discovered that he had been figuring upon the back of one of the missing question sheets."

The professor's voice had a triumphant ring when he came to the end of his little speech. There was evidently no doubt in his mind that what he had discovered would be sufficient proof to the dean of Frank's crookedness.

The dean pursed up his lips and looked absently up at the ceiling for a moment, and then turned to Frank.

"If I understand the professor correctly," he said, slowly, "you had two of the question papers on your desk instead of one?"

"Yes, sir," Frank responded.

"How did the second one get there, Merriwell?"

"I don't know, sir."

Prof. Babbitt snorted contemptuously.

Frank flushed and glanced at him angrily, but held his tongue.

"Didn't the professor make any inquiries when he discovered that two papers were missing?" asked the dean.

"Yes, I did – "

"Let Merriwell answer, please."

"He did," said Frank, "and I examined my desk, as I thought, thoroughly, to see if an extra paper had been placed there by mistake. I found none and went to work without any further thought on the matter. I worked out the problem on the back of the question paper without knowing what it was until the professor pounced on me."

"And is that all you can say about it?"

"Everything, sir."

The dean turned to Prof. Babbitt and said:

"I can't deny that the discovery of a paper under such circumstances is very suggestive, but I take it for granted that you have some explanation of your own to offer as to how Merriwell got possession of it?"

"Indeed I have, and that is just why I brought Mr. Harding here," replied Babbitt. "Tell the dean what you saw, Mr. Harding."

"I suppose," said Harding, "that it was simply some harmless prank of students at first, for we who live in New Haven are quite accustomed to such things, don't you know."

"I don't think I do," replied the dean, sharply, "for I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about."

"Come right to the point, Mr. Harding!" added Babbitt.

"Well, sir, I live in the house next to the one occupied by Prof. Babbitt and some of the students."

"One day I was astonished, as I happened to be looking out of my window, to see a young man climb out of the big chimney at the top of Prof. Babbitt's house."

"He went around on the roof for a moment, looking for some way to get down, and at last caught the limb of a tree which bent under his weight until he could drop safely to the ground."

"Then he hurried away through an alley that led to another street. There was no doubt that he was trying to escape observation."

"Had you ever seen this student before?" asked the dean.

"Many times, though I never knew his name until now –"

"I was the student," interrupted Frank, quietly.

"The impudence of that confession," exclaimed Prof. Babbitt, hotly, "is enough to drive a man crazy! The great chimney in that house, dean, hasn't been used for many years, and the fireplaces have been boarded up, but an athlete like Merriwell could go up and down easily and you can see how he could effect an entrance by going into the fireplace of the room under mine, which is occupied by one of his friends, and so climbing up through the chimney to my room –"

"May I ask a question?" interposed Frank.

"Certainly," responded the dean.

"Mr. Harding," said Frank, "what day was it when you saw me climb out of the chimney on the roof?"

Harding was silent a moment, and then said:

"I hadn't given the matter any thought until a few moments ago, when Prof. Babbitt met me and remarked that he was in great trouble because a student had somehow entered his room and stolen a paper."

"I then told him what I had seen and he asked me to come here and tell the same thing to you. I think that this thing occurred on Tuesday."

"Are you quite sure?" asked Frank.

Mr. Harding took some envelopes from his pocket and looked them over.

"Yes," he said, "I had an important letter come a few minutes after that, and I see by the postmark here that it was delivered on Tuesday. I am certain that it was Tuesday."

"I only wish to say," said Frank, turning to the dean, "that it was on Tuesday that Prof. Babbitt took his question paper to the printer. The printed examination papers could not have been delivered before Wednesday at the earliest."

CHAPTER VII

A FORCED CONFESSION

There was a sarcastic smile on the dean's face as he turned to Prof. Babbitt and asked:

"That doesn't seem to justify your charge, does it?"

"Why – why – " stammered the professor. "At first blush perhaps it doesn't, but, don't you see, it shows that he had found the way to my room, and the fact that he was idling away his time in Page's room beneath ever since, is proof enough that he was waiting his chance to go up again.

"I'm sure he got the paper, for I have taken a glance at the answers given by him and his particular crew of friends, and I find that every one of them passed perfect papers, and, without cheating, not more than one of them could have answered more than one problem."

"You see, Merriwell," said the dean, "the circumstances point very unhappily – "

"I know they do, sir," said Frank, "and I feel miserable about it, but there's an explanation of how I and my friends have passed perfect papers, that I'm perfectly willing to state."

"Do so, then."

Frank thereupon related Page's joke just as it happened. He told all about the conversation he had overheard between Babbitt and Instructor Frost, and then described how he had got his friends together and led them in studying up the subject.

"It may be that you call that cheating," he concluded, "but you must understand that none of us knew what problems the professor was to put upon the paper.

"We only knew the general subject which he had chosen for the examination, and we set to work to make ourselves solid on that subject, and it seems that we did so."

"Why, yes," responded the dean, with a queer smile. "I must say that if your story is correct, the professor has nothing to complain of. He wanted to compel you to work up on points that you were weak on, and it seems you did so.

"Of course it was a very unusual thing for you to get the warning as to what the subject of the examination was to be, but if the professor himself gave the warning – "

"Who would have dreamed," exclaimed Babbitt, "that a rascally student was listening in the chimney!"

"Tut! tut!" exclaimed the dean, "don't use harsh language, professor. I don't think the situation justifies it. According to Merriwell's story, he was in the chimney without any idea of listening to you, and I think any of us who can remember our student days will admit that if we had been in the same position we would have done substantially what he did."

Prof. Babbitt bit his lip. It was not at all pleasant for him to find that Frank had a friend in the dean, who, next to the president, is the highest official in the college.

"All this," he muttered, "doesn't explain the fact that two examination papers were missing!"

"True," answered the dean, "and we shall have to think that over. Merriwell, will you step into the next room for a short time, please?"

Frank obeyed, and he felt certain that he read in the dean's eyes perfect belief in his story.

"It'll come out right somehow," he thought, as he closed the door upon the dean, Babbitt and Mr. Harding.

He could hear their voices in earnest conversation for fully a quarter of an hour. They were doubtless discussing the discovery of the extra paper upon Merriwell's desk, and Frank wondered what conclusion they would come to about it.

Meantime, another event was taking place that led to a solution of the mystery.

One by one the students finished their work on the examination papers and left the hall; few of them went away from the door; the most gathered there talking excitedly about the accusation against Merriwell.

There were some who professed to believe that Merriwell had been up to a sharp trick, and had actually stolen the question paper, but the great majority indignantly denied it.

There are many students who would have no scruples against cheating at an examination, but few would think of descending so low as to commit theft for the purpose.

Frank's friends were in the majority, and very loud in their assertions as to his honorable conduct.

Among the first to leave the room after Frank's exit was Dismal Jones; he stood around with his hands in his pockets saying nothing, but looking from one to the other with a very worried expression upon his solemn face.

Among the last to leave was Mortimer Ford. He walked through the group with a jaunty air, as if confident that he had come out of the examination in good order, and started for his room.

Jones tried to speak to him, but Ford simply said:

"Ah, there, Dismal, I hope you didn't get plucked," and continued on.

Dismal scowled savagely and stood for a moment looking at Ford's retreating form, and then he turned about, and catching Diamond by the sleeve, said:

"See here, Jack! I want to speak to you for a minute."

"What's the matter?" returned Diamond, feeling a little impatient and provoked, for his mind was full of Frank's trouble, and he could not think of talking of anything else.

"It's about Merriwell," whispered Jones, "and I want you and Rattleton and Browning and Page to come here."

He withdrew to one side, and Diamond, with a mystified expression, touched Rattleton on the shoulder and beckoned him to follow.

"What's up, Dismal?" said Rattleton.

"Get the other fellows," replied Jones.

The others were soon drawn from the group of excited students, and then Dismal said:

"I've got the key to this whole thing, and if you fellows will help turn it, we'll get Merriwell out of this scrape in less than no time."

The boys were too astonished to reply, and Dismal went on:

"Yesterday," he said, "a fellow came to me and after a lot of hemming and hawing and beating about the bush, told me that he could put me onto a way to pass Babbitt's examination perfectly; he also said that I could give the same tip to my friends.

"I'm not letting any tips on examinations go by, you can bet on that, and so I made him tell me what the racket was. He said he had got hold of two copies of Babbitt's paper."

"Who was it?" exclaimed the boys, eagerly.

"Wait a minute," said Jones. "He said the printer accidentally struck off more than was necessary, and he got the copies in that way."

"What way?"

"Oh, I don't know, I didn't ask particularly, because" – Dismal hesitated a moment – "because, well, I'm not putting up a front for being a preacher, or a goody-goody boy, but I didn't quite fancy taking part in a cheat like that, and I told him so.

"Besides that, I couldn't see any reasons why he should give this favor to me: he and I have never been chummy, and I don't believe that he got them from the printer, either."

"Well, well, who was it?" demanded Rattleton, excitedly.

"Ford."

"Ford, of all men!"

"Yes, he was the fellow."

"It's just as Merriwell says," said Page. "Ford is crazy to lead the class, and he will take any means for getting a paper."

"How is it going to help Merriwell?" asked Rattleton.

"You fellows must get after Ford," responded Jones, "and make him own up. Do you remember how he passed down the aisle and asked Babbitt a question?"

"Yes."

"And don't you remember Merriwell's papers were knocked off his desk?"

"I saw that something had happened," responded Diamond, "but I sat too far away –"

"Well, the papers were on the floor," responded Jones, "and I'd like to bet a dollar to a button that Ford tucked in that extra examination paper when he picked the papers up."

The boys looked seriously at one another a moment, and then two or three said together:

"Let's call on Ford!"

Away they went at once, and in a few minutes were at Ford's door.

"Come in," he said, when they knocked.

One of them tried the door, but found that it was locked.

"Wait a minute," called Ford, and they heard him crossing the room.

Rattleton heard the scratching of a match at the same moment. Something seemed to go wrong with the key, for Ford fumbled at the lock for a moment before he opened the door.

"Hello!" he said in a tone of surprise. "Come right in."

Rattleton dashed past the others, and ran to the fireplace. There was no excuse for a fire in September, but a tiny blaze was there, nevertheless.

Rattleton put his hand upon it instantly, to beat the flame out, and stood up with a partially burned and charred fragment of paper in his hand.

"What are you trying to do?" demanded Ford, indignantly.

"Dock the loor – I mean lock the door," cried Rattleton, excitedly, to Browning.

The latter immediately closed the door, turned the key, and stood with his back to it.

"We'll settle this thing in a hurry," continued Rattleton, shaking the charred paper aloft; "this is a part of Babbitt's examination paper."

"Well, what of it?" asked Ford, angrily; "why shouldn't a man burn up a piece of paper that he's got no further use for?"

"Because you left the paper you've been at work on with your answers in the examination room!" retorted Rattleton, "and this is an extra sheet. It shows what became of the two sheets that Babbitt missed."

Ford looked from one to another of the students and broke into a laugh.

"Well," he said, "I don't feel called upon to make any explanation to you fellows, but as I understand it, your particular friend, Merriwell, will have a good deal to explain."

"By all that's good," exclaimed Diamond; wrathfully, "you'll do the explaining for him."

"Me?"

"Yes, you, you skulking hound! You had those two papers; here's Dismal Jones, to whom you confessed to having got hold of them. You wanted Dismal to take one, hoping that he would give it away to Frank and the rest of us, so that if any exposure came we'd be mixed up in it. I know your sly trick!"

Ford had turned very pale. He sank into a chair, shut his teeth together, and muttered:

"You're doing a good deal of guesswork; but if you're trying to pick a row go right along; I'm not afraid of you."

"We're not here to pick a row, Ford," said Page; "I'm beginning to see through the whole thing."

"You're about the only one, except Merriwell, who knew how the chimney in my room communicated with Babbitt's, and I remember you were coming away from my room at one time

when we were coming from dinner. You had been up there then to steal the papers. You managed to work one of them off on Merriwell's desk to-day. Rattleton there has got a part of the other."

"Well, see here," said Ford. "What does it all mean? Ever since there were colleges, students have done their best to get ahead of the faculty, and if I've succeeded, what's the harm? It isn't hurting you fellows, and no student ever tells on another."

He said this with a haughty air, as if to imply that they would be beneath contempt if they should report his doings to the faculty.

"We're not going to do any tell-taleing – I mean tale-telling," blustered Rattleton. "We're here to make you do that."

"What do you mean?"

"I tell you," said Browning, slowly, and there was a dangerous glitter in his eyes, "I'm not above telling tales in a case like this, and if you don't go straight to the dean and tell him the truth, I'll go and lay the matter before him, and what's more, Master Ford, I'll give you such a thumping that you'll carry the marks as long as you live."

Browning spoke quietly, but there was a businesslike ring in his tone that Ford could not misunderstand.

The others were very quiet, and they looked at Ford, awaiting his answer.

"You take a mighty high attitude," he muttered.

"Shut up," muttered Browning, savagely. "I for one won't hear any argument about it; you've got to do what we say, or take the consequences. And to make certain of those consequences, I'm going to give you a licking now!"

Browning pulled off his coat, threw it upon the floor, and advanced upon Ford. The others stood aside, their eyes glistening, and their fists fairly itching to take a share in Ford's punishment.

As to the latter, he retreated to a corner, and placed a chair between himself and Browning.

"Hold on," he said, huskily. "You've got the best of me because there are so many of you – "

"I propose to lick you alone!" interrupted Browning.

"All the same," suggested Dismal Jones, slowly, "when Browning gets through with him, I think the rest of us will take a turn one at a time."

Ford was thoroughly frightened.

"I give it up," he stammered. "You force me to it I'll do what you say, and I guess my standing in the class is good enough, as I never have done anything before this – "

"Never been caught at it," interrupted Diamond, sarcastically.

"Don't waste any talk," said Browning; "he's going with us to the dean's office now; Merriwell is probably there at this minute trying to make Babbitt believe in a student's honor."

Saying this, Browning put on his coat and unlocked the door; then he turned to Ford.

"Come along," he said.

Trembling like a leaf, Ford crossed the room, picked up his hat from the table, and went out into the hall.

The other students followed closely after.

As he came to the stairway Ford made a leap. In his excitement he probably hoped that he might be able to run away from these angry fellows, and possibly escape making the confession that they wished him to make.

With an angry laugh they all leaped after him and caught him as he was two steps down the stairs.

The result was that the whole pack of them went tumbling down the flight and landed with many a bruise in a heap at the bottom.

When they got up Browning had his strong hand clinched in Ford's collar until the miserable rascal was almost choking.

In this way he was fairly pushed across the campus, to the great astonishment of all the students who happened to be there at the time.

He was marched straight up to the dean's office, where the students entered without knocking. The dean was still talking with Babbitt and Mr. Harding.

Frank, in the adjoining room, wondered what all the commotion was about. The dean wondered, too, and said sharply:

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, what does this mean?"

"It means, sir," said Browning, respectfully, "that an infamous outrage has been attempted, by which an honorable student is made to suffer. Ford will explain."

Ford did explain with many cringing appeals for mercy, and with many protests against the violence with which the students had treated him.

The dean listened with growing indignation, while even Babbitt was stirred to anger against his favorite student.

The upshot of the matter was that Babbitt withdrew his charges against Frank, and even went so far as to make a sort of apology for having suspected him.

Ford's case went before the whole faculty at its meeting that evening, with the result that he was suspended for one year.

"I never was so relieved in my life, Merriwell," said the dean, as he shook Frank's hand, "for if it had been proven that you had done this thing, I am afraid I should have lost all faith in students, but – "

And there was a sly twinkle in his eye.

"I think we shall have to recommend that Prof. Babbitt stuff his chimney with bricks and mortar, or else move to a new room."

"He needn't fear that I shall invade the chimney again," responded Frank; "I'm only too glad that the matter has turned out so that there is no doubt about me."

"Well," said the dean, thoughtfully, "you ought to learn some kind of a lesson out of the experience, I suppose. Let's take it for granted, Merriwell, that you'll give your mathematics a little more attention this year."

Frank, smiling, assured the dean that he would do so, and there the matter ended.

At a later time Page asked Frank why it was that he had insisted on the fireplace being kept secret until after the examination.

"Because," said Frank, "I had got a tip there that was too valuable to lose. If you had shown the opening to everybody, it struck me that perhaps Babbitt would hear you. With his suspicious nature, he might conclude at once that we had good papers because, somehow, we got into his room and found the questions."

"As it happened, you see, the showing of the fireplace resulted in even worse than I feared. It gave Ford his opportunity, and one of the reasons why I insisted on studying in your room was to prevent any such thing by having your room occupied all the time."

"That scheme failed, because Ford watched his chance and got in while we were at dinner."

"I'll have my door fitted with a combination time-lock!" exclaimed Page; "he could have unlocked it as it is now with a button hook."

"You'd certainly better put on a better lock if you think of keeping pets in the chim – "

"Oh, come off, Frank! I thought I'd heard the last of that."

Frank laughed pleasantly, but from that time on he never mentioned the subject.

"It's just as well," he said. "I think we are lucky to get out of the affair so easily."

"Right you are," answered Browning. And then, after a pause, he continued: "Got a letter this morning. Important news."

"Of what?" asked several.

"About the intercollegiate games to come off in New York. Friend of mine at Princeton says they are bound to beat us."

"Not on your life!" came in a chorus; and on the moment the affair of the examination papers was forgotten and all of the boys were talking about the contests to come off and wondering who of the Yale students would take part.

CHAPTER VIII

PICKING OUT A TEAM

"One, two, drop!"

At the word there was a sudden thud as four bodies fell to the ground. Immediately afterward there was a creaking and a sound of straining as the four prostrate men pulled with all their might at a rope.

Then there were long breaths and grunts, and presently one of the four exclaimed:

"I say, Merriwell, I didn't suppose you were going to say 'drop' until you had counted three!"

"You had no business to suppose any such thing," responded Frank, seriously, and yet with a smile; "the man who gives the word in a tug of war sometimes doesn't count at all, and you've got to get used to falling at one word only."

"It will be a pistol shot in New York, won't it?"

"That isn't decided on. You didn't get the rope under your knee when you fell, Taylor."

"I know," responded the one addressed, "and that was because the word 'drop' came before I was ready for it."

"Look out for it next time, then. That will do for the present."

At this word the four young men stood up and looked at Merriwell to await his next command.

They were in the gymnasium at Yale. A corner of the main exercise hall had been set apart for them and screened so that their work could not be seen or interrupted by other students.

Four short pieces of wood had been nailed to the floor at intervals of about five feet. At each of these blocks or cleats a student stood with his hand upon a rope that was tied to a post a few feet distant from the nearest cleat.

These four were stripped to the thinnest of athletic costumes, but Frank, who stood by directing their work, was in his usual street clothes.

He was training the four to represent the college in a tug of war that was to be one feature of some intercollegiate games to take place early in the following month.

The contests were to consist of all kinds of indoor exercises, as the season for outdoor sports had come to an end.

There was to be leaping, wrestling, trapeze and horizontal bar work, maneuvers on the giant swings, fencing and so on.

The entries for these events were not limited to any one class; freshmen could contest as well as seniors, and as a matter of fact many ambitious fellows in the freshman class were in training for the big event.

Every day the wrestlers got together in the gymnasium and varied their work at the machines by wrestling with each other.

The leapers, too, made daily efforts to jump a little higher or a little farther than they had the day before, while those who made specialties of tricks upon the bar and trapeze spent hours every day in perfecting themselves in their feats.

The students talked of little else when they met on the campus, or in one another's rooms of an evening.

Four colleges were to be represented in the meet, namely: Yale, Harvard, Cornell and Princeton. The contests were to take place on neutral ground, and for this purpose the big Seventh Regiment Armory in New York City had been engaged.

The college year had hardly begun before arrangements for this athletic meeting were under way.

As is usual in such matters, where the whole college is concerned, the management was given to a committee of upper classmen.

There were three on this committee, Jack Rowland, and Bed Hill from the senior class, and Frank from the junior.

It was not Frank's intention to take any active part in the contests, although he was well known throughout the college as a first-class, all-round athlete.

It seemed to him better that the contests against the other colleges should be made by those who were specialists in one line or another. He talked this matter over with his particular friends shortly after the term began.

"It won't seem quite right to see you out of it," protested Rattleton, "for when we had our sporting trip across the continent you were always coming in at the last minute to pull victory out of defeat, no matter whether we were jumping, running, playing ball or horse racing."

"That's another story," Frank replied. "When we were sporting it across the continent there were only nine of us, and we were not all Yale students at that. Here there are several hundred healthy men to choose from."

"I don't think there's much doubt that out of all the students now in college there is some one who could beat me at any one thing I might undertake to do, from wrestling to trapeze work."

"But," said Diamond, "if you should go into training for any one event, I think you'd come out on top."

"And that's what I don't care to do!" retorted Merriwell. "I'd rather be an all-round man than be able to do just one thing; I shouldn't know which to choose if I were to start in training."

"But we may lose a cup in some branch of sport if you don't go in."

"Oh, no, I think not. Besides that, there's going to be one event in which I can take a kind of share, and where perhaps I can be as useful to Yale as if I were contesting."

"What's that?"

"The tug of war."

"Is there going to be a tug of war?"

"Yes, siree!"

"Who's going to be on the team?"

"Will it be on cleats or on the level floor?"

"Will it be on the ground?"

These and many other questions of a similar kind were asked so rapidly that Frank had no chance for a reply. At length he explained that the team had not been chosen, and that anybody might be a candidate.

"The managing committee," he said, "has asked me to take charge of the training, and we're going to have trials in a corner of the gymnasium every afternoon. As soon as the team is made up, we shall get down to daily practice."

It was perfectly natural that the tug of war should arouse more interest throughout the college than any of the other events.

Of course it was important that one or another student should be in training to meet the best wrestler or jumper from the other colleges, but the tug of war was an event in which the whole college was represented.

There is never anything like a team event to arouse the enthusiasm of students.

A tug of war team consists of but four men, to be sure, but at that they are supposed to be, and generally are, the strongest men in the college, and so students of all classes looked to them for holding up the glory of the college.

There was another thing that made the tug of war team especially interesting at this time. For two or three years Princeton had been very successful in the tug of war, whether pulling against other colleges or against outside athletic organizations.

It had happened that three very strong men in a certain class had gone onto the team in their freshman year and had stayed there ever since.

That was greatly to the advantage of the Princeton team, for with three men on it who were perfectly used to each other, and who had had a great deal of experience, the team was not only powerful, but it made every other team afraid of it.

There is a great deal more in this than those who are not athletes imagine. A team that has the reputation of always winning is apt to strike terror to the hearts of its opponents and rattle them so that they cannot do their best.

Princeton naturally was very proud of its tug of war team and perfectly confident of carrying off the prize for that event. This was understood not only at Yale, but at Harvard and Cornell, and at each of these three colleges there was a determination to "down" Princeton if possible.

So it happened that when the managing committee at Yale announced that they would examine candidates for the tug of war team, there was so much interest in it that a perfect mob of students gathered at the gymnasium eager for a place upon the rope.

Rowland and Hill, the senior members of the committee, were inclined to dismiss the whole crowd and then quietly pick out four men according to their own judgment, but Merriwell opposed this policy.

"There may be perfect giants concealed in that crowd," he said, "and if there's only one, we want to discover him. Give them all a trial."

"But it would take weeks," exclaimed Hill, "to arrange those men in teams and make them pull against each other until we could sift out the best four!"

"I don't think we need to have them pull against each other to find out what they're worth," Frank responded.

"What other way is there?" asked Rowland.

"I have an idea that I can sift that crowd in a week."

"Well, then, you'd better try it."

So it was agreed that Frank should undertake to examine the candidates for the team, and to superintend its training.

His plan for examining the applicants caused a good deal of amusement at first, but it proved to be remarkably effective as well as a great time saver.

In a tug of war, as in many other sports, it is not only brute strength that tells, but quickness and skill. Frank believed a good deal more in the head work of tugging than he did in solid muscle.

"If a man can't drop right every time," he declared, "he isn't fit for the team. If he can drop right, he's got the making of a tugger."

To test this he had a rope fastened securely to a post, and the candidates in squads of four took hold of this rope and dropped half a dozen times at Frank's command. He gave brief explanations of what was necessary for them to do, to each squad before giving the word; then he watched the men go down, showing them where they had been in error and had them try again.

It took no more than half a dozen minutes for as many trials and then another squad was brought on.

In this way he easily tested from thirty to forty men an hour, and so in the course of three days had given every candidate for the team a chance.

After that it was an easy matter for him to strike off the list fully three-quarters of the candidates; that left from twenty to thirty who might still be useful.

These men he tried in groups of four also, but continually shifted the men from one group to another so as to find out which of them worked together to the best advantage.

At length, after ten days of patient examination in this way, he had Rowland and Hill come behind the screen and watch the efforts of six men who had been selected as the best team workers in the whole college.

The matter was discussed very frankly, not only by the members of the committee, but by the candidates themselves, for everybody was anxious that the best possible team should be selected and nobody would have been offended if he had been left off.

It was decided at last that Bruce Browning should be the anchor of the team. He had been Frank's choice almost from the start, for he was heavy and cool, and from past experience Frank knew that Bruce could be quick if it was necessary.

It is the anchor in a tug-of-war who does the head work for the team.

"I'd rather have a good anchor and three weak men," said Frank, emphatically, "than three giants on the rope directed by an anchor who is either excitable or slow."

Everybody agreed that Bruce was just the man for the Yale anchor, and after a good many trials Taylor, of the senior class, and Jackson, of the sophomore, were assigned places on the rope; that left one vacancy.

Merriwell recommended that the other three men who had stood the test so far be trained equally, so that two at least could rank as substitutes in case of sickness or other difficulty.

The committee and the members of the team suggested that Frank himself should take the vacant place on the rope.

"Everybody knows you've got the muscle and the head, and with you and Bruce on the rope, we'll have as perfect a team as possible."

Frank hesitated a little before accepting this suggestion, but he finally yielded, for without conceit he felt that he could be more useful than the others, and he had a natural eagerness to take an active part in the contest.

Nevertheless, he continued to direct the training of the team, using Rattleton as a substitute on the rope while he stood by and gave orders.

In this way he got the men so that they could fall at the word and fall right, and when this had been gained he took Rattleton's place and gave over the direction of the movements of the team to the anchor.

After that there was a good deal of practice in pulling at voluntary teams from among the students.

It proved that there were no four students in the college who could stay on the cleats half a minute against the team that Frank had selected and trained; so practice teams were made up of five, six, and sometimes eight men.

The dead weight of eight men proved to be a little too much for the regular team, although the latter was never pulled off the cleats.

All in all the Yale students were greatly satisfied with their tug of war team, and as the time for the intercollegiate contests approached their confidence grew.

They believed that they would be able to get away with Princeton, and it did not seem to strike them at all that the other colleges were in it.

CHAPTER IX

HUNTING FOR A FRESHMAN

The contests were to take place on a Wednesday evening. On the Monday previous all the Yale athletes went to New York.

Special permission from the faculty had to be obtained for this absence from the college, but there was no difficulty in getting that, as there is hardly a professor at Yale who does not have a strong interest in athletic events.

As New Haven is but two hours' ride from New York, it might have been possible for the students to attend to all their duties on the Wednesday, and still get to New York in time for the events, but that would never do for the contestants.

Nobody knows better than men who train how easy it is for an athlete to get thrown out of order by a change in diet and air. The finer the training the greater care there has to be.

Therefore, the managing committee for Yale felt that it was absolutely necessary to give the contestants at least two whole days in New York City, in order to get used to the slight change that would result in their leaving familiar quarters in New Haven.

Students who were not contestants in the intercollegiate sports were not allowed to leave New Haven so early, and so it was a comparatively small party that went with Frank and the other members of the committee to rooms that had been engaged for them in the Murray Hill Hotel.

It would probably have amused an outsider if he could have known the great care taken to prevent those students from being harmed by illness or anything else.

They were grown men and able to take care of themselves ordinarily, but from the time they went into training they were like so many children in charge of a nurse.

They were informed as to just what they could eat and what they must let alone. Not one of them was permitted to smoke, and every one of them was required to do just so many hours of exercise of some kind every day.

While they remained in New Haven it was no very difficult matter to see to it that every one of the contestants obeyed the regulations of the managing committee.

In New York it was not quite so easy, for the members of the committee were a good deal occupied in discussing arrangements with the committees from other colleges who were quartered at different hotels.

When it happened that all the committee had to be away from the Murray Hill at the same time, the oversight of the Yale crew was left to Browning, who was the most experienced athlete among them.

There was not much for him to do, for each one of the contestants had a programme of exercise laid out for him.

There was to be just so much walking, and at certain hours, and the rest of the time, except for meals, was to be put in in resting.

It was understood that as often as possible the entire crowd should walk together, and this they did on the first evening after their arrival.

They went up Fifth Avenue to Central Park, and walked rapidly for fully an hour among its winding paths; then they returned to their hotel, had baths, and went early to bed.

During the next day, Tuesday, the contestants were left pretty much to themselves, as the members of the committee were away most of the time.

After one of the meetings with the committees from other colleges, the Yale managers, finding that a number of things had to be done, divided up the work and separated.

Three or four hours later Rowland and Frank met on the way to the hotel where their companions were staying. They reported to each other what they had done, and then fell as usual into discussing the prospects for victory.

"I saw the Cornell tug of war team out for a run," said Rowland.

"Ah! What do they look like?" Frank responded, without much show of interest.

"Beef!" said Rowland.

"Not dangerous, then, eh?"

"Why, no, I presume not. They look as if they could carry you fellows around on one hand, but it seemed to me they were clumsy in their running."

"I don't fear them," said Frank; "I'd heard from some other fellows that Cornell was counting on weight more than anything else, and as you know, I take more stock in head work."

"There's this to think of, though," remarked Rowland, "if a beefy team gets the fall on you by the fraction of a second, you simply can't stand it. That's the time when dead weight will tell."

"The Cornell beefeaters won't get the drop on Yale," returned Frank, quietly.

"No, I guess not, and for that matter, so far as I can hear, there seems to be no doubt in anybody's mind that the real contest will be between Yale and Princeton."

"Have you seen the Harvard men?" asked Frank.

"No, but we know all about them, don't we?"

"I think so. They're a game lot, but I don't think they can stand against us. The fact is, Rowland, I'm thinking more of the other events than of the tug of war just now."

"So? I would have supposed you would be capable of thinking of nothing else."

Frank shook his head.

"The tug of war doesn't worry me a little bit," he said, "but as one of the managers I should feel pretty badly if we fell down on everything else."

"Oh, we're not going to fall down; there are two or three events, you know, in which we are almost certain to win. The high leap, for example –"

"That's just what I've been thinking of," interrupted Frank.

"Why, are you afraid of Higgins?"

Higgins was a member of the freshman class who had shown most unusual power in jumping, and had easily beaten all the other Yale students who had tried for that event.

"I hear that Cornell has a man named Stover," said Frank, "who thinks he can beat everybody at the high jump."

"Yes, I've heard of him, too," Rowland responded, "but what of it? Higgins has broken the record in private practice –"

"That doesn't make it certain that he will do as well at the armory."

"No; but he's in good condition, isn't he?"

"First rate."

"Then I wouldn't worry about him."

"I'm not worrying exactly, and in any case, if our fellows do their best and we get beaten, there's nothing to complain of."

At this point in their conversation the two arrived at the Murray Hill Hotel. They went at once to the suite of rooms that had been engaged for the athletes, and found most of the contestants reading or dozing.

A few were out for a walk. All the students asked eager questions as to the final arrangements and so on. After several questions had been asked and answered, Rowland remarked:

"There'll be hard times in Princeton this winter if the orange doesn't get most of the cups."

"Are the Princeton men offering odds?" asked Browning.

"Not quite so strong as that, but they're putting up loads of money."

"Is the betting any heavier than usual?" asked Frank.

"Perhaps not," Rowland answered, "but if not I must have come across the betting crowd. It seemed as if they had begged and borrowed every dollar they could lay hold of and had brought it here to put up on the different events."

"How is the betting going?" asked Browning.

"I didn't pay very much attention to it, but it seemed to be about even as between Princeton and Yale on the tug of war, and on some of the other events the Princeton men were asking for odds rather than giving them."

"What impressed me most was that it looked as if it was the Princeton crowd that had the most money."

"Why," asked Frank, in a surprised tone, "it wasn't the Princeton contestants who were doing the betting, was it?"

"No, but some of the students."

"That's queer."

"Why?"

"Here it is Tuesday afternoon and the Princeton fellows who are going to see the contests are not due before to-morrow afternoon. It doesn't seem to me probable that the Princeton faculty would let the general run of students come up here at this time any more than the Yale faculty would allow our men to come."

"Can't help that," said Rowland, "there's a raft of Princeton men in town going around with orange ribbons in their buttonholes and hunting for chances to bet money against Yale, Harvard and Cornell."

Frank made no response, but remained for a moment in thought, while the others continued to talk about the betting. Presently Frank asked where Higgins and Mellor were.

Mellor was another freshman athlete. He was a giant in stature, and one of the best wrestlers that had ever been seen at Yale.

There was a good deal of confidence that he would win the cup for wrestling, for from all that could be learned of the wrestlers representing the other colleges, there was no one who could compare with him in strength, and his skill seemed to be all that would be needed.

"They're taking in the town," answered Browning.

"What!" exclaimed Frank, aghast.

"Oh, not in any improper sense," said Browning. "They're just out for a walk, and I didn't see any objection to their taking it in such a way that they could see some of the principal streets."

"No, that's all right," responded Frank, in a tone of relief; "when are they due back?"

"In about half an hour."

More than half an hour passed, and neither Higgins nor Mellor had shown up at that time. Rowland and Hill were away on some other business concerned with the management.

Frank was getting anxious. He could not have said exactly why, for so far as Mellor and Higgins were concerned, he had a good deal of respect for them, but he was fearful of accidents, as if they were little children unable to care for themselves.

He did not betray his anxiety to Browning or the others, but remarked after a time that he had another errand to do, and went away, leaving instructions that no contestant should leave the hotel until his return.

Then he went down to Madison Square and stood for a moment looking doubtfully at the several hotels in that vicinity. He knew that the Princeton athletes had had rooms engaged at the Fifth Avenue, but this thought was not in his mind at the moment.

"The Hoffman House," he was thinking, "is one of the most celebrated hotels in New York, and a place to which all strangers like to go."

As it was the time of year when days are short, it was already dark as night, although it was yet some time before the usual evening dinner hour.

Frank strolled across to the Hoffman House, and went in at the main entrance. A number of men were in the lobby, but apparently there were no students among them.

He went slowly past group after group, and turned at length to the barroom.

This place was famous at that time for its remarkable collection of valuable paintings and statuary; it was often referred to jocosely as the "art gallery." Every stranger in New York regarded it as one of the most interesting sights of the town.

It was pretty well filled with customers when Frank entered, but everything was quiet and orderly.

At the farther side of the room, and partly concealed by the bar, which took up the very middle, was a group of young men just on the point of leaving by the door that opens upon Twenty-fifth Street.

"Too bad you've got to hurry," one of them remarked in a pleasant voice.

"I'm overdue at the hotel already," said another, "and must get back before they become anxious about me."

Frank could not see the speaker, but he recognized the voice as that of Higgins.

"He has no business in here, confound him!" thought Frank, angrily. "No one but a freshman would go into a barroom even out of curiosity, at such a time as this."

He crossed the room, intending to speak to Higgins and walk back to the hotel with him, and give him some earnest advice on the way.

Higgins was a little in advance of the group as they went out, and so Frank did not catch up with him before they were all out upon the sidewalk.

He noticed that all the men who had been speaking with Higgins wore orange ribbons in their buttonholes, but it struck him, too, that somehow they did not look like students.

He had no time to reflect upon this doubt, for just as he stepped out upon the dark street he saw one of the crowd pretend to stumble and fall rather heavily against Higgins.

"I beg pardon," this man said, quickly.

"It's all right," Higgins responded, as he staggered to the curb under the force of the shove.

At that instant Frank saw another in the crowd making a movement which showed that he was going to trip Higgins and cause him to fall.

The attempt was not made, for acting instantly upon his impulse, Frank leaped from the doorway and caught the fellow a terrible blow upon the side of the face.

It sent him reeling halfway across the street before he finally lost his balance and fell full length.

The attack was so unexpected and sudden that most of the others in the group did not stir for a second.

There was one exception to this.

It was a man who had edged forward in order to make sure of tripping Higgins if the first man should fail, and he was so intent upon accomplishing this that he did not stop when Frank's form shot past him to attack the other.

Therefore when Frank wheeled about to defend himself in case the others should fall upon him, he saw this man just in the act of giving Higgins a violent kick upon the shins.

It was all happening so quickly that at this instant Higgins had just made his reply to the apology of the man who had shoved him, and was only beginning to regain his balance.

The kick in the shins did the business for him. He fell upon his hands and knees, and just then Frank struck out again.

He was never so thoroughly aroused in his life, and his blows fell like rain upon the Princeton man's face and chest. The latter would have suffered a square knockdown if he had not been standing so that he fell against his comrades.

The others, recovering a little from their first astonishment, made a feeble effort to close in on Frank, but it would have taken more than them to stop him then.

He beat them off vigorously, striking without mercy at any one who came within reach.

"Cheese it, there's a cop!" exclaimed one of the party suddenly, and they all took to their heels. Higgins by this time had got up and was supporting himself against a lamp-post.

"Can you walk?" asked Frank, quickly.

"I guess so," responded Higgins, so surprised that he could hardly speak.

Frank took him by the arm and marched him back to the barroom, through which they went to the lobby, and then out by the ladies' entrance upon Twenty-sixth Street.

The scrimmage had taken place so quickly and quietly that it had attracted no attention within the barroom, and as Frank and Higgins were not followed, it seemed probable that the cry of alarm about a policeman coming was false.

CHAPTER X

THE FINDING OF MELLOR

"Now, Higgins," said Frank, rather sharply, as they were well out on Twenty-sixth Street, "what have you been up to?"

"Why," answered Higgins, hesitatingly, for he had not yet half recovered from the surprise of the event, "nothing but swapping boasts with those Princeton fellows and refusing to drink with them."

"It's small business for a Yale student to boast of what he can do," exclaimed Frank, in disgust.

Higgins bit his lip and said nothing; although he was a freshman of but few months' standing, he had already learned that in athletic matters the word of a manager is law, and that a student in training would no sooner dispute his manager or trainer than a soldier would dispute an officer.

"And did you refuse their drinks?" demanded Frank in the same sharp tone.

"On my honor, Merriwell, I did. Do you suppose I would take such risks just previous to –"

"Don't talk to me about risks," Frank interrupted; "here it is only the day before the contests, and you're not back at the hotel at the time you're ordered to be."

"I know that," Higgins responded humbly, "and I'm sorry for it, but I didn't realize how the time was going by after I got in with those fellows. They're very pleasant chaps, and I must say that I can't understand for the life of me why it was you sailed into them so."

Frank was too irritated to explain for a moment. It was very seldom that he spoke as sharply as this to a comrade, and he would not have done so on this occasion if he had not been so anxious for the success of Yale in every possible event.

As they walked along he noticed that Higgins was perfectly steady, and although there was a slight flush on his face, there was no sign that he had been drinking. The flush undoubtedly was due to mortification and excitement.

"See here, Higgins," said Frank, at length, in a quieter tone, "don't you know that those Princeton students, as you call them, were trying to disable you?"

"I never dreamed of such a thing."

"It's a fact."

"How do you know, Merriwell?"

"I saw the attempt made, and for that matter you got kicked in the shins and tumbled over, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I supposed that was an accident of the scrimmage."

"It was nothing of the kind; it was a put-up job, and if I hadn't sailed in it might have lamed you so that you couldn't jump. That was what they were after."

"Whew!" exclaimed Higgins. "I think I'm a good Yale man, if I am a freshman, and I hate Princeton and all the rest of them, but, on my honor, Merriwell, I didn't think that a student of any college would resort to such a low-down trick."

"I don't believe it, either," said Frank.

"Well, that –"

"What made you think those fellows were students?"

"Why, they said they were; they gave the year of their class, which made them out to be seniors. They had big wads of money that they wanted to bet, and they got into conversation with me by asking what odds would put up on myself in the high jump."

Frank grunted to express his disgust, and asked:

"Did they talk like students?"

"I thought so."

"I don't believe they were," said Frank, "for there was something in their manner that didn't make them seem like students, and besides that, I can't believe any more than you that Princeton men would try to win out in these contests by deliberately disabling any of our fellows.

"Of course, I can understand how, in an exciting match like a game of football, a man's temper might get the best of him, but to try to lame a fellow in cold blood hours before the beginning of the event is a little too much for me to think of when it comes to a student, whether he's from Princeton, Harvard or anywhere else."

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