

Standish Burt L.

Dick Merriwell's Trap: or, The Chap Who Bungled



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CHAPTER I – A FARDALE VICTORY

For a moment as he lay on the ground holding the ball for Dick Merriwell to kick the goal that must win the game with Hudsonville for Fardale Military Academy, Hal Darrell, the left half-back, was seized by a strong temptation to do wrong. How easy it would be to spoil that kick! A slight shifting of the ball just as the captain of the Fardale eleven kicked, and the attempt for a goal would be ruined.

There was bitterness in Hal's heart, for he realized that Dick was covering himself with glory, while up in the grand stand sat June Arlington, a thrilled witness to everything that had occurred during that most thrilling game.

At first Hal Darrell had refused to play on the team during this game, but because June had urged him to reconsider his determination not to play, Hal had humbled his proud spirit and offered to take part in it. But even then, to his chagrin, he was left among the substitutes until Earl Gardner, who had been given his position when he withdrew from the team, was injured so badly that he could not continue in the game. Then Dick Merriwell thought of Hal Darrell's desertion of the team and at first wanted to punish him for it by leaving him on the substitutes' bench, but his better nature conquered and the spirit of forgiveness reigned triumphant.

Hal knew nothing of Dick's temptation to call out another player to take Gardner's place, which would have humiliated and infuriated Darrell to an unspeakable degree. Hal was not aware that Dick fought the temptation down, crushed it, conquered it, and did what he believed was best for Fardale, regardless of his own inclination and feelings.

So Hal had been given his old position as half-back and had played a steady game, contributing greatly to Fardale's success, although he made no individual play of brilliancy that distinguished him above the others.

At the same time he had seen Dick make a great run down the field, had seen him leap clean over one tackler, and had witnessed a touch-down that tied the score between Hudsonville and Fardale. If Dick kicked the goal the game would be won.

If he failed it would most certainly remain a tie, as there was not enough more playing time to enable either side to score again, unless some amazing fluke should take place.

So as Hal lay on the ground, holding the ball, he was tempted. Under any circumstances Fardale would come out of the game with flying colors. During the first half she had been outplayed by the big Hudsonville chaps, who had secured two touch-downs and a goal. Her line had been weak, and she had seemed to have very little chance of making a point. It looked like a hopeless battle against overpowering odds.

But Dick had never given up for a moment. He had kept up the courage of his men. And all through the first half Obediah Tubbs, the fat boy who played center on Fardale, had continued to hammer at Glennon, the big center of the opposing team, until finally all the fight and sand had been taken out of the fellow, and the strongest point in Hudsonville's line became the weakest.

The cadets took advantage of that weakness in the second half. The most of their gains were made through center. Glennon, limp as a rag, asked to go out of the game; but King, the captain, angrily told him to stand up to his work, knowing it would discourage the others to lose the big fellow, who had never yet failed to play through any game he had entered.

And when Dick Merriwell had been hurt and it seemed he must leave the field, Hal had seen June Arlington – forgetting appearances, remembering only that Dick was stretched on the ground and might not rise again – run out from the grand stand and kneel to lift his head.

Standing apart, his heart beating hotly, Darrell saw her give back to Dick a locket containing her picture – a locket she had given to him once before when he had risked his life to save her from some savage dogs which attacked her on a lonely road on the outskirts of Fardale, and then demanded again after her brother had told her some untrue tales about Dick.

“She would not let me have it when I asked her for it after she got it back,” thought Hal. “But now she gives it to him again! And she does not mind who sees her!”

It seemed very strange for a proud, high-bred girl like June Arlington to do such a thing before the assembled spectators. She had been governed by her heart, not her head. Had she paused to consider, she would have been dismayed; but she scarcely knew how she reached Dick, and she seemed to come to a realization of her position first as she knelt and held his head. Then she had courage not to lose her nerve, and she gave him the locket as a “charm” to restore his good luck.

It was after this that Dick made the run that set thirty “faithful” Fardale rooters howling mad with joy. He did it even though he reeled and could scarcely stand when he rose to his feet. He did it by casting off his physical weakness and calling to his command all the astonishing reserve force of a perfectly trained young athlete. But for his training and his splendid physical condition, he would have been carried from the field, done up.

In the moment of his temptation Hal realized that Dick had trusted him perfectly in calling him to hold the ball.

“But he’s made me help him win glory in her eyes!” was the stinging thought that followed.

However, he conquered the temptation. As Dick balanced himself, Darrell carefully lowered the ball toward the ground. The seam was uppermost and everything was ready for the kick that would decide whether the game should end a tie or Fardale should leave the field victorious.

Darrell’s hand was perfectly steady as Dick advanced quickly and kicked. Fairly over the middle of the bar sailed the ball, and the “faithful” shrieked and howled and thumped one another on the back and had fits.

But they were not the only ones who had fits. Apart at one side of the field Chester Arlington, June’s brother, and a student at Fardale, walked round and round in a circle, muttering and almost frothing at the mouth. Then he started for the grand stand.

“I’ll tell her what I think!” he grated.

But he stopped and stared at the field, where Hudsonville was making a listless pretense of playing during the few moments that remained. He seemed to go into a trance and stand there until the whistle blew and the game was over. He saw the “faithful” go tearing on to the gridiron and surround Dick, and he could bear to see no more.

“I believe I’ll have to kill him yet!” he snarled, as he turned away.

He walked blindly into the rail beyond which the spectators were slowly filing out from the enclosure. Some of them stared at him wonderingly, noting his wildly glaring eyes and hearing his incoherent mutterings.

“What ails that chap?” said a man.

“Gone bughouse,” intimated another. “Who is he?”

“Don’t know. Saw him with that pretty girl who ran out on the field when Merriwell was hurt.”

“He’s a Fardale boy?”

“Yes.”

“Must be crazy with joy. Can’t blame him after seeing his team win in that way.”

Chester crawled under the rail and bumped against a man.

“Get out of the way, you old fool!” he snarled.

“Who are you talking to?” demanded the man, in astonishment and anger. “Who are you calling an old fool?”

“You! you! you! You ran into me – me, son of D. Roscoe Arlington! Do you hear?”

“You’re a crazy ass!” said the man, and walked on.

Somehow those words seemed to bring Chester to his senses in a measure.

“Brace up, old man!” he muttered huskily. “Why, I wouldn’t have Merriwell see you like this for a fortune!”

He passed out through the gate with others and started away. Then he bethought himself and turned back to where a carriage, containing a driver, waited. He got into the carriage.

“Go on,” he growled.

“But the young lady, sir,” said the driver; “your sister.”

“Oh, yes!” mumbled Chester. “I had forgotten her. We’ll wait for her. Darrell is a thundering fool!”

“I beg your pardon, sir?” said the driver.

“Nothing that concerns you,” growled Arlington, and he sat like a graven image, waiting for June.

CHAPTER II – DICK STOPS A RUNAWAY

The sweat-stained, bruised, battered, triumphant Fardale lads peeled off their football armor in the dressing-room beneath the stand. Earl Gardner was there, barely able to walk, but supremely happy. Dick was happy, too. Scudder, partly recovered from a collapse, was shaking hands with everybody.

“It was a shame!” said Ted Smart in fun. “I hated to see us do it! They were so sure of the game that it seemed like robbery to take it.”

“By Jim! I’ll be sore to-morrer!” piped Obediah Tubbs. “Never got no sech drubbin’ before sence dad used to lay me over his knee an’ swat me with the razor-strop.”

“But you put Glennon on Queer Street,” smiled Dick. “And that was the finest thing I ever saw happen to a bruiser like him.”

“He! he! he!” came from the fat boy. “I kinder thought I might git called down fer some of that business, but the empire didn’t dast say a word.”

“I should opine not,” put in Brad Buckhart, the Texan. “He permitted Glennon to start the slugging-match, and he couldn’t say anything when it became too hot for the big tough.”

“Both umpire and referee were against us,” grunted Bob Singleton.

“But we won out against all odds, fellows,” said Dick cheerily. “And I am proud of you!”

“It’s us that sus-sus-sus-should be pup-pup-pup-proud of you!” chattered Chip Jolliby, his protruding Adam’s apple bobbing as it always did when he was excited and tried to talk fast.

“That’s right! that’s right!” cried the boys. “Captain Dick was the one who turned the trick and won the game!”

“No, fellows,” said Dick earnestly. “I did what I could, but to no one individual belongs the glory of this game. It was a victory won by the splendid courage and staying qualities of the whole team. It was the kind of courage that wins great battles. It showed that this team is made up of the right kind of stuff. We were stronger at the finish than at the start, while they were weaker. It’s staying power that counts.”

Dick was right. And it is “staying power” that counts in the great game of life, just the same as in football. A fellow may have ability and be brilliant in his accomplishments, but if he has not “staying power” he will be beaten out every time by the tireless, persistent, dogged plodder.

The boys were not able to bathe and be rubbed down there, so they hustled on their clothes and prepared to make for the hotel, where they might cleanse and refresh themselves after their successful struggle.

“Thunder!” moaned Tubbs. “How hungry I be! Don’t think I ever was so hungry before in all my life.”

Then it was that some of the faithful appeared with pies of various sorts, procured at a bakery in town, and delivered them to the fat boy, who was so fond of pies that he ate all he could even while in training, the one who presented them making a humorous speech.

When the boys piled into the big carryall that was to take them to the hotel Obediah had his lap full of pies. Holding one in each hand, he proceeded to devour them, a supremely happy look on his full-moon face. Along the route he was observed with amusement, and he laughed and waved his pies at those who laughed at him.

It seemed that almost half a hundred small boys were waiting for the Fardale team to appear, and they ran after the carryall, cheering and calling to one another.

“Well, we seem to have won favor with the kids, anyhow,” said Dick.

When the hotel was reached the boys leaped out and hurried in.

Dick was ascending the steps when a carriage bearing Chester Arlington and his sister drew up. Chester was talking to June in a manner that showed his temper. When he saw Dick, he ordered the driver to drive on, but June said:

“You will stop here. I am going to get out here.”

“Not if I know it!” grated her brother, his face pale with anger. “You’ll never speak to that fellow again if I can prevent it!”

“Get down, driver,” said June firmly, “and assist me to alight, if my brother is not gentleman enough to do so.”

The driver sprang down at once, but Arlington grasped his sister’s arm to restrain her.

At this moment a big dog pounced upon another in front of the building, and the fighting, snarling animal was under the feet of the horse in a twinkling. With a snort, the animal sprang away, the reins being jerked from the hands of the driver.

Arlington had partly risen to his feet, and the sudden leap of the horse flung him backward over the seat to the ground.

June Arlington was the only occupant of the carriage as the runaway dashed wildly down the main street of the town.

Dick had witnessed this occurrence. He made a leap down the steps, but was too late to reach the horse.

Chester Arlington sat up, looking dazed and frightened.

“Stop that horse!” he cried, in genuine alarm. “A hundred dollars to the man who stops that horse!”

Even as he uttered the words, Dick Merriwell caught a bicycle from the hands of a boy who had ridden up and was standing beside his machine. On to the bicycle leaped the captain of the eleven, alighting in the saddle and catching the pedals instantly with his feet. Away he went after the runaway, somewhat slowly at first, but with swiftly increasing speed.

“Hi! hi! Runaway! Runaway!”

“Look out for that horse!”

“The girl will be hurt!”

“She may be killed!”

“Look at the fellow on the bike!”

“He can’t catch the horse!”

“Couldn’t stop him if he did!”

The crowd rushed away after the runaway, shouting loudly. Others ran out from offices and stores. In a twinkling the whole street was swarming with excited persons.

Dick bent over the handlebars and pedaled with all the strength and skill he could command. He felt that it was to be a race for life, and he set his teeth, his heart filled with the win-or-die determination that had made him remarkable on the gridiron.

A farmer turning in from another street barely reined his horse aside in time to avoid a collision. He caught a glimpse of the pale face of the girl in the carriage.

A man ran out and waved his arms at the horse, but he jumped aside when the animal came straight on without swerving.

Another dog darted after the runaway, barking furiously and adding to its terror and speed.

June turned and looked back. She saw the bicyclist coming after her, and she was not so frightened that she failed to recognize Dick Merriwell.

The dog that had barked at the horse got in Dick’s road and barely sprang aside in time. Had the wheel struck the animal Dick’s pursuit might have ended there in a twinkling.

It was astonishing how fast young Merriwell flew over the ground. He strained every nerve. Dick soon saw he was gaining. Fortunately the street was long and straight, and the runaway kept a

fairly straight course. The reins were on the ground, and it seemed that the girl could do nothing to help herself. Once she partly rose, as if to spring from the carriage.

“Don’t do it!” cried Dick. “Hold on! I’ll save you!”

Did she hear him? Whether she did or not, she sank back on the seat and looked round again.

The lad on the bicycle was nearer – he was gaining. It happened that Dick had seized a racing-wheel that was geared very high. Fortunately the road was level and fairly good for his purpose.

Out of Hudsonville tore the runaway, but Dick was close to the carriage when the horse reached the outskirts of the town. He was confident then that he would soon overtake the horse. But could he stop the animal then?

Watching for the opportunity, Dick pushed the wheel along by the side of the carriage. Not a word did he speak to the girl, and she made no appeal to him.

Strange as it may seem, all the fear had departed from June, and she was watching Dick’s efforts with curiosity and confidence. Here was a fellow to be admired. She asked herself how he would stop the horse, but she believed that somehow he would succeed.

Past the carriage Dick forged. The wheel whirled beneath him. On the hard road the hoofs of the horse beat a tattoo. The wind was whistling in the lad’s ears, but he heard it not. Cold and keen, it cut his face, but he minded it not.

Nearer, nearer, nearer. Now he was at the fore quarters of the horse, and he gathered himself for a last burst of speed, fearing the creature might see him and sheer suddenly to one side. In a sudden fine spurt he was at the head of the horse. Then his hands left the handlebars. In a twinkling he had the horse by the bit with one hand, while the fingers of the other fastened on the animal’s nostrils, closing them instantly.

The bicycle went down, and the wheels of the carriage crashed over it, but Dick had swung free, and he clung like grim death to the horse.

June Arlington watched that struggle, her heart swelling at the heroism and nerve of the boy who had ridden thus to her rescue. To her it was a grand struggle, and her faith in her savior never faltered for a second.

The horse tried to fling up his head, but the weight of the boy held it down. It seemed that his feet might strike the lad and cause him to relinquish his hold. In that case, Dick would fall beneath the iron hoofs, to be maimed or killed.

But the horse could not breathe, his nostrils being closed, and this soon caused it to show signs of weakness. Its speed decreased, and Dick, clinging there desperately, felt that the battle would be won if he could hold out a little longer.

Could he? He had made up his mind that he would – that nothing on earth should prevent it. When Dick set his mind on anything like that he always won, and this case was no exception. Little by little the horse faltered. And then, with surprising suddenness, it gave out entirely and stopped.

Dick did not relinquish his hold at once. He held on, talking to the animal and trying to allay its fears. In this he succeeded wonderfully, until he soon was confident enough to let up and permit the animal to breathe.

When the creature was fully quieted and under control, young Merriwell turned to the girl in the carriage. He was hatless, flushed, triumphant, handsome.

“You are quite safe, Miss Arlington,” he said.

“Thanks to you,” she answered, in a voice that did not tremble. “But I knew you would do it!”

Dick picked up the reins from the ground when he had succeeded in quieting the horse, and climbed into the carriage.

Two men driving out of town in pursuit of the runaway met Dick Merriwell, with June Arlington at his side, serenely driving back into town.

“By thunder!” said one of the men wonderingly. “This beats the world! He’s stopped the horse and is driving the critter back as cool as you please.”

“Who is he?” asked the other man.

“Dick Merriwell, brother of Frank Merriwell, the great Yale athlete, who used to go to school at Fardale.”

“Well, he’s a good one.”

“A good one! He’s a rip-snorter! Not many boys of his years could ’a’ done that job!”

Dick spoke to them pleasantly.

“We were after the runaway,” said one of the men; “but I rather think you don’t need none of our help.”

“Thank you, no,” said Dick. “But you might drive on a short distance and pick up that bicycle. I think it is pretty badly smashed. If you’ll bring it back to the hotel I’ll be much obliged.”

“We’ll do it,” said both men.

“Good boy! Well done!” was shouted at him from all sides as he drove along the main street toward the hotel.

When he reached the hotel he found a crowd gathered there. Chester Arlington, pale as a ghost and covered with dirt, was sitting on the steps.

The Fardale crowd was on hand to cheer Dick, but he called on them to be quiet.

“This horse is nervous enough now,” he said. “Do you want to start him off again?”

“He’d be all right with you behind him,” declared Joe Savage.

“That’s Dick Merriwell!” piped a small boy, bursting with enthusiastic admiration. “Ain’t he jest a peacherino!”

“Boy, it’s marvelous!” declared a man. “You deserve great credit. It may be that you saved this girl’s life! She shouldn’t forget that.”

“I won’t!” murmured June, loud enough for Dick to hear.

The driver took the horse by the head.

“I’ll hold him,” he said, “while you get out. I don’t know how I can thank you for keeping him from smashing the carriage and injuring himself.”

“Where is my bicycle?” asked the boy from whose hands Dick had snatched the wheel.

“Here it comes,” Dick answered, noting that the two men in the team were approaching, with the ruined bicycle held before them. “But I’m afraid you’ll never ride it again.”

“Well, that’s pretty tough on me,” said the boy, sadly, yet plainly trying to keep from showing his grief. “I won that for a prize in a race at the county fair this fall. But I ain’t going to fuss over it as long as you stopped the horse and kept her from being hurt.”

“Perhaps you’ll get another one, all right,” said Dick. “I think you will, even if I have to pay for it.”

“You won’t have to do that,” declared the man who had been among the first to express his admiration over Dick’s feat. “The girl’s brother said he’d give a hundred dollars to the one who stopped the horse. That ought to buy another wheel.”

“But I didn’t mean that I’d give it to him!” said Chester Arlington weakly.

“What?” roared the man. “What’s the difference who stopped the horse? I heard you telling since the runaway started that you are the son of D. Roscoe Arlington, the great railroad man. If that’s so your father can buy a whole bicycle-factory without going broke. You’d better keep your word.”

“You mind your business!” jerked out Chester, trying to rise from the steps to meet June, who had been assisted to the ground by Dick. “It was on his account that – ”

Then Chester’s knees buckled beneath him, and he dropped in a limp heap at the foot of the steps. With a cry, June bent over him.

“He’s hurt!” she exclaimed, in great agitation. “Chester! Chester! Speak to me, brother!”

But Chester Arlington lay white and still on the ground.

“I think he has fainted, Miss Arlington,” said Dick. “Don’t be alarmed. He may not be seriously hurt at all. The fright over your danger may have brought this on. Come, fellows, let’s carry him into the hotel.”

Brad Buckhart drew back.

“Well, I don’t care about dirtying my hands on the coyote,” he muttered.

There were others, however, who were ready enough to assist Dick, and Chester was borne into the hotel, where he was attended by one of the village doctors who had joined the crowd. In a few moments he recovered.

The doctor was unable to tell just how much Chester was hurt, and he was taken to a room for further examination and treatment. June kept close to him, betraying the greatest anxiety on his account.

Chester’s back was injured, and he did not seem to have strength enough in his legs to walk. However, as he lay on the bed, he gave his sister a reproachful look, saying:

“See what you have brought me to, June! It was all on account of your obstinacy, and – ”

“Oh, hush, Chester!” she said gently. “I am very sorry anything happened to you.”

“And you came near being killed, too. If you had – ”

“Don’t talk that way! I am all right, thanks to Mr. Merriwell.”

He started as if he had been stabbed with a keen point, his face showing pain and anger.

“That fellow! that fellow!” he panted. “That he should be the one to stop the horse! Oh, I’d given anything rather than had him save you!”

“I presume you would have preferred to see me thrown out and injured or killed!” she exclaimed.

“No,” he huskily said, “no, June! Oh, you don’t know how I felt when I realized what had happened and that you might be hurt! I tried to get up and run after the horse, but I didn’t have the strength. June, you know I – I wouldn’t have harm come to you for anything. You know it! But to have him save you!”

There was no doubting Chester Arlington’s affection for his sister; but his hatred for Dick Merriwell was equally intense.

“My dear brother!” she murmured, gently touching his hair. “Don’t be silly! Don’t worry any more. It’s all right.”

“No, no; all wrong!” he groaned.

CHAPTER III – HAPPINESS AND MISERY

Dick escaped from the crowd and from his friends and took a bath, followed by a brisk rub-down. When this was over, he donned his clothes, feeling pretty well, for all of the game he had played through, for all of his exertions in pursuing the runaway, for all of the bruises received in stopping the frightened horse.

Being in perfect physical condition, he recovered swiftly. His eyes were sparkling and there was a healthy glow in his cheeks as he hurriedly packed his stuff and prepared to take the train that was to carry the triumphant cadets back to Fardale.

He could hear the boys singing in a room across the corridor. The “faithful” were having a high old time. They were packed into that room, their arms locked about one another, howling forth the old songs of their academy, “Fair Fardale,” “The Red and Black,” and “Fardale’s Way.”

“It’s no use moaning, it’s no use groaning,
It’s no use feeling sore;
Keep on staying, keep on playing,
As you’ve done before.
Fight, you sinner; you’re a winner,
If you stick and stay;
Never give in while you’re living —
That is Fardale’s way.”

Dick smiled as he heard this familiar old song roared forth by the lusty-lunged chaps who were rejoicing over the wonderful victory. It gave him a feeling of inexpressible pleasure, and it was something he would never forget as long as he lived.

Oh, these wonderful days at Fardale! It was not likely he would forget them in after years. He had learned to love the old school as Frank Merriwell loved it before him, and he was thankful that Frank had rescued him from the lonely life in far-away Pleasant Valley beneath the shadow of the Rockies and brought him to the academy.

Not that Dick’s heart had ever ceased to turn lovingly toward the hidden valley where he had lived a peaceful, happy life, with his little cousin Felicia Delores as his sole companion and playmate near his own age. True, he often thought of the days when he had wandered alone into the woods and called about him the birds and wild creatures, every one of whom seemed to know him and fear him not a bit. True it was that he realized a change had come over him so that no longer could he call the birds and the squirrels as he had done; but still he was happy and had no desire to exchange the present for the past.

“No matter where we roam in the mystic years to come,
There are days we never shall forget,
The happy days when we, in a school beside the sea,
Cast aside the past without regret;
’Twas there sweet friendship grew ’mid hearts forever true,
And our longing souls must oft turn back
With yearnings for that time in youth’s fair golden clime
When we wore the royal red and black.

“Oh, the royal red and black!
We’ll love it to the end.

True to it we'll stand,
And true to every friend;
So rise up, boys, and cheer
For those colors bright and clear —
For the royal red and black.”

In spite of himself, Dick's eyes filled with a mist as he heard this sweet song, in which the great chorus joined in that room packed with loyal Fardale lads. His lips smiled while there was a tear in his eye, for that tear was a pearl of happiness. They were cheering! He stopped and listened. They cheered for the red and black, and then a voice cried:

“I propose the long cheer for Captain Merriwell, the royal defender of the red and black, the greatest captain Fardale ever knew, and the finest fellow who ever breathed. Let her go!”

They did let her go! It seemed that they would raise the roof. And the cheer ended with Dick's name three times shouted at the full capacity of their lusty, boyish lungs.

In his room Chester Arlington heard them, and he writhed with mental anguish that caused him to forget his bodily pain.

“Fools! fools!” he snarled. “Where is Darrell? Why doesn't he come to me? Is he ashamed because he broke his promise not to play? Well, he ought to be! He swore he wouldn't go into that game, and then he went!”

June could have told her brother that Hal offered to go into the game because she had urged him to do so, but she did not care to agitate Chester any further just then.

“You must keep still,” she said. “The doctor is going to bring back another physician and make a closer examination. You may be seriously hurt.”

“No!” snapped Chester. “I won't have it so!”

“But I hope it is not so.”

“I won't have it so! Why should I be hurt while he – while Dick Merriwell is all right? It isn't possible!”

“I hope not! I think you will be all right, Chester.”

“You're a good sister, June!” he suddenly exclaimed, looking at her. “I'm sorry you made the mistake of having anything to do with that cheap fellow Merriwell. But, June, you can never know how I felt when I saw you in that carriage and knew I could do nothing to save you. I thought I should die! But to have him save you, June – that was the bitterest pill of all!”

“Don't keep thinking about that, Chester. Just be quiet until we find out how much you are hurt. It will kill mother if you are hurt much.”

For Chester Arlington's mother doted on him. He was her pride and joy, and she had implicit confidence in him. She had permitted June to come to Fardale to satisfy June that Chester was in the right in his trouble with Dick Merriwell, but she had not fancied that June did not mean to let her brother know she was in town until after she had investigated and discovered the truth.

“I won't be hurt!” exclaimed the unfortunate lad. “Why should anything like that happen to me? But it was so strange that I had no strength in my legs when I tried to stand.”

“That is what worried the doctor.”

“Worried him?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“He was afraid your spine had been injured.”

Chester turned still paler.

“My spine?” he whispered, a look of horror on his face. “Why, if that should be, I might become a helpless cripple.”

“Oh, I don't think it's anything like that!” cried the girl, regretting that she had spoken so plainly. “I am sure it isn't.”

He lay still and stared up at the ceiling.

“A cripple!” came huskily from his lips. “What a terrible thing! And that fellow still strong and well! Nothing ever happens to him. Why is it? It's his luck – his luck!”

June knew he was thinking of Dick Merriwell, and she thought how nearly Dick had been knocked out of the game that day, how she had rushed to him as he lay on the field, and how she had given him the little locket as a “charm” to keep away misfortune in the future.

“What made you do it, June?” whined the lad on the bed, and she started as she realized he was thinking of the same thing. “It was a shame – a disgrace!”

“I'm sorry I disgraced you, Chester!” she said, somewhat coldly.

“I'd rather given anything than to have my sister make such a spectacle of herself. All Fardale will know of it! They will say you are smitten on him – on that fellow!”

“Chester, I know how much you dislike him; but don't you think you are somewhat in the wrong yourself?”

He started to his elbow, with a cry.

“It's hard enough to be knocked out this way without having my sister go back on me for a dog like that!” he exclaimed fiercely.

“He is no dog, Chester! Have you forgotten that he stopped the runaway and saved me?”

“No! no! Wish I could!”

“Have you forgotten that this is the second time he has saved me? Surely I owe him something! I owe him respect, at least!”

“That's all! You can keep away from him! June, you must stay in Fardale no longer. I'll write mother. That is, if you do not decide to leave at once.”

“Perhaps I may not be able to leave.”

“Not able?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“You may need me.”

“You think I am going to be as bad as that? Then that infernal doctor must have told you something he did not say to me! But I'll fool him – I'll fool them all! I'll get up all right in a day or so! It's nothing but a sprained back! Why doesn't Darrell come to me? Has he gone back on me entirely?”

“Perhaps the doctor has told everybody to keep away.”

“Confound the doctor! June, go find Hal Darrell and tell him to come here right away. I have something to say to that fellow, and I'm going to say it while it is hot on my mind.”

“Keep still while I am gone,” she said. “Will you?”

He promised, and she left the room to look for Darrell.

CHAPTER IV – JUNE'S PROMISE

The hilarious fellows were repeating "The Red and Black" when Dick passed down-stairs in search of the boy whose bicycle had been smashed. Dick had been thinking of that lad. The boy had not raised a fuss over the destruction of his wheel, and Merriwell admired him for his behavior.

The boy was sitting on the hotel steps, mournfully trying to bend the twisted spokes back into shape. A number of his friends had gathered around him.

"It's tough on you, Sammy," said one of the group. "No fellow has a right to grab a chap's wheel and smash it like that."

"He didn't mean to do it," said Sammy.

"That don't make no difference! He hadn't any right to take it at all."

"He did it to chase the runaway and save the girl."

"Well, you didn't start the runaway. You wasn't to blame for it. Somebody oughter to pay you for your wheel."

"The fellow whose sister he saved said he'd give anybody a hundred dollars to stop the horse. Why didn't he keep his word? Then Dick Merriwell could pay me for my bike and have fifty dollars left."

Dick was deeply moved by this, and he came down the steps at once. The boys looked a bit startled as they saw him and realized he might have heard some of their talk.

"So you won your bicycle in a race at a fair, Sammy?" he said.

"Yes," said the boy, and there was a little choke in his throat. "It was the best wheel I ever had. Judge Merritt put it up as a prize for the best rider."

"An' he thought his son was going to git it," put in a little fellow; "but Sammy he jest beat Arthur Merritt out at the finish an' got the wheel, though Art was the maddest feller you ever saw."

"Well, it's a shame to have your wheel smashed after you worked so hard for it," said Dick. "What did you do with your other wheel – the one you had before you got this one?"

"I sold it. It wasn't much good, anyhow, and it only cost me nine dollars second-hand. But I earned all the money to buy it myself."

"Did you race on your old wheel at the fair?"

"Oh, no! I never could have won on that. Fred Thurston let me have his wheel to race on."

"Well, this bike is ruined, that's plain," said Dick, as he examined the ill-fated bicycle. "You'll never ride it again."

"I guess that's right," nodded Sammy sadly. "But you stopped the horse and saved the girl."

Not a whimper, not a sign of anger, only regret for the loss of the wheel and satisfaction because Dick had been able to save June.

Young Merriwell realized that the boy was something of a hero, with a most remarkable disposition.

"Don't worry, Sammy," he said, smiling reassuringly. "You shall have another wheel, and I will buy it for you – a wheel just as good as this one."

"Pardon me," said a voice that startled Dick and caused the boys to stare as June Arlington herself came from the hotel and tripped down the steps. "I claim the privilege of buying another wheel for him. No; it is right, Mr. Merriwell! My father will gladly furnish the money when he hears how this wheel came to be broken. I'll write him all about it this very day."

"Hush!" grunted one of the boys doubtfully, speaking in a low tone to a companion; "that's a big bluff! That's jest so Sam won't raise a row about it."

"She's trying to make Sam think her father has money enough to buy a fifty-dollar wheel every day if he wants to," said the other, joining in the doubtful derision.

June was forced to smile. Sammy had risen and taken off his cap when Dick lifted his.

"It's plain your friends haven't much faith in my promise," said June.

"That's all right," declared the owner of the wheel. "I believe it, anyhow. Of course, I feel pretty bad over my wheel, but I'm glad the horse was stopped before you was hurt."

June's expressive eyes glowed.

"Thank you," she said. "Did you ever hear of D. Roscoe Arlington?"

"No; I – why, do you mean the big railroad man?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I've heard of him!"

"He is my father, and I promise you that he will buy another wheel for you at –"

"Excuse me," put in Dick. "But I was the one who snatched the bicycle from this boy and smashed it, so it is I who should provide for the loss."

"Not at all," declared June, with almost haughty decision. "You did it while trying to save me from harm, and the debt is mine. I insist, and I shall be angry if you do not let me refer this matter to my father, who will certainly replace this wheel with the very best bicycle money can procure."

Dick saw that she was very much in earnest, and it was plain that June was accustomed to have her own way in most things. He was obliged to yield gracefully.

June borrowed a pencil and piece of paper from Dick, after which she noted the answers of the boy in regard to the kind of a wheel he wanted, height of frame, gear, saddle, pedals, and so forth. She was perfectly practical in this, and when she had finished questioning Sammy she was in condition, if necessary, to go out and purchase the bicycle herself and get exactly what the lad most desired.

Dick's admiration for June Arlington grew steadily. He noted that she was perfectly cool and self-possessed, for all of the recent adventure through which she had passed, and that, to a large extent, she was lacking in the frivolity and giggling giddiness that marred the natural charm of many girls near her age.

"If I had the money with me," said June to Sammy, "I would pay you for your wheel right here; but I haven't that much, and, besides, I think it possible you will get a far better machine if you permit my father to select it for you."

"Oh, I'm willing to do that!" exclaimed the boy; "and I thank you for –"

"I am the one to thank you," said June. "You happened along at just the right time to aid in stopping that runaway."

This made the boy feel very good, while some of the fellows who stood near grew jealous and tried to sneer.

June shook hands with Sammy, promising he should hear from Mr. Arlington within a week, and then she turned back into the hotel, telling Dick she wished to speak with him. The moment she entered the hotel the other boys surrounded Sammy. One of them, a raw-boned, freckled chap with dirty teeth, gave Sammy "the laugh."

"You're a soft mark!" he said. "Why, if you'd raised a big fuss you might have frightened her into paying for your bike right off – that is, if her father is the big gun she says he is."

"Go on, Spike Hanlon!" exclaimed Sammy. "What do you take me for? I ain't built that way!"

"Because you're easy. Mebbe you'll get another bicycle, and, then again, mebbe you won't! Soon as she gits outer town she'll never bother about it no more. You let her soft-soap you and fool you jest because she shook hands with ye! Yah!"

"Now, close your face!" exclaimed Sammy, flushing hotly and showing anger for the first time. "If you say anything more about her I'll soak you in the mouth!"

Which demonstrated that Sam had temper and could be aroused to anger, for all that he had taken the smashing of his wheel so mildly.

At once the boys began to take sides. The majority were with Sammy, but two fellows sidled over and joined Spike Hanlon.

“You hit me,” said Hanlon, “and I’ll break your head with a rock! That’s what I’ll do, softie! I’m glad your old wheel was smashed. I’m glad of it, and I’ll bet you a hundred dollars you never get another one! Yah, yah! Thought you was big because you beat Art Merritt and got a fine bike, didn’t ye! Well, now you ain’t no better off than any of us! You ain’t so well off, for my brother’s got your old wheel, and he lets me ride it when I want to! Yah! yah! yah!”

But Hanlon had carefully placed himself at a distance by walking away in a sidelong fashion, and he took to his heels, whooping and laughing scornfully as Sammy made a move as if to rush at him.

“Don’t you mind, Sammy,” said one of the friends who had sided with him. “Spike’s jealous. He’s been so ever since you won your bike. And I think you’ll get a new wheel all right.”

“I know it!” said Sam, with the utmost confidence. “That girl’s all right, and I’d bet my life she’d have the wheel sent to me! Then won’t Spike feel sick!”

CHAPTER V – DICK KEEPS THE LOCKET

Up one flight in the hotel was a window in the hall at the front of the house. Dick and June passed by this window, which, although closed, did not prevent them from hearing the words of the boys below, and June laughed when Sammy declared he would soak Spike Hanlon in the mouth if Spike said anything more about her.

“That’s the kind of champion to have!” exclaimed Dick.

“They are going to fight!” exclaimed June. “That freckled boy is big and strong.”

“But I’ll bet anything Sammy does him if they come to a genuine scrap,” said Dick. “But don’t worry; there’ll be no fight. The most of the boys are on Sammy’s side, and the other fellow doesn’t want to mix in.”

They heard Spike’s taunts just before he retreated, and June muttered:

“Just you wait and see what kind of a wheel he’ll have! I’ll make father buy him the very best in the market.”

“Then that other boy will turn green with jealousy,” laughed Dick. “It will be a great triumph for Sammy.”

“He deserves it.”

“I agree with you. He is a most remarkable fellow, and I like him. Evidently he’s a poor boy. But he didn’t whimper when his wheel was smashed, and that is why I say he is remarkable. Most boys would have put up a terrible outcry over it.”

“It is strange that my brother should have been hurt so badly just from falling backward out of the carriage when the horse started,” said June.

“Is it a fact that he is badly hurt?” asked Dick.

“I fear so. The doctor told me that, at least, we had not better think of returning to Fardale before to-morrow. He said he would be able to say positively to-morrow whether Chester is badly hurt or not. He is coming back with another doctor in a short time, and they will make a more complete examination.”

“For your sake,” said Dick sincerely, “I am very sorry that your brother was hurt.”

Dick spoke with perfect truthfulness, and she understood him. It is not likely that he would have felt keen regret on Chester’s account alone, but his interest in June made it possible for him to be sorry, as the affair had caused her distress.

She thanked him, but she did not misinterpret his words in the least. She understood that her brother and Dick Merriwell were persistent and unrelenting enemies.

“I was so glad to see you win the game to-day,” she said, seeming to wish to change the subject.

“Yes, the boys did splendidly.”

“They did very well, but you – you were the one who really won the game.”

“In football every man is dependent on the others engaged in the game. Without their assistance he would be powerless to win.”

“Oh, if you put it that way, of course no fellow could stand up alone against eleven others and win a game. But that does not alter the fact that you were the one who won the game to-day. And I thought you badly hurt that time when I – when I made a sensation by running on to the field,” she finished, her face getting very red.

She was confused, and Dick’s heart beat a bit faster now. But she quickly found a way to make it appear that it was not purely from agitation over Dick that she hurried on to the gridiron.

“I was so afraid that meant failure for the team! When I saw you down and feared you would have to leave the field, I knew Fardale was in a bad scrape. Without a captain, she would have been defeated quickly.”

Dick knew well enough that it was more than fear for the result of the game that had caused her to rush pale and trembling across the field and kneel to lift his head while he lay helpless on the ground; but he pretended disappointment now, seeking to draw her out.

"I'm very sorry," he said, watching her closely; "I fancied you were anxious on my account. I presume it was conceited of me to have such a thought."

She looked him straight in the eyes.

"Doubtless my conduct was such that it gave you cause to think so," she nodded, perfectly at ease.

"Your conduct – and your words," he returned.

She remembered with some dismay that she had been greatly excited as she lifted his head and knelt on the ground. She could not recall the words she had uttered at the time, but she knew she had called him "Dick," and she entreated the doctor to tell her he was not badly hurt. Still June retained her self-possession, although she did not repress an added bit of color that again rose to her cheeks.

"I believe you were shamming, sir!" she asserted, severely. "You seemed almost unconscious, yet you pretend that you heard what I said. I think you dreamed that you heard it."

"Well, it was a very pleasant dream, and it quite repaid me for the jar I received in that little clash."

She could not resist his subtle compliment, and, in spite of her self-control, she felt her pulse thrill a little. Although a girl of sixteen and usually most reserved, she was open to flattery in its finest form, as most girls are.

Dick, however, was no flatterer, and he spoke what he felt to be the simple truth and nothing more. It is possible that his sincerity impressed her.

"My locket –" she began.

"Oh, I hope you are not going to command me to return it to you again!" he exclaimed.

"No."

"I am thankful for that. I gave it up once, thinking you would be generous enough to hear what I had to say; but you refused to see me or to permit me to explain –"

"Which was very unjust of me," she frankly admitted. "I was sorry when it was too late, but you did not come again."

"Because I did not care to receive another snub."

"Will you pardon me?"

"Surely I will, now that I have the locket again. But I do not wish you to believe that I ever dropped that locket intentionally with the desire of having it become known that you had given it to me. I did not think you could believe such a thing of me."

There was reproach in Dick's words, and she felt it.

"My brother made it seem that you did," she hastened to say; "and – and – another would not deny it."

"Another?" exclaimed Dick. "I know who it was! It was Hal Darrell!"

"I have not said so."

"But you cannot say it was not Darrell?"

"I will not say it wasn't or that it was."

"We were enemies once," said Dick, "but I found him pretty square, and I can admire a fellow who is my enemy if he is honest. Later we became, not exactly friends, but reconciled. Somehow we could not get on real friendly terms, though I fancy we both wished to be friendly at one time. Of late he has changed, and I am satisfied that he is once more my enemy. I don't think he will lie about me, but it is possible he might not correct the false statement of another. Miss Arlington, is it possible that, at the present time, there remains in your mind the least doubt concerning my behavior? If there is such a doubt, even though I would dearly love to keep your locket and your picture, I must beg you to take it back."

He was grim and stern now, and for a single instant she felt a trifle awed. Then pride came to her rescue, and she exclaimed:

“If you wish to get rid of it so much, I’ll take it, sir!”

“I do not wish to get rid of it. Indeed, I wish to keep it always; but I cannot keep it knowing you might suspect me of showing it, laughing over it and boasting that it was a ‘mash.’ Do you understand?”

“I think I do,” she said quietly. “I shall let you keep it, and you may be sure there is no doubt in my mind. I believe you are a gentleman.”

Dick had triumphed. Again he was a winner, and it made him glad indeed. He thanked her earnestly and sincerely, upon which she said:

“Foolish though it may seem, I am certain now that the locket has given you good fortune. I felt sure you would win the game for Fardale to-day after I gave you the locket, and you took it. Then, with the locket still in your possession, you stopped the runaway. Keep it, and may it be the charm to give you luck as long as it remains in your possession.”

“I am sure it will!” he laughed. “As long as it contains that picture it will remain a charm for me.”

“You know I accept you as a friend, Mr. Merriwell; but my brother is angry with me, my mother will be more so, and my father will side with my mother. I tell you this as an explanation of my conduct in the future, should anything happen to make it seem that I am unfriendly.”

“I think I’ll understand you.”

“Then you will do better than most fellows,” smiled June; “for they do not understand girls at all. Hal Darrell – ”

Then she paused suddenly, for Hal himself had ascended the stairs and stopped, staring at them. His face was rather pale, and there was a glitter in his dark eyes.

“Oh, Mr. Darrell!” exclaimed June. “I have been looking for you.”

“Have you?” said Hal, his eyes on Dick.

“Yes. Brother wants to see you. He’s in room 37. Please go right up.”

Hal stood still and stared at Dick a moment longer, after which he mounted the stairs to the second story and disappeared.

CHAPTER VI – A DOUBTFUL MATTER

Chester and June Arlington remained in Hudsonville that night and the next day. On Monday they came back to Fardale, but Chester did not return to the academy. He declined to go to the house where June had been stopping, but ordered the best suite of rooms in the Fardale Hotel, and there he went comfortably to bed.

Perhaps it was a mistake to say he went comfortably to bed, for he was far from comfortable, as his back had been hurt badly, although the Hudsonville doctors consoled him with the assurance that, with rest and proper treatment, he would recover without any permanent injury.

June remained at the hotel to care for him as best she could, and Mrs. Arlington was notified of his misfortune, with the result that she lost no time in hastening to the side of her idolized son.

Dick had called at the hotel to see June a moment, and she showed him the telegram that told her that her mother was coming with all speed.

“I don't know what will happen when mother gets here,” confessed June, “but there may be trouble. To tell the truth, I am afraid there will be, for Chester is determined to tell her I gave you that locket, unless I get it back.”

Dick's heart sank a little, but he soon said:

“Then I suppose I shall have to give it up, for I do not wish you to get into trouble on my account.”

But she declined to take it.

“No,” she said firmly. “I gave it to you, and you are to keep it. I want you to promise to keep it, even though my mother demands it of you.”

His heart rose at once.

“You may be sure I will do so,” he said.

He was in very good spirits as he went whistling back to the academy. It was just past midday, but the autumn sun was well over into the southwest. The wind sent a flock of yellow leaves scudding along the roadside like a lot of startled birds. The woods were bare, and there was a haze on the distant hills. In spite of the bright sunshine, in spite of the satisfaction in his heart, he felt vaguely the sadness of autumn, as if the world itself were fading and growing old and feeble, like a man that has passed the prime of life and is hurrying down the hill that leads to decrepit old age and death. Always the autumn impressed Dick thus. True he saw in it much of beauty, but it was a sad beauty that made him long to fly to another clime where fallen leaves and bare woods would not remind him of winter.

Not that Dick disliked the winter, for in it he found those pleasures enjoyed by every healthful lad with a healthy mind; but it was the change from early autumn to winter days that stirred his emotions so keenly and filled him with that unspeakable longing for something that was not his.

A stream ran through the little valley, the sunshine reflected on its surface. Beyond the valley was a little grove, where a red squirrel was barking, the clear air and favorable wind bringing the chatter of the little creature to the lad's ears. Some one had started a fire on the distant hillside, and the smoke rose till it was hurled away by the sweeping wind.

Dick's eyes noted much of beauty in the landscape, for he was sensitive to color, and the woods were gray and brown and green, the fields were mottled with brown and green, for there remained a few places where the grass was not quite dead, late though it was; the hills were misty blue in the far distance, and the sky overhead was cloudless.

From a high point of the road he could look out on the open sea, and he heard the breakers roaring on Tiger Tooth Ledge.

The squirrel in the grove seemed calling to him, the woods seemed to beckon, and even the dull, distant roar of the sea struck a responsive chord in his heart. A sudden desire came upon him to stray deep into the woods and hills and seek to renew the old-time friendship and confidence with

nature and the wild things he had once been able to call around him. Then he thought of Fardale, of the football-field, of his friends at school, and, lastly, of – June.

“No,” he muttered, “I would not give up my new friends for those I used to know. The birds and squirrels know me no longer, but I have found human friends who are dearer.”

He resumed his whistling and trudged onward with a light heart.

That afternoon Dick worked earnestly with the scrub on the field, for the weakness of the academy's line in the recent game with Hudsonville had shown him that injury to one or two players simultaneously might cause Fardale's defeat unless some remarkably good substitutes were ready at hand to go in. And he had come to realize that first-class substitutes were lacking.

The injured ones were improving as swiftly as could be expected, but it was certain they would not get into practice until near the end of the week, and Shannock might not be able to go on to the field for another week to come.

At the opening of the season Fardale had resolved not to play with Franklin Academy for reasons well known on both sides. A year before Franklin had permitted a Fardale man and a traitor to play with its eleven, and the traitor had dashed red pepper into Dick Merriwell's eyes at a time when it seemed certain that the game would be won by the cadets through young Merriwell's efforts.

Brad Buckhart “mingled in” and promptly knocked the pepper-thrower stiff, after which the fellow had been exposed.

But Franklin's action in permitting the traitor to play on her team had angered the Fardale athletic committee so that a vote was taken not to meet her on the gridiron again. But the faculty at Franklin took a hand, offered apologies, regrets, and made promises to look after the team in the future. They felt a keen disgrace to have Fardale refuse to meet the Franklin eleven. The result was that the Fardale athletic committee finally withdrew the ban, and a date was arranged with Franklin.

This was the team Fardale had to meet on the following Saturday after the game with Hudsonville, and to Dick's ears came a rumor that Franklin had a remarkable eleven that had been winning games in a most alarming manner.

To add to Dick's uneasiness came a report that Franklin had hired a professional coach and that there were at least four “ringers” on the team. Dick was not inclined to believe this at first, for it did not seem possible such fellows would be permitted on the eleven after the entreaty and assurance of the Franklin faculty.

Brad Buckhart resolved to investigate. Without saying a word to Dick, who, he fancied, might object to “spying,” the Texan paid a man to find out the truth. The result was that, one day, he informed Dick there was not the least doubt but the “ringers” were to be with the Franklin team.

“I can hardly believe it now!” exclaimed Dick, when Buck had explained how he came by his knowledge. “How can they afford to do such a thing?”

“Well, pard,” said the Westerner, “I hear that they're hot set to wipe out the disgrace of last year's defeat, and then they won't care a rap whether we play with them any more or not. That's what's doing over yon at Franklin. I opine we'd better decline to play.”

“No,” said Dick. “We have no absolute proof that there are ‘ringers’ on their team, although it is likely your man made no mistake. I shall notify their manager at once that I have heard such a report, ask concerning its correctness, and protest against the questionable men being in the game.”

“And then if they are in it just the same?”

“We'll play them,” said Dick grimly, “and beat them. After that we can decline to have any further athletic dealings with them.”

“Partner, you're right!” exclaimed the Texan. “The only thing I fear is that our team may not be up to its usual form. If it is, we can down 'em, ‘ringers’ or no ‘ringers.’”

No reply came to Dick's note of protest until Friday, before the game was to come off. Then the manager answered briefly that all the men on his team were amateurs and were taking regular courses at Franklin Academy.

“That settles it,” said Dick. “I’d play him now if I had proof that he had ‘ringers’ on his team. Then I’d relieve my mind after the game.”

CHAPTER VII – SOMETHING WRONG

Dick knew Mrs. Arlington had arrived in Fardale, and after her arrival he waited in daily expectancy of hearing something from June. He learned that the injury to Chester Arlington was so serious that he might be confined to his bed for two or three weeks. And he also found out that Hal Darrell visited the hotel daily.

Ostensibly Hal went to see Chester, but Dick felt that the real reason of his going was to see June. And Dick was startled to feel a sensation of keen jealousy in his heart. He tried bravely to put it aside, telling himself that June was his friend and nothing more; but it was obstinate and declined to be crushed in such a manner, not a little to his annoyance.

On Saturday morning Dick received a brief note from June, and it fairly staggered him. This was what she said:

*“Mr. Richard Merriwell: Kindly return my locket at once by the messenger who brings you this. I insist on it, and you will do so if you are a gentleman. —
June Arlington.”*

A second time had this happened. Once before June had sent for her locket and Dick had returned it as requested. Then, when he sought to call for an explanation, he was snubbed at the door. He puzzled over this second note, being astonished by it. For had not June urged him to promise not to give up the locket on any condition?

“Is she so changeable?” he muttered, in great disappointment. “I could not have thought it of her! She doesn’t seem that way.”

He could not express his feeling of disappointment at June. She had seemed like an unusually sensible girl, who would not whiffle round with every shifting wind.

He understood that, without doubt, strong pressure had been brought to bear on June by her mother and brother. She had been commanded to send again for her locket. Chester Arlington was determined that Dick should not keep it, and he would rejoice if it were sent back to his sister.

But had June been influenced so that she really wished the locket returned? Rather had she not been compelled to write the request while she did not wish Dick to comply with it?

He started at this thought, and, of a sudden, he found a way to excuse June. She could not refuse to obey the command of her mother, and she had written for the locket because Mrs. Arlington commanded it. That was the explanation. The messenger was waiting outside the door. Dick turned, walked to the door, and said:

“There is no answer.”

“But the lady what give me the note said there would be one,” declared the boy. “She said I was to bring back somethin’ you’d give me.”

“Did she?”

“Yep. An’ said I was to be careful not to lose it.”

“What sort of a lady gave you this note?”

“Oh, she was pritty swell, you bet! She wore good togs, but she had gray hair, and she looked me over through a glass with a handle what she held up to her eye, and she says, says she, ‘Boy, are you honest?’ and I says, ‘I am, though I know I’ll never grow up to be a great politician or a millionaire if I stay so.’ She didn’t seem to like that much, but she finally give me the paper what I brought to you, sayin’ as how I was to bring back the thing what you would give me.”

“Well, there is nothing for you to take back,” said Dick. “But here is a quarter for you. Just say to the lady that the article is so precious that I will bring it in person, as I dare not trust it out of my hands.”

“All right. Thankee,” said the boy, and he hurried away.

A feeling of satisfaction had come to Dick.

"I was right," he exclaimed, with a short laugh. "It is the work of June's mother. But how can I get out of giving up the locket and the picture? June told me to keep it, but if her mother demands it of me I'll be placed in an awkward position."

He was soon given other things to think of, however. The Franklin team arrived in town before noon, and Buckhart, who was at the station to see them, came hustling back to the academy and sought Dick, whom he found in the gym.

"There's no mistake about it," said the Westerner excitedly. "One of their players is Plover, the chap who was barred from the Exeter team because he was a professional. Why, he's nineteen years old, and he's played the game for three or four years. He got into some kind of a mess at Exeter and left school to avoid a disgrace. He's one of the 'ringers.'"

"How do you know this?" asked Dick. "You do not know Plover personally, do you?"

"No, but there was a chap at the station who knew him and spoke to him."

"Well?"

"Plover didn't seem to like it much. He pretended not to know the fellow who spoke to him."

"Who was the fellow?"

"Clerk in Peabody's store, a fellow who hasn't been here very long."

"I'll have to see him at once," said Dick.

"I had a talk with him, you bet your boots!"

"Did you?"

"Sure thing, pardner. Said he knew Plover all right, and that the fellow couldn't fool him. Said Plover was a chap who played baseball summers for money, raced for money, had been pulled up for some sort of crookedness in a running-race, had coached football-teams for money; in short, he made his living by just such things."

"Well, he is a fine fellow for Franklin to run up against us!" exclaimed Dick. "Come, Brad, we'll look up the manager of that team without delay."

But the manager of the visiting team had not come to Fardale with his players, as they learned on hurrying to the hotel and making inquiries.

"He didn't dare come!" muttered Buckhart in Dick's ears. "He was afraid you'd get after him before the game. That's why the onery galoot stayed away."

Dick's face wore a grim expression as he called for Captain Hickman. Hickman and two other Franklin fellows were found in a room. The captain of the team rose and held out his hand to Dick, crying:

"How are you, Merriwell, old man! Glad to see you again! Of course, we'll have to trounce you this afternoon, but that is no reason why we shouldn't be friends before the game – and afterward."

"No, that is no reason," admitted Dick. "As for trouncing us, that remains to be seen; but I am sure you ought to do it with the kind of team you have brought!"

"Oh, yes! we've got a corker this year," laughed Hickman.

"But aren't you out of your class a bit?" asked Dick, while Brad stood by the door, grimly waiting the clash of words he expected would come and eyeing the two chaps with Hickman, to have their measure in case there was an encounter.

"Do you fancy your team so very weak?" asked Hickman jokingly. "Why, you seem to be doing very well."

"We are strong enough for a school team made up of amateurs, but we may not be able to cope with professionals."

"And 'ringers,'" put in Brad.

Hickman pretended to be surprised and astonished.

"Professionals?" he exclaimed. "Ringers? Why, what do you mean? It can't be that you accuse us of having such men on our team?"

"I have information that leads me to believe you have," said Dick grimly.

"It's not true!" retorted the captain of the Franklin team hotly.

"It's a lie!" said a yellow-haired chap, rising behind Hickman, and stepping forward.

"That's exactly what it is!" agreed the third fellow, as he also rose and joined the others.

"Here's where we get into a scrimmage!" thought Buckhart, with a glow of genuine satisfaction.

"Here is where we wipe the floor with three young gents from Franklin!"

But Dick was not there to get into a row.

"Such information reached me a few days ago," said Dick, "and I wrote at once to Mr. Rankin, your manager."

"Well, you heard from him, didn't you?"

"Yes; he answered that the report was untrue."

"Well, that should have satisfied you," said Hickman. "What more do you want?"

"To-day," said Dick calmly, "I have been told that on your team there is a regular professional by the name of Plover."

"Plover?"

"Yes."

"There is no man by that name on the team," said Hickman. "So you see that you have been led astray in this matter."

"Of course it is possible," admitted Dick, "But we have not forgotten last year, Mr. Hickman."

"Last year?" said Hickman uneasily. "What do you mean by that?"

"You should remember very well."

"Why not – "

"Yes, your little trick you played on us. I believe a fellow by the name of Jabez Lynch played with you, and he was a Fardale man at the time. He wore a nose-guard and head-harness that so disguised him he was not recognized; but he did a piece of dirty work that exposed him before the game was over. You remember, Captain Hickman."

Hickman forced a short laugh.

"That was a joke, Merriwell."

"A joke!" exclaimed Dick, his eyes flashing. "Is that what you call it? It was no joke, Mr. Hickman, and you know very well that it came very near ending all athletic relations between our teams and our schools."

"If that is what he considers as a joke," put in Brad; "mebbe he allows it's a joke to spring a lot of 'ringers' on us!"

"Who are you?" savagely asked the captain of the visiting team, glaring at Brad. "What right have you to dip into this matter?"

"Who am I? Well, I'm Brad Buckhart, the unbranded maverick of the Rio Pecos! I'm playing with Fardale, and I allow that I can dip in some. If any of you gents think not, I'm willing to argue it with you any old way you say. You hear me chirp!"

"Have you come to raise a fuss, Mr. Merriwell?" cried Hickman.

"I have come to warn you," said Dick, with unabated grimness.

"Warn us – of what?"

"That you are making a grave mistake."

"Are you going to squeal? Are you going to back out?"

"We shall play you this afternoon if your team is made up entirely of professionals."

"Then what – "

"I wish to notify you, Mr. Hickman, that a thorough investigation will be made. If we learn that you have professionals on your team, Fardale will sever relations with you. There will be no further contests between us."

Hickman snapped his fingers.

“Do as you like,” he said. “We’ll have the pleasure of wiping you up in the last encounter, anyway.”

“Will you?” cried Dick. “Not much! Fardale will defeat you to-day, for all of tricks and crookedness!”

“Whoop-ee!” exploded Buckhart. “You bet your boots she will!”

Then both boys turned on their heels and left the room.

Dick and Brad were descending the stairs to leave the hotel when something struck Dick’s shoulder with a little tinkle and fell on the steps before him.

Dick picked it up, and glanced upward. He fancied he saw a face disappear above, and there was a rustling sound that died away almost immediately. In his hand Dick held a bit of paper that was twisted about an old-fashioned copper coin. He untwisted the paper and saw there was some writing upon it.

“I shall try to be at the game. See me a moment if possible. Have something to say to you. —
June.”

“What is it, pard?” asked Brad.

“Nothing much,” smiled Dick, folding the paper and carefully putting it in his pocket, along with the coin.

The smile left his face, as at the very door, when he was passing out, he encountered Mrs. Arlington, who had just alighted from a carriage and was coming in. She saw him, and a haughty look of anger and accusation settled on her cold face.

“So you decided to come!” she said freezingly. “It is well that you did. I have consulted a lawyer, and I have about concluded to have you arrested.”

“To have me arrested?” said Dick, in surprise.

“Exactly.”

“What for?”

“Theft!”

Dick’s face flamed crimson, while a gurgle of incredulity and astonishment came from Brad’s throat.

“Theft, madam?” said Dick warmly. “Such a thing is ridiculous!”

“Outrageous!” came from Brad.

“I sent for a piece of property belonging to my daughter and you declined to return it,” said the woman, with a crushing air of superiority.

“So it was you who sent for it?” came quickly from Dick. “I am glad to know that.”

“My daughter wrote the note, which I sent by a messenger. Your refusal to return the locket makes you a thief. But I presume you have come to your senses and decided to give it up, in which case I shall not proceed against you.”

Dick was boiling with anger, and he longed to tell the woman just what he thought; but he could not forget that she was June’s mother, which held him in check.

“I did not call to return the locket, madam,” he said. “I had another matter that brought me here.”

“Indeed?” said the woman, annoyed and surprised. “You will find it best to attend to this matter without delay if you wish to escape the unpleasantness of being arrested. To a boy of your callous nature I do not suppose arrest would seem like a disgrace, but you may fear imprisonment.”

Dick could not find words to retort to this insult, but he knew he could not restrain his outraged feelings much longer, for which reason he sought to pass the woman at once and get away from her. But Mrs. Arlington had not played all her cards. She was holding one in reserve.

“I think you were somehow concerned in stopping a horse that had become frightened in a neighboring town, and I also think my daughter was in the carriage,” she said, in the same haughty, freezing manner. “Much to my regret, I have learned that my son failed to pay you for your act, as he promised to do; but you know he was injured by falling from the carriage, which explains his failure. I have been told that he said he would give you a hundred dollars to stop the horse. I always take pains to have my son keep his word, and I shall do so in this case. When you call with the locket you shall have the hundred dollars, just as he promised.”

Dick knew she felt sure the promise of that money would cause him to hasten to bring the locket, and it but added to his outraged sense of fairness. Surely she was the most overbearing, haughty, cold-blooded woman he had ever met! But she was June’s mother!

“Madam,” he said, “if you imagine for a moment that I stopped that horse because a hundred dollars was offered to any one who would do so, you have made a great mistake. I did so because your daughter was in peril. Nothing could induce me to accept money from your son, from you, or from any one on earth for such an act!”

He managed to pass her, but Buckhart paused to say:

“Well, I should opine not! Why, confound it! I told you once that this yere pard of mine has money enough to buy up your old husband’s railroads and run ’em! Money! Why, when he comes of age he’ll have it to burn in an open grate instead of coal! Money! Don’t insult him by – ”

“Brad!” said Dick sharply; “that will do! Come!”

“All right,” said Buckhart, regretfully following young Merriwell. “But I wasn’t half done with her. I was just getting round to say over my opinion of her, and I reckon I’d sure rumbled her fur some.”

“Never mind,” said Dick. “We’ve got other things to think of besides that woman.”

“Don’t you worry none whatever about arrest,” said the Texan. “She’ll not be that big a fool.”

“I hope not,” said Dick.

As Dick said, he had other things to occupy his mind. He was bound to win the game that afternoon and teach Franklin a lesson.

Midday had passed and Dick was entering the gymnasium to prepare for the game when a boy on a bicycle hailed him. He stopped, frowning a little as the boy came up swiftly, for he half-fancied it was some one sent by Mrs. Arlington. As the lad drew near, however, Dick suddenly recognized him. It was Sammy – Sammy of Hudsonville, on a brand-new wheel! Sammy was laughing as he jumped off.

“I wanted you to see the wheel Mr. Arlington sent me in place of the old one,” he said. “I’ve ridden over here on it to thank Miss Arlington and to see the football-game. I’m going to root for you in the game. Say, ain’t this wheel a peach?”

“It is very handsome,” said Dick. “It seems to be quite as good as your other one.”

“Oh, it’s better! A machinist over in our town says it’s the best he ever saw, and he knows a good one when he sees it.”

“I congratulate you, Sammy,” said Dick. “I’m very glad you got the wheel all right and like it.”

“Oh, I like it! Say, you’re going to do them Franklin fellows, ain’t you? They beat our team, and they think they are the real stuff. I’d give anything to see you do ’em up.”

“All right,” smiled Dick. “Keep your eyes open this afternoon, Sammy.”

CHAPTER VIII – FARDALE'S WAY

In some respects the first half of the game that day was like the first half in Hudsonville. Franklin had the heavier team, and it kept the ball in Fardale's territory fully three-fourths of the time. The first touchdown was made by Franklin with such ridiculous ease that the watching cadets groaned in despair. But Dick managed to put enough fight into his team to enable it to withstand the further assaults of the enemy, and the half ended with the ball on Fardale's ten-yard line.

Chester Arlington was not on hand to witness the game, but the rest of the Wolf Gang, composed of cadets who hated Dick Merriwell – Mark Crauthers, Fred Stark, Sam Hogan, and Bunol, the Spanish boy – were there and rejoiced. These fellows did not dare show their satisfaction openly, but they expressed it to one another.

Sammy of Hudsonville was disappointed, but he kept up his cheering for Fardale and for Dick Merriwell right through to the end of the half.

"What are you yelling for?" asked a man roughly. "Fardale is getting beaten."

"That's all right," said Sammy. "I've seen them fellows play before. I saw them play last Saturday, and they crawled out of a worse hole than this. You can't keep Dick Merriwell from winning."

"You seem to be stuck on Dick Merriwell?"

"I am. He's all right, you bet! I'll bet a hundred dollars he wins this game!"

"I'll take you," said the man. "Put up your hundred dollars."

Sammy gasped.

"I – I ain't got a hundred dollars," he said; "but I've got a brand-new bike that cost pretty near that, and I'll bet that."

The man laughed.

"I don't want to rob you of your wheel," he said, "so we won't bet."

"Don't you be afraid of robbing me!" exclaimed the boy. "But I think you need your money, so you hadn't better bet."

Dick had looked in vain for June Arlington. She had said she would see him that afternoon, but he was sure she was not in the stand where most of the ladies were assembled.

"Her mother would not let her come," he decided. "I'm sorry. I believe we could do better if she were here. But we must win this game, anyhow."

After his usual manner he talked to his men during the intermission, suggesting little things, telling them where the enemy was weak, working up their confidence and courage, and doing everything in his power to get them into proper condition of mind to go in for the game and take it.

"Plover hasn't made no great stir so far, has he, pard?" said Buckhart. "It was Andrews made that touch-down."

"Plover?" said Singleton. "Who is Plover?"

"The fellow playing left half-back for them."

"Why, that's Gray."

"That's the name they have given him," confessed Brad; "but his right name is Plover, and he's the chap who got into that bad scrape at Exeter last year."

"Why, Plover – he's a professional!" exclaimed big Bob.

"That's what we're up against to-day?" nodded Brad. "Rush and Carney, their end-men, are 'ringers.' Neither of them is taking a regular course at Franklin. And Wettinger, the left guard, is another. Oh, they've got a scabby team!"

The boys were aroused.

"Let's beat them, hany'ow!" cried Billy Bradley.

"It would be a shame, a measly shame!" said Ted Smart.

“By Jim!” squeaked Obediah Tubbs; “if them fellers is goin’ to play that sort of a team they want to look out! Dern my picter if I don’t sail in hot an’ heavy next half!”

“Everybody sus-sus-sus-sail in!” chattered Chip Jolliby. “We can eat ’em up!”

“Eat ’em! eat ’em!” growled Harry Dare.

So the boys went back on to the field in something of a fierce mood. Franklin had fancied the cadets would be spiritless and easy toward the end of the game, but when they found the home team snappier than ever, they were amazed.

“On your taps every moment, fellows,” said Dick. “Keep them guessing.”

Fardale did keep them guessing, but Franklin seemed to recover from her first surprise and settled down for a stubborn battle. It was hot work. With the ball down for the first time on Franklin’s forty-yard line, the cadets could not make a gain, and were forced to kick. Hickman ran back in anticipation of the kick, which he took prettily, and the Fardale rushers were blocked long enough to give him a start, which he improved.

Down the field came the captain of the visiting team. Two of his men turned in with him as interferers and blocked first one and then another of the Fardale tacklers. Hickman was covering ground handsomely and had reached the middle of the field before Darrell closed with him and dragged him down,

“Great! Great work, Hal!” panted Dick, in admiration. “I was afraid you’d miss him.”

Hal said not a word.

Franklin had done a clever bit of work, and she was determined to improve it now. The ball was snapped and passed to Gray, who went across and plunged into the right wing of Fardale’s line, hitting Jolliby hard and going through for four yards.

Again Darrell was in the play and stopped the runner.

Andrews, the right half-back, took the ball next time and went at the right side of Fardale’s line.

The forwards ripped open a hole for him and he slipped through, but Dick Merriwell hooked on to his legs and pulled him down. This time, however, full five yards had been made.

“Got to stop it, fellows!” breathed Dick.

Franklin was full of confidence.

“Get ’em going, boys!” said Hickman. “They’ll never be able to stop us.”

But an attempted end run resulted in a loss of three yards, as the runner tried to dodge back to avoid a tackler. Dick was certain a plunge into the line would follow.

“20 – 23 – 2,” called Quaile, the quarter-back.

Dick was not mistaken. Hickman came plunging right into the line, and he was met and held in handsome manner. Now something must be done.

The cadet band was playing “Fardale’s Way,” and a great mass of cadets took up the song. The words seemed sufficient to encourage the desperately fighting lads.

“It’s no use groaning, it’s no use moaning,
It’s no use feeling sore;
Keep on staying, keep on playing,
As you’ve done before;
Fight, you sinner, you’re a winner
If you stick and stay;
Never give in while you’re living —
That is Fardale’s way.”

It was a song to stiffen the backs of those lads. It seemed to do its work, for again Franklin was held fast without a gain.

Singleton ran back in anticipation of a kick, which the visitors apparently prepared for. But the preparation was made to deceive, and Gray was sent with a rush into the line, which it was hoped to take unprepared.

What a roar of delight went up from the bleachers when the line held and Gray was actually flung back for a loss! The ball was Fardale's on downs.

The cadets struck into another stanza of the song:

“It's no use trying, it's no use crying,
It's no use raising Cain;
We don't fear you, we'll be near you
When you come again.
When you bump us, what a rumpus!
We are here to stay;
Then we'll ram you, buck and slam you —
Good old Fardale's way.”

“100 – 13 – 88.” It was Fardale's signal, and the tackles' back formation was made. The ball went to Jolliby, who tried center. Knowing what was coming, Obediah Tubbs actually butted the Franklin center over, and Jolliby went through for seven yards. This was the kind of stuff!

“20 – 102 – 21 – 44.” It was the signal for the same formation, but Kent was to take the ball this time. Kent went into center and made three yards, but Selden, Franklin's snap-back, stood up against Tubbs in far better style.

There was a slight pause, as one of the visitors was hurt a bit. In that pause Dick glanced hopelessly toward the grand stand. He could see nothing of June.

“She will not come,” he thought. “Her mother has refused to let her.” Then he went into the game again with all the energy he could command. He was wearing her locket. If she was not there, he had her picture, and that was the next best thing.

Fardale played fiercely for a time, actually pushing the ball down the field to within twenty-five yards of Franklin's goal, but there it was lost on a forward pass.

Franklin went into Fardale savagely, but at the very outset was set back for holding, a thing which delighted the watching cadets. But they made it up quickly by a clever crisscross and a run round Fardale's left end, securing twelve yards.

Franklin realized that it had no snap, and the visitors strained every nerve. After that run round the end the gains were small, but Fardale was steadily pushed back to the center of the field. There something happened.

Franklin lost the ball on a fumble, and Darrell got through and caught it up like a flash. He managed to squirm out of the tangle and started for the enemy's goal.

How it was that Dick Merriwell got through also and joined Hal no one could say, but he bobbed up just as Captain Hickman came down on Darrell with a rush.

Dick hurled himself before Hickman, who pulled him down, and Hal ran on with a clear field before him. The crowd rose up and roared like mad.

Darrell ran as if his life depended on it. Behind him the players strung out in pursuit, but they could not catch him.

Dick Merriwell had made the run and touchdown possible by blocking Hickman.

Over the line went Darrell for a touch-down. This was the stuff to thrill every watcher! Somehow Dick seemed to close behind Darrell, for all that he had been hurled to the ground, and he was laughing.

“Great!” he said again. “Now we're in the game good and hard!”

“You blocked Hickman handsomely,” said Hal, relaxing a little. “I thought he had me. Where did you come from?”

“Oh, it was a lucky stab for me, that’s all,” said Dick, modestly declining to take credit for special cleverness.

The ball was brought out. Darrell was willing to let Dick or Singleton try the kick, but Dick declined to take the privilege away from him. So Dick held the ball, and Darrell lifted it over the bar, which tied the game.

“They can’t beat us now!” declared Dick.

Hickman was growling like a dog with a sore ear.

“Talk about rotten luck!” he said. “That was it. Why, we had them skinned to death!”

He kicked off and Singleton returned the ball with a handsome drive. There was some volleying of this sort, and then Fardale attempted a run, but the runner was pulled down promptly, and the teams lined up for the concluding struggles of the game.

Fardale fought earnestly, but the visitors were desperate, and but four yards could be made on three downs. Singleton kicked, and the ball went out of bounds, where Gray fell upon it. It was brought in for a scrimmage, and Franklin came back at the cadets. Fardale’s line seemed made of stone, and Franklin was compelled to kick.

Singleton rushed the ball back eighteen yards before being dragged to the turf. They piled upon him like a lot of tigers, and when the mass untangled big Bob lay still and stiff.

Dick advanced anxiously when he caught a sly wink from Singleton and understood that Bob was playing for time in order to give the boys a chance to freshen up for the attack. That gave Dick another opportunity to turn his eyes toward the grand stand. She was not there.

But now, at one side of the field, he saw a carriage, and standing in that carriage, waving the Fardale colors, was – June! How his heart leaped as he saw her there!

“She has kept her word! We’ll win!”

But little time was left, and he knew it. In order to win, some fast work must be done.

Dick spoke to Smart as big Bob slowly rose to his feet. Ted called for the center-back play, which was a surprise to the enemy, as Smart looked “easy fruit” when he stepped in to fill the place of the fat boy.

Singleton was behind Ted, however, and he held Selden until Tubbs came like a rushing mountain and crashed into the line. Behind Obediah were Merriwell and Darrell, pushing him on. Ahead of him were others, pulling him ahead. They seized him and sought to drag him down, but he kept on going, making full ten yards.

Three times Tubbs did this, gaining twenty-one yards in all. But the fourth attempt resulted in no gain.

Franklin had discovered how to meet the attack and check it. Dick knew it was time for something else, and so did Smart. The funnel-play was tried, and Dick was sent into the left wing of the visitors, making a gain of three yards. It was repeated, and Dick dodged out through the side of the funnel, striking right-guard and making four yards more. A third attempt was stopped with no gain.

Fardale was resorting to every stratagem. A wedge was hurled into center, Singleton carrying the ball. As the wedge went to pieces Dick caught the ball when Bob tossed it out to him. He darted to the right, to the left, bowled one man over, and on he went clean to Franklin’s thirty-yard line.

“It’s Darrell’s turn,” thought Dick. “He ought to get through for a gain. If we can only keep it up!”

But Darrell was stopped and tackled by Wettinger, who carried him back for a loss of three yards. He tried again, but lost two yards more. Then somebody gave Dick the tip that the half was almost up. It seemed that the game would end in a tie.

A word from Dick. What was going to happen? The cadets were breathless. They stood up and stared in silence. Even the band was still.

“A field-kick!” cried some one.

That was it! Franklin was preparing for it. They saw Dick Merriwell was going to try to kick a goal from the thirty-five-yard line.

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