

Stratemeyer Edward

The Rover Boys on a Tour: or, Last Days at Brill College



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INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: This book is a complete story in itself, but forms the twentieth volume in a line issued under the general title, "The Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

As I have mentioned in other volumes, this line was started a number of years ago with the publication of "The Rover Boys at School," "On the Ocean," and "In the Jungle." These stories were so well received that there was an immediate cry for more, and so, year by year, they were followed by the publication of "The Rover Boys Out West," "On the Great Lakes," "In the Mountains," "In Camp," "On Land and Sea," "On the River," "On the Plains," "In Southern Waters," "On the Farm," "On Treasure Isle," "At College," "Down East," "In the Air," "In New York," "In Alaska," and finally, "In Business," where we last left our heroes.

The Rover boys have, of course, gradually been growing older. Dick and Tom are both married and doing what they can to carry on their father's business in New York City. Sam, the youngest of the boys, is still at Brill College. The particulars are given of some winter sports around that institution of learning, and then of a great baseball game in which the youngest Rover distinguishes himself. Then Sam graduates from college, and all the boys, with some others, go on a long automobile tour, during which a number of exciting adventures occur. The party is caught in a storm on the mountains, and later on are caught in a great flood. What the Rover boys did under such trying circumstances I leave for the pages which follow to disclose.

Once more I wish to thank all my young friends for the many gratifying things they have said about my books. I trust that the present volume will fulfil all their expectations, and that the reading of the same will do them good.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

Edward Stratemeyer

CHAPTER I

THE SNOWBALL FIGHT

"Now then, boys, are you ready?"

"I am!"

"Been ready for the last five minutes!"

"Sure you've got all the snowballs you can carry?"

"I couldn't carry any more if I tried," came from Sam Rover, with a grin. "Just see how I am loaded up," and he glanced down at both hands, which were filled with snowballs, and at the snowballs held under either arm.

"I've got some dandy hard ones," put in Spud Jackson.

"Oh, you can't use soakers, Spud!" cried Stanley Browne, who was the leader of the snowballing contingent. "That's against the rules."

"They are not soakers, Stanley," was the reply. "They are only good and hard, that's all."

"Hi, you fellows! When are you going to start things?" came a cry from behind a snow wall up the slope of a hill. "We can't waste the whole afternoon waiting for you."

"We're coming, don't fear," answered Stanley Browne.

"And when we arrive you won't know what's struck you," announced Sam Rover gaily.

"It's all vell enough to brag, but you'd chust better start dot fight," came in German-American accents from behind the snow wall, and a merry face appeared in sight for an instant and a fist was shaken playfully at those beyond.

"Sound that bugle, Paul!" yelled the leader of the attacking party, and an instant later the mellow notes of a bugle floated out on the crisp, wintry air.

It was the signal for the attack, and with merry shouts the students at the foot of the hill charged upward through the snow toward the wall above.

The occasion was the annual snowball fight at Brill College. Snow fights there were, of course, without number, but each year there was one big contest in which the freshmen and sophomores attempted to hold a snow fort located on the hill back of the institution against the attacks of the juniors and seniors. According to the rules, three charges were allowable, all of which must be made inside of two hours, and if all of these failed to take the fort, then the victory went to the defenders, and they were permitted to crow over their success until the following winter.

A little over an hour and a half had been spent in the sport and two attacks had been made and repulsed, much to the chagrin of Stanley Browne, the senior in charge of the attacking army. Juniors and seniors had fought nobly, but the freshmen and sophomores outnumbered them, and, being strongly intrenched behind the snow wall of the so-called fort, had succeeded in forcing a first, and then a second, retreat.

"Say, fellows, we've got to do it this time, sure!" cried Sam Rover, as, side by side with Stanley, he led the attack. "If we don't oust them they'll never get done talking about it."

"Right you are, Sam!" answered Bob Grimes, who also had hands and arms full of well-made snowballs.

"Remember what I told you," came from Stanley, as he turned slightly to address his followers. "Don't throw any snowballs yet. Do as the soldiers did in Revolutionary days – wait until you can see the whites of their eyes."

"And then make those whites blacks!" burst out Spud Jackson, gaily. "Come ahead, and no turning back."

Up the snowy hillside sped the crowd of students, while a number of professors and visitors watched the advance from a distance.

"Get ready for 'em! Don't let them come too near!" came in a rallying cry from behind the snow wall. And then, as the attacking party came closer, a volley of white spheres came flying through the air into the faces of the juniors and seniors.

It was a sharp and heavy volley, and for the instant the air seemed to be filled with flying snowballs. Many of them, of course, went wild, but others landed on the heads and bodies of the attacking party, and for the moment the advance was checked.

"Wow!" came from one of the juniors who had been hit in the ear. "Why can't we do some throwing ourselves?"

"That's the talk! Give it to 'em!" came from another student who had had his cap knocked off by a snowball.

"No, no," answered Stanley. "Save your snowballs until we get closer."

"Come on, we'll soon be up there," put in Sam Rover. "Only a hundred feet more, fellows!"

There was a yell of assent, and forward the charging party went again in the face of another volley of snowballs. By bending low the juniors and seniors protected themselves as much as possible from the onslaught, but many were hit, two so stingingly that they had to retire to the rear.

"Hurrah! We've got 'em on the run!" came from the leader of the fort contingent, who had mounted a tree stump located behind the wall. "Give it to 'em, fellows! Give it too 'em hot!"

"Now, then, boys, all together!" yelled Stanley at the top of his voice, and then the eager juniors and seniors launched their snowballs with all the swiftness and accuracy of aim at their command.

The two previous attacks which had been repulsed had taught the advancing students a lesson, and now in this third attack scarcely a snowball was wasted. Those in the front ran directly up to the wall of the fort, while those farther back spread out, as directed by their leader, to the right and to the left, sending in cross fires at points where the fort was supposed to be weakest.

It was a thrilling and spirited fight, but, although the students were greatly excited, there was little more actual roughness than there would have been at a football or other athletic contest.

"Over the wall, boys! Over the wall!" burst out Sam Rover, and the next instant he was up on the wall of the fort, quickly followed by Stanley, Bob, Spud, and several others.

"Back there, you rebels! Back!" came in a yell from the interior of the fort, and then a wild fusillade of snowballs struck Sam and his chums in various parts of their bodies.

"Jumping hambones!" spluttered Spud, as a snowball took him directly in the chin. "What do you think I'm built of, iron?"

"Get back or you'll get worse!" was the cry from the fort, and then another snowball took Spud in the ear.

In the meantime, Sam Rover had dodged a ball which was coming directly for his face, and now he returned the fire with a hard one that took the sophomore below him in the ear. Then Sam jumped down into the fort, quickly followed by eight or ten others.

"Clear them out! Don't let them stay here!" was the wild cry.

"Everybody around the flagpole!" was the command of the fort leader.

The flagpole was a small one located in the center of the enclosure, and from it fluttered the banners of the freshmen and the sophomore classes. Those making the attack would have to haul those banners down before they could claim a victory.

Snowballs were now flying in all directions, and it was quite probable that in the excitement many of the students let fly at their friends instead of at the enemy; but it was all good, clean sport, and everybody enjoyed it greatly.

"Now, then, fellows, for a center rush!" came from Stanley, when he and Sam and about twenty others had forced their way to within ten yards of the flagpole.

"Avalanche them, boys! Avalanche them!" came suddenly from one of the sophomores, and then without warning huge chunks of loose snow were sent flying through the air on the heads of those who were battling to get to the flagpole.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" spluttered Bob, as some of the snow went down inside his collar. "What is this; a snowslide?"

"Oh, you mustn't mind a little thing like that," answered Sam Rover. "Come ahead, everybody! Push!"

There was a wild scramble, with many yells and shouts. Student after student went down in the mêlée, a few to be trampled upon, but fortunately nobody was seriously hurt. There was such a congestion that to make or throw more snowballs was out of the question, and the most a fighter could do was to snatch up a handful of loose snow and thrust it down the neck of the student opposing him. Sam and Stanley, with four others close by them, had now managed to get within a few feet of the flagpole. Here, however, the freshmen and sophomores had planted themselves in a solid mass, and it looked for the moment as if nothing could budge them.

"Only six minutes more, boys! Only six minutes more!" came from one of the sophomores who had been detailed as a timekeeper. "Save those banners for six minutes and we'll win."

"Hit 'em, fellows, hit 'em!" roared Stanley. "We've got to get those banners this year."

"And we're going to do it," added Sam. He turned to Bob and Spud. "Boost me up, fellows, and I'll walk right over their heads to the pole."

"All right, if you want to take the chance," answered Spud, and in a twinkling Sam was shoved up into the air onto the shoulders of the boy in front of him.

This student let out a cry of alarm, but before he could do anything Sam made a leap forward, landing on the shoulders of two students close to the pole.

"Fire him back! Don't let him reach the pole!" came in a yell from several throats.

"Hold him by the ankles! Don't let him jump!" cried out the leader of the fort defenders.

Several students turned to clutch at the ankles of Sam Rover, but he was too nimble for them, and with another leap he reached the flagpole and clutched it tightly.

"Hurrah! Rover has reached the pole!"

"Get those banners, Sam! There is no time to spare!"

"Hold him!" "Pull him down!" "Maul him!" cried the fort defenders. "Don't let him climb up the pole!"

Several turned to clutch at Sam's legs and feet, but he thrashed out wildly and all but one fell back, fearing injury. The undaunted student caught Sam by a heel and held on very much as might a bulldog.

"Let go there," came from Spud, and the next instant he raised a chunk of snow and shoved it directly into the open mouth of the boy who had the grip. This was too much for the student, and he fell back among his fellows.

"Only two minutes more!" yelled the timekeeper. "Two minutes more!"

"We won't need more than fifteen seconds," came triumphantly from Sam, and as he spoke he commenced to climb the pole.

A sophomore followed, clutching again at one of his feet, but now the Rover boy had his hand on the first of the banners, and down it came in a twinkling, and the second quickly followed.

"Here you are, boys; catch them!" Sam cried and, wadding the banners into something of a ball, he hurled them out into the midst of a group of seniors.

"Hurrah! we've got 'em!" was the triumphant cry. "We've got 'em!"

"Time's up!" yelled the timekeeper.

A cheer arose from the juniors and seniors, who quickly held the captured banners aloft. The freshmen and sophomores were, of course, keenly disappointed, and a number of them showed it.

"Let's drive them out of the fort, anyway!" was the sudden cry. "Give it to 'em! Send 'em flying!"

"Wait, wait, this contest is at an end," said a professor who was one of the umpires.

"Never mind, let's have some fun anyway." This cry was taken up on every side, and while some of the seniors retired with the two captured banners, the other students continued the contest, those who had held the fort doing all they possibly could to overcome and expel their enemies.

As soon as he had thrown the banners Sam slid down the pole, and was now trying his best to make his way out of the crowd of freshmen and sophomores. These students were very bitter against the Rover boy, and several did all they could to trip him up and cover him with snow.

"Say, Sam, that was great!" cried Spud. "Best I ever saw!"

"Out with 'em! Out with 'em!" was the yell. "Don't let 'em stay in the fort even if they did get the banners."

"Come on!" cried Sam quickly. "Now we have the banners let us drive them clean down the other side of the hill."

This suggestion received instant approval and, in spite of all that some of the professors could do to stop it, the fight went on as furiously as ever. Some of the students who had retreated to a safe distance came back with a fresh supply of snowballs, and the air was once more filled with the flying missiles.

"Come on, let us teach them a lesson," cried Bob Grimes. "They should have stopped fighting as soon as the banners were captured. Let us give the sophomores and freshmen all they want."

This cry was taken up on all sides, and around and around the enclosure which had been designated the fort went the various crowds of students. The blood of the juniors and seniors was now up, and slowly but surely they forced the younger students to retreat. Then came a break and something of a panic, and a few minutes later the fort defenders were retreating down the other side of the hill, which led through some brushwood to a road that ran to Ashton.

"After 'em! After 'em! Don't let 'em get away!" cried Sam, and was one of the first to go down the hill after the retreating students. On the way he paused only long enough to make several snowballs.

Having reached the road which led to the town, the freshmen and sophomores divided, some going behind a barn and others taking to the woods beyond. Not knowing exactly what to do next, Sam and several with him halted to consider the matter.

"There they go!" was the cry a moment later, and a number of students were seen speeding around a corner of the road.

"That's Bissel, the fellow who hit me in the ear," cried Sam. "I'm going after him."

"And, yes, there is Dutz, who filled my mouth with snow," cried Spud. "Come on!"

Sam was already on the run, and, coming to the turn in the road, he let fly several snowballs.

"Here! Here! What do you mean by such actions?" came suddenly from behind some brushwood which lined the roadway and then, as the students advanced still further, they were surprised to find themselves confronted by a tall man wearing a heavy, fur-lined overcoat. He had likewise been wearing a beaver hat, but the tile now lay in the snow.

"Belright Fogg!" exclaimed Sam in dismay. "That lawyer who tried to get the best of us! And I thought he was one of the students!"

"Ha! so it is you," snarled the man in the fur overcoat harshly. "What do you mean, Rover, by attacking me in this fashion?"

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING ABOUT THE ROVER BOYS

"Say! that isn't one of the students."

"Not much! Why, that's the lawyer who used to do business for the railroad company – the man the Rovers had so much trouble with!"

"Who knocked his hat off?"

"I don't know – Sam Rover, I guess."

Such were some of the remarks made as a number of the juniors and seniors began to congregate around Sam and Mr. Belright Fogg. All of the students could readily see that the lawyer was very much put out over what had occurred.

"I say, Rover, what do you mean by attacking me in this fashion?" repeated Belright Fogg, with a savage look at the youth before him.

"If I knocked your hat off, Mr. Fogg, I am sorry for it," answered Sam, as soon as he could recover from his surprise.

"Knocked my hat off?" roared the lawyer. "You hit me a hard one on the head; that is what you did!"

"Let me see if you are hurt," put in Stanley, stepping forward. "Where did the snowball hit you?"

"You keep your hands off me," returned Belright Fogg. "I've a good mind to have the law on such loafers as you."

"We are not loafers, Mr. Fogg," answered Sam, the color coming quickly to his face. "We were having our annual snowballing contest, and we did not know that any outsider was on this back road. If I hit you and hurt you I am very sorry for it."

"Humph! I think you will be sorry for it if I bring a suit for damages," muttered the lawyer. "I don't know why Dr. Wallington permits such rowdyism."

"This isn't rowdyism, nor are we loafers," put in Stanley, somewhat sharply. "You seem to forget, Mr. Fogg, that this road runs through the property belonging to Brill College, and we have a perfect right to hold our snowballing contest here. If you want to report the matter to Dr. Wall –"

"Bah! I know you students, and I wouldn't expect any sympathy from your teacher. He's too afraid of losing any of his students." Belright Fogg snatched his beaver hat from the hands of Spud, who had picked it up. "I'll settle with you for this later, Rover," he added, and then turned on his heel and hurried down the road.

"I wonder what brought him on this back road on foot?" observed Bob.

"He isn't on foot. He has his horse and cutter beside the barn," answered another student. "There he is now, picking up a robe out of the snow. It must have fallen out of the cutter and he walked back to get it." Which surmise was correct.

"This looks like more trouble for me," said Sam, soberly. "I'm mighty sorry it was Mr. Belright Fogg I hit with that snowball."

"You can wager he'll make out a case against you if he possibly can," remarked Spud. "Lawyers of his calibre always do."

"Well, this settles the snowball fight for us," put in Stanley, as he looked up and down the road. "The freshies and sophs are clear out of sight. Let us go back to the campus and celebrate our victory;" and then, as Belright Fogg drove away in his cutter, the students walked over the hill in the direction of Brill.

To my old readers the youths already mentioned in these pages will need no special introduction. For the benefit of others, however, let me state that Sam Rover was the youngest of three brothers, Dick being the eldest and fun-loving Tom coming next. They were the sons of one Anderson Rover,

a rich widower, and had for years made their home with their Uncle Randolph and their Aunt Martha at a beautiful farm called Valley Brook.

From the farm, and while their father was in Africa, the three Rover boys had been sent by their uncle to school, as related in the first volume of this series, entitled "The Rover Boys at School." This place was called Putnam Hall Military Academy, and there the lads made many friends, and likewise several enemies, and had "the time of their lives," as Tom Rover often expressed it.¹

The first term at school was followed by an exciting trip on the ocean, and then another trip into the jungles of Africa, where the boys went looking for their parent. Then came a trip to the West, followed by some grand times on the Great Lakes and in the Mountains. Then the boys returned to Putnam Hall, to go into an encampment with their fellow-cadets.

This term at Putnam Hall was followed by a never-to-be-forgotten journey on Land and Sea to a far-away island in the Pacific. Then they returned to this country, sailing down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. After leaving the Father of Waters, they took an outing on the Plains, and then went down into Southern Waters, where they solved the mystery of a deserted steam yacht.

After so many exciting adventures the three brothers had been glad to journey to the home farm for a rest, after which they returned to Putnam Hall, settled down to their studies, and graduated with considerable honor.

"Now for college!" Dick Rover had said. But before setting out for Brill, a fine institution of learning located in the Middle West, the boys had become involved in a search for a fortune left on Treasure Isle.

During their days at Putnam Hall the Rover boys had become well acquainted with Dora Stanhope, who lived near the school with her widowed mother, and also with Nellie and Grace Laning, Dora's two cousins, who resided a short distance farther away. It had not been long before Dick and Dora showed a great liking for each other, and at the same time Tom often paired off with Nellie and Sam was frequently seen in the company of Grace.

A few miles away from Brill College was located Hope Seminary, an institution for girls, and when the Rover boys went to Brill, Dora, Nellie and Grace went to Hope; so that the young folks met almost as often as before.

A term at Brill College was followed by an unexpected trip Down East, where the Rovers brought to terms a rascally ex-schoolteacher, named Josiah Crabtree, who had given them much trouble while at Putnam Hall.

In those days the art of flying was attracting considerable attention and, through the indulgence of their father, the Rover boys became the possessors of a biplane and took several thrilling trips through the air, their experiences in that line coming to an abrupt finish when the flying machine was one day wrecked on the railroad tracks. This had brought on a sharp contest between the Rover boys and the railroad lawyer, Mr. Belright Fogg. The Rovers had claimed all that was coming to them, and the railroad had been made to pay up, much to Belright Fogg's disgust. Later, the lawyer had been discharged by the railroad from its services.

About this time Mr. Anderson Rover, who was not in the best of health, was having much trouble with brokers in New York City who were trying to swindle him out of some property. The brokers were Pelter, Jackson & Company, and it was not long before the Rover boys discovered that Pelter was in league with Josiah Crabtree. In a struggle poor Tom Rover was hit on the head by a wooden footstool thrown by Pelter and knocked unconscious. This had so affected his mind that he wandered off to Alaska, and Sam and Dick had many adventures trying to locate him. When he was found he was brought home and placed under the care of a specialist, and soon was as well as ever.

¹ For particulars regarding how Putnam Hall Military Academy was organized, and what fine times the cadets there enjoyed even before the Rover boys came on the scene, read "The Putnam Hall Series," six volumes, starting with "The Putnam Hall Cadets." – Publishers.

Dick Rover was now growing older, and, with his father in such poor health, it was decided that the youth should leave Brill, become married to Dora, and settle down in charge of the office in Wall Street, New York. This plan was carried out, as related in detail in the volume preceding this, entitled "The Rover Boys in Business." At that time, Sam and Tom still remained at Brill, but an urgent message from Dick brought them quickly to the metropolis. A large number of unregistered bonds belonging to the Rovers had mysteriously disappeared, and all the boys went on a hunt to recover the securities. In the end it was learned that their old enemy, Jesse Pelter, was the guilty party, and he was brought to justice. Then it was felt that Dick needed assistance in the office, and it was decided, much to Tom's satisfaction, that he might get married to Nellie Laning and move to the city.

"That will leave me all alone at Brill," said Sam Rover at that time.

"Well, you shouldn't mind that so much," Tom Rover had replied. "Remember, Grace will still be at Hope," at which words the youngest Rover had blushed deeply.

When the Rovers had gone to Brill College they had been accompanied by their old-time school chum, John Powell, always called "Songbird" on account of his propensity for writing doggerel which he insisted on calling poetry. At the same time there came to Brill from Putnam Hall one William Philander Tubbs, a very dudish student with whom the boys often had great fun.

It did not take the three Rover boys long to make a number of friends at Brill. These included Stanley Browne, a tall, gentlemanly youth; Bob Grimes, who was greatly interested in baseball; Will Jackson, always called Spud, because of his unusual fondness for potatoes; and Max Spangler, a German-American youth, who was still struggling with the language, and who had failed to advance in his studies, so that at the present time he was only in the sophomore class. They had also made several enemies, but these had for the time being left Brill.

"You'll be the hero of this occasion, Sam," remarked Stanley, as the students tramped in the direction of the college campus.

"Hero of the occasion, I suppose, for hitting Mr. Fogg in the head," returned Sam, with a slight grin.

"Oh, forget that!" burst out Spud. "I don't think he'll do a thing. Remember the affair occurred on the college grounds, just as Stanley said."

"Say! where is Songbird to-day?" asked Paul Orben. "He ought to have been in this fight."

"He wanted to come very much," answered Sam, "but he had a special errand to do for Mr. Sanderson, who is laid up with a broken ankle."

"Was he doing the errand for Mr. Sanderson or for Minnie?" questioned Stanley; and then a short laugh went up, for it was well known among the young collegians that Songbird Powell and the daughter of Mr. Sanderson, a prosperous farmer of that vicinity, were much attached to each other.

As Sam Rover and his friends reached the college campus, a great cheer arose.

"There he is!"

"Here the conquering hero comes!"

"Let us put him up on our shoulders, fellows!" and a rush was made towards the youngest Rover boy.

"Not much! Not to-day!" returned Sam, and slid back behind some of his friends.

"Aw! come on, Sam!" cried one of the students. "You are the hero of the occasion, and you know it."

"Forget it, Snips," answered Sam. "What did the fellows do with those banners?"

"Lentwell has them. He is keeping them for you. I suppose you'll nail them up in your den?"

"Surest thing you know!"

"Maybe the freshies and sophs will want them back," put in another youth in the crowd.

"Not much! They can have them back after I graduate next June," answered Sam. "They have got to understand – Stop it, fellows, stop it! I don't want to – Well, if you've got to, I suppose I'll have to submit." And an instant later Sam found himself hoisted up on the shoulders of several stalwart

seniors, who tramped around and around the college campus with him while all the other seniors, and also the juniors, cheered wildly and waved their caps.

"Doesn't that make you feel proud, Sam?" asked Spud, during a lull in the proceedings.

"It sure does, Spud," was the quick reply. "I've only got one regret – that Dick and Tom aren't here to share this victory with us."

"Yes, it's a shame. And just to think of it, after next June, when we graduate, we'll all be scattered here, there, and everywhere, and the good old times at Brill will be a thing of the past."

"Don't mention such things," put in Stanley. "It makes me sick clean to the heels every time I think of it. But I suppose college days can't last forever. We've got to go out into the world, just as our fathers did before us."

"Yes, and I've got to get into business," answered Sam. "I want to help father, as well as Dick and Tom, all I can."

"Hi, fellows!" was the unexpected cry from the lower end of the campus. "Here come the freshies and the sophs back! Line up and be ready to receive them!"

"That's it! Line up, line up, everybody!" ordered Stanley. "Give them our old song of victory!"

CHAPTER III

WHAT HAPPENED TO SONGBIRD

It was fully half an hour later before Sam Rover could break away from his college chums and run up to room Number 25, which he had formerly occupied with his brother Tom and which he now shared with Songbird Powell.

Nearly a week before, the youngest Rover had made a date with Grace Laning, inviting her, if the snow remained on the ground, to a sleighride that afternoon and evening. At that time Sam had forgotten completely that this day was the date set for the annual snowballing contest.

"I think I'll go anyway," he had remarked to Songbird, the day before. But then had come word to his roommate that Mr. Sanderson wanted him on a matter of importance, and Stanley, as the leader of the seniors, had insisted upon it that he could not spare both of his chums.

"All right, then," Sam had answered finally; "you can go, Songbird, and do what Mr. Sanderson wants you to, and I'll put off my sleighride with Grace until after the contest;" and so it had been settled.

There were no public turnouts at the college, but Sam had arranged with Abner Filbury, who worked around the place with his father, to obtain for him a first-class horse and cutter from the Ashton livery stable.

"That horse is some goer, believe me!" remarked Abner, when he came to the door of Sam's room, to tell him that the turnout was in readiness. "You'll have to keep your eye on him, Mr. Rover."

"All right, Ab. Trust me to take care of him," returned Sam lightly. "Don't forget that I was brought up on a farm, and my Uncle Randolph had some pretty spirited animals."

"Have a good time, Sam!" cried Spud, who was present to see his chum depart. "Wish I was going to see such a nice girl."

"Oh, your time will come some day," answered Sam.

"Are you going directly to Hope?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"I expect to unless you want to ride along that far."

"Say! I'd like that first-rate," returned Spud, eagerly. "I know some of the girls up there, and I'd like to call on them. I wouldn't mind walking back later on."

"Then come on if you are ready. I haven't any time to wait."

"Oh, I'm always ready," came from Spud; and he lost no time in bestowing himself beside Sam.

The latter gathered up the reins, gave a slight chirp to the horse, and away they sped out of the college grounds and on to the highway leading past Hope Seminary, which was about two miles distant.

The air was cool and bracing, and the snow on the highway well packed down, so that the cutter slid over it with ease. As Abner Filbury had said, the steed was a mettlesome one, and soon Sam found he had all he could do to hold the horse in.

"Some goer, that!" remarked Spud, as he pulled his cap down tighter to keep it from flying off. "Puts me in mind of a race horse."

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder but what he could make a mile in almost record time," responded Sam, as they flew along past the trees, bushes and occasional farm buildings which lined the roadway near Brill.

"You want to watch yourself with a horse that goes as fast as that," returned Spud, with a chuckle. "If you don't, you'll get a mile or two past Hope before you know it;" and at this little joke Sam grinned.

Early in the ride they passed one or two cutters and several farm wagons. Then they reached a turn in the road, and to their surprise saw ahead of them a sign resting on a large wooden horse:

ROAD CLOSED

"Hello! What does this mean?" queried Sam, as he brought his horse to a standstill. "I didn't know this road was shut off."

"Oh, yes, I heard something about this, come to think of it," returned Spud. "They are going to move that old Jackson barn from one side of the road to the other, and they must have closed the road for that purpose. You'll have to take the old road on the left, Sam."

"I suppose so," grumbled the other. "Too bad, too, for this road was just about perfect for sleighing. But never mind, I suppose I can get through on the other road well enough."

They turned back a distance of less than two hundred feet, and then took to the side road which Spud had mentioned. This was more hilly than the other, and ran through a long patch of timberland on which no houses were located.

"Hark! Don't I hear another sleigh coming?" questioned Spud, a minute later.

"Something is coming, that's sure," answered Sam. "Gracious me! Look at that!"

Coming to another bend of the woodland road, the youngest Rover had barely time to pull his steed well toward the right hand and almost into some bushes when another cutter hove into sight, coming along at a furious rate. The horse was on a gallop, and the man driving him, a fellow wrapped up in a heavy overcoat and with a fur cap pulled far down over his forehead, was using his whip freely.

"Wow! That fellow must be in some hurry," observed Spud, as the other turnout flashed past. "He isn't sparing his horse any."

"It's a lucky thing for me that I pulled in here as I did," returned Sam, and his tone of voice showed his anger. "If I hadn't done it he would have run into us, sure pop."

"You're right, Sam. That fellow had no right to come along in that fashion. He ought to be arrested for reckless driving. But maybe he wants to catch a train at Ashton or something like that."

"No train he could catch for an hour and a half, Spud. And he could walk to the station in that time;" and thus speaking, Sam chirruped to the horse, and they resumed their ride.

A little farther on the woodland road made another turn, and here the way was uphill. The numerous rains of the summer previous had washed the rocks bare of dirt, and often the cutter bumped and scraped so badly that Sam was compelled to bring his steed down to a walk.

"Well, one satisfaction, we'll be back to the main road before long," observed Spud, as they finally reached the top of the hill and could get a view of the surroundings. "There is the other road just below us."

"Hello! What's that ahead?" cried Sam, pointing with his left hand. "Looks to me like somebody lying in the snow."

"It is somebody!" exclaimed his chum. "Say! do you suppose that other horse was running away, and this fellow fell out?"

"Not much, with that other fellow using the whip as he was!" returned Sam. "This fellow ahead probably had nothing to do with that other cutter. Excepting he may have been knocked down by the horse," he added suddenly.

"That's what the trouble is! That rascal knocked this fellow down and then hurried on, Sam! Poor fellow! I wonder if he is much hurt?"

By this time the cutter had reached a point opposite to where the person in the snow rested. All the boys could see was some person, wrapped in an overcoat, lying face downward. A cap that looked strangely familiar to Sam lay close at hand. Stopping the horse, Sam leaped from the cutter, and Spud did the same.

"Say, Sam!" burst out the latter, "it looks like – "

"Songbird!" burst out the Rover boy. "It's Songbird, Spud, and he's badly hurt."

It was indeed poor Songbird Powell who rested there in the snow by the roadside. He had on his overcoat and his fur-lined gloves, but his head was bare, and from a cut on his left temple the blood was flowing. The boys turned their college chum over, and at this Songbird uttered a low moan.

"He has either had an accident or been attacked," was Spud's comment. "I wonder how badly he's hurt?"

"I'm afraid it's pretty bad," answered Sam, soberly. "That's a nasty cut. And say! his chin is all swelled up as if he had been hit there with a club!"

The two boys knelt beside their unconscious chum and did what they could to revive him. But Songbird did not open his eyes, nor did he make any other sound than a low moan.

"We'll have to get him somewhere out of this biting, cold air," observed Sam. "There is a farmhouse just below here on the main road. Let us put him in the cutter and carry him there."

When they picked Songbird up he uttered another moan and for an instant his eyes opened; but then he collapsed as before. They deposited him on the seat of the turnout, and Sam picked up his cap and several books that lay scattered around. With sober faces the boys led the mettlesome horse down the slope to the main road. Both kept their eyes on their chum, but he still remained insensible.

"Maybe he won't get over it," suggested Spud.

"Oh, don't say that!" cried Sam in horror. "It can't be as bad as that." And then he added: "Spud, did you notice the looks of that horse when he dashed past us?"

"I didn't have time to notice much," was the reply.

"Did he wear white stockings?"

"What? Oh! I know what you mean – white feet. Yes, he had white feet. I know that much."

"And did he have any white under his neck?"

"Yes, I think he did. Do you think you know the horse, Sam?"

"I know Mr. Sanderson has a horse with white feet and a white chest – a dark horse, just like that one was."

"Then it must have been Mr. Sanderson's horse and cutter!" cried Spud. "If it was, do you think that man was running away with the outfit?"

"I don't know what to think, Spud. To my mind it's a mighty serious piece of business. But our first duty is to do all we can for poor Songbird."

Arriving at the nearest farmhouse, Spud ran ahead and knocked on the door. A woman answered the summons, and as she happened to know the youth, she readily consented to have Songbird brought in and laid on a couch in the dining-room. Hardly had this been done when the sufferer slowly opened his eyes.

"Don – don't hit m-m-me again!" he murmured. "Ple-please don't!"

"It's all right, Songbird. Don't you know me?" said Sam, quietly.

The injured collegian opened his eyes again and stared at the youth before him.

"Sam! Wh-where did you co-come from?"

"Spud and I found you on the road, face down in the snow," answered Sam. "What happened? Did you fall out of the cutter, or were you attacked?"

"I – I – Oh! how my head spins!" muttered Songbird. He closed his eyes again and was silent for a moment. Then he looked once more at Sam.

"I was attacked," he mumbled. "The man – he hit me – with a club – and hauled me out of the cutter."

"It must have been the fellow we saw on the road!" exclaimed Spud. "Songbird, why did he do it?"

"I – I – do-don't know," mumbled the sufferer. "But maybe I do!" he suddenly shouted, in a strangely unnatural voice. Then with a sudden strength born of fear, he raised his left hand and dived down into the inner pocket of his coat. "The package! It's gone!"

"The package! What package?" queried Sam.

"The package belonging to Mr. Sanderson!" gasped poor Songbird. "The package with the four thousand dollars in it! It's gone!" and with another groan Songbird lapsed once more into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHASE

It must be confessed that Sam and Spud, as well as the woman of the house, were very much surprised over the statement made by Songbird.

"Attacked and robbed!" murmured Sam. "What an awful thing to do!"

"He said he had been robbed of four thousand dollars!" broke in Spud. "Where in the world would he get that much money? He must be dreaming, Sam."

"I hardly think so, Spud. I know he was to go on a very important errand for Mr. Sanderson, who is laid up at home with a sprained ankle."

"Well, if Songbird was robbed, it's more than likely the fellow we saw in the cutter did it."

"Exactly! And the chances are he will get away just as fast as he possibly can," added Sam, bitterly.

"What do you think we ought to do?"

"I think we ought to notify the authorities, Spud."

"Hadn't we better wait until we get some particulars from Songbird?"

"Not much! The quicker we get after that fellow the better. Remember he is running away not only with the money but also with Mr. Sanderson's horse and cutter. Many people living in this vicinity know Mr. Sanderson's animal, and that may help us to locate that rascal." Sam turned to the woman of the house. "Have you a telephone?"

"No, we haven't any; but the folks in the next house up the road have one."

"Then I'll go there and telephone," said Sam. "You do what you can for Songbird, Spud. I'll try to get a doctor, too, while I'm at it."

In a few seconds more Sam was on the way, using his horse and cutter for that purpose. Arriving at the next farmhouse, he readily received permission to use the telephone, and at once got into communication with the authorities in Ashton, and asked the official in charge to send word around to the various towns and villages within the next ten or fifteen miles, and he also sent word to a physician at Ashton. Then he managed to get Grace on the wire.

"I'm afraid I'll be late," he told the girl. "And maybe I won't be able to get there at all," he added. "Songbird has been knocked down on the road and robbed, and he is in pretty bad shape."

"Oh, Sam! isn't that too bad!" was Grace's reply. "Do you mean that he is seriously injured?"

"We can't tell yet, Grace. I have just telephoned for the doctor, and now I am going back to the Bray farmhouse, where Songbird is, to wait for him." And after that Sam gave the girl as many details of the affair as he deemed necessary.

"Oh! I hope he gets over it, Sam," said Grace. "And to think he was robbed of all that money! If they can't get it back, what ever will Songbird and the Sandersons do?"

"I don't know," he returned. "It certainly is a bad piece of business. But now I've got to go back, so I'll say good-bye."

"Good-bye, Sam, and you stay with Songbird just as long as you please. We can have our sleighride some other time."

When Sam returned to the Bray farmhouse he found that Spud and the lady of the house had washed Songbird's wound and bound it up. The lady had also brought forth some simple home remedies, and these had been so efficacious that Songbird was sitting on the couch, propped up by numerous pillows.

"Did you catch him?" asked the sufferer eagerly, as Sam entered.

"I've sent word to the police, Songbird, and sent word for a doctor too. Now you had better take it easy until the doctor comes."

"But how can I take it easy with that four thousand dollars missing?" groaned the youth on the couch. "Why, I can't make that amount up, and Mr. Sanderson can't afford to lose it."

"How does your head feel?"

"It feels sore all over, and sometimes spins like a top. But I wouldn't care about that if only I could get that money back. Can't you and Spud go after that rascal?"

"I'm willing if you want us to, Songbird; but you'll have to promise to stay here until the doctor comes. We don't want you to attempt to do anything while you are in your present condition."

"Oh, I'll stay here, don't fear," answered Songbird, grimly. "I just tried to stand up, and I went in a heap, and Spud and the lady had to put me back on this couch."

"Let's take that horse of yours and go after that fellow, Sam," burst out Spud, eagerly. "That horse is a goer, as we know, and we ought to be able to catch that man sooner or later."

"Providing we can follow his trail, Spud," answered Sam. "You must remember there are a good many side roads around here, and he can take to any one he pleases."

"But we might be able to find the footprints of the horse in the snow."

"Possibly, although I doubt it, with so many other horses using the highway. However, come on, we'll do the best we can." Sam turned again to the sufferer. "Now, Songbird, you keep quiet until the doctor comes, and then you do exactly as he orders."

"Maybe Mrs. Bray will see to that," ventured Spud.

"I will if you want me to," responded the woman of the house. "That cut on his head is a nasty one, and if he doesn't take care of himself it may make him real sick."

In a moment more Sam and Spud were out of the house and into the cutter, which was then headed up the side road where they had found Songbird. Here they stopped for an instant to take another look around, and picked up two more books which had escaped their notice before.

"Books of poetry, both of 'em," remarked Spud. "Songbird thinks more of a poem than he does of a square meal," and he smiled a bit grimly.

It did not take long to reach the spot where the other cutter had passed them. They went straight on, soon reaching the point where the woodland road joined the main highway.

"Now, you see, here is where we are going to get mixed up," announced Sam, as they moved in the direction of Brill. "Did the fellow go straight to Ashton, or did he turn off to one of the other places?"

"The folks traveling along the road must have seen him," returned Spud. "Let us make some inquiries as we go along."

This was a good suggestion, and was carried out. They found a farmer who had seen the strange man in the cutter drive toward Ashton, and a little later they met two ladies in a sleigh who declared that the fellow had turned into a side road leading to a hamlet known as Lester's Corners.

"If he went there, we ought to have a chance to catch him," cried Spud. "This road I know doesn't go beyond the Corners."

"Yes. But he could take a road from there to Dentonville," answered Sam, "and you know that is quite a railroad station."

"But if he went to Dentonville and to the railroad station, couldn't you telephone to the operator there to have him held?"

"Maybe, Spud, providing there is any telephone at the Corners."

Onward they went once more, through some heavy woodland and then over several small hills, finally coming in sight of the Corners, where were located a general store, a blacksmith's shop, a chapel, and about a dozen houses.

"Did I see a feller in a cutter goin' as fast as he could?" repeated the storekeeper, when questioned by Sam. "You just bet I did. Gee whiz! but he was goin' to beat the band!"

"And which way did he head?" questioned the Rover boy, eagerly.

"Headed right straight for Dentonville."

"And how long ago was this?" put in Spud.

"Oh, about quarter of an hour, I should say. Say! he nearly skeered old Mrs. Rasley to deth. She was a-crossin' the road comin' to my store when he swung aroun' that corner yonder, and he come within a foot of runnin' over her. She wanted to git Joe Mason, the constable, to arrest him, but, gee whiz! there wasn't no arrestin' to it – he was out o' sight before you could say Jack Robinson."

"Have you any telephone connection with Dentonville?" questioned Sam.

"Ain't got no telephone here at all. The telephone fellers promised to put a line through here three years ago, but somehow they hain't got around to doin' it. You see, Squire Buzby owns some of their stock, and he don't think that we ought to –"

"That's all right, Captain," broke in Sam, hastily. "Then if we want to catch that fellow, all we can do is to go after him, eh?"

"That's about the size on it," returned the storekeeper. "Now you see if we had that telephone here, we might be able to –"

"That's so, we might. But as the telephone is missing, we'll go after him in our cutter," broke in Sam; and a few seconds later he and Spud were once more on their way.

The road to Dentonville was not much traveled, and for a mile and a half they met no one. Then, just as they reached a crossing, they came in sight of an old farmer driving a box-sled filled with milk cans.

"Did you meet a man driving a horse and cutter very rapidly?" questioned Sam, after he drew up. "A dark horse with a white breast and white feet?"

"I jest guess I did!" replied the farmer. "He come pretty close to runnin' into me."

"Which way was he headed?"

"Headed straight for Dentonville."

"Can you tell me when the next train stops there?"

"The train is due there in about fifteen minutes, and she won't stop more'n long enough to put my milk cans on board. I jest left 'em there, and got these empty ones," explained the farmer, pointing to the cans behind him.

"Fifteen minutes!" cried Spud. "And how far is it from here?"

"Nigh on to three miles."

"Is it a good road?" queried Sam.

"Pretty fair. It's some washed out on the hills, but the snow has covered the wo'st of the holes. Want to ketch that feller?"

"We certainly do. That horse and cutter belongs to Mr. Sanderson."

"By gum! You don't say! Did he steal the turnout?"

"He certainly did," answered Spud, "and nearly killed a young fellow in the bargain."

"Then I hope you ketch 'im," answered the farmer, and stood up in his sled to watch Sam and Spud as they sped once more along the highway leading to Dentonville.

The boys had a long hill ahead, and before the top was gained the horse attached to the cutter was glad enough to settle down to a walk. But once the ridge was passed, he did not need much urging, and flew along almost as rapidly as ever.

"This horse must have been in the stable for quite some time," remarked Spud. "He evidently enjoys the outing thoroughly."

"Listen!" cried Sam, a little later. "Isn't that the whistle of a locomotive?"

"It sure is, Sam! That must be the train coming into Dentonville!"

They were passing through a small patch of timber, and directly beyond were the cleared fields and the buildings of a tidy farm. As the boys came out of the woods they looked over the fields in the direction of Dentonville and saw a mixed train, composed of several passenger coaches and a string of freights, entering the station.

"There she is!" cried Sam. "Oh, if only we can get there before she leaves!"

He spoke to the horse and did what he could to urge the steed forward at a greater rate of speed than ever. Much to the astonishment of several onlookers, they dashed into the outskirts of Dentonville and then along the main street leading down to the railroad station.

"Hi! Stop!" roared a voice at them, just as they were crossing one of the side streets, directly in front of a sleigh and two wagons. "Hi! Stop, I tell you! You ain't got no right to drive that fast here in town," and a blue-coated policeman, one of the four of which the place boasted, shook his club at the boys and ran out in front of their cutter.

"Say! officer, you are just the man we want," cried Sam, hurriedly. "Come on with us. We want to have a man arrested down at the depot before he has a chance to get away on the train."

"What's that? Want a man arrested?" queried the bluecoat. "What has he done?"

"A whole lot of things," broke in Spud. "Jump in; we haven't any time to explain now – that train may pull out at any moment."

"That's so; so it might," replied the officer; and then, as Spud made room for him, he sprang into the cutter, sitting on the boy's lap. "But you look out that you don't kill somebody," he added to Sam, who was now using the whip lightly to urge the horse to greater efforts.

They were still two blocks away from the railroad station when there came a whistle, followed by the clanging of a bell, and then they saw the train moving away.

"There she goes!" groaned Spud. "But she isn't moving very fast."

"Maybe we can catch her yet," returned Sam; and then the race continued as before.

CHAPTER V

AT THE RAILROAD STATION

"See anybody, Sam?"

"Nobody that looks like that man, Spud, but there is Mr. Sanderson's horse with the cutter."

"Yes, I spotted those right away. Look how the poor nag is heaving. He must have been driven almost to death."

"That may be. Although we got here almost as quickly as he did. But he may have been used quite some before this trip," returned Sam; and this surmise was correct.

The two boys, with the policeman, had done their best to catch the departing train and have it stop, but without avail. When they had reached the depot the last of the cars was well down the line, and soon the train had disappeared around a curve of the roadbed.

"What's the matter, Ike? What are you after?" queried the freight agent, as he came up to the policeman.

"We are after the man who was driving that cutter yonder," explained Sam. "Did you see him – a big fellow with a heavy overcoat and with a fur cap pulled down over his forehead?"

"Why yes, I saw that fellow get aboard," answered the freight agent. "I was wondering what he was going to do with his horse. He didn't even stop to put a blanket over the animal."

"That fellow was a thief," explained Sam. "I wonder if we can't have him captured in some way? What is the next station the train will stop at?"

"Penton."

"How far is that from here?"

"About six miles."

"And after that?"

"She'll stop at Leadenfield, which is about six miles farther."

"Then I'll send a telegram to Penton and another to Leadenfield to have the train searched and the man arrested if he can be spotted," said Sam; and a few minutes later he was in the telegraph office writing out the messages. He described the man as well as he could, but realized that his efforts were rather hopeless.

"Maybe Songbird could give us a better description," he said to his chum; "but as Songbird isn't here, and as we can't get him on the telephone, we'll have to do the best we can."

The policeman was, of course, anxious to know some of the details of what had occurred, and when the boys told him that their college chum had been knocked senseless and robbed of four thousand dollars he was greatly surprised.

"It's too bad you didn't get here before the train started," he observed. "If you had we might have nabbed that rascal and maybe got a reward," and he smiled grimly.

"We don't want any reward. We simply want to get that four thousand dollars back," returned Sam. "And we would like to put that fellow in prison for the way he treated our college chum."

"What will you do with the horse and cutter?"

"If there is a livery stable handy, I think I'll put the horse up there," answered Sam. "He is evidently in no condition to be driven farther at present. I'll notify Mr. Sanderson about it." And so it was arranged.

A little while later, after the two boys had walked around to the police station with the officer and given such particulars as they were able concerning the assault and robbery, Sam and Spud started on the return to the Bray farmhouse. When they arrived there, they found that Dr. Havens and Dr. Wallington had come in some time before. By the directions of the head of Brill the physician from

Ashton had given Songbird a thorough examination and had treated him with some medicine from his case.

"The cut on his head is rather a deep one," said the doctor to the boys, "but fortunately it is not serious, nor will there be any bad effects from the blow on his chin. He can thank his stars though that the crack on his head did not fracture his skull."

"We are going to take him back to Brill in a large sleigh," said Dr. Wallington, "and then I think the best he can do will be to go to bed."

"Oh, I can't do that!" broke in Songbird, who was still on the couch, propped up by pillows. "I've got to get to Mr. Sanderson's and explain how the thing happened."

"You had better let me do that, Songbird," answered Sam, kindly. "I can drive over there and Spud can go with me. You just let us know exactly how it occurred." This, of course, was after the boys had related the particulars of their failure to catch the fleeing criminal at Dentonville.

"It happened so quickly that I hardly realized what was taking place," answered the would-be poet of Brill. "I was driving along from Knoxbury, where I had been to the bank for Mr. Sanderson, when I came to the spot where I suppose you found me. Just as I reached there a man in a heavy overcoat, and with a thick fur cap pulled over his face so that I could hardly see him, stepped in front of the cutter.

"Say! can you tell me where these people live?" he asked me, and thrust a sheet of paper towards me. 'I've lost my eye-glasses, and I can't see to read without them.'

"I took the paper he handed out and started to look at some writing on it which was very indistinct. As I bent over the paper the man swung a club or something in the air and struck me on the head. Then, as I tried to leap up and defend myself, he hit me another blow on the chin. That seemed to knock me clean out of the cutter; and that is all I know about it."

"Then you don't know where that fellow came from?" queried Spud.

"No more than that he came from the bushes beside the road." Songbird seemed to meditate for a moment. "Now I come to think of it though, maybe that's the same fellow that watched me go into the bank at Knoxbury and get the money for Mr. Sanderson!" he cried, suddenly.

"It was a very unwise move on Mr. Sanderson's part to have you get that money for him in cash," observed Dr. Wallington. "I do not understand why he could not have transacted his business with a check, especially if it was certified."

"I don't know much about that part of it," answered Songbird, "excepting he told me that the old man with whom he was doing business was something of a crank and didn't believe in banks or checks, and said he wanted nothing but solid cash. It's a pity now that Mr. Sanderson didn't use a check," and Songbird heaved a deep sigh.

"But what did you just say about a man watching you when you went into the bank?" questioned Sam.

"Oh, I noticed that fellow hanging around the building just as I went in," returned Songbird. "He was asking the janitor about the trains out of town, and the reason I noticed him was because he had a peculiar stutter and whistle when he talked. He went like this," and Songbird imitated a man who was stuttering badly, ending in a faint whistle.

"Great Scott! A fellow ought to know a man who talked like that anywhere," was Spud's comment. "Should be able to pick him out in the dark," and at this sally even Dr. Wallington smiled faintly.

"Of course I'm not sure that that man had anything to do with it," went on Songbird. "But he was the only fellow around who seemed to notice me when I got the money. When the bills were passed over to me, there were forty one-hundred-dollar bills. I took them to a little side stand, to place them in a wallet Mr. Sanderson had lent me, and then I wrapped the wallet in a piece of paper with a stout string around it. As I did this I noticed the man who stuttered and whistled peering at me hungrily through a side window of the bank."

"And the fellow wore a heavy overcoat and a fur cap?" questioned Sam.

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Then it is more than likely he was the guilty party," remarked Spud.

"But hold on a minute!" broke in Sam. "You got the money at Knoxbury, and this attack took place on the road above here, which is at least seven miles from that place. Now, if the man who did the deed was at the bank when you drew the money, how did he get here in time to hold you up?"

"I don't know about that, Sam; but I didn't leave Knoxbury immediately after getting the money. I had an errand to do for Minnie. She wanted me to pick out a – er – a necktie for my birthday, and I – well, I looked around two or three stores, trying to find something nice to take back to her. I bought two books of poetry, but I don't know where they are now."

"We found them on the road, and they are out in the cutter," answered Sam. "Spud, you might bring them in and give them to Songbird."

"The errands kept me in town for about half an hour after I was at the bank," continued the youth who had been attacked.

"And where had you left Mr. Sanderson's cutter in the meantime?"

"Right in front of the bank building, the horse tied to a post."

"That would give the man time to get another turnout in which to follow you," said Sam.

"But if he did that, I don't see how he got ahead of you."

"Well, maybe he didn't, and maybe it was some one else who did the deed," returned Sam.

"You had better not worry your head too much about this affair, Mr. Powell," said Dr. Havens. "That crack on the head might have been more serious, but at the same time you ought to take care of yourself for a day or two at least."

"Then you don't think I ought to go to Mr. Sanderson's?" queried the would-be poet of the college.

"Not just yet. If you feel stronger you might go there to-morrow, or the day after."

"Then will you go, Sam, and try to explain matters?" questioned Songbird, eagerly.

"Of course I'll go, Songbird."

"And I'll go with him," added Spud.

A large sleigh had been brought to the farmhouse by Dr. Wallington, and Songbird was placed in this and made as comfortable as possible among the robes and blankets which it contained. Mr. Bray, the owner of the farm, had been up in the timber bringing down some firewood, and now, when he approached, the others saw that he had tied behind his sled an extra horse.

"Hello! Where did that horse come from?" cried Sam. "Is it yours?"

"No, 'tain't mine," said Timothy Bray. "I found it up in the woods right near the road yonder," and he pointed with his hand as he spoke.

"Found that horse in the woods!" cried Spud. "Then that explains it."

"It sure does," returned Sam.

"Explains what?" demanded Timothy Bray. "What's goin' on down here anyway?" he continued, looking at his wife and then at the others.

"Oh, Timothy! an awful thing has happened!" cried Mrs. Bray, and then she and the others gave the farmer a few of the particulars. He listened with mouth wide open, and then looked at the horse which he had found.

"I guess you are right!" he exclaimed. "That feller got this horse in Knoxbury. It's one that belongs to Hoover, the livery stable man. I know him on account of this brand on his left flank. It's a horse Cy Tamen used to own and swapped for a bay mare."

"Then I think that explains it," declared Sam. "That rascal saw Songbird get the money, and he at once went to the livery stable and hired the horse and followed Songbird to the spot where the attack was made. More than likely he passed Songbird on the road."

"That's just what he did!" cried the youth who had been struck down. "I remember now! I was busy composing some poetry when I noticed a fellow on horseback go past me and disappear around a turn in the road, and that was just a few minutes before that fellow came up with a sheet of paper, and knocked me senseless."

"I believe you have made out a pretty clear case," was Dr. Wallington's comment. "Now if we can only reach that man who stuttered and whistled, I think we shall have the culprit."

"We telephoned ahead from Dentonville. If they can only locate him on the train it will be all right," answered Sam. "But you must remember we didn't have very much of a description to go by."

"Yes, and that fellow may be fixed to change his appearance a good deal," added Spud. "A man isn't going to get his hands on four thousand dollars without doing all he possibly can to get away with it, especially when he knows that if he is caught he will be sent to prison."

"What am I going to do with this horse?" questioned Timothy Bray.

"You had better keep that animal in your stable until the livery man from Knoxbury calls for him," answered Dr. Wallington.

"He'll have to pay me for doing it," was Mr. Bray's reply. "Every time I go to Knoxbury, Hoover charges me an outrageous price for putting up at his stable, and now I can get even with him," and he chuckled over the thought.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE SANDERSON HOME

It was just about supper time when Sam, accompanied by Spud, drove into the lane beside the Sanderson farmhouse, which was lit up from end to end.

Evidently Minnie Sanderson, the pretty daughter of the farmer, had been on the watch, for as they approached the house she came out on a side piazza to meet them.

"Why, Songbird! what kept you so long?" she cried, and then added: "Who's that with you?"

"It isn't Songbird, Minnie," answered Sam, after he sprang out of the cutter, followed by Spud. "We've got some news for you."

"Oh, Sam Rover!" exclaimed the girl. "And Will Jackson! Whatever brought you here? Where is Songbird – do you know anything about him?"

"Yes, we do; and that is what brought us here," answered Sam.

"Oh, Sam! you don't mean that – that something has happened to John?" faltered the girl, turning pale.

"Yes, something did happen, Minnie, but don't be alarmed – he isn't hurt very much. Come into the house and we'll tell you and your father all about it."

"Hurt! Oh, are you sure it isn't serious? Now please don't hold anything back."

"I'll give you my word, Minnie, it isn't serious. The doctor said he would be as well as ever in a few days, but he is rather knocked out, and the doctor said he had better not try to come here. So then he asked Spud and me to come."

While Sam was speaking he and Spud had led the girl back into the house. She was very much agitated and her manner showed it.

"But what was it, Sam? Do tell me. Did that horse run away with him? I know John isn't much of a driver, and when he gets to composing poetry he doesn't notice things and becomes so careless –"

"No, Minnie, it was not that. Where is your father? We'll go to him and then we'll tell you the whole story."

"What's this I hear?" came from the dining-room, where Mr. Sanderson rested in a Morris chair, with his sprained ankle perched on a footstool. "Where is John? And what about that money he was to get for me?"

"Good evening, Mr. Sanderson," said Sam, coming in and shaking hands, followed by Spud. "We've got some bad news for you, but please don't blame Songbird – I mean John – for I am sure he was not to blame."

"That's right!" broke in Spud. "What happened might have occurred to any of us. I think we ought to be thankful that Songbird – that's the name we all call John, you know – wasn't killed."

"Oh, but do tell me what did happen!" pleaded Minnie.

"And what about my money – is that safe?" demanded Mr. Sanderson.

"No, Mr. Sanderson. I am sorry to say the fellow who attacked Songbird got away with it."

"Gone! My four thousand dollars gone!" ejaculated the farmer. "Don't tell me that. I can't afford to lose any such amount. Why! it's the savings of years!" and his face showed his intense anxiety.

"Oh, so John was attacked! Who did it? I suppose they must have half killed the poor boy in order to get the money away from him," wailed Minnie.

"We might as well tell you the whole story from beginning to end," answered Sam, and then, after he and Spud had taken off their overcoats and gloves, both plunged into all the details of the occurrence as they knew them.

"And he was hit on the head and on the chin! Oh, how dreadful!" burst out Minnie. "And are you positive, Sam, it was not serious?"

"That is what Dr. Havens said, and he made a close examination in the presence of Dr. Wallington."

"He ought to have been more careful," said Mr. Sanderson, bitterly.

"But, Pa! how could he have been?" interposed the daughter.

"Oh, in lots of ways. He might have placed that money inside of his shirt," answered the father. "It don't do to carry four thousand dollars around just as if it was – a – a – book of poetry or something like that," he added, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Pa, I think it's real mean of you to talk that way!" flared up Minnie. "John told me that he didn't much like the idea of bringing that four thousand dollars in cash from the bank, but he undertook the errand just to please you."

"Humph! Well, I was foolish to send him on the errand. I should have got some man who knew how to take care of such an amount of cash."

"Mr. Sanderson, I don't think it's fair for you to blame Songbird," broke in Spud. "He did the best he could, and, of course, he had no idea that he was going to be attacked."

"It's all well enough for you to talk, young man," broke out the farmer, angrily; "it wasn't your four thousand dollars that was stolen. I wanted that money to pay off the mortgage on this farm. It's due to-morrow, and the reason I wanted cash was because old Grisley insisted on cash and nothing else. He lost a lot of money in the bank years ago, and that soured him, so he wouldn't take a check nohow. Now what I'm going to do if I can't pay that mortgage, I don't know. And me down here with a sprained ankle, too!" he added with increasing bitterness.

"You'll have to tell Mr. Grisley to wait for his money," said Sam. "When he learns the particulars of this affair he ought to be willing to wait."

"If I could only walk I'd get on the trail of that thief somehow," muttered Mr. Sanderson. "It's a shame I've got to sit here and do nothin' when four thousand dollars of mine is floatin' away, nobody knows where."

"We have notified the police and sent telegrams ahead, just as I told you," answered Sam. "I don't see what more we can do at present. Songbird was attacked so suddenly that he isn't sure that the fellow who did it is the same fellow he saw around the Knoxbury bank or not. But if he is the same fellow, we have a pretty fair description of him, and sooner or later the authorities may be able to run him down."

"Oh, I know the police!" snorted the farmer. "They ain't worth a hill of beans."

"Well, Songbird told me to tell you that if the money is not recovered, he will do all he can to make good the loss," continued Sam.

"Make good the loss? Has he got four thousand dollars?" questioned the farmer, curiously.

"Oh, no! Songbird isn't as wealthy as all that. He has only his regular allowance. But he said he'd work and earn the money, if he had to."

"Humph! How is he going to earn it – writing poetry? They don't pay much for that kind of writing, to my way of thinking."

"Now, Pa, please don't get so excited," soothed the daughter. "Let us be thankful that John wasn't killed. If he had been, I never would have forgiven you for having sent him on that errand."

"Oh, now, don't you pitch into me, Minnie!" cried the father. "I've lost my four thousand dollars and that's bad enough. If I can't pay that mortgage, Grisley may foreclose and then you and me will be out of a home."

"Nothing like that will happen, Mr. Sanderson," said Sam.

"I don't know why."

"The mortgage is on this farm, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Is it the only mortgage you have, if I may ask?"

"It is."

"And what do you consider the farm worth?"

"Well, I was offered eight thousand dollars for it last year, and I refused to sell."

"Then I think it will be an easy matter to arrange to have the mortgage taken up by somebody else. Possibly my father or my uncle will do it."

"Will they?" demanded Mr. Sanderson, eagerly. "Well, of course, that would be some help, but, at the same time, it wouldn't bring my four thousand dollars back," he added glumly.

After that Minnie demanded to know more concerning Songbird's condition, and the two youths gave her every possible detail.

"If I had a telephone here I might send word to Ashton to find out if they had tracked that rascal yet," said Mr. Sanderson. "But they asked so much money to put a telephone in over here I didn't have 'em do it."

"Where is the nearest telephone?" questioned Spud.

"Nothin' closer nor the railroad station at Busby's Crossing."

"That's only half a mile away," put in Sam. "We might drive over there now and see if there is anything new."

"You wait until you have had your supper," interposed Minnie. "It's all ready. I was expecting John, you know," and she blushed slightly.

"But if your father is anxious to get word –" began the Rover boy.

"Oh, I suppose you might as well wait and have somethin' to eat first," said the farmer. "That will give the authorities time to do somethin', if they are goin' to."

In the expectation of having Songbird to supper, Minnie, with the aid of a young hired girl, had provided quite an elaborate meal, to which it is perhaps needless to state the young collegians did full justice. Then the youths lost no time in driving off in the cutter to Busby's Crossing, where they were lucky enough to find the station agent still in charge, although on the point of locking up, for no more trains would stop at the Crossing that night.

The boys first telephoned to the college and to Ashton, and then to Dentonville and the railroad stations up the line. To get the various connections took considerable time, and to get "information that was no information at all," as Spud expressed it, took much longer still. The sum total of it was that no one had been able to trace the man in the heavy overcoat and with the heavy fur cap, and no one had the slightest idea about what had become of that much-wanted individual.

"It's going to be like looking for the proverbial pin in the haystack," remarked Spud.

"It's too bad," returned Sam, gloomily. "I did think we'd have some sort of encouraging word to take back to Mr. Sanderson."

"Say! he's pretty bitter over the loss of that money, isn't he, Sam?"

"You can't blame him for that. I'd be bitter too."

"It looks to me as if he might make Minnie break with Songbird if that money wasn't recovered."

"Possibly, Spud. Although he ought to know as well as we do that it was not Songbird's fault."

"I'm glad to see Minnie sticks up for our chum, aren't you?"

"Oh, Minnie's all right and always has been. She thinks just as much of Songbird as he does of her. Once in a while she pokes a little fun at his so-called poetry, but Songbird doesn't mind, so it doesn't matter."

When the boys returned to the farmhouse Minnie ran out to meet them, and from their manner saw at once that they had no news worth mentioning. They could see that the girl had been crying, and now it was all she could do to keep from bursting into tears again.

"Oh, Minnie, you ought not to take it so hard," said Sam, kindly. "Of course, to lose four thousand dollars is a terrible blow, but maybe they'll get the money back some way, or at least a part of it."

"It isn't the money, Sam," cried the girl, with something like a catch in her voice. "It's the way papa acts. He seems to think it was all John's fault. Oh! I can't bear it! I know I can't!" she suddenly sobbed, and then ran away and up the stairs to her bedroom, closing the door behind her.

CHAPTER VII

SAM AND GRACE

"This whole affair is certainly a tough proposition," remarked Sam, when, about half an hour later, he and Spud were on their way back to Brill.

The time had been spent in telling Mr. Sanderson how they had failed to obtain any satisfaction over the telephone, and in listening to the farmer's tirade against poor Songbird.

"Old Sanderson certainly pitched into Songbird," returned Spud. "I declare if anybody called me down that way, I think I'd be apt to get into a regular fight with him."

"He is very much excited, Spud. I think when he cools down he will see matters in a different light. Just at present the loss of the four thousand dollars has completely upset him."

"I suppose he pitched into Minnie even more than he pitched into us."

"Maybe he did. I must say I am mighty sorry for that poor girl."

"What are you going to tell Songbird?"

"I suppose we'll have to tell him the truth, Spud, although we'll have to smooth over Mr. Sanderson's manner as much as we can. There's no use in hurting Songbird's feelings, especially now when he's broken up physically as well as mentally."

When they reached the college they found that Songbird had insisted upon it that he be taken to the room he occupied with Sam instead of to the sick ward. He was in bed, but wide awake and anxious to hear all they might have to say.

"Of course I knew Mr. Sanderson would blame me," he said, after asking a great number of questions. "Four thousand dollars is a heap of money." He knitted his brows for a moment, and then cast an anxious glance at Sam. "How did Minnie really seem to take it?" he continued.

"She sided with you, Songbird, when her father talked against you," answered Sam.

"She did, did she? Good for her!" and Songbird's face lit up for an instant. "She's true blue, that girl is!"

"Now, the best thing I think you can do is to try to go to sleep and get a good night's rest," went on Sam. "This worrying about what can't be helped won't do you any good."

"Yes, but, Sam, what am I going to do if that money isn't gotten back? The Sandersons can't afford to lose it, and even if I went to work right away, it would take me a long, long time to earn four thousand dollars."

"I have been thinking that over, Songbird, and as the money was to be used in paying off a mortgage, I think I can arrange the matter, providing the holder of the present mortgage won't extend the time for it. I think I can get my father or my uncle to take the mortgage."

"Very good, Sam, so far as it goes. But that wouldn't be getting the money back. If it isn't recovered, I'll feel that I am under a moral obligation to earn it somehow and give it to Mr. Sanderson."

"We'll talk about it later. Now you've got to go to sleep," were Sam's concluding words, and after that he refused to say any more. He undressed and threw himself on his bed, and was soon asleep. But poor Songbird turned and twisted, and it is doubtful if his eyes closed until well along in the early morning hours.

On the following day Sam had several classes to attend, as well as to work on a theme; but as soon as these tasks were over he obtained permission to leave the college to find out, if possible, if anything had been done in the matter of the robbery. He visited Ashton and had an interview with the police, and then used the telephone in several directions. But it was all of no avail; nothing whatever had been seen or heard of the rascal who had made the attack upon Songbird.

"I'm afraid it will be one of those mysteries which will never be explained," mused the youngest Rover boy, as he jumped into the cutter which he was using and drove away from Ashton. "It's too bad! Oh! how I'd like to get my hands on that rascal, whoever he may be!"

It was not until two days later, when Songbird was once more able to be about and had insisted on being driven over to the Sanderson place, that Sam had a chance to go on the sleighride with Grace Laning. He drove over to Hope Seminary about four o'clock in the afternoon, having sent word ahead that he was coming. Grace was waiting for him, and the pair speedily drove away, wistfully watched by a number of the girl students.

"It's so nice of you to think of me, Sam, when you've got so much to think about on poor Songbird's account," said Grace, as they were speeding out of the seminary grounds. "How is he?"

"Oh, he's doing better than we expected, Grace. He insisted on being driven over to the Sandersons this afternoon. Stanley took him over, because none of us thought Songbird was strong enough to drive himself."

"I want you to give me all the particulars of the attack," said the girl, and this the youth did readily.

"It must have been the man who stuttered and whistled – the fellow Songbird saw at the Knoxbury bank," declared the girl, positively. "Wouldn't it pay to get a detective on his track?"

"Perhaps so, Grace. I think Songbird is going to mention that to Mr. Sanderson."

Sam did not want the girl to worry too much over what had occurred and so soon changed the subject. They talked about college and seminary matters, and then about affairs at home, and about matters in New York City.

"I just got another letter from Nellie to-day," said Grace. "She says that the apartment she and Tom have rented is perfectly lovely – every bit as nice as the one occupied by Dick and Dora."

"I'm glad they like it, Grace. But, believe me, it will be some job for Tom to settle down and be a staid married man! He was always so full of fun."

"Why, the idea, Sam Rover! Don't you think a man can be married and still keep full of fun?"

"Well, maybe, if he got such a nice girl as Nellie. Just the same, I'll wager Tom sometimes wishes he was back in good old Brill."

"Indeed! And do you think you'll wish you were back at Brill if ever you get married?" she asked slyly.

"Oh, I didn't say anything about that, Grace. I – I –"

"Well, it's just about the same thing," and Grace tossed her pretty face a trifle.

"Oh, now look here, Grace! You haven't any call to talk that way. I suppose when I get married I'll be just as happy as Dick or Tom. That is, providing I get the right girl," and he gazed at the face beside him very ardently.

"Sam Rover, you had better watch where you are driving, unless you want to run us into the rocks and bushes," cried the girl, suddenly. For, forgetting the steed for a moment, Sam had allowed the horse to turn to one side of the somewhat rough highway.

"I'll attend to the horse, never fear," he answered. "I never yet saw the horse that I couldn't manage. But speaking of letters, Grace, I had one from Dick day before yesterday and he made a suggestion that pleased me very much."

"What was that?"

"He suggested that if I graduate from Brill this coming June, as I expect to do, that we make up a party to occupy two or three automobiles and go off on a regular tour this summer, taking in the Middle West and maybe some other points."

"Oh, Sam, how grand! Of course he was going to take Dora along?"

"Yes. His idea was that if matters could be arranged at the offices in New York, that he and Dora, as well as Tom and Nellie, would go along and that we would go too, along with some others – say enough to make at least two automobile loads."

"Oh, I'd love an auto tour like that! Couldn't we have just the best times ever?" and Grace's pretty eyes sparkled in anticipation.

"When I got the letter I thought the same, and I also thought we might ask Songbird and Minnie – Dora and Nellie could chaperon her, you know. But now I don't know what we'll do about them. Most likely Songbird wouldn't feel like going if that money wasn't recovered, and more than likely Mr. Sanderson wouldn't let Minnie go."

"Oh, dear! I suppose the loss of that money will hang over Songbird like a big cloud forever," pouted the girl. "It's too bad! I don't see why Mr. Sanderson couldn't have paid that mortgage with a check."

"Just exactly what we all say now, Grace. But that doesn't do any good."

"Are you sure you are going to graduate, Sam?"

"I certainly hope so. I am going to try my best not only to graduate, Grace, but to get as close to the top of the class as possible. Dick and Tom had to leave before they had a chance to graduate, so I want to make a good showing for the Rover family."

"It's the same with me, Sam. Nellie left to get married, and so did Cousin Dora, so I've got to do the best I can for our family next June."

"Then you hope to get through too?"

"Of course."

"How are the teachers treating you these days? Have you had any more trouble with Miss Harrow, or the others?"

"Not the least bit. They are all perfectly lovely, and Miss Harrow is so sorry that she ever thought Nellie had taken that diamond ring."

"Well, she ought to feel sorry," responded Sam. "It certainly put Nellie to a lot of trouble. Did that gardener who put the diamond ring in the inkwell ever come back to work at the seminary?"

"Andy Royce? Yes, he is working there. I have seen him several times. He is quite a changed man, and I don't think he drinks at all."

"Well, that's one good job done, Grace. That man's worst enemy was liquor."

Sam had arranged that they might remain out until nine o'clock that evening, and so drove Grace over to Knoxbury, where they went to quite a fashionable restaurant for dinner. Here they met several young men and girls they knew, and all had a most delightful time during the repast.

When Sam went outside to get his horse and cutter, which had been placed in a livery stable near by, he was surprised to encounter the very man he had mentioned but a short while before, Andy Royce, the gardener who had once been discharged from Hope Seminary for not attending properly to his duties and who, through the intercession of the Rovers and the Lanings, had been reinstated in his position.

"Good evening, Mr. Rover," said Andy Royce, respectfully, as he touched the cap he wore.

"Hello, Royce! What are you doing here?" asked the youth.

"Oh, I just drove over to Knoxbury to get some things for the seminary," replied Royce; and then stepping closer he added in a lower tone: "I saw you going into Meeker's restaurant a while ago and I stayed here to see you when you came out. I'd like to talk to you a bit."

"All right. What have you to say?" returned Sam, briskly. "I haven't got much time to waste."

"I wanted to ask you about the young fellow who was knocked down and robbed the other afternoon," went on Andy Royce, as the two walked away, out of the hearing of the others in the livery stable. "Somebody told me that the fellow who was robbed said a man did it who stuttered and whistled."

"Well, we rather think that man did it, but we are not certain," answered Sam. He glanced sharply at the gardener. "Do you know anything of that fellow?"

"I think I do, Mr. Rover. You see it's this way: Several years ago I used to live out West, in Denver and Colorado Springs, and I used to know a man out there who went by the name of Blackie Crowden. He used to stutter fearfully and had a funny little whistle with it."

"Out in Denver, you say? That's a long way from here."

"I know it is, sir, but after I left I heard that this Blackie Crowden had come to Center Haven, and that's only twenty miles from here. And that ain't all," continued Andy Royce, earnestly. "I was in this town about a week ago and I am almost certain I saw this same Blackie Crowden on the street. I tried to reach him so as to speak to him, but he got away from me in a crowd that had come up to see a runaway."

"This is interesting," returned Sam. "Tell me how this Blackie Crowden looks," he went on. And then as Andy Royce described the individual he added slowly: "That seems to tally with the description Songbird gave of the fellow who looked at him through the bank window when he was placing the money away. More than likely that fellow was that same Blackie Crowden."

"Well, if it was Blackie Crowden, why don't you have him locked up?" queried the gardener.

"Perhaps I will, providing he is still in Center Haven," answered Sam.

CHAPTER VII

SOMETHING ABOUT BLACKIE CROWDEN

When Sam returned to Brill late that evening, after having spent a most delightful time with Grace, he found that Songbird had returned from the Sandersons' homestead some time before. The would-be poet of the college was working hard over some of his lessons, and it was plainly to be seen that he was in anything but a good humor.

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